

# **The Poets Laureate of the Long Eighteenth Century: Courting the Public, c.1668-1813**

Submitted by Leo Shipp to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History, October 2019

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Signed.....

## Abstract

This thesis examines the office of poet laureate, and the wider cultural role of the court by whom the laureate was employed, in the long eighteenth century. This was the period in which the laureateship first came into being (1668), developed from an honorific into a functionary office with a settled position at court (c.1689-1715), and was bestowed upon Robert Southey (1813), whose selection precipitated a further transformation of the office and therefore marks the endpoint of this study. Taking an interdisciplinary approach, this thesis examines the institutional changes in the office, the mechanics of each laureate's appointment, the reputation and public reception of the office, and the works produced by the laureates both before and after their appointments. It demonstrates that the office was hugely prominent, relevant, and respectable throughout the period, and argues that it crowned and encapsulated some of the most vital trends in eighteenth-century culture.

The analysis is framed within the question of whether (as tends to be postulated in scholarship on the long eighteenth century) this period witnessed the rise of a commercial, middle-class public at the expense of the court's previously central role in society and culture. In this postulation, the long eighteenth century was the period in which British society underwent various modernizing developments, becoming more commercial, more defined by middle-class activities, and more conscious of a British national identity; while 'literature' was first created as a concept and an institution, and literary production moved away from the court into the marketplace.

While this thesis pays great attention to these developments, it argues that they did not occur so much at the expense of the court, but rather in close and fruitful interaction with it. The court retained an active but evolving role in literary production, cultural and commercial affairs more widely, issues of national identity, and the activities and interests of a middle-class public; it thus remained central to British society and culture. The laureateship, standing at the dynamic interface of court and public, is the definitive exemplar of this state of affairs.

## Acknowledgments

First of all, I would like to thank all of the people who have supervised and supported my work on the poets laureate of the long eighteenth century. Jonathan Conlin agreed to supervise my BA dissertation at Southampton, and was hugely accommodating to my hopes of writing something interdisciplinary on the Romantic period; it was he who turned my attention to the poets laureate in the first place, by suggesting that I ought to find a more neglected subject than my initial suggestion, Wordsworth's 1807 *Poems, in Two Volumes*. His stimulating and insightful supervision, as well as his subsequent advice and conversation over the years, have been immeasurably helpful; without them, that dissertation's mutation into a journal article would never have been possible, and that focus on the laureateship would never have developed into a doctoral project and a thesis. Alex Barber then supervised my admittedly rather distracted efforts at producing an MA dissertation on the later Stuart poets laureate at Durham, and his generous references helped me into a funded PhD place at Exeter. I am also thankful to my Upgrade examiners, Hester Schadee, Richard Ward, and Henry Power, for their constructive feedback and discussion.

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many of the works referenced in the following pages. Stephen's suggestions and challenges regarding the big picture – how the thesis and its chapters ought best to be structured and conceptualized – have been immeasurably important, but so too have been his far more minute observations on grammatical lapses, typos, and infelicitous phrasing, which have produced a thesis far more readable and comprehensible than it would otherwise have been. I could of course say much on all three of them, but it is probably best to leave the panegyrics for the thesis itself.

I am also sincerely grateful to the teachers at the Ravenscroft School, and especially Ms Button, who first introduced me to classic novels, poetry, and the Romantics. But I am no less grateful to Meqdad Jawid, one of my oldest friends, whose homework on Alfred the Great made me realize that I ought to be taking an A-Level in History, rather than the Advanced GNVQs (or whatever on earth they were) in Applied Science and Business Studies that I had signed up for. I would also like to thank my friends and colleagues at Exeter, amongst whom I have enjoyed a fun, varied, and interesting three years. The fact that my time at Exeter has been possible at all is due to the funding and support of the South, West and Wales Doctoral Training Partnership and the Arts and Humanities Research Council, for which I am likewise hugely thankful.

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## Quotations, Dates, and Abbreviations

In quotations, the original spelling and punctuation is retained, and the term 'sic' is not used. Dates given before the introduction of the Gregorian calendar in 1752 are given in the old style, but the beginning of the year is dated to 1 January throughout.

For all publications dating to the period of study, the place of publication is London, unless otherwise stated. The names of the biannual odes produced by the laureates for New Year's Day and for the reigning monarch's birthday are abbreviated in the footnotes to the year of performance and 'NY' (for New Year's Day) or 'BD' (for royal birthday). Further details as to where each ode might be found are given in the Bibliography. For periodicals, naming and differentiation conventions follow those of the Burney Collection online database, except for those periodicals that do not appear on that database.

In addition, the following abbreviations are used in the footnotes:

**Add. MS:** Additional Manuscript

**BL:** The British Library, London

**Bod:** The Bodleian Library, Oxford

**CSP Dom:** Calendar of State Papers, Domestic

**CTB:** Calendar of Treasury Books

**Dryden, Works:** John Dryden, *The Works of John Dryden*, ed. by H.T. Swedenberg et al., 18 vols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1956-2002)

**Gray Correspondence:** Thomas Gray, *Correspondence of Thomas Gray*, ed. by Paget Toynbee and Leonard Whibley, 1<sup>st</sup> edn reprint with corrections and additions by H.W. Starr, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971). Volume I for pp. 1-453, II for pp. 455-909, III for pp. 911-1194

**HO:** Home Office

**LC:** Lord Chamberlain's Department

**ODNB:** Oxford Dictionary of National Biography

**SP:** State Papers

**Spence, *Observations*:** Joseph Spence, *Observations, Anecdotes, and Characters of Books and Men: Collected from Conversation*, ed. by James M. Osborn, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966)

**TNA:** The National Archives, London

***Warton Correspondence*:** Thomas Warton, *The Correspondence of Thomas Warton*, ed. by David Fairer (London: University of Georgia Press, 1995)

**'Whitehead Memoirs':** William Mason, 'Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Mr. William Whitehead', in William Whitehead, *Poems, Vol. III.*, ed. by William Mason (York: 1788), pp. 1-129

## Introduction

The office of poet laureate was instituted in 1668 for John Dryden, and underwent its most dramatic changes following the appointments of Thomas Shadwell, in 1689, and Robert Southey, in 1813. Its history is therefore almost uncannily aligned with that flexible period of study, 'The Long Eighteenth Century', whether that period be taken to begin at the Restoration or at the Glorious Revolution, and whether it be bounded with the defeat of Napoleon or with the passing of the Great Reform Act. Some version of the long eighteenth century – in this case, 1668 to 1813 – thus constitutes a good framework for the study of the office. It begins with the formation of the office, and the fixing of its duties, and ends with that office's transformation into something less prominent and more staid, yet less demanding and more honourable. But the symmetry is more than a coincidence. The poet laureateship of the long eighteenth century is not only an eminently characteristic feature of that century; it is also an institution which can be highly illuminating of some of the central issues in long-eighteenth-century scholarship.

As will be discussed in more detail below, the long eighteenth century has tended to be understood as a period in which 'Britain' came into being; not just in terms of the Act of Union being signed in 1707 and worked out over the ensuing decades, but in terms of the more intangible measures by which a modern nation-state distinguishes itself from the traditional, hierarchical kingdom which existed before it. Thus, Britain in the long eighteenth century transitioned from a society in which king and court were paramount in all matters political, administrative, social, and cultural, to one in which a nationally-conscious 'public', based upon commercial practices and the energies of the middle class, gained the overriding agency in each of these areas; it manufactured a cultural pantheon; and it developed and refined its self-conceptualization, first by sloughing off the distractions of loyalty to a prince, then by learning to reconcile geographical boundaries with ethnocentric history into one seamless formulation, and lastly by establishing a new kind of hierarchy in which distant peoples were subjugated to its imperium. Against this understanding of an essentially modernizing Britain, voices of dissent have been raised, emphasizing the slowness, fitfulness, and uncertainty of these various developments. The significance of this thesis, then – in its widest sense



– regards how we are to make sense of this long-eighteenth-century Britain. As will be seen throughout the following pages, an interdisciplinary study of the laureateship is important in that it advances a conceptualization of the period hitherto untenable or undernourished.

If that seems too broad a remit, then the issue can be made clearer by being addressed in its constituent parts, and by emphasizing the extent to which all scholars working on the long eighteenth century, in their choice of subject as much as in their conclusions, have put forward an argument as to the nature of that century. A good example comes in a review article written by Clarissa Campbell Orr in 2009, in which she reviews, amongst other works, Stephen Conway's *War, State and Society in Mid-Eighteenth-Century Britain and Ireland*, and Hannah Smith's *Georgian Monarchy*.<sup>1</sup> Orr is particularly interested in the way that Conway seeks to define and understand mid-century Britain and Ireland in terms of 'partnerships'. As Conway himself explains, his monograph offers an attempt to move beyond questions of whether power lay more with central, state mechanisms, or with local and private interests, by exploring the relationship between the two sides, and thus showing that the centre was powerful *because* it could draw upon local and private interests, just as local and private interests sought to achieve their own objectives through working with the centre.<sup>2</sup> This is only one of the 'partnerships' that Conway's work investigates, but it is arguably the most prominent; and Orr, recognizing it as a characterization of where practical agency and ideological importance resided in Britain, objects to it not so much on its own terms, as for what it leaves out of the equation. For Orr, Conway's discussion of the central British state is unjustifiably neglectful of the place of the court and monarchy: Conway's central state is a kind of modern government, in which the ministers are only nominally 'His Majesty's Government'.<sup>3</sup> In this respect, Orr finds *Georgian Monarchy* far more accurate as a depiction of long-eighteenth-century Britain, Smith arguing for the continuing centrality of king and court to all manner of practices and beliefs. But she also protests that Smith does not go far enough, and that an

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<sup>1</sup> Clarissa Campbell Orr, 'New Perspectives on Hanoverian Britain', *The Historical Journal*, 52 (2009), 513-529.

<sup>2</sup> Stephen Conway, *War, State, and Society in Mid-Eighteenth-Century Britain and Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 3-5, 33-55.

<sup>3</sup> Orr, 'New Perspectives', pp. 515-7.

even more assertive case as to the continuing centrality of the monarchy and court could viably be made.<sup>4</sup>

It is in relation to such issues that this study of the laureateship gains its importance. In particular, there are two thematic threads which a study of the office engages with and illuminates. The first is the role and agency of the court with regards to the emerging idea of the British nation. As has been mentioned above and will be elaborated on in the historiographical review that makes up the bulk of this Introduction, the more predominant view – and certainly the assumption that scholars have found more useful to work with, in terms of carrying out their research – is that the court lost its practical and symbolic role at the apex of society, and was superseded by the institutions and ideologies of a new British ‘nation’. The second is the relationship between the court and literature (along with high culture in general). Again, the predominant view is that the more highly esteemed forms of literature, having traditionally been produced for and consumed by the court, moved from that courtly environment to a new home in the public marketplace, where they were produced for and consumed by a much wider, much more national, and increasingly middle-class audience, shunting the court into irrelevance. Both of these threads are associated with the idea of an emergent or emergently important public, and both are central to the way that the long eighteenth century is understood.

A study of the laureateship is of crucial importance to these two threads, and to the wider picture outlined above. The office was a court office, but one which also, especially as the long eighteenth century wore on, positioned its holder in a highly prominent place with regards to the reading public, and demanded of them that they say something to the nation whose most prominent official cultural position they held. The office was a product of the traditional, courtly-patronal mode of literature, being appointed for (if not *by*) the highest patron in the land so as to glorify and entertain him; and yet the majority of the laureate’s works were his own independent, commercially-minded productions, while his *ex officio* poems were sold on the market and widely printed in newspapers. The office, by 1813, was considered by some observers to be a flagrant anachronism, worthy only of abolition; yet for others it remained a viable and important office, appropriate for a great British genius like Walter Scott or

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, pp. 519-23.

Robert Southey. In short, despite its roots in the sphere of courtly patronage, it remained a conspicuous element in the literary world and in public life throughout the long eighteenth century, adapting to developments rather than being submerged by them. It can therefore be studied with a view to illuminating the place of the court, and of patronal ideas and practices, with regards to the modern British nation that was then taking shape.

As such, a study of the poet laureateship carries great significance for the ways in which the eighteenth century is conceptualized, whether the perspective lies primarily with literary or with historical scholarship. It can also play an important contributory part in eliding the boundary between those two disciplines, encouraging scholars still further to study the long eighteenth century from an interdisciplinary perspective. Interdisciplinarity has come to seem increasingly appropriate for scholarship on this period, both in the sense that the period itself exhibits a particular overlap between the matters that interest literary scholars and those that interest historians (in comparison to other periods), and in the more material sense that, by giving the long eighteenth century this interdisciplinary character within academia, it is rendered more distinct and attractive in comparison to the two periods that have tended to jostle and obscure it, the early modern and the modern. Since the laureateship is particularly well-suited to life in the interstices, an increasingly interdisciplinary perspective for the long eighteenth century must include a heightened attention for the office, and will be both more complete and more pointed as a result of such attention.

The main argument of this thesis is that the significance of the laureateship and the agency of the court were greater than has generally been recognized. It will show that the poets laureate were not merely figures to be mocked and ignored – their office universally considered an anachronism – but rather that they enjoyed a continuing prominence, and even a certain respectability, throughout the long eighteenth century. Moreover, the practices and ideologies of which the office was the crowning feature – the courtly-patronage mode – remained entirely viable, and, rather than giving way to newer agencies of cultural production and consumption associated with the public, actually enjoyed a fruitful relationship with these newer agencies. Following on from this, this thesis will argue that the court itself was more central to British society, and more compatible and adaptive with newer

developments, than is usually thought. In summary, this thesis throws its weight behind the argument that the court was far more central to eighteenth-century British society than the dominant modernizing narratives allow for, and argues that the laureateship stands as a prime feature of this conceptualization of eighteenth-century Britain. An interdisciplinary study of the laureateship can, in fact, encourage a conceptualization of the period that would not otherwise be possible.

This Introduction will summarize the dominant narrative of the long eighteenth century, before examining its most apposite constituent elements in more detail; and will then proceed through a narrative and historiographical survey of the poets laureate themselves, to a description of the chapters of the thesis. It will be particularly concerned to highlight those nodes of scholarly dissension, and those areas of potential overlap between different disciplines and fields of scholarship, which a study of the laureateship is ideally-placed to engage with.

## **From Court to Public**

Upon the Restoration (according to the conventional narrative), the monarchical court attempted to assert its primacy over the various areas of national life it was felt to have formerly dominated: political, social, constitutional, financial, and cultural.<sup>5</sup> In the literary sphere, it was partly – but only provisionally – successful in doing so. As had been the case during the early Stuart period, the prevailing mode of literary production and consumption was based at least partly on the court, in both practical and theoretical terms. But socio-economic changes, coupled with the intellectual energies released by the Civil Wars, had

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<sup>5</sup> This following account is mainly based upon John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2013); E.K. Broadus, *The Laureateship* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921); Brean Hammond, *Professional Imaginative Writing in England, 1670-1740: 'Hackney for Bread'* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997); Brean Hammond, 'The Poet as Professional', in *The Oxford Handbook of British Poetry, 1660-1800*, ed. by Jack Lynch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 144-61 (pp. 151, 157-61); and Moyra Haslett, *Pope to Burney, 1714-1779: Scriblerians to Bluestockings* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 1-25, 50-54. Other relevant works are noted where pertinent.

already begun to effect a transformation of which the momentum could not be trammelled.<sup>6</sup>

In 1668, as part of the court's cultural pretensions – pretensions which still had some force, despite being historically doomed – the office of poet laureate was conferred upon John Dryden. This office was conceived and instituted as a key element of the patronage system, which was in turn central to the idea that literature was bound up with the court. Before the Civil Wars, the patronage system had defined literary production; now, it would have its final flourish. It culturally validated the court and aristocracy, and especially the king, who served as the (at least nominal) apex of all patronage networks and whose personal patronage was more desired and esteemed than that of anyone else. The court and aristocracy still subscribed wholeheartedly to this system. Literary figures theoretically subscribed to it, and aspired to profit through its mechanisms; but their behaviour hinted towards the triumph of later, modern practices.<sup>7</sup>

Moving into the eighteenth century, the patronage system which had predominated under the later Stuarts ceased to be the prevailing framework in which literature was created or conceived, just as conceptions of the nation and practices of politics became increasingly dissociated from the king. By the start of the nineteenth century, literary production was defined by the marketplace and by strident, sophisticated conceptions of literature and the national literary heritage. Thus 'literature' became an important aspect of national identity, and the status and legitimacy afforded to each form and theme became wildly different to what it had been previously.<sup>8</sup> In this new climate, where literary works were produced for a middle-class public or marketplace, and where literature was associated with conceptions of the nation (rather than with the court), poets laureate became obsolete. The laureateship was too much a part of the patronage system for its continuation to appear as anything other than

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<sup>6</sup> Richard D. Bevis, *English Drama: Restoration and Eighteenth Century, 1660-1789* (London: Longman, 1988), pp. 6-32; Brewer, *Pleasures*, pp. 2, 15-54; Hammond, *Hackney for Bread*, pp. 4-6.

<sup>7</sup> Hammond, *Hackney for Bread*, pp. 4-6; for discussion of the workings of patronage, see Dustin Griffin, *Literary Patronage in England, 1650-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 13-29.

<sup>8</sup> Brewer, *Pleasures*, pp. 2-3, 10-11, 15-54, 137-39; Hammond, *Hackney for Bread*, pp. 69-79, 198-200, 249-51; J. Paul Hunter, 'Political, satirical, didactic and lyric poetry (1): from the Restoration to the death of Pope', in *The Cambridge History of English Literature, 1660-1780*, ed. by John Richetti (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 160-208 (pp. 202-8).

anachronistic. By the end of the eighteenth century, it was universally reviled, and teetered on the verge of abolition.<sup>9</sup> Yet it managed to re-invent itself, due to a particular constellation of factors: the Napoleonic Wars, the Prince Regent's taste, and Robert Southey's apostasy. Instead of being abolished, it fell into line with the prevailing conditions of cultural production and consumption. The laureate ceased to be a panegyric court functionary. Instead, the office became a national, honorary distinction. Thus after having been held by a succession of poetical non-entities from the time of Dryden's dismissal (1689), it became a post worthy of William Wordsworth and Alfred, Lord Tennyson.<sup>10</sup>

The dominant narrative, then, can be summarized as follows. The court, which had once been theoretically and practically central to literary production, rapidly lost its importance in this area over the course of the later Stuart period, and had become virtually irrelevant by the reign of George I. This loss was an inevitable part of the rise of the nation-state, the middle-class public, the cultural marketplace, and the concept of literature. The laureateship, concomitantly, was becoming an ever more flagrant anachronism.

The narrative is, in its basic form, an old one. It is entailed by the classic, teleological, nineteenth century 'Whig interpretation of History', in which pre-modern forms of social, political, and cultural organization are inevitably superseded over time by modern, liberal, rational forms. That 'Whig interpretation' was denounced during the interwar period (most influentially by Herbert Butterfield), and was stripped of all its theoretical credibility after the Second World War;<sup>11</sup> while the related Marxist interpretation had passed its peak and become (arguably) something of a niche persuasion by the end of the 1970s.<sup>12</sup> However, the rejection of determinist and teleological assumptions has of course left intact the evidence which underlay those assumptions, while enabling scholars to look at that evidence in newer and sometimes more probing ways. In terms of the long eighteenth century, this means that the teleological narrative has remained not only flourishing but fruitful, even after

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<sup>9</sup> Broadus, pp. 102-3, 113, 119, 123, 133-35, 144-45, 154-63.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 163-96.

<sup>11</sup> Herbert Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History* (London: G. Bell, 1931).

<sup>12</sup> For the fortunes of Marxist historiography in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and some recent assertions as to the continuing viability and utility of Marxism to historical research and writing, see e.g. R.S. Neale, *Writing Marxist History: British Society, Economy & Culture Since 1700* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985); *Marxist History-Writing for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. by Chris Wickham (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

having been stripped of its teleology; a teleology which, after all, had not been grafted onto it, but had sprung from it in the first place.<sup>13</sup>

Thus the last forty years have seen the narrative of the long eighteenth century greatly enriched and elaborated by scholars working in various academic fields. There has also emerged a more contrarian strain which seeks to downplay not only the inevitability, but the substance of change, emphasizing instead the extent to which eighteenth-century Britain remained characterized by practices and attitudes which have been typically deemed 'traditional'.<sup>14</sup> This contrarian strain, although giving rise to various debates, has essentially been incorporated within the dominant narrative. There is currently a widespread scholarly recognition that, although the long eighteenth century did indeed see various fundamental, long-term changes at play in Britain, traditional attitudes and practices persisted more tenaciously than was once assumed.<sup>15</sup> This thesis will further prove the persistence of traditional attitudes and practices, while also demonstrating their vitality, variability, and even novelty. Thus the dominant narrative will be further challenged, further complicated, and further problematized.

This thesis, then, will be positioned alongside the work of such scholars as Hannah Smith and Dustin Griffin (examined below), which seeks to rediscover court agency and traditional literary practices within the picture of an eighteenth century that was increasingly modern, commercial, and middle-class. Like the work of those scholars, it will not simply argue that the court's role and literary practices remained unchanged from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Instead, it will acknowledge the eighteenth century's

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<sup>13</sup> E.g. Hammond notes that the literary world was far more complex than any simple teleological picture would suggest; yet admits that, in general, the eighteenth century did see a change from patronized to professional writing. Hammond, 'Poet as Professional', pp. 151, 157-61. Similarly, James Raven has pointed out that, though it seems old-fashioned or neo-Whiggish to make such a point, 'a very large number of economic and social statistics for the eighteenth century can be reduced to a crude upward curve which accelerates slowly (even levelling off) towards mid-century and then rushes skywards in the final two decades'. James Raven, *Publishing Business in Eighteenth-Century England* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2014), p. 15.

<sup>14</sup> E.g. J.C.D. Clark, 'On Hitting the Buffers: The Historiography of England's Ancien Regime. A Response', *Past & Present*, 117 (1987), 195-207; J.C.D. Clark, *English Society, 1660-1832: Religion, Ideology and Politics During the Ancien Regime*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Griffin, *Patronage*; Dustin Griffin, 'The Social world of authorship 1660-1714', in *English Literature, 1660-1780*, ed. by Richetti, pp. 37-60 (pp. 52-60); Holger Hoock, *The King's Artists: The Royal Academy of Arts and the Politics of British Culture 1760-1840* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003); Holger Hoock, *Empires of the Imagination: Politics, War, and the Arts in the British World, 1750-1850* (London: Profile Books, 2010).

<sup>15</sup> E.g. Hammond, 'Poet as Professional', pp. 151, 157-61; Haslett, *Pope to Burney*, pp. 50-54.

distinctive developments, and attempt to show how the court, and the courtly-patronage mode of literature, adapted, forming essential components of a changing society. This thesis aims to enhance our understanding of the court's perceived role and status in relation to such key historiographical issues as the rise of the nation state, the commercialization of society, the self-assertion of the middle class, and the partisanship of politics; and will indicate the ways in which the court interacted with, rather than simply giving way to, the entities and phenomena that historians have found to be in the ascendant. It also aims to show how the courtly-patronage mode of literary production and consumption co-existed, and indeed developed, in relation to those newer and increasingly prevalent practices which are typically associated with the idea of an emergent public.

Perhaps the most important issues that this thesis will be engaging with, then, centre on the notions of the public, the marketplace, and the middle class. These notions have a certain affinity, tending towards symbiosis, which is sometimes made explicit in the various relevant strands of scholarship. Social (and indeed political) historians have become increasingly keen, in the last forty years, to emphasize the role and agency of the middle class.<sup>16</sup> The preferred term is often now 'middling sort', which comes from the early modern period, whereas 'middle class' was first used in the mid-eighteenth century and did not gain its prevalent position until the nineteenth.<sup>17</sup> Yet the term 'middle class', although more characteristic of older scholarship, is still sometimes employed, and, while some scholars use 'middle class' to denote what others call the 'middling sort', some use 'middle class' *alongside* 'middling sort' to mean slightly different things, with 'middle class' denoting a broader, more trans-historical group, or perhaps a trans-historical mentality. Meanwhile, the terms 'bourgeois' and 'bourgeoisie' are also used fairly commonly, sometimes to indicate that it is specifically the *urban* middle class that is being studied, sometimes because 'middling sort' cannot be used as an adverb or adjective, and sometimes out of some vaguely Marxist motivation.<sup>18</sup> Whatever the terms used, this middle class

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<sup>16</sup> E.g., see works cited individually in this and the following paragraph.

<sup>17</sup> Jonathan Barry, 'Introduction', in *The Middling Sort of People: Culture, Society and Politics in England, 1550-1800*, ed. by Jonathan Barry and Christopher Brooks (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1994), pp. 1-27 (p. 2); Margaret R. Hunt, *The Middling Sort: Commerce, Gender, and the Family in England, 1680-1780* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1996), p. 15.

<sup>18</sup> Jonathan Barry, 'Bourgeois Collectivism? Urban Association and the Middling Sort', in *The Middling Sort of People*, ed. by Barry and Brooks, pp. 84-112 (p. 85).



is usually felt to comprise independent tradesmen, especially those who were directly involved in commerce.<sup>19</sup> It also tends to include bureaucrats and members of the professions (Hunt describing the latter as ‘the intellectual fringe of the middling sort’).<sup>20</sup> This thesis favours the term ‘middle class’, partly because it is concerned with a period that stretches down to 1813, partly because it would rather keep in mind the slightly sprawling, blurry edges of the eighteenth-century middle class than ignore them.

The idea that eighteenth century Britain witnessed the rise of a middle class which increasingly characterized all aspects of public life is integral to what, as noted above, is the conventional narrative. However, as with many aspects of this narrative, it is only really in the last forty years that this issue has been properly studied, refined and given substance. In fact, in this particular instance, the period from the 1960s to the mid-1980s had seen the roles of the gentry and lower orders (‘patricians and plebeians’) so heavily emphasized, that the middle class was at risk of disappearing.<sup>21</sup> The historians who began publishing on the middle class in the late 1980s and 1990s found themselves to be not just pioneers, but proselytizers.<sup>22</sup> They revealed the numerical weight, modes of organization, habits of life, cultural preferences, ideological values, and political aspiration of the class, arguing that, even if there was not an overt ‘class consciousness’ amongst its members, there was nonetheless a similarity of experience and a harmony of action between them.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, they played a crucial and growing role in all areas of public life. Jonathan Barry has been particularly prominent in arguing that eighteenth century society was characterized by the activities and principles of this group.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Barry, ‘Introduction’, pp. 2-3; Shani D’Cruze, ‘The Middling Sort in Eighteenth-Century Colchester: Independence, Social Relations and the Community Broker’, in *The Middling Sort of People*, ed. by Barry and Brooks, pp. 181-207 (pp. 181-83); Hunt, *Middling Sort*, pp. 1, 6, 15.

<sup>20</sup> Hunt, *Middling Sort*, p. 20.

<sup>21</sup> Or, they were at risk of seeming to have no distinct identity of their own, but to be constantly striving to ‘emulate’ the gentry, and universally hoping to make enough money to become landed gentry themselves. The dismantling of the ‘emulation’ theory has been an important component of the rediscovery of the middle class. Barry, ‘Introduction’, pp. 6-11; Hunt, *Middling Sort*, pp. 2-5.

<sup>22</sup> Jonathan Barry, ‘Consumers’ Passions: The Middle Class in Eighteenth-Century England’, *The Historical Journal*, 34 (1991), 207-16 (p. 207); Barry, ‘Introduction’, pp. 6-23; Barry, ‘Bourgeois Collectivism?’, pp. 85-88; Hunt, *Middling Sort*, pp. 2-6, 14.

<sup>23</sup> On this last point, see Barry, ‘Bourgeois Collectivism?’, pp. 88-104; Hunt, *Middling Sort*, p. 14; Paul Langford, *Public Life and the Propertied Englishman, 1698-1798: The Ford Lectures Delivered in the University of Oxford 1990* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p. vii.

<sup>24</sup> E.g. he argues that Norbert Elias’s ‘civilizing process’ was perhaps more characteristic of middle-class associational activity than of Louis XIV’s court, and that it may actually have

Historians of the middle class were encouraged in their task by scholarship on the two other concepts noted above, the public and the marketplace.<sup>25</sup> 'The public' was an often-used contemporary term, with a knot of meanings broadly similar to, but more limited than, those which it enjoys today. Historians have become increasingly interested in the ways in which the public operated and was conceptualized over the course of the eighteenth century, and have shown that, however it was and should now be defined, it was vital to the practice of politics, government, and culture. Habermas's work on the 'public sphere', which was translated into English in 1989, has been especially important here. The framework of Habermas's theory (at least as it concerns the issues of this thesis) is that, in medieval and early modern societies, culture was 'representational', being the representation of power by those who exercised power (principally the prince); the baroque courts of the seventeenth-century represented the apogee of this representational culture. In Britain around 1700, and in other countries later in the eighteenth century, there then emerged a public sphere – partly ideal, partly actual – in which an increasingly powerful middle class discussed and cast judgement over matters of culture and politics, and which was inherently opposed to the traditional structures of power.<sup>26</sup> Many aspects of this theory have been convincingly rejected, including its chronology and its insistence on the public sphere as oppositional, but the overall framework has proven durable, continues to be made use of, and bears an obvious relation to the dominant narrative of cultural development outlined above.<sup>27</sup> Habermasian or not, the public tends to be seen as linked with, and characterized by, the middle class (though this too has been challenged). The gentry were involved too, and exercised an importance disproportionate to their

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spread from the middle class to the gentry, rather than vice versa. Barry, 'Introduction', pp. 8-9, 17-20; Barry, 'Bourgeois Collectivism?', pp. 106-7.

<sup>25</sup> Hunt, *Middling Sort*, pp. 1, 6.

<sup>26</sup> A good summary of Habermas's theory is offered in T.W.C. Blanning, *The Culture of Power and the Power of Culture: Old Regime Europe 1660-1789* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 5-12.

<sup>27</sup> For thorough, explicit engagements with Habermas's 'public sphere' theories, and the influence of those theories, by historians of late seventeenth century Britain, see Blanning, *Culture of Power*, pp. 2-14; Mark Knights, *Representation and Misrepresentation in Later Stuart Britain: Partisanship and Political Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 48-52, 67, 94-99; *The Politics of the Public Sphere in Early Modern England*, ed. by Peter Lake and Steven Pincus (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007); Joad Raymond, 'The Newspaper, Public Opinion, and the Public Sphere in the Seventeenth Century', in *News, Newspapers, and Society in Early Modern Britain*, ed. by Joad Raymond (London: Frank Cass, 1999), pp. 109-40.

numbers;<sup>28</sup> but it was the middle class which dominated the substance and identity of the public, especially as time went on.<sup>29</sup> The rise of the public, and the rise of the middle class, were necessarily related developments.

As for the marketplace, and the labelling of eighteenth century Britain as a 'commercial' society, the story is a similar one. These ideas had been formulated by eighteenth-century Britons themselves, and had persisted through the historical record. And yet, in the late 1970s and 1980s, they were re-invented by two historians – Neil McKendrick and J.H. Plumb – who repeatedly professed themselves shocked at the absence of relevant scholarship.<sup>30</sup> The McKendrick-Plumb thesis was articulated, first, in Plumb's 1977 lecture and pamphlet, *The Commercialisation of Leisure*. It was then expanded in 1982's *The Birth of a Consumer Society*. Here, Plumb reprinted his 1977 work<sup>31</sup> and conjoined three more chapters to it; McKendrick wrote some grandiose introductory material, and several long chapters of his own; and a young John Brewer was brought in as a junior partner, offering his take on 'Commercialization and Politics'. The overall argument was that eighteenth-century Britain had undergone a 'consumer revolution', bringing about the world's first 'consumer society' (terms defined with luxurious, rolling prolixity by McKendrick).<sup>32</sup> This argument was bound up with the rise of the 'middle-class', whose numerical increase and socio-political weight were both cause and consequence of the 'consumer revolution'.<sup>33</sup> Yet the middle class of this account had essentially no identity beyond commercialization; it awaited the specific attention of the slightly later scholars (detailed above) to give this social group 'a local habitation and a name'.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Barry, 'Introduction', p. 19; Hunt, *Middling Sort*, p. 16; Neil McKendrick, 'Commercialization and the Economy', in *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England*, ed. by Neil McKendrick (London: Europa Publications Ltd, 1982), pp. 9-194 (p. 43).

<sup>29</sup> See Chapter Four for the changing makeup of the 'public'.

<sup>30</sup> E.g. Neil McKendrick, 'Introduction', in *Birth of a Consumer Society*, ed. by McKendrick, pp. 1-6 (pp. 3-5); J.H. Plumb, 'Commercialization and Society', in *Birth of a Consumer Society*, ed. by McKendrick, pp. 265-334 (p. 285).

<sup>31</sup> Albeit with 'commercialisation' having now hardened into 'commercialization'.

<sup>32</sup> Neil McKendrick, 'Preface', in *Birth of a Consumer Society*, ed. by McKendrick, pp. vii-viii; McKendrick, 'Introduction'; McKendrick, 'Commercialization Economy', pp. 9-13.

<sup>33</sup> Brewer, 'Commercialization Politics', pp. 197-202; Plumb, 'Commercialization Society', p. 284.

<sup>34</sup> William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, V. 1. 17.

## Cultural Historiography and Literary Scholarship

There is, then, a powerful body of scholarship characterizing British society of the long eighteenth century by reference to a commercial, middle-class public. Britain was increasingly defined by people, ideas, and structures which were distinct from, or even antagonistic to, the court. This thesis will have ramifications for such wider notions, but it is, of course, particularly focussed on literary production and consumption. It is therefore time to look at how these wider notions – and the older, less rigorous notions which preceded them – have played out in scholarship on culture.

In 1982, John Brewer had played only a minor role in *The Birth of a Consumer Society*. However, in 1997 he was to extend the McKendrick-Plumb thesis triumphantly into the realm of culture. *The Pleasures of the Imagination* gives the definitive modern vision of a Britain in which music, literature, and the visual arts were produced specifically at the demand of a middle-class market. That market was new, expanding, confident, and aspirational. Its size and wealth were sufficient not only to take over from the court and aristocracy in funding the production of culture, but to increase that production indefinitely. Naturally, this meant that the character of British cultural production changed from being courtly and baroque to middle-class and commercial. Music, literature, and the visual arts were theorized in new ways which relocated their value in the appreciation of either the popular market, or the connoisseurial element within that market. The particular kind of music, literature, and visual art that tended to be produced underwent concomitant changes. Culture thus changed from being 'courtly' to 'commercial'. It had done so, more or less comprehensively, by the time of the Hanoverian Succession. The rest of the century witnessed the development and working-out of this new state of affairs.<sup>35</sup> Scholars of eighteenth-century historiography have given a complementary picture, showing history writing to have been increasingly commercialized, increasingly wide in its readership, and increasingly unaffiliated with court, church, and universities. In connection with this, history became more diverse, social, and 'novelized' in its subject matter.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Brewer, *Pleasures*, pp. 1-4, 7-11, 15-54, 81-99.

<sup>36</sup> Karen O'Brien, 'The History Market in Eighteenth-Century England', in *Books and Their Readers in Eighteenth-Century England: New Essays*, ed. by Isabel Rivers (London: Continuum, 2001), pp. 105-33 (pp. 106, 108-9); Mark Saber Phillips, *Society and Sentiment:*

A cultural marketplace comprises two reciprocal components: buyers to demand, professionals to supply. While Brewer's book gives more or less equal attention to both sides, other scholars have tended to focus on one or the other. There has, for example, been a lot of interest in the emergence of professional writers.<sup>37</sup> One key work in this field is Brean Hammond's *Professional Imaginative Writing in England, 1670-1740* (1997).<sup>38</sup> Hammond argues that, because Britain's economy was expanding and becoming more complicated, a new (or at least newly-sizeable) middle class had come into being. Such a middle class was inevitably characterized by its leisure time and its pretensions, meaning that it demanded a supply of literature, and showed a preference for writing which would be relevant to its own interests and self-identifications. With such a demand having opened up, a supply was necessarily furnished. In the later seventeenth century, writers who had come of age intending to write for courts and aristocrats discovered that, in order to subsist and prosper, they would be better off writing for the marketplace. They were then joined, and eventually succeeded, by a far more numerous brood of writers than had ever before existed; the middle class market being larger and more lucrative than the patronage system it had superseded, and continuing to grow. By 1740, there were many voices deploring the changes in cultural product and value; but although these complaints played an important part in forging subsequent conceptions of literature, professionalism had already triumphed, and would only strengthen its hold in the coming decades. In a modern, developed economy, this was the only way that things could be.<sup>39</sup>

Of course, a literary marketplace entailed a demand not just for modern writing, but also for such writings of former centuries as were still deemed to be of interest and value. The British literary past was necessarily reevaluated and repackaged. How this happened, why it happened the way it did, and its various

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*Genres of Historical Writing in Britain, 1740-1820* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000), pp. xii, 6-8, 18-19.

<sup>37</sup> For the issues around and complexities of literary 'professionalism', see Brewer, *Pleasures*, pp. 125-29, 138.

<sup>38</sup> Hammond has also recently given a similar, more concise treatment of the subject in Hammond, 'Poet as Professional'.

<sup>39</sup> Hammond, *Hackney for Bread*, pp. 2-6, 13, 69-79, 105-55, 249-51. Looking at the other end of the century, Peter Murphy's 1993 monograph, *Poetry as an Occupation and an Art in Britain, 1760-1830*, shows a similar concern to historicize literary production, exploring the writing of poetry in terms of its being a choice and an occupation, with poets employing various strategies in their ambitious search for a success that was as much social as it was poetic. Peter Murphy, *Poetry as an Occupation and an Art in Britain, 1760-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). See especially pp. 1-13, 47-8, 136-8, 229-40

ramifications and effects, are all questions which have received much scholarly attention.<sup>40</sup> René Wellek and Lawrence Lipking each published early and enduring landmarks in the field, in 1941 and 1970 respectively.<sup>41</sup> Their work concerned itself particularly with how eighteenth-century Britons created histories, categories, and hierarchies for their cultural heritage. Subsequent scholars have investigated certain aspects of these issues without finding too much cause to disagree with either Wellek or Lipking. Recently, emphasis has tended to coalesce on three main issues: how the cultivation of the cultural heritage was bound up with the development of national identity;<sup>42</sup> how it was bound up with the development of the aforesaid cultural marketplace;<sup>43</sup> and in what ways it was structured along the lines of a debate between Gothicism and Classicism.<sup>44</sup>

### National Identity and Partisan Politics

The public and the marketplace are, therefore, the most closely relevant topics to this thesis. But there are two other related issues which have not yet been touched upon. One is national identity: what it was, and indeed how and whether it was formed, in this period. The other is partisan politics. Although

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<sup>40</sup> Brewer, *Pleasures*, pp. 371-82; John Butt, *The Mid-Eighteenth Century*, ed. by Geoffrey Carnall (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), pp. 4-6, 58-78, 94-114; Adam Rounce, 'Scholarship', in *British Poetry, 1660-1800*, ed. by Lynch, pp. 685-700; Harold D. Weinbrot, *Britannia's Issue: The Rise of British Literature from Dryden to Ossian* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 115-41.

<sup>41</sup> Lawrence Lipking, *The Ordering of the Arts in Eighteenth-Century England* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1970); René Wellek, *The Rise of English Literary History*, 2nd edn (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966).

<sup>42</sup> E.g. Paulina Kewes, *Authorship and Appropriation: Writing for the Stage in England, 1660-1710* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), p. 180; Weinbrot, pp. 115-41. Eighteenth-century attitudes to Shakespeare, Spenser, Milton, and Renaissance literature in general have been especially useful grounds for such lines of inquiry; e.g., Joseph M. Levine, *The Battle of the Books: History and Literature in the Augustan Age* (London: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 245-63; Jack Lynch, *The Age of Elizabeth in the Age of Johnson* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Rounce, 'Scholarship', p. 685; Marcus Walsh, *Shakespeare, Milton, and Eighteenth-Century Literary Editing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), especially pp. 10-12, 31, 52-53, 57, 62-64, 124, 198-200.

<sup>43</sup> E.g. Kewes, *Appropriation*, p. 180; Brewer, *Pleasures*, pp. 371-91.

<sup>44</sup> E.g. Nick Groom, 'Romanticism Before 1789', in *The Oxford Handbook of British Romanticism*, ed. by David Duff (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 13-29; Joseph Brody Kramnick, 'The Making of the English Canon', *PMLA*, 112 (1997), 1087-1101; Joan H. Pittock, *The Ascendancy of Taste: The Achievement of Joseph and Thomas Warton* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), pp. 127-64; Richard Terry, *Poetry and the Making of the English Literary Past: 1660-1781* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

there are not many synthetic works that draw all these issues together, there is an often-acknowledged link between them. The middle-class, commercial public both characterized and was characterized by national identity; they developed in tandem. Similarly, political partisanship was bound up with the middle-class, commercial, public arena in various different ways. A study of the laureateship therefore needs to incorporate an understanding of the relevant scholarship, and can contribute to our understanding of these matters.

The development of British national identity has been a subject of great interest and debate for the last thirty years. The landmark work here is Linda Colley's *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (1992), which has probably been cited in every publication on the subject since, either to be endorsed, qualified, or refuted.<sup>45</sup> Colley argues that British national identity was forged over the eighteenth century on the basis of Protestantism, and in opposition to the 'other' of Catholic France. This national identity had nothing to do with the Hanoverian monarchy, which was unpopular and did not possess the cultural and political significance of its forebears; indeed, national identity was to some extent a replacement of the personal loyalty to the crown that had defined pre-modern kingdoms. Yet Colley does observe that, towards the end of his reign, George III was reinvented as a patriot king, and the monarchy was repositioned as an important part of British national identity. In proportion as its political significance and agency faded, it could be symbolically incorporated into a national identity that had been created independently of it.

Colley's formulation has never been universally accepted, but it has mostly succeeded in setting the terms of the debate. For example, some scholars have found her ascription of Britishness to Protestantism to be too simplistic, while nonetheless admitting that the development of national identity cannot be understood except by reference to religion. And the idea that national identity developed independently of the monarchy has received widespread tacit acceptance. But there have been moves away from Colley's paradigm.<sup>46</sup> In particular, the idea that national identity developed negatively, against the

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<sup>45</sup> Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837*, revised edn (London: Yale University Press, 2009).

<sup>46</sup> For an overview of work on national identity, and a signal of recent directions, see Tony Claydon and Ian McBride, 'The Trials of the Chosen Peoples: Recent Interpretations of Protestantism and National Identity in Britain and Ireland', in *Protestantism and National Identity: Britain and Ireland, c.1650-c.1850*, ed. by Tony Claydon and Ian McBride (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 3-29.

French Catholic 'other', has been often questioned. It is now sometimes argued that the sociological truism of the necessary 'other' has been too readily and unquestioningly embraced by historians, who were delighted to find an explanatory tool which allowed them to describe nationalism in explicitly negative terms.<sup>47</sup> In place of this, scholars have advanced analyses of eighteenth-century British national identity which place it in a more inclusive, positive European context.<sup>48</sup>

Interest in political parties, and in partisan political culture, has always been a feature of eighteenth-century historiography, and shows no sign of diminishing.<sup>49</sup> Scholars of recent generations, for example, have been interested in how politics was played out in locations other than parliament. The practices and habits of partisan politics have been found in such places as the parish vestry, the high society ballroom, the provincial club, and the city streets.<sup>50</sup> Likewise, the operations of politics in literature and philosophy have been traced with increasing ingenuity. One key figure here is Lawrence E. Klein, who has studied the concept of politeness, particularly with regards to the reign of Anne. In Klein's work, politeness is revealed as a discourse which, cultivated by the likes of Shaftesbury and Addison, undermined the traditional authority of court and church, suggesting that they were no longer needed and would in fact hinder the progress of liberty and refinement, and thus subtly advanced the Whig cause.<sup>51</sup> Abigail Williams has also played an important part in providing a

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<sup>47</sup> For relatively comprehensive denunciations of, and departures from, Colley, see Jeremy Black, 'Confessional State or Elect Nation? Religion and Identity in Eighteenth-Century England', in *Protestantism and National Identity*, ed. by Claydon and McBride, pp. 53-74; J.C.D. Clark, 'Protestantism, Nationalism, and National Identity, 1660-1832', *The Historical Journal*, 43 (2000), 249-76 (pp. 259-76); Claydon and McBride, pp. 7-29.

<sup>48</sup> E.g. Black, 'Elect Nation?', pp. 64-74; Tony Claydon, *Europe and the Making of England, 1660-1760* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Stephen Conway, *Britain, Ireland, and Continental Europe in the Eighteenth Century: Similarities, Connections, Identities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Colin Kidd, *British Identities Before Nationalism: Ethnicity and Nationhood in the Atlantic World, 1600-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), especially pp. 9-10, 27-33, 59-72, 185-200, 207-49; Brian Young, 'A History of Variations: The Identity of the Eighteenth-Century Church of England', in *Protestantism and National Identity*, ed. by Claydon and McBride, pp. 105-28.

<sup>49</sup> E.g. Gerrard has recently asserted that party politics dominated poetry until at least the mid-1740s, and that 'Debates over apparently literary matters... were continually underscored by party bias.' Christine Gerrard, 'Poems on Politics', in *British Poetry, 1660-1800*, ed. by Lynch, pp. 286-302 (pp. 286-87).

<sup>50</sup> See e.g. Gerrard, 'Poems on Politics', pp. 287-88; Nicholas Rogers, *Whigs and Cities: Popular Politics in the Age of Walpole and Pitt* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989); Kathleen Wilson, *The Sense of the People: Politics, Culture, and Imperialism in England, 1715-1785* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

<sup>51</sup> Lawrence E. Klein, 'Liberty, Manners, and Politeness in Early Eighteenth-Century England', *The Historical Journal*, 32 (1989), 583-605 (pp. 584-87, 603-5); Lawrence E. Klein,



more nuanced understanding of how politics was manifested in literature. Her *Poetry and the Creation of a Whig Literary Culture, 1681-1714* (2005) demonstrates that certain poetic forms and tropes were made characteristic of Whiggism; that the co-operation of Whig political and literary figures created an impression of Whiggism as being intrinsically linked with good literature; and that the Whigs were able to develop certain critical principles which privileged Whig literature.<sup>52</sup>

In general, the role of the court is marginalized by the scholarship discussed hitherto. Mostly, this is done implicitly; but sometimes, as in *Pleasures of the Imagination*, explicit justifications are given for it.<sup>53</sup> The key work that scholars tend to cite in such contexts is R.O. Bucholz's *The Augustan Court: Queen Anne and the Decline of Court Culture* (1993). Although focussing on the reign of Anne, this work gives the definitive account of longer-term courtly decline. It examines 'the constitutional, political, financial, social, and cultural history of Augustan England... seek[ing] to explain why an institution [i.e. the court] that had once dominated national life in each of these areas had... declined into a state of near irrelevancy to them by 1714.'<sup>54</sup> Bucholz traces the origins of that decline to the reigns of Charles II and James II, who tried to maintain the court's splendour and authority but found themselves financially unable to do so, and who were challenged by the new structures described above. Under William III, Mary, and Anne, that decline became terminal. By the time of George I's accession, the court was thus in 'a state of near irrelevancy', and, even if this situation could have been reversed (which it could not), Georges I and II were not the men to do so. Bucholz's work, then, has confirmed and encouraged the pre-existing scholarly tendency to dismiss the eighteenth-century court as insignificant.

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'Coffeehouse Civility, 1660-1714: An Aspect of Post-Courtly Culture in England', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 59 (1996), 30-51 (pp. 44-51); Lawrence E. Klein, 'Joseph Addison's Whiggism', in *Cultures of Whiggism: New Essays on English Literature and Culture in the Long Eighteenth Century*, ed. by David Womersley (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005), pp. 108-26 (pp. 110-11, 113-14, 117-21).

<sup>52</sup> Abigail Williams, *Poetry and the Creation of a Whig Literary Culture, 1681-1714* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 1-12, 16, 175-81, 204-27, 239-40.

<sup>53</sup> Brewer, *Pleasures*, pp. 15-54.

<sup>54</sup> R.O. Bucholz, *The Augustan Court: Queen Anne and the Decline of Court Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), p. 11.

## Contrarian Tendencies

So far, discussion has focussed on those scholars whose work most fundamentally accords with the narrative described at the start. While this thesis will engage with such work, it will also seek to challenge and qualify it, particularly by asserting the continuing importance of the court. In so doing, its approach will be consonant with the work of the revisionist or contrarian scholars mentioned above, whose work will now be examined.

When looking at the eighteenth century, the historian whose name springs to mind in connection with the word 'contrarian' is J.C.D. Clark. His *English Society, 1688-1832* (1985) was the first general work to argue that eighteenth-century England was more traditional in its attitudes and practices than is generally assumed. Clark's England was an 'ancien régime' society, hierarchical and devout, rather than the modern, commercial, and irreligious society appearing in other accounts; and as such it was more akin to the continental societies that were eventually racked by the forces of the French Revolution than those accounts had acknowledged. More directly relevant to this thesis is Dustin Griffin's 1996 monograph, *Literary Patronage in England, 1650-1800*. Here, Griffin argues vigorously against the idea that patronage gave way to market-orientated professionalism in the eighteenth century. He shows that the practice of literary patronage persisted throughout the century, in both its traditional form, and in newer manifestations, of which the most significant was perhaps the subscription edition. He also shows that patronage was enduringly understood to be the ideal framework for the production of literature, and perhaps even, by some people, the normal framework. An attendant argument is that writers themselves used, negotiated, and benefitted from the patronage system, rather than being servile and subordinate figures within it.<sup>55</sup>

Hannah Smith's *Georgian Monarchy: Politics and Culture, 1714-1760* (2006) is similarly contrarian, challenging head-on the idea that the court had no cultural or political authority in the early Hanoverian period. She observes that, until very recently, political histories of the period could be written without reference to George I or George II at all, as if they were completely insignificant.

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<sup>55</sup> Griffin, *Patronage*, pp. 10-11, 162-69, 246-85. Prior to Griffin, Paul J. Korshin published an article on eighteenth-century patronage which to some extent foreshadowed some of Griffin's arguments. Paul J. Korshin, 'Types of Eighteenth-Century Literary Patronage', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 7 (1974), 453-73.

Even at the time of her writing (she continues), it was widely assumed that these monarchs were unpopular and philistine, and thus had virtually no literature, art, or music produced either in honour of them or under their auspices; and it was also widely assumed that eighteenth-century Britons had no reason to go to court, because everything of any importance was happening elsewhere. She then advances contrary lines of evidence and analysis on all of these points.<sup>56</sup> Smith demonstrates that the court remained an important forum for political and social activity;<sup>57</sup> that the monarchy remained important to Britons' conceptions of their nation;<sup>58</sup> and that the court did exercise some kind of theoretical and practical cultural agency.<sup>59</sup> Perhaps most helpfully of all, she indicates that the court should not be seen as a rival to parliament, national identity, or the cultural marketplace; it enjoyed a complex and fruitful relationship with each.<sup>60</sup> As mentioned above, Clarissa Campbell Orr has voiced her agreement with Smith's arguments, and quibbles only that Smith does not go far enough in making the case for the court's importance to eighteenth-century Britain. In her own work on long eighteenth-century queenship, Orr has also made the case for the great, enduring significance of royal figures as cultural patrons, showing in particular how such patronage was exercised in association with other agencies, from the aristocratic to the professional to the commercial.<sup>61</sup>

Other works of appositely revisionist tendencies can be found on a variety of subjects. For example, Christine Gerrard's study of the Patriot Whig opposition to Walpole reveals, as part of its argument, that monarchism was actually central to that opposition's writings.<sup>62</sup> Hoock has sought to collapse what he calls 'simplistic dichotomies' such as 'market *versus* state', instead arguing for the importance of state, court, and other official and institutional agencies in cultural production.<sup>63</sup> Abigail Williams's book, mentioned above in

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<sup>56</sup> Hannah Smith, *Georgian Monarchy: Politics and Culture, 1714-1760* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 2-3, 8-11, 15-16, 19-21, 73-95, 123-60, 232-43.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 197-243.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 21-58.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 81-95, 188, 232-38.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 232-38.

<sup>61</sup> *Queenship in Britain 1660-1837: Royal Patronage, Court Culture and Dynastic Politics*, ed. by Clarissa Campbell Orr (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002); *Queenship in Europe 1660-1815: The Role of the Consort*, ed. by Clarissa Campbell Orr (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). See especially Orr's introduction and own chapter in each volume.

<sup>62</sup> Christine Gerrard, *The Patriot Opposition to Walpole: Politics, Poetry, and National Myth 1725-42* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 35-45, 48-65, 150-229.

<sup>63</sup> Hoock, *King's Artists*; Hoock, *Empires of the Imagination* (p. 15 for quotation).

connection with Klein, similarly argues that the patronized Whig literature of the early eighteenth century was perfectly respectable in its own day.<sup>64</sup> Tony Claydon has argued that William III's court propagated a cultural and political ideology of godly reformation so as to legitimate William's rule; and he demonstrates the symbolic and abstract importance of the Williamite court in inspiring such cultural products, even when produced by non-courtly agents.<sup>65</sup> Taking a different tack, Andrew Barclay has argued that William actually tried to restore a 'golden age of the court' by imitating the baroque magnificence of Charles I and Charles II.<sup>66</sup> J.A. Winn, meanwhile, argues in his *Queen Anne: Patroness of the Arts* that the court was not culturally insignificant in Anne's reign, and that she personally was a great patroness.<sup>67</sup> Most recently, Paulina Kewes and Andrew McRae have edited a volume on *Stuart Succession Literature*, positioning it explicitly against 'certain biases' in recent work on politics and literature, these biases including 'relatively little [attention] to the values of monarchy – the category through which contemporaries most commonly approached questions of power'.<sup>68</sup>

This thesis will investigate the court and the courtly-patronage mode of literary production, and seek to position them in relation to the wider developments outlined above. The court and laureate will be studied not as anachronisms, but as dynamic agents within a middle-class, commercial, party-political, nationally-conscious society. Thus this thesis will aim to shift the scholarly perspective away from the idea of modernizing agencies having marginalized the court and its associated traditional attitudes and practices, and towards the idea that the court and those attitudes and practices remained of

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<sup>64</sup> Williams, *Whig Literary Culture*, pp. 1-5.

<sup>65</sup> Tony Claydon, *William III and the Godly Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 1-4, 22, 46-63, 72-73, 79-88, 90, 126-59, 228-29.

<sup>66</sup> Andrew Barclay, 'William's Court as King', in *Redefining William III: The Impact of the King-Stadholder in International Context*, ed. by David Onnekink and Esther Mijers (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 241-61 (pp. 249-52, 258-61).

<sup>67</sup> James Anderson Winn, *Queen Anne: Patroness of Arts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). However, Brean Hammond has objected that Anne's court was not directly responsible for most of the writings, music and visual art that Winn discusses. Brean Hammond, 'Review of "Queen Anne: Patroness of Arts"', *The Modern Language Review*, 111 (2016), 543-44.

<sup>68</sup> Paulina Kewes and Andrew McRae, 'Introduction', in *Stuart Succession Literature: Moments and Transformations*, ed. by Paulina Kewes and Andrew McRae (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 1-19 (p. 3). Although a highly informative, useful, and wide-ranging volume, it does not much feature the laureateship; Dryden is discussed at various points, and his status as laureate mentioned in passing, while Shadwell and Tate are briefly mentioned on pp. 198-9 as part of McRae's own chapter, but without any allusion to the laureateship. Andrew McRae, 'Welcoming the King: The Politics of Stuart Succession Panegyric', in *Stuart Succession Literature*, ed. by Kewes and McRae, pp. 187-204 (pp. 198-9).

central importance in a changing world, albeit playing new and changing roles which engaged with those modernizing agencies. Primarily (in terms of the focus of this study) this means a laureateship that bridges the gaps between court and public, and between monarchy and nation.

### Existing Work on the Poets Laureate

Finally, it is time to survey the work that has been carried out on the poets laureate themselves. It is a very patchy body of work, with a great deal having been written on some of the laureates, not much at all on some of the others, and a great discrepancy as to the kind of work that has been done on each figure. In exploring this work, it will be necessary to give a narrative outline of the history of the office and its holders at the same time.

The office itself has not been much treated, especially in its eighteenth-century form. The standard account is E.K. Broadus's *The Laureateship: A Study of the Office of Poet Laureate in England, With Some Account of the Poets* (1921), which devotes a chapter each to the later Stuart period and to the eighteenth century. This is a well-researched and insightful history, with helpful information on each of the laureates. But it does not engage with the same themes, questions, and concerns as this thesis, and it is nearly a century old. General narrative histories of the office were also published in 1853, 1879, 1895, 1914, and 1955; but none are very analytical, none come close to the scholarship of Broadus, and none offer much new information (if any).<sup>69</sup> In 2014, Ewa Panecka published a study which is predominantly focussed on the laureate poems themselves. It devotes most of its attention to the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and, in its treatment of the eighteenth-century laureateship, is entirely based on those earlier narrative histories, leavened with occasional new mistakes and misconceptions.<sup>70</sup> Other than Broadus's work, the most valuable and original contribution to the field has been Rosamond

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<sup>69</sup> In chronological order: Wiltshire Stanton Austin Jnr and John Ralph, *The Lives of The Poets-Laureate* (London: 1853); Walter Hamilton, *The Poets Laureate of England* (London: 1879); Kenyon West, *The Laureates of England, from Ben Jonson to Alfred Tennyson* (London: 1895), William Forbes Gray, *The Poets Laureate of England: Their History and Their Odes* (London: 1914); Kenneth Hopkins, *The Poets Laureate* (London: Bodley Head, 1954).

<sup>70</sup> Ewa Panecka, *Literature and the Monarchy: The Traditional and the Modern Concept of the Office of Poet Laureate of England* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing: Newcastle, 2014).

McGuinness's *English Court Odes: 1660-1820* (1971), which, although primarily a study of the musical trends and traditions of the biannual court odes for which the laureates wrote most of the words, includes a rigorous, comprehensive attempt to identify all of the odes and trace the history of the form.<sup>71</sup>

The origins of the office of poet laureate, and the rationale behind its conferral upon John Dryden in 1668, will be discussed in Chapter One. However, it should be noted here that, after several decades in which prominent English poets had bandied around the idea of 'poets laureate' and had sporadically associated this idea with the pensions that were sometimes bestowed upon favoured poets by the Stuart court, Dryden was the first man for whom the laureateship was a genuine, salaried office. William Davenant, who had received a pension from Charles I, died in 1668, and Charles II issued a royal warrant making Dryden his poet laureate shortly after. Neither Charles nor Dryden, nor (it seems) any other contemporary, realized that Dryden's appointment was a novelty, or an invention. The recent currency of the idea of 'poets laureate' had caused people to believe not only that Davenant had been holding a particular, official position which had now passed to Dryden, but that a long succession of other poets must have been holding the same position too. Any poet who had been pensioned by the English court, or whose work seemed associated with it, was yoked into this spurious laureate tradition, the highlights of which were Geoffrey Chaucer, Edmund Spenser, and Ben Jonson. Dryden became England's first poet laureate, yet was imagined to be the latest in a long, distinguished line. At this stage, there were no responsibilities attendant on the office, which was more honorific and abstract in its workings. In 1689, due to his Catholicism and implicit loyalty to the deposed king, James II, he was himself deposed.

Dryden has received more scholarly attention than all of his long-eighteenth-century successors put together (possibly excepting Southey), with all his various works having attracted at least some generous ration of academic interest. As well as dedicated monographs, biographies, and essay collections, he finds his way into almost every more general publication on his period.<sup>72</sup> Because of the profuseness of his oeuvre, and his keenness to

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<sup>71</sup> Rosamond McGuinness, *English Court Odes: 1660-1820* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971).

<sup>72</sup> For dedicated works, see e.g. Paul Hammond, *John Dryden: A Literary Life* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991); Paul Hammond, *Dryden and the Traces of Classical Rome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); David Bruce Kramer, *The Imperial Dryden: The Poetics of*

discuss virtually everything that was going on in his lifetime, he has proved to be the academic's friend. However, his role as laureate – which was ambiguous and ill-defined – has received only a small portion of all this scholarly attention. That portion has mainly taken the form of a debate about the early years of his salary.<sup>73</sup>

Dryden's successor was Thomas Shadwell (PL 1689-1692), with whom he shared more in common than the respective natures and copiousness of scholarly publications on the two men would suggest. Dryden and Shadwell knew each other well, having been, arguably, the two mainstays of the Restoration stage, and having long been professional and political rivals. But Shadwell's tenure as laureate was brief. He wrote some odes and other forms of panegyric for William and Mary, and enjoyed a few years as the most successful playwright in the country; and he died in 1692. The existing Shadwell scholarship reflects both the relative brevity of his tenure, and the more general lack of scholarly concern for the office. It also manifests the posthumous potency of Dryden's hatred. For a long time, Shadwell was known only as Dryden's 'dull' antagonist. But a multi-volume *Complete Works* was published in 1927 by the eccentric Montague Summers, who also provided, in the long introduction, a detailed study of Shadwell's life and times.<sup>74</sup> Then, over the latter half of the twentieth century, Shadwell was rehabilitated as a major Restoration playwright. There has been a fairly ample smattering of articles on various aspects of his plays; A.S. Borgman published a biography of him in 1969; and he now tends to feature prominently in any general dramatic history of the period, partly on account of being the foremost exponent of 'humours' comedy.<sup>75</sup> However, his work as a satirist and controversialist has been far less

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*Appropriation in Seventeenth-Century England* (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1994); James Anderson Winn, *John Dryden and His World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); *The Cambridge Companion to John Dryden*, ed. by Steven Zwicker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). For general publications which include substantial discussion of Dryden, see e.g. Kewes, *Appropriation*, pp. 54-63; Terry, *Literary Past*, pp. 145-67; Cynthia Wall, 'Poems on the Stage', in *British Poetry, 1660-1800*, ed. by Lynch, pp. 23-39 (pp. 24-27); Steven Zwicker, *Lines of Authority: Politics and English Literary Culture, 1649-1689* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), pp. 90-199.

<sup>73</sup> This debate is summarized and, it seems, finally settled in Edward L. Saslow, "'Stopp'd in Other Hands": The Payment of Dryden's Pension for 1668-1670', *Restoration: Studies in English Literary Culture, 1660-1700*, 30 (2006), 31-42.

<sup>74</sup> Thomas Shadwell, *Complete Works*, ed. by Montague Summers, 5 vols (London: Fortune Press, 1927).

<sup>75</sup> Jack M. Armistead, 'Scholarship on Shadwell since 1980: A Survey and Annotated Chronology', *Restoration: Studies in English Literary Culture, 1660-1700*, 20 (1996), 101-18;

studied, and his brief but important tenure as laureate has been entirely neglected.

Following Shadwell was Nahum Tate (PL 1692-1715), who has proven neither the academic's friend, nor the revisionist's bounty. The little scholarly attention he has received has tended to focus on his work as a Shakespeare adaptor.<sup>76</sup> His other, more original plays have been largely ignored; likewise his vast reams of poetry, his attempt to write a poetic and religious version of *The Spectator*, and his successful translation of the Psalms into English. Purcell scholars know him, and mostly revile him, as the librettist to *Dido and Aeneas*.<sup>77</sup> But there was a 1972 biography of him produced under the imprint of Twayne Publishers, who for several decades were publishing critical biographies of a wide range of English writers.<sup>78</sup> There has also been a short article on the vicissitudes of Tate's laureate salary (1957); an obscure but strangely effusive study of Tate's laureate panegyrics (1999); and a handful of other anomalous articles.<sup>79</sup>

It is, however, highly appropriate that work on Tate's laureate salary and panegyrics should bulk comparatively large in the diminutive field of his academic afterlife. Tate's tenure was a transformative period for the office. By the time of his death in 1715 – a year after Anne's – the laureateship had become associated with formal expectations, such as had not existed at all for Dryden, and had passed firmly into the Lord Chamberlain's department at court. The laureates would henceforth be formally appointed by the Lord Chamberlain, and would have to write two odes a year, for New Year's Day and for the monarch's birthday, which would be set to music by the king or queen's master of music and performed as part of the festivities on those days. It also became

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Bevis, *English Drama*, pp. 71-98; A.S. Borgman, *Thomas Shadwell* (New York: New York University Press, 1969).

<sup>76</sup> E.g. Odai Johnson, 'Empty Houses: The Suppression of Tate's "Richard II"', *Theatre Journal*, 47 (1995), 503-16; Thomas G. Olsen, 'Apolitical Shakespeare: Or, the Restoration Coriolanus', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 38 (1998), 411-25; Susan J. Owen, *Restoration Theatre and Crisis* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), p. 132.

<sup>77</sup> Anthony Welch, 'The Cultural Politics of *Dido and Aeneas*', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 21 (2009), 1-26.

<sup>78</sup> Christopher Spencer, *Nahum Tate* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1972).

<sup>79</sup> Stuart L. Astor, 'The Laureate as Huckster: Nahum Tate and an Early Eighteenth Century Example of Publisher's Advertising', *Studies in Bibliography*, 21 (1968), 261-66; Samuel A. Golden, 'The Late Seventeenth Century Writer and the Laureateship: Nahum Tate's Tenure', *Hermathena*, 89 (1957), 30-38; Peter F. Heaney, 'The Laureate Dunces and the Death of the Panegyric', *Early Modern Literary Studies*, 5 (1999), 4.1-4.24 [+notes]  
<<https://extra.shu.ac.uk/emls/05-1/heandunc.html>> [accessed 29 September 2019].



customary for those odes to be published, either as individual publications or in newspapers, or both. For the rest of the eighteenth century, the office would be heavily identified with, and even defined by, this duty.

To some extent, this development was a result of Nahum Tate's own activities. Neither he himself nor anyone else regarded him as an equal of Dryden's, or even of Shadwell's. Although his early literary career had overlapped with theirs, he had never become as prominent as either of them, and nor had his name ever been firmly associated with any particular genre, as Shadwell's had been with drama, and as Dryden's had been with both drama and satire. He had written several plays, ranging from farces to topical adaptations of Shakespeare's tragedies, and one of those adaptations, *Richard II*, had even been banned from the stage for its depiction of a king being dethroned. Despite this setback, Tate's sympathies were initially with the Tories; he wrote most of the sequel to Dryden's anti-Whig satire, *Absalom and Achitophel*. He also spent the 1670s and 1680s writing lighter, more occasional poetry, which was published in *Poems* (1676) and an enlarged second edition, *Poems on Several Occasions* (1684). However, his loyalties fixed firmly upon William and Mary after the Glorious Revolution, and, having apparently always been something of a political naïf, he rarely evinced any partisan leanings thereafter, with his only controversial pronouncements coming in favour of certain policies being espoused by the court. In this respect, his appointment as laureate seems to have been both cause and effect, hardening his pre-existing tendencies to shy away from political controversy and cleave to the court. After becoming laureate, the nature of his output became more restricted. Although he wrote occasional translations and a couple of mildly humorous poems, most of his productions were concerned with the depiction of virtuous figures and enumerations of their virtues.

Tate died about a year after George I's accession, and a very different sort of writer, Nicholas Rowe, was appointed to succeed him. Rowe (PL 1715-1718) was the leading tragedian of the day, a highly-respected literary figure, and an inveterate Whig office-holder. He had already served the Whig government in a fairly serious fashion under Queen Anne, and, in the few years of his life lived under George I, he was to accumulate both sinecurial and non-sinecurial positions, of which the laureateship was but the most conspicuous. In terms of his work and reputation, he was almost the polar opposite of Nahum

Tate. Yet he was enjoined with continuing Tate's habit of writing the biannual courtly odes, which, having only been a habit during Tate's tenure, was now formalized into an official responsibility. Rowe disliked the task, and, on at least two occasions, farmed it out to his friends.

Rowe is another figure who has attracted a lot of attention for his theatrical work, but not much for anything else. In fact, the situation of Rowean scholarship is almost identical to that of Shadwellian. Rowe appears in general dramatic histories as the foremost exponent of a certain type of play: the softer, sentimental tragedy of the early eighteenth century, best exemplified by his three 'she-tragedies'.<sup>80</sup> His individual plays have, like Shadwell's, been addressed in various articles.<sup>81</sup> But two things set him apart from Shadwell. One is his edition of Shakespeare, which, being the first 'modern' edition, has inevitably attracted a lot of interest.<sup>82</sup> And the other is that he was active in the reign of Queen Anne, which means that scholars have obsessively ransacked his work for any semblance of political content. 2017's multi-volume *Plays and Poems of Nicholas Rowe* is a good example of this. It is a comprehensive and highly competent edition, providing everything that students of Rowe could possibly want; but the introductory matter to each play is dominated by party-political considerations, to a far greater extent than seems justified by the content of those plays themselves.<sup>83</sup>

The next laureate was Laurence Eusden (PL 1718-1730), who is the most neglected of the lot. He does not seem to have inspired a single monograph or article, nor even a Twayne Publishers' biography. His *ONDB*

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<sup>80</sup> Bevis, *English Drama*, pp. 123, 129-33.

<sup>81</sup> Jones DeRitter, "'Wonder Not, Princely Gloster, at the Notice This Paper Brings You": Women, Writing, and Politics in Rowe's *Jane Shore*', *Comparative Drama*, 31 (1997), 86-104; Alfred W. Hesse and Richard James Sherry, 'Two Unrecorded Editions of Rowe's *Lady Jane Gray: The Early Editions*', *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 72 (1978), 220-26; Paulina Kewes, "'The State Is out of Tune": Nicholas Rowe's *Jane Shore* and the Succession Crisis of 1713-14', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 64 (2001), 283-308; Brett Wilson, '*Jane Shore* and the Jacobites: Nicholas Rowe, The Pretender, and the National She-Tragedy', *ELH*, 72 (2005), 823-43.

<sup>82</sup> Joseph Candido, 'Prefatory Matters in the Shakespeare Editions of Nicholas Rowe and Alexander Pope', *Studies in Philology*, 97 (2000), 210-28; Robert B. Hamm, Jr., 'Rowe's Shakespeare (1709) and the Tonson House Style', *College Literature*, 31 (2004), 179-205; Peter Holland, 'Modernizing Shakespeare: Nicholas Rowe and *The Tempest*', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 51 (2000), 24-32.

<sup>83</sup> Rebecca Bullard and John McTague, 'Introduction to *The Ambitious Step-Mother, Tamerlane, and The Fair Penitent*', in *The Plays and Poems of Nicholas Rowe. Volume I: The Early Plays*, ed. by Stephen Bernard, Rebecca Bullard, and John McTague (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), pp. 35-55.

entry is several short paragraphs in length.<sup>84</sup> Because he was not a playwright and was not very active in politics, he is likewise missing from more general works. The only real scholarly attention to him comes in response to the mocking references made to him by Pope, especially in *The Dunciad*; he was mentioned several times in that work, and Valerie Rumbold touches upon him at the appropriate points in the notes to her edition of the four-book version.<sup>85</sup> He is the extreme version of Nahum Tate (who was also mocked in *The Dunciad*), except for the fact that Tate's characteristics as a writer included prolixity and profuseness, whereas Eusden did not write (or at least publish) very much over the course of his lifetime (contrary to Pope's characterization of him as prolix and profuse).<sup>86</sup> He spent much of that life at Trinity College, Cambridge, and then, between 1724 and his death in 1730, was engaged with the twin demands of clerical work and clerical drinking. (The drinking had probably begun earlier.) His appointment to the laureateship had come at a young age, and is most obviously attributable to an epithalamium he wrote for the marriage of the Duke of Newcastle, who was then Lord Chamberlain. Although Eusden diligently wrote panegyrics (both within and without the remit of his office), he was even more diligent in his alcoholism, and he died at forty-two years old, having supposedly mortgaged the laureateship in a desperate attempt to stay afloat.<sup>87</sup>

Colley Cibber (PL 1730-1757) came next, and was, again, a very different kind of appointee to Eusden. He was probably the most famous theatrical figure of the time, and has even been viewed as one of the earliest celebrities, having acted, managed Drury Lane theatre, and written plays (some of them hugely successful and enduring) for several decades. His work had not been especially political, for the most part, but *The Non-Juror* (1717) had comprised an explicit attack on supporters of the Stuarts, and, as well as enjoying massive popular success, had earned him a £200 gift from George I. He was also known to be close to leading Whig statesmen, including Robert Walpole, and he was associated with government Whiggism to a greater extent

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<sup>84</sup> James Sambrook, 'Laurence Eusden', *ODNB*.

<sup>85</sup> Alexander Pope, *The Dunciad In Four Books*, ed. by Valerie Rumbold (Harlow: Longman, 1999), pp. 92, 98, 108, 111, 136-7, 194, 199, 212, 259, 287.

<sup>86</sup> For Tate in *The Dunciad*, *ibid.*, p. 112.

<sup>87</sup> The suggestion that he mortgaged the laureateship appears only in a single letter, written two decades after his death, by a man who did not know Eusden personally, but had been gathering information from Coningsby, where Eusden had lived the last few months of his life. Lincolnshire Archives, MON 7/13/249.

than would be suggested by a mere perusal of his writings. Some observers considered the appointment a disgrace, and Cibber's activities as laureate only increased the numbers and the hostility of these critics; his biannual odes were the most widely-mocked of the century, for reasons discussed in Chapter Five.

In terms of the scholarship, if Eusden belongs with Tate, then Cibber is firmly in the camp of Shadwell. Indeed, he is to Pope what Shadwell is to Dryden: a 'dull' antagonist, condemned to centuries of notoriety and neglect by his opponent's hostile wit. Only in the latter half of the twentieth century did scholars begin to reappraise Cibber. Now, he is recognized as one of the major playwrights of the eighteenth century.<sup>88</sup> To what extent he should be identified with 'sentimental comedy', and whether such a genre even existed, are subjects of debate.<sup>89</sup> Whatever the case, he was certainly a popular and imaginative playwright, who was very well in tune with eighteenth-century tastes. Helene Koon published a biography of him in 1986,<sup>90</sup> and in 2001 came *The Plays of Colley Cibber: Volume 1*, edited by William J. Burling and Timothy J. Viator; but no following volumes were ever published, despite being contracted to appear.<sup>91</sup> There has been a not inconsiderable number of articles published on various aspects of his plays and on his relationships with other literary figures of the time,<sup>92</sup> and, recently, there has been emphasis on his stature as an early 'celebrity'.<sup>93</sup> In 2016, Elaine McGirr published a study of Cibber rebutting the literary histories that have been constructed at his expense, and asserting his centrality to eighteenth-century culture.<sup>94</sup> The autobiographical *Apology for the*

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<sup>88</sup> Bevis, *English Drama*, pp. 154-61; William Burling and Timothy J. Viator, 'General Introduction', in *The Plays of Colley Cibber: Volume 1*, ed. by William Burling and Timothy J. Viator (London: Associated University Presses, 2001), pp. 11-24 (p. 13).

<sup>89</sup> Bevis, *English Drama*, pp. 154-55; Robert D. Hume, 'Drama and Theatre in the Mid and Later Eighteenth Century', in *English Literature, 1660-1780*, ed. by Richetti, pp. 316-39 (pp. 323-24); Harold Love, 'Restoration and Early Eighteenth-Century Drama', in *English Literature, 1660-1780*, ed. by Richetti, pp. 109-31 (pp. 127-28); Helene Koon, *Colley Cibber: A Biography* (Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1986), pp. 24-29.

<sup>90</sup> Koon, *Cibber*.

<sup>91</sup> William J. Burling died in 2009. There is an online résumé of his, compiled in 2005, in which the second volume of the Cibber *Plays* is listed under 'Books in Progress', with a note that it is 'Under contract'. There is no indication as to why it stalled; Burling was still actively publishing at the time this résumé was compiled.

<sup>92</sup> John Fuller, 'Cibber, The Rehearsal at Goatham, and the Suppression of Polly', *The Review of English Studies*, 13 (1962), 125-34; Beth Kowaleski Wallace, 'Reading the Surfaces of Colley Cibber's "The Careless Husband"', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 40 (2000), 473-89.

<sup>93</sup> Julia H. Fawcett, 'The Overexpressive Celebrity and the Deformed King: Recasting the Spectacle as Subject in Colley Cibber's "Richard III"', *PMLA*, 126 (2011), 950-65; Julia H. Fawcett, *Spectacular Disappearances: Celebrity and Privacy, 1696-1801* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016), pp. 23-60.

<sup>94</sup> Elaine M. McGirr, *Partial Histories: A Reappraisal of Colley Cibber* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

*Life of Colley Cibber* has long been recognized as a valuable guide to the theatrical world of the early eighteenth century. But his non-dramatic poetry has been entirely ignored. This is slightly strange, given how much attention his laureate odes attracted at the time.

His successor, William Whitehead (PL 1757-1785), has been considered a talented and interesting poet by those who have read his work, but their number is small and their voices quiet. He has been studied even less than Tate, and little more than Eusden. Other than a German-language monograph published on him in 1933, and an entry in *ODNB*, no book or article seems to have been written on him.<sup>95</sup> His dramatic works are referenced in *English Drama: Restoration and Eighteenth century, 1660-1789*, where Richard D. Bevis notes that his *Roman Father* entered the repertory for a while.<sup>96</sup> Scholars of Charles Churchill know Whitehead as one of that satirist's repeated targets.<sup>97</sup> But he is mostly invisible in eighteenth-century literary scholarship.

This is partly a result of his modelling himself on Pope, which self-modelling has left him isolated from such important scholarly narratives as preromanticism, Graveyard poetry, and Gothicism. Whitehead was in fact a fairly adventurous poet, but his idea of the poetic vocation had far more in common with Pope's than it did with those later-eighteenth-century poets whom retrospective interest has tended to focus upon. His output, which was almost entirely in verse, was initially circumscribed within the twin examples of Pope and Matthew Prior; but he had started to widen his compass just before his appointment, writing ABAB elegies and a blank verse effusion on the landscape around Bristol. Shortly after becoming laureate, he wrote an explicitly *ex cathedra* poem, addressing the poets of the nation in the manner of a bishop to his clergy; and thereafter he published little other than his laureate odes. He also produced four plays over the course of his life, with decent success; and he avoided party and political matters, while nonetheless drawing the hatred of the satirical attack-poet, Charles Churchill. Whitehead generally enjoyed a far more positive reputation than Cibber, and was probably the most celebrated laureate *qua* laureate since Dryden.

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<sup>95</sup> August Bitter, *William Whitehead, Poeta Laureatus* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1933); Rosemary Scott, 'William Whitehead', *ODNB*.

<sup>96</sup> Bevis, *English Drama*, p. 204.

<sup>97</sup> Wallace Cable Brown, *Charles Churchill: Poet, Rake, and Rebel* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), pp. 87-88, 107.

His successor as laureate was Thomas Warton (PL 1785-1790), who enjoyed even more esteem in the world of letters, and who, for his literary scholarship and poetic innovations, was to be far more enduringly esteemed, too. He was a lifelong fellow of Trinity College, Oxford, and in 1785 he was best known for his *Pleasures of Melancholy* and 'The Suicide' (quintessential Graveyard poems) and for his *History of English Poetry*, the only three completed volumes of which had appeared in 1774-81.<sup>98</sup> He has been much studied, especially with regards to the questions of canon-formation and Gothicism, and is a central figure in the work of Wellek, Lipking, and their successors.<sup>99</sup> However, his role and work as laureate – a position he only held for five years – have not generated much interest.<sup>100</sup>

In 1790, William Pitt the Younger, then Prime Minister, seems to have taken the appointment decision upon himself, and gave the office to Henry James Pye (PL 1790-1813). Pye was a fairly well-known poet, having written a number of long poems in couplets and shorter lyrics in a variety of forms; and he had served as an MP for Berkshire between 1784 and 1790, as well as serving long stints as a magistrate. While laureate, Pye turned out copious amounts of verse and prose, his name becoming a byword for bad poetry in certain quarters, and he also set about diligently quelling any potential Jacobin activity, both through his powers as a magistrate and through his writings (which included two anti-Jacobin picaresque novels).<sup>101</sup>

Pye has been treated by academia in much the same way as Tate, Eusden, and Whitehead. As a prolific writer, spanning many forms and genres, he has managed to find his way into a couple of general works; his long poem *Farrington Hill*, for example, has been discussed as an example of topographical poetry by Donna Landry and David Fairer, and the recent interest in anti-Jacobin novels has led to reinvestigations and reprintings of his *The Democrat* and *The Aristocrat*.<sup>102</sup> But no publication has ever been devoted

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<sup>98</sup> For the popularity of 'The Suicide', a short, non-laureate ode published in successive editions of Warton's *Poems*, see Richard Mant, 'Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Thomas Warton', in Thomas Warton, *The Poetical Works of the Late Thomas Warton, B.D.*, ed. by Richard Mant, 2 vols (Oxford, 1802), I, pp. ix - clxii (passim, especially p. clii).

<sup>99</sup> E.g. Pittock, *Ascendancy of Taste*, pp. 175-213; Terry, *Literary Past*, pp. 293-320.

<sup>100</sup> Rounce, 'Scholarship', pp. 690, 698-99.

<sup>101</sup> For mockery of Pye, see e.g. Thomas Lawrence to William Godwin, Bod, MS Abinger c.15, f. 40.

<sup>102</sup> For *Farrington Hill*, see David Fairer, *English Poetry of the Eighteenth Century 1700-1789* (London: Longman, 2003), pp. 204-7; Donna Landry, 'Poems on Place', in *British Poetry, 1660-1800*, ed. by Lynch, pp. 335-55 (pp. 341-51). For his anti-Jacobin novels, M. O. Grenby, 'The

specifically to him. He was despised by the Romantics (amongst others), and no one has attempted to reverse that judgement. Like Whitehead, his poetry was insufficiently experimental or post-Popean to attract the attention of later generations.

Pye's death in 1813, just as the Peninsular War was reaching its triumphant conclusion, gave rise to the best-documented and most interesting selection process of the long eighteenth century.<sup>103</sup> The Prince Regent, Prime Minister, and Lord Chamberlain, as well as various other government figures, involved themselves in the question of who should succeed Pye, united in their opinion that it should go to the greatest poet in the land. After a certain amount of confusion, the laureateship was offered to Walter Scott, who declined it, and then Robert Southey, who accepted. Upon his appointment, Southey (PL 1813-1843) discovered that he was still expected to write the biannual odes – which he believed was contrary to a promise he had received beforehand – but eventually, in the course of his thirty-year tenure, he managed to have the task permanently dispensed with. Because Southey was generally held to be a great poetic genius by contemporaries, and because he had freed the laureateship of its duties, the position finally settled down into a comfortable honourability. Southey's successors were William Wordsworth and then Alfred, Lord Tennyson, and, although subsequent holders have rarely been lauded as highly as those two, the office has remained quietly respectable ever since.

Dryden and Southey thus mark the two boundary-stones of the eighteenth-century laureateship, one representing its creation, the other its transformation into something else. In terms of scholarly attention, too, they are good bookends to this history of the laureateship, because a colossal amount of work has been carried out on both of them (although Dryden's is the more colossal). Lynda Pratt and Tim Fulford have been particularly active in restoring Southey to something like the position of prominence he enjoyed (or at least occupied) in his own day, leading two projects to make widely available his

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Anti-Jacobin Novel: British Fiction, British Conversation and the Revolution in France', *History*, 83 (1998), 445-71 (pp. 458-60); M. O. Grenby, *The anti-Jacobin Novel: British Conservatism and the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Henry James Pye, *Anti-Jacobin Novels: Volume 1, Henry James Pye, The Democrat and The Aristocrat*, ed. by W.M. Verhoeven (Abingdon: Pickering and Chatto, 2005).

<sup>103</sup> For a full account and an exploration of its implications, see my forthcoming article in *The English Historical Review*, 'Appointing a Poet Laureate: National and Poetic Identities in 1813'.

complete correspondence and his complete poetic works.<sup>104</sup> In addition, they and others have published various chapters, articles, and monographs on all manner of Southey's (very diverse) body of work, and he has become one of those stock writers for more thematic-based monographs and edited collections to discuss.<sup>105</sup> Whereas Dryden has proven a favourite of older and newer generations of literary scholarship alike, Southey, although somewhat neglected by the older, has been found newly relevant to the newer.<sup>106</sup> However, the laureateship has not loomed very large in this corpus, the exceptions being volume three of the *Later Poetic Works*, the introductions of which discuss Southey's appointment and poetic practice as laureate, and Michael Gamer's work on the financial motivations for Southey's acceptance of the post.<sup>107</sup>

Scholarly neglect of the eighteenth-century laureateship is part and parcel of the characterizations that prevail for that century. By the same token, a study of the laureateship can provide a fuller, more nuanced picture of this period. In this thesis it will be argued that, as certain scholars mentioned above have recently asserted, the extremity of eighteenth-century developments has tended to be exaggerated. In particular, it will be demonstrated that the laureateship was considered a relevant and respectable office to a greater extent than is supposed, and that, far from being anachronistic, it was actually representative of certain court-orientated ideas and practices of literary production that persisted and adapted throughout the long eighteenth century.

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<sup>104</sup> Robert Southey, *Poetical Works, 1793-1810*, ed. by Lynda Pratt and others, 5 vols (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2004); Robert Southey, *Later Poetical Works, 1811-1838*, ed. by Lynda Pratt, Tim Fulford and others, 4 vols (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2012); *The Collected Letters of Robert Southey*, ed. by Lynda Pratt, Tim Fulford, Ian Packer and others <[https://www.rc.umd.edu/editions/southey\\_letters](https://www.rc.umd.edu/editions/southey_letters)> [accessed 19 January 2018].

<sup>105</sup> See e.g. David M. Craig, *Robert Southey and Romantic Apostasy: Political Argument in Britain, 1780-1840* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2007); *Romanticism and Millenarianism*, ed. by Tim Fulford (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); Charles Mahoney, *Romantics and Renegades: The Poetics of Political Reaction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2003); Michael O'Neill, 'Southey and Shelley Reconsidered', *Romanticism*, 17 (2011), 10-24; Lynda Pratt, 'Revising the National Epic: Coleridge, Southey and Madoc', *Romanticism*, 2 (1996), 149-64; *Robert Southey and the Contexts of English Romanticism*, ed. by Lynda Pratt (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006); W.A. Speck, *Robert Southey: Entire Man of Letters* (London: Yale University Press, 2006); Daniel E. White, 'Idolatry, Evangelicalism, and the Intense Objectivism of Robert Southey', *Romanticism*, 17 (2011), 39-51.

<sup>106</sup> See e.g. Elisa A. Beshero-Bondar, 'Southey's Gothic Science: Galvanism, Automata, and Heretical Sorcery in Thalaba the Destroyer', *Genre*, 42 (2009), 1-32; Matthew Leporati, "'Authority from Heaven": Robert Southey's Madoc and Epic Christian Imperialism', *European Romantic Review*, 25 (2014), 161-180.

<sup>107</sup> Michael Gamer, 'Laureate Policy', *Wordsworth Circle*, XLII (2011), 42-47; Michael Gamer, *Romanticism, Self-Canonization, and the Business of Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 156-196; main introduction and section introductions in Southey, *Later Poetical Works*, ed. by Pratt and Fulford, III.



This argument is located at the interstices of literary and historical scholarship, and will both continue, and take advantage of, the trend in eighteenth-century studies towards interdisciplinarity. The types of evidence and approaches here employed are variously rooted in the traditional practices of each separate discipline, but will be used in conjunction so as to illuminate each other.

## Terminology and Structure

Having surveyed the various fields of scholarship with which this thesis engages, it is worthwhile defining how some of the key terms that have continually cropped up will be employed, and understood, over the course of the following chapters, before giving a brief outline of those chapters themselves. Firstly, the idea of a 'court' must be defined. The best starting point here is R.O. Bucholz's discussion, found at the start of his *The Augustan Court* (1993). 'In contemporary usage,' he observes, 'the word "court" denoted at once a physical place, a group of people, a form of behaviour, and a set of attitudes. Moreover, none of these meanings is entirely clear-cut in its own right.'<sup>108</sup> The court could be a fixed location (such as Whitehall), or wherever the monarch happened to be; the group of people could be those within that location, or everyone employed by or associated with the crown, or could even include the current ministry; and behaviour and attitudes are even harder to pin down. Bucholz's own study is on 'the court in its narrower sense of household servants, courtiers, and the environment they inhabited.'<sup>109</sup> To some extent, this will be this thesis's usage too; but there will also be two additional emphases. The first is on the court as an abstract, ideological entity; that is, 'the court' as contemporaries understood and viewed it. According to Bucholz, the court had drastically lost 'authority' over the course of the seventeenth century, particularly between the time of the early and later Stuarts.<sup>110</sup> But 'authority' has nothing to do with 'household servants, courtiers, and the environment they inhabited'; it exists in perceptions, abstractions, and ideologies; hence this additional emphasis. The second emphasis is on the elision of court and crown.

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<sup>108</sup> Bucholz, *Augustan Court*, p. 2.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid*, p. 3.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid*, p. 11.

When this thesis references the court, it is to be remembered that the person of the monarch, and the institution of the monarchy, were central to the identity, agency, and indeed authority of that court.

Secondly, an explanation of the word 'literature' must be given. It will be used in its modern, somewhat anachronistic sense: creative or imaginative writing, mostly of a high-brow, fictional inclination. This is not how the term was understood in the early eighteenth century, when it tended to mean something more like 'learning' or 'book-based learnedness'. The modern definition and conception of literature came into being in the latter half of that century; and even then Samuel Johnson, for example, was happy to switch between usages.<sup>111</sup> To further complicate matters, the coming-into-being of 'literature' is an important theme for this thesis as a whole. The sense in which the term is being used will be made clear as and when it comes up; but generally, when it is used in an offhand manner, the modern definition is being intended.<sup>112</sup>

Thirdly, it is important that terms like 'mode', 'cultural', 'production', and 'consumption' are not understood as harking towards any Marxist or related body of theory. When such a phrase as, 'the mode of cultural production and consumption' is used, it is used in a very limited sense, meaning that narrowly-defined culture (music, painting, theatre, and literature) is made, and engaged with, according to a general set of norms and structures which are consistent and coherent enough to be loosely dubbed a 'mode' (or a 'structure'). Essentially, this usage is to be understood along the lines of John Brewer's argument in *The Pleasures of the Imagination*, where he asserts that a 'courtly' culture gave way to a 'commercial' culture. Brewer's favoured conceptualization of these 'cultures', and the replacement of one by the other, is based around what might be termed *loci* (that is, locations which are as much mental and ideological as they are physical). He traces culture, or 'the arts', flowing from the court into coffeehouses, clubs, academies, and commercial venues.<sup>113</sup> But he also talks of a 'new system of the arts, with its new institutions and concepts of taste'.<sup>114</sup> It is this latter emphasis – on practical and ideological structures which

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<sup>111</sup> Brewer, *Pleasures*, pp. 1-4, 33-54; Hammond, *Hackney for Bread*, pp. 198-200; Clifford Siskin, 'More Is Different: Literary Change in the Mid and Late Eighteenth Century', in *English Literature, 1660-1780*, ed. by Richetti, pp. 797-823 (pp. 809-23).

<sup>112</sup> For the most useful discussion of the term 'literature', and of the terms and ideas that preceded its modern conceptualization, see Terry, *Literary Past*, pp. 11-34.

<sup>113</sup> Brewer, *Pleasures*, pp. 2-3, 15.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid*, p. 10.

together comprise a 'system' by which culture tends to be made (produced) and engaged with (consumed) at any given time – which determines this thesis's angle of enquiry, rather than any more theoretically rigorous approach.

Lastly, the term 'public' must be considered. It is a key term for this thesis, but, as Habermas himself discusses at the start of his seminal work on the public sphere, it is a word that can be used in a variety of different ways.<sup>115</sup> Essentially, this thesis follows T.W.C. Blanning's usage, as set out in his monograph on the public sphere in Europe, 1660-1789. Blanning argues that 'during this period a new cultural space developed', concerned with both politics and matters of high culture, 'which posed new challenges to regimes and their ruling orders. Alongside the old culture, centred on the courts and the representation of monarchical authority, there emerged a 'public sphere', in which private individuals came together to form a whole greater than the sum of the parts. By exchanging information, ideas, and criticism, these individuals created a cultural actor – the public – which has dominated European culture ever since... it was [in the eighteenth century] that 'public opinion' came to be recognized as the ultimate arbiter in matters of taste and politics.'<sup>116</sup> Blanning's work itself reflects an almost consensual scholarly tendency to endorse and employ Habermas's overall conceptual framework, while repudiating many of his subsidiary arguments and points of detail; but where Blanning goes somewhat beyond that consensus, and where this thesis goes further still, is in collapsing Habermas's oppositional distinction between the public sphere and the traditional structures of authority, particularly the court.<sup>117</sup> Essentially, then, this thesis accepts the notion of an identifiable 'court' and an identifiable 'public' playing key roles in post-1660 society, politics, and culture, and it accepts the identification of the public with the newer and expanding elements, practices, and attitudes discussed above, most notably the commercial. But it seeks to challenge, qualify, and recast the currently prevailing notions of the relationship between court and public. Partly for this reason, and partly so as to emphasize certain aspects of the public and its relationship with the court, the term 'public' itself will sometimes be broken down into more particular or intricate

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<sup>115</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Enquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. by Thomas Burger with the assistance of Frederick Lawrence (Oxford: Polity, 1999; first published 1962 in German and 1989 in English), pp. 1-4.

<sup>116</sup> Blanning, *Culture of Power*, p. 2.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 2-14.

formulations, and there will be occasional reconsiderations of it, especially with regards to how it was used by writers of the long eighteenth century themselves. Moreover, the emphasis of this thesis's phraseology will tend to fall more on Blanning's new 'cultural actor – the public' than on his 'new cultural space... a 'public sphere'".

The overall structure to be followed in this thesis is partly chronological, and partly thematic. This structure has been chosen as giving the best representation of the way in which the office changed and developed over time, while also allowing the key aspects and themes of the office to be properly discussed and analysed, and showing how certain aspects and themes became more or less prominent over time. Chapter One focusses on the later Stuart period, investigating the formation, early fluidity, and transformation of the laureateship in those years. By examining court archives and those of Charles Sackville, Sixth Earl of Dorset, along with contemporary publications on the court and the writings of the first three laureates, this chapter shows that the office was instituted as a vague, honorific position, before becoming fixed with a certain function by the early years of George I's reign. The laureate gained a distinct place within the royal household and its cultural life, which it occupied for the next hundred years; this chapter therefore sets out the framework for all which follow.

Chapter Two then focusses on George I and George II's laureates, and especially on Nicholas Rowe. Investigating the dichotomy of patronal court and commercial marketplace as it manifests in the printed works of these laureates, that dichotomy is shown to be a false one, with the laureateship being both a symbol and an organ of their mutuality. Rowe, Eusden, and Cibber pitched their work to both court and public, and used the validation gained from each to sell their work to the other. Nor were they atypical in their practices; in a sense, the laureateship to which they were appointed formed the pinnacle of a system in which literature was produced and consumed according to various agencies, of which the court's was central.

Chapter Three, taking a view of the entire Hanoverian period, returns to more behind-the-scenes matters. It discusses the practicalities of appointing a new laureate, looking at the roles of the different agents: king, royal family, Lord Chamberlain, politicians, and others. Although this Introduction has indicated that there was no overwhelming consistency in terms of what kind of writer was

appointed laureate, Chapter Three shows that a number of significant patterns can be identified. The laurel was used to strengthen and legitimize various networks, and to establish the court's importance to those networks; and it was also used to link the court with values that had been cultivated amongst the public, by showing that the ultimate validation of a celebrated poet came in the form of courtly office. Behind each selection process, there was a complex relationship between the exigencies of patronage and ideas of 'merit', which relationship bears some correlation to the duality between court and public.

Chapter Four broadens the thematic scope, bringing the related topics of national identity, partisan politics, and ideas concerning literature more directly into focus. Using a vast amount of contemporary printed material (predominantly newspapers), this chapter seeks to establish the public standing of the laureates in the latter half of the eighteenth century. It shows that, in the reign of George III, the laureate became a public figure in an unprecedented manner. George III's laureate held a unique and uniquely-important place in the world of letters, and his office was clearly of much greater prominence, and much greater diversity of reception, than has been previously recognized. This pre-eminence demonstrates the nature of the court's relationship with the public, and the continuing importance of the court in the production of culture.

With the first four chapters having covered the long eighteenth century in a vaguely sequential fashion, Chapter Five then takes the entire period as its timeframe, and explores the entire corpus of biannual laureate odes. The odes are here studied as deliberate attempts to present an image of the monarch, an image of the national community, and an idea of the relationship between the two. It is argued that the laureate ode format was highly sensitive to that relationship, uniquely well-positioned to comment upon it, intrinsically concerned to find some way of negotiating it, and increasingly responsible for mediating it to a reading public. Although the odes were constantly evolving – the demands upon them becoming more numerous and more complex over time – these issues remained consistently important to the ode format. Approached with interest rather than with scorn, they give a powerful sense of the relationship between court and public as it developed over the long eighteenth century, and of the laureateship's place within it.

Lastly, the thesis is concluded. The Conclusion summarizes the main arguments of each chapter, discusses once more the importance of the laureateship, and indicates possible future directions of research.

## **Chapter One. Patronage Asserted: The Formation of the Laureateship, 1668-1714**

The eighteenth-century laureateship was to be a very different office from that which was conferred upon John Dryden in 1668. Dryden's laurel was akin to the unofficial laurels of Ben Jonson and William Davenant, being a mark of nothing more than a pension and poetic honour, both stemming from the person who was supposedly best placed to judge of such matters, the king. The eighteenth-century laureateship, on the other hand – the office that formed under William III and Anne, and was formalized at the accession of George I – was an office that could be located in a distinct place within the court establishment, and which was defined by its function: the writing of biannual odes for performance at court. This chapter will investigate how and why such a transformation occurred. It will do so by considering a range of different evidences: archival material generated by the court, and particularly by the Lord Chamberlain's office; the private papers and accounts of Charles Sackville, Sixth Earl of Dorset, who was Lord Chamberlain in the crucial transformative years of 1689-1695; contemporary printed material on the court; and the writings of the laureates themselves.

These issues have important ramifications for the wider theme of this thesis: the viability of the paradigm in which a patronal court gave way to a commercial public. It is highly significant that, between 1668 and 1715, the court should have felt the need to create and gradually define the position of laureate, and equally significant that the entire process was attended with such uncertainty. Over a half century of continual ruptures between one monarchical regime and the next, with each successive monarch burdened rather with rival claimants than with legitimate heirs, and with the putatively Golden Age of Charles I's court separated from touching distance by the Interregnum, there was a constant need for monarchs and their court officials to work out their ceremonial role afresh, and to try to create a compelling representation of the ideal of courtly rule. This heightened awareness of the importance of ceremony, and the ruptures in courtly practice, manifested strongly in the realm of high culture. Successive courts felt keenly the need to live up to a patronal role that seemed characteristic of the past and of successful foreign monarchies, and to occupy a commanding role with regards to literary, artistic, and musical

production. But they also felt the difficulties of doing so. Moreover, there were now increasingly powerful alternative cultural agencies at work – those of the public – necessitating that the court define its position with regards to them, too.

Hence the formalization of a pension into an office of poet laureate; hence the eventual definition of that office into the form which it would take for the next hundred years; but hence also the continual uncertainties of the process. The laureateship went from a vague position to a fixed position with set duties specifically *because* the court was trying to work out and to define its cultural role, to define where it stood vis-à-vis the public, and to work out a definitive vision of its ceremonial life. The settling of the laureateship's position was symptomatic of this: by bringing the laureate clearly and securely into a household position, paying him more regularly and giving him a set role, the court created a clear manifestation of its cultural role, and of its relationship to the world of letters; and that role itself allowed for the court to use the poetic talents of an esteemed writer as part of its own ceremony, as well as propagating a vision of a ceremonial, resplendent court to an emergent public. In all these respects the court was highly successful. The laureateship that was fixed into place in 1715 was to endure for a century, and, as will be seen in the following chapters, was to play an increasingly important and prominent part in the cultural life of the nation.

This chapter will begin its investigation of these matters with a short survey of the relevant scholarship, which will also serve to flesh out the situation summarized above. It will then proceed to a discussion of the uncertainties of the laureate's initial position, especially during Dryden's tenure, by reference to the works and correspondence of the later Stuart laureates (Dryden, Shadwell, and Tate). The next section will then explore archival evidence relating to the Lord Chamberlain's department to show how and when the laureate's position became formalized and defined. Then the Earl of Dorset's records will be brought in to complete the picture, and lastly the printed works of Shadwell and Tate will be used to demonstrate their own importance in the fixing of the laureate's position.



## Settings of the Scene

The later Stuart period was a time of constant reinvention for the British court.<sup>1</sup> From the outbreak of the Civil Wars in 1641 to the Restoration in 1660, there had existed only various thin semblances of Charles I's monarchical court: his wartime court at Oxford, Oliver Cromwell's regime, and Charles II's court in exile. When Charles II was restored to the throne in 1660, he was therefore seeking to re-establish his court upon a model from which it was disconnected by twenty years of abeyance. He (and the officials and associates also concerned in the endeavour) did so with the memories of the Civil Wars, regicide, and Interregnum still palpably fresh. He needed to assert a legitimacy that was based on immemorial tradition but responsive to recent developments.<sup>2</sup>

Charles II's successor, his brother James II, came to the throne in 1685 only after having survived a widespread and extended attempt to have him excluded from the line of succession several years earlier, and immediately had to defeat an armed attempt upon the throne by Charles II's illegitimate son, the Duke of Monmouth. In 1688-9 he then fled to the continent in the face of the Glorious Revolution, which installed his daughter Mary II and her Dutch husband William III as joint monarchs, but in circumstances that were profoundly controversial at the time and continued to be so thereafter. They were not the legal successors under any law that had existed prior to that point, especially given that James II remained alive until after Mary's death and just before William's, and the issue of how to justify their legitimacy, along with the question of whether they were indeed legitimate at all, therefore came to the fore of British political debate.<sup>3</sup> Their court was distinguished from recent courts by centring on two monarchs rather than one, and by William's foreignness in nationality and religion. William and Mary's accession also saw the later Stuart period's greatest purge in terms of court personnel, effecting a huge loss of

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<sup>1</sup> For an overview of the history of the court in this period, see Bucholz, *Augustan Court*, pp. 12-35. The fragility and high incidence of serious ruptures in the history of the Stuart monarchs has recently been emphasized by Kewes and McRae, 'Introduction', pp. 1-7.

<sup>2</sup> Kevin Sharpe, *Rebranding Rule: Images of Restoration and Revolution Monarchy, 1660-1714* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), pp. 3, 7-8.

<sup>3</sup> Kewes and McRae have emphasized one aspect of this issue that is especially significant for this chapter: William and Mary's 'challenge – which had cultural as well as political and military dimensions – was to create an impression of continuity when the old king was alive and unwilling to accept the loss of his kingdoms.' Kewes and McRae, 'Introduction', p. 6.

experience and continuity, and, according to Bucholz, filling court positions with Whigs who felt no personal or ideological loyalty to the institution of the court.<sup>4</sup>

Mary's death came several years before William's, and it was her sister, Anne, who acceded to the throne in 1702; but she herself had lost her only living child, the Duke of Gloucester, shortly beforehand. Anne's court differed from William's in that, for the first time in a century, the sole monarch was a woman, and also in that she was an Englishwoman and a devout Anglican. Her reign was overshadowed by the issue of the succession, which had technically been settled upon her very distant relative, the dowager Electress Sophia of Hanover, but which was still ardently claimed by James II's son. Sophia's and Anne's deaths in 1714 saw the relatively untroubled accession of George I, another foreign, non-Anglican male who, unlike William, brought with him neither armed soldiers, a wife, nor even a passing competence with the English language. But he did bring a solid brood of legitimate children and grandchildren, meaning that, after seventy-five years of discontinuities and ersatz successions, the British court was able to take on a relatively settled form.

Amongst the issues that have most interested recent scholars of the later Stuart period, the court has loomed increasingly large, especially for the reign of Charles II. The key themes here have been ceremony, formality, and representation. Brian Weiser's 2003 work, *Charles II and the Politics of Access*, was arguably the first to bring serious attention to the practices of Charles II's court, and the first to argue that, rather than being marked by every kind of laxness, his court actually became increasingly formal over the course of his reign, and personal access to the king became increasingly restricted.<sup>5</sup> Subsequent historians have added to this argument, further revealing a Charles for whom formality and protocol were of great importance to the regulation of his life and court, particularly as his reign wore on. Connected to this was Charles's great concern for ceremony, which has received its most in-depth treatment in

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<sup>4</sup> On this point, see Bucholz, *Augustan Court*, pp. 26-35.

<sup>5</sup> Brian Weiser, *Charles II and the Politics of Access* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2003). However, Keay draws attention to Ronald Hutton's 1989 biography of Charles II as representing 'one of the few historians' to emphasise 'Charles II's attitude to court ceremonial', quoting Hutton's appraisal of Charles as 'pedantically conscious of the dignity which was due to the monarchy'. Anna Keay, *The Magnificent Monarch: Charles II and the Ceremonies of Power* (London: Continuum Books, 2008), p. 233; Ronald Hutton, *Charles II: King of England, Scotland, and Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 453.

the work of Anne Keay (2008) and Matthew Jenkinson (2010). The importance of ceremony had been impressed upon Charles as a child by his governor, the earl of Newcastle, who had recognized it as the quality which set monarchs apart from their subjects, enhancing their majesty and their hierarchical pre-eminence; and the lesson was amply reinforced by the death of Charles I, executed as Charles Stuart in plain view of his subjects. Thus it was that, as Keay shows in her 'ritual biography' of Charles II and his court, he strove to cultivate a sacral and magnificent idea of kingship through his actions, his modes of display, and the manner in which he conducted his personal relationships. For Keay, the importance of ceremony permeated Charles's life and court, evidenced both in the details of day-to-day routine and in such grand set-piece instances as his touching for scrofula.<sup>6</sup>

Jenkinson, while building on such ideas, takes a different emphasis, investigating a court culture which he argues both reflected and contributed to the wider tensions of later Stuart society and politics. Jenkinson's wide-ranging monograph includes studies of the works of Dryden and other literary figures associated with the court, and concludes that court culture, taking its cue from Charles himself, was able to accommodate both a positive and a negative discourse of monarchy, each positive symbol or trope having its negative counterpart, bound together in an almost symbiotic fashion. In the short term, this allowed Charles's rule to remain strong in what might have been a perilous period for the institution of monarchy; but in the long term, its effects on the nation and on the monarchy were probably damaging. Two aspects of Jenkinson's approach will be especially significant here: his desire to draw attention to the motives of the individuals responsible for creating and contesting court culture, and his emphasis that the court was porous, interacting with other areas of cultural production and spreading court culture beyond the walls of the court.<sup>7</sup>

The most recent major work to deal with such issues has been Kevin Sharpe's *Rebranding Rule* (2013). Here, Sharpe gives the most extensive existing account of the later Stuart court and courtly culture as a mode of representing the monarch. His main argument, somewhat similar to

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<sup>6</sup> Keay, *Magnificent Monarch*, p. 2 for quotation, pp. 22-4 for the earl of Newcastle's instruction.

<sup>7</sup> Matthew Jenkinson, *Culture and Politics at the Court of Charles II, 1660-1685* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2010), especially pp. 5, 11-20.

Jenkinson's, is that the court's representations of Charles were designed to re-sacralize and re-mystify monarchy, recapturing the representative discourse of Charles I's court, but that the impact of the 1640s and 1650s, and the various societal developments that were continuing over the course of Charles II's reign, could not be ignored, and were indeed fully understood by Charles II himself. 'Charles II had often to stand for stasis and tradition, while accommodating to change.' Sharpe emphasizes the debates that had been unleashed by the Civil Wars and regicide, and the emergence of a public sphere, with its insatiable demand to scrutinize and comment on everything. The representational culture of Charles II's court therefore contained profound tensions, and those tensions were eventually resolved by incorporating the consciousness of opposition into the representational culture itself: instead of ignoring the arguments and alternatives that were floating about in the public sphere, the court acknowledged them and opposed them, gradually losing its sacral, mystical pretensions in the process.<sup>8</sup>

Sharpe goes on to survey the reigns of James II, William and Mary, and Anne, showing how those reigns appeared in the representational culture emanating from the court, and how that culture was produced in response to opposition rhetoric and the need to establish the regime's legitimacy.<sup>9</sup> His overarching argument is that the later Stuart period did indeed see a decline in the court's importance and in the scope, ambition, and efficacy of representational court culture. Curiously, he assigns prime responsibility for this decline to William III. William (argues Sharpe) cared only about making war with France, and, in pursuit of this goal, traded in his prerogatives, encouraged the desacralization of monarchy, and paid too little attention to matters of culture, ceremony, and representation. But Sharpe does also mention wider societal changes as important factors in this decline, describing (in relatively bald terms) such developments as the emergence of the public sphere, the rise of scientific knowledge, and the death of superstition.<sup>10</sup>

The other most important works on the later Stuart courts have already been mentioned in the Introduction to this thesis, as they have been more widely influential and are of more direct relevance to this thesis's overall

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<sup>8</sup> Sharpe, *Rebranding Rule*, pp. 7-8 (p. 8 for quotation), 202-14.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 343-50, 482-4, 502-6, 510-4.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, p. 503-6, 672-80.

arguments. But no court has received as much attention from scholars as Charles II's. Claydon's monograph on the courtly reformation ideology that was propagated by clerical figures associated with William III's court has been the most important work on the themes being described here. Of particular relevance is Claydon's argument that, with the emergence of alternative centres of social and political power, and of an increasingly large, literate political nation, William's court had to spread its message (of courtly reformation) in new, more far-reaching ways; and although Claydon admits the importance of the later Stuart court as a political forum to have been declining, he suggests it to have been perhaps the most significant ideological and propagandistic force in the nation at large, deserving of more scholarly attention in this respect.<sup>11</sup> Bucholz's study of Anne's court has articulated the definitive argument on the decline of the court in the later Stuart period, against which J.A. Winn's more recent study of Anne as a cultural patron has been something of a corrective. Orr's edited volume on queenship in Britain includes various interesting explorations of female royal figures as cultural patrons, generally showing that they patronized artistic figures who made most of their income elsewhere, but that they used their patronage as part of deliberate endeavours of self-assertion.<sup>12</sup>

The issue of the court's relationship to culture, then, has become an important one in the historiography of the later Stuart period, and has been treated in various insightful ways, revealing the issue's wider implications for how the court's place in society and the role of the monarchy are conceptualized by historians. The related themes of formality, ceremony, and representation are critical here; historians have often been concerned to plot their material with relation to one or more of these themes, and to suggest whether the court's formality, ceremonial role, and representative efforts were growing or diminishing over their chosen period of study. Historians have also sought to work out how the court's cultural role changed in response to the wider societal changes of the time, from the impact of the Civil Wars to the emergence of a public sphere; and literary scholars have explored how those

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<sup>11</sup> Claydon, *Godly Revolution*, pp. 1-4, 73-88, 228-9.

<sup>12</sup> Edward Corp, 'Catherine of Braganza and cultural politics', in *Queenship in Britain*, ed. by Orr, pp. 53-73; Andrew Barclay, 'Mary Beatrice of Modena: the 'Second Bless'd of Woman-kind?', in *Queenship in Britain 1660-1837*, ed. by Orr, pp. 74-93.

changes manifested in the world of literature (as was described in the Introduction and as will be more fully dealt with in Chapter Two).

No comprehensive answer, or at least consensus, has yet appeared. There remains much to explore and to understand in terms of how successive courts responded to the uncertainties of their own inceptions, how they responded to the emergence of new agencies in the realm of culture, and what cultural role they played. However, some of the works cited above have indicated a line of argument that will prove highly significant for this chapter's argument. Bucholz believes that Charles II's 'real cultural achievement' was to resurrect the court's 'traditional leadership as an artistic patron', making widespread again the assumption 'that cultural innovation and patronage depended on the court'. Charles achieved this despite financial difficulties, and despite the emergence of the public sphere, by a wide yet discriminating patronage, by making his court attractive on a personal level, and by encouraging innovation. For William III's reign, Claydon's work stresses the manner in which the court of William and Mary developed a coherent ideology that legitimized their unusual rule and distinguished them from their predecessors' courts. Both present these activities as occurring in deliberate, targeted interaction with the public.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, Sharpe shows successive courts structuring and enacting their authority by reference to traditional conceptions of monarchy and to somewhat mythical notions of how the court operated prior to the Civil Wars, but using those ideological resources in a manner that was appropriate for a new context in which the public not only exerted its own social, political, and cultural authority, but was increasingly vocal in asking questions of both the institution and the occupants of monarchy.<sup>14</sup>

This idea of a court responding to the challenges and pressures of its situation, and doing so by defining its cultural role and enacting that role in engagement with the world beyond the court, is something which, as will be seen, fits very well with the history of the laureateship. In turn, the history of the laureateship will prove greatly illuminating as to how the court went about this. This chapter will argue that the laureateship was created, and progressively defined, due to successive courts' need to establish their legitimacy and pre-eminence, which need was enacted in between the twin poles of a traditional,

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<sup>13</sup> Bucholz, *Augustan Court*, pp. 16-7; Claydon, *Godly Revolution*, pp. 64-88.

<sup>14</sup> See citations of Sharpe above.

ideal conception of the monarchical court on the one hand, and an increasingly powerful public on the other. In cultural matters, this required the court to assert some form of patronal and ceremonial leadership over cultural production, but to do so in interaction with agencies of cultural production and consumption that existed outside the court. The laureateship was the result.

### **The Birth Pangs of the Office**

Prior to Dryden's appointment, the office of poet laureate did not exist. Contemporaries with any interest or agency in the matter assumed that there was such an office, and they assumed that William Davenant had been its most recent holder. But Davenant – the poet, playwright, and stage manager whose death in April 1668 precipitated Dryden's appointment – had never actually held any such office.<sup>15</sup> Instead, he had held a pension from Charles I. Having written a number of masques for the entertainment of Charles's court, and having written a number of poems in praise of the royal family, Davenant had become the beneficiary of Charles's patronage, receiving £100 a year from 1638 onwards. During the Civil Wars, Davenant fought for the king, and endured both exile and imprisonment under the Interregnum regime. But his pension necessarily lapsed, and was not renewed by Charles II. The idea that he was or had been poet laureate – an idea apparently cultivated to some degree by Davenant himself – was not based on any official appointment, role, or status.<sup>16</sup>

In a similar way, it was widely thought that Ben Jonson had preceded Davenant as poet laureate. He, too, had written masques and poems for and in honour of Charles I; he, too, had been rewarded with a pension; he, too, had sometimes been informally thought of, by others and by himself, as a 'poet laureate' or as 'the king's poet'.<sup>17</sup> Jonson, himself a rigorous classical scholar, had once requested his friend John Selden – another scholar – to investigate the tradition of crowning poets with laurel, which went back to ancient Greece and Rome. Selden had duly done so, and published the results in the second

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<sup>15</sup> Broadus, *Laureateship*, pp. iv, 51-64; A.M. Gibbs, 'Introduction', in William Davenant, *The Shorter Poems, and Songs from the Plays and Masques*, ed. by A.M. Gibbs (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), pp. xvii-xciii (pp. xx, xxiv-xxv, lvi).

<sup>16</sup> Broadus, *Laureateship*, pp. 51-8; Gibbs, 'Introduction', pp. xx, xxiv-xxvi, xxxii-xxxviii, lvi.

<sup>17</sup> Broadus, *Laureateship*, pp. 40-51; McGuinness, *Court Odes*, pp. 5-6.

edition (1631) of his *Titles of Honor*. The practice of crowning poets, he found, appeared sporadically across European history – sometimes an informal crowning of great poets, at other times a more official conferral – and had honoured such great poets as Petrarch and Tasso. Laurel leaves were the standard and hoariest material used for this crown.<sup>18</sup>

The laurel wreath had been a mark of triumph or glory in ancient Greece, and the association of laurel with greatness had persisted in European iconography ever since. The actual practice of crowning with laurel therefore found a metaphorical analogue in poetry itself. Poets would regularly depict other poets, and also generals and statesmen, as being crowned with laurel in recognition of their greatness. This iconographical trope, combined with the research of Selden and the pensioning of Jonson and Davenant, made for a very muddled understanding (on the part of those who were interested in the matter) as to what a poet laureate actually was and who had, in an official capacity, enjoyed the designation. By the time of Davenant's death, it was generally thought that not only he and Jonson, but also Spenser, Chaucer, and certain others had been appointed and paid as official poets laureate.<sup>19</sup>

If, however, the institution of the laureateship in 1668 involved a reconceptualization of certain past poets' relationships with the court, in practical terms it means that the laureate was little more than a court pensioner in the manner of Jonson and Davenant. He did not have any duties, and there was no explicit definition of his role. He was a poet whom the king had favoured with a regular stipend to be paid from the treasury, and the dignity of his appointment was signalled by the formal letters patent with which the king appointed him. According to the letters patent appointing Dryden laureate,

wee [Charles II], for and in consideration of the many good and acceptable services by John Dryden... to us heretofore done and performed, and taking notice of the learning and eminent abilities of him the said John Dryden, and of his great skill and elegant style both in verse and prose, and for diverse other good causes and considerations us thereunto especially moving, having nominated, constituted, declared, and appointed... him the said John Dryden, our POET LAUREAT and HISTORIOGRAPHER ROYAL; giving and granting unto him the said John Dryden all the singular rights, privileges, benefits, and advantages, thereunto belonging, as fully

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<sup>18</sup> John Selden, *Titles of Honor*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn (1672), pp. 333-42.

<sup>19</sup> Broadus, *Laureateship*, pp. 15-23, 33-9.



and amply as Sir Geoffrey Chaucer, Knight, Sir John Gower, Knight, John Leland, Esquire, William Camden, Esquire, Benjamin Johnson, Esquire, James Howell, Esquire, Sir William D'Avenant, Knight, or any other person or persons having or exercising the place or employment of Poet Laureat or Historiographer, or either of them, in the time of any of our royal progenitors, had or received, or might lawfully claim or demand, as incident or belonging unto the said places or employments, or either of them. And for the further and better encouragement of him the said John Dryden, diligently to attend the said employment, we are graciously pleased to give and grant [a pension of £200 and a butt of canary wine].<sup>20</sup>

There are several things of note in this patent. The first is that all power and responsibility for the appointment was assigned to Charles II personally, who had 'nominated, constituted, declared, and appointed' Dryden. The second is the vague but comprehensive message as to why Dryden was appointed, with the only specific reasons stated being his talent for verse and prose, but with a general assertion that Dryden had in some way served the king already (which can only have been in his writings). Lastly, the office was not defined at all except by vague reference to the past. Dryden's 'employment', which he was encouraged to attend to 'diligently', was not described, and must be presumed merely as a continuation of the sorts of service he had already supposedly been providing. His office allowed him certain 'rights, privileges, benefits, and advantages', but, instead of describing what these might be, the patent simply referred to a fabricated list of honourable predecessors, and to other unnamed 'person or persons' who may have held the office under Charles's 'royal progenitors'. It then granted a £200 pension and butt of canary as *additions* to these historical 'rights, privileges, benefits, and advantages', which was undoubtedly necessary, given that those 'rights, privileges, benefits, advantages' were not defined. Clearly, then, there was no 'place' or 'employment' here at all. There was a whimsical articulation of historical relationships between royal and poetical 'progenitors', which articulation then served as almost the exclusive definition of the new office, thus ensuring that it had no material purpose or practicalities involved with it; there was a vague notice of Dryden's literary talents having in some way constituted 'services' to the king, in which 'service' he was presumably (though not explicitly) hoped to

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<sup>20</sup> Patent printed in John Dryden, *The Critical and Miscellaneous Prose Works of John Dryden*, ed. by Edmond Malone, 4 vols. (1800), IV, pp. 553-9.

continue; and there was, more specifically, a pension and a butt of wine, which were here phrased as if unconnected with the supposed traditions of the office.

Essentially, then, the office of poet laureate (as it appeared in this patent) was created as an attempt to connect Charles II with his 'royal progenitors', Dryden with the great poets of the past, and the patronage between Charles and Dryden with the patronage that was believed to have existed in past ages of great kings and great poets. This conceptualization of the past, and this conceptual link between Charles II's court and the courts from which it was separated by the Interregnum, was more important than the logistics of the new office; indeed, the office was being defined *by* this conceptualization, rather than by any logistics. The office, and its whimsical tradition, suggested that there was a natural link between the king of a nation and that nation's greatest poet. Chaucer, Jonson, and (although passed over in the patent) Spenser all proved the link. They were kings of verse, and were, accordingly, supported and acknowledged by their monarch. In turn, the laureate would celebrate that monarch: not simply out of gratitude, but because it was a poet's duty and privilege to celebrate great men, and because poetry thereby reached its apogee.

The connection being expressed here did, however, go far beyond the laureateship and its spurious line of succession. It was a connection that had been inherent to the poetic vocation, or at least to certain ideas of the poetic vocation, since ancient times, and likewise inherent to certain conceptualizations of what good rulers and good courts ought to be. Poets were ideally situated under the patronage of a monarch, from whence they would transmit the glories of that monarch's reign through their writings. But the patronal relationship was nonetheless often phrased, or at least felt to exist in its most important form, in terms of a one-to-one relationship between one great monarch and one great poet; and the prime model for this ideal relationship was that of Augustus and Virgil. This was a relatively distant relationship, but one of symbiotic necessity, whereby Augustus was known to favour (sometimes financially) his poet, grant him the political and intellectual conditions needed to flourish, and set an example of greatness and heroism by his own princely actions. The poet, in turn, would glorify the monarch by producing great works, some of which would specifically acknowledge and praise that monarch. Dryden himself and William Soames gave one of the best expressions of these notions

in their *Art of Poetry* (1683), a translation of Boileau's recent *L'Art Poétique* (1674), which was itself based heavily on Horace's *Ars Poetica*. The Dryden-Soames poem celebrated the patronage of 'a sharp-sighted Prince,' who 'by early Grants/Rewards [poets'] Merits, and prevents [their] Wants'; and it exhorted poets to 'Sing then his Glory, Celebrate his Fame;/Your noblest Theme is his immortal Name...But where's a Second *Virgil*, to Rehearse/Our Hero's Glories in his Epic Verse?'<sup>21</sup>

These ideas had become newly significant upon Charles II's accession. This was partly due to the example of France under Louis XIII and, especially, Louis XIV, where a programme of court patronage had been developed and where poets routinely sung the king's praises.<sup>22</sup> Charles II had spent part of his time in exile in Paris, and had witnessed the magnificence of Louis XIV's patronage;<sup>23</sup> while English poets of the Restoration were highly aware, and (sometimes grudgingly) respectful of their French counterparts.<sup>24</sup> The very fact of the Restoration was also important in emphasizing the connection between court and poets. Many post-1660 writers, including Dryden, expressed the idea of the Interregnum as having been a time of cultural abeyance, or catastrophe; and the Restoration, accordingly, was celebrated as a renaissance. Public theatre, which had been banned under Oliver Cromwell, quickly became the major proof and emblem of this change. The London stage was legally duopolized by two theatre companies, both owing their existence to royal warrant, one of which was run by Davenant. Charles was a regular theatre-goer, and, in addition, frequently had his favourite plays acted at court. He was known to have given ideas for original and translated plays to certain playwrights, and even allowed Dryden (prior to his appointment as laureate) to publish *Secret-Love* as 'His [Charles's] Play' on account of his favour for it.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Dryden, *Works*, II, p. 155. Dryden also expressed these conventional ideas in various forms and contexts, such as, also, *Threnodia Augustalis*, in *Works*, III, pp. 102-3. See also e.g. Charles Gildon, *Miscellaneous Letters and Essays on Several Subjects* (1694), pp. 9-10. For some discussion of these matters in secondary scholarship, see e.g. Bertrand A. Goldgar, *Walpole and the Wits: The Relation of Politics to Literature, 1722-1742* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1976), pp. 8-16.

<sup>22</sup> Peter Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), pp. 49-59.

<sup>23</sup> McGuinness, *Court Odes*, pp. 8-9.

<sup>24</sup> Hunter, 'Restoration to Pope', pp. 177-9; Kewes, *Authorship*, pp. 36-7, 43.

<sup>25</sup> Kewes, *Authorship*, pp. 26-8, 36-7; Jessica Munns, 'Theatrical Culture I: Politics and Theatre', in *The Cambridge Companion to English Literature 1650-1740*, ed. by Steven Zwicker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 82-103; Winn, *Dryden*, pp. 145-51; for 'Secret-Love', see Dryden, *Works*, IX, pp. 114-203 (p. 115 for quotation).

Partly due to the money in drama, and partly due to its cultural prestige, the stage attracted men and women of literary ambition to an unprecedented extent.<sup>26</sup> The word 'poet' became virtually synonymous with, yet far more common than, the word 'playwright'.<sup>27</sup> Most plays were published in book form after performance, and these publications were usually prefaced with a dedicatory epistle to the playwright's patron. Generally, this patron would be a nobleman – perhaps a prominent figure at court, like Rochester or Buckingham – who would in turn reward the playwright financially and in certain more miscellaneous ways.<sup>28</sup> It was not atypical for the dedicatory epistles to note the patron's loyalty or service to the crown, and to praise the king as well as the patron himself.<sup>29</sup> Thus most literary figures of the time – including Dryden, Tate, and (until the Exclusion Crisis) Shadwell – were bound up in networks of patronage and systems of literary production which reached their apex with the court. When Davenant died in 1668, it was therefore fitting and logical for all involved that Dryden should be appointed poet laureate. He was, by that point, England's leading playwright, and his plays were known to have pleased the king. He was already patronized by certain prominent courtiers and had displayed this patronage in his publications.<sup>30</sup> The laureateship definitively consolidated the relationship between court and poetry. It proved the pre-eminence of the court in cultural matters by extending a symbolic and financial patronage over the poet who was most highly esteemed by both a court-centric nobility and by the public, and it cast into a more well-defined form the links between Charles II's court and that of his 'royal progenitors'.

For over a decade following his appointment, Dryden continued with his literary career in the same manner as he had always done, unburdened by any official demands. Sporadically receiving his official salary, he focussed mainly on writing plays, many of which were premiered or subsequently performed at court, and he enjoyed the recognition of being 'the Kings Poet Laureat'.<sup>31</sup> The court made no apparent effort to direct Dryden's activities. This state of affairs

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<sup>26</sup> Kewes, *Authorship*, pp. 2-3.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 29-30.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 25-6.

<sup>29</sup> E.g. Dryden, *Works*, XIII, pp. 3-9; Thomas Otway, *Venice Preserv'd, or, A Plot Discover'd* (1682), Sig. A2r-v.

<sup>30</sup> Winn, *Dryden*, pp. 191-2.

<sup>31</sup> Saslow, 'Dryden's Pension', p. 33; Winn, *Dryden*, pp. 191-2, 208-9, 221, 243-55, 314. For quotation, see e.g. *True Domestick Intelligence*, 23 Dec. 1679.

changed slightly with the Exclusion Crisis, during and after which the court entered into fierce political disputes and attempts to propagate its political message. Dryden did then write certain disputational writings which seem to have received some official instigation, and his writings became more broadly identified with his position as laureate; it became increasingly commonplace for him to be attacked as a mercenary hireling of the court.<sup>32</sup> Dryden's laureateship came to be defined – at the time and subsequently – by his occasional, partisan, pro-court writings.

However, looking at the more direct evidence of Dryden's relationship with the court, it becomes apparent that it was neither very close nor very active, even after he started writing his disputational works. Throughout his tenure, he had great difficulty in securing the courtly favour that he was supposedly entitled to. Dryden's salary was perpetually in arrears, and he frequently had to solicit high-placed courtiers and ministers to help him have just a portion of those arrears paid.<sup>33</sup> In 1677 he wrote a letter to the twenty-two-year-old Lord Latimer, son of Lord Chancellor Danby, pleading for the former to plead to the latter to have 'My Sallary from Christmasse to Midsummer, last' paid. The letter went on to mention one of Dryden's more attentive patrons, 'My Lord Mulgrave', who, the letter suggested, had also been interceding on Dryden's behalf, presumably with mixed results.<sup>34</sup> A similar letter of 1683, this time addressed to the Lord of the Treasury, Lawrence Hyde, told a similar story. It began, 'I know not whether my Lord Sunderland has interceded with your Lordship, for half a yeare of my salary...', and went on to justify his request by reference to his work on behalf of both the king and Hyde's late father.<sup>35</sup> Dryden reminded Hyde, 'The King is not unsatisfyed of me, the Duke [of York, the future James II] has often promisd me his assistance; & Your Lordship is the Conduit through which their favours passe.'<sup>36</sup> He ended the letter on the pitiful note, 'You

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<sup>32</sup> E.g. Thomas Shadwell, *The Medal of John Bayes* (1682), pp. 1-2, 5, 7-10. For this phase of Dryden's career, see Philip Harth, *Pen For A Party: Dryden's Tory Propaganda In Its Contexts* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Sharpe, *Rebranding Rule*, pp. 194-222; Winn, *Dryden*, pp. 209, 371-80, 395-405, 420-3.

<sup>33</sup> Dryden, *Works*, IV, p. 23; Winn, *Dryden*, pp. 191-2. The best account of Dryden's pension, payments, and arrears is Saslow, 'Dryden's Pension'.

<sup>34</sup> John Dryden, *The Letters of John Dryden: With Letters Addressed to Him*, ed. by Charles Ward (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1942), p. 12.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

have many petitions of this nature, & cannot satisfy all, but I hope from your goodness to be made an Exception to your generall rules'.<sup>37</sup>

It would therefore seem that Dryden's role as laureate gave him no special relationship with or especially direct channel to the king. The evidence of the letters (and also of the dedicatory epistles) shows Dryden as being scarcely any different, in terms of court favour or attention, from any other professional poet. He was still bound up in the lower strands of the patronage network which culminated in the crown. He still had to cast about for any and every patron he could find, hoping that they would both pay him on their own account and present his petitions to the king's government. And he still had to accept that, much of the time, he would be frustrated in his hopes; that 'my Lord Sunderland' may or may not intercede for him, and would not let him know either way; that his petition was one amongst many, and could well be dismissed with the bulk of them. Charles, he said, was 'not unsatisfied' with him. It was a cautious and negative phrase, but entirely justified. Likewise his reference to James's frequent promises of favour, which, he implied, had not borne fruit. His royal masters showed him very little positive attention. Even as laureate, he was still just a struggling poet, making his own way in the world of letters, and using his laureateship as just one more lever in the common system of patronage.

It is even possible that he was not only the poet to have been granted some form of courtly position. In 1674, Dryden joined forces with Shadwell and another playwright, John Crowne, to publish *Notes and Observations on The Empress of Morocco*, attacking a young newcomer, Elkanah Settle. Settle's tragedies *Cambyses* (1671) and *The Empress of Morocco* (1673) had been hugely successful with audiences both in the public theatres and at court; the latter had in fact received its first performance at court, and Lords Rochester and Mulgrave (prominent aristocratic courtiers) had each contributed prologues to it. In 1672, Settle had been made 'Sewer in ordinary to His Ma<sup>tie</sup> being one of the poettes in His Ma<sup>ty</sup>s Theatre Royall', and Samuel Holt Monk has speculated that, although the position was probably a sinecure, 'Settle may have had some part in the staging of plays at court.'<sup>38</sup> The title page to *The Empress of Morocco* certainly designated Settle as 'Servant to his Majesty', a designation usually

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid, pp. 21-2.

<sup>38</sup> Samuel Holt Monk, 'Commentary', in Dryden, *Works*, XVII, pp. 327-484 (pp. 390-1).

confined to Dryden, provoking Shadwell to grumble in the preface to *The Libertine*, 'he is no more a Poet than Servant to his Majesty, as he presumes to write himself'.<sup>39</sup> Clearly, it rankled with Settle's rivals that he should claim to have a special and in some ways official relationship with Charles II, and they were keen to weaken the validity of this relationship; and Dryden may have been provoked to co-author the *Observations* because he felt that his own special, official position in the patronage network was being compromised by Settle's pretensions. But the main point to make here is, again, the uncertainty of Dryden's position. The laureate had no fixed pre-eminence in the network of courtly patronage, and no official recourse by which to assert his pre-eminence; if another poet pleased the court sufficiently, that poet might well be appointed to a courtly position which would place him above Dryden in the nominal hierarchy, at least until that poet's fortunes waned too.

Shadwell's surviving letters are far fewer than Dryden's, and Tate's are non-existent. But it appears that, under William, Mary, and Anne, the laureates faced similar struggles to Dryden's. Shadwell received nothing for the first two years of his tenure, and, when he died, his salary was still in arrears.<sup>40</sup> The lord chamberlain who had appointed him laureate – Charles Sackville, Earl of Dorset – had been a friend and patron of Shadwell's long before that appointment, and (as will be explored in more detail below) had even paid him a private pension.<sup>41</sup> In 1691, Shadwell attempted to have a friend's play performed, and was scorned and rebuffed by the theatre company concerned, despite his laureate status. He wrote to Dorset, requesting intervention; and then, when nothing happened, wrote once more. This time, Dorset – whose position as lord chamberlain gave him authority over the London stage – did intervene, and had the play performed.<sup>42</sup> Like Dryden before him, Shadwell's office seems to have given him no special privileges in the literary world. He was frustrated in his attempts to exert theatrical influence; he wrote to Dorset because Dorset was a long-time friend and patron; and Dorset, on that account, rendered Shadwell

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<sup>39</sup> Thomas Shadwell, *The Libertine* (1676), Sig. br.

<sup>40</sup> Broadus, *Laureateship*, p. 85.

<sup>41</sup> Borgman, *Shadwell*, p. 25; Broadus, *Laureateship*, pp. 77-8; Brice Harris, *Charles Sackville, Sixth Earl of Dorset, Patron and Poet of the Restoration* (Urbana: The University of Illinois Press, 1940), p. 75; 'A Letter from Shadwell to the Earl of Dorset' (24 Jan. 1682) in Shadwell, *Works*, V, p. 401.

<sup>42</sup> Borgman, *Shadwell*, pp. 86-7; 'A Letter from Shadwell to the Earl of Dorset' (19 Jan. 1691) in Shadwell, *Works*, V, p. 403; 'A Letter from Shadwell to the Earl of Dorset' (2 May 1692) in Shadwell, *Works*, V, p. 404.

assistance. Shadwell's laurel crown granted him neither authority of his own, nor any special connection to the authority of the court.

The case of Tate is even more unfortunate. Unlike Dryden and Shadwell, he did not receive the office of historiographer along with that of laureate, meaning his salary was only £100.<sup>43</sup> It is unclear how reliably this was paid over the course of the 1690s. Samuel Golden notes that Thomas Rymer, who had been made historiographer, had to petition regularly for the money that was due to him, whereas Tate did not seem to petition at all; and Golden extrapolates from this that Tate *was* paid.<sup>44</sup> Yet it is probably more likely, in view of Dryden and Shadwell's difficulties, that Tate's payments were as unreliable as Rymer's, and that Tate was either too modest to make a fuss (which would have been in keeping with his character), or made his petitions in some way that has not left enduring evidence.

From 1700 onwards, however, certain evidence of Tate's penury begins to appear. In February of that year he petitioned the king, complaining that he needed to print a new edition of his translation of the psalms, but was too poor to supply the advance required by the printer. He ascribed this poverty to the fact that he had 'already been at much expense, and his salary of poet laureate [was] £100 *per ann.*, of £300 which his predecessors enjoyed'; and therefore requested an addition to his salary or a one-off payment.<sup>45</sup> In 1703, his privations led him to have his yearly butt of wine (which had been a perk of the office since Dryden's appointment) commuted into an extra £30 per year.<sup>46</sup> He was requesting more money in 1704 to meet the printer's advance for a supplement to his psalms, and in 1712 the Treasury Minutes reveal a

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<sup>43</sup> The office of historiographer was nominal and disregarded until this separation, serving only as a kind of adjunct or extension to that of laureate. Broadus, *Laureateship*, pp. 59-64. For the separation and Tate's subsequent salary, see Broadus, *Laureateship*, pp. 63-4; 'Thomas Rymer Esq Historiographer' (8 December 1692), TNA, SP 44/341 f. 452; 'Nahum Tate Esq Poet Laureat' (8 December 1692), TNA, SP 44/341 f.453. For the office of historiographer, see 'Historiographer c.1662–1782, c.1807–1837' in *Office-Holders in Modern Britain: Volume 11 (Revised), Court Officers, 1660-1837*, ed. by R.O. Bucholz (London: University of London, 2006), p. 179.

<sup>44</sup> Golden, 'Tate's Tenure', pp. 33-5.

<sup>45</sup> *CSP Dom 1699-1700*, p.372. He was mistaken as to the value of his predecessors' salaries.

<sup>46</sup> *CTB 1703 XVIII*, p. 225. There is some uncertainty as to when this commutation actually occurred; many scholars follow Southey in blaming Pye, but Southey was certainly mistaken. Warton believed that the wine was 'never taken in Kind, not even by Ben[ Jonson]; but in Money', yet he too seems to have been mistaken, and Tate seems to have been the laureate responsible. *Warton Correspondence*, 577 (p. 629; editorial notes, pp. 629-30, for some discussion of the matter).



discussion on Tate's arrears.<sup>47</sup> Like Dryden and Shadwell, Tate found it more worthwhile cultivating alternative or subsidiary patrons than relying directly on the monarch. Dorset had been the one to appoint Tate, having been an acquaintance and patron of his for some time already, and he continued to patronize Tate thereafter.<sup>48</sup> Robert Harley was also an important patron.<sup>49</sup> Beneath these two eminences were a brood of lesser noblemen and statesmen to whom Tate dedicated works and who presumably paid him some subsistence in return.<sup>50</sup>

For all of his efforts, the final years of Tate's life were a time of abject despair. He was forced to take refuge in the Mint on at least two occasions – apparently hiding from his creditors – and died there in 1715.<sup>51</sup> The poetry and prefatory material he wrote over the course of Anne's reign tells, sporadically, of his collapse into dearth and desperation. He felt that he had spent his life serving the court, the church, and the cause of virtue, and that, rather than profiting him, it had only ever been to his cost.<sup>52</sup> Golden observes that Tate was no longer petitioning the crown by this point, and suggests that he 'must have been out of favour.'<sup>53</sup> Again, it may be that Tate was appealing for money, but in a way that left no record. Or it may just be that Tate had learned how little he could expect from the court. He was not 'out of favour', as such. He had simply never been *in* favour.

However, the case for courtly negligence towards the laureateship can be overstated. Arrears of payment were standard for all court officials and pensioners, with payments becoming more reliable under Anne but never

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<sup>47</sup> CTB Jan 1704 - March 1705, XIX, p. 60; CTB 1712 (part 2), XXVI, p. 33.

<sup>48</sup> See Nahum Tate, *Elegies On* (1699), pp. 71-9; 'To William Broughton, Esq; Marshall of the Queen's-Bench', in M. Smith, *Memoirs of the Mint and Queen's-Bench* (1713), pp. 5-8 (p. 6); and dedications to *Brutus of Alba* (1678), *A Poem On the Late Promotion Of Several Eminent Persons In Church and State* (1694), and John Davies, *The Original, Nature, and Immortality of the Soul*, ed. by Nahum Tate (1697). In *A Poem Occasioned by William III's Voyage to Holland* (1691), p. 7, Tate articulates a particularly close relationship between himself and Dorset, referring to him as 'My Dorset'.

<sup>49</sup> See Nahum Tate, *The Muse's Memorial, Of the Right Honourable Earl of Oxford, Lord High Treasurer of Great Britain* (1712); *The Muse's Bower An Epithalamium* (1713).

<sup>50</sup> E.g. Nahum Tate, *A Present for the Ladies*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (1693), to the Countess of Radnor; *Panacea: A Poem upon Tea* (1700) to 'the Right Honourable Charles Montague, Esq; One of his Majesty's most Honourable Privy Council'.

<sup>51</sup> Spencer, *Tate*, pp. 37-40.

<sup>52</sup> E.g. Tate's dedication to Davies's *Immortality*, Sig. A4v; Nahum Tate, *The Muse's Memorial of the Happy Recovery Of the Right Honourable Richard Earl of Burlington From a Dangerous Sickness In the Year 1706* (1707), p. 1; 'Broughton', p. 6; *A Poem Sacred To the Glorious Memory Of Her Late Majesty Queen Anne* (1716), pp. 1-2.

<sup>53</sup> Golden, 'Tate's Tenure', p. 36.

catching up with the deficit.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, some of Tate's appeals did result in aid. The request for an addition to his salary or a one-off payment, made in 1700, received the latter response to the sum of £200.<sup>55</sup> In 1705, he was paid £50 for his psalms supplement;<sup>56</sup> and in 1712 it was resolved to pay Tate's deficit 'from time to time'.<sup>57</sup> Tate convinced William to make a proclamation in favour of his psalms translation, and, when setting up his short-lived periodical *The Monitor*, did so with either the approval or even the express command of Anne.<sup>58</sup> Finally, as will be detailed below, Shadwell and Tate as laureates were becoming increasingly responsible for the biannual odes that were set to music by the master of the king or queen's music and performed at court on the monarch's birthday and on New Year's Day.

Moreover, when attention is turned from the plight of the individual laureates to other forms of evidence, it becomes clear that the reigns of William III and Anne marked not a continuation of Dryden's laureateship, but a time of transition and of working-out. Dryden's laureateship had been an anomalous, ill-defined position: an attempt to formalize certain vaguer, pseudo-mythological ideas about the poetic vocation and to elevate the traditional practice of bestowing court pensions on worthy poets, but an attempt which was lacking in formal definition, institutional accommodation, and practical justification. The laureate was therefore left adrift with regards to the court – the body from which his ideological prestige and remunerative recognition was supposed to flow – and unable to fulfil the ideals that underpinned his office. Shadwell and Tate, following on from Dryden, were still somewhat to suffer from these issues. But at the same time, their tenures saw the office adapting, and moving from a position of unsatisfactory anomalousness to one of functional and institutional definition. The need for successive courts to assert their legitimacy, and to prove themselves as viable courts on the traditional model by increasingly formalized ceremonial and cultural activities, doing so in interaction with non-courtly agencies, was recurrent and growing; as a result, the laureateship was

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<sup>54</sup> Bucholz, *Augustan Court*, pp. 115-44.

<sup>55</sup> *CTB XV, Aug 1699-Sep 1700*, pp. 51-2, 290, 315.

<sup>56</sup> *CTB 1705-6 (part 2) XX*, p. 229.

<sup>57</sup> *CTB 1712 (part 2), XXVI*, p. 33.

<sup>58</sup> Nahum Tate, *A New Version of the Psalms of David* (1700), Sig. Av; Nahum Tate, Mr. Smith, and others, *An Entire Set Of The Monitors* (1713), Sig. Ar. It was later stated in *The Lives of the Poets* (1753), a compendium of useful, inaccurate, and dubious biographical information, that the *Monitor* was carried out on Anne's orders. Theophilus Cibber [and Robert Shiels], *The Lives of the Poets*, 4 vols (1753), III, p. 260.

becoming more well-defined and being given greater prominence and purpose. Tate may never have quite grasped the courtly acknowledgement that his financial straits necessitated, but he bequeathed to his successors an office that now had a fixed place at court and a fixed practical aspect.

### **The Lord Chamberlain's Department**

The best place to start an investigation of the way that the laureateship transformed over the later Stuart period, and solidified in its new position under the early Hanoverians, is in the documents produced by the court at the time, and particularly by the Lord Chamberlain's department. The first three laureates – Dryden, Shadwell, and Tate – were all appointed by formal letters patent, indicating the original idea behind the office: that it represented the king's choosing of a certain great poet to be his laureate. Yet when Tate's office was reconfirmed at Anne's accession, it was by warrant from the Lord Chamberlain's department, and, from George I's accession onwards, all new appointments followed this process.<sup>59</sup> However, although this alteration in the appointment process highlights the transference of the office into the Lord Chamberlain's care, it is also somewhat misleading about how and when that transference occurred. It is by reference to the records of the Lord Chamberlain's department that a more exact and more interesting story can be unravelled.

The earliest records of the staff falling under the Lord Chamberlain's remit – of which the most useful are the comprehensive establishment books – do not mention the poet laureateship. The Lord Chamberlain oversaw the household above stairs, and also a more anomalous grouping of courtly officers and temporary employees concerned with such things as revels, music, handicrafts, and artisanship; his was the largest and most diffuse department, concerned with court ceremonial in its widest sense, and, if the laureate was to be found in any court department, it would have most logically been his.<sup>60</sup> But according to the earliest records, the laureate was not included under the Lord

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<sup>59</sup> Broadus, *Laureateship*, pp. 89-90.

<sup>60</sup> John M. Beattie, *The English Court in the Reign of George I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), pp. 17-8, 23-52; Bucholz, *Augustan Court*, pp. 37-9; 'Chamber Administration: Lord Chamberlain, 1660-1837', in *Court Officers, 1660-1837*, ed. by Bucholz, pp. 1-8.

Chamberlain's supervision or responsibility. An establishment book for 1671 (three years after Dryden's appointment) contains no trace of either the poet laureate or the historiographer.<sup>61</sup> The next existing establishment book, running from 1674 to 1685, is similarly lacking.<sup>62</sup> A precedent book from about the same period, containing 499 pages and several lists of places within the Lord Chamberlain's disposal, finds no place for the laureateship either. Although the information in the book generally dates to between 1660 and 1689, there is even a note dating to May 1693 written by the then-Lord Chamberlain, Dorset, solemnly setting out that none of the above positions are to be given without his consent or warrant; and the list of positions in question, titled 'places in ye Lord Chamberlains disposall', finds place for an 'Embroider' and a 'Drum Major and Drummers', but none for a poet laureate.<sup>63</sup>

The sequence of establishment books, which is somewhat patchy, resumes in 1695, and here, at last, the poet laureate is accounted for. However, he is not very attentively placed. The contents page directs the reader to almost the back of the book, where is to be found, after the 'Kettle Drum[m]er for Ireland' and before a tacked-on scrawl about the 'Maker & Repairer of the water engines at Kensington' and a section for 'Vocall Musick', a poet laureate going by the name of 'Nathaniel Tate'. Since Tate's forename was actually 'Nahum', it hardly seems as though he was being treated as a very important or integral part of the court establishment. However, he had now undoubtedly become a part of the Lord Chamberlain's jurisdiction. A couple of pages after Tate comes a closing, reiterative list of 'Places in the Disposall of the L[ord] Chamberlain of His Ma[jestie]s Household', registering the poet laureate and the historiographer.<sup>64</sup> The next establishment book, 1700-1702, is even more telling. The laureate and the historiographer are here placed on the final page of the establishment list, and Tate is again re-christened as 'Nathaniel'. He and the historiographer precede only the Kensington water engineers and 'Vocall Musick' section, all of which positions are appended with dates but no salaries, indicating them to have been occasional, incidental positions, recorded at some point after the establishment list had first been compiled. As for the laureate's and historiographer's salaries, they are included in the 'Treasury Chamb[e]r'

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<sup>61</sup> TNA, LC 3/27.

<sup>62</sup> LC 3/28.

<sup>63</sup> LC 5/201, p. 181.

<sup>64</sup> LC 3/3, pp. 26, 30.

column – this particular establishment book specifying whether each salary came from that source, or from the ‘Cofferer’ – but then, in a different, hastier hand, a note has been made underneath the salaries: ‘Excheq[ue]r’.<sup>65</sup> This note is found in many other places throughout the establishment book, too, and is part of more far-reaching organizations of court finances and payments. All told, though, the laureateship’s place in the Lord Chamberlain’s department was clearly uncertain.

What these documents show, then, is that the Laureateship was not originally instituted as part of the Lord Chamberlain’s concern, nor, by extension, with a very secure or specific position in the court establishment as a whole. He was given a pension by the king and decorated with an honorific title to go with it; he was, in some vague and suitably poetical way, the king’s poet laureate. But he was not regarded as a feature or functionary of the royal establishment, even by the end of Shadwell’s tenure. Only with the appointment of Nahum Tate did the laureate begin to be accommodated at court, as a specific court official under the remit of the Lord Chamberlain (where, if he was to be a court officer at all, he logically belonged, given the nature and constituents of that remit). But it would appear to have been a rather muddled accommodation at this point. The laureate was added almost at the end of the establishment list, unsorted and miscellaneous, and the details of his naming and salary show no very marked concern for him. At this stage, he was an anomaly. What was going on in these years will be discussed below, but for now it is worthwhile pointing out that, although the Lord Chamberlain had claimed the laureate for his own, no one much knew or cared how he fitted into the court establishment, and his sole characteristic was his partnership with the historiographer, despite those two offices having been cleaved asunder in 1692.

In Anne’s reign, however – to continue following the establishment books – the poet laureate started moving up in the world. In the 1702-1713 establishment book, he was included (with the historiographer) on a much earlier page than usual, and was included amongst more estimable company: the page begins with ‘Master of ye Revels’, then reads ‘Yeomen of ye Revels’, then laureate and historiographer.<sup>66</sup> This was the beginning of a clear association between the laureate and the revels staff, and is especially notable

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<sup>65</sup> LC 3/4, p. 34.

<sup>66</sup> LC 3/5, p. 8.

in the light of the office's changing function (detailed below). However, while the contents pages of this and following establishment books clearly group together the revels staff, they just as clearly leave the laureate out of that grouping; and the books in general, while tending to place the laureate near to the revellers, do not indicate the Master of Revels's authority to comprise the laureateship.<sup>67</sup> The association would seem to have been based on similarity of function, rather than on any official relationship.

It was in the 1702-1713 establishment book that Tate's name was finally treated with due courtesy, 'Nahum Tate Esqr', and his payment was listed in the treasury chamber column, rather than in the new 'Exchequer' column. Thus the source of the laureate's salary seems to have been moving about in these years. A precedent book for 1697-1739 gives further evidence of the financial reorganizations affecting the laureateship, with an establishment account dated to June 1702 attributing all expenses to 'the Office of Treasurer of our Chamber', and a note next to Tate specifying his payments to be 'in lieu of the like Salary or allowance which was also payable to him at Our said Exchequer'.<sup>68</sup> Although these money matters reach far beyond the laureateship, it is nonetheless clear that the office's place at court was still being worked out.

By the end of Anne's reign, the working-out was almost complete. The next establishment book (1714) is, in respect of the laureateship, almost identical to the previous. This and the following one (matching George I's reign, 1714-1727) even keep the laureate, the historiographer, and the revels staff on the exact same page number (p. 8), while a narrower, contemporary establishment book (1717-1724) is only so bold as to push them overleaf to page 9.<sup>69</sup> The sole remaining development, witnessed in the various (and overlapping) establishment books of the 1720s and 1730s, was for the laureate, historiographer and revellers to start being more closely grouped with the Master of Ceremonies, even, sometimes, appearing on a dedicated 'Ceremonies' page or section.<sup>70</sup> But this was just a slight formalization, or cosmetic neatening, of a court positioning, and court function, that had been developed over the course of William and Anne's reigns and fixed at the accession of George I. The laureateship had gone from an anomalous position,

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<sup>67</sup> See especially LC 3/8 (1717-1724), contents page and p. 9.

<sup>68</sup> LC 5/202, p. 125.

<sup>69</sup> LC 3/6, 3/7.

<sup>70</sup> E.g. LC 3/14 (1735).

hanging off the end of the establishment lists and barely given any attention, to a more securely-fastened, comfortably-accommodated office found fairly early on in the establishment books and typically in the company of the revellers. Since the revels staff had generally been understood as pertaining to matters of ceremony anyway – even before they became friends with the laureate – the nearer approximation of the laureateship with the Master of Ceremonies, or with a distinct ‘Ceremonies’ section, was a natural but essentially superficial development after the laureate had found his place.

Before moving on or analysing these developments, it is worth taking a look at some fairly different evidence that concerns itself with the same subject-matter: publications on the court establishment. The most useful and prominent is Edward Chamberlayne’s *Angliae Notitia, Or The Present State of England*, in which Chamberlayne attempted to give a general picture of contemporary England. His work included a section on the court and, within that section, various catalogues comprising every single member of the court establishment. Twenty-two separate editions of the work were printed between 1669 and 1707, each with various alterations, at which point the work passed to Chamberlayne’s son, John, and became *Magnae Britanniae Notitia*, continuing until 1755. Its successive editions therefore can be used to explore the changes in the laureateship’s position. The very first edition did not record the laureate at all, neither in the list of places at the Lord Chamberlain’s disposal nor anywhere else.

However, the second edition (also 1669) complicates matters. Here, the poet laureate appeared in a long section on ‘*His Majesties Servants in Ordinary above Stairs*’. He appeared towards the end, and in miscellaneous company, coming after ‘*Messengers of the Chamber in Ordinary*’, ‘One Library Keeper’, and ‘One Publick Notary’, and just before ‘*Musicians in Ordinary*’ and such figures as ‘*Apothecaries*’, ‘*Chirurgeons*’, ‘*Printers*’, and a ‘*Hydrographer*’. This time, the historiographer was nowhere in sight (though the position, of course, was at this point held jointly with the laureateship. The fact that the hydrographer’s position remained one below the laureate’s in all future editions suggests that perhaps Chamberlayne was confusing his information in some way).<sup>71</sup> The holders of neither the laureateship nor the other surrounding

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<sup>71</sup> Edward Chamberlayne, *Angliae Notitia*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (1669), p. 265.

positions were named. Earlier in the book, the Lord Chamberlain's office was described as bearing jurisdiction over 'all Officers belonging to the Kings Chamber, except the Precincts of the Kings Bed-Chamber, which is wholly under the Groom of the Stole; and all above Stairs; who are all sworn by him (or his Warrant to the Gentleman Ushers) to the King. He hath also the over-sight of... [various positions, including] Apothecaries, Surgeons, Barbers, &c.'<sup>72</sup> The laureate was not specifically named as coming under his authority, and the section on offices above stairs included the bedchamber staff, who had earlier been specified not to be part of that authority, but instead to answer to the Groom of the Stole. Moreover, the above stairs section was long, sprawling, and often subdivided, and the laureate, as already mentioned, only appeared towards the end of it.

Nonetheless, it cannot be ignored that Chamberlayne (the author) had suggested the laureateship to form part of the Lord Chamberlain's remit, in contrast to the contemporary establishment records emanating from the Chamberlain's office. Chamberlayne's remark that all positions above stairs were sworn by the Chamberlain or his warrant, and his listing of the poet laureate in the above stairs section, is also contradicted by the fact that Dryden, Shadwell, and Tate were all appointed by formal letters patent, without reference to the Lord Chamberlain's office. Perhaps Chamberlayne was simply uncertain of where to place the laureate in his account of the state of England, and, therefore, judging him to pertain to the court in some capacity, decided that he must be some form of above-stairs official, since he could certainly not be located below stairs, and since other artistic and artisanal officials tended to answer to the Lord Chamberlain.

The seventeenth edition (1692) was the first to be published after the Glorious Revolution. The material on the court had been gradually reorganized over the years, but the position of the laureate, while being given slightly more clarity, had not been much changed. Here, it appeared towards the end of 'A *List of their Majesties Officers and Servants in Ordinary above-stairs*', in a small, miscellaneous grouping headed, 'Also among his *Majesties Servants in Ordinary* are reckon'd'. This group – which was separated from the Master of Revels by several pages and sub-sections – comprised a '*Principal Painter*',

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid, pp. 247-9.



'One Poet Laureat', 'One Hydrographer', 'One Library-keeper', and then a few other positions.<sup>73</sup> There was no historiographer, despite the position having parted from the laureateship by this time. All the positions were named, and had their salaries given; the laureateship was correctly identified as 'Thomas Shadwell Esq; 200*l. per An.*' However, in the following, eighteenth edition (1694), Chamberlayne mistook both the name and the salary, 'Mr. Nathanel Tate. 200 *l. per An.*'<sup>74</sup> Clearly, Chamberlayne still did not know exactly where to locate the poet laureate. He was not basing his understanding of the laureateship on a very sure grasp of the facts; but then, that was probably because there were not a great deal of facts to be had at the time. After all, even Tate and his paymasters had never known how large a poet laureate's salary ought to be.

The nineteenth edition (1700) boasted on its title page to be issued 'with great Additions and Improvements'. However, Chamberlayne's treatment of the laureateship witnessed neither. It was clumped at the end of the above-stairs officers again, in between the principal painter and the hydrographer, and its salary was once again listed wrongly as '200 *l. per An.*'<sup>75</sup> Chamberlayne actually retracted his earlier innovation of naming the holders of the laureateship and its neighbouring offices. The mistake was repeated in the twentieth edition (1702), and then with the twenty-first edition (1704) came a further diminution, the laureate's salary being erased entirely.<sup>76</sup> The final edition (1707) repeated this very cursory notice of the laureateship, and, as testament to the care with which *Angliae Notitia* was being revised by this stage, it even repeated the designation of the relevant chapter as pertaining to the 'Government of the King's Houshold'.<sup>77</sup> By this point, Anne had been on the throne for five years.

*Magnae Britanniae* began with the Act of Union, and John Chamberlayne, the new author, finally began to get things right (although the book still remained confused and inconsistent as to whether Britain was now ruled by a king or a queen). At the end of a cramped, grubby, generally uninformative list of 'The Queen's Officers and Servants in Ordinary above

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<sup>73</sup> Chamberlayne, *Angliae Notitia*, 17<sup>th</sup> edn (1692), p. 134.

<sup>74</sup> Chamberlayne, *Angliae Notitia*, 18<sup>th</sup> edn (1694), p. 241.

<sup>75</sup> Chamberlayne, *Angliae Notitia*, 19<sup>th</sup> edn (1700), p. 175.

<sup>76</sup> Chamberlayne, 20<sup>th</sup> edn (1702), p. 180; 21<sup>st</sup> edn (1704), p. 178.

<sup>77</sup> Chamberlayne, 22<sup>nd</sup> edn (1707), pp. 163, 178.

*Stairs, under the Lord Chamberlain*’, appeared ‘*Poet Laureat, Nahum Tate, Esq; Sal. 100 l. per Ann.*’, followed by the Hydrographer and then the Historiographer (‘*T. Rimer, Esq; Sal. 200 l. per Ann.*’).<sup>78</sup> The 1718 edition then had ‘*Poet Laureat, Nicholas Rowe, Esq; Sal. 100 l. per Ann.*’ in a list of ‘*Other Servants to the King*’ at the end of the section on the Lord Chamberlain’s department.<sup>79</sup> In these successive editions, often apparently compiled in a rush and with the materials being continually rearranged, it would therefore appear that the Chamberlaynes were gradually, uncertainly finding an appropriate place for the laureate as a semi-unique servant in ordinary above stairs, answering to the Lord Chamberlain and being paid £100 a year.

There were also other sources of information for members of the public interested in the staffing of the court, and they generally treated the laureateship in a similar way. A good example is 1720’s *The Present State of the British Court*, published several years after the Hanoverian Succession. Here, the laureate (correctly identified as Laurence Eusden, correctly allocated a £100 salary) was placed in a miscellaneous grouping of positions in the section on the Lord Chamberlain’s jurisdiction, next to the historiographer and in the company of a clerk, a goldsmith, a jeweller, and various painters. This grouping was adorned with far less information or description than the other groupings in the section; the only comment was, ‘in the Gift of the Lord Chamberlain’. The Ceremonies staff, adorned with a much longer description, formed the next-group-but-one, and the Revels staff, distinct and well-described, formed the next-group-but-one-after-that.<sup>80</sup>

Comparing the archival material to the contemporary publications, it is evident that the compilers of the latter were not particularly reliable in their treatment of the laureateship. They did not know where it should properly be located in the court establishment, so they left it dangling miscellaneously at the ends of their lists of court officials, even after the establishment books internal to the Lord Chamberlain’s department had found a settled niche for the office. Details or descriptions of the office did not tend to be given, and, where they

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<sup>78</sup> John Chamberlayne, *Magnae Britanniae Notitia* (1707), p. 614. The title page advertises this as the twenty-second edition, but it was not, being distinct in more than just name from the twenty-second and final edition of *Angliae Notitia*, even if published in the same year.

<sup>79</sup> Chamberlayne, *Magnae Britanniae Notitia*, ‘The Five and Twentieth Edition of the *South Part* call’d *England*, and Fourth of the *North Part* call’d *Scotland*’ (1718), p. 93.

<sup>80</sup> *The Present State of the British Court* (1720), pp. 33-7.

were, they were not always correct. But the authors of these works did recognize that the laureateship pertained to the Lord Chamberlain's jurisdiction, even, in Edward Chamberlayne's case, expressing this recognition before it appeared in the records of the Lord Chamberlain's department, and therefore dating the Lord Chamberlain's responsibility for the office to a time substantially earlier than every other piece of evidence would suggest. As discussed earlier, this may well be because Chamberlayne (the author) simply assumed that any poet laureateship would most logically fit amongst the more miscellaneous offices for which the Lord Chamberlain was responsible; or it may be the case that the format of Chamberlayne's work was misleading, and that he did not intend to place the laureate under the Lord Chamberlain's authority any more than he did the members of the king's bedchamber (who also appeared in the same section, but were elsewhere specifically excepted from that authority). Whatever the case, it is significant that Chamberlayne should have identified the laureate as a standard (though miscellaneous) kind of court official as early as 1669 (albeit leaving him out of the first edition of his work, published earlier the same year), and it is significant that, one way or another, he was implying the laureate to have something to do with the Lord Chamberlain's remit.

Taking all the foregoing evidence as a whole, then, the picture that emerges is one of confusion on the part of contemporaries, but nonetheless of significant developments in the positioning and definition of the office over time. Throughout the tenures of Dryden and Shadwell, and for at least the first half of Tate's long stint, no one really knew where the laureate fitted in the court establishment, or even to what extent he should be considered as having a place there at all; and such rudimentary details as his salary and his name were often muddled, with there being no certain bedrock of precedent or constitutional information to appeal to. Even under George I, the author of *The Present State of the British Court* could do nothing better with the laureate than to toss him together amongst a few other misfits – not even placing him alongside the revels staff, as had become commonplace in the Lord Chamberlain's own records – and could offer none of the information as to the laureate's role that he was offering for most of the other courtly positions. But by the year of this book's publication (1720), the laureateship had in fact undergone dramatic changes. Over the course of William III and Anne's reigns, it had been brought under the supervision and disposal of the Lord

Chamberlain's department, having previously floated about with only a vague tether to the king. Then, after floating around uncertainly within that department for some time – being not greatly heeded, and with its financial arrangements shifting and uncertain – it was gradually fastened down into a more secure position, and was treated with a greater deal of consideration. The Hanoverian accession seems to have set in stone these developments, and, for the next hundred years or so, the only major change in the courtly accommodation of the laureateship was the cosmetic one of emphasizing the closeness of the laureateship (and the revellers) to the Ceremonies staff.

The reason, nature, and implications of these developments will be explained in due course, when the changing function of the laureateship is discussed below. But before then, the transition of the office into the Lord Chamberlain's keeping must be investigated in more detail. The Lord Chamberlain at the time was the Earl of Dorset; and it is on his private accounts that the investigation will be founded.

### **Dorset's Accounts**

Dorset was famous in his own day and subsequently for his patronage, which was variously (and sometimes conjointly) described as discerning and universal (despite the contradictions between the two characterizations).<sup>81</sup> He was celebrated for showering largesse upon the generality of poets, and also for showing fine taste in favouring such celebrated poets as Dryden. The first three poets laureate all benefitted from his patronage over significant stretches of time, and duly dedicated some of their works to him. Although he was personally and politically close to Charles II, he had opposed James II's policies and thus fallen from favour, and had then supported William and Mary's accession to the crown. For this support he was rewarded at the Glorious Revolution, being made Lord Chamberlain, amongst other things. He held the post from 1689 until 1695, overseeing the dismissal of Dryden from the laureateship (due to Dryden's refusal to renounce Catholicism) and the appointment of Shadwell in his place. As Lord Chamberlain, he was known for

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<sup>81</sup> For the information in this paragraph on Dorset as a literary patron, politician, and Lord Chamberlain, see Harris, *Charles Sackville*, pp. 31, 101, 117-36, 173-204.

his greedy and aggressive practices, exhibiting a general desire to expand and solidify the powers of his department as much as possible, and an attendant desire that he and his favoured underlings should reap all the financial benefits that they could, often by underhand means. The late 1680s and 1690s were in some ways an ideal time for such practices, with, as Bucholz has shown, constant shifting of and squabbling over the jurisdictions of the various court departments.<sup>82</sup> In one of the precedent books referred to above, there is a detailed description of a dispute that the Lord Chamberlain's department was involved in over who had the right to appoint the court's Lenten preachers.<sup>83</sup> All these points are significant in considering what happened to the laureateship around this time.

As has been discussed above, when Dorset became Lord Chamberlain, it was by no means the case that the laureateship should have had anything to do with him. The laureate's primary relationship was supposed to be a direct one with the crown, and his appointment had come by the king's choice operating through formal letters patent. The office was formally little more than a pension. Dryden had not been appointed by, or ever answered to, a Lord Chamberlain; and the establishment records of the Lord Chamberlain's office took no notice of any poets laureate before Tate. And yet it seems indisputable that, when Dorset became Lord Chamberlain, he busied himself over the laureateship and made decisions regarding its occupant. It was Dorset who dealt with Dryden, trying to convince him to change religion and stay on as laureate; and it was certainly Dorset who was responsible for Shadwell's appointment in Dryden's place, Shadwell thanking him for it in the dedication to *Bury-Fair* (1689).<sup>84</sup> Looking further ahead, Dorset's successors as Lord Chamberlain enjoyed the formal prerogative of choosing a laureate; and the first establishment book of the Lord Chamberlain's department to have been written during Tate's tenure, although coming a couple of years after Tate's appointment, includes the laureateship as one of the offices in the Lord Chamberlain's disposal. Even though Tate was appointed by formal letters patent (rather than by Lord Chamberlain's warrant, as his successors were), he too thanked Dorset for his appointment.<sup>85</sup> It therefore seems that Dorset, by this

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<sup>82</sup> Bucholz, *Augustan Court*, pp. 39-44.

<sup>83</sup> LC 5/201, f. 48.

<sup>84</sup> Thomas Shadwell, *Bury-Fair* (1689), Sig. A2r-v.

<sup>85</sup> Tate, dedication to Davies, *Immortality*, Sig. A4r-v.

stage, was already fixing the laureateship in the Lord Chamberlain's firmament. Given his keenness to make the most of his position, and the fact that he was acknowledged as a great patron and a man of eminent literary taste, it would not have been unnatural for him to act in such a way; and given that the king who had installed him as Lord Chamberlain had no knowledge of English literature and had more pressing business on his hands, it would not have been very difficult. A consideration of Dorset's personal accounts provides further evidence of his instrumentality in the repositioning of the laureateship. It also reveals why Dorset acted towards the laureateship in the manner he did.

In the accounts, it is no surprise to find that Dryden, Shadwell, and Tate all appear recurrently as beneficiaries of Dorset's financial patronage. Although Dryden had had to be ejected from the laureateship for his religious and political unsuitability, it was well-known by the end of the seventeenth century that Dorset had personally recompensed him for this loss.<sup>86</sup> Dryden seems to have remained viewing Dorset as his greatest patron until the end of his life, despite their political differences; and he duly shows up in Dorset's account books (which begin in 1671) a number of times, for (usually large) one-off payments.<sup>87</sup> Shadwell, meanwhile, was first paid in July 1684, to the tune of £10, and, after several more such payments over the years, was last paid on 23 December 1689.<sup>88</sup> There is no appearance of regularity to the payments; they come at fairly random intervals and are described in differing ways. But the final payment is (uniquely) described as being 'for a quart[er]', indicating that Shadwell was in receipt of a £40 pension paid in quarterly sums by the end of 1689, and flagging up the deficiencies of the account books: it seems that they do not cover all the payments that Dorset was making to poets. (There is a separate set of receipts in Dorset's accounts, but they do not pertain to any payments that are not also identifiable in the account books.<sup>89</sup>) Dorset was known for giving out money in various spontaneous and irregular ways that would have escaped even the most diligent of accountants, and his accounts must therefore be considered as an incomplete record of his financial patronage; while on the other hand there is evidence that his private pension payments were sometimes in arrears, suggesting that any omissions in the

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<sup>86</sup> Harris, *Charles Sackville*, pp. 121-3; Griffin, *Literary Patronage*, pp. 50-1.

<sup>87</sup> Kentish History and Library Centre, U269, A7/23, A7/26, A7/28.

<sup>88</sup> U269, A7/6, A7/12, A7/13 (two payments), A7/17, A7/18.

<sup>89</sup> U269, A189-90, passim.

account books may in fact be more of payment than of record.<sup>90</sup> Whatever the case, the accounts are nonetheless very informative.

Tate's recorded payments are more numerous than Shadwell's, and are more routinely identified as constituting the quarterly payments of a £40 annuity.<sup>91</sup> His first recorded payment came in July 1689, and his last in May 1694. But his last £10 annuity payment came in October 1692, and the only payment after that – the May 1694 payment – clearly had nothing to do with the annuity, being a gift of £5, 10s, paid by specific order and probably relating to a poem that Tate dedicated to Dorset around this time.<sup>92</sup> Again, the recorded annuity payments do not add up to the four-per-year that would be expected, suggesting negligence either in the payments or in the account-keeping. The account books continue until Dorset's death in January 1706, but with no more appearance of Dryden, Shadwell, or Tate, other than a subscription payment for Dryden's Virgil translation in July 1694.<sup>93</sup> It is also worthwhile noting that, after Shadwell's death, Dorset paid Shadwell's son £20 by specific order (in December 1692).<sup>94</sup>

Of course, it is unsurprising to find Dorset showering bounties on Dryden, Shadwell, and Tate, and to find him paying the latter two with some degree of routineness, given his reputation as a general benefactor of poets. In fact, though, two aspects of these payments are highly interesting. The first is that, in spite of his reputation, Dorset actually seems to have been concentrating his favour on these specific three poets, and, although giving occasional large gifts to Dryden, showed his greatest diligence in his care for Shadwell and Tate. It would appear that Nathaniel Lee's widow was in receipt of a fairly long-running annuity, but, other than that, it is very hard to find any trace of Dorset's much-vaunted literary patronage.<sup>95</sup> As mentioned above, the accounts do not give a complete picture of Dorset's largesse; but it is nonetheless hard to escape the conclusion that Dryden, Shadwell, and Tate were his three favoured poets.

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<sup>90</sup> Harris, *Charles Sackville*, pp. 124, 196-7.

<sup>91</sup> U269, A7/17, A7/18 (two payments), A7/19, A7/20, A7/23 (two payments), A7/24, A7/25, A7/26 (last to be identified as a quarterly payment), A7/28.

<sup>92</sup> Nahum Tate, *A Poem On the Late Promotion Of Several Eminent Persons In Church and State* (1694).

<sup>93</sup> U269, A7/28.

<sup>94</sup> U269, A7/26.

<sup>95</sup> For Lee's widow, see e.g. U269, A7/40.

More striking still is the dating of Dorset's payments. As mentioned above, Shadwell can be identified as having been paid from July 1684 to December 1689, and Tate from July 1689 until May 1694. Dorset's patronage of (and indeed friendship with) Shadwell went back long before 1684, but it was around this time that Shadwell had really started suffering financially due to his political opposition to the court; and Shadwell was later to thank Dorset for saving and supporting him in these barren years. Still more significant is the year that Shadwell was appointed poet laureate: 1689. It was in this same year that, according to the accounts, he ceased to receive a private pension from Dorset. Tate, who first seems to have started receiving his own in the same year, then succeeded Shadwell as laureate at the end of 1692; and there are no more recorded annuity payments for him after this appointment, with the only subsequent gift being the £5, 10s of May 1694. The pattern is unmistakable. Dorset stopped paying out annuities to Shadwell and Tate at about the time that they were each made laureate. Moreover, his payments generally seem to have been motivated by the desperation of their recipients: Dryden was given a financial safety blanket after being jettisoned from the laureateship; Shadwell's payments began when his Whig partisanship had reduced him to penury; and Tate's constant financial problems have already been documented above. Even in the case of Nathaniel Lee, Dorset seems to have been more concerned to support his widow with an annuity than to pay Lee himself while he was still alive; and the Lee family's case was especially piteous, given Lee's descent into madness and poverty in the latter years of his life.

Dorset's payments to this small band of poets, then, correlate firmly with two things: their desperation, and the laureateship. He paid them when they needed it, and he stopped paying them when they were appointed laureate. Dorset's approach to the laureateship thus becomes clear. He was not bestowing it as Charles II had bestowed it on Dryden, merely as a mark of royal distinction and as proof that the court did indeed patronize great poetry (although Dorset, as a great patron himself and as a key member of the Williamite regime, would presumably have recognized the continuing importance of establishing the cultural patronage of the court, too). More immediately, he was using it to support a couple of poets, Shadwell and Tate, who were either his favourite poets, or those whom he had found most needy and deserving of his care. By so doing, he transferred the financial burden of his



patronage – patronage which had already been in regular operation for several years with regards to each of these two men – from his personal coffers to the court. This was entirely in keeping with his attitude to the Lord Chamberlain's department as a whole, and with the more general disregard that office-holders tended to have for the borderline between their own private means of patronage and the patronage opportunities attached to their office.

It would therefore appear that Dorset's time as Lord Chamberlain was crucial in the development of the office of poet laureate. Widely known and respected for his taste in literature and for his patronage, he was appointed Lord Chamberlain by a king and queen who had little interest in the laureateship, and, therefore, armed with an expansionist zeal and a small troupe of starving poets, he decided to annex that office to his own department, and to bestow it in the same manner as he had previously been bestowing his own private funds. In this endeavour, he was encouraged by the general fluidity of prerogatives, and mess of disorganization, that existed in the court at this time, and by the particular state of the laureateship, which, while being an anomalous, neglected, and uncomprehended office, also seemed to have just the sort of character that – as Edward Chamberlayne had felt in 1669 – could justify its coming under the Lord Chamberlain's jurisdiction. He was so successful that, by the time of Tate's death in 1715, the laureateship had become naturally regarded as and assumed to be an office in the Lord Chamberlain's gift, disposed by his department's warrant, and, officially speaking, having nothing to do with the crown, which had previously been used to appoint 'the king's poet laureate' according to formal letters patent. The heir to Virgil would no longer float about in vague communion with his latter-day Augustus. He had been redefined as a court functionary, and fitted into a niche under the remit of the Lord Chamberlain.

### **Finding a Role**

These developments, however, were not purely formal or organizational. In fact, they were intimately bound up with the public, functional transformation that the office was undergoing. The eighteenth-century poet laureate was not to be a Drydenic figure, either in the early sense of enjoying an honour that conferred

no responsibilities, or in the later sense of writing disputational works in favour of the court. Instead, he was to be a panegyric functionary. The job of the eighteenth-century laureates was to centre on the writing of biannual odes, scheduled for the ruling monarch's birthday and for New Year's Day. The odes would be set to music – usually, and with increasing exclusivity, by the master of the king or queen's music – and performed at court on the set date. Usually, the texts would then be published soon after. By mid-century, a large and growing number of periodicals were making it their habit to print the words of the odes immediately after their performances at court, and this widespread practice was to persist until the odes themselves were discontinued.<sup>96</sup>

The odes and their history will be explored in Chapter Five, but there are a couple of things worth drawing attention to here. Firstly, they were highly suited to the manner in which the regimes of William, Mary, and Anne presented themselves and were presented to the public. Where Charles II's regime had entered into a furious partisan debate over monarchical power and legitimacy, post-1688 regimes attempted to make their case without appearing to make any case at all, avoiding being associated with the political and constitutional disputes of Whigs and Tories. Instead, the ideology of rule that emanated from and focused on the courts of William, Mary, and Anne was that they (and especially William) had been providentially ordained to rescue England from Catholicism and sin. These monarchs would overturn the popish oppression beneath which England had laboured; and they would then reform the nation's morals and manners, through both example and action.<sup>97</sup> In line with this, Sharpe has shown how pro-court poetry in these years tended to avoid argument in favour of emotive assertion, thus making the court's case by appealing to the emotions and by suggesting all matters of dispute to have been already settled.<sup>98</sup> What Sharpe does not observe is that the characteristics of the ode format (to be elaborated in Chapter Five) were particularly amenable to such a tendency, being ecstatic, sublime, emotive, and celebratory in tone, whereas rhyming couplets (the most common form of verse) had more of a logical and argumentative bent.

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<sup>96</sup> McGuinness, *Court Odes*, pp. 1, 10-11. For more on these matters, see chapters Four and Five.

<sup>97</sup> Claydon, *Godly Revolution*, pp. 1-4, 22, 46-63, 72-3, 79-88, 90, 126-59, 228-9.

<sup>98</sup> Sharpe, *Rebranding Rule*, pp. 373-82.

The second thing to note is that it was during the tenures of Shadwell and especially Tate that the existence of the biannual courtly odes became firmly established, and that the association of the poet laureateship with those odes took shape. Some form of song or ode had tended to be performed at court on festive occasions prior to 1681, and performances became increasingly routine thereafter, with a host of different poets supplying texts for the performances up to 1715. But Shadwell and Tate, when laureates, were increasingly responsible for their production; and when Tate died a year after the Hanoverian succession, this apparently informal practice hardened into a formal demand. It was actively expected of Rowe that he would provide two odes a year for the designated occasions, and it was expected of him purely because he had been laureated. Rowe was not much enamoured with the task, and his sparse surviving correspondence reveals him to have been subcontracting the odes out to friends and associates, explaining the requirements of the courtly ode format and then having them send him their compositions.<sup>99</sup> During Tate's laureateship, if another person had written an ode, then that ode would have been ascribed to that other person. But for Rowe, the arrangement was different; even if he was not to write the odes himself, he was responsible for sourcing them, and they would be formally ascribed to his pen. By the reign of George I, the laureates had thus been exclusively identified with the function of providing the biannual odes. This identification was to remain into the early nineteenth century.<sup>100</sup>

As to why this identification came about, part of the answer seems to lie with Shadwell and Tate themselves. Upon the arrival of William and Mary, Shadwell immediately published several works of panegyric celebration, seemingly of his own volition, predating his appointment as laureate.<sup>101</sup> Once appointed, he then produced a batch of seven further panegyrics, some of which were avowed as odes for specific occasions (such as William's return from Ireland), and some of which were performed at court as part of the birthday

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<sup>99</sup> John Hughes, *The Correspondence of John Hughes, Esq*, 2 vols. (1773), I, pp. 84-5.

<sup>100</sup> For more on these developments, see Chapter Five.

<sup>101</sup> *A Congratulatory Poem On His Highness the Prince of Orange* (1689) and *A Congratulatory Poem to the Most Illustrious Queen Mary Upon Her Arrival in England* (1689). He also published a satirical poem attacking Dryden, *The Address of John Dryden, Laureat, To His Highness the Prince of Orange* (1689).

and New Year festivities.<sup>102</sup> Tate was to continue and expand this panegyric trend. Although his output had been relatively diverse in the early part of his career, he showed a marked trend in his later years – starting even before his appointment as laureate – towards writing panegyric poetry. His panegyrics were written in couplets as well as odes, and, although he regarded his reigning monarch as his prime and most glorious theme, he also wrote panegyrics for an exceptionally wide group of other figures, from bishops, to beauties, to personal friends. None of this was accidental on Tate's part; on several occasions he articulated his belief that a poet's highest calling was to serve religion and virtue, and that the best manner of doing this was to set forth glorious instances of virtue which would serve as stimuli for emulation.<sup>103</sup>

Most tellingly in the context of the laureateship, he even linked his role as laureate to his panegyric poetry. Writing a dedication to Dorset, he thanked him for 'placing me in His Majesty's Service; a Favour which I had not the Presumption to seek. I was conscious how short I came of my Predecessors in Performances of Wit and Diversion; and therefore, as the best means I had of justifying Your Lordship's Kindness, employ'd my Self in publishing such Poems as might be useful in promoting Religion and Morality. But how little I have consulted my immediate interest in so doing, I am severely sensible. I engaged in the Service of the temple at my own Expence, while Others made their profitable Markets on the Stage.'<sup>104</sup> Here, Tate made several clear distinctions. One was between his activities before and after being appointed laureate. He claimed to have 'employ'd my Self... in promoting Religion and Morality' as a direct and considered response to being made 'His Majesty's' laureate. The second distinction was between himself-as-laureate and all of his fellow, non-laureated poets. While Tate was 'engaged in the Service of the Temple', others were making money from the immoral stage. Lastly, Tate distinguished between himself and his predecessors. Dryden and Shadwell had been celebrated

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<sup>102</sup> *Ode on the Anniversary of the King's Birth* (1690), *Poem on the Anniversary of the King's Birth* (1690), *Ode to the King on His Return from Ireland* (1691), *Ode on the King's Birth-Day* (1692), and *Votum Perenne: A Poem to the King on New-Years-Day* (1692) were all published. A 1689 birthday ode to Mary and a New Year ode for 1690 were not. For those that were performed at court as part of either birthday or New Year festivities, see McGuinness, *Court Odes*, pp. 19-20.

<sup>103</sup> E.g. Nahum Tate, *Characters Of Vertue and Vice* (1691), Sig. A2r; *An Elegy In Memory Of the Much Esteemed and Truly Worthy Ralph Marshall, Esq;* (1700), Sig. A2r; *Happy Recovery*, pp. 21-2; *A Congratulatory Poem To His Royal Highness Prince George of Denmark* (1708), p.4.

<sup>104</sup> Tate, dedication to Davies, *Immortality*, Sig. A4r-v.

writers, known for their 'Performances of Wit and Diversion'. Tate claimed that he could not compete with them in this respect, and so intentionally took the laureateship in a different direction. If he could not 'justify' his appointment by literary greatness, he would do so by religious and moral utility.

It seems likely, then, that the increasing identification between the laureates and the biannual odes was due in part to the volition of Shadwell and Tate themselves. Because of Shadwell's political inclinations and his career as a Whig polemicist, and Tate's belief in the importance of panegyric verse both for poetry in general and for his own personal distinction, it suited them to assume responsibility for the songs or odes that had already started to be performed on festive occasions at court. They thereby elevated the status of those odes and created an identification between them and the laureateship. Undoubtedly, this emergence of a function for the laureateship was also bound up with the contemporaneous formal developments in the office's positioning. Over the same years as the laureates were becoming identified with the biannual odes, and were thus gaining a recognizable function and identity with regards to the court, their office was becoming less and less anomalous, less and less neglected, and was finding a specific position in the court establishment. The office was brought directly under the Lord Chamberlain's jurisdiction, having floated in vague, kingly loftiness during Dryden's tenure, and was then accommodated cosily amongst the revels and Ceremonial staff, just at the time as it was becoming devoted to the regular manufacture of courtly odes. From Nicholas Rowe's time onwards, the laureates would be more fixedly placed and more securely paid than had been the case in the later Stuart period, and would be tasked with a specific ceremonial function, which would often entail the dissemination of the laureate's text to the reading public.

The laureateship therefore became formalized in line with successive courts' attempts to assert their legitimacy and their courtliness; after 1688, this meant the assertion of a particular, godly kind of courtliness, and after 1714 it meant the formal affirmation of practices which seemed, in retrospect, to have been commonplace prior to the Hanoverian succession. The identification of the laureates with the odes was part of this, because it gave the court itself, and the court's laureate, a clear role with regards to both the ceremonial life of the court and the reading public, while also drawing a successful poet firmly within the remit of courtly culture. Moreover, the odes themselves proved useful for

propagating to the public a certain image of the court that was in keeping with the court's wider ideology of legitimation. Yet the impetus of Shadwell and Tate in bringing this about flags up an issue that has not yet been explored in this chapter. So far, the pressures on successive courts, and their responses to them, have mostly been mentioned in abstract terms, and not very firmly related to the evidence under discussion. How those wider, abstract issues operated has been left unclear.

After all, while this chapter has claimed that the later Stuart court increasingly defined its ceremonial life and cultural role, and that it did so by the formation and the formalization of the laureateship, it is obviously the case that none of this was the result of a long-term plan. The court was not a sentient being, and the court history of the later Stuart period was marked by continual ruptures. It therefore remains to explain how these wider pressures, and the responses to them by successive courts, operated; by what individual agencies their effects played out, creating what now appears as one teleological development. This chapter's argument is that the monarchs and their court officials did show some awareness and responsiveness to these pressures, but that the court's cultural role was not simply a matter of direction from above; instead, the court-as-patron was an ideal to which various individuals worked and which various individuals sought to tap into, in pursuit of their own objectives.<sup>105</sup> The court's cultural role was defined as much by those whose interest it was to create that role from the outside as by those within; it was created by the very acts which sought to benefit from that creation.

This can be seen in the activities of all the persons discussed in this chapter. Firstly, it can be seen in the laureates themselves. In different ways, Dryden, Shadwell, and Tate all felt it incumbent on themselves to foster a relationship with the court, and to present themselves to their readers in terms of their court-centric identity. Dryden did this before his appointment in his *Astraea Redux* and *Annus Mirabilis* (long, ambitious poems celebrating Charles II, published for general retail), and in publishing *Secret-Love* as 'His [Charles's] Play'; then, as laureate, he served the court with his disputational writings. Shadwell greeted the arrival of William and Mary with panegyrics, and then

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<sup>105</sup> The importance of considering how, especially, individuals outside the court bought into monarchical culture and the monarchical image, and used it for their own ends and as a negotiation with the crown, has recently been stressed by historians working on e.g. the reigns of Georges I, II, and III. Colley, *Britons*, pp. 221-33; Smith, *Georgian Monarchy*, pp. 123-4.

continued to write panegyrics when laureate, as well as advertizing his status as poet laureate. Tate had written the follow-up to Dryden's *Absalom and Achitophel*, and, like Shadwell, wrote panegyrics for the crown; but, when appointed laureate, he realized that he could not rival Dryden or Shadwell as a pre-eminently celebrated writer, and he therefore defined his relationship with the court in a new way, presenting the court as a supremely moral and religious institution which he was serving through his moral, religious writings, and seeking to engross responsibility for the production of the biannual courtly odes. This self-presentation also identified him with the rhetoric of courtly reformation that was emanating from William, Mary, and Anne's courts, further reinforcing the public-orientated notion that he enjoyed a firm association with the court, while also allowing him to make a better claim on the favour and finances of the court itself. All three men (or their printers) made sure to designate them(selves) as 'servant to his majesty' or 'king's poet laureat' on their title pages.<sup>106</sup>

These writers therefore all found it advantageous to validate their own literary practice by reference to the court. By so doing, they in turn validated the court's own cultural role, while also necessitating that they define what that role was. The diverse profusion of their own writings, and the wideness of their audiences, meant that it would not have been immediately obvious how they did stand in relation to the court, and what part the court did have in their writings; but by defining their own positions as poet laureate, they made it more likely that their salaries would actually be paid, and they emphasized to their readers the nature and importance of their status as prime beneficiaries of court patronage. Thus the macro situation, of a court under pressure to define itself by reference to its traditional ceremonial and cultural role, and having to do so in engagement with an increasingly powerful public, operated through the micro activities of individual agents. Each poet laureate sought to take advantage of the traditional ideal of the court's ceremonial and cultural role, and to do so on the basis of their own former success with the theatre-going and reading public, while also attempting to use their position as court poets so as to increase their appeal to that public. They thereby affirmed the court's cultural role and its

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<sup>106</sup> E.g. *The State of Innocence, and Fall of Man* (1677), in Dryden, *Works*, XII, p. 80, 'By John Dryden, Servant to His Majesty'; *The Scowrers* (1691), 'Written by Tho. Shadwell, Poet Laureat, and Historiographer-Royal'; *An Elegy on the Most Reverend Father in God* (1695), 'By N. Tate, Servant to His Majesty'; *The Kentish Worthies* (1701), 'By Mr. Tate. Poet -- Laureat to His Majesty.'

relationship with the public, causing the macro pressures to translate into a macro response from the non-sentient court: the creation and the increasing formalization of the office of poet laureate at the interface of court and public.

Aristocratic patrons played their part too. Whether these patrons were closely associated with the court or not, they were part of a system and an ideology that was bound up with the court, in social and political terms as much as in cultural; without due regard for the crown, there could have been no due regard for those persons placed just below the crown in the social hierarchy, and whose authority and status derived from the crown. The court also held out the best opportunities for an aristocrat's own status and material benefit, encouraging him or her to have a strong presence there. It was therefore in their interests to bring 'their' writers to court, to argue their case at court, and to encourage writers to work within the framework of courtly patronage, because by doing so they would increase their own prestige as patrons. This is seen, for example, in Dryden's intercessions with various courtly and aristocratic figures to have his salary paid; and it is seen in the patronage activities of Dorset.

Indeed, Dorset provides the clearest evidence of what is being described here: the functioning of individual agency to bring about long-term, macro developments in response to societal pressures. Dorset contributed massively to the definition of the court's cultural role, and of the laureateship within it, by seeking to benefit himself, his favoured poets, and his monarchs; and even his endeavours to benefit those poets and those monarchs were ultimately beneficial to himself, since those poets gave him his reputation as a patron and those monarchs had appointed him Lord Chamberlain. To help his own finances, Dorset removed the patronal burden from himself to a higher sphere, the court. To burnish the idea of himself as a great patron, he brought the laureateship firmly within the Lord Chamberlain's department and gave it to two poets with whom he had good relationships. To help out Shadwell and Tate, he made sure that their position within the royal household structure would be more robust than Dryden's had been. And to buttress the Williamite regime against its enemies, he helped define the poet laureate as someone who would write on behalf of the court and contribute to its ceremonial life. Thus the macro pressures of the time manifested in the demands and opportunities that presented themselves to one individual, and, by responding to them, he contributed to the long-term developments that those macro pressures were



effecting. Dorset, along with a number of individuals both within and without the court, thus created and defined the court's role as a cultural patron, and fixed the laureateship as a critical element within it.

## **Conclusion**

The laureateship had gone from being an honorific, informal position which was not firmly placed or understood in the court structure, to one firmly under the Lord Chamberlain's auspices, grouped with the revels and Ceremonials staff, and defined by its exclusive and comprehensive relationship with the writing of biannual odes. Looking onwards through the eighteenth century, this formalization of the laureateship into a very functional manifestation of courtly patronage was to be advantageous in that it gave the laureate a distinct role and prominence in public life, and meant that his courtly position and payment of salary were fixed and regular, but was also to entail problems when competing ideas and ideals of the poetic vocation began gaining currency, and commercial writing practices emerged. As will be seen in the following chapters, the laureateship did not simply become obsolete or ridiculous; but, eventually, certain portions of the reading public were to describe it in just such ways.

The questions now are why these developments occurred and how they relate to the wider issues described at the start of this chapter. Essentially, it would seem to be the case that successive courts were manifesting an urge to formalize their cultural role and ceremonial life, and to assert their position in the world of letters by the creation of a fixed, institutional presence in that world. There was a pressure to do so even at the start of Charles II's reign, because the Civil Wars had ruptured his court from that of his predecessors, and that pressure was renewed with the start of each new reign, due to the repeated turbulences and ruptures that marked each succession and due to the new questions about monarchical rule and monarchical legitimacy that each succession created. Moreover, as will be explored in the next chapter, new agencies in cultural production and consumption were emerging. At the start of Charles II's reign, a patronage network that centred on the court and reached its apex with the king still appeared to form the prevailing cultural framework. Poets pitched their work to well-placed patrons, and strove against each other for the

attention of the court; and, even though it was the two public theatres of London that promised the best hopes of money, those two theatres were intimately connected with the court, and courtly patronage was a key factor in whether a playwright would or would not succeed there, as well as offering occasional fixed pensions or employments to figures who first made their name on the stage. Even at this point, though, the court needed to determine its position more clearly and formally, and did so by the institution of the laureateship; and the wider situation was changing, making such definition increasingly necessary. Just as the public were becoming more willing and able to scrutinize the conduct of the monarch, so too were the finances and inclination necessary for cultural consumption burgeoning amongst them, tempting poets (amongst others) to seek fame and fortune in a newly attractive cultural marketplace.<sup>107</sup> The pressure on the court was to respond to these developments.

Its response ties in to the historiographical themes discussed above: formality, ceremony, and representation. For one thing, the court became increasingly formalized and well-defined in its practices. When it had been taken for granted that poets would seek courtly approval, and would fight amongst themselves to acquire it, the court had not needed to define its own role or the practices by which it operated. When that situation began to change, the need for definition, and for a formalization of practices, became increasingly pressing. The court therefore defined its cultural role, its supposed historical role as a cultural patron, and its relationship to the world of literature. One of the major ways in which it did so was through the laureateship. The office of poet laureate was instituted in 1668, initially in a relatively vague and informal manner, primarily concerned with establishing a connection with the past; then, as the decades passed and the need for formalization became greater, it fixed and defined the office, giving itself a clear presence in the world of literature and defining its role as a cultural patron.

Likewise, it established its ceremonial pretensions at a time when they seemed more important than ever, and in the face of various threats, by bringing the poet laureate – supposedly the supreme poet in the land – into the royal household and by giving him a distinct ceremonial role. In his writings, and especially in the biannual odes, he also became an essential part of the court's

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<sup>107</sup> Discussion and references for these developments can be found in the Introduction and Chapter Two; but for the definitive summary, see Brewer, *Pleasures*, pp. 15-33.

representational culture; and here too the nature of the office's evolution demonstrates the pressures that the court was responding to. As the scholarship described above has shown, the courts of Charles II and his successors were attempting to represent themselves in a manner suggestive of traditional, unquestionable monarchical rule, while at the same time responding to new, sometimes oppositional discourses. Thus it was that Dryden became a disputational laureate during the Exclusion Crisis, and Shadwell and Tate began writing odes that exalted their monarchs in new ways and dealt with opposition more obliquely; thus it was that, by 1715, the laureate had become fixed as the man officially responsible for representing the monarch in verse. In the person of the laureate, the court had a guaranteed advocate, a guaranteed proof that it was functioning appropriately as a cultural patron, and a guarantee that the person so chosen would stand prominent amongst his poetic brethren.

The last thing to stress here is just how critical an element the laureateship was, and how successfully its position was fixed. The laureateship became important partly because it *was* so well-defined, and *did* have the potential for definition. If Elkanah Settle had indeed occupied some kind of rival courtly role to Dryden in the 1670s, that role did not make much of a mark beyond the court, and it had no staying power in comparison to the laureateship; it faded away, while the laureateship became an ever more fixed and prominent part of the cultural firmament. Settle's putative role had neither a present definition, nor past nor future potential; the laureateship, on the other hand, had a name and an official salary, a heritage that stretched back to ancient Greece and Rome (encompassing Chaucer, Spenser, and Jonson), and was found capable of being put to new uses in response to new circumstances (first the Exclusion Crisis, then with the biannual odes). The laureateship was something that writers, nobles, court officials, and monarchs could clearly identify and fix onto. It thus served an important function in defining or even proving the court's cultural role, and it became more important and more fixed in this regard as the later Stuart period wore on, precisely because of its clearness and its potential. The office that had become fixed by 1715 was then to remain unchanged for a century, and was highly prominent and much discussed throughout that time.

Clearly, then, a successful position had been found for it. The court had worked out a definition for its role as cultural patron, and had worked out

answers to the issues of formality, ceremony, and representation, in which a newly (trans)formed office of poet laureate played a central part. This had occurred not just because of the court's necessity to assert itself by reference to a traditional courtly ideal in which cultural patronage was a crucial element, but because of the political scrutiny and commercial practices of an increasingly assertive public; and it is to that public that this thesis's attention will now turn.

## **Chapter Two. Loyalty Marketed: The Works of the Early Hanoverian Laureates, c.1700-1730**

The court does not typically loom very large in accounts of early eighteenth-century cultural production and consumption, while the laureateship, if it receives any attention at all, is considered to have been generally scorned or ignored by contemporaries. This chapter seeks to redress the balance. It argues that, while the prevailing norms of cultural production certainly became more commercial, public, and party-political in this period, the court retained a significant role, co-existing and interacting with other, newer agencies. The status and function of the laureateship is evidence of this. Having originally been instituted as a reassertion of a courtly, patronage-based system of cultural production, it had become, by the time of the Hanoverian succession, a vital component of the fruitful interactions between court and public.

The central issues of this chapter will be framed by a two-sided question. On one side is the question of how far the court was involved in the arts, and particularly literature, in the early eighteenth century. It is generally supposed that the arts underwent a great change between the early Stuart and early Hanoverian periods, going from 'courtly' to 'commercial'. Having been produced in a court-based system, by patronized artists, for an audience centred on the court, they came to be produced (according to this narrative) in a marketplace system, by independent professionals, for an increasingly middle-class public. The marketplace (and, to some extent, parties) therefore supplanted the court, becoming central to the production and consumption of culture. This narrative of cultural transformation will be questioned. Wider points about the role of the court in early eighteenth-century Britain will thereby be raised.

On the flipside is the second question: what was the role and status of the laureateship in this period? In considering the extent to which the arts were characterized by courtly agency, and the place of the court in public life, it is reciprocally necessary to consider the works of the laureates, and how the laureates were perceived by the public. This chapter will therefore study the laureates with regards to the landscape of early eighteenth-century literature, drawing conclusions on the laureateship itself, the literary world, and the court. The poets laureate Nicholas Rowe (appointed 1715, died 1718), Laurence Eusden (died 1730), and Colley Cibber (died 1757) will provide the focus of

discussion. Particular emphasis will here fall on Rowe, with Eusden and Cibber being further treated in later chapters. Where those later chapters will examine the Hanoverian laureate appointment processes, the public standing, and the official odes of the laureates, this chapter will start from a thematically earlier position, focussing primarily on the works that the laureates wrote *before* becoming laureate. It was on the basis of their pre-laureate works that Rowe, Eusden, and Cibber made their names, gained their success within the particular cultural framework that will be elaborated in this chapter, and eventually earned their appointments to the laureateship. In a sense, their appointments signalled royal patronage over their entire oeuvres, and symbolically confirmed that they had spent their careers working to make themselves the most eminent and serviceable poets in the eyes of the supreme arbiter of such things, the king. It is therefore not only instructive, but vital, to look at their pre-laureate writings, and it is mostly on the basis of this work that this chapter will advance its arguments and conclusions.

### **Courtly to Commercial**

Nicholas Rowe (1674-1718), appointed poet laureate a year after George I's accession, was one of the most respected literary figures of his time, and several of his plays remained repertory staples throughout the eighteenth century. In current scholarship, he tends to be defined in three ways: as a professional playwright who was expertly catering to new, middle-class audiences; as a party-political figure, ardently serving the Whig cause; and as Shakespeare's first 'modern' editor.<sup>1</sup> In each of these respects, Rowe is depicted as characteristic of his period. Because his literary work was produced in line with the prevailing trends of literary value, and excelled according to the criteria of those trends, he enjoyed critical esteem and popular success. To understand this three-pronged characterization, the way in which Rowe's world

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<sup>1</sup> Bernard, editor of the recent *Plays and Poems of Nicholas Rowe*, also emphasizes Rowe's translation of Lucan's *Pharsalia*, but that was (mostly) published after Rowe's death, and does not tend to feature in Rowean scholarship, so this chapter does not examine it. Stephen Bernard, 'General Introduction', in *The Early Plays*, ed. by Bernard, Bullard and McTague, pp. 1-28 (pp. 2-4); Bullard and McTague, 'Introduction to Step-Mother, Tamerlane, and Fair Penitent', pp. 35-55.

– the Britain of William III, Anne, and George I – is understood by scholars must be looked at in more detail.

The first salient point regards the state of drama around the turn of the eighteenth century. Public theatre had been banned during the Commonwealth, and, when it was brought back at the time of the Restoration, it returned with a courtly identity. Charles II gave royal patents to two courtiers, Sir William Davenant (unofficial poet laureate) and Charles Killigrew, permitting them each to manage a theatre company and to stage plays in public. The patents also stipulated that no public drama was to be performed by anyone other than Davenant's and Killigrew's companies, meaning that theatre could only exist within the framework of royal approval; and the two companies were named after the king and his brother (the future James II). This identification of theatre with court was further enhanced by the complexion of producers and consumers. A court-based 'coterie', led by certain high-profile aristocrats, not only provided the most prominent element of the audience, but also wrote many of the 1660s' new plays, and continued to furnish occasional new plays in the succeeding two decades. Charles II and his brother regularly attended the public theatre or commanded one of the companies to perform at court. Those theatre personnel who had not started off as courtiers inevitably ended up with intimate court connections; Nell Gwynn, popular actress and Charles II's mistress, is only the most famous example.<sup>2</sup>

As the reign of Charles II wore on, the theatre became gradually less dominated by the court-based coterie, and came to seem less like Charles's own personal plaything. But the court remained essential to drama's characterization and audience make-up, and, in proportion as playwrights of non-courtly and non-aristocratic origin came to dominate the production of new plays, the system of courtly patronage became more important. Playwrights would habitually dedicate their plays to some courtly figure (or, occasionally, to an aristocrat who was not associated with the court; or, rarely, to someone else entirely), and would, in their dedicatory inscriptions, often emphasize the fact that all plays rested ultimately under the patronage of the king.<sup>3</sup> A patronage

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<sup>2</sup> Bevis, *English Drama*, pp. 29-32; Dustin Griffin, 'Social world of authorship', pp. 38-49; Kewes, *Authorship*, pp. 26-28; Munns, 'Politics and Theatre', pp. 83. 87.

<sup>3</sup> E.g. Aphra Behn, *The Feign'd Curtizans, or, A Nights Intrigue* (1679), Sig. A2r-A3v; John Dryden, *All for Love: Or, the World Well Lost* (1692), in Dryden, *Works*, XIII, pp. 3-9; Otway, *Venice Preserv'd*, Sig. A2r-A2v.

hierarchy was thus articulated, in which a courtly figure would pay, assist, and 'defend' the playwright and his play, and would, in so doing, act as the intermediary of the king, who thereby exercised a more abstract and spiritual patronage. If, however, a playwright could sufficiently delight the king, he would receive his direct attentions (as shown in Chapter One with Dryden's *Secret Love*). The invocation, and evidence, of courtly patronage was significant not just on its own terms, but because it recommended the playwright to the wider paying public; courtly taste could make or break a play. Successful playwrights would also be welcomed into the social circle of the court (often to the eventual discredit of both parties).<sup>4</sup> With the court-based patronage system thus dominating the production and consumption of drama, plays took on a courtly hue. This meant a preponderance of heroic dramas, aristocratic wit-based comedies, and refined, cosmopolitan plays translated from French and Spanish originals.<sup>5</sup>

This was the situation under Charles II and James II (albeit somewhat disrupted and altered by the controversies of the Exclusion Crisis). By the end of the seventeenth century, however, drama was undergoing radical changes. Audience complexion was changing. There was an increasing number of people who had the inclination and resources to visit the theatre, and an increasing proportion of them were not gentry or courtly. Theatre thus became more orientated towards what is generally described as 'the middling sort', 'the (new) middle class', 'the town', or the 'public'.<sup>6</sup> There is a certain overlap between these formulations; they comprise the notion of a literate, confident, assertive, numerous, expanding set of persons, who were fairly prosperous, but who were not aristocratic, and who were to have an increasing impact on all areas of public life over the course of the eighteenth century.

But these terms also, of course, have more specific applications. The 'new' or 'rising' middle class of the eighteenth century has long been a truism of historiography and of literary and theatre scholarship, gesturing vaguely

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<sup>4</sup> For discussion of the workings of the classic patronage system, see Griffin, *Literary Patronage*, pp. 13-29; Kewes, *Authorship*, pp. 25-26.

<sup>5</sup> Stanley L. Archer, 'The Epistle Dedicatory in Restoration Drama', *Restoration and Eighteenth Century Theatre Research*, 1971, 8-13; Bevis, *English Drama*, pp. 39-42, 71-90; Hammond, *Hackney for Bread*, pp. 69-77; Kewes, *Authorship*, pp. 36-37; Love, 'Restoration and Early Eighteenth-Century Drama', pp. 112-28; Deborah C. Payne, 'Patronage and the Dramatic Marketplace under Charles I and II', *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 21 (1991), 137-52 (pp. 138-40, 147-52).

<sup>6</sup> Bevis, *English Drama*, pp. 67, 117-20; Hammond, *Hackney for Bread*, pp. 69-79, 249-51.



towards the modern, trans-historical definition of that class. Recent decades, however, have seen social historians attempting to recreate a more historically exact middle class, often using the contemporary term, 'middling sort'.<sup>7</sup> This 'middling sort' has been concisely defined as 'independent trading households', where 'trade' stretches from lower artisanship to well-educated professionalism, and where bureaucrats are permitted 'independence'.<sup>8</sup> This group, it is argued, was indeed on the rise, and was indeed exercising an ever more prevalent role in public life; its numbers, economic heft, social prominence, ideological character, and political voice were inexorably gaining ground, especially in London. Crucial to its identity and power was its relationship with commerce; the rise of the middling sort was a symbiotic phenomenon with the commercialization of Britain.<sup>9</sup>

'The public' and 'the town' were also contemporary designations, although their usage was fairly flexible and varied from writer to writer. Generally speaking, 'the public' was the agglomeration of people who cared about, and had some say in, political, literary, and theatrical affairs (with the emphasis depending on the context). It was a national, impersonal arbiter, made up of numberless persons, and its inception as a concept may be dated to the later Stuart period in the sense that (according to Mark Knights) this was when the word 'public' was first used as a noun, rather than only as an adjective.<sup>10</sup> 'The town' meant something similar, but connoted London rather than the national community.<sup>11</sup> The major differences between the two designations, which were especially marked in the later Stuart period but which were lessening by the time of George I's accession and thereafter, were that 'public(k)' still tended to be used more as an adjective than as a noun, and

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<sup>7</sup> E.g. Barry, 'Consumers' Passions'; Barry, *The Middling Sort of People*, ed. by Barry and Brooks; Peter Borsay, *The English Urban Renaissance: Culture and Society in the Provincial Town, 1660-1770* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989); Peter Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class: Business, Society and Family Life in London 1660-1730* (London: Methuen, 1989); Hunt, *Middling Sort*; Langford, *Propertied Englishman*; Hoh-Cheung Mui and Lorna H. Mui, *Shops and Shopkeeping in Eighteenth-Century England* (London: Routledge, 1989); Lorna Weatherill, *Consumer Behaviour and Material Culture in Britain 1660-1760* (London: Routledge, 1988).

<sup>8</sup> Barry, 'Introduction', pp. 2-3; D'Cruze, 'The Middling Sort in Eighteenth-Century Colchester', pp. 181-83.

<sup>9</sup> Barry, 'Introduction', p. 3; Hunt, *Middling Sort*, pp. 1, 6, 15-20; J.H. Plumb, 'Commercialization Society', p. 284.

<sup>10</sup> Brewer, *Pleasures*, p. 159; Mark Knights, *Misrepresentation*, pp. 3-10, 48-52, 67, 94-99 (for 'the public' as a noun).

<sup>11</sup> Brewer, *Pleasures*, pp. 33-54.

tended to denote more political matters, or matters which had a serious bearing on the security of the nation, whereas ‘the town’ was exclusively a noun and was more firmly concerned with matters of culture and taste.

Thus in Dryden’s translation of the *Aeneid* (1697), for example, he had Aeneas describe a Greek who was supposedly going to be sacrificed to please the gods as ‘the Wretch, ordain’d by Fate,/The Publick Victim, to redeem the State’.<sup>12</sup> ‘The Publick’ here was a matter of ‘the State’, and of things like life, death, and fate. In the same year, the preface to Cibber’s *Woman’s Wit* stated that his audiences had not liked the play, but that ‘Tis dangerous to Quarrel with a whole Town, as ’tis difficult to please ’em; there is no Appealing to *Apollo’s* Court, after an Illegal Sentence from them, their Will is Law, and ’tis but reasonable it shou’d be so, since they pay for their Power.’<sup>13</sup> Like Dryden, Cibber was referring here to grand matters – gods, laws, and sentences – but in a frivolous manner that allowed Cibber (and the many other writers who adopted this rhetoric) to affirm the importance of literary affairs even as they mocked the idea of that importance. Moreover, whereas Dryden’s ‘Publick’ matters were dictated by fate, Cibber’s ‘Town’ matters were dictated by the purely commercial power of ‘pay[ment]’. Yet if these two examples demonstrate how the terms ‘public’ and ‘town’ could be used differently, Cibber’s subsequent publications eventually demonstrated the overlap between them; an overlap that was in evidence elsewhere earlier than in Cibber’s usage, but which Cibber’s usage shows to have been ongoing and becoming more extreme.<sup>14</sup> In the prefatory writings to his plays published before 1719, he invariably dubbed his readers and theatrical audiences as ‘the Town’, while using the word ‘publick’ only rarely, only as an adjective, and only in reference to the national weal. However, in the dedicatory epistle to *Ximena* (1719), he finally used the word ‘the Publick’ (as a noun) in place of ‘the Town’; and in that to *The Provok’d Husband* (1728) he described plays as ‘Publick Diversions’ which indicated ‘the Genius of the People’ and ‘our [national] Taste’.<sup>15</sup> This overlap between the concepts of ‘public’ and ‘town’ indicates, amongst other things, London-based

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<sup>12</sup> Dryden, *Works*, V, p. 384.

<sup>13</sup> Colley Cibber, *Woman’s Wit* (1697), Sig. A2r.

<sup>14</sup> For the best and an earlier example of the elision of ‘public’ and ‘town’, see Rowe’s use of the term ‘Publick’ in 1714, below.

<sup>15</sup> See dedicatory epistles (and other forms of preface) to all plays between *Love’s Last Shift* (1696) and *Ximena* (1719), and *The Provok’d Husband* (1728).

writers' opinion as to the centrality of London to national affairs, and especially cultural affairs.

Both concepts, 'the town' and 'the public', included significant gentry elements; the gentry, although numerically small, exercised a disproportionate influence over taste and fashion.<sup>16</sup> But the basic novelty and substance of 'the town' and 'the public' was their middle-class identity (even if, as Chapter Four will show, this became more pronounced and qualitatively different later on), and, especially in cultural matters, the notion that 'they pay for their Power'. Moreover, the lower gentry were not very distinct from the upper middling sort, and indeed are sometimes still included in broad definitions of an eighteenth-century middle class; while the richest members of the middling sort rivalled the peerage for wealth.<sup>17</sup> As was mentioned in the Introduction, it is partly to keep these slippages and overlaps in mind that this thesis will favour the term 'middle class'. Finally, whatever else might be said about these formulations, it is universally the case that scholars hold them in contradistinction to the court.<sup>18</sup> Klein has perhaps put the case most dogmatically, arguing that a 'town' or 'public' based (symbolically and often physically) in coffee-houses developed an ideology of politeness as part of 'the larger process' by which a 'cultural regime centred on a court was transmuted into a post-courtly one.'<sup>19</sup> Thus, in Klein's influential analysis, a 'public' directly superseded the court.

Because theatre was now financed, enjoyed, criticized, and validated by this new audience, its values and priorities changed accordingly. Plays became more sentimental, feminine, didactic, and moralizing; less cynical and witty; looser in genre; more reflective of, and based upon, contemporary, middle-class life. Although determinations of genre are problematic for this period, it is instructive to note some of the designations which have sometimes been employed: sentimental comedy, crying comedy, humane comedy, reform comedy, domestic tragedy, she-tragedy. Heroic drama, meanwhile, was falling into abeyance by the turn of the century (albeit with occasional revivals later

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<sup>16</sup> Barry, 'Introduction', p. 19; Hunt, *Middling Sort*, p. 16.

<sup>17</sup> Hunt, *Middling Sort*, pp. 15-20.

<sup>18</sup> Bucholz, *Augustan Court*, p. 242; Haslett, *Pope to Burney*, pp. 1-25, 50-54, 86; Knights, *Misrepresentation*, p. 273; McKendrick, 'Commercialization Economy', p. 43.

<sup>19</sup> However, Klein is not inclined to make much of the middle class in his analyses of the public, the Town, politeness, etc. Klein, 'Coffeehouse Civility', pp. 44-51 (p. 50 for quotation).

on). This was the theatrical world entered into by Nicholas Rowe and Colley Cibber, and was the world that they came to dominate.<sup>20</sup>

There is much that might be objected to in these generalizations. Theatre scholars, it might be argued, have drawn too simplistic a connection between the characteristics of eighteenth-century drama and the supposed values of a supposedly middle-class audience. However, recent scholarship has generally served to shore up this picture, and to bestow evidential rigour on what were once vague assumptions. Historians of the middle class have found that this group did indeed generate, and seek to abide by, a distinct structure of values, and that these values broadly correlate with the tendencies identified by theatre scholars in later Stuart and early Hanoverian drama.<sup>21</sup> Various reasons have been advanced to explain this middle-class attitude. Hunt suggests that there was a 'middling urge to understand and better control the social world in which commerce was conducted',<sup>22</sup> and that ideals of morality, virtue, sociability, and sympathy were manifestations of this 'urge'; they would bring stability and trust to a commercial world which had a short supply of both. Similarly, Brewer observes that the middle class faced problems of economic volatility and debt, and sought to deal with them by placing a premium on certain relevant personal qualities. It was important to show reliability, candour, affability, generosity, politeness, and civility, and to encourage these qualities in others.<sup>23</sup> Middle-class persons thus had very material reasons to care about other middle-class persons, to show sympathy with them, and to demonstrate their own feelings, but within careful constraints of morality and politeness.

Barry, meanwhile, points out that the middle-class life-cycle was much more variable than that of the higher and lower social groups, both over an individual life-span and between individual middle-class persons. This, he argues, gave the middle class a strong sense of the importance of personal qualities, which would be crucial in determining each person's fortunes.

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<sup>20</sup> Bevis, *English Drama*, pp. 117-20, 123, 129-33, 154-61; Hammond, *Hackney for Bread*, pp. 105-25, 144; Robert D. Hume, *Henry Fielding and the London Theatre, 1728-1737* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p. 20; Hume, 'Drama and Theatre', pp. 323-24, 328; Koon, *Cibber*, pp. 24-29, 178; Love, 'Restoration and Early Eighteenth-Century' pp. 112-28; Munns, 'Politics and Theatre', p. 97; Wall, 'Poems on the Stage', pp. 27-313.

<sup>21</sup> Barry, 'Introduction', pp. 14-18; Barry, 'Bourgeois Collectivism?', pp. 95-103; Brewer, 'Commercialization Politics', pp. 214-15, 217, 229-30; Hunt, *Middling Sort*, pp. 14, 16, 101-24; Plumb, 'Commercialization Society', p. 269.

<sup>22</sup> Hunt, *Middling Sort*, pp. 102 (for quotation), 121.

<sup>23</sup> Brewer, 'Commercialization Politics', pp. 214-15, 229-30.

Success or failure was dependent on 'the classic virtues'. 'These moral evaluations thus came to play a major part in the self-classification of the middling sort', being used both to distinguish this group from those above and below it, and to distinguish individuals within the group.<sup>24</sup> It might also be argued (although Barry does not extend his observation this far) that this concern with stereotypically middle-class qualities, and with their importance in determining an individual's fortunes, would have fuelled a middle-class interest in drama based on domestic, relatable, middle-class family stories. Whether or not these reasons are found convincing, the important point here is that the middle class were indeed committed to values of politeness, sociability, virtue, morality, domesticity, and sentiment. It seems fair, then, that theatre scholars have linked the changes they see in drama of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries with the increasingly middle-class character of audiences.

The wider literary scene was changing, too. Because of the expansion of a literate, middle-class reading public, who were confident enough to want to have their voice heard, and had sufficient leisure time to want to read imaginative writing, literature was no longer produced by the economic and ideological impetus of a patronizing court and aristocracy, but by this new readership's. It was therefore produced and consumed in a literary marketplace.<sup>25</sup> Again, this had far-reaching ramifications for the kind of literature that was produced. When literature had been produced for (and to some extent by) a court-based and heavily aristocratic coterie, dramatic forms had been the most highly valued. Of the non-dramatic forms, the most heavily practised and valued had been harsh satire and fulsome panegyric.<sup>26</sup> Now, both forms were subject to a growing number of objections: the panegyric was sometimes considered too obsequious, the satire too rude.<sup>27</sup> The preferred writing was softer, more polite, and more accessible; it was more reflective of and based in contemporary, normal life. Amongst the changes, humble prose became more commercially viable and (in some instances, especially as the early eighteenth century wore on) more respectable: for example, *The Spectator* and Samuel

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<sup>24</sup> Barry, 'Introduction', pp. 14-16.

<sup>25</sup> Brewer, *Pleasures*, pp. 1-4, 7-11, 15-71; Hammond, *Hackney for Bread*, pp. 2-6, 13, 69-77, 104-44, 249-51; Hammond, 'Poet as Professional', pp. 151, 157-61; Haslett, *Pope to Burney*, pp. 1-25, 50-54; Hunter, 'Restoration to Pope', pp. 202-4.

<sup>26</sup> Hunter, 'Restoration to Pope', pp. 183-87.

<sup>27</sup> Butt, *Mid-Eighteenth Century*, pp. 114-24; Hunter, 'Restoration to Pope' pp. 202-4; Ashley Marshall, 'Satire', in *British Poetry, 1660-1800*, ed. by Lynch, pp. 495-509 (pp. 495-99).

Richardson's novels.<sup>28</sup> Drama did not suffer much in absolute terms; even the two most high-profile writers of the eighteenth century, Pope and Johnson, harboured some sort of playwright ambitions at certain points in their careers. But literary ambition was no longer as heavily concentrated upon the stage as it had been during the Restoration period, and the careers of Pope and Johnson flag up the point that a lessening proportion of high-profile writers wrote primarily for the stage.<sup>29</sup> History writing, similarly, became more commercialized, wider in its readership, and less affiliated with court, church, and universities; its subject matter, in correlation with these changes, becoming more diverse, more social, more domestic, and more 'novelized'.<sup>30</sup> Phillips, in particular, has emphasized history writing's adaptation to 'the needs of a modern, commercial, and increasingly middle-class society.'<sup>31</sup> Historians, and their readers, evinced increasingly 'social and sentimental' concerns. Phillips sees such concerns as typical of the long eighteenth century, and finds them manifested not just in history, but in all types of writing.<sup>32</sup>

For all the sentiment, mildness, and politeness of this period, however, these were also the years of 'Rage of Party'. Undoubtedly, this 'Rage' was a more restrained affair than had been the Exclusion Crisis and Tory Reaction. Under Charles II, those who had lost the political game had sometimes paid with their lives. By the time of Anne's reign, this was no longer the case. Nevertheless, the country was split into two partisan camps, which detested each other, fought over power, and attacked each other with venom.<sup>33</sup> Party needs and party principles fuelled the production and consumption of literature.

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<sup>28</sup> Blanning, *Culture of Power*, pp. 147-8; Brewer, *Pleasures*, pp. 89-107; Hammond, *Hackney for Bread*, pp. 69-79, 104-44, 178-91, 249-51, 266-75; Jennifer Keith, 'Lyric', in *British Poetry, 1660-1800*, pp. 579-95 (pp. 580-82); William B. Warner, 'Novels on the Market', in *English Literature, 1660-1780*, ed. by Richetti, pp. 87-105 (pp. 87-92, 100-105).

<sup>29</sup> Hammond, *Hackney for Bread*, pp. 48-50; Pat Rogers 'Samuel Johnson', *ODNB*. Contemporaries widely supposed Pope to have had a large or even predominant hand in John Gay's afterpiece, *The What d'ye call it?* (1715), and play, *Three hours after Marriage* (1717), and his concern for the plays' success, and hatred of Cibber for mocking the latter, were subsequently adduced as further proofs of his involvement and his hopes. Spence reported that Cibber himself believed *The What d'ye call it?* to be Pope's. Pope certainly did have some involvement in the writing of at least one of the works, and probably both, but how much is unclear. Spence, *Observations*, I, 235, p. 103; McGirr, *Partial Histories*, pp. 83-6; David Nokes, 'John Gay', *ODNB*.

<sup>30</sup> However, these processes are generally seen as registering later in historiography than they did in other, and especially more literary, genres. O'Brien, 'History Market', pp. 106, 108-9.

<sup>31</sup> Phillips, *Society and Sentiment*, p. xii.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. xii, 6-8, 18-19.

<sup>33</sup> Tim Harris, *Politics Under the Later Stuarts. Party Conflict in a Divided Society 1660-1715* (London: Longman, 1993); Geoffrey Holmes, *British Politics in the Age of Anne*, 2nd edn (London: Hambledon, 1987); Knights, *Misrepresentation*, pp. 3-10, 18-25.

Parties also served to heighten, but to some extent fragment, the value accorded to literary works. It was widely recognized by contemporaries that any work which came evidently from one side would be hyperbolically lauded by its sympathizers, and hyperbolically damned by their opponents. Yet a work that could bridge the gap between the parties, like Addison's *Cato*, was all the more valued as a result.<sup>34</sup>

The final salient point to make about this new world is that it saw a slowly increasing interest in the works of the past. (This point factors less significantly in scholarship on the field than the previous points raised, but it is an important subtext.) Milton came of age with Addison's *Spectator* essays; Spenser enjoyed a minor boost in popularity, foreshadowing his later triumphs; and Shakespeare's reputation was, for the first time, elevated beyond that of any other modern writer. Pope wrote imitations of Waller, Cowley, Spenser, and even Chaucer; Prior had great success with a poem in Spenserian stanza (1706). The first two decades of the eighteenth century were still very different to the 1760s and 1770s, in terms of appreciation of the nation's literary heritage; but it was nonetheless the case that a firm notion of that heritage was being formed, and that it was much to a contemporary writer's advantage to craft some sort of personal relationship with it.<sup>35</sup>

This, then, was the literary world of the early eighteenth century, as it appears in current scholarship. And it was a world in which Rowe made himself essential. The prevailing modes of cultural production were based around the public, the marketplace, political parties, and (in a more abstract way) the national literary heritage. Rowe's work entailed a recognition of this state of affairs, and, because it met the demands and principles of these modes so well, it enjoyed critical and popular success.

The court, meanwhile, is generally assumed to have been insignificant.<sup>36</sup> It is held that, at the Hanoverian Succession, the newly-triumphant Whigs gave the laureateship to Rowe as a reward for his commercial success and party-

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<sup>34</sup> Knights, *Misrepresentation*, pp. 354-60.

<sup>35</sup> Brewer, *Pleasures*, pp. 33-54, 371-82; Butt, *Mid-Eighteenth Century*, pp. 4-6, 58-78, 94-114; Rounce, 'Scholarship', pp. 685-700; Siskin, 'More is Different', pp. 809-23; Terry, *Literary Past*, pp. 2-8, 287-323; Weinbrot, *Britannia's Issue*, pp. 115-41. For more on Spenser's reputation in the eighteenth century, see Hazel Wilkinson, *Edmund Spenser and the Eighteenth-Century Book* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

<sup>36</sup> Brewer, *Pleasures*, pp. 15-33, 137-39; Bucholz, *Augustan Court*, pp. 11, 228-42; Hammond, *Hackney for Bread*, pp. 69-79.

political service, bypassing a king who, after all, did not even understand English. But the laurel (in this interpretation) was not very material to Rowe's standing at the time or to later scholarly assessments of him. It was a small additional emolument for an inveterate place-seeker. The work that he produced in fulfilment of its function – the biannual panegyric odes – were ignored by contemporaries, because anachronistic; they were not characteristic of or valued by his age in the way that his plays (and his Shakespeare edition) were.<sup>37</sup>

### Questioning Commerce

Although such a vision of the long eighteenth century has long dominated scholarship, there are contrary voices which seek to challenge and qualify it, insisting that older practices and attitudes persisted into the eighteenth century far more tenaciously (and indeed complicatedly) than has generally been supposed. While these contrarians are not especially numerous, they have achieved a certain amount of success. It has been increasingly commonplace, over the last two decades, for scholars to pay lip service to the idea that traditional practices and attitudes endured throughout the eighteenth century, and that a teleological narrative is too simplistic, even as those same scholars deliver an argument or account which makes clear the distinctiveness, novelty, and transformative character of that period.<sup>38</sup> There does not seem to be an overt scholarly debate, for the most part.<sup>39</sup> But the contrarian, traditionalist scholars are constantly attempting to have a more composite, qualified picture of the century created.

A significant strand of this contrarian tendency is the revaluation – or rediscovery – of loyalist and monarchist sentiment. This strand comprises

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<sup>37</sup> For the idea that neglect (at best) or scorn (at worst) constituted the invariable reception of laureate odes, and the public attitude to the laureateship, from Shadwell's appointment to Pye's death, see Chapters Four and Five, but also Broadus, *Laureateship*, pp. 84-88, 102-3 (for Rowe), 113, 119, 123, 133-35, 144-45, 154-63.

<sup>38</sup> E.g. Brewer, *Pleasures*, pp. 10, 137-39.

<sup>39</sup> The most obvious exception is the controversy raised by Clark's 1985 book on *English Society*. See, for example, J.C.D. Clark, 'Historiography of England's Ancien Regime'. Smith, meanwhile, posits that there are two, polarized views of the eighteenth century: the modernist, 'public sphere' approach, and the traditionalist, 'ancien regime' approach; but she notes that, at the time of writing (2005), 'a more nuanced picture of eighteenth-century society is beginning to emerge', combining the two approaches. Smith, *Georgian Monarchy*, p. 12.



several related arguments. One is that the various monarchs of the long eighteenth century (including Georges I and II) were more intelligent, active, cultured, and effective than has generally been realized. Another is that the Hanoverian monarchy was genuinely popular, and that there was a thriving loyalist culture which expressed itself in both plebeian and elite forms. Lastly, there is the argument that the eighteenth century court did still have a role to play in public life, and that it interacted with, rather than being undermined by, the marketplace.

Of those three arguments, it might be expected that the redemptive-biographical is the oldest and least respectable. In fact, however, it is exemplified by publications that are both recent and (in their scholarship) rigorous. 2014 saw Joanna Marschner's *Queen Caroline: Cultural Politics at the Early Eighteenth-Century Court* (Yale University Press), and J.A. Winn's *Queen Anne: Patroness of Arts* (Oxford University Press).<sup>40</sup> Biographies of George II were published in 2007 (Jeremy Black, University of Exeter Press) and 2011 (Andrew C. Thompson, also Yale); while George I's revaluative biography appeared in 1978, written by an expert on European diplomacy, Ragnhild Hatton, and was republished in 2001 with a foreword by Jeremy Black.<sup>41</sup> As the subtitles to the two 2014 works indicate, recent interest in the early eighteenth century court often takes cultural patronage as its theme. That same year an edited volume on *The First Georgians: Art & Monarchy* was published, while in 2013 came *William Kent: Designing Georgian Britain*, a collection of essays on one of the Hanoverian court's favourite architects.<sup>42</sup> The Hanoverians' relationship with the theatre has also generated occasional interest. Louis D. Mitchell published articles on command performances in the reigns of Anne, George I, and George II (in 1970, 1973-4, and 1987, respectively);<sup>43</sup> and in

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<sup>40</sup> Joanna Marschner, *Queen Caroline: Cultural Politics at the Early Eighteenth-Century Court* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014); Winn, *Queen Anne*.

<sup>41</sup> Jeremy Black, *George II: Puppet of the Politicians?* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2007); Andrew C. Thompson, *George II: King and Elector* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011); Ragnhild Hatton, *George I*, with new foreword by Jeremy Black (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

<sup>42</sup> *The First Georgians: Art & Monarchy, 1714-1760*, ed. by Desmond Shawe-Taylor (London: Royal Collection Trust, 2014); *William Kent: Designing Georgian Britain*, ed. by Susan Weber (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).

<sup>43</sup> Louis D. Mitchell, 'Command Performances During the Reign of Queen Anne', *Theatre Notebook*, 24 (1970), 111-17; Louis D. Mitchell, 'Command Performances during the Reign of George I', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 7 (1973-74), 343-49; Louis D. Mitchell, 'Command Performances during the Reign of George II', *College Language Association Journal*, 31 (1987), 223-39.

1991 appeared Harry Pedicord's short monograph on *The House of Hanover at the London Theatres*, asserting 'the great value of royal patronage in terms of the box-office, the social scene, and the taste of the times.'<sup>44</sup>

Studies of popular loyalist culture in the early eighteenth century are not very numerous. One notable contribution to the field is Bob Harris and Christopher A. Whatley's 1998 article on 'Loyalism in George II's Britain'. Looking at celebrations of the king's birthday across Britain, they argue that, although some communities did not display any marked enthusiasm for the occasion, many held keen and vibrant festivities, especially in Scotland. On a related note, studies of Walpolean newspaper writers, pamphleteers, clergymen, and poets have shown that the celebrating of George I and George II was central to Walpolean ideology and propaganda. The Hanoverian court was the essential theoretical element to justifications of Walpole's government, and was used heavily in the transmission of those justifications to the country at large.<sup>45</sup>

But the most important publication on the Hanoverian court, and on popular loyalism, is Hannah Smith's *Georgian Monarchy: Politics and Culture, 1714-1760* (2006). Smith's main objective is to disprove the notion that the early Hanoverian court was, in matters 'constitutional, political, financial, social, and cultural', virtually irrelevant.<sup>46</sup> Her arguments are wide-ranging, covering such topics as the king's powers over the army,<sup>47</sup> Queen Caroline's interest in scientific debate,<sup>48</sup> and the importance of royal palaces as social venues;<sup>49</sup> but of greatest relevance here are her discussions of the court's relationship with the public.

First of all, Smith argues that there existed in Britain a vibrant, widespread popular loyalism towards George and George II. It was animated by innocent, genuine good feeling towards the royal family personally, and its

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<sup>44</sup> Harry W. Pedicord, "By Their Majesties" Command": *The House of Hanover at the London Theatres, 1714-1800*' (London: The Society for Theatre Research, 1991), p. 2.

<sup>45</sup> Reed Browning, *Political and Constitutional Ideas of the Court Whigs* (London: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), pp. 58-64, 196-209; Tone Sundt Urstad, *Sir Robert Walpole's Poets: The Use of Literature as Pro-Government Propaganda 1721-1742* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1999), pp. 156-69.

<sup>46</sup> This quotation is taken from Bucholz, who is talking about the state of the court upon Anne's death in 1714; but his thesis impinges upon, and reflects scholarly assumptions of, the early Hanoverian court too. Bucholz, *Augustan Court*, p. 11.

<sup>47</sup> Smith, *Georgian Monarchy*, pp. 182-88.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 86-92.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 197-210, 227-32.

existence created commercial opportunities.<sup>50</sup> Cultural producers had an interest in buying into what she terms ‘monarchical culture’, which they could sell as a commodity on the marketplace.<sup>51</sup> Thus, for example, print-makers could make money by selling prints depicting the royal family.<sup>52</sup> Smith then considers the notion that a Habermasian public sphere was usurping the authority of the court. She finds that, while the public sphere was certainly growing and becoming of critical importance, the court did not simply cede place to it in matters of culture. In fact there was a close relationship between court and public sphere. The court endorsed, sponsored, and drew upon the public sphere, to the benefit of both. The reigning king was able to enjoy and cultivate the arts with a minimal outlay, and the public sphere in turn was able to trade off its relationship with the crown. There was even some royal control over theatres through the Lord Chamberlains, especially after 1737; and the theatres all closed whenever the court went into mourning. Smith concludes that there was ‘an element of mutual dependency and, more often than not, a craving for royal support’ in the public sphere’s dealings with the court.<sup>53</sup>

There is, then, an assertive body of scholarship which seeks not to overturn the novel, commercial, and public characterization of the eighteenth century, but rather to show both the persistence and adaptability of traditional practices therein, and to reintegrate and revivify the court. This trend is also found in literary scholarship. For example, patronage – the traditional, courtly mode of literary production – has been studied by Dustin Griffin, who argues that it endured throughout the century as a vital, evolving phenomenon.<sup>54</sup> Paul J. Korshin has identified ‘an intricate but limited’ patronage system which ‘accommodated itself to the economic conditions of the age’, and was ‘necessary’ because ‘a free market system for literary property had not yet fully developed.’<sup>55</sup> Daniel J. Ennis, meanwhile, has emphasized the extent to which eighteenth-century Britain ‘was an age when poetic distinction was recognized with medals, prizes, and positions, and poets openly jostled for acclaim.’ Of particular relevance here, he notes that ‘The selection of the poet laureate at

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<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 156-60.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 123-24, 245.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 135-42.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 232-238 (238 for quotation).

<sup>54</sup> Griffin, *Patronage*, pp. 10-11, 162-69, 246-85.

<sup>55</sup> Korshin, ‘Patronage’, pp. 468, 473.

court was much discussed'; it was 'the most public honour to which a poet could aspire'. The periodic controversies over the appointment 'show how much cultural capital the post retained'. Certain other positions, like the Oxford poetry professorship, were also prominent. 'Institutional recognitions of poetic merit often generated controversy... Besides offices, poetic accolades and emoluments multiplied.' These honours were invariably mentioned on the title pages of their holders' works, indicating their commercial importance.<sup>56</sup>

Ennis does not develop these ideas in detail, and he makes some casual errors which indicate his unfamiliarity with the relevant material; but he flags up an important and neglected fact of eighteenth-century literary life. Public, institutional, and honorific positions were widely sought and widely respected in this period. Hoary institutions like the court conferred a recognition on poets that could not be attained through the marketplace, but which was in itself eminently marketable; and most eighteenth-century poets were perfectly happy to write *ex officio* verse. These themes will be of the utmost importance in the following investigation of the early Hanoverian laureates, where it will be shown that early eighteenth-century culture was not simply commercial, not simply party-political, and not simply courtly, but was produced under a mixed aegis of marketplace, party, and court. It is this mixed culture – this mixed mode of literary production – that is evinced in the careers of Rowe, Eusden, and Cibber.

### **Rowe's Plays as Commercial**

Rowe's plays (which are all tragedies, except for the never-revived *Biter*) are justly understood as being 'sentimental', 'domestic', 'moralizing', and 'she-tragedies'. They were produced specifically for the consumption of the new kinds of audience and readership delineated above, whose principles and practices of consumption they ably serviced. This is best seen in Rowe's first play, *The Ambitious Step-mother* (1701). In its dedication, Rowe explains his theory of tragedy. Noting that 'Terror and Pity are laid down for the Ends of Tragedy' by Aristotle, Rowe pronounces his inclination for the latter. The audience 'should... always Conclude and go away with Pity, a sort of regret

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<sup>56</sup> Daniel J. Ennis, 'Honours', in *British Poetry, 1660-1800*, ed. by Lynch, pp. 732-46 (p. 732).

proceeding from good nature, which, tho an uneasiness, is not always disagreeable, to the person who feels it. It was this passion that the famous Mr Otway succeeded so well in touching, and must and will at all times affect people, who have any tenderness or humanity.<sup>57</sup> Thus he recasts Aristotelian tragedy in a mould that is determined by, on the one hand, an audience of ‘tenderness’ and ‘humanity’, and, on the other, by recent English practice, exemplified by Otway. Pity both stems from, and satisfyingly reminds the viewer of, their ‘good nature’; it is even a sort of pleasure, being ‘not always disagreeable’.

The prologue (which follows in the printed work, but of course would have initiated the performative experience) gives such ideas in a more artful, less theoretical form.<sup>58</sup> It begins,

If Dying Lovers yet deserve a Tear,  
 If a sad story of a Maids despair,  
 Yet move Compassion in the pitying fair,  
 This day the Poet does his Art employ,  
 The soft accesses of your Souls to try.<sup>59</sup>

In these opening lines – the consonants of which impart a soft, delicate air – the play is configured around tears, sadness, compassion, and pity. The female element is heavily emphasized: Rowe appeals to the ‘pitying fair’ in the audience, and emphasizes ‘a Maids despair’. The titular subject of the play – *The Ambitious Step-mother* – becomes immediately sidelined. She cannot function as an object of pity or female identification, and therefore must give way to ‘Dying Lovers’ and despairing maids.

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<sup>57</sup> Nicholas Rowe, *The Ambitious Step-Mother* (1701), Sig. A3r.

<sup>58</sup> Prologues were often not written by the playwright themselves. There is no evidence that this was the case here, although Rowe is known to have sometimes had prologues or epilogues written for him by others (contrary to Johnson’s statement in his biography of Rowe that it was ‘remarkable that his [Rowe’s] prologues and epilogues are all his own, though he sometimes supplied others’). Even if this prologue was not written by Rowe, it is nonetheless significant and worth discussing, because presumably endorsed by Rowe, and, appearing at the start of the play, forming an essential part of the read and performed experience. Samuel Johnson, ‘Rowe’, in *The Lives of the Poets*, ed. by John H. Middelndorf (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), II, pp. 576-95 (p. 584). ‘Nicholas Rowe to Alexander Pope, 1713’, and editorial note by George Sherburn, *Electronic Enlightenment Scholarly Edition of Correspondence* <[https://www.e-enlightenment-com.uoelibrary.idm.oclc.org/item/popealOU0010184b1c/?srch\\_type=letters&auth=nicholas+rowe&lang\\_main=all&r=1](https://www.e-enlightenment-com.uoelibrary.idm.oclc.org/item/popealOU0010184b1c/?srch_type=letters&auth=nicholas+rowe&lang_main=all&r=1)> [accessed 29 September 2019]. For more on prologue and epilogues, see Wall, ‘Poems on the Stage’, pp. 24-7.

<sup>59</sup> Rowe, *Ambitious Step-Mother*, Sig. A6r.

The relationship between playwright and audience is set out as an emotive, intimate one. The 'Art' of the 'Poet' is 'The soft accesses of your Souls to try.' Rowe thus envisions the playwright's task as touching his audience's sensibilities. In so doing, he will 'try' – and potentially confirm – both his and their capacities for passionate sensitivity. Tragedy is thus a profoundly moving and open experience, in which both playwright and audience bare their souls to each other, and, ideally, come away confirmed in their humanity. The prologue continues in much the same vein, referencing Otway and 'humane nature' again, and equating 'Grief', particularly that of 'the weeping fair', with 'niceness of Taste' and 'the Tragick Muse'. Finally, Rowe makes a rousing demand: 'Assert, ye fair ones, who in Judgment sit,/Your Ancient Empire over Love and Wit;/Reform our Sense, and teach the men t'Obey'.<sup>60</sup> Even allowing for the tongue-in-cheek tendencies of eighteenth-century prologues, it is clear that Rowe is here presenting a theory of tragedy that emphasizes the humane, the sentimental, and the feminine.<sup>61</sup>

While *Step-mother* concerns high politics in an eastern kingdom, Rowe's later plays evince a desire to bring the action ever closer to contemporary life. The cardinal quotations here are from *Fair Penitent* (1703), in the prologue to which Rowe promises that he will not give the audience a tale of kings and queens, because such tales take place in 'a higher Sphere./We ne'er can pity what we ne'er can share'. Therefore, 'an humbler Theme our Author chose,/A melancholy Tale of private Woes'. Here, 'you shall meet with Sorrows like your own'.<sup>62</sup> The play itself is an adaptation of John Massinger's *The Fatal Dowry* (published 1632), but with Massinger's emphasis on the bridegroom transferred to the eponymous, 'penitent' bride. Considerations of how much agency, and how much penitence, she actually has, are not important here. For eighteenth-century audiences, she seemed a strong, realistic, relatable female character, whose story both aroused pity (in her favour) and moral considerations (at her expense).<sup>63</sup>

After *Fair Penitent*, Rowe actually strayed back towards 'higher Sphere[s]'; but he always tried to make his characters relatable, domestic, and

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<sup>60</sup> Rowe, *Ambitious Step-Mother*, Sig. A6r-v.

<sup>61</sup> For prologues and epilogues in general, see Wall, 'Poems on the Stage', pp. 24-27.

<sup>62</sup> Nicholas Rowe, *The Fair Penitent* (1714), Sig. a2r. (*Fair Penitent* was first published in 1703, but the 1714 printing is referred to here due to the illegibility of ECCO's 1703 printing.)

<sup>63</sup> For reception and popularity, see below.

relevant to modern concerns. For example, *Ulysses* (1706) begins with a jaunty prologue in the 'mock-epic' style that Brean Hammond has identified as being characteristic of this period. According to Hammond, writers of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, having been brought up on the classics and desirous of writing epics, found themselves pulled towards contemporary, realistic and middle-class life by their audiences. Thus a 'credibility gap' opened up between the classical and the contemporary urges. Writers found that the only way to bridge this gap (and, at the same time, a brilliant way of achieving comic effect), was by developing a 'mock-epic' style in which modern life and classical literature were ironically, jarringly melded.<sup>64</sup> Rowe's *Ulysses* prologue is a manifestation of this phenomenon. It begins, 'A Lady, who, for Twenty Years, withstood/The Pressing Instances of Flesh and Blood' was 'Left at ripe Eighteen' by her husband, Ulysses, who had gone to 'Battel for a Harlot at *Troy Town*'. Penelope (the 'Lady') was then inundated with 'fresh Lovers... Much such as now a-days are *Cupid's Tools*,/Some Men of Wit, but the most part were Fools./They sent her *Billets doux*, and Presents many,/Of ancient Tea and *Thericlean China*'. Happily, though, Penelope was 'Coxcomb Proof'.<sup>65</sup> Then, Rowe abruptly abandons this tongue-in-cheek jauntiness so typical of contemporary prologues, and states, in all seriousness, that 'Our *English Wives* shall prove this Story true', by remaining chaste while their husbands fight and die abroad.<sup>66</sup> Rowe ends with a celebration of British heroism, currently on show in the War of Spanish Succession, and exhorts 'Ye beauteous Nymphs': 'with open Arms prepare/To meet the Warriors, and reward their Care.'<sup>67</sup>

The play itself then confirms this switch to seriousness. Ulysses is modern in both a realistic and an exemplary sense. He becomes agitated at the thought that Penelope might be cheating on him, and at one point even curses her infidelity, before being reproved by his friends for his overreaction.<sup>68</sup> But he is also chaste, pious, and virtuous; it is these qualities, rather than his classically-heroic prowess, that really distinguish him from the villainous suitors, and that guarantee his eventual success. Whereas the suitors are constantly

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<sup>64</sup> Hammond, *Hackney for Bread*, pp. 105-44.

<sup>65</sup> Nicholas Rowe, *Ulysses* (1706), Sig. A3r.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*, Sig. A3r.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, Sig. A3v.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 31-32.

'Immerst in Riot, and defying/The Gods as Fables',<sup>69</sup> Ulysses is restrained and good, and makes repeated appeals to the gods.<sup>70</sup> Eventually, he is reunited with Penelope. Having warmed up his audience with a typically mock-heroic prologue, Rowe therefore reveals his prevailing inclinations even before that prologue is finished, and carries them sombrely through the rest of the play. Distant and classical subjects can indeed be made incongruous by comparing them to modern life; but that incongruity is neither necessary nor urgent. For Rowe, the *Ulysses* story is affective, moral, and relevant. Ulysses and Penelope can easily function as a realistic couple, sharing the concerns and experiences of their audience, and giving an ideal for modern domesticity.

Indeed, although Rowe's subsequent plays all concern royal subjects, his emphases remain domestic, sentimental, and modern. The plays are uniformly geared towards questions of love and lust. Questions of state and narratives of heroism are present, but marginal. However much the plays initially seem to be about politics and principles, they always turn out to be convoluted love-affairs. The various romantic and sexual desires of each character are (almost always) the sole agents and motivators of the plot and (almost) the sole concern of the dialogue. *The Royal Convert* (1708) is on one level an allegory in favour of Protestantism and the 1707 Union between England and Scotland; yet the play is mostly concerned with and actuated by the various personal loves and lusts of each character. As the despairing Seofrid puts it: 'What is the boasted Majesty of Kings,/Their Godlike Greatness, if their Fate depends/Upon that meanest of their Passions, Love?'<sup>71</sup>

In many respects, Rowe seems to have been following the model made definitive by Pierre Corneille: a plot confined by the three dramatic unities; each character 'loving' and/or 'loved by' another character; some presiding issue of politics and/or government; that presiding issue brought into tension with, or subjected to the test of, or riven by the demands of *amour*.<sup>72</sup> In *Royal Convert*, the (female) character Rodogune even starts shrieking about her 'injur'd Glory',<sup>73</sup> which calls to mind Chimène's tedious insistence on her 'gloire' in *Le*

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid, p. 41.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, p. 62.

<sup>71</sup> Nicholas Rowe, *The Royal Convert* (1708), p. 22.

<sup>72</sup> Pol Gaillard, 'Introduction', in Pierre Corneille, *Horace*, ed. by Pol Gaillard (Paris: Bordas, 1976), pp. 3-20 (p. 10).

<sup>73</sup> Rowe, *Royal Convert*, p. 27.



*Cid*.<sup>74</sup> But whereas Corneille always at least intended love to be a subordinate issue, and imagined himself to be exploring questions of state, Rowe's plays are unashamed in placing love at the forefront. Rowe's female characters are also stronger, and far more vocal about female oppression, than are Corneille's. The injuredly-glorious Rodogune, for example, rants at some length about the sufferings of women, and the unfairness of male dominance.<sup>75</sup> She hopes one day for women to be in charge, and to subdue and oppress men; but she herself has actually spent most of the play controlling and oppressing two of the other characters, Aribert (a man) and Ethelinda (a woman). In *Jane Shore*, the titular character herself (who, unlike Rodogune, is an object of sympathy) makes a similar complaint, although without Rodogune's hopes of revenge.<sup>76</sup> Neither complaint is refuted or answered by any of the other characters. Indeed, Shore's complaint is given the extra impact of being allowed to close out the play's first act. In Rowe's hands, then, the neo-classical model of tragedy is adapted to become modern and affective. Whereas Corneille was concerned to create poetic masterpieces, and wrote in a theatrical context dominated more overtly by the court, Rowe was giving his middle-class, paying audiences a spectacle of relevance and sentiment.

Party-political matters loom larger in Rowean scholarship than do elaborations of his middle-class sentimentality, but the latter actuates the plays far more than does the former. As a corrective against current scholarly biases, therefore, only a brief, arbitrary analysis of partisan politics will be given here;<sup>77</sup> a somewhat more searching interrogation of the nature of political parties will be given in Chapter Three. For the most part, Rowe's plays do not contain political messages and references, and their overall designs are not determined by political intentions. However, their sentimentality, politeness, and conscious modernity, and the fact that they were written by a known Whig, may in some way have been hoped, by Rowe, to have advanced the party cause.<sup>78</sup> Several

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<sup>74</sup> Pierre Corneille, *Le Cid*, very passim.

<sup>75</sup> Rowe, *Royal Convert*, p. 55.

<sup>76</sup> Nicholas Rowe, *The Tragedy of Jane Shore* (1714), pp. 11-12.

<sup>77</sup> Bullard and McTague, 'Introduction to Step-mother, Tamerlane and Fair Penitent'; DeRitter, 'Politics in Jane Shore'; Kewes, 'Jane Shore and the Succession Crisis'; Wilson, 'Jane Shore and the Jacobites'.

<sup>78</sup> For more on these ideas, discussed in connection with other contemporary Whig writers, see Lawrence E. Klein, 'Liberty, Manners, and Politeness', pp. 584-87, 603-5; Klein, 'Coffeehouse Civility', pp. 44-51; Klein, 'Joseph Addison's Whiggism', pp. 110-11, 113-14, 117-21; Williams, *Whig Literary Culture*, pp. 15, 159-63, 204-27, 239-40.

of his plays, meanwhile, do carry scattered political references. *Jane Shore* seems to contain some overtly partisan lines, although these, and the overall design of the play itself, have been profoundly debated. Wilson finds it to be profoundly Whiggish; Kewes has claimed that the play reflects the uncertainty of the succession question by balancing Whig *and* Tory attitudes; while DeRitter has even read the play as an indictment of female monarchs.<sup>79</sup> *Royal Convert* contains an overt celebration of the 1707 Act of Union, and, in its narrative, offers a more extended endorsement of that Act, showing Saxons and Britons joining together.<sup>80</sup> *Jane Gray* is an explicit and thorough-going attack on Jacobites and popery.<sup>81</sup> Rowe's second play, *Tamerlane*, is a celebration of William III, mainly depicting him in conflict with Louis XIV, but also casting attendant invective on William's domestic malcontents, and making William the mouthpiece of Whiggish religious doctrine. The dedication, prologue, and epilogue of *Tamerlane* set out these applications, but are hardly necessary to reveal so blatant a parallel.<sup>82</sup> It seems, then, to have been Rowe's general practice to make his political references entirely unmissable. He is not subtle in either *Tamerlane*, *Royal Convert*, or *Jane Gray*. This fact renders unlikely the more speculative assertions of scholars on his other plays. If Rowe had wished to make them politically relevant, the evidence would probably not be hard to find.<sup>83</sup>

In fact, when Rowe addressed the issues of parties directly, he evinced a fairly commonplace strain of distaste for them.<sup>84</sup> In the dedication to his 1714 *Tragedies*, Rowe complained that parties were selfish, factional groups,

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<sup>79</sup> DeRitter, 'Politics in *Jane Shore*'; Kewes, 'Jane Shore and the Succession Crisis'; Wilson, 'Jane Shore and the Jacobites'.

<sup>80</sup> Rowe, *Royal Convert*, pp. 55-56.

<sup>81</sup> See e.g. Nicholas Rowe, *The Tragedy of the Lady Jane Gray* (London [The Hague]: 1718), pp. 12, 15, 45-46. The play was first published in 1715, but the 1718 Hague printing is referred to here, because of the illegibility of ECCO's 1715 printing.

<sup>82</sup> Nicholas Rowe, *Tamerlane* (1702), Sig. ar-b2v.

<sup>83</sup> For a useful discussion of the difficulties and complexities of looking for political content in eighteenth century plays, see Hume, *Fielding Theatre*, pp. 77-86. He gives it as part of a careful and sceptical analysis of political engagement in drama of the post-Rowean generation, which he finds to have hardly any partisanship at all; a discovery which, he notes, is directly contrary to the assumptions and assertions that are usually made on the subject.

<sup>84</sup> For early eighteenth-century distaste of parties, and a particularly influential interpretation of party politics which Bolingbroke developed from this attitude, see Isaac Kramnick, *Bolingbroke and His Circle: The Politics of Nostalgia in the Age of Walpole* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 26-32, 153-59. One of the most famous anti-party messages to come in Rowe's own lifetime would have been that in the Number 125 of *The Spectator* (1711), for which see *The Spectator*, ed. by Donald F. Bond, 5 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), I, pp. 509-10.

pursuing their own interests at the expense of the nation's. Parties worked for the 'Subversion of the established Government', and indeed were 'Enemies' of George I, Protestantism and 'our Libertys'. Against this, Rowe contrasted the 'honest Man, and... good Subject', who would write and act 'in Defence of the Legal Constitution'.<sup>85</sup>

On a related note, Rowe claimed that his own plays furthered the cause of virtue and morality, which was linked to the cause of Protestantism, Hanoverianism, and liberty. This is most evident in *Jane Gray*, where Jane is idealized as a character (she is pious, virtuous, meek, and self-sacrificing) to represent the purity and goodness of the cause she represents (the Protestant succession). By making his audience love and feel pity for Jane, Rowe believed that he was inculcating Whiggish principles in the nation, and thus assisting the patriotic cause of George I, Protestantism, and liberty.<sup>86</sup> In his final play, then, the sentimental side of Rowe's practice becomes synonymous with the partisan side. But again, Rowe did not see himself as making a 'party' argument. In fact, by using Jane Grey, he was emphasising the supposedly patriotic and non-partisan nature of his principles. Jane was a historical figure, living long before Whiggism and Toryism; a spotless and celebrated Protestant heroine; a founding figure in Anglican mythology; an innocent young girl, rather than an intellectual or controversialist; and had wedded an Englishman, unlike her successor, whose marriage left England at Spain's mercy. Rowe was thus making Whiggism synonymous with national identity.

Of course, Rowe's anti-party analysis would have been recognized by contemporaries as Whiggish.<sup>87</sup> Although his distaste for parties was undoubtedly genuine, it was this genuine distaste that gave his argument such force. He was claiming that Whiggism was synonymous with the national interest, and so could not be considered partisan, whereas Jacobites (and indeed all Tories, insofar as they could be tarred with the same brush) represented a partial, partisan, and unpatriotic interest. At the same time, this partisan anti-partisan attitude is characteristic of a culture that was actuated by

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<sup>85</sup> Dedication to Rowe's *Tragedies* (1714), reprinted in Nicholas Rowe, *The Dramatick Works of Nicholas Rowe* (1720), Sig. A5r-v.

<sup>86</sup> Rowe, *Jane Gray*, pp. 9, 76.

<sup>87</sup> For discussion of the rationality, moderation, politeness, and anti-party rhetorics of this period, and their association with Whiggism, see Knights, *Misrepresentation*, pp. 337-48; Kramnick, *Bolingbroke*, pp. 153-55.

both commercial and party-political agencies. Rowe was a Whig, for whom there was cultural authority in the party cause; the furtherance of that cause was thus a factor that made a literary work valuable. But politics was only one consideration, and only one source of value. For Rowe, it was not to override such values as sentimentality, sociability, politeness, humaneness, and contemporaneity, which values were appropriate for a commercial, middle-class culture. Rowe's plays might therefore have been designed and celebrated on account of their partisan worth, but only occasionally and secondarily. Party concerns are sometimes mixed with sentimental, moralizing, and contemporary concerns, but are usually excluded by them. Indeed, it seems likely that Rowe and his audiences shared a conviction that, had his plays been too party-motivated, their value would have been fatally compromised. Rowe's ideal is expressed towards the end of his 1714 dedication. 'I could not but congratulate the Publick, upon seeing Men of all sides agree so unanimously as they did upon... the Applause of Mr. *Addison's Cato*, and the Encouragement given to Mr. *Pope's Translation of Homer*... I hope it is an Omen of their Unanimity in other Matters.'<sup>88</sup> For Rowe, the greatest value is in *uniting* the 'Publick'.

Rowe himself was familiar with uniting the 'Publick' in 'Applause', because his own plays were huge and enduring successes. He appears to have made an impact with his debut, *Ambitious Step-mother*,<sup>89</sup> *Tamerlane* and *Fair Penitent*, although destined to become repertory staples, initially had moderate, but not extraordinary success;<sup>90</sup> his comedy, *The Biter*, had a decent, six-night first run;<sup>91</sup> *Ulysses* appeared ten times in its first season, and *Royal Convert* had a five-night run followed quickly by two further performances;<sup>92</sup> *Jane Shore* proved Rowe's greatest immediate success, being staged eighteen times in its first month-and-a-half;<sup>93</sup> and *Jane Gray* enjoyed a decent popularity, but not as much as *Shore*.<sup>94</sup> When Jacob Tonson published Rowe's *Shakespear*, he made sure that the advertisements and title page featured Rowe's name prominently, hoping to create interest in the work by playing on Rowe's reputation. Tonson was also creating a link between two great playwrights, past and present,

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<sup>88</sup> Rowe, *Dramatick Works*, Sig. A6r.

<sup>89</sup> Bernard, 'General Introduction', p. 12.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

which, due to the incipient energies of patriotic canon formation, boosted Rowe's reputation further. The popularity of Rowe's *Shakespear* duly fed into the feverish popularity of Rowe's next play, *The Tragedy of Jane Shore. Written in Imitation of Shakespear's Style*, which, in turn, fed back into the popularity of Rowe's *Shakespear*; Tonson capitalizing on *Jane Shore* by expanding *Shakespear* to include Shakespeare's non-dramatic verse.<sup>95</sup> The production of *Jane Gray* was accompanied by a storm of opportunistic publications, with publishers rushing out fictional and non-fictional works on Jane Grey to take advantage of Rowe's appeal.<sup>96</sup> Nor did that appeal diminish quickly. *Tamerlane* and *Jane Gray* remained repertory staples until almost the end of the century, while *Fair Penitent* and *Jane Shore* lasted well into the nineteenth. Excluding Shakespeare, *Fair Penitent* was the sixth-most frequently performed tragedy of the 1700s.<sup>97</sup> In terms of publication, these four plays were to be printed some 140 separate times between them, prior to modern editions. Rowe was widely esteemed as one of the great literary figures of his time. Over fifty years later, Johnson still admitted him to have many great qualities, especially admired his command of blank verse, and was able to quote sections of his plays from memory.<sup>98</sup>

It seems just, then, that Rowe should have often been taken as a characteristic figure of his age; someone whose work held a particular appeal for contemporary consumers of literature. It is likewise natural that, looking at the content of his work, and looking at the conditions of the time, a correlation has been drawn between sentimental, middle-class, patriotic plays and sentimental, middle-class, patriotic audiences. Equally, Rowe was the perfect playwright for a time of party rage: able, by turns, to calm that rage or to write in accordance with it. Thus a play like *Fair Penitent* could appeal to spectators'

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<sup>95</sup> The copyright to Shakespeare's non-dramatic verse was owned by rival publishers, with whom Tonson now collaborated. Hamm, Jr., 'Rowe's Shakespeare', pp. 190-3.

<sup>96</sup> Hesse and Sherry, 'Two Unrecorded Editions of Rowe's Lady Jane Gray', pp. 220-21.

<sup>97</sup> Malcolm Goldstein, 'Introduction', in Nicholas Rowe, *The Fair Penitent*, ed. by Malcolm Goldstein (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1969), pp. xiii-xxi (p. xiv).

<sup>98</sup> It is hard to get a sense of Johnson's overall estimation of Rowe. The length of the biography would suggest that Johnson did not feel Rowe to be one of the major writers in the language, and he offered some sweeping criticisms of him; yet Johnson was highly critical even of those writers he admired most. His most summary paragraph ran thus: 'Whence, then, has Rowe his reputation? From the reasonableness and propriety of some of his scenes, from the elegance of his diction, and the suavity of his verse. He seldom moves either pity or terror, but he often elevates the sentiments; he seldom pierces the breast, but he always delights the ear, and often improves the understanding.' Johnson, 'Rowe', p. 594; *Johnsonian Miscellanies*, ed. by George Birkbeck Hill, 2 vols (London: Constable, 1966; reprint of the 1897 edn), II, p. 197.

sense of humaneness and sympathy, while *Tamerlane* could be celebrated by Whigs as a party masterpiece. Indeed, *Tamerlane* was played throughout the eighteenth century on the 4<sup>th</sup> and/or 5<sup>th</sup> of November, serving as a Whiggish commemoration of William's arrival. Rowe's work was esteemed very highly in the early eighteenth century, and this esteem was at least partly due to its ability to meet the demands of a commercial and party-political culture.

### Rowe's Plays as Courtly

The preceding discussion has been intentionally confined to the two standard interpretations of Rowe's work. It has demonstrated the nature of Rowe's appeal to a middle-class paying public, and shown how his works were celebrated according to the standards of just such an audience. It has also shown how Rowe's works likewise derived value from the party-political situation, by giving political comment, advancing a party cause, and yet encouraging an end to party strife; but it has argued that this 'party' element was not as important to Rowe's work as recent scholarship has claimed. Taken together, these two interpretations would suggest that Rowe was characteristic of an age of post-courtly culture, and that Rowe's success resulted from his ability to meet the standards created by new modes of cultural production and consumption. But it is now time to change this picture. It is time to consider, once again, the court's involvement in production of the arts. This chapter will not examine the practicalities of such an involvement, which are investigated elsewhere in the thesis. Instead, emphasis will fall on what literary works themselves can tell us about the court's involvement in literary production, and about how fair, or unfair, it is to characterize early eighteenth-century culture as 'commercial' and 'post-courtly'.

The starting point, naturally enough, is Rowe's first play, *Ambitious Step-mother*. The dedication to this play was quoted above for an illustration of how Rowe's tragic theory centred on pity. But Rowe's dedication is not just a manifesto; it is also, of course, a dedication. The dedicatee is the Earl of Jersey, who is specified as being 'Lord Chamberlain of his Majesty's Houshold, &c.'<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Rowe, *Ambitious Step-Mother*, Sig. A2r.

Rowe has many, conventional praises to make of Jersey, and explicitly solicits his patronage. Particularly telling is the passage in which he praises Jersey's 'Taste and Judgement', and says that 'all men that I have heard speak of your Lordship' have encouraged him to 'hope every thing from your Goodness. This is that I must sincerely own, which made me extremely Ambitious of your Lordship's Patronage for this Piece.' He then admits that his play has faults; but, 'since the good nature of the Town has cover'd, or not taken notice of 'em', he will not worry about them too far himself.<sup>100</sup> Thus Rowe begs a traditional patron-client relationship of Jersey, hoping for financial and other, less tangible forms of beneficence. And for all that he acknowledges the authority of the town – an authority which has even encouraged him to think his play better than it is – that authority is secondary to the 'Taste and Judgement' of Jersey. Indeed, the 'good nature' of the town, which is elsewhere portrayed as an authoritative humaneness, here becomes a benign failing: a cheery negligence to the exact standards of true judgement. In this dedication, then, Rowe recognizes a predominantly patronage-based system of literary production and consumption. The fact that he has chosen the 'Lord Chamberlain of his Majesty's Houshold' implies the same notion revealed so often in Restoration dedications: that the patronage system is centred on the court, and reaches its apex in the king.

The play itself, although rife with love and sentiment, is a sort of heroic tragedy, which would not have been too out of place in the 1660s or 1670s. Likewise *Tamerlane*, which, although generally studied for its relation to political parties, is, most immediately, a panegyric to the king. *Tamerlane's* dedication, to the Marquis of Hartington, is an explicit example of the idea that the playwright should appeal to a noble patron who is himself a direct servant of, and direct link to, the king. Although Hartington is highly praised for his own sake, his 'crowning good quality' is deemed to be 'your Lordship's continual adherence and unshaken Loyalty to His present Majesty'. Rowe 'cannot help distinguishing this last instance very particularly.'<sup>101</sup> Rowe then springboards from Hartington into a 'Panegyrick' on William.<sup>102</sup> After panegyricizing at some length, he says, 'If your Lordship can find any thing in this Poem like [William]... I persuade my self it will prevail with you to forgive every thing else that you find

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid, Sig. A3r.

<sup>101</sup> Rowe, *Tamerlane*, Sig. av.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, Sig. av-br.

amiss.<sup>103</sup> Of course, this is typical panegyric rhetoric, and should not be read in too wide-eyed a fashion; but it is nonetheless significant that Rowe claims the entirety of his play's value to rest in its ability to represent the monarch (and, by extension, the monarch's qualities and glory). Rowe finishes by noting that his dedication to Hartington has given him 'the pleasure of expressing those Just and Dutiful Sentiments I have for his majesty, and that strong Inclination which I have always had to be thought... Your Lordships most Obedient, Humble Servant.'<sup>104</sup> Once again, Rowe casts the playwright as servant to the noble courtier, and expresses the idea that, through that patronal relationship, the playwright can satisfy the more abstract patronage he receives from the king by offering him praise.

The dedication was always the first thing to appear in a printed work, and would therefore frame and condition the work itself. On stage, the prologue came first; and, in *Tamerlane's* prologue, Rowe delivers a similar message to that which he gives Hartington, but in a form appropriate for the audience. He tells the crowd that, 'Of all the Muses various Labours, none/Have lasted longer, or have higher flown,/Than those that tell the Fame by ancient heroes won... Like [Virgil to Augustus] (tho' much unequal to his Flame)/Our Author [Rowe] makes a pious Prince his Theme.'<sup>105</sup> Again, it is asserted that the highest form of poetic value comes from representing a glorious monarch. This assertion is not supported by some reference to Otway making English audiences cry, but to the classical, timeless, grandiose image of Virgil and Augustus. This is very much in keeping with a courtly-patronal mode of literary production: a prince eternally re-enacting the ideal of Augustus, held in a relationship of reciprocal glory with a poet who re-enacts the role of Virgil; the poet entirely dependent on the prince; the prince dependent on the poet for the transmission of their reputation to posterity. Rowe then gives a panegyric on William in artful rhyming couplets.<sup>106</sup> The play that follows is a panegyric in the form of a heroic tragedy, although, like all of Rowe's plays, its generic model is primarily Cornelian and its spirit is primarily sentimental. This mixing of forms and values – the courtly and heroic with the sentimental and middle-class – is significant, as will be demonstrated below.

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid, Sig. bv.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid, Sig. bv.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid, Sig. b2r.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid, Sig. b2r.



All of Rowe's plays have dedications, and they all fit very well the kinds of values associated with the court-centred patronage system. *Fair Penitent*, though famous for offering the middle-class audience 'Sorrows like your own', is dedicated to the Duchess of Ormond, who, like Hartington, is used as a springboard to her monarch (Anne). Indeed, the Duchess is 'the Noblest and Best Pattern' of Anne's 'own Royal Goodness, and Personal Virtues'.<sup>107</sup> The prologue itself, which begins by disavowing 'the Fate of Kings and Empires', nonetheless ends with a brief encomium to the queen. Rowe is attempting to 'shew [the audience] Men and Women as they are'; and, 'With Deference to the Fair', he must admit that 'Few to Perfection ever found the Way'. But 'This Age, 'tis true, has one great Instance seen,/And Heav'n in Justice made that One a Queen.'<sup>108</sup> He asserts the contemporary realism of his play; he gives a smile to 'the Fair'; and then he bows his tragedy onto the stage with a tribute to Anne. Although she is far distant from the world of the play, she stands over it as a kind of positive ideal of womanliness, in contrast to the shortcomings of the titular penitent. The modest tale of everyday passions is placed under the presiding spirit of a perfect queen and set before the appreciative eyes of a courtly authority. Rowe hopes that 'the Misfortunes and Distress of the Play... may be not altogether unworthy of [the Duchess]'s Pity. This is one of the main Designs of Tragedy, and to excite this generous Pity in the greatest Minds, may pass for some kind of Success in this way of Writing.' The Duchess's praise would mean 'much more to me than the general applause of the Theatre'.<sup>109</sup> For Rowe, drama is best appreciated by the great, courtly figures, whatever principles it is composed upon. Courtly figures are not distinct from the public, but crown it, and represent its qualities and ideals in their highest forms. Anne is the perfect woman and patroness. The Duchess of Ormond, who is a link to and stand-in for Anne, is the perfect sentimental theatre-goer.

As mentioned above, Rowe's subsequent plays return to the world of courts and princes. He may treat his subjects in such a way as appeals to a middle-class, paying public, but they are princes and courtiers all the same. And although (as mentioned above) *The Royal Convert* includes a pro-Union message, the explicit articulation of that message only comes as a subsidiary

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<sup>107</sup> Rowe, *Fair Penitent*, Sig. av.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid*, Sig. a2v.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid*, Sig. A4r.

part of a long, closing panegyric to Anne. Ethelinda ends the play with a recitation of a prophecy, beginning, 'Of Royal Race a *British* Queen shall rise,/Great, Gracious, Pious, Fortunate and Wise...'; it goes on for a total of twenty-one lines. It explains that 'this happy Land her Care shall prove,/And find from her a more than Mother's Love... most in peaceful Arts she shall delight,/And her chief Glory shall be to Unite.'<sup>110</sup> The Union thus appears as but an aspect of Anne's own 'Glory', and as an emblem of the greatness of her reign.

None of this is to say that Rowe was writing the sort of material that was written under Charles I or Charles II, or that the conditions of cultural production and consumption had not substantially changed since the mid-seventeenth century. The situation had of course changed a great deal since then; but the practical and theoretical agency of the court had not lapsed or been replaced. Instead, Rowe's work suggests that the court's agency now operated in conjunction with other, newer agencies, as befitted the fact that culture was produced and consumed by multiple, interrelated constituencies, of which the court was one. The mode of courtly patronage, with its attendant traditions, themes, and ideals, was interwoven with the marketplace mode and the party-political mode.

For example, Rowe's dedications were ostensibly private epistles to individual patrons.<sup>111</sup> Yet they were invariably printed at the beginning of each of his publications (as was conventional). Every single reader who bought one of Rowe's publications would not only be confronted with, but would to some extent have their reading of the following play conditioned by, a dedicatory epistle which was not actually addressed to them personally. Therefore, the dedication was functioning as an essential aspect of the marketplace mode of cultural production. Rowe was broadcasting his position within a court-based patronage system so as to increase his profitability on the market. The fact that he came under the patronage of some great, courtly nobleman served as a

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<sup>110</sup> Rowe, *Royal Convert*, p. 56.

<sup>111</sup> Haslett, discussing the epistolary and discursive tendencies of eighteenth century literature, notes how apparently 'private' writing was made meaningful by public exposure, and how it served to invite readers into an intimacy and community with each other and with the writers themselves. However, her formulation of the eighteenth century literary world is framed within ideas of a public and a marketplace; she depicts independent readers and writers sustaining each other. Dedicatory epistles, and wider themes of patronage and courtly authority, are excluded from her account. Haslett, *Pope to Burney*, pp. 99-131.

recommendation to middle-class, paying consumers, who were thus encouraged to buy his wares and finance his writing. The particular use that Rowe made of his dedications conferred a further profitability to his product. By the artistry of his praise, he was showing off both his literary ability and the strength of his relation to his patron; by extending that praise to the reigning monarch, he suggested a kind of patronal relationship with the crown itself, and emphasized his loyal monarchist sentiments; and by the values he exhibited in the dedication – for example, a polite distaste for partisan rage, or a tragicomic theory centring on pity – he turned a private dedicatory epistle into an advertisement to the nation. In all these ways, then, courtly patronage was marketable. Opening the publication, buyers would have seen that Rowe was validated by the patronage system, and, in reading through the dedication, they would have assessed the strength of his position within that system, and found his credentials glowingly contextualized within a semi-mythical private dialogue between him and his patron. Thus Rowe's commercial and critical success with the public was built upon the courtly-patronage mode of literary production.

At the same time, court and patron benefitted too, and Rowe's own position within the patronage system was strengthened by his success on the market and his validation by the critical judgement of the public. In his dedications, patron and court had an idealized picture of themselves promulgated to all of Rowe's readers. Their good taste, wit, humaneness, sentimentality, intelligence, and innumerable other qualities were trumpeted through the marketing of mass-produced, printed texts. In particular, they were shown to be great patrons, who had enabled Rowe to produce such great works of art. The individual patron, the court, and the patronage system itself had created Rowe's tragedies.

This is not to say simply that the court put a stamp of approval on Rowe's work, which encouraged people to buy it, or that the good judgement of the public was proven by its agreement with courtly taste. Neither it is not to say that the good judgement of the court was proven by its patronage of writers who gained a critical and commercial seal of approval from the public. Clearly, things did not work quite as baldly as that. It is rather to say that, at this time, the system of cultural production was a mixed one. A literary work was produced through the ideological and financial agency of court and marketplace working in conjunction; indeed, working through each other. Cultural value was thus

understood in accordance with the ideals that pertained to each of both entities. To a lesser extent, party was involved as well. Rowe's most direct discussion of party matters is usually found in his dedicatory epistles and in connection with the various royal figures in his plays. The Whig cause operated with and through the courtly and commercial modes of production.

This chapter has already demonstrated some of the manifestations of all this in Rowe's work. One is the *Step-mother* dedication to the Lord Chamberlain, in which Rowe justifies his play to the dedicatee by reference to the judgement of 'the Town', while justifying it to his readers by reference to the patronage of a great courtly figure in possession of 'Taste and Judgement'. Another is *Tamerlane*, where Rowe offers his audience a dramatized panegyric of William, complete with Whiggish proselytizing and sentimental sub-plots. *The Fair Penitent* provides the image of an idealized courtly patron and viewer, the Duchess of Ormond, who both stands in for Queen Anne, and exemplifies the sentimental humaneness that Rowe sought from his paying audience. And *Ulysses* and *Royal Convert* create an ideal of sentimental, contemporary, patriotic, middle-class monarchy, many decades before George III would famously embody the same. Indeed, the prophecy at the end of the latter presents Anne as the apotheosis of three separate strands of cultural value: courtly, party-political, and paying-public. She is a great classical prince, a forger of Whiggish Union, and a loving mother to her nation. Each strand of her identity is dependent upon the others.

However, the best example of all this comes in Rowe's final drama, *Jane Gray*. Performed and published just after the Hanoverian succession, *Jane Gray* is dedicated to Caroline, the new Princess of Wales, and the Protestant martyr queen is immediately identified with Britain's queen-in-waiting. 'A Princess of the same Royal Blood to which you are so closely and happily ally'd, presumes to throw her self at the feet of YOUR ROYAL HIGHNESS for Protection', Rowe announces. He has drawn his Jane Grey in approximation to the actual historical figure, but has also somewhat 'improv[ed]' her, to make her worthier 'of those Illustrious Hands to which I always intended to present her.'<sup>112</sup> The identification is further strengthened when Rowe then celebrates Caroline's own Protestantism and patriotism. She chose the British rather than the Imperial

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<sup>112</sup> Rowe, *Jane Gray*, p. 3.

crown, because doing the latter would have required her to convert to Catholicism;<sup>113</sup> and she has now become ‘the brightest Ornament’ and ‘the Patroness and Defender of our holy Faith.’<sup>114</sup> But she is not just a religious paragon. She is ‘the best daughter to our king and best wife to our prince’;<sup>115</sup> a model of touching domesticity. Caroline thus appears not just as Rowe’s patron, but as a great royal figure who has given the poet his subject and inspired him in his art, as Virgil was supposed to have done by representing Augustus as Aeneas. Moreover, she protects and exemplifies the values of Rowe’s readership: love of Britain, devotion to Protestantism, and domestic femininity. The last theme in Rowe’s dedication is the obligation which Britain owes to its new princess. Since the Hanoverians have saved Britain from popery, ‘every particular Person amongst us ought to contribute’ to ‘discharg[e] that publick obligation.’<sup>116</sup> *Jane Gray* is Rowe’s own ‘Offering’.<sup>117</sup> Again, though, it must be remembered that the dedicatory epistle was not sent in private; it was published with every copy of the play. The reminder of ‘publick obligation’ therefore works in two ways. On the one hand, it informs the paying public of how obliged they are to their magnificent new princess; on the other, it allows the ‘publick’ to buy into Rowe’s ‘discharging’ of ‘that publick obligation’. By purchasing and reading *Jane Gray*, they can give Rowe’s offering their endorsement, and thereby register their own loyal gratitude.

In the prologue, Jane Grey herself is focussed upon. It is shown that she is both a great prince, and a humble exemplar of sentimental values. She is ‘A Heroine, a martyr, and a Queen’; irrespective of Rowe’s ‘Art’, his choice of subject ‘shall something great impart,/To warm the generous Soul, & touch the tender Heart.’<sup>118</sup> She shines with royal resplendence, yet she has an affective relationship with her audience, based on a sympathetic humaneness. ‘To you, fair Judges, we the Cause submit’, Rowe continues. ‘If your soft Pity waits upon our Woe,’ then ‘the Muse’s labour’ will have been successful.<sup>119</sup> Again, Rowe is appealing to his favourite constituency: the female, deep-feeling audience. But

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<sup>113</sup> For more on the importance of this event to Caroline’s reputation and popularity, see Smith, *Georgian Monarchy*, pp. 32-37.

<sup>114</sup> Rowe, *Jane Gray*, p. 4.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

the 'Sorrows like your own' which Rowe depicts are, in this instance, those of a queen. The relatable, sympathetic, sentimental heroine is Jane Grey. By activating his audience's pity for her, Rowe creates an affective bridge between the patriotic identity of Protestant Britain, and the real-life character of Princess Caroline.

These themes are all emphasized throughout the play as a whole. For example, the legitimacy of Jane's rule is explained to be based on the realm's consent (including parliament's approval), making Jane a symbol of the Hanoverian Succession. Jane herself is depicted as patriotic, Protestant, self-sacrificing, meek, humane, and whatever else she needs to be. At one stage, she speaks of the hardness of being queen; she only took on the royal burden 'To save this Land from Tyranny and *Rome*.'<sup>120</sup> This is a reminder of both the Jacobite threat, and of the gratitude Britons owe to their new royal family. Just before Jane dies, she prays that Heaven will raise up a 'Monarch of the Royal Blood,/Brave, Pious, Equitable, Wise, and Good', and that this 'hero' will save Britain from Rome, then leave behind a son who will 'guard that Faith for which I die to-day.'<sup>121</sup> In this way, Jane creates a transcendental royal line, carried across dynasties, united by its virtues and its Protestantism, but also valid on the basis of 'Royal Blood'. She emphasizes that her own story – a sentimental she-tragedy – is synonymously a story of party struggle (against those Tories of Jacobite inclination) and of courtly greatness. The epilogue then gives a similar message to that found in the dedication, making the Caroline-Jane parallel clear for spectators. It is emphasized that Caroline is 'the Fairest of her Sex', and that the audience owes her 'Gratitude'.<sup>122</sup> Rowe also warns against 'vile Faction', and says that, 'If you are taught to dread a Popish Reign,/Our beauteous Patriot has not dy'd in vain.'<sup>123</sup> Again, the various priorities of a mixed cultural production are working here in tandem. The relatable, sympathetic female character serves as a celebration of Whiggism and of the court *because* she is a relatable, sympathetic female character. The Whig cause is revealed to animate both the sentimental, identifiable story and the court *because* it is the Whig cause. And the court presides over both the story and Whiggism *because* it is the court. The product itself – *Jane Gray* – is not simply a work of

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid, p. 48.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid, p. 74.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid, p. 76.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

patronage, or of party, or of professionalism, but of all three working in unconscious synonymity.

The work of Nicholas Rowe, then, presents a challenge to the conventional modern picture of eighteenth-century culture. It is not simply the case that culture was produced for the public, town, marketplace, and/or political party. In fact, Rowe's work suggests that the court was still very much involved in the arts, and that, rather than being supplanted by a middle-class, commercial, party-political public, it actually worked in conjunction with it. The nature of cultural production and consumption still involved a large element of courtly patronage, though now in dynamic and fruitful interrelation with other modes. The mixed nature of this culture meant that its needs and ideals were distinct from those of the seventeenth (more courtly) and nineteenth (more commercial) centuries. It is because Rowe met these particular needs and ideals so adeptly that he was so highly esteemed by contemporaries. He was commercially successful with both theatre-goers and readers, critically lauded, and valued both as a strident Whig and as someone whose work appealed across the party divide. Finally, he was made poet laureate by the Hanoverian court, in operation with the new parliamentary and ministerial Whig regime. His appointment to the laureateship was no accident; but nor was it because he was only a good Whig, or only a popular and well-respected playwright. His appointment represents the mixed nature of contemporary artistic production. It was the supreme, natural, and appropriate honour for a man who succeeded in a particular cultural system, in which the court was prominent, but was mutually dependent and mutually active with other agencies. The laureateship was not an anachronism. It was, in fact, highly characteristic of early eighteenth-century culture.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> The obvious objection to raise here is that a study of a poet laureate's career would naturally throw up some evidence of reciprocal courtly attention, and that this may very well be unrepresentative of literary figures as a whole. Perhaps Rowe was a peculiar figure, and was chosen for a peculiar office, the laureateship, on account of this peculiarity. This objection will be addressed after a short consideration of Rowe's successors, Eusden and Cibber.

## Eusden and Cibber

Upon Rowe's death in 1718, he was replaced by Laurence Eusden (1688-1730), later to become notorious as a drunken clergyman, but then a Cambridge fellow, young poet, and member of the Addison-Steele nexus of writers.<sup>125</sup> Eusden had just written a poem on the marriage of the Duke of Newcastle, who, as Lord Chamberlain, technically had the laureateship in his gift. Newcastle was a pugnacious Lord Chamberlain and later gained a reputation for pettiness, defensiveness, and jealousy over his prerogatives, and it seems highly likely that the 1718 appointment decision was his. When Eusden eventually died in a stupor of provincial booze, he was replaced by Colley Cibber (1671-1757). Cibber was a famous playwright and actor, a firm Whig, and one of the managers of Drury Lane theatre. He was a friend and associate of many of the leading governmental figures, including Walpole himself, and his appointment was credited at the time to this closeness.

In the work of Eusden and Cibber, a similar case to that of Rowe is revealed. It is commercial, courtly, and (sometimes) party-orientated; it seeks market success, traditional forms of patronage, and (sometimes) party advantage. The poem that apparently gained Eusden the laurel – *A Poem on the Marriage Of His Grace the Duke of Newcastle* (1717) – is a good example. It is a panegyric and an epithalamium, praising Newcastle and his bride. Eusden aspires to 'reach transcendent Worth with Praise', and to depict 'A *British Pollio*... More bright, than *Pollio*, whom a *Virgil* drew.'<sup>126</sup> It is all very classical and courtly, invoking the timeless examples of Virgil and his patrons, and using them to praise Newcastle and to re-enact the Virgilian patronal model (Pollio being one of Virgil's patrons). But it also includes themes that are more specifically typical of early eighteenth-century poetry, and which are found across all kinds of poems which seem more directed to the public than to a patron. For example, Eusden represents Venus and Minerva having a civil, high-society sort of debate, in which Venus announces her concern for Britain's welfare, and designates it 'that blest Isle' where 'Triumphant Beauty reigns,/And willing Youth wears Love's delightful Chains./Not ev'n *Augustus* dares to

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<sup>125</sup> For more on Eusden, Newcastle, Cibber, and the laureate appointments, see Chapter Three.

<sup>126</sup> Laurence Eusden, *A Poem on the Marriage of His Grace the Duke of Newcastle to the Right Honourable The Lady Henrietta Godolphin* (1717), p. 4.



disobey,/His *Carolina's* Looks confirm my Sway.'<sup>127</sup> Thus the Prince of Wales and his wife are held up as epitomes of the polite, loving spirit that apparently animates Britain; the monarchy is the crown of a sentiment which is here cast as patriotic. But Minerva insists that *she* is more concerned for Britain: 'My Pow'r shall *Brunswick's* [i.e. George I's] lawful Crown protect,/And still his Councils, and his Arms direct.'<sup>128</sup> She then cites Newcastle as the greatest and most patriotic Briton, and boasts that he does not feel Venus's powers. Venus retaliates by causing Newcastle to fall in love with Henrietta Godolphin and marry her. '*Britannia's* Welfare is my great Design', she announces; by inducing Newcastle and Henrietta to marry, she has guaranteed Britain a 'num'rous Line' of patriotic progeny.<sup>129</sup> There is also, at the start of the poem, a warning against 'baneful Faction', which 'would its Pow'r advance/By Popish Chains, and *Vandal* Ignorance'.<sup>130</sup> This is contrasted to the bright glories and patriotism of Newcastle.

The whole performance is delivered in typically refined couplets, and the paying public enjoyed it so much that a second edition was published in the same year, before Eusden had even been made laureate.<sup>131</sup> Thus Eusden enjoyed commercial success on the marketplace, struck a minor blow for his party, and received the patronage of a great courtly figure, all of which factors contributed to raise him to the laureateship. Again, cultural production and consumption appear not simply as commercial, or party-political, or even courtly, but mixed. The public liked Eusden's courtliness; the court (presumably) liked Eusden's popular appeal, and his ability to write competent, modern verse. The court and public also liked his party spirit, and the party faithful liked his courtly and popular appeal. By satisfying the needs and ideals of court, marketplace, and party, Eusden's poem is exemplary of the then-prevailing conditions of cultural production.

As laureate, Eusden continued in this vein, writing panegyric poetry that was designed to appeal to the individual addressee, the court more generally, the paying public, and (sometimes) the party of (governing) Whigs. It did not

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid, p. 6.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid, p. 7.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid, p. 14. In fact, the couple were to be childless.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid, p. 3.

<sup>131</sup> Laurence Eusden, *A Poem on the Marriage of His Grace the Duke of Newcastle to the Right Honourable The Lady Henrietta Godolphin*, 2nd edn (1717).

appeal to them as separate constituencies, but, as it were, through the agencies of each other. The court as formulated in Eusden's poetry is not distinct from the public; it stands at the head of it, epitomizing its values and concerns, and leading it in taste. The Walpolean Whigs, meanwhile, are solidly identified with the court. In *An Epistle to Walpole* (1726), Eusden celebrates the addressee's elevation to 'the Most Noble Order of the Garter',<sup>132</sup> and feels no hesitation in offering his verse to him, confident that 'On whom GEORGE smiles, a WALPOLE will not frown.'<sup>133</sup> Walpole is deemed the 'Delightful Wonder of each *British Tongue*',<sup>134</sup> and his chief quality is his 'em-bosom'd Care' for '*Albion*'.<sup>135</sup>

Cibber did not write much in the way of non-dramatic verse, but this did not mean that his appointment was incongruous. He was a hugely successful dramatist, some of whose plays were among the century's most popular, and, although he was most well-known for his prose comedies, he wrote verse tragedies too, one of which, his adaptation of *Richard III*, was a popular favourite well into the nineteenth century.<sup>136</sup> Most of Cibber's plays debuted around the same time as Rowe's (from the late 1690s into the 1710s), and were in fact the comedic analogues to Rowe's; they have been seen ever since as typifying the sentimental and middle-class inclinations of the time, just as Rowe's did in tragedy.<sup>137</sup> Like Rowe, Cibber was also a Whig, and his plays sometimes delivered overt party messages.<sup>138</sup> But, again like Rowe, Cibber's work is also orientated towards a courtly audience and its attendant values. The supreme example of how these strands operated in conjunction is *The Non-Juror* (1718). This play was an adaptation of Molière's *Tartuffe*, given a heavily anti-Jacobite design. Anti-Jacobitism identifies the play as Whiggish, but it also identifies it as a paean to George I and the Hanoverian monarchy. Suitably enough, the play ends with the observation that 'no Change of Government can give us a Blessing equal to our Liberty', followed by the couplet, '*Grant us but this and then of Course you'll own,/To Guard that Freedom, GEORGE must fill*

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<sup>132</sup> Laurence Eusden, *An Epistle To the Noble, and Right Honourable Sir Robert Walpole, Knight of the Most Noble Order of the Garter* (1726), p. 3.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>136</sup> Bevis, *English Drama*, pp. 154-61; Burling and Viator, 'General Introduction', pp. 13-14; Koon, *Cibber*, pp. 36-39, 44-50, 178.

<sup>137</sup> Koon, *Cibber*, pp. 24-29, 178.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 86-97.

*the Throne*.<sup>139</sup> It might be argued that Cibber's praise of George I is not very meaningful in and of itself; it is simply a stock doctrine of Whiggism. But never minding how accurate that argument might be, it actually highlights the point being made here. The court interest was not separate from the party interest, but was bound up with it. Dictates of court and party co-existed, co-operated, and maintained each other. The play was also an enormous commercial success, delighting audiences and being published in a fifth edition before the year was out.<sup>140</sup> Cibber made an unprecedented sum of money from the copyright (£105), and was given a huge gift of £200 by the king, to whom the dedicatory epistle was addressed.<sup>141</sup> Again, the persistence and nature of the court's cultural agency is evident.

In the works of the three poet laureates of the early Hanoverian period, then, literary figures are revealed to have been working within a system of cultural production that was courtly, commercial, and party-political. The question now is, were the laureates anomalous? Was it because they were unique (in the respects demonstrated above) that they were appointed to the laureateship, and, as laureates, did they continue to behave in unique ways because encouraged to do so by their office? Is it wrong to draw wider conclusions from a study of them? Were they unrepresentative? Were they, in a sense, anachronistic, despite their commercial and party-based success?

Testing the laureate paradigm against the wider literary scene suggests that, in fact, their situation was far from abnormal. For example, the court still practised direct financial patronage, and still conferred fixed employments, even upon non-laureate poets. George I gave an enormous patronal gift of £500 to Richard Steele for his *Conscious Lovers*, a popular, sentimental, moralizing, reforming comedy by a stalwart, vigorous Whig.<sup>142</sup> For his services to the Court Whigs, Edward Young was recommended by Walpole for a court pension, which he duly received.<sup>143</sup> Queen Caroline's patronage of Stephen Duck was famous amongst contemporaries. She not only granted him a series of courtly employments, but ensured that his publications were financially successful by encouraging all her acquaintance to subscribe to them, which would have also

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<sup>139</sup> Colley Cibber, *The Non-Juror* (1718).

<sup>140</sup> Colley Cibber, *The Non-Juror*, 5th edn (1718); Koon, *Cibber*, pp. 86-89.

<sup>141</sup> Hume, *Fielding Theatre*, p. 26.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>143</sup> Griffin, *Patronage*, pp. 155-63.

increased the popular sales appeal of these publications on the open market.<sup>144</sup> Meanwhile, Richard Savage dubbed himself a 'Volunteer Laureate', and published an annual panegyric for Caroline.<sup>145</sup> Not only did this secure him a pension from her; it gave him a marketable identity, and allowed him to place a regular, royally-authorized product on the market each year.<sup>146</sup>

Indeed, on every occasion of note for the royal family – accessions, marriages, returns from abroad, recoveries from illness, births, deaths – the nation would be convulsed by poetical activity. Poets of every stripe and pedigree would compose something suitably panegyric, and then publish it on the open market; sometimes with a politically partisan bent, sometimes with a dedicatee (distinct from the subject or addressee of the poem itself), sometimes in an imagined dialogue with another poet.<sup>147</sup> Oxford and Cambridge would commonly produce an entire volume of such poems on these occasions, written by current dons and undergraduates, in English, Latin, Greek and other languages (albeit not with retail in mind).<sup>148</sup> Many of these poems were 'odes', either sharing the pseudo-Pindaric form of the laureate odes, or written in some other 'ode' form.<sup>149</sup> The Prior poem mentioned priorly – his Spenserian ode – was in fact *An Ode, humbly inscrib'd to the Queen*.<sup>150</sup> Such poems were not the products of any one simple system of literary production and value; they were commercial, they were patronized, they were courtly, they were political, they

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<sup>144</sup> Betty Rizzo, 'The Patron as Poet Maker: The Politics of Benefaction', *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, 20 (1991), 241-66 (pp. 244-48).

<sup>145</sup> Griffin, *Patronage*, pp. 169-88.

<sup>146</sup> Not that Savage's savvy deserves any emphasis. For Savage's life, see Samuel Johnson, 'Savage', in *The Lives of the Poets*, II, pp. 848-968.

<sup>147</sup> See e.g. the instructively-named, Anon, *Albina, the Second Part. Or, The Coronation. A Poem on Her Present Majesty's Happy Accession to the Crown. By the Author of Albina: Or, A Poem on the Death of King William the Third* (1702); Stephen Duck, *A Poem On the Marriage of His Serene Highness the Prince of Orange, with Ann Princess-Royal of Great Britain* (1734); Laurence Eusden, *A Letter to Mr. Addison on the King's Accession to the Throne* (1714); P. Turner, *Augustus. A Poem on the Accession of His Majesty King George. Humbly Dedicated to the Right Honourable Charles, Lord Halifax, One of the Lords Justices Appointed by His Majesty* (1714). For some more examples, and more on this sort of poetry in general, see e.g. Urstad, *Walpole's Poets*, pp. 156-169; Williams, *Whig Literary Culture*, pp. 111-18, 169-72; Winn, *Queen Anne*, p. 287.

<sup>148</sup> Harold Forster, 'The Rise and Fall of the Cambridge Muses (1603-1763)', *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society*, 8 (1982), 141-72 (pp. 143-45, 147-49, 151-52). For an investigation of the political content of these volumes, primarily for 1660 and earlier, see Henry Power, 'Eyes without Light: University Volumes and the Politics of Succession', in *Stuart Succession Literature*, ed. by Kewes and McRae, pp. 222-40.

<sup>149</sup> For a discussion of odes in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, see Chapter Five and the works cited there.

<sup>150</sup> Matthew Prior, *An Ode, Humbly Inscrib'd to the Queen. On the Late Glorious Success of Her Majesty's Arms* (1706).

were professional, they were nationally-conscious. They understood poetic worth, and potential reward and advancement, as being conferred by a set of standards which related to multiple, interlocking cultural agencies, amongst which was the court.

The theatre, meanwhile, presents a similar picture. While it is certainly the case that it was not the courtly institution of Charles II's reign, the Hanoverian theatre nonetheless retained associations with the court that were both functionally and ideologically vital. For one thing, public theatre still operated under the system of royal patents. This situation became somewhat confused in the first few decades of the eighteenth century, when theatres began to be operated under vague royal 'licenses' or under no official authorization at all; but the 1737 Licensing Act returned the system to its original purity, eliminating all but the two patented companies.<sup>151</sup> Moreover, as Harry William Pedicord has demonstrated, the relationship between Hanoverian court and London theatres was not just regulatory and negative, but was active, patronal, and mutually beneficent.<sup>152</sup>

## Conclusion

Rowe, Eusden and Cibber, then, were not exemplars of an anachronistic practice. The systems within which they operated, their modes of writing, and the standards of cultural value that they worked by, were characteristic of their time. It was not simply a time when the literary marketplace determined all, or when the cultural agency of a reading, theatre-going, and judgemental public was absolute. Nor was the agency of parties, or abstract notions of the nation, or an incipient institution of 'literature', overwhelming or unique. In a sense, the poets laureate actually represented the pinnacle of a system in which literature was produced and consumed according to various agencies, and concomitant cultural ideals, within which the court was still very much embedded.

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<sup>151</sup> Hume, *Fielding Theatre*, pp. 3-14, 239-53.

<sup>152</sup> Pedicord, *Hanover at the London Theatres*, pp. 2, 41.

### **Chapter Three. Merit Rewarded: The Hanoverian Appointments, 1715-1813**

Chapter One showed that, in the decades following its establishment, the office of poet laureate underwent significant changes, going from a vague, honorific position, to a more specific and functionary role. By the time of the Hanoverian Succession, it had become fixed in a particular niche within the Lord Chamberlain's department, tasked with providing the biannual odes that would be performed at court on the royal birthday and on New Year's Day. Certain significant aspects of this development were highlighted above: that the laureate now had a more formal connection with the court; that his payments had become more reliable; and that the laureate was now appointed by the Lord Chamberlain's warrant, rather than by royal letters patent, with the appointment becoming widely recognized as being in the Lord Chamberlain's gift. It was also stressed that the Hanoverian Succession set these developments in stone, particularly in the case of the biannual odes, which only became the exclusive responsibility of the laureates upon the appointment of Nicholas Rowe. In this chapter, related matters will be investigated for the century following George I's accession, focussing on how and why each laureate was appointed. From this basis, wider questions about the laureateship's role and significance will be answered.

To begin with, this chapter will survey the appointments of the Hanoverian period as a whole, from Rowe in 1714 to Southey in 1813. It will then be determined whether any similarities and consistencies can be identified, and whether the evidence relating to each individual appointment can also be used to shed light on any of the others. Following that, the wider questions about how the laureateship was conceived, and what significance it had, will be explored, by way of three detailed case studies. The emphasis here will fall on two particular themes: one being the networks that underlay each laureate's appointment, the second being the purpose that the laureateship was expected to fulfil. Each laureate was appointed by the will of a single person or by a small group of people in informal discussion, and each appointment came after a brief but intense period of activity in which various self-appointed candidates pushed forward their claims and besought their friends to intercede for them. It therefore seems legitimate to explore what sorts of networks were coming into play in

each case. As for the purpose of the laureateship, it will be shown that the rationale behind each appointment consists in the complex relationship between the exigencies of patronage and ideas of 'merit', and that such a relationship can be tentatively mapped onto the duality that was explored in the last chapter between courtly/patronal and commercial/public.

Because the second section of this chapter will attempt to make sense of the appointments that have been described and surveyed in the first section, and because the case studies which constitute the third section all fall within the wider period explored in the first and second sections, some of the information presented here will be mentioned in more than one place. This slight savour of chronological repetition will hopefully be excused as necessary. The approach taken in this chapter is essentially that of a snowball which, rather than being rolled downhill so as to gather momentum, is rolled continually around the same wide field of snow, steadily gathering mass. To have adopted a different approach, in which thematic arguments, comparisons, and case studies were inserted at the chronologically appropriate moments within the descriptive overview of the appointments, would have compromised the nature of the overview, disrupted the coherence of the analysis, and confused the themes of the case studies.

## Overview of the Appointments

There is no direct evidence as to who selected Nicholas Rowe for the laureateship in 1715. He was famous for the strength of his Whig politics, and, throughout his life, he managed to accumulate various sinecurial and non-sinecurial public offices during periods of Whig ascendancy; but he is also known to have been an eager place-hunter during the years of Tory dominance at the end of Anne's reign, too.<sup>1</sup> Pope later told what became a famous story in which Robert Harley, the Tory First Lord of the Treasury, hinted to Rowe that it might be worth his while to learn Spanish, whereupon Rowe spent many months diligently learning the language, expecting that he was to be appointed

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur Sherbo, 'Nicholas Rowe', *ODNB*. For Rowe as a paragon or shorthand of Whiggery, see e.g. Alexander Pope, *The Correspondence of Alexander Pope*, ed. by George Sherburn, 5 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1956), I, pp. 27, 102-3; Spence, *Observations*, I, 214, p. 93.

to a position responsible for dealings with Spain; only for Harley to tell him, 'Then, sir, I envy you the pleasure of reading *Don Quixote* in the original'.<sup>2</sup> Whether or not in connection with this, Swift claimed (also many years in retrospect) that he used to intercede with Harley on the behalf of Rowe and other Whigs, trying to get them government places in spite of their politics.<sup>3</sup> Clearly, then, Rowe was no stranger to place-hunting, and, as a genial man whose company seems to have been enjoyed by everyone (including Pope), and who himself enjoyed a wide and well-placed circle of friends, he may well have put himself forward for the laureateship when it became vacant in 1715. He would certainly have known how best to advance his claim.<sup>4</sup> Addison seems to have distrusted him somewhat, on account of his superficiality and glibness;<sup>5</sup> but even these were the qualities of a seasoned courtier and place-hunter, and they would have done him no harm in gaining him such offices as were to be gained through court attendance, seeking favours of great men, and calling upon friends for timely intercession.

Whether the laureateship was indeed such an office, in this case or in general, remains to be established; but, if it was, then Rowe was the ideal man to acquire it; and, since he did acquire it, and there is no other evidence as to why or through which means, then it seems reasonable to put forward these particular means as a possibility. But he was also the foremost tragic playwright of his day, and was a famously ardent Whig; and so, without yet exploring the relationship between these three potentially key recommendations of his (place-hunting prowess, publicly-recognized poetic 'merit', and famous Whiggery), each of these three qualities can be provisionally suggested as having, in his case, determined the bestowing of the laureateship.

There seems to have been a great bustle among the literary community upon Tate's death, with many writers trying to get themselves made laureate.<sup>6</sup> But besides Rowe there are only two or three competitors for the office now identifiable. One was John Dennis, another Whig man of letters, whose

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<sup>2</sup> Spence, *Observations*, I, 221, p. 96.

<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Swift, *The Correspondence of Jonathan Swift*, ed. by Harold Williams, 5 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963-1965), II, p. 369.

<sup>4</sup> For more on the operations of patronage and place-hunting, see Bucholz, *Augustan Court*, pp. 64-114; Beattie, *English Court*, pp. 152-61; and the third case study, below. On Rowe's geniality, see e.g. Spence, *Observations*, I, 249, p. 109.

<sup>5</sup> Owen Ruffhead, *The Life of Alexander Pope, Esq.* (1769), p. 493.

<sup>6</sup> E.g. *Weekly Packet*, 30 Jul.-6 Aug. 1715; *Weekly Journal With Fresh Advices Foreign and Domestick*, 13 Aug. 1715.



popularity and reputation as an imaginative writer were smaller than Rowe's. He would certainly have made a better controversialist and disputational writer, if that had been what the court was looking for, because he was primarily known for his literary criticism and his generally trenchant prose; but, on the other hand, his politics were somewhat idiosyncratic, and he had public discords with other Whig writers.<sup>7</sup> He was not as personally endearing or well-connected as Rowe, but he was, at this time, already one of the king's waiters at the Customs House.<sup>8</sup>

Dennis's candidature is known only from contemporary newspapers, as is that of a man named William Ellis, whose candidature seems to have been some sort of hoax or joke.<sup>9</sup> Some papers even reported that Dennis had been made laureate, indicating that his candidature must have proceeded quite far.<sup>10</sup> The last candidate to note is John Oldmixon, who did not appear in the newspapers, but who, in a letter of 1718, claimed that he would have been appointed to succeed Tate if it had not been for Rowe, and claimed that Samuel Garth could give testimony of this fact.<sup>11</sup> The tenor and context of Oldmixon's letter (which will form this chapter's first case study, below) gives reason to believe him to have been exaggerating on this point, particularly given his non-appearance in contemporary newspapers, but he was presumably at least known to have a claim on the office. The nature of this claim would have rested on his tenacious Whig politics and his standing as a man of letters; he was, by 1715, primarily known for Whiggish prose tracts and more anomalous non-fiction writings. But he was somewhat lacking in connections, living in Somerset

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<sup>7</sup> Williams, *Whig Literary Culture*, pp. 125-7.

<sup>8</sup> *Weekly Packet*, 30 Jul.-6 Aug. 1715.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*; *Weekly Journal With Fresh Advices Foreign and Domestick*, 13 Aug. 1715. 'William Ellis' does not appear in the *ODNB*, *The London Stage* or other relevant databases. However, there is an *ODNB* article on a 'Jacobite politician' named Sir William Ellis who held office at the Jacobite court at this time; he does not seem to have been a published writer. Piers Wauchope, 'Sir William Ellis', *ODNB*.

<sup>10</sup> *Weekly Journal With Fresh Advices Foreign and Domestick*, Saturday, 13 Aug. 1715. The *British Weekly Mercury* reported that Rowe and Dennis had been made joint-laureates, while the *Weekly Packet*, even more confusedly, initially identified Dennis as a candidate for the laureateship, but then reported that he had been made historiographer (whereas the current historiographer was in fact still alive). *Weekly Packet*, 30 Jul.-6 Aug. 1715; *Weekly Packet*, 6-13 Aug. 1715; *British Weekly Mercury*, 6-13 Aug. 1715.

<sup>11</sup> This letter can be found in BL, Add. MS 28275, f. 46. It is also printed in *The Letters, Life and Works of John Oldmixon: Politics and Professional Authorship in Early Hanoverian England*, ed. by Pat Rogers (Lampeter: The Edwin Mellers Press, 2004), pp. 54-7, and in *The Literary Correspondences of the Tonsons*, ed. by Stephen Bernard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016; first published 2015), pp. 184-6; the two publications give essentially the same transcription, but the Rogers publication has more extensive notes.

and linked to London chiefly through his communications with Jacob Tonson Senior.<sup>12</sup>

In 1715, then, the laurel was gained by a pre-eminent tragicomic playwright with impeccable Whig credentials and the means and abilities to acquire court patronage. As well as an indeterminate number of now-invisible competitors, he defeated two fellow Whig writers who lacked his courtliness and connections and whose writings were not only less celebrated than his, but had also come to centre on non-fiction prose. There is no evidence as to who may have made the appointment decision, although Oldmixon believed Samuel Garth, the poet, physician, and Kit-Cat Club stalwart, to have infallible knowledge on the matter. The Lord Chamberlain at the time was the duke of Bolton, who had only just taken the position and was widely regarded by contemporaries as an incompetent buffoon.<sup>13</sup> He was, however, a staunchly pro-Hanoverian Whig and former Junto follower, and his correspondence shows him concerned to favour those who were known to be firmly loyal to the new regime.<sup>14</sup> Although he technically had the office in his gift, he perhaps would not have exerted much agency over the matter, or would have happily yielded to the arguments and intercessions of others; but any preference he did show would have surely been for someone known to be a strong Whig, like Rowe.

For 1718, although there is likewise no direct evidence, the case seems much clearer. Laurence Eusden, the Cambridge Fellow and budding poet, had already been forging a small place for himself in the Addison-Steele nexus of literary London, contributing to Steele's *Poetical Miscellanies* (1714) and to *The Spectator* and *Guardian*, and addressing poems to Halifax and to Addison himself.<sup>15</sup> In 1717, he published a reasonably popular epithalamium on the wedding of the Duke and Duchess of Newcastle, at a time when Newcastle was not only Lord Chamberlain and a prominent member of the Kit-Cat Club, but

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<sup>12</sup> J.A. Downie, 'Foreword', in *Oldmixon*, ed. by Rogers, pp. iii-v; Pat Rogers, 'Life', in *Oldmixon*, ed. by Rogers, pp. 13-27.

<sup>13</sup> Matthew Kilburn, 'Charles Paulet [Powlett], second duke of Bolton', *ODNB*.

<sup>14</sup> 'Charles Paulet, 2<sup>nd</sup> duke of Bolton to Joseph Addison, Monday, 4 October 1717 – [a fragment]', *Electronic Enlightenment Scholarly Edition of Correspondence*, < [https://www-e-enlightenment-com.uoelibrary.idm.oclc.org/item/addijoEE0060506a1c/?srch\\_type=letters&auth=charles+paulet&lang\\_main=all&r=1](https://www-e-enlightenment-com.uoelibrary.idm.oclc.org/item/addijoEE0060506a1c/?srch_type=letters&auth=charles+paulet&lang_main=all&r=1) > [accessed 29 September 2019]; 'Charles Paulet, 2<sup>nd</sup> duke of Bolton to Joseph Addison, Sunday, 21 November 1717', *Electronic Enlightenment Scholarly Edition of Correspondence*, < [https://www-e-enlightenment-com.uoelibrary.idm.oclc.org/item/addijoEE0060501a1c/?srch\\_type=letters&auth=charles+paulet&lang\\_main=all&r=4](https://www-e-enlightenment-com.uoelibrary.idm.oclc.org/item/addijoEE0060501a1c/?srch_type=letters&auth=charles+paulet&lang_main=all&r=4) > [accessed 29 September 2019].

<sup>15</sup> Sambrook, 'Eusden'.

was also trying to establish himself as a great literary patron in the mould of Dorset (one of his forebears as Lord Chamberlain, and another Kit-Catter) and Halifax (also a Kit-Catter).<sup>16</sup> In 1718, the laureateship became vacant, and Eusden was promptly appointed. The unreliable Cibber/Shiels biographical compendium of mid-century, *The Lives of the Poets*, was to attribute this appointment to Newcastle, and was also to offer its opinion that Eusden deserved the honour, being morally unblemished and a not inconsiderable versifier.<sup>17</sup>

The only other known candidate was Oldmixon, whose aforementioned letter dates from this time, and consists of a plea to Tonson Senior to intercede on his behalf with the Duke of Newcastle. However, Oldmixon made vague reference to Thomas Tickell, John Hughes, and John Dennis, seeming unsure as to whether or not they would contend with him;<sup>18</sup> and Garth had apparently written to Newcastle encouraging him in favour of Leonard Welsted.<sup>19</sup> Pat Rogers, in a note to his transcription of Oldmixon's letter, states, 'There were indeed alleged to be many candidates for the vacant post', but bases this claim on John Sheffield's poem, 'The Election of a Poet Laureate in 1719', which was simply a new, topical iteration of the 'Session of the Poets' tradition of poems, and included depictions of most major writers of the time vying for the laurel crown, at least several of whom were evidently never in contention for the laureateship.<sup>20</sup> Rogers does admit as much, and then adds, with more plausibility than in his initial suggestion, 'the poem may perhaps reflect a degree of excitement and charged interest in quarters of literary London somewhat remote from Grub Street'.<sup>21</sup> In any case, beyond Oldmixon and Eusden (and perhaps Welsted), it is impossible to find any other definite contenders.

It seems almost certain that Newcastle made the appointment decision. Given his later activities as a patronage magnate, and his later reputation for

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<sup>16</sup> For Kit-Cat Club membership, see Ophelia Field, "In and Out": An Analysis of Kit-Cat Club Membership (Web Appendix to *The Kit-Cat Club* by Ophelia Field, 2008) <[https://img1.wsimg.com/blobby/go/2d4b6719-1f56-4f40-abd6-b45a987d1775/downloads/1c3mci6ke\\_279827.pdf?ver=1552840569340](https://img1.wsimg.com/blobby/go/2d4b6719-1f56-4f40-abd6-b45a987d1775/downloads/1c3mci6ke_279827.pdf?ver=1552840569340)> [accessed 23 March 2019]. For Newcastle as Kit-Cat Club magnate and cultural patron, Ophelia Field, *The Kit-Cat Club* (London: Harper Perennial, 2009; first published 2008), pp. 308-9, 330, 334, 350.

<sup>17</sup> Cibber [and Shiels], *Lives of the Poets*, IV, pp. 193-5.

<sup>18</sup> Oldmixon letter, pp. 54-5. References are to the printing in *Oldmixon*, ed. by Rogers.

<sup>19</sup> Richard Steele, *The Correspondence of Richard Steele*, ed. by Rae Blanchard (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1941), p. 111.

<sup>20</sup> John Sheffield, *The Election of a Poet Laureat* (1719), reprinted in *Works*, 2 vols (1723), I, pp. 195-200.

<sup>21</sup> Rogers, Note 2 to Oldmixon letter, p. 55.

jealousy, pettiness, and paranoia, it is probable that he made this decision alone.<sup>22</sup> However, one of Addison's biographers has speculated that Addison may have advanced Eusden's claim,<sup>23</sup> and, although the office was securely in the Lord Chamberlain's gift by this point, there were certainly times during Newcastle's tenure that George I (or someone close to him) selected someone for a position in the Lord Chamberlain's jurisdiction, with Newcastle then required to do no more than rubber-stamp the decision. Similarly, there is evidence of Newcastle deciding upon an appointment to a different office and then seeking the king's ratification for it.<sup>24</sup> In the case of a poetic office, though, it seems improbable that George I would have been overly concerned with the decision, given his incomprehension of English and dislike of ceremony.<sup>25</sup>

For the 1730 decision, the evidence is much better. The newspaper world had developed substantially, and a greater number of letters from the time have survived.<sup>26</sup> Colley Cibber, Lewis Theobald, and Stephen Duck were the main candidates, perhaps along with Matthew Concanen; and Richard Savage was in some sense involved as well.<sup>27</sup> Cibber was appointed. The claim made in his autobiographical *Apology* (1740) that 'Part of the Bread I now eat, was given me, for having writ the *Nonjuror*', has generally been taken to refer to the matter of the laureateship.<sup>28</sup> He also wrote there, 'In the Year 1730, there were many Authors, whose Merit wanted nothing but Interest to recommend them to the vacant *Laurel*'.<sup>29</sup> Certainly, he was on good terms with various high-ranking Whig peers and politicians, and was recognized as a firm adherent to, or even some sort of oblique bulwark of, the Walpole ministry; and the *Non-Juror* had played a significant part in this, while also being hugely successful amongst the

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<sup>22</sup> Reed Browning, 'Thomas Pelham-Holles, duke of Newcastle upon Tyne and first duke of Newcastle under Lyme', *ODNB*; Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England, 1727-1783* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 14, 18, 43, 54, 188–89, 195, 206–12, 217–20, 223–32.

<sup>23</sup> Peter Smithers, *The Life of Joseph Addison* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954), p. 209.

<sup>24</sup> Beattie, *English Court*, pp. 132–8.

<sup>25</sup> For George I's personality and lack of English, see Jeremy Black, 'Foreword to the Yale Edition', in Hatton, *George I*, pp. 1–8 (pp. 1–3); Hatton, *George I*, pp. 132–42.

<sup>26</sup> For more on the appointment and reaction to it, see Goldgar, *Walpole and the Wits*, pp. 89–98; Koon, *Cibber*, pp. 125–6.

<sup>27</sup> *The Weekly Register*, 31 Oct. 1730; *The St. James's Evening Post*, 29–31 Oct. 1730; Swift, *Correspondence*, III, p. 421; Rose Mary Davis, *Stephen Duck, The Thresher-Poet* (Orono: University of Maine Press, 1926), pp. 40–50; Ennis, 'Honours', p. 738; John H. Middendorf, editorial note to Johnson, 'Savage', p. 885.

<sup>28</sup> Colley Cibber, *An Apology for the Life of Colley Cibber*, 2 vols (1756; first published 1740), II, p. 58. E.g. in Hopkins, *Poets Laureate*, p. 68.

<sup>29</sup> Cibber, *Apology*, I, p. 35.

theatre-going public and eliciting the hefty financial favour of George I. The Duke of Grafton, Lord Chamberlain 1724-57 and close friend of George II, esteemed Cibber both socially and (although apparently not much interested in books<sup>30</sup>) as a playwright, as did Walpole, Henry Pelham, and Newcastle.<sup>31</sup> Cibber had also recently dedicated his and Vanbrugh's comedy, *The Provok'd Husband* (1728), to Queen Caroline.

Cibber's biographer Helene Koon has further adduced as a reason for his appointment that, by 1730, his plays enjoyed more popularity on the stage than any other living playwright's.<sup>32</sup> But Swift, Pope, and the circle of their correspondents had something to say on the subject too. Lady Elizabeth Germain wrote to Swift over two months after Cibber's appointment, 'if it was the Q. and not the Duke of G: that picked out such a Laureat she deserves his Poetry in her praises',<sup>33</sup> and Pope reported, in a letter of 1728, 'I am told the Gynocracy are of opinion, that they want no better writers than Cibber and the British Journalist'.<sup>34</sup> Germain's suggestion came in the same sentence as her admission that she was not well-acquainted with Pope, so it may be the case that Swift had merely passed Pope's report on to her, and that she was responding to it, rather than having had the testimony from another source; but in any case, this suggestion of the influence of Queen Caroline (and her female entourage) is an interesting one, and will be discussed as the second case study. Swift himself gave a somewhat mercurial analysis of the situation: 'as to Cibber if I had any inclination to excuse, the Court I would alledge that the Laureats place is entirely in the Lord Chamberlain's gift; but who makes Lord Chamberlains is another question. I believe if the Court had interceded with D. of Grafton for a fitter Man, it might have prevailed.'<sup>35</sup>

However, it was widely felt at the time that the favourite poet of Queen Caroline was Stephen Duck, and that, whether or not everyone else was simply following her lead, Duck was very much in fashion at court. Both before and after the matter of the laureateship, Caroline showered bounties on Duck; he was given offices, a home, a wife, and a pension. But he had no politics to

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<sup>30</sup> Black, *George II*, p. 127.

<sup>31</sup> Goldgar, *Walpole and the Wits*, pp. 189-96; Koon, *Cibber*, passim, especially p. 125.

<sup>32</sup> Koon, *Cibber*, pp. 125-6.

<sup>33</sup> Swift, *Correspondence*, III, p. 441.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 265.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 459.

speak of and no connection with Walpole's ministry, and his writings (all lyrical poetry), though fairly popular with the reading public, were something of a novelty act, being rooted in Duck's background as a rustic labourer who had taught himself to read and write.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, Duck was away from court around the time of Eusden's death, attending the deathbed of his first wife, and Hopkins has suggested that this absence was the critical factor in his missing-out.<sup>37</sup>

Lewis Theobald, meanwhile, was solidly present at court at this time, attending daily and wearing himself out specifically so as to acquire the laureateship; but although he had a wide-ranging literary output by this time, he was not as distinguished a writer as Cibber, and, by his own admission, he had no powerful patrons.<sup>38</sup> Neither was Richard Savage as distinguished or well-connected as Cibber, and he would probably have been considered too unreliable for the laureateship anyway (although he later became Caroline's 'Volunteer Laureate', writing her birthday poems in exchange for a pension);<sup>39</sup> while Matthew Concanen was a solid Whig and journeyman poet who, at some point around 1730, attracted the patronage of Newcastle, but who was never especially successful or well-respected, and who does not loom large in the competition for the office.<sup>40</sup> Somewhat bizarrely, then, it would seem that Colley Cibber – the most reviled man in the history of the laureateship – was appointed because, unlike any other writer of the day, he had every possible recommendation for the job. His backers were potentially legion.

At one point during his tenure, when he feared himself to be dying, Cibber wrote to Grafton (whose time as Lord Chamberlain was almost entirely coeval with Cibber's as laureate) requesting that his successor be Henry Jones, an Irish poet. However, Cibber recovered, and, by the time that he sunk into an illness from which he could *not* recover (1757), Jones had become somewhat obscurer, and somewhat less dear to Cibber, than he had been at the time of

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<sup>36</sup> For more on Duck, see Davis, *Duck*, especially pp. 40-93; Bridget Keegan, 'The Poet as Labourer', in *British Poetry, 1660-1800*, ed. by Lynch, pp. 162-78; Leslie Stephens, revised by William R. Jones, 'Stephen Duck', *ODNB*.

<sup>37</sup> Hopkins, *Poets Laureate*, pp. 73-4.

<sup>38</sup> Peter Seary, 'Lewis Theobald', *ODNB*. For Theobald's account of his experience, which will be explored in more detail below, see Lewis Theobald to William Warburton, December 1730, in *Illustrations of the Literary History of the Eighteenth Century*, ed. by John Nichols, 8 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014; first published 1817-1858), II, pp. 616-8.

<sup>39</sup> Griffin, *Literary Patronage*, pp. 169-88; Johnson, 'Savage', pp. 910-5; Freya Johnston, 'Richard Savage', *ODNB*.

<sup>40</sup> James Sambrook, 'Matthew Concanen', *ODNB*.

Cibber's sickly, but not mortally-sickly endorsement. Nonetheless, he did appear in an early and ill-informed newspaper report on the contest to become laureate, in *Lloyd's Evening Post*: 'The following Gentlemen are talked of as Candidates... Mr. Mason, Mr. Henry Jones, Mr. Lockman, Mr. Boyce, and Mr. Hackett'.<sup>41</sup> For the most part, these names do not show up elsewhere. 'Mr. Boyce' may have been a reference to a writer named Thomas Boyce, but the candidacy of a 'Boyce' for the laureateship was more probably a misunderstanding; the musician and composer William Boyce had been appointed master of the king's music in December 1755, and was not officially sworn in until June 1757, a few months before Cibber's death.<sup>42</sup> Since the master of the king's music was responsible for composing the music for the laureates' annual odes, it would have been easy to confuse him as being in some way involved with the laureateship. The most that can be said for 'Mr. Hackett' is that he was very obscure. John Lockman, like many of the writers mentioned so far, had a wide-ranging and miscellaneous body of work to his name, and his greatest successes were in prose; he had also been appointed secretary to the council of the Free British Fishery in 1750, inspiring him to publish prose and verse works about fish.<sup>43</sup> None of these men seem to have been particularly known for their politics.

William Mason, poet, clergyman, polymath, and busybody, regarded himself as a fervent 'old Whig'.<sup>44</sup> This designation meant different things at different times, and even to different people, but Mason believed his principles to have been 'in fashion' in the latter years of George II's reign, and 'out of fashion' thereafter.<sup>45</sup> Yet political works were never very prominent in Mason's sprawling, interdisciplinary oeuvre, and, when his politics fell 'out of fashion', he

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<sup>41</sup> *Lloyd's Evening Post and British Chronicle*, 12-14 Dec. 1757.

<sup>42</sup> Robert J. Bruce, 'William Boyce', *ODNB*.

<sup>43</sup> James Sambrook, 'John Lockman', *ODNB*.

<sup>44</sup> For Mason, see John W. Draper, *William Mason: A Study in Eighteenth-Century Culture* (New York: The New York University Press, 1924).

<sup>45</sup> *Warton Correspondence*, 348 (pp. 386-7). He was also involved in the Yorkshire Association movement, keeping up a regular correspondence with Christopher Wyvill until the two of them fell out in the 1790s. Mason-Wyvill correspondence in North Yorkshire County Record Office, ZFW 7/2/45/1, 7/2/45/11, 7/2/53/5, 7/2/66/6, 7/2/66/10, 7/2/66/19, 7/2/66/23, 7/2/66/24, 7/2/66/26, 7/2/71/16, 7/2/84.9, 7/2/89/25. For more on the varieties and evolution of eighteenth-century Whiggism, see J.G.A. Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 215-310; *Cultures of Whiggism*, ed. by Womersley.

turned to pseudonyms and anonymity as a vehicle for his political publications.<sup>46</sup> He was one of the most well-connected men of his day, and an assiduous seeker of patronage (for himself and for others<sup>47</sup>). He was the private tutor, and afterwards lifelong friend, of Lord John Cavendish, the younger brother of William Cavendish, the Duke of Devonshire who served as Lord Chamberlain between 1757 and 1762. Through this connection with the Cavendishes, Mason was made a royal chaplain in 1757, and held the post until 1772, most of his tenure thus coming under George III and the kind of ministries that Mason disliked.

The year of his appointment to the royal chaplaincy – a year when Mason's politics were still 'in fashion' – was also the year of Cibber's death. In the event, Mason did play a part in the appointment process, though he was not (as Horace Walpole believed) offered the laureateship himself.<sup>48</sup> As he later explained in his memoirs of Thomas Gray (1775) and Whitehead (1788), the Lord Chamberlain, Devonshire, told his brother, Lord John Cavendish, to offer the laureateship to Gray, and Lord John, being busy elsewhere, passed on the commission to Mason.<sup>49</sup> Gray was a lifelong Cambridge Fellow, and had few contacts in either the world of letters or the world of 'great men'; nor had he ever publicly expressed or been identified with any political persuasion. But he was close friends with Mason and with Lord John, and, as well as having published his massively popular *Elegy* several years before, he had recently published his two famous *Odes*, provoking the fascination of the literary world. The laurel came to him unsolicited, and he rejected it.

It was then offered to Whitehead, another non-political and somewhat reclusive figure who was best known for *The Roman Father*, a repertory play of the second half of the eighteenth century. Along with Gray, Mason, and 'Warton' (and also Young, Armstrong, and Akenside), Whitehead had recently been

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<sup>46</sup> On one occasion, he reprimanded Thomas Warton for having spread the news that the popular anti-ministerial *Heroic Epistle to Sir William Chambers* (1773) had been written by him, and he assured Warton, falsely, that he had had nothing to do with it. *Warton Correspondence*, 348 (pp. 386-7).

<sup>47</sup> See e.g. his efforts to help out a friend of Richard Hurd's, despite that person being a stranger to himself. *Warton Correspondence*, 347-348 (pp. 385-7).

<sup>48</sup> Horace Walpole, *Memoirs of George the Second*, ed. by John Brooke, 3 vols (London: Yale University Press, 1985), II, p. 294. As is made clear by an editorial note on this page, quoting a marginal note on the fair copy of the manuscript, Walpole was not very well-informed on the subject of the relevant communications regarding the laureateship.

<sup>49</sup> William Mason, 'Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Mr. Gray', in Thomas Gray, *The Poems of Mr. Gray*, ed. by William Mason, 2 vols (1775), II, pp. 18-19; 'Whitehead Memoirs', pp. 86-8.



commended by the *Critical Review* as one of the great poets of the age, 'not inferior to *Pope himself*, and who might have vied with him in reputation, had they been as properly introduced into the temple of Fame.'<sup>50</sup> Whitehead did not know the Cavendishes, but he was the tutor of the scions of the aristocratic Jersey and Harcourt families. Their intercessions had already procured him the position of Secretary and Registrar to the Order of the Bath, and the current Earl Harcourt had once been governor of the Prince of Wales (the future George III);<sup>51</sup> it is generally thought that this connection was what determined the appointment in Whitehead's favour.<sup>52</sup>

However, there is some reason to doubt this. When Whitehead had been appointed Secretary and Registrar, he had profusely thanked Lord and Lady Jersey for their endeavours on his behalf, and had, therefore, evidently known who had been responsible for the favour, despite the fact that he had been in Germany at the time.<sup>53</sup> Yet the laureateship, he later claimed, came to him 'Unask'd... and from a friend unknown'; a comment which Mason endorsed.<sup>54</sup> The Jerseys seem to have been seeking places for Whitehead for several years by this point; in one letter of 1753, Lord Jersey pointed out to Newcastle that a place in the Wardrobe had just become vacant, and said, 'I need not repeat to your Grace how much it is incumbent on us to serve M<sup>r</sup> Whitehead; or how greatly we should think ourselves obliged if you could obtain it'.<sup>55</sup> It is possible, therefore, that Devonshire or someone close to him remembered Whitehead's needfulness and decided to have the laureateship given to him without any direct prompting, on this occasion, by the Jersey family (or by the Harcourts); yet, if this were so, the unknown agent would probably still have informed the Jerseys or Harcourts of the favour that they had done them, and on what remembrance they had done it. Another relevant consideration is that, since the Jersey family had been previously assiduous in seeking positions for

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<sup>50</sup> *The Critical Review*, I (1756), p. 276. For *The Roman Father*, see Chapter Four. For Whitehead's distaste of politics, see e.g. Whitehead Letters to George Simon Harcourt, Bod, Eng misc d. 3844, ff. 41-42b, 112; for the political opinions that he did, however, in private, hold to, see e.g. Eng misc d. 3845, ff. 91-b, Eng misc d. 3846, ff. 10-b, 13, 92b.

<sup>51</sup> This position did place intermittent responsibilities on Whitehead, which he fulfilled intermittently for the rest of his life. See Bod, Eng misc d. 3845, ff. 99-b, 110; *The Correspondence of King George the Third: From 1760 to December 1783*, ed. by John Fortescue (London: Macmillan and Co., 1927), 794 (p. 148), 909 (p. 217), 910 (p. 218).

<sup>52</sup> E.g. Broadus, *Laureateship*, p. 136.

<sup>53</sup> William Whitehead to Lord Jersey, 7 June, 16 September and 29 November 1755. London Metropolitan Archives, Acc. 510/242, 510/245, 510/246.

<sup>54</sup> 'Whitehead Memoirs', p. 87.

<sup>55</sup> Lord Jersey to Newcastle, 29 November 1753. BL, Add. MS 32733.

Whitehead, it seems unlikely that they would have been completely inactive when such an obviously-applicable post as that of poet laureate became available (unless they believed his position as Secretary and Registrar sufficient).<sup>56</sup>

Perhaps, then, it was the case that the Jersey family (or perhaps the Harcourts) did indeed intercede on Whitehead's behalf, and successfully, but that they either did not inform Whitehead on this occasion, or he pretended ignorance in public as to who had interceded for him. Perhaps it was the Jerseys' wont to be silent about their favours to him, and he had only heard of their intercession in the case of the Bath position through another channel. But it is an equally likely scenario that, on the occasion of Cibber's death, the Jersey family was too predisposed or unaware to intercede in time, and the laureateship was offered to Whitehead of Devonshire's own volition, or on the prompting of another, mysterious agent. As for Mason, he was apparently told by Lord John that he had been considered for the office, but that it had been thought improper to bestow it upon someone in holy orders; which, Mason told his readers, was a reason 'I was glad to hear assigned; and if I had thought it a weak one, they who know me, will readily believe that I am the last man in the world who would have attempted to controvert it.'<sup>57</sup> Gray's biographers have

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<sup>56</sup> Clarissa Campbell Orr claims that Whitehead gained the post due to Lady Jersey's exertion of influence with the Duchess of Newcastle, who, Orr says, was a friend of Lady Jersey's and the wife of the Lord Chamberlain. But she gives no evidence for her claim, which must be at least partly mistaken: the Duke of Newcastle had not been Lord Chamberlain for a few decades, and, although he was now Prime Minister, he seems to have left behind his literary interests long before 1757. No source whatsoever gives any hint of his (or his wife's) involvement, and Orr is probably speculating on the basis of Lady Jersey's influence in having Whitehead made Secretary. Mason's memoirs of Whitehead contain the following passage: 'he had received, while yet in Italy, the badges of secretary and register of the Right Honourable order of the Bath. Two genteel patent places usually united, which were procured for him by the interest of the late Countess of Jersey, who always had the highest esteem for him; and who, for this generous purpose, employed the mediation of her near relation, the late Dutchess of Newcastle, Lady of the Duke, then Prime Minister.' This passage comes directly before Mason's account of the laureateship (which makes no mention of the Countess or the Duchess, and specifies that the office came to Whitehead due to an unknown benefactor), so perhaps Orr mixed the two appointments together, misled by Mason's reference to 'Two genteel places' (by which he meant the two Bath positions of *Secretary* and *Register*). Even Mason is arguably somewhat mistaken here, as Whitehead's letters, and the 1753 letter from Lord Jersey to Newcastle, show Lord Jersey taking the lead in interceding for Whitehead, both with the Bath position and earlier on; Lady Jersey, who was often very ill, seems to have had a more background or subsidiary role. 'Whitehead Memoirs', pp. 86-7; Clarissa Campbell Orr, 'Queen Charlotte, 'Scientific Queen'', in *Queenship in Britain*, ed. by Orr, pp. 236-266 (p. 255).

<sup>57</sup> 'Whitehead Memoirs', pp. 87-8.

suggested, but without evidence, that Mason actively wished for the office and was bitter at not receiving it.<sup>58</sup>

The laureateship, then, had been offered to two rather reclusive men, neither of whom had any apparent connection with political affairs, but who were both friends with Mason and who were each on intimate terms with a couple of (different) well-placed peers. They were both respectable poets who had not dabbled much in prose. However, when the office became vacant in 1785, it was passed on to Thomas Warton, who was, in most respects, a very different kind of figure. He was an Oxford Fellow, and, like Gray and Whitehead, had not exerted himself for the laureateship; but he was far more closely connected with the London-based world of arts and letters than either of those men, and was known more for his work as a literary historian than for his lyric poetry. He seems to have inspired a fairly disinterested zeal of intercessionary generosity in those who knew him; his campaign for the Oxford Regius Professor of History post in 1768-71 had, for example, been taken especially to heart by William Warburton (then Bishop of Gloucester), who had come to see Warton's candidacy as a kind of moral crusade against cultural degeneration, and had been despondent upon Warton's failure.<sup>59</sup> Likewise in 1785, Warton was informed by Edmond Malone that, 'Some of your friends here have spoken of you for the Laureat, and wish you to think of it for yourself.'<sup>60</sup>

At least one of those friends spoke very much to the point. Warton had already, the previous day, written to Joshua Reynolds offering 'Many, many thanks for your most friendly exertions in my favour. How can I refuse what you have so kindly procured? The laurel was never more honourably obtained.'<sup>61</sup> Reynolds was at this time president of the Royal Academy, and enjoyed a testy, sporadic communication with George III, in addition to being close to many other well-placed politicians, peers, and artists and writers.<sup>62</sup> However, the

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<sup>58</sup> Edmund Gosse asserts that Mason had 'wished for' the office, and 'raged with disappointment' not to get it; and Gray's most recent and comprehensive biographer, Robert Mack, mentions this assertion with a slight doubtfulness, but no outright disagreement. Mack also suggests that Gray's letter to Mason explaining why he turned the post down may entail a 'thinly veiled attack on Mason's own vanity'. But there are no real grounds for either suggestion. Edmund Gosse, *Gray* (London: Macmillan, 1895), p. 138; Robert L. Mack, *Thomas Gray: A Life* (London: Yale University Press, 2000), pp. 498-9.

<sup>59</sup> David Fairer, 'Introduction: The Achievement of Thomas Warton', in *Warton Correspondence*, pp. xvii-xxxvi (xxvi); *Warton Correspondence*, 263 (pp. 293-4).

<sup>60</sup> *Warton Correspondence*, 482 (p. 529).

<sup>61</sup> *Warton Correspondence*, 481 (p. 527).

<sup>62</sup> Hoock, *The King's Artists*, pp. 136-79; Joshua Reynolds, *The Letters of Sir Joshua Reynolds*, ed. by John Ingamells and John Edgcumbe (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 25 (p.

newspapers of the time also mentioned rumours that the king himself had intervened to have Warton made laureate,<sup>63</sup> and Joseph Warton wrote to his and Thomas's sister, 'the King has sent to offer it Him in the Handsomest manner'.<sup>64</sup> The antiquary Michael Lort wrote to a correspondent around this time that there was disagreement as to whether Reynolds or George III had been responsible.<sup>65</sup> Newspaper evidence from the next several years suggests that George III's preference and intervention became the generally accepted reason for Warton's appointment.<sup>66</sup>

A few decades later, John O'Keeffe mentioned in his *Recollections* (1826) that he had gone to see Lord Salisbury (Lord Chamberlain, 1783-1804) upon Whitehead's death and asked to be made poet laureate, to which Salisbury had replied that 'he had not the smallest objection; but that he had previously given his promise to another'.<sup>67</sup> Yet there is no indication of whether, on this occasion, Salisbury's 'promise' represented a mere rubber-stamping of someone else's decision, or whether it had been motivated by either Reynolds or George III. Despite the titles and positions that Reynolds accrued under George, and the intermittent communications between the two men, their relationship was not a smooth one, so it seems unlikely that Reynolds gained Warton the office by interceding with George himself. Perhaps Reynolds suggested Warton to Salisbury, who passed on the suggestion to George; perhaps Reynolds and George both decided upon Warton independently. Reynolds did not know Salisbury well, but had a couple of distant interactions with him.<sup>68</sup> Whatever Reynolds's involvement, it therefore seems likely that George had the decisive say on this occasion.

Other than O'Keeffe, the only identifiable competitor to Warton was Robert Potter, who was described by the newspaper that mentioned him as 'the Translator, of Aeschylus'.<sup>69</sup> However, there is no further evidence of his candidacy, and he was not as prominent a public figure as Warton; in any case,

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32), 38 (p. 49), 172 (p. 183) 195 (pp. 202-3), 227 (p. 227). Fairer states confidently, 'Reynolds was certainly a good friend... it was to him that Warton owed his appointment in 1785 to the Poet Laureateship'. Fairer, 'Introduction: The Achievement of Thomas Warton', p. xxxii.

<sup>63</sup> *General Advertiser*, 25 Apr. 1785.

<sup>64</sup> Joseph Warton to Jane Warton, 29 April 1785, Bod, MS Don. c. 75, ff. 39-40b.

<sup>65</sup> *Illustrations*, ed. by Nichols, VII, p. 468.

<sup>66</sup> See in particular, *General Evening Post*, 28-30 Apr. 1785; *Public Advertiser*, 2 Jun. 1790.

<sup>67</sup> John O'Keeffe, *Recollections of the Life of John O'Keeffe*, 2 vols (1826), II, pp. 132-3.

<sup>68</sup> Reynolds, *Letters*, 121 (pp. 126-7), 180 (p. 189).

<sup>69</sup> *General Advertiser*, 25 Apr. 1785.

the translator of ancient Greek literature lost out to the redeemer of England's own literary past. Rumours connected Mason with the post on this occasion and again in 1790,<sup>70</sup> but his twentieth-century biographer has expressed doubt as to the truth of these rumours, and Mason himself always insisted that he had no such wish.<sup>71</sup>

For 1790, 'Many persons have been spoken of as being intended to fill the vacant place of Laureate';<sup>72</sup> but the only genuine candidates now identifiable are William Hayley, Henry James Pye, and (perhaps) Robert Merry. The former was a very popular, fashionable poet, primarily on account of his didactic poem to women, *The Triumphs of Temper* (1781), which was perhaps the most popular English poem of George III's reign until the emergence of Scott and Byron. He had many prominent acquaintances, including his fellow Williams: Pitt the Younger, Cowper, and Blake. Indeed, he was later to acquire a government pension for Cowper from Pitt, whom he had met and befriended when Pitt was only fourteen.<sup>73</sup> Upon Warton's death, Pitt, who was then Prime Minister, apparently offered the laureateship to Hayley, who turned it down, thanking him in verse for the offer.<sup>74</sup> He then offered the post to Henry James Pye, who accepted. Pye and Hayley were both prolific poets, and, perhaps more importantly, Pye had been a loyal Pittite MP from 1784 until just before Warton's death, with his initial election campaign having been supported by a large grant from the government's secret service fund.<sup>75</sup> He and Hayley also had a great mutual respect for each other's work, with commendatory verses to each other published in Pye's 1787 *Poems On Various Subjects*.<sup>76</sup> When Pye complimented Cowper in a prose work, Hayley wrote to Cowper to draw his

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<sup>70</sup> E.g. one newspaper in 1788, presumably at least partially erroneously (see Hayley, below), referred to Hayley and Mason as 'disappointed candidates for the Laureatship'. *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser*, 10 Nov. 1788.

<sup>71</sup> Draper, *William Mason*, pp. 106-7, 114-5. Ennis asserts that Mason was offered the laurel in 1785 and refused it, but gives no evidence, and is probably repeating an ill-founded rumour or speculation from elsewhere. Ennis, 'Honours', p. 734.

<sup>72</sup> *Diary or Woodfall's Register*, 7 Jun. 1790.

<sup>73</sup> William Hayley, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of William Hayley Esq.*, 2 vols (1823), I, pp. 127-8.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, II, p. 35; Vivienne W. Painting, 'William Hayley', *ODNB*.

<sup>75</sup> TNA, PRO 30/8/169, ff. 256-b; *The Later Correspondence of George III*, ed. by Arthur Aspinall, 5 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), I, 62 (p. 50), 158 (p. 157).

<sup>76</sup> Henry James Pye, *Poems on Various Subjects*, 2 vols (1787), I, pp. 45-9.

attention to it, and Cowper expressed gratification at receiving praise from such a source.<sup>77</sup> Perhaps, then, Hayley put a word in for Pye to Pitt in 1790.

In any case, Pye exploited his own connection to Pitt as rigorously and as grovelingly as possible, continually courting him, both in person and by letters, in search of places. It was probably foremost by these means that he gained the office (as shall be investigated in the third case study, below). Meanwhile, the candidacy of Robert Merry is known only by a single newspaper report: 'Mr. Merry, who was a *Cambridge Man*, should he be chosen Laureat, will, in turn, vindicate the honours of that University.'<sup>78</sup> It is not clear how much weight should be placed on this testimony, since the paper in question, *The World*, enjoyed a very friendly working relationship with Merry, and had been regularly publishing his Della Cruscan poetry for several years by this time. Moreover, in 1790, Merry's sympathies were already turning in favour of the French Revolution, which would not have endeared him to the government.

Last of all was the 1813 appointment.<sup>79</sup> Although various poets hoped for the office, the only men who could ever have been offered it were, first, Walter Scott, and, after Scott turned it down, Robert Southey. In this decision, both the Prince Regent (the future George IV) and the Prime Minister, Lord Liverpool, were in agreement. The Lord Chamberlain was then the Marquess of Hertford, who was seventy years old. He favoured Scott, and was cagey about Southey due to the latter's former reputation as a radical, but, throughout the decision process, he was keenly solicitous of Liverpool's opinion, and set his compass primarily by this reference point. Scott did not make any request for the office, but the historiographer and royal librarian, James Stanier Clarke, probably agitated on his behalf, whereas Southey's claim was pushed by, amongst others, John Wilson Croker (Secretary to the Admiralty) and certain members of Hertford's own family. Liverpool seems to have been the prime decision-maker, but with the Prince Regent greatly important too, and the Lord Chamberlain was certainly not much more than a rubber-stamper on this occasion. As for the reasons behind Scott and then Southey's selection, all of the men involved in the selection process avowed a desire to appoint the best poet in the kingdom,

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<sup>77</sup> *The Letters and Prose Writings of William Cowper*, ed. by James King and Charles Ryskamp, 5 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979-1986), IV, pp. 123-4.

<sup>78</sup> *The World*, 7 Jun 1790.

<sup>79</sup> For more on this appointment process, see my forthcoming article, 'Appointing a Poet Laureate: National and Poetic Identities in 1813', *The English Historical Review*.

and it was also significant that both poets were strongly associated with the *Quarterly Review*. This journal, which enjoyed a huge readership, was pro-ministerial, and a belligerent advocate for the war that Lord Liverpool's government was prosecuting.

Now that the individual laureateship appointments for the Hanoverian period have been examined in turn, it is time to cast a critical look over the evidence as a whole, so as to answer the questions raised in the introduction to this chapter.

### **Patterns and Consistencies**

The first and most straightforward question is what wider trends can be identified across these appointments, especially with regards to who made the decision, what kind of people were considered for the post, and what were the reasons for a laureate's appointment. In this thesis's Introduction, the randomness and variability of the laureate succession was in evidence; but this does not mean that there might not be consistencies and coherence as well.

On at least one occasion (1757), the Lord Chamberlain (Devonshire) can be seen having chosen the laureate, probably in discussion with his brother, possibly in response to intercessions from elsewhere, but with no evidence of his being directed from above. Similarly, in 1718, the Lord Chamberlain (Newcastle) cannot seriously be doubted as to having selected the laureate. There are suggestions as to certain people having interceded with him: the literary men, Tonson, Addison, and Garth, and certain 'Illustrious Persons' speculated on by Oldmixon. However, for the reasons given above, it seems likely that Newcastle's personal preference was strong from the beginning and that he himself determined the choice. In 1730, the Lord Chamberlain (Grafton) certainly seems to have appointed the laureate in a formal sense, but contemporaries believed him to have either been influenced into this decision, or to have been making a decision which could have been contravened by others if those others so wished. It should also be remembered that Grafton was notoriously boorish and un-literate, and was thought to have never read a book in his life. For the later appointments, the Lord Chamberlain Salisbury was involved in the 1785 appointment but not attributed any agency by

contemporaries, and then apparently overshadowed (if not ignored) by the Prime Minister, Pitt, in 1790; while in 1813 the Lord Chamberlain simply ratified the decisions of others. Given that the laureateship remained, throughout this period, an office that was technically in the Lord Chamberlain's gift, and which had been firmly placed under his jurisdiction, and given that Dorset had made the office so much his own in the later Stuart period, the evidence as a whole would point to the conclusion that the Lord Chamberlains could and did select the laureate in the reigns of George I and George II, and that, even under George III, the default understanding and procedure was that the Lord Chamberlain should select the laureate and offer that person the post without recourse to anyone else; but that there was always room for other powerful voices to exert themselves on the matter, if they so chose, and that, in George III's reign, the selection of the laureate became seen as a matter which went beyond the Lord Chamberlain's remit, and which was a valid object of concern for kings, prince regents, and especially prime ministers, any of whom would expect their opinion to be carried if they put it forward.

A comprehensive view of the appointments would therefore suggest that, in 1715 – when Rowe was appointed, but by an unknown agency – it was probably the Lord Chamberlain, the Duke of Bolton, who made the decision, but that he probably acted on advice and intercession rather than on any great personal preference. Likewise, in 1730, a comparison with other appointments encourages an emphasis on Grafton's role in the decision, but also flags up the importance of the Lord Chamberlain's personality, which in this case was not highly predisposed to a concern for such a post as the laureateship. As for 1785, when Pitt was not yet as established in power or as assertive as in 1790, it seems valid to suggest that Salisbury, while fairly indifferent as to who should be poet laureate, was the person with whom Reynolds interceded to have Warton made laureate (if Reynold's contribution was key), and was either the person to pass on this suggestion to George III, or was himself the initial and major recipient of George's own suggestion as to Warton being made laureate. Therefore, it was probably only in 1790 and 1813 that the Lord Chamberlain was not really involved in the decision-making process and that an assertive Prime Minister took the laureate selection entirely upon himself.

However, this pattern also indicates the importance of royalty in the decision-making. In 1785, George III clearly had some role or other in the



appointment; and if he seems to have played no role in the 1790 appointment, then it should be remembered that he had only recently recovered from his first bout of madness, and was now beginning to leave the direction of national affairs securely in the hands of Pitt. By 1813, he was fully incapacitated; but, in his absence, Southey's appointment did see heavy involvement from the Prince Regent.

As for the appointments under George I and II, there is no hint of those kings having had any involvement. This too is what would be expected on the basis of their personalities. George I did not speak English, George II's first language was German, and, while their general attitude to matters of high culture has been debated by historians, they undoubtedly had no interest in English-language literature.<sup>80</sup> It is highly instructive that, across their two reigns, the only appointment to have been connected by contemporaries with the royal family was that of 1730. This was the only time in which England had a queen, and the queen in question was George II's wife Caroline. Recent decades have seen an increasing appreciation for Caroline, who is now regarded as having turned the court into a vibrant, flourishing social venue and to have had a highly significant role as a patron of artistic and intellectual matters.<sup>81</sup> Whereas the courts of George I and George II are supposed to have been relatively dull and philistine, Caroline, during her period on the throne (1727-37), brought splendour and vitality to the court, as well as colouring it with her own particular personality.<sup>82</sup> It is therefore no coincidence that her pet poet, Duck, was Cibber's main competitor for the laureateship in 1730, or that Pope and others then believed her influence to have been paramount in the selection of Cibber.

In fact, then, the Hanoverian period sees the laureate appointments matching the history of the royal family and of court life exactly.<sup>83</sup> In the reigns of George I and II, the kings had nothing to do with the laureateship because it was not amongst their interests, but, in that happy decade when Caroline

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<sup>80</sup> Black, 'Foreword to George I', pp. 1-8; Black, *George II*, pp. 108-129.

<sup>81</sup> Smith, *Georgian Monarchy*, pp. 32-7; Joanna Marschner, 'Queen Caroline of Anspach and the European princely museum tradition', in *Queenship in Britain*, ed. by Orr, pp. 130-42; Joanna Marschner, *Queen Caroline*; Christine Gerrard, 'Queens-in-waiting: Caroline of Anspach and Augusta of Saxe-Gotha as Princesses of Wales', in *Queenship in Britain*, ed. by Orr, pp. 143-61.

<sup>82</sup> Black, *George II*, p. 137.

<sup>83</sup> On the history of the royal family and court life as outlined in this paragraph, see Smith, *Georgian Monarchy*, pp. 73-104, 193-243; G.M. Ditchfield, *George III: An Essay in Monarchy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), pp. 7, 49-76, 138-68; E.A. Smith, *George IV* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), pp. 65, 81, 87, 142-3, 146-8, 206-7.

presided over the court, she, and the courtly fashions that revolved around her, had a significant, or perhaps even an overwhelming, influence on who was made laureate. When, however, George III became king, the situation changed. George III was more assertive in English affairs than either of his predecessors had been, he was a lover and connoisseur of English literature, and he was eager to become a significant patron of the arts. Thus, for the one appointment in which he was fully capable, George III became the first reigning monarch since Charles II to exert himself in the appointment of a laureate; and in 1813, still typically of the wider history of English royalty, the appointment saw the involvement of a cultured and well-read Prince Regent. As for whether any of these observations can help shed light on the individual laureateship appointments, the answer is probably negative; where there is evidence of royal involvement, royalty was indeed involved, and probably with significant influence; where there is no such evidence, it is because royalty had no interest in being involved at that time.

Finally, on the subject of decision-makers, there are the littler interceders to be considered. Not too many of these are now visible, although the evidence from both the laureateship appointments in particular and the workings of patronage in general suggest that they probably would have been potentially numerous and influential. As well as the peers and government figures involved in, for example, Southey's appointment, various cultural figures appear exerting themselves across the period; given the nature of the office, it is probably valid to speculate that they could often play important parts in the appointment decisions. Clearly, the likes of Tonson, Reynolds, and Hayley could not actually decide the appointee themselves, as a Lord Chamberlain, monarch, or Prime Minister could; but they could have a powerful voice in articulating a poet's claim and merits for the office.

Who were those poets, though, and what were their merits? Was the criteria for a laureate as arbitrary and inconsistent as it seems on the surface, and was their selection merely a result of having the right backers? The laureates and their competitors were patently a mixed bunch, some of them (like Rowe) being seasoned place-hunters, others (like Gray) being college recluses; some of them primarily known as playwrights, some of them as lyric poets, some of them for their prose. But certain patterns can nonetheless be identified. Firstly, the obvious and cynical qualities do hold true: it helped

massively to have connections and to be politically well-disposed towards the government. Most of the laureates and of those who almost became laureate were well-connected, and those who were not – Gray and Whitehead – nonetheless had one or two key connections, Gray being close friends with Lord John Cavendish and on reasonably good terms with Devonshire (who hosted Gray in his own box on George III's coronation),<sup>84</sup> Whitehead being intimately bound up with the Harcourt and Jersey families.<sup>85</sup> Rowe was a bastion of Whiggism, Eusden a willing Whig, and Cibber associated with both the general Whig defence of the Hanoverian Succession and the particular ruling band of Whigs. Dennis and Oldmixon, laureate candidates in the early years of George I's reign, were also firmly Whiggish.

It is tempting to suggest that politics became less important in the reign of George III; contemporaries were certainly less inclined to see the appointments as political appointments during his reign, and it is generally the case that historians and literary scholars find slightly less political matter to study in the later eighteenth century than they do in the reigns of Anne, George I, and George II. Nonetheless, George III's laureates did tend to be politically-amenable. Warton may not have partaken of much in the way of overtly political activity, but he was a firm and Toryish supporter of the king; Pye was a loyal Pittite MP; and Southey, although his politics were idiosyncratic, was, in 1813, writing for the *Quarterly Review* in favour of government policies. Walter Scott was known to be Tory, pro-Pitt, and pro-government, while Hayley was friendly with Pitt but not much involved in political activities. The only laureate-elects who really had no association with a party or government were Gray and Whitehead, in 1757 (towards the end of George II's reign); but even they were dealt with through Mason, a staunch 'Old' Whig.

The laureateship appointments also show some correlation to another broader trend: the lessening dominance of plays over other forms of imaginative writing, and the increasingly assertive prominence of non-dramatic poetry.<sup>86</sup> Broadly speaking, the earlier laureates (going back to the later Stuart period,

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<sup>84</sup> Thomas Gray to James Brown, 24 September 1761, *Gray Correspondence*, pp. 752-5.

<sup>85</sup> For more on the relationships of the Jerseys and Harcourts to the court, and some mention of Whitehead and Mason within this nexus, see Orr, 'Scientific Queen', pp. 244-57.

<sup>86</sup> For wider trends in imaginative writing, see, e.g. the chapters in *English Literature, 1660-1780*, ed. by Richetti; for theatre's central importance to writing in the later Stuart and early Hanoverian periods, and logistics of the careers and activities of those who wrote for the stage, see e.g. Hammond, *Hackney for Bread*, pp. 48-69; Kewes, *Authorship*, passim.

too) were primarily known as playwrights, while the later laureates were not. General men of letters, some of whom were primarily known for their non-dramatic prose, were always present as candidates – for example, Dennis, Duck, Theobald, and Concanen – but, in the first half of the eighteenth century, they tended to lose out, whereas, under George III, they were more successful; Southey represents the culmination of this trend, being ‘the only existing entire man of letters’ in Britain.<sup>87</sup> 1757 marks the turning point: Gray was a lyric poet who never produced a play in his life, while Whitehead had had his greatest and most enduring success with a tragedy (*The Roman Father*), and remained involved with the theatrical world for most of his life, but mostly published non-dramatic poetry, and was well-known for both.

However, it is perhaps somewhat misleading to distinguish dramatists from non-dramatists. The dramatists – even Cibber – published in other forms too, while the non-dramatists had usually written a play or two over the course of their career, and probably would have focused more of their energies on the stage if only the stage had accepted them, given how lucrative a successful play could be for its author. It is therefore perhaps better to say – at least for the later Stuart and early Hanoverian periods – that *successful* writers were favoured for the laureateship, and writerly success lay principally in the theatre. Under George III, the pattern continued, but with the measures of writerly success becoming different and more diverse. The men chosen for the laureateship enjoyed more success in their field than anyone else: Gray in lyric poetry, Warton in the rediscovery of the English lyric, Hayley in a sort of gentle didactic poetry that had some affinities with Della Cruscan verse, Scott in metrical romances, Southey as an ‘entire man of letters’ and poetic genius. Whitehead, meanwhile, straddled a transitional period with a sort of calm mastery, leaving only Eusden and Pye as the exceptions to the pattern. As for the failed candidates, they were generally fairly successful in some particular field, but were neither as successful as the men who were chosen ahead of them, nor had found such a defining prominence in one particular field; on this count, it should be remembered that Whitehead was second-choice after Gray, and Pye after Hayley. This flags up two features of the appointments: firstly, as was mentioned already, that the history of the appointments represents a

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<sup>87</sup> Lord Byron in his journal, 22 November 1813, Lord Byron, *Letters and Journals*, ed. by Rowland E. Prothero, 6 vols (London: J. Murray, 1898-1901), II, p. 331.

microcosm of wider literary developments; and, secondly, that those writers offered the laureateship had almost invariably found great critical and commercial success in their careers to date. In short, the writers chosen for the laureateship were amongst the leading few writers of their time.

This analysis of the kind of men considered and favoured for the laureateship has already suggested some reasons for why each laureate was appointed: they deserved the office on account of their literary success, they had proven themselves politically-agreeable or even politically-serviceable, and they enjoyed the connections to be able to advance these powerful claims. However, these are all speculations; whether any patterns can be identified in the identifiable reasons given for the appointing of laureates is another matter, and is hampered by lack of evidence. Party-political considerations appear, but only obliquely, in 1715 and 1730, and still more obliquely in 1790 and 1813; but they were almost certainly of no importance in 1757 and 1785. In 1718, Eusden was clearly appointed for having written a poem celebrating the Lord Chamberlain's marriage, but on no other occasion did the laureateship become so overt an embodiment of an individual patron-client relationship (as it had done under Dorset), except, in a very different manner, in 1790. The reasoning and processes behind each appointment therefore appears generally quite inconsistent.

However, the inconsistency that appears on an appointment-by-appointment basis was nonetheless productive of the more consistent patterns regarding the kind of people appointed laureate (as outlined above). This in itself is instructive. It suggests that, underlying the successive laureateship appointments, there may have been some consistent sense of the qualifications and characteristics necessary for a laureate, or some notion of precedent; a suggestion for which there is otherwise no evidence, since no contemporary can be found avowing that such-and-such a laureate was appointed because they were similar to their predecessors. On the other hand, perhaps no one ever did have any such sense, or appeal to any such reasoning; perhaps the broader patterns identified above are not ascribable to the conscious reasoning of any of the agents involved in the appointments, but rather reflect the deeper institutional facts of the office itself, and its positioning with regards to the court and to the world of letters.

Indeed, one factor that supports this somewhat abstract conclusion is that the patterns identified above were all susceptible to a sort of oscillating alternation. To state it plainly: Shadwell was very political; Tate was not; Rowe was very political; Eusden was not; Cibber was very political; Gray and Whitehead were not; Hayley was not, but Pye was; Scott was political, but Southey was more complicated. Shadwell was a pre-eminent playwright; Tate was comparatively undistinguished; Rowe was a pre-eminent playwright; Eusden was comparatively undistinguished; Cibber was a pre-eminent playwright; Gray and Whitehead were pre-eminent in different fields; Warton was pre-eminently Wartonish; Hayley was a pre-eminent non-dramatic poet, but Pye was not massively distinguished for anything in particular; Southey and Scott were pre-eminent in their own fields. It is a similar story in terms of the distinction between university men and non-university men, and in any other identifiable pattern.<sup>88</sup> Admittedly, there is not a very large sample size to be working with here, and the oscillation collapses somewhat under George III, as well as being mitigated throughout by the inclusion of people who were selected but not appointed (Gray, Hayley, and Scott); it would be mitigated even further by some sort of weighted inclusion of the other candidates. In fact, the true alternation only really exists for the time period between Shadwell and Cibber, a period comprising five names (and also including the later Stuart period, which is not even the subject of this chapter due to the laureateship being something different at that time).

Nonetheless, it is clearly the case that few, if any laureates were succeeded by someone who was similar to themselves (in terms of the features discussed above), and that it was more normal for a new laureate to have more

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<sup>88</sup> There has not been space to investigate the university pattern, but, essentially, the reigns of Georges I and II saw the favouring of men who were associated with Cambridge, while no identifiable candidate for the laureateship was even educated at Oxford, whereas, following George III's accession, men with Oxford associations pushed ahead of Cantabrigians in the likelihood of being considered for, and especially appointed to, the laureateship; Eusden and Warton are the prime examples. This reflects the fact that Cambridge had a far more Whig and pro-Hanoverian identity, and Oxford a more Tory and pro-George III, with Cambridge therefore being massively favoured and Oxford massively snubbed by court and government under the first two Georges, and Oxford then enjoying favour under George III, even if Cambridge was not exactly shunted into outer darkness. In terms of oscillation, it was usually the case that a man with a strong university affiliation was replaced by one who had small or no affiliation, who then gave way to one who had a strong university affiliation, and so on. For the universities in the eighteenth century, see *The History of the University of Oxford. Volume V: The Eighteenth Century*, ed. by L.S. Sutherland and L.G. Mitchell (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986); D.A. Winstanley, *The University of Cambridge in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922).

similarities with their laureate-grandfather than with their immediate predecessor. This observation supports the argument that the agents selecting laureates were not doing so with a job specification for the laureateship in mind, and that the processes by which a laureate was appointed were not dictated by much in the way of a conscious precedent; and this argument, in turn, suggests that the patterns identifiable in the history of laureate appointments are ascribable to the nature of the office itself rather than to anyone's conscious decision-making.

### **Case Study: Oldmixon**

Now that this investigation of the appointments has been carried out, it is time to ask what the foregoing information and conclusions can reveal about the nature of the laureateship and about the society it was part of. This shall be done by looking at three case studies, the first two of which will focus on the networks that were coming into play in each appointment process. Recent scholarship has shown an increasingly sophisticated interest in the workings of networks with regards to literature, showing the sorts of network that underlay literary production and arguing that literary products themselves embodied sociability, clubbability, party identity, and the act of conversation.<sup>89</sup> This case study and the next will develop such concerns, exploring the laureate appointments in terms of the workings of overlapping networks, and, in the third case study especially, investigating how ideas of value or merit were produced by such networks, those ideas then entailing a claim on the meaning of literature, and the appointment of a laureate constituting both a result and a reinforcement to such a claim.

As was discussed above, many different agents were potentially involved in the appointing of a laureate, pertaining to a number of very different spheres of activity and identity. By the time of the 1813 selection, the Prime Minister, the Prince Regent, the Lord Chamberlain, the Lord Chamberlain's aristocratic relatives, the historiographer and royal librarian, and several figures associated

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<sup>89</sup> See especially Margaret J. Ezell, 'The "Gentleman's Journal" and the Commercialization of Restoration Coterie Literary Practices', *Modern Philology*, Vol. 89, No. 3 (1992), 323-40; Fairer, *English Poetry*, p. x; Dustin Griffin, 'Social world of authorship', pp. 38-52; Haslett, *Pope to Burney*; Williams, *Whig Literary Culture*, pp. 204-40.

with the government (some of whom also had pronounced literary interests) were all involved in determining Pye's successor; and it may be that, were there as much surviving evidence for previous appointments as there is for Southey's, a similar story could be told throughout the Hanoverian period. In any case, the laureateship selection process clearly had the potential to draw in the activities of a wide and diverse cast of characters, and, by considering the interrelations of these characters, and the overlapping spheres that the appointment processes touched upon, this chapter will now show how the laureateship functioned with regards to the networks that comprised Hanoverian society. It will make the argument that the laureateship, being situated between the court and the world of professional literature, demonstrates something of the nature of these networks, and also, at the time, had an important role to play in constituting those networks, partly through the binding agency of patronage (as well as through other means that are explored in other chapters). The laureateship stands out as an important element in the networks of Hanoverian society; networks which show some similarities across the period, but which also changed in significant ways.

The first case study is Oldmixon's letter to Tonson, relating to the 1718 appointment.<sup>90</sup> The letter begins,

If you ever had Compassion for a man most unjustly Suffering for his Zeal for a Cause you always espoused which I shall most amply make appear when I come to London / If my particular Attachment to yr Interest & the Pleasure I took in Serving you If the Desire I have to return to Town & Evidence by Deeds what I can only now by Words can prevail upon a Generous Mind I flatter my self you will be so kind, as to speak to my Lord the Duke of Newcastle that I may succeed Mr Rowe in the Laureats Place which I was to have had before had it not been for him as Sir Samuell Garth knows. My Lord will be spoken to by severall Illustrious Persons. But I know, Sir, yr Opinion & Recommendation in this case will have as much Weight as any Bodies.

There are several obvious points to make about this plaintive appeal. Firstly, it is a testament to the importance and workings of the Kit-Cat Club and to the Whiggish writers, politicians, and peers who were not part of that Club but who

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<sup>90</sup> Oldmixon's decision to write to Tonson was in fact misguided, as Tonson, unbeknownst to Oldmixon, had very recently retired from literary affairs and left London for the continent; but the letter is nonetheless highly instructive in terms of how Oldmixon thought that the laureateship could be gained. For the information on Tonson, Newcastle, Oldmixon, and the Kit-Cat Club (and their importance in the literary world of the early eighteenth centuries) which underpins the following discussion, see Stephen Bernard, 'Introduction', in *Tonsons Correspondences*, ed. by Bernard, pp. 1-68; Rogers, 'Life'; Field, *Kit-Cat Club*; Williams, *Whig Literary Culture*, pp. 204-40.



had dealings with its members and shared its ethos. Oldmixon conjures up an image of Newcastle – the Lord Chamberlain at court, a prominent literary patron, a rich young nobleman, and a Whig politician – being approached by Tonson and ‘by severall Illustrious Persons’ (that is, peers) to advance the claims of their favoured writers. Newcastle the patron, whose patronage to some extent operated through the medium of the Kit-Cat Club, is here imagined to be susceptible to the implorations from that Club and its associated members in terms of how he bestows that (court) patronage. But Oldmixon believes that Tonson’s ‘Opinion & Recommendation’ will be as powerful as any of those peers’. Tonson, as the great publisher, ex-secretary of the Kit-Cat Club, and personal friend of Newcastle, is attributed an influence that is the equal of anyone’s over Newcastle in the matter of the laureateship. Through this influence, Oldmixon – a small, suffering writer who lives far distant from London – imagines that he can gain Newcastle’s patronage and be made laureate. He is highly aware of his competitors and of other associated writers who may be able to speak well or ill of him; he insists that he would have been laureate already if not for Rowe, and that Garth can vouch for this fact; and then, as the letter goes on, he discusses various other Whig writers, explaining why their claims are worse than his and alluding to their own connections and to the patronage which some of them have already enjoyed.

The network that Oldmixon thus articulates is one in which ‘Illustrious Persons’ – peers, and especially politically-active and courtly-based Whig magnates like Newcastle – stand in leading positions, with a hierarchy of lesser peers and then literary figures beneath them, rendering them service in exchange for intercessions and patronage; and those lesser figures, as well as serving the same overall masters and working, as it were, on the same page, are also competitors with each other, their loyalties more vertical than horizontal. This chimes well with Field’s observation that patronage was ‘the single most important constant in the Club’s story – the mechanism that made it tick.’<sup>91</sup> Oldmixon also suggests that the system functions according to a sense of fairness and noblesse oblige. The figures at the top of the hierarchy are defined by their lustre and lucre; those at the bottom by their hard work and neediness; and material rewards are therefore expected to flow downwards,

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<sup>91</sup> Field, *Kit-Cat Club*, p. 36.

puddling in the laps of those people who have worked the hardest and whose needs are the greatest. When explaining why he should be given the laurel rather than some of his competitors, Oldmixon points out that he is 'the Oldest Claimer', and that 'Mr Tickel is above it Mr Hughes has a 500<sup>l</sup> a Year Place, So they all have, I think.' Oldmixon's longstanding need, and the fact that his competitors have already been supplied with rewards, render him the most appropriate recipient of the laureateship. The system must contain an ideal of fairness, or else the vertical transactions it consists of would break down; it is to this logic that Oldmixon makes appeal.

Yet there is also a sense in which the hierarchy is blurred. Tonson, a low-born literary figure, not connected with the court or government, appears at Newcastle's elbow, equally influential with any of the 'Illustrious Persons'. Oldmixon also ends the letter with the supposition that, 'if Friends will be Friends I see no Reason to despair of carrying it'; a comment which seems to suggest the existence of other interceders who, from the word 'Friends' and from Oldmixon's other known relationships, are probably not to be imagined as 'Illustrious Persons'; he means such people as Addison and Steele, neither of whom are mentioned in the letter but whose influence is well-known; or perhaps he means people who were neither writers nor aristocrats. Whatever the case, Oldmixon seems to be suggesting a nexus centred on Newcastle in which figures from distinctly different backgrounds, deriving their position and influence from distinctly different sources (rank, money, sociability; success in writing, or publishing, or politics, or organization) jostle about with each other, both competing and co-operating.

Moreover, Oldmixon clearly articulates the rationale that has brought this particular network into being, and that has given it its powers of patronage; and, at the same time, he indicates his knowledge of the values that are important to that network, and which therefore must be appealed to by someone who wishes to profit by it, whether by gaining a leading position within it (as Newcastle has done) or by pulling the right levers to make money fall out of it (as Oldmixon wishes to do). The first line of his letter reads, 'If you ever had Compassion for a man most unjustly Suffering for his Zeal for a Cause you always espoused'. This is a highly sympathetic appeal – 'Compassion', 'Suffering' – but it is a sympathy that is activated by 'a Cause you always espoused', namely, the Whig cause (and, in some sense, the cause of the Hanoverian Succession).

Throughout the letter, Oldmixon maintains this curious mixture of personal pitifulness (designed to play upon Tonson's heartstrings) and political zeal; he turns himself into a Whig martyr, for whom personal, emotive sympathy is conflated with the great motivating cause of Whiggism. 'Hard will be my Case', he says, 'if while I am banishd in a Corner of ye Kingdom surrounded with Jacobites vilifyd insulted & having not a Minutes Ease my Friends will not endeavour that this fatal Absence of mine may not be my Ruin.' His 'Friends' must save him from his tragic situation in the midst of Jacobites, which has been brought about by his selfless work for the cause; it is as much of an emotional necessity as it is a political one. What this indicates is that the network being invoked here – a network centring on Newcastle and the Kit-Cat Club – was one in which a set of personal relationships was actuated and fostered by a transcendent ideological cause, which cause, in turn, became the cause of those persons and their relationships. Oldmixon does not call it 'the Whig cause'; he calls it, 'a Cause you always espoused'. The nature and importance of this spousely cause allowed it to draw together people from different walks of life who would be well-suited to aid, serve, and reward each other, and who, by working in unison, would be able to take hold of the means by which to benefit themselves and each other. This meant that there was an explicit and complex interplay between working for the abstract cause, and working for the individuals who made up that cause; an interplay that Oldmixon appealed to, and sought to take advantage of, in his letter to Tonson.

Obviously, this is making the discussion worryingly reminiscent of Namier. His arguments have been soundly refuted from a number of angles, and Walcott's interpretation – which, having applied Namier's arguments to the reign of Queen Anne, impinges still more closely on 1718 – has been comprehensively discredited by the work of Geoffrey Holmes.<sup>92</sup> But a somewhat more recent definition of party by the doyen of eighteenth-century party politics, Frank O'Gorman, does seem to apply here. For O'Gorman, 'a party is an organized group which pursues political power and thus political office. It endeavours to cultivate popular support for its beliefs and focuses its activities upon Parliament... such a definition is sufficiently flexible to allow parties to be

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<sup>92</sup> Linda Colley, *In Defiance of Oligarchy: The Tory Party 1714-60* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 85-117; H.T. Dickinson, *Liberty and Property: Political Ideology in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977), pp. 1-10; Holmes, *Politics Age of Anne*, especially pp. 6-49.

treated (at the same or different times) as vehicles of ideology, agencies for securing popular support, dispensers of patronage or instruments of government.<sup>93</sup> Party is here defined by its pursuit of a power located in the metropole and gained by the cultivation of popular support, where ideology, patronage, and government can all serve as both means to and ends of that power. O’Gorman emphasizes that these different constituent elements can come into play ‘at the same or different times’, suggesting that different persons, interest groups, or relationships might demonstrate differing recipes of these elements in the way that they conceptualize the party cause or in their conduct with regards to it.

Moreover, it may be argued that the ideological element is sometimes emphasized too strongly in scholarship on parties. Somewhat contrary to the tenets of the Geoffrey Holmes consensus, debate in the early eighteenth century seems to have focussed on personalities more often than on abstract ideological matters;<sup>94</sup> and there are clear continuities between the behaviour of the old-fashioned, much-maligned political cliques of the early modern kingdoms, and the political parties of the early eighteenth century. Newcastle himself later became a stalwart of the Walpolean regime and then the Old Corps Whig party which followed it, both of which groups had to fend off constant accusations that they had betrayed the principles of Whiggism, and both of which emphasized their Whig identity primarily by recourse to warnings about Jacobites. Newcastle spent his entire political career worrying about the actions of his fellow politicians, wondering about the fidelity of his ‘friends’, and seeking to reward his followers; his primary role and expertise was in managing court and government patronage on a nationwide scale.<sup>95</sup> He seems to have spent a great deal less time fretting about the niceties of Whiggism, or

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<sup>93</sup> Frank O’Gorman, *The Emergence of the British Two-Party System, 1760-1832* (London: Edward Arnold, 1982), p. viii.

<sup>94</sup> Periodicals, for example, tended to concern themselves primarily with the personalities and actions of public figures (such as Marlborough and Harley), historical figures (such as Thomas Wolsey), and fictional figures (such as the members of the Spectator club). Even the greatest ideological matter of all was whether the country should be ruled by James III (a person) or George I (a different person). For some examples of the heavy emphasis on individual persons (and their personal qualities) in political argument, or the tendency to understand politics by reference to individual persons (and their personal qualities), see e.g. *The Tatler*, numbers 4 (I, p. 44), 5 (I, pp. 51-3), 130 (II, p. 257), 193 (III, pp. 43-4) and *The Spectator*, number 174 (II, pp. 186-7), in *The Tatler*, ed. by Donald F. Bond 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987) and *The Spectator*, ed. by Bond.

<sup>95</sup> Browning, ‘Thomas Pelham-Holles’; Langford, *Polite and Commercial People*, pp. 14, 18, 43, 54, 188–89, 195, 206–12, 217–20, 223–32.

constructing justifications of his creed. Of course, he did not need to construct any such justifications, since that was the job of men like Oldmixon; but Oldmixon had to be paid for these services, and it was services like these which kept Newcastle in the power and the money. Politics was personal. Oldmixon's letter to Tonson does not offer any description of Whiggism, or any appeal to specifically Whig values. Instead, it offers the pitiful image of an old man, dying and miserable, having spent his life in the service of 'a Cause you [Tonson, personally] always espoused', now surrounded by a hideous band of Jacobites. The Whigs are outnumbered and oppressed; they must stick together, and help out their own; Oldmixon must be given the laureateship.

But they were more outnumbered in some areas than others. Oldmixon was on his own in Somerset, whereas Tonson was amidst a strong core of Whigs in London. Thus the final suggestion that Oldmixon's letter provides on the subject of the Kit-Cat Club network: the importance of London, and of physical proximity. Again, Oldmixon emphasizes this point at the very start of his letter: 'If you ever had Compassion for a Man most unjustly Suffering... which I shall most amply make appear when I come to London.' Here, he appears like the risen Jesus, thrusting himself before a doubting Tonson and showing him his wounds; those wounds will only gain credit if they are touched; and Oldmixon needs credit to pay for the laureateship. Immediately he carries on in this vein: 'If the Desire I have to return to Town & Evidence by Deeds what I can only now by Words can prevail upon a Generous Mind', then Oldmixon believes that Tonson will speak to Newcastle on his behalf. The Whig network to which Oldmixon makes appeal is explicitly London-based. Its leading members and operations are in London, and, if a Whig is to function within it and derive benefit from it properly, he must be present in the metropole. As well as emphasizing the importance of location to this network, and how centrally clustered it was, this rhetoric also reiterates the importance of the personal. Whiggism and Toryism were, of course, nationwide ideologies, uniting people across a vast geographical span; Oldmixon and his struggles with his Jacobite neighbours in Somerset are proof of that (although Oldmixon may have been exaggerating in this respect, so as to cast his personal situation in terms of a Whig-Tory struggle that would have resonated with Tonson). But it was nonetheless the case that Whiggism, at least, was centred on the activities and relationships of a relatively small, factional clique of Londoners. Oldmixon knew

this, and knew that he had to be present in London so as to prove his service in the Whig cause and gain the benefits that he deserved: his sufferings would not become real until he had shown the personal evidence of them to Tonson; his 'Words' would only become 'Deeds' once he had set foot in London.

The fact that Oldmixon lived so far from London was therefore a severe handicap to him, and rendered him only a peripheral member of the network to which he was making appeal. But what is interesting is the way in which he tried to circumvent this handicap, and even extract advantage from it. Just as his physical absence from London curtailed his practical ability to forward his claims, so that absence was used to demonstrate his zeal for the Whig cause, which zeal had come at the cost of his own person. Again, the importance of personal relationships becomes evident, but here constructed in an alternative, imagined form. In the absence of his *actual* person, Oldmixon creates a surrogate: an affective, ideal version of himself, placed before the Londoners so as to trigger a personal reaction in them. If he cannot be in London, then his bleeding wounds can be, reminding Tonson and Newcastle of the valiant work he has been doing for them amongst the Jacobite hordes of Somerset.

Ultimately, this attempt to make capital from his disability was not enough; he lost out to Eusden. Whether Eusden was living more often in Cambridge or London at this time is not clear, but, whatever the case, Eusden had been much more successful over the last couple of years in making friends and patrons in the sphere of London Whigs, and had played a bigger part in that sphere (for example, with his contributions to Steele's and Addison's productions).<sup>96</sup> Whether physically or imaginatively, he had done a better job of

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<sup>96</sup> There is not much surviving epistolary evidence of Eusden's connections, but *The Poetical Works of Mr. William Pattison, Late of Sidney College Cambridge (1727)*, pp. 37-8, does give some examples of the titular poet's correspondence with Eusden, Pattison seeking subscriptions for a planned volume of his poetry and asking for Eusden's help. In 1726, Eusden offered him, 'if, either there [in London], or here [in Cambridge], I can be of any little Assistance to you, you shall not ever want it'; Pattison wrote in reply, 'if you can oblige me with your Interest in Cambridge, or Recommendations here in Town, I know you will give me leave to depend upon them'. This would suggest some belief on Pattison's part that Eusden was indeed capable of exerting influence in both Cambridge and London. Eusden then appears a few pages later having recommended a doctor in London, who came to Pattison when he fell sick with the small pox in Edmund Curl's shop in London, although it is not clear whether Eusden was present there at the time or had recommended the doctor previously (pp. 44-5). After that he appears as one of the subscribers to Pattison's intended poetic miscellanies, designated '*Poet-Laureat*' and placed directly above Pope (p. 63); and then, further on, one of Pattison's poems is 'To Mr. Eusden, desiring his Corrections on a Poem' (pp. 157-8).

rendering himself present to the London Whigs, and to Newcastle and the Kit-Cat Club around which they were centred.

But Oldmixon's attempt is very telling. It reveals that this network to which he was appealing was a sort of imagined, nationwide community, bound by the abstract ideal of a Whig cause; but that it was centred on a real, London-based clique, operating according to their personal relationships. The laureateship, as a piece of court patronage designed for writers, was one of the prizes that held this network together; indeed, being designed for writers, and having a nationwide prominence, it was uniquely important in reifying this interdisciplinary network. But although it could thus function as a symbol and lubricant of the overall triumph of Whiggism, in practice its fate would be determined by a small band of metropolitan Whigs – peers, politicians, courtiers, literary figures – who would use it as a personal reward for whoever was most evidently serviceable before their eyes.

### **Case Study: Fashion**

By 1718, that London-based Whig world was already splitting, and the Kit-Cat Club collapsing as a result. Newcastle would enter into a protracted conflict with Steele over Drury Lane theatre, Steele holding one of the theatrical patents that Charles II had granted in 1660, Newcastle holding the Lord Chamberlain's vague powers over all matters theatrical; each man believing their authority to trump the others; Newcastle eventually triumphing, and proving the authority of court and government over an independent, commercial playhouse; an authority which would eventually be confirmed and strengthened immeasurably by the Licensing Act (1737).<sup>97</sup> By the time of Eusden's death in 1730, the Whigs were irrevocably fractured between the ruling Walpoleans (sometimes referred to by contemporaries as 'the court Whigs') and the opposition Whigs, the semi-literate Duke of Grafton was the Lord Chamberlain, and George II and Caroline were on the thrones.

To some extent, however, a similar case to 1718 is in evidence. Cibber was the manager of Drury Lane theatre (over which the Lord Chamberlain's

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<sup>97</sup> Beattie, *English Court*, p. 26; Hume, *Fielding Theatre*, pp. 3–14, 239–53.

authority had been proven during his time there). He was intimate with various Whig magnates, and, both as a highly successful playwright and as one of the men who chose what plays to perform, he had great influence in the world of letters. Publicly, he was identified with the ruling Whigs, and his massively successful *Non-Juror* had gained him the patronage of George I due to its rebuttal of Jacobitism. He can therefore be seen to have succeeded by the same criteria as those which Oldmixon unsuccessfully made appeal to; and, although there was no longer any Kit-Cat Club, his success would seem to indicate the operations of a similar network to that which had existed in 1718.

However, there is another angle on the 1730 appointment worth following, and it is relevant to subsequent appointments too. Henry Power has argued that a 'central feature of Scriblerian literature' was 'the contrast it draws between durable classical literature, capable of communicating its message across generations, and ephemeral modern works, written to tickle the palates of fickle consumers';<sup>98</sup> and in the years around 1730, it was according to this contrast that Pope, Swift, and their correspondents made sense of the laureateship, its holders, and the prime contenders for it. It has already been touched upon that they felt the laureateship to have been primarily contested between two men, Duck and Cibber, who enjoyed favour from the women at court, chiefly the queen; but a more thorough examination of their letters reveals a wider tendency to contrast themselves with those two favoured authors, and to articulate the contrast by reference to the idea of an ephemeral fashion that was not only commercial, but was equally (and connectedly) courtly and commercial. On the one hand, Pope et al were 'unfashionable', and were isolated from court; on the other, Duck and Gay were 'fashionable', and their fashionability derived from a courtly, female preference.

Pope set the tone in 1728, writing to Swift (as was quoted above): 'I am told the Gynocracy are of opinion, that they want no better writers than Cibber and the British Journalist; so that we [himself and Swift, the unfashionable writers] may live at quiet, and apply ourselves to more abstruse studies.'<sup>99</sup> A couple of years later he wrote to John Gay, just before Eusden's death became widely-known, that the 'bad taste' of the times was indicated by the fact that

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<sup>98</sup> Henry Power, *Epic Into Novel: Henry Fielding, Scriblerian Satire, and the Consumption of Classical Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 4.

<sup>99</sup> Swift, *Correspondence*, III, p. 265.



Eusden had the laurel, and that Duck enjoyed popularity. He went on, 'I hope this Phaenomenon of Wiltshire [Duck] has appear'd at Amesbury, or the Duchess [of Queensbury, whose seat was at Amesbury] will be thought insensible to all bright qualities and exalted genius's, in Court and country alike.'<sup>100</sup>

The Duchess of Queensbury was a close friend of Gay, and a correspondent of Pope and Swift. She had recently been banned from court due to having argued with Grafton and George II over Gay's *Polly*, the sequel to the *Beggar's Opera*, and she thus served as a kind of anti-court patroness, contrasted to the women of court by her superior taste and disregard for 'fashion'. Indeed, the same note was then rung in a letter from Gay and the Duchess to Swift, in November 1730. Gay, describing how happily isolated he was at Amesbury, wrote, 'I do not Envy either Sir Robert, or Stephen Duck, who is the favorite Poet of the Court. I hear sometimes from Mr Pope, & scarce from any body else; Were I to live here never so long I believe I should never think of London, but I cannot help thinking of you.'<sup>101</sup> Again, the contrast was between the isolated band of unfashionable poets, keeping up only their communications with each other – 'I hear sometimes from Mr Pope, & scarce from any body else' – and the favourites of London and the court, Walpole in politics, Duck in poetry.

One interesting thing about this contrast is that it did not tend to be phrased in terms of politics. The one exception was Gay's passing reference to Walpole, and even here the Prime Minister was being used only as a shorthand for someone enjoying court favour and London bustle. Instead, the emphasis was on 'taste' and 'fashion', with the bad taste of the court, and especially of the court women, contrasted with the good sense and good taste of the Duchess of Queensbury. Admittedly, Swift and Pope had reasons to avoid explicit political discussion in their letters;<sup>102</sup> but it is nonetheless striking that Pope, Swift, and their correspondents wrote consistently in this way, and portrayed the matter of the laureateship through this lens. Indeed, when Swift first reported the news

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<sup>100</sup> Pope, *Correspondence*, III, p. 143.

<sup>101</sup> Swift, *Correspondence*, III, p. 415.

<sup>102</sup> As Samuel Johnson was to observe mockingly later on, Swift and Pope were always paranoid about their letters being read by the government, and tended to think of themselves as standing above the political fray. Johnson, 'Pope', in *The Lives of the Poets*, III, pp. 1177-8. See also Goldgar, *Walpole and the Wits*, pp. 28-49.

about the appointment to Gay and the Duchess, he wrote, 'But the vogue of our few honest folks here [in Dublin] is that Duck is absolutely to Succeed Eusden in the Lawrell, the contention being between Concannan or Theobald, or some other Hero of the Dunciad.'<sup>103</sup> Even here, Swift could not help framing the news in such a way as to place the laureateship in opposition to Pope's satirical epic; even here, Swift could not resist using a phrase like 'the vogue' when mentioning the news of Duck's impending success.

It has already been noted that Lady Elizabeth Germain, when writing to Swift shortly after Cibber's appointment, mentioned the possibility that it was the Queen who had chosen the laureate in the same sentence as she mentioned her want of acquaintance with Pope.<sup>104</sup> Whether or not this shows her to have been repeating news that originated with Pope, it is again striking that Pope should have been presented in immediate contrast with the laureate: Lady Elizabeth was 'sorry' for her lack of acquaintance with Pope, while the queen 'deserves' the poetry of such a laureate as Cibber. A month later came Swift's letter to Pope in which he suggested that 'the Court' either selected the laureate, or could have interceded with Grafton to have had someone else chosen, had it so desired. Just before this speculation came an apology from Swift; he wrote that Pope had been 'hard on me for saying you were a Poet in favour at Court: I profess it was writ to me either by Lord Bol. or the Doctor. You know favor is got by two very contrary qualitys, one is fear, the other by ill taste; as to Cibber...'.<sup>105</sup> Yet again, the mention of Cibber's appointment was framed in a wider discussion about 'ill taste' and 'favour at Court'; yet again, the contrast was between Pope and Cibber, even if Swift seems to have let the contrast lapse in a previous letter, and been reprimanded for it by Pope. Presumably, the letter in which Pope reprimanded Swift also grouped together the matters of 'ill taste' and 'favour at Court' with that of Cibber's appointment; this is the sense given by Swift's formulation, '...ill taste; as to Cibber...'.<sup>105</sup>

Lastly, in 1732, Swift wrote a letter to the Duchess in which he expounded on what a bad courtier she was. Indeed, she was not even qualified to be a mere 'maid of honour'; there was no place for her in Pope's 'Gynocracy' of sycophantic court women spreading the fashions set by their queen. Swift,

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<sup>103</sup> Swift, *Correspondence*, III, p. 421.

<sup>104</sup> Swift, *Correspondence*, III, p. 441.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid*, III, p. 459.

enumerating the ways in which she failed as a courtier, went on, 'you are neither a free-thinker, nor can sell bargains... you pretend to be respected for qualityes which have been out of fashion ever since you were almost in your cradle... your contempt for a fine petticoat is an infalible mark of disaffection, which if further confirmed by your ill tast for wit, in preferring two old fashioned Poets before Duck or Cibber; besides you spell in such a manner as no Court Lady can read, & write in such an old fashioned Style, as none of them can understand.'<sup>106</sup> Here, Swift presented a comprehensive package of the fashionable court woman and her debased taste. He thrice bantered the Duchess for being 'out of fashion': in terms of her serious 'qualityes', her taste in 'wit', and, more trivially, her handwriting; and he demonstrated her 'disaffection' for the court by her taste in clothes and her taste in poets.

Thus Swift portrayed a court in which vice, irreligion, and corruption were jumbled together with the ruling fashions in clothing, wit, and handwriting, and where a debased female taste was characteristic of a degraded courtly ethos.<sup>107</sup> Again, Swift stressed the contrast between Lady Queensbury's preference for the unfashionable poets and the courtly preference for Duck and Cibber (who both, by now, enjoyed remunerative marks of court favour); and his close linking of 'petticoats' with 'wit', as well as his reference to 'Court Ladies' in the same line, indicates that he was thinking particularly in terms of a female court preference. To Pope, Swift, and their friends, then, the matter was clear. While the court politicians destroyed the country with their underhand practices and misrule, the women of the court, led by the benign patroness Queen Caroline, set a fashion for (amongst other things) bad poets, principally Duck and Cibber. These poets were frivolous, vapid, and lacking in integrity; indeed, it was necessary and inevitable that they be so, since they were the mere trinkets of a gynocratic court fashion; but, as a fashion, they would be swept away in time, leaving serious writers like Pope and Swift to stand proud before posterity. It was as a mocking inversion of this theme that Pope, in one of the earliest letters quoted here, stated that Duck and the laureate (at that time, Eusden) would stand as monuments to 'our ancestors' of the present 'bad taste'.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid, IV, p. 73.

<sup>107</sup> On notions of the Walpole government's corruption and misrule, and Pope, Swift and Gay's subscription to such notions, see Kramnick, *Bolingbroke and His Circle*, pp. 56-83, 206-34.

<sup>108</sup> Pope, *Correspondence*, III, p. 143.

In this interpretation, then, the appointment of Cibber, and Duck's nearness to being appointed, were the result not so much of the workings of a political faction, as of a courtly fashion set by the patronage and favour of Queen Caroline. As with the Kit-Cat Club, this fashion, though it was centred on a small nucleus of Londoners – in this case, the court women, and an obliging, semi-literate Lord Chamberlain – diffused across the rest of the nation. Pope and Swift's interpretation was based on a solipsistic sense of contrast in which their own independence of mind and greatness of talents were highlighted by reference to the lesser poets who enjoyed a gaudy, transitory favour in the present day but whom posterity would treat with ignominy. Yet it is nonetheless significant that Pope and his correspondents should have settled on Cibber and Duck to provide this antithetical role, or that they should have insisted on viewing Cibber, Duck, and the laureateship within this framework. Although the Scriblerian contrast identified by Power, between durable classical literature and ephemeral modern works, usually and most evidently played out by reference to a commercial, consumerist public, it was here being consistently cast with reference to court favour. As in *The Dunciad*, the modern, dull, degraded culture was presided over by a queen.

Moreover, their interpretation can be shown to be accurate in at least some particulars. Helped along by Caroline's favour for him, Duck did indeed become a 'Phaenomenon' with the reading public. It has already been noted that she gave him various material rewards; and there were perhaps ten pirate editions of his poems between 1730 and 1733. His most productive and rewarding time as a poet came between the start of Caroline's patronage of him and her death in 1737.<sup>109</sup> Cibber's success as a writer had different and much older foundations, and his appointment to the laureateship demonstrates the overlap between commercial popularity and courtly fashion in a different way to the case of Duck. Pope, like everyone else in the eighteenth century, thought very highly of Cibber's *The Careless Husband*; but otherwise he found Cibber to be a great debaucher of public taste, overseeing a theatrical fare of pantomime, farce, dross, and mutilations; and he was outraged at the popular, commercial success that Cibber enjoyed, finding it indicative of the bad taste of the times.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Davis, *Duck*, pp. 40-93; Stephens and Jones, 'Duck'.

<sup>110</sup> For Pope's opinions of Cibber, see e.g. the four-book version of Pope, *The Dunciad Variorum* (1743) in Alexander Pope, *The Poems of Alexander Pope*, ed. by John Butt (London: Routledge, 1996; first published 1963), pp. 317-459; McGirr, *Partial Histories*, pp. 2-5, 131-5.

This success owed nothing to Caroline's patronage, but it helped carry him into the favour of the royal family. By 1730, his work would have been very well-known and much enjoyed by the court; he had been entertaining the royal household for years, and it had been in 1728 that Pope had claimed the 'Gynocracy' to 'want no better writers than Cibber and the British Journalist'. Cibber's final comedy, *The Provok'd Husband* (1728) was dedicated to Caroline, and began with the words, 'The *English* Theatre throws itself, with This Play, at Your MAJESTY's Feet, for Favour and Support'.<sup>111</sup> Here, Cibber explicitly brought the commercial theatre together with courtly, queenly favour; and indeed, the royal family had attended the play for one of its first performances.<sup>112</sup>

Whatever Caroline's feelings of indulgence for Duck, she and the members of her household were far more familiar with Cibber, and recognized him as one of the leading figures of literary and London-based entertainment. He was, like Duck, fashionable, and it was a fashion that encompassed Caroline and her court, as well as the reading and theatre-going public. In his case, the role of the 'Gynocracy' with regards to the fashion was different than in Duck's, but Cibber's dedication of *The Provok'd Husband* emphasizes the fact that it did indeed have a role, and so too does his appointment as laureate. If Pope, Swift, and their correspondents are to be believed, Cibber's appointment, and Duck's almost-appointment, came at the hands of Caroline and her court ladies, who presided over a literary 'fashion' which stretched out over London and beyond. It was this fashion which Duck and Cibber were benefiting from, and, by bestowing the laureateship on Cibber, Caroline confirmed both the fashion itself, and the role of her court as its spiritual president.

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<sup>111</sup> *The Provok'd Husband* (1728), Sig. A2r. This play had been begun by Sir John Vanbrugh, who had left it unfinished at his death; Cibber completed it, wrote the prefatory materials, prologue and epilogue, produced it and performed in it. The eventual work was about a third Vanbrugh's, two thirds Cibber's. For more on matters of authorship, see Peter Dixon, 'Introduction', in Sir John Vanbrugh and Colley Cibber, *The Provoked Husband*, ed. by Peter Dixon (London: Edward Arnold, 1975), pp. xiii-xxvii (pp. xviii-xxv).

<sup>112</sup> Dixon, 'Introduction', p. xxvi.

## Case Study: Pye

These two case studies have shown how certain networks might carry a poet to the laureateship, and to an extent they have provided a pseudo-Namierite proof as to the importance of connections and personalities. Yet they have also shown that ideals, or even ideologies, were intrinsically bound up with the functional workings of the relevant networks. If Oldmixon was attempting to make himself appear present and serviceable to his superiors, then he was also appealing to the qualities which were important to those superiors and which gave the network its coherence and rationale: the Whig cause. Likewise, Cibber was fashionable not just because he was liked by the right people, but because his work had those qualities which made the right people like it. In the final case study – Pye’s letters to Pitt – the relationship between ideal merit and the practicalities of patronage will be more specifically explored.

This chapter has already shown that there were various different rationale and criteria that a poet could appeal to, or profit by, in the contest to become laureate, and that different networks operated in different ways. Throughout the period, there was generally some sense that the laureate should ‘deserve’ the laurel, and that it should be handed to someone who ‘deserved’ it. Oldmixon protested, ‘Long have I been in the Service of the Muse and the Press without any Reward’; a century later, the laureateship was decided on the basis that, ‘Scott was the greatest poet of the day, & to Scott therefore they had written to offer it.’<sup>113</sup> Yet the sense in which a poet ‘deserved’ the laurel was neither simple nor straightforward. The notion of ‘merit’ did not necessarily refer to some pure ideal of poetic merit, but it did usually at least overlap, or mesh with, some such ideal.

A good starting point in this consideration is provided by John Beattie, in his 1967 study of George I’s court. Exploring the reasons behind court appointments, he observes that, while a candidate’s ‘ability’ was sometimes referred to in support of their claim for a post, it was never unmixed with patronage.<sup>114</sup> He gives as an example Thomas Burnet, a loyal Whig writer, who spent several years soliciting and attending on great men in the early years of George I’s reign, fruitlessly hoping for a place, and eventually receiving an

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<sup>113</sup> *CLRS*, 2305. See also 2307.

<sup>114</sup> Beattie, *English Court*, pp. 152-3.

unsought-for office which had no relation to his own qualities or expertise. Likewise, when Theobald was disappointed of the laureateship in 1730, he asked Warburton whether he ought to stay on at court, continuing to solicit great men in the hope of a place; the attempt upon the laureateship was thus potentially not the end, but the beginning of the search for court patronage, despite the fact that no other position would have suited Theobald's activities as well as the laureateship. Something similar can be seen in Pye's interactions with Pitt. The two logics – 'merit' and 'interest', in Cibber's terms<sup>115</sup> – sometimes appear in distinct, as well as in elided, operation.

The Chatham Papers in the National Archives have several letters from around this time from Pye to Pitt, and they show him constantly wheedling and badgering his political master with all the adroitness of a seasoned veteran.<sup>116</sup> In 1784 he wrote to Pitt, 'I am really both ashamed & hurt to trespass so often on that time which I know is so fully employed'; and he went on to discuss the expenses that had been incurred in his election campaign, which he submitted 'to your own consideration'.<sup>117</sup> The next surviving letter is from July 1790, just after Pye's appointment as laureate. Pye wrote to inform Pitt of Salisbury's offer to him, 'which I have accepted, but as that office is by no means one of profit, I flatter myself it will not interfere with the kind intentions you had the goodness to express concerning me in regard to an application I made respecting another appointment at the close of the last session of Parliament.'<sup>118</sup> Here, Pye barely seemed to care for the laureateship; Pitt, having evidently been pestered for a position, decided to have Pye made laureate as a means of fulfilling the patronal obligation that was being demanded of him; and Pye, whose financial difficulties required a more substantial remedy, was keen to ensure that the laureateship would not be thought a sufficient recompense for the place-hunting capital that he had built up, therefore reminding Pitt of his earlier claims as quickly as possible. His claim was couched in such unassuming terms as, 'I flatter myself', and was presented as evidence of Pitt's 'kind intentions' and

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<sup>115</sup> See full quotation above. Cibber, *Apology*, I, p. 35.

<sup>116</sup> For the most part, he was advancing his own cause; but he is also found trying to gain patronage for another man, William Pratt, in 1785. Pye to Pratt, 27 June 1785, TNA, PRO 30/8/169, f. 15; Pratt to George Rose, 20 August 1787, TNA, PRO 30/8/169, f. 18

<sup>117</sup> Pye to Pitt, 27 July 1784, TNA, PRO 30/8/169, f. 256.

<sup>118</sup> Pye to Pitt, 16 July 1790, TNA, PRO 30/8/169, f. 258.

'goodness', rather than of Pye's demandingness; but it was nonetheless a fairly blunt reminder.

In his subsequent letters, Pye became more obsequious and wheedling still, and gave further evidence of how assiduously he could pester Pitt in hope of patronage. He explained to Pitt in 1791 that 'I did myself the honor of waiting on you yesterday. But as I am fully sensible how precious your time always is... I would by no means wish to intrude on your leisure by requesting the favour of a personal interview, but as you Sir had the goodness to think of me for a situation in the County of Berks, where I believe there is now no probability of a vacancy... I hope you will pardon the liberty I take in requesting your remembrance of me on some other occasion.' He then explained that he had come to London due to a vacancy appearing in the Tax Office, but he wrote 'rather from the desire of offering myself to your recollection than the presumption of pointing out any particular mode for the exercise of the kind intentions you have had the goodness to express towards me.'<sup>119</sup> Again, Pye's rhetoric cast the proposed transaction in terms of Pitt's goodness and superiority, and portrayed Pye himself as a little supplicant worm, so wormy as to be horrified at himself for even daring to pop his head above the soil. But behind the rhetoric was another fairly blunt estimation of Pye's place-hunting capital and of what he wished to spend it on. Since he had earlier been able to acquire a promise from Pitt – that he should have a situation in Berkshire – he now wished to trade that promise in for a position of equivalent value, in the Tax Office. A couple of weeks later, Pye, writing from a coffeehouse in London, explained that the aforementioned Berkshire situation (now identified as that of Receiver of the Land Tax) was vacant after all.<sup>120</sup> Clearly, although a place-hunter was not too fussy about what places he ended up with, it helped to have a hawkish appreciation for where vacancies did or did not exist, and to be able to deal in specificities, rather than vagaries, with one's patron, even if those specificities would then be traded in for some other specificity at a later date.

Pye went on to explain that he had only applied to Pitt, and to no one else, even though some of his friends in the government had suggested that he apply elsewhere; and Pye expressed his confidence that there was no need to apply elsewhere anyway, since Mr Steele had assured him of Pitt's good

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<sup>119</sup> Pye to Pitt, 3 April 1791, TNA, PRO 30/8/169, ff. 260-b.

<sup>120</sup> Pye to Pitt, 27 April 1791, TNA, PRO 30/8/169, ff. 262-b.



intentions towards him.<sup>121</sup> Thus Pye managed to express his loyalty to Pitt even as he hinted at that loyalty's lapsing, and he made clear which quality made the difference between loyalty and its absence: Pitt's intentions. This was an almost absurd articulation of the nature of the patronal relationship, in which the client was a paragon of loyalty, but only to the patron who secured him his just deserts. Pye's letter then continued in a stream of obsequiousness and diffidence, in the course of which he finally mentioned some personal quality of his own, namely, that he would be utterly incorrupt in the role of Receiver of the Land Tax, and 'indeed shall be rather anxious to get the public money out of my possession'. Finally, in 1795, Pye wrote to Pitt again, telling him, 'Mr Neville having communicated to me your good wishes to assist me in general, tho' it was not possible in the particular mode which he was so obliging as to mention, I take the liberty of mentioning a small thing now vacant in the Excise'. The salary of this office was small, but it would be useful in accumulation with Pye's other salaries. Of course, Pye did not want to seem to be 'grasping at any unreasonable accumulation of favours', but salaries in public office were irregularly paid, and Pye was reliant on his income from them; not to mention that the expense of living in London rendered public office more an injury than a benefit to him.<sup>122</sup> Here, then, Pye finally discovered his inner Oldmixon, plaintively prostrating himself before his patron and imploring his pecuniary pity.

Again, as with Theobald, the bestowal of the laureateship was not the end, but almost the beginning, of the quest for patronage. Although most of the letters date from after Pye's appointment, it is evident how Pye went about achieving the laurel (and his other positions), too. Only once in the course of these letters did Pye appeal to his own personal qualities; only once did he appeal to his own neediness. For the most part, Pye's emphases lay elsewhere. The key was to be persistent and rigorous, but to attribute that persistence and rigour to the bounteousness of the patron. Pye, like Oldmixon, knew that he had to be continually before Pitt's eyes, ideally in person, but, when that was not possible, through writing. And he knew that he could not trust to vagaries or to chance; he had to construct a continuous narrative, or even a sort of balance account, of all his former dealings with Pitt, continually building up capital, auditing that capital to Pitt, and then cashing it in when a worthwhile reward

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<sup>121</sup> Pye to Pitt, 27 April 1791, TNA, PRO 30/8/169, ff. 262-b.

<sup>122</sup> Pye to Pitt, 15 April 1795, TNA, PRO 30/8/169, f. 264.

materialized. Like any good accountant, Pye needed to be able to cook the books, turning everything into more capital for himself; and he needed to be able to leap upon any irregularity of Pitt's, proving that Pitt had not kept up his side of the bargain properly and was still obliged to pay up. Pye lauded Pitt as a great man, a great statesman, a great benefactor, and a generous mind, and he showed himself to be unendingly grateful and devoted. But he also did enough to indicate that this valuation of Pitt, and of their relationship, was bound up with the balance sheet.

It was to such a man, and for such activities, that Pitt allocated the laureateship. As with Rowe and Theobald, the appointing of a laureate here appears to have been little more than the distribution of a vacant position to a place-hunter who had been agitating for a salary. On each occasion, some great person, having been courted for some time by various importunate suitors, learned that, due to the death of the previous laureate, there was now an open, salaried position, and therefore gave it to whichever suitor had been most importunate and had built up the strongest claim to favour. The laureateship was but one more bauble in the endless round of patronage.

This, however, is only one aspect of the matter. It does not cover, or sit well with, all the various motives described throughout this chapter, or all the various people concerned with the laureateship; it certainly does not sit well with the fact that, as mentioned above, the laureates tended to be the amongst the few leading literary figures of their day. Gray, Warton, and Hayley were all selected for the laurel without making the slightest effort to seek it for themselves, and at least two of them seem to have been offered it for little reason other than their stature as poets. Even in the case of Pye, his letter of 1790 suggests that he had not actively sought the laurel. His appointment actually seemed to perturb him a little; he was anxious to ensure that it did nothing to upset the balance account that he had been carefully constructing, and which he wished to use so as to acquire a more profitable post. Pitt may have offered it to him as a sop to his incessant importunities; but the offer also seems to have stood somewhat apart from the regular game of patronage transactions. Beattie's observation remains sound: it is not easy to disentangle 'ability/merit' from 'patronage/interest'. Generally speaking, it is not even relevant to make the attempt; and in the case of the laureateship, whenever the

cause of an appointment seems to err more one way than to the other, it is rather towards the ideal of pure merit than away from it.

## Conclusion

To some extent, this distinction between ‘merit’ and ‘interest’ can be mapped onto the distinction between the commercial and the courtly, explored in the last chapter. As this chapter has shown with regards to some of the networks detailed above, the court does not generally seem to have been the first or most directly lucrative evaluator of poetic merit; Cibber, for example, had achieved his leading place in the theatre through the popularity of his plays with the theatre-going public; Gray had made his name through his elegy and his odes; even Oldmixon, insofar as he wished to argue his qualities, pointed to his ‘Service of the Muse and the Press’. It then required ‘interest’ – solicitations, attendance, friends in high places – to extract the laureateship from the court; patronage which would presumably mobilize the claims of merit to some degree, but, as in the cases of Eusden and Pye, perhaps not to a very marked degree. The nature of the merit in question, too, was a matter of variability, and depended on the particular network which was coming into play. In 1718, merit could refer to the service for a Whig party cause; in 1730, it could refer to fashionability amongst (apparently) the women of court. The network concerned would then use this merit as one of the raw materials of patronage, using it so as to acquire the office of poet laureate for whichever writer had a sufficiently convincing stock of that merit and was personally best-placed with the other people who made up that network. The workings and balance of that equation were different each time, as were the types of network and the types of person coming into play; however, the end result was that the poets selected for the laurel tended to be amongst the most popular and esteemed writers of their day. Ultimately, some notion that the laurel ought to go to a worthy poet, or even (as was said explicitly in 1813) to ‘the greatest poet of the day’, seems to have factored quite strongly throughout the period. The laurel was used to strengthen and legitimize various networks, and to establish the court’s importance to those networks; but it was also used, more generally speaking, to link the court with values that had been cultivated amongst the reading and

theatre-going public, by showing that the ultimate validation of a celebrated poet came in the form of courtly office.

In the Introduction to this thesis, the randomness and contingency of the laureate succession appeared in evidence. This chapter has now traced certain patterns and consistencies, and it has shown that the history of the laureate appointments follows (amongst other things) the contours of literary history and the history of the royal family. There remains a large degree of variability in terms of who was appointed laureate, why, and by whose agency; and yet, even in this respect, the laureateship was representative of Hanoverian society. Poetry was not some discrete notion or institution; it did not pertain exclusively to the marketplace, or to the nation, or to the public, or to any such thing. It was mixed up amongst competing agencies and rationales, each valuing it in different ways. Political parties, lordly families, the court, and writers and artists themselves all had their own claims on its meaning, and sought to utilize and legitimate it in their own ways. Such being the case, it is unsurprising that the history of the laureateship should appear, in some ways, random and inconsistent, as if no one really knew what to do with the office, or had any fixed notion of its purpose. In fact, there were too many people who knew what to do with it, and too many purposes for it. Throughout it all, however, there remained an ideal of poetic merit, and a sense that its proper recognition came in the form of a courtly office designed specifically for poets.

## **Chapter Four. Parnassus Reported: The Public Laureate, c.1757-1813**

The office of poet laureate was, across the long eighteenth century, usually a highly prominent feature of the English literary landscape. John Dryden, the most highly-regarded writer of the late seventeenth century, was routinely referred to as 'the laureate', and the office played a significant part in how he and his works were perceived by others. Colley Cibber, from the time of his appointment in 1730, likewise became known as 'the laureate', and in this capacity was mentioned, discussed, and criticized innumerable times in print. Even when held by less famous writers, the office itself always attracted interest and commentary. The laureateship was not forgotten about during either Tate's or Eusden's tenure; at their deaths, as at the death of every other laureate, there was a buzz of activity amongst the literary community, with even those writers who were not hopeful for the office themselves showing an interest in who should receive it.

The reigns of George II and George III, however, were to see the laureate become a public figure in an unprecedented manner. As the volume and sophistication of print culture developed – particularly with the flourishing of newspapers – the relationship between laureate and readers became newly familiar. When the laureate had become responsible for the Birthday and New Year's odes, those odes had started to appear as individual publications and in newspapers, but their circulation had been limited and uncertain compared to what was to come. By the accession of George III, and over the course of his reign, it was to become standard for the odes to be printed prominently in newspapers, and for a lively discussion of the laureate and his odes to be carried on in this same medium. The world of the reading public, as it took shape under George III, was a world in which the laureate held a unique, and uniquely-important, place.

Previous scholarship on the literary world of the late eighteenth century has tended to be most interested in poetry by the likes of Gray and Collins, and criticism and canon-formation as carried out by the likes of Samuel Johnson; and the laureateship has not been found particularly relevant. As will be discussed in Chapter Five, scholars from the 1980s onwards have sought to widen the cast list of eighteenth-century poetry and literary criticism, and even

to pay more attention to the importance of readers and various forms of ephemeral activity with regards to these matters; yet the traditional names nonetheless retain their primacy, and this is partly because there has arguably not yet been any substantial effort to incorporate the evidence of newspapers into considerations of matters which are felt to have more properly played out in more durable mediums. More widely speaking, there are obvious difficulties in dealing with the overlap between the realms of the quotidian and the canonical.<sup>1</sup> But a change of focus – a change of source-base and assumptions – presents a different picture, and brings just such an overlap to the fore. This chapter will correct the balance by giving due attention to newspapers, reconstituting a literary world which may initially seem more concerned with the quotidian than with the canonical, but which in fact tended to make sense of the quotidian by references to such wider narratives as that of national identity, the national literary heritage, and the judgement of a hypothetical posterity. In this world – the great marketplace of the reading public, where journalists and readers flocked indistinguishably together, sharing news and opinion, their voices bubbling and clamouring – writers like Gray and Johnson were still towering figures; but so too were the poets laureate.

This chapter will also provide something of a corrective to those which have preceded it. Until now, this thesis has looked mostly at behind-the-scenes matters, and at how the laureateship was treated and conceived by those people who were directly involved with it. This chapter, by contrast, will try to establish how the laureateship was understood by everyone else: the consumers of literary productions, and those who, in print, discussed, codified, and conceptualized those productions, from critics and poets to the aforesaid newspaper writers and newspaper correspondents. It will try to establish what role the laureate was perceived to have, and how much or how little the office was held in esteem; questions in which the themes of national identity, partisan politics, and the conceptualization of literature will prove significant. Firstly, this chapter will describe the relevant themes and scholarship; then it will give a

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<sup>1</sup> Roger Lonsdale's *The New Oxford Book of Eighteenth Century Verse* (1984) is particularly associated with the change of attitude and expansion of scope to scholarship on eighteenth-century poetry, and David Fairer's *English Poetry of the Eighteenth Century 1700-1789* (2003) is a good example of recent approaches, with understudied poets and ephemera making significant appearances, but with the primary focus remaining on the traditional canonical names of eighteenth-century poetry. For more on these matters, see Chapter Five.

wide overview of how the press discussed the laureateship; and then, it will explore the press's treatment of the individual laureateships of Whitehead, Warton, and Pye. These investigations will give rise to further conclusions about the relationship between court and public, especially as it played out under George III (1760-1820). George III's reign correlated roughly with the tenures of the three aforesaid laureates –Whitehead (1757-1785), Warton (1785-1790), and Pye (1790-1813) – and it is this approximate period which forms the timeframe for this chapter.

### **Themes and Context**

The Introduction and Chapter Two have already described the key historical concepts with which this thesis is engaging, and their related historiographies. However, it is worthwhile re-focussing these matters in relation to the reign of George III.<sup>2</sup> The concepts to be dealt with will be the development of the public, and its commercial and national associations; the development of literature as an idea and as an institution; the identity of the reading public; and the position of the monarchy with regards to these other concepts. Each will be elaborated on in turn.

First, then, is the commercialization of culture and the associated development of a public element in British society, which element historians have tended to link to the numerical expansion, increasing wealth, and increasing assertiveness of a middle class, and which was given greatest scope for action in London. For the late eighteenth century, in the account given its definitive form by Brewer, these developments proceeded apace.<sup>3</sup> The various formats and forums of a public culture gained new quantitative heights and social prominence, with increasing popularity for such things as public concerts, circulating libraries, and pleasure gardens and with newspaper numbers booming in terms of both circulation figures and individual titles.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> For this and the following paragraphs, see the material cited in the Introduction and Chapter Two, as well as that which the following footnotes newly or particularly draw attention to.

<sup>3</sup> Brewer, *Pleasures*, passim.

<sup>4</sup> E.g. Hammond suggests that 1744 was a watershed year in the transformation of poets into professionals, and that the transition from patronized writing to marketed writing continued over the following decades; Raven notes that book production exploded in scale from the 1740s to the 1780s; and Siskin summarizes the late eighteenth century thus: 'A commodified culture in

It was also during the reigns of George II and especially George III that this public, with its newfound social and economic stature, is generally seen as starting to assert itself politically.<sup>5</sup> On the one hand, it generated and insisted on a particular identity for itself, namely, 'the public', 'the people', or even, especially as the century wore on, 'the nation'. References to these overlapping entities, and to more evocative and politically-potent versions of them – such as 'the sense of the people' or 'public opinion' – became increasingly common in political discourse, whether carried out in newspapers or in Westminster. Nor were these terms usually understood in a negative light, as with older terms like 'the mob'. 'The public' was something which ought to be listened to; it was the body of respectable, well-informed citizens whose principles were sound and whose activities were essential to British wealth and power. On the other hand, the middle class began to act on these ideas and this self-identification, proclaiming its right to a greater role in the political life of the nation and launching campaigns to achieve this role. This middle-class agitation was most forceful and concerted over the Wilkesite affair and during the American Revolutionary War (as the laureate, Whitehead, found to his cost).

There is ample room for uncertainty and disagreement in interpreting these matters. For one thing, 'the public' was a flexible concept that could be understood in different ways and employed for different reasons by different agents; some historians have even been quite dismissive of the term, and of similar terms, as they were used in political discourse, because their material signification was so vague and their usage so rhetorical.<sup>6</sup> Even if there was a 'public' – in the sense of a national body of persons who were interested in

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the form of a national tradition highlighted by rising genres and valorised by institutions of criticism gave us literature.' Hammond, 'Poet as Professional', pp. 147-51; James Raven, 'Publishing and bookselling 1660-1780', in *English Literature, 1660-1780*, ed. by Richetti, pp. 13-36 (pp. 15-6); Siskin, 'More is different', p. 822. For pleasure gardens, and for wider discussion of the links between commercialization, commodification, and the middle class, see Jonathan Conlin, 'Introduction', in *The Pleasure Garden: From Vauxhall to Coney Island*, ed. by Jonathan Conlin (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), pp. 1-28 (pp. 2-13).

<sup>5</sup> For the political dimension of the 'public' of the middle and late eighteenth century, see especially Hannah Barker, *Newspapers, Politics, and Public Opinion in Late Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), pp. 1-94; John Brewer, *Party Ideology and Popular Politics at the Accession of George III* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976); Stephen Conway, *The British Isles and the War of American Independence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 103-8, 128-65; Conway, *War, State, and Society*, pp. 165-9; Stephen M. Lee, *George Canning and Liberal Toryism, 1801-1827* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2008), pp. 108-18, 131; Jonathan Parry, *The Rise and Fall of Liberal Government in Victorian Britain* (London: Yale University Press, 1993), pp. 6, 23-36; Wilson, *Sense of the People*.

<sup>6</sup> E.g. Boyd Hilton, *A Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People?: England 1783-1846* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 311.



current affairs, and who were willing and able to express their opinions on such matters in a way that would reach the ears of each other and of the political elite – then it is unclear how historians should delineate this body or determine the nature of its opinions. Even if ‘public opinion’ was making itself heard in newspapers and in Westminster, it would necessarily be in a distorted fashion; and the nature of the dialogues that existed between newspapers and readers, and between politicians and citizens, are endlessly debatable. Moreover, while there does seem to be much sense in relating this newly-assertive public to the middle class, the relation is not a simple or exclusive one. The public, its political demands, and the values which formed part of its identification, went beyond the middle class; they were even, in some senses, entirely classless. Meanwhile, much of public opinion actually rejected the demands for a reform of the political system, proudly supporting the king and his ministers, and abhorring John Wilkes and the Association movement.

There are also chronological developments to bear in mind. As described above, Habermas has located the beginnings of his public sphere in the later Stuart period, and writers of that period would often use the word ‘public(k)’ to mean something referring to the generality of people.<sup>7</sup> Yet this public was, especially in relation to cultural matters, distinctly rooted in a set of London-based activities. It was envisaged as operating through the sorts of places to which *The Spectator* had famously wished to bring ‘philosophy’ – clubs, coffeehouses, tea-tables, and closets – and the word ‘public(k)’ was still more commonly used as an adjective than as a noun.<sup>8</sup> In cultural matters, when writers referred to their hypothetical audience and its collective judgments, ‘the Town’ was more often their preferred designation. By contrast, the public of George III’s reign was more distinctly a noun, and less distinctly a ‘Town’. It had also become more distinguished from the new idea of the ‘ton’: the quick-talking, quick-living, well-born men and women who imagined themselves as the pinnacle of London life.<sup>9</sup> George III’s public was more provincial and more numerous than the public discussed in Chapter Two.

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<sup>7</sup> For the ‘public sphere’ and its application to the later Stuart period, see Chapter Two and works cited there, especially Knights, *Misrepresentation*, pp. 48–52, 67, 94–99; *Politics of the Public Sphere*, ed. by Lake and Pincus; Raymond, ‘The Newspaper, Public Opinion, and the Public Sphere’, pp. 109–40.

<sup>8</sup> *Spectator* 10, in *The Spectator*, ed. by Bond, I, p. 44.

<sup>9</sup> Whitehead used this phrase often to refer to the set of people around Lady Jersey (future mistress of the Prince Regent, amongst others); e.g. Bod, Eng misc d. 3845, f. 157b.

It was also more overtly connected with ideas of the British nation. As described previously, the eighteenth century has been seen as a key period for the development of British national identity, and this development is generally linked to such ideas as that of a rising middle class and an emerging public opinion.<sup>10</sup> The public was a national public, and its opinion was 'the sense of the nation'. It concerned itself with national affairs, and it desired to speak on the national stage. Rather than inhering in a London coffeehouse, it was to be found in the vast mass of sturdy, respectable, patriotic Britons who lived and worked all over the country, their opinions formed by nothing else than their own good sense and good values. Newspapers kept them well-informed, and strove to articulate their opinion when appropriate; but their opinion could also be seen at work in such political activities as elections, petitions, addresses, and instructions. By the early nineteenth century, it was fairly routine for politicians to eulogize the middle class as being the backbone of the nation, or the source of its strength and prosperity, or that essential societal element which kept the lower and upper classes united.<sup>11</sup> Again, it is not possible to draw a simple or consistent pattern here, but it is undeniable that the developments of the late eighteenth century regarding national identity, the middle class, and the idea of 'the public' were all intimately connected. This had important implications for the way that 'the nation', 'the middling sort', and 'the public' were understood by contemporaries, because it meant that the three different elements were each coloured by each other.

As touched upon already, these developments were significant for the conduct of politics. The Wilkesite agitation and the Association movement were two of the most intense and far-reaching domestic political episodes of the eighteenth century, and came amidst wider demands for political reform and increased representation, with such causes emanating or receiving substantial backing from a vocal middle-class public. No success was had in matters of direct parliamentary representation until well into the nineteenth century, but the governments of Pitt the Younger and Lord Liverpool did make highly significant piecemeal reforms cutting down on the executive's powers of patronage (or 'corruption') and clearing out the dead wood of the structures of government. They also tried to gain middle-class support for their own administrations, and

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<sup>10</sup> On these matters, see especially Wilson, *Sense of the People*.

<sup>11</sup> Lee, *Canning*, pp. 108-118; Parry, *Liberal Government*, pp. 23, 27-31, 34.

for the 'unreformed' parliamentary system.<sup>12</sup> In political rhetoric, 'public opinion' and national identity were obviously of great importance.

As for the nature of partisan politics, George III's reign throws up huge possibilities of contention amongst historians. The early part of this reign is the *locus classicus* for the Namierite thesis, in which party labels and ideologies mean very little, and a variety of factions battle selfishly for power, their battles conducted in the small, self-enclosed venue of Westminster.<sup>13</sup> Even B.W. Hill, in his two monographs on political parties, gives an account of the years 1760-1789 which is significantly at odds with his own central argument, that two-party politics remained the prevailing framework across the long eighteenth century.<sup>14</sup> Although the terms 'Whig' and 'Tory' remained part of political discourse, and although there were certainly times when two major groups of MPs were facing off against each other – one in government, the other in opposition – this period generally saw numerous and shifting groupings, often moving in and out of alliance with each other, with no major group ever calling itself 'Tory', and with many MPs impossible to identify consistently with anything that could be called a political party. With the establishment of Pitt the Younger's ascendancy, and especially with the outbreak of the French Revolutionary Wars, the political scene became more evidently bipartisan, and, eventually, Westminster politics became clearly characterized as a division between a Tory party (in government) and a Whig party (in opposition).<sup>15</sup> In the country at large, though, the idea of Whig-Tory ideological distinction seems to have carried more valence throughout George's reign.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Conway, *American Independence*, pp. 218-38; Lee, *Canning*, pp. 82; Parry, *Liberal Government*, pp. 6, 23, 27-32, 34-6, 44.

<sup>13</sup> Lewis Namier, *England in the Age of the American Revolution* (London: Macmillan, 1930).

<sup>14</sup> B.W. Hill, *British Parliamentary Parties 1742-1832* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1985), pp. 3-18, 90-159.

<sup>15</sup> Even here, however, historians differ greatly as to when this two-party paradigm emerged (or re-emerged); and the leading members of the Tory party were only just becoming content to label themselves 'Tories' when their party sundered and collapsed. Hill, *1742-1832*, pp. 163-231; Lee, *Canning*, pp. 12-17, 82-5, 131.

<sup>16</sup> E.g., Samuel Johnson, who lived in the prime Namierite years, is routinely identified as a 'Tory' in his views; and he once pejoratively described William Mason as 'a Whig', even about the same time that Pitt the Younger, the progenitor of Lord Liverpool's 'Tory' party, would have been proudly using the term to identify himself. James Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, ed. by R.W. Chapman (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), p. 949. For more on the continuing importance of the Whig-Tory divide in the country at large, and on the flexibility and evolution of eighteenth-century Whiggism and Toryism, see Colley, *Tory Party*, pp. 85-174; Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History*, pp. 215-310; introduction and chapters in *Cultures of Whiggism*, ed. by Womersley.

The second concept to consider is that of 'literature'.<sup>17</sup> Here, again, the late eighteenth century is of critical importance. It was in this period that the developments described previously really took effect, the word 'literature' definitively taking on its present meaning, and the world of writing being conceptualized and organized in new ways. 'Literature' became a sort of institution, based around those works of imaginative writing that were held to have the highest value, and, on the basis of those works, stipulating a set of standards and a prospect of validation for future writers. As part of this, scholars have traced a transformation in the notion of what a 'poet' ought to be, in which, by the start of the nineteenth century, 'poetry' was felt to inhere in certain great, independent 'geniuses' (predominantly Milton and Shakespeare), who had not subordinated their work to any court, party, or patron, and whose relationship with the nation was a sort of mystical communion, rather than being an earthly, financial connection with any form of state apparatus.

Scholars have also linked this transformation, and the establishment of 'literature' more generally, to the other developments described above. Because it was increasingly normal for writers and other kinds of artist to make a living through a generalized relationship with the public, rather than through a particular relationship with a court or a courtly patron, and because a newly strident and sophisticated national identity required an exalted cultural pantheon, ideas regarding a national canon and literary greatness came into being. For example, various scholars have shown that 'genius' was a construction stemming from, on the one hand, a proud and assertive sense of Britain's history and cultural identity, and, on the other, from the triumph of the literary marketplace, which allowed writers to become independent literary professionals.<sup>18</sup>

Thirdly, at the intersection of these different concepts comes the formulation which will be of most importance to this chapter: 'the reading

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<sup>17</sup> For this and the following paragraph, see especially Brewer, *Pleasures*, pp. 371-5; Frank Donoghue, *The Fame Machine: Book Reviewing and Eighteenth-Century Literary Careers* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996); Nick Groom, 'Unoriginal Genius: Plagiarism and the Construction of 'Romantic' Authorship', in *Copyright and Piracy: An Interdisciplinary Critique*, ed. by Lionel Bently, Jennifer Davis and Jane C. Ginsburg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 271-99; Hammond, *Hackney for Bread*; Siskin, 'More is different', pp. 809-23; Clifford Siskin, *The Work of Writing: Literature and Social Change in Britain, 1700-1830* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1998), pp. 13-4; Terry, *Literary Past*; Weinbrot, *Britannia's Issue*.

<sup>18</sup> For this last point, see especially Groom, Hammond, Terry, and Weinbrot, referenced above.

public'.<sup>19</sup> Although this has proven a handy phrase for scholars, it was not in contemporary usage, partly because the context of discussion would usually have made it clear in what respect 'the public' was being characterized. There even seems to be a sense in which there was only one 'public' anyway, and it was always and everywhere a 'reading' public, just as much as it was always and everywhere a politically-minded public, or any other sort of 'public'. Yet the issue is somewhat complicated by the fact that there were different sorts of reading and of reading material. Access to texts was a crucial aspect of the existence of 'the public', and for individual inclusion within that public, because information and opinion could only be conveyed and unified across the nation by writing, and specifically by printed writing.<sup>20</sup> But when the term 'reading public' is used in modern scholarship, the reference is to that body of people who had an interest in books, rather than just in the content of newspapers; that is, those who read for the sake of reading. Contemporaries did use other phrases which perhaps match up more closely to the modern scholarly notion of 'the reading public', such as 'the literati', or 'the general reader';<sup>21</sup> these phrases can be of use to scholars in tracing what were felt to be the activities and opinions of (the modern scholarly notion of) the reading public. Because this chapter is attempting to establish the general trends of opinion, response, and reception to the laureateship, it will in some sense be engaging with both the modern scholarly notion of the reading public and the eighteenth-century notion of the public.

The last theme to consider is the monarchy. The scholarly narratives regarding such concepts as national identity, literature, commercialization, and the public have tended to ignore the monarchy, or even to explicitly argue that these new developments came at the expense of monarchy and court and of the traditional practices based upon them. But in addition to the more recent

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<sup>19</sup> On this subject, see especially Brewer, *Pleasures*, pp. 141-163; Haslett, *Pope to Burney*, pp. 17-25, 86.

<sup>20</sup> This is not to say that 'the public' was a fully and fundamentally literate public. As has been widely recognized in recent scholarship, texts were routinely engaged with in a variety of communal, sociable, and non-literate ways. See e.g. Barker, *Newspapers Late Eighteenth-Century*, pp. 22-32; Tim Harris, 'Problematising Popular Culture', in *Popular Culture in England, c. 1500-1800*, ed. by Tim Harris (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), pp. 1-27 (p. 18).

<sup>21</sup> For 'the literati', see e.g. *General Advertiser*, 12 Dec. 1788. For 'the general reader', see e.g. Richard Mant, 'Preface', in Thomas Warton, *The Poetical Works of the Late Thomas Warton, B.D.*, ed. Richard Mant, 2 vols (Oxford, 1802), I, pp. i-v (p. v); the phrase comes after he has already used the phrase 'the public' several times to describe the book's audience or potential audience.

scholarly challenges to such narratives (detailed in the Introduction), there are a few more objections that can be made here for George III's reign.

First of all, in comparison to his two predecessors, George III has in fact attracted a fair deal of scholarly interest, and has generally been allocated a more important role within the political histories of the time than any monarch since William III;<sup>22</sup> the example of *Britons*, in which Linda Colley argues that an enduring idea of patriotic monarchy developed during the latter part of his reign, has already been noted. Perhaps the key aspect of recent scholarship devoted to George is his multifariousness as a public figure, and particularly the notion that there was a great shift in his public standing between the first and second halves of his reign. Having been greeted with widespread fervour on his accession, he is supposed to have quickly lost the goodwill of vast swathes of the nation due to his political actions, especially his destruction of the governing Whig supremacy and his devotion to the Earl of Bute. He was heavily disliked by the opposition, and painted as a tyrant, throughout the Wilkesite and American Revolutionary periods. In the mid-1780s, due to various events of political and personal importance, his reputation is supposed to have begun changing. Over the course of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, he then achieved an 'apotheosis' into a patriotic icon due to the nature of the ideological conflict between Britain and regicidal France, becoming celebrated for his domesticity, accessibility, philanthropy, patronage, and middle-class qualities.<sup>23</sup>

This picture has been well-investigated and partially debated. Frank Prochaska has identified George III's reign as beginning the monarchy's transformation into a 'welfare monarchy', defined by its philanthropic activities and middle-class qualities, and moving from a political to symbolic importance

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<sup>22</sup> Ditchfield, writing in 2002, stated that there have not been many analytical studies of George III, which he attributed to the academic retreat from high politics. Ditchfield, *George III*, p. 1. But George III has nonetheless featured far more heavily in eighteenth-century historiography than have Georges I and II.

<sup>23</sup> The term 'apotheosis' was used by Colley in the article which originally established the transformation and nature of George III's public image in the 1790s, and much of which then found its way into *Britons* as the underpinnings for her argument as to the emergence of patriotic monarchy in the later part of George III's reign. Subsequent scholarship has generally questioned and rejected the term, even while (broadly speaking) accepting the related evidence, arguments, and conclusions. Linda Colley, 'The Apotheosis of George III: Loyalty, Royalty and the British Nation 1760-1820', *Past & Present*, 102 (1984), 94-129; Colley, *Britons*, pp. 200-41; Ditchfield, *George III*, pp. 7, 49-76, 138-68; Marilyn Morris, *The British Monarchy and the French Revolution* (London: Yale University Press, 1998), pp. 160-1 for discussion of 'apotheosis'.

in the nation.<sup>24</sup> Holger Hoock, in his study of the Royal Academy, has emphasized George's role, and shown how both political support and political opposition to him could find an object and a venue in the Royal Academy, which was set up under his patronage.<sup>25</sup> Marilyn Morris, studying attitudes towards the monarchy during the 1790s, argues this as the period when it 'became a cultural icon: the embodiment of a British heritage', and that this was both a cause and effect of British responses to the French Revolution.<sup>26</sup> Her most significant arguments in terms of this thesis (perhaps primarily for Chapter Five) are that the French Revolution debate in Britain, partly inspired by George III's personality, created a powerful ideology of monarchy that combined patriarchal and republican ideals, and that the 1790s saw the ceremonial life of the court becoming central to nationwide loyalism and popular patriotism in an unprecedented manner.<sup>27</sup> Ditchfield, meanwhile, has argued that there was more continuity between the two halves of George III's reign than has been realized: George enjoyed great support from certain sections of society throughout the first half, the factors underpinning his 1790s 'apotheosis' were already present in earlier decades, and, conversely, the 1790s saw continuing hostility towards him from Whig, republican, reforming, and Dissenter angles.<sup>28</sup> Although Ditchfield admits that changes did occur, and that the period between about 1784 and 1790 was crucial in this respect, he presents an image in which the different facets of George's reputation were always present, rather than superseding each other chronologically.

This chapter will engage with these issues and contribute to this body of scholarship. It will show how the court's cultural patronage was perceived and received by the public, and how the changing, contested nature of George's public reputation affected the way that the press discussed matters of national identity and literature. In so doing, it will further elaborate on the multifariousness of George's, and the court's, public image. It will also add to Ditchfield's arguments against the idea of George's reign being too drastically bipartite, showing continuities in both support and opposition to the court, while

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<sup>24</sup> Frank Prochaska, *Royal Bounty: The Making of a Welfare Monarchy* (London: Yale University Press, 1995), pp. 1-37.

<sup>25</sup> Hoock, *King's Artists*, pp. 136-79.

<sup>26</sup> Morris, *British Monarchy*, passim (p. 2 for quotation).

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 56-100, 134-74.

<sup>28</sup> Ditchfield, *George III*, pp. 49-74, 138-59.

also plotting the developments that did indeed occur between about 1784 and the end of the century. But this chapter will also argue that, even accounting for such recent work, late eighteenth-century scholarship as a whole still does not adequately reflect the significance of the court. Despite George III's actions, the overall narrative of courtly decline and the rise of post-courtly practices remains strong. Especially insofar as George III is lumped together with Georges I and II as part of longer-term views, he becomes part of a set of monarchs who are felt to have been increasingly inconsequential to the way that Britons thought and behaved.

Yet contemporaries seem to have credited their monarch with a far more pervasive influence over the life and affairs of the nation than historians have been willing to acknowledge. James Boswell and Thomas Sheridan had a conversation in 1762 in which they defined the 'age' in which they lived, and previous 'ages', by the character and activities of the reigning monarch; under George III, 'we may now expect that merit will flourish.'<sup>29</sup> In response to the king's recovery from illness in 1789, William Cowper wrote a poem and had it presented to Princess Amelia, in the hope that it would be shown to the queen; he said of the poem that 'though it be praise it is truth', and 'it seemed necessary that I, who am now a poet by profession, should not leave an event in which [George and Caroline's] happiness and that of the nation are so much concerned, uncelebrated.'<sup>30</sup> It was specifically because he was a 'poet by profession' that he should give vent to his devotion to the king and queen, and should mark an occasion which was equally of royal and patriotic importance. There is also much evidence of middle-class loyalty to and fondness for George III, which, if it became more marked after the French Revolution, did so because circumstances encouraged it to rear its head, rather than because those circumstances had called it into being. Newspapers – the prime source material of this chapter, and that most characteristically public medium – reported obsessively on royal minutiae.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> James Boswell, *Boswell's London Journal: 1762-1763*, ed. by Frederick A. Pottle (London: Heinemann, 1950), p. 91.

<sup>30</sup> Robert Southey, 'A Life of the Author', in William Cowper, *The Works*, ed. by Robert Southey, 15 vols (London: 1835), III, p. 3.

<sup>31</sup> Even the sulkiest opposition papers had difficulty resisting the allure of a great royal event. In 1793, the *Morning Chronicle* very grudgingly reported on the king's birthday celebrations, offering snide remarks on various aspects of the courtly celebrations, but stating, 'We must comply with the demand of our fair readers, however, in giving some account of the dresses', before giving the conventional detailed description of the attendees' clothing. *Morning*



The evidence of the laureateship further demonstrates the importance of king and court to the themes described above. As will be shown, the laureate was a figure of huge public prominence and significance, and even of respectability. He enjoyed this position partly by virtue of his connection with the court, and by the sense that he was the embodiment of a public courtly culture; and, in turn, his activities proved and established the central importance of the court as an agent in the public sphere.

### The Cardinal Texts

Where scholars have paid the late eighteenth-century laureateship any attention, they have generally had no qualms about dismissing it as contemptible. It is widely felt that eighteenth-century opinion regarded the institution as a bad joke, and its holders – Cibber, Whitehead, and Pye – as abject poets. Warton has always had a better reputation, but his five-year tenure, and the odes he produced as laureate, have not been given weight in estimations either of the office or of Warton himself, despite the diligence, sincerity, and ambition which his letters and notebooks show him putting into his official productions.<sup>32</sup> Even those scholars who have devoted attention to any individual laureate, and who have therefore taken a more sympathetic view of that poet and his official work, have set up an explicit, contemptuous contrast to the office itself and to its other holders. Helene Koon, for example, argues that Cibber's odes were not as execrable as his critics made out, but, to support her point, she insists that Whitehead's efforts 'were no better than Cibber's and considerably duller, but they were not attacked.'<sup>33</sup> Ennis, in his discussion of the laureateship as one of the eighteenth-century's poetic 'Honours', lumps Whitehead together with Eusden as 'obscure but politically reliable poetasters whose undistinguished verse did nothing to raise the prestige of the position'.<sup>34</sup>

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*Chronicle*, 5 Jun. 1793. For the *Morning Chronicle*'s hostility to discussing the royal birthday celebrations, see Morris, *British Monarchy*, p. 144.

<sup>32</sup> Bod, Dep d. 615; Dep d. 616; *Warton Correspondence*, 523 (pp. 568-9), 525 (p. 572).

<sup>33</sup> Koon, *Cibber*, pp. 128, 180 (for quotation).

<sup>34</sup> Ennis, 'Honours', p. 733. Ennis's discussion of the laureateship (pp. 733-7), while a useful overview in many respects, includes many inaccuracies and vague, lax statements, and refers uncritically to most if not all of the handful of works that have been allowed to determine retrospective estimations of the eighteenth-century laureateship (to be surveyed below).

David Fairer is respectful (in passing) to Warton's laureate odes, calling them 'effective and dignified', but then goes on to say, 'It was generally held that Warton, whose tenure fell between those of William Whitehead and Henry James Pye, raised the reputation of the post at a difficult moment in its history'.<sup>35</sup> This is a strange comment, given that it comes in the introduction to a volume of letters which includes Edmond Malone's statement, 'Whitehead redeem'd the fame of the place, and the crown may now be worn with honour.'<sup>36</sup> Stranger still is the source which Fairer references to prove that such an opinion 'was generally held'. The relevant endnote gives a single quotation from Robert Southey, in which Southey grumbles about the impossibility of writing a good laureate ode, and then qualifies his own complaint by saying, 'Like Warton, I shall give the poem an historical character; but I shall not do this as well as Warton, who has done it very well'.<sup>37</sup> There is nothing in this comment to suggest that even Southey, let alone any 'generality' of people, thought that Whitehead and Pye represented 'a difficult moment' in the office's history, or that its reputation was in especial need of raising. In fact, although Southey was certainly no admirer of Pye, he wrote approvingly of both Whitehead and Warton in his biography of Cowper, saying of the laureateship that, in 1790, it 'had never been worthily bestowed since it was taken from Dryden till Whitehead succeeded Cibber in it, [but] had been rendered respectable by its last two possessors'.<sup>38</sup>

As for that handful of modern scholars who have studied the entire laureateship, they have tended to express some (rather small) appreciation of the late eighteenth-century laureates, but without showing any desire to correct the notion of this having been a low point in the office's history.<sup>39</sup> The most fundamental problem is that they reiterate the few well-known mocks and criticisms of the time, and are content to let such evidence stand for both the 'general' contemporary opinion, and as a set of parameters for the judgement of posterity. Broadus's observation 'that Warton's appointment had turned a good poet into a bad laureate', and thus 'crystallized' public opinion against the office

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<sup>35</sup> Fairer, 'Introduction: The Achievement of Thomas Warton', p. xxxiii.

<sup>36</sup> *Warton Correspondence*, 482 (p. 529).

<sup>37</sup> Fairer, 'Introduction: The Achievement of Thomas Warton', p. xxxvi.

<sup>38</sup> Southey, 'Cowper Life', III, pp. 3-4.

<sup>39</sup> Broadus, *Laureateship*, pp. 135-163; Hopkins, *Poets Laureate*, pp. 62-113.

and the odes, is, as will be seen, a gross misrepresentation.<sup>40</sup> No scholar seems to have gone searching for much new evidence of how contemporaries viewed the office and its holders; if they had, and if the modern digital databases had been available to them, then they would have found a very different picture.

But before delving into that mass of untapped evidence, it is worthwhile considering those few isolated comments that have been allowed to set the tone for almost two hundred years. The first is Thomas Gray's.<sup>41</sup> After rejecting the laureateship in 1757, he wrote to Mason comparing the office of laureate to that of '*Rat-Catcher*', disparaging its previous holders (including Dryden), and opining that it always humbled its occupants, either by rendering their lack of talent more conspicuous or by drawing envy and resentment upon them.<sup>42</sup> This appraisal has been well-known ever since Mason's garbled first publication of Gray's biography and letters in 1775. But why Gray should be accepted as either a sound or representative judge on such matters is unclear. Even in the famous letter, he admitted, 'but I do not pretend to blame any one else, that has not the same sensations [as himself about the laureateship]'.<sup>43</sup> Gray was antisocial, timid, reclusive, and aloof.<sup>44</sup> He abhorred the idea of being a published poet, or indeed any sort of public poet, writing very little verse and publishing still less of it;<sup>45</sup> and he seems to have felt not only that the role of public poet was unsuitable for himself, but that there was something vaguely distasteful about it in general.<sup>46</sup> He also seems to have felt that poetry had

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<sup>40</sup> Broadus, *Laureateship*, p. 154.

<sup>41</sup> Made much of by, e.g., Broadus, *Laureateship*, pp. 135-6; McGuinness, *Court Odes*, p. 63.

<sup>42</sup> *Gray Correspondence*, pp. 543-5.

<sup>43</sup> *Gray Correspondence*, p. 544.

<sup>44</sup> In 1757, prior to Cibber's death, he had written to Mason, 'You are welcome to the land of the Living, to the sunshine of a Court, to the dirt of a Chaplain's table'; and then, talking of the obscurity of his two own recent odes, 'I would not have put another [explanatory] note to save the souls of all the *Owls* in London. it is extremely well, as it is. nobody understands me, & I am perfectly satisfied.' *Gray Correspondence*, pp. 522-4. His letter to James Brown recounting his experience of George III's coronation is a good, extended example of the aloofness and critical attitude with which he often treated public affairs. *Gray Correspondence*, pp. 752-7.

<sup>45</sup> In 1759 he wrote to Mason on publishing poetry, 'money (I know) is your motive, & of that I wash my hands. fame is your second consideration; of that I am not the dispenser.' He recommended instead paying attention only to the approbation of each man for the other, suggesting that Mason write one or two odes a year, 'not for the World, but for us two only. we will now & then give a little glimpse of them, but no copies.' *Gray Correspondence*, p. 609.

<sup>46</sup> In 1748 he wrote of Tickell's very popular and much reprinted poem on the peace of Utrecht, 'This is...a state-poem (my ancient aversion)'. *Gray Correspondence*, pp. 294-302.

fallen, in his own age, from its former heights.<sup>47</sup> When writing *The Progress of Poesy*, he found, after depicting the spirit of poetry as passing through a very small, canonical band of great poets, that there was no contemporary poet suitable for rounding off the poem. Inevitably, such a man as Gray would have sneered at the laureateship; inevitably, such a man as Gray would have broken out in sweats and scorns at the idea of taking on the mantle for himself, and having to step out into the midst of society as the chief representative of a degraded, bickering band. Gray was not an objective, insightful, or typical observer of the laureateship; he was a man of highly singular inclinations.

The next canonical comment in the anti-history of the laureateship comes from Edward Gibbon.<sup>48</sup> In *Decline and Fall*, Gibbon gave this robust opinion on the laureateship: 'From Augustus to Louis, the muse has too often been false and venal; but I much doubt whether any age or court can produce a similar establishment of a stipendiary poet, who in every reign, and at all events, is bound to furnish twice a year a measure of praise and verse, such as may be sung in the chapel, and, I believe, in the presence of the sovereign. I speak the more freely, as the best time for abolishing this ridiculous custom is while the prince is a man of virtue and the poet a man of genius.'<sup>49</sup> This comment vies with Gray's as being the most famous and famously-damning thing ever said about an office which has therefore been taken to be famously-damnable.

However, Gibbon's criticisms were actually rather limited. He was complimentary to George III and Warton. He also expressed no wish in doing away with the office itself; he only wished that the odes were dispensed with, because he thought them 'a ridiculous custom'. Furthermore, the footnote itself was a cursory, throwaway comment, which can hardly be considered as the product of any sustained thought or research, given that Gibbon admitted uncertainty as to whether or not the odes were sung 'in the presence of the sovereign'. Also telling is the context in which Gibbon framed his criticism: the discussion in the main body of the text concerned the anointing of Petrarch as a poet laureate, and the note itself began, 'From Augustus to Louis, the muse has

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<sup>47</sup> E.g. he wrote to Horace Walpole in 1747, 'Litterature (to take it in its most comprehensive Sense, & include every Thing, that requires Invention, or Judgement, or barely Application & Industry) seems indeed drawing apace to its Dissolution'. *Gray Correspondence*, pp. 264-5.

<sup>48</sup> Broadus, *Laureateship*, p. 155; McGuinness, *Court Odes*, pp. 63, 74.

<sup>49</sup> Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed. by J.B. Bury, 7 vols (London: Methuen, 1914), VII, p. 266, note 8.

too often been false and venal'. Gibbon was here naming monarchs who were widely acknowledged as having presided over two of the greatest flowerings in the history of poetry; his allusion would have been understood as pertaining to such writers as Virgil, Horace, Boileau, and Racine. Although he was tapping into a longstanding critique of the mercenary, obsequious strain in those writers' work, he was also admitting the issue to be more complicated than the cavalier nature of his footnote suggested, and was reminding his readers that, even if the laureates represented an (apparently) extreme case, they were nonetheless following on from a glittering list of antecedents.

The final main piece of evidence used in retrospective judgements of the late eighteenth-century laureateship is not a single statement, but is the humorous production, *Probationary Odes for the Laureatship* (1785).<sup>50</sup> This was an enormously popular volume, and undeniably shows that the tradition of mocking the laureate odes was alive and well.<sup>51</sup> In its 'Preliminary Discourse', it called the laureateship a 'political office', characterized it by reference to Shadwell and Cibber, described the laureate as singing the praises of despotic monarchical 'prerogative', and compared the laureate odes to the productions of a mechanical labourer, being repetitively churned out at regular intervals.<sup>52</sup> At the end of the volume came some instructions on making birthday odes, including advice on the fabrication of royal virtues.<sup>53</sup> However, taking the volume as a whole, the striking thing is just how little and how lazily it criticized the laureateship. The 'Preliminary Discourse' was supposedly by John Hawkins, the music historian, and was (slightly) more concerned to mock Hawkins than the laureateship;<sup>54</sup> then followed a rambling, obscure section 'On Ode Writing', supposedly by Warton, which satirized Warton's scholarly writings and had virtually nothing to do with the laureateship;<sup>55</sup> then various other public figures were impersonated, each giving their testimony in favour of one of the other public figures whose supposed attempts to write a laureate ode made up the

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<sup>50</sup> Broadus, *Laureateship*, pp. 148-9; Butt, *Mid-Eighteenth Century*, pp. 114-24; McGuinness, *Court Odes*, p. 73.

<sup>51</sup> E.g. a ninth edition was published in 1791, and it was soon being published together with the authors' other satirical works as one volume, which likewise moved quickly through successive editions.

<sup>52</sup> *Probationary Odes for the Laureatship* (1785), pp. x-xv.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 128-30.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, pp. vii-xvii.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, pp. xviii-xxii.

bulk of the volume.<sup>56</sup> Few of these public figures – either the ode-writers or those who recommend them – were poets, and the only ones to have any connection at all with the laureateship were Warton, his brother Joseph, and Mason.

Nor did the probationary odes themselves satirize the laureateship, except in the sense that the entire conceit constituted such a satire. Rather, the odes were used as a vehicle for satirical humour targeted against a broad selection of public figures. When, for example, Probationary Ode XIII, attributed to Henry Dundas, began, ‘Hoot! hoot away!/Hoot! hoot away!’, and proceeded in this vein, the target of the joke was Henry Dundas, and not the office he was supposedly trying to acquire.<sup>57</sup> Continuing on from their earlier work with the *Rolliad*, the authors of the *Probationary Odes* were more concerned to make fun of the various named figures who appeared in the work than they were to ridicule or criticize the laureateship; and the specific mockery of the laureateship was amongst the weakest, laziest, and most casual in the volume. Warton was only one of the figures mocked, and he was mocked for his individual personality, quirks, and writings, rather than because he represented a despicable office.<sup>58</sup> The fact that the targets of mockery included Warton’s and Hawkins’s scholarly publications, which have never been considered to have been as contemptible as the laureateship is, again emphasizes the fact that the existence of mockery, even when witty and popular, does not necessarily indicate any serious contempt amongst the society in question. If anything, the *Probationary Odes* should be read as suggesting the opposite: the satirists seized upon the idea of the laureate odes precisely because they held a prominent place in the public consciousness at the time. This suggestion would certainly be consistent with the evidence discussed below.

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid, pp. xxiii-xxxvii for the testimonies; pp. 13-114 for the odes.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, p. 54.

<sup>58</sup> Warton was mocked for the obscurity of his poetry, and his the silliness of his yearning for inspiration (pp. xxxviii-xlvi); for his prose style and subject matter as a scholar (pp. xviii-xxii); and for his physical person and personality (pp. 115-22). The volume also printed Warton’s genuine first laureate ode after all of the other probationary odes, as if that ode itself was ridiculous enough to be a parody (pp. 113-4); but this joke would only have worked in 1785, when the timing of Warton’s appointment meant he had to rush out a birthday ode, and the result was widely considered a poor effort. Able to devote an appropriate amount of time to his work on subsequent occasions, his odes quickly attracted huge praise and respect, as will be detailed below. Moreover, there is no reason why more weight should be attached to the mockery of his first laureate ode here than to the mockery against his lyric style in general, his scholarly work, or his physical person and personality, either as proof of wider contemporary views or as a valid piece of criticism.

There have also been a few attacks on individual laureates that have contributed to posterity's negative judgement. Firstly, Whitehead had the misfortune of being repeatedly savaged by Charles Churchill.<sup>59</sup> Churchill's principal criticisms were that Whitehead was a sort of popular, prissy writer, whose poems were much read by simpering, delicate men and women; that Whitehead, in his *Charge to the Poets* (1762) was setting himself up as a head of poets; and that Whitehead was a toady of the government.<sup>60</sup> The former charge should, in this context, not be taken too seriously, since it represents nothing more than an attack on a poet who wrote a very different sort of poetry to that which Churchill himself wrote, and since it contains an admission of Whitehead's popularity and appeal; the second charge, which was based on a misreading of and overreaction to Whitehead's work, clearly stems from the sort of petulant dissatisfaction with people more prominent and complacent than himself that was typical of Churchill. The latter charge, meanwhile, formed part of a larger raft of criticisms that will be dealt with more fully below; but is worth pointing out here that, again, it entails an admission of Whitehead's significance and prominence.

The satirical poet Peter Pindar, in the 1780s and 1790s, also addressed individual laureates in his writings, primarily Warton.<sup>61</sup> Indeed, several of his publications were explicitly targeted against laureates: *Ode Upon Ode, An Apologetic Postscript, Instructions to a Celebrated Laureat* (all 1787), *Brother Peter to Brother Tom* (1788), and *Advice to the Future Laureat* (1790). As with the *Probationary Odes*, however, Pindar used the conceit of an address to the laureate as a vehicle to attack what he himself repeatedly admitted to be his prime and only true subject, the king. Even the publications supposedly devoted to the laureate were (in a fashion typical of Peter Pindar and his classical namesake) hugely digressive, generally using the laureateship as a launching-pad so as to fly madly about over various terrains, all the while barraging George III with criticism. The laureates were useful to him because, just as the laureate was associated with praising the monarch, so Peter Pindar wished to do the opposite. Following Whitehead's death, Pindar asked of him, 'For what the devil can he do,/When forc'd to praise---*the Lord knows who!*/Verse must be

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<sup>59</sup> Broadus, *Laureateship*, pp. 145-6; Brown, *Charles Churchill*, pp. 87-88, 107.

<sup>60</sup> Charles Churchill, *The Poetical Works*, ed. by Douglas Grant, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), pp. 93-4, 107-10, 114-6, 132, 160-1, 182, 201-2, 300, 420-1, 441-2.

<sup>61</sup> Broadus, *Laureateship*, p. 150; Butt, *Mid-Eighteenth Century*, pp. 114-24.

dull on subjects so damn'd *dry*.' An asterisk on this page noted that Whitehead had recently died, and been succeeded by Warton; and it expressed the hope that Warton's verses will not prove true the old Latin adage, '*Ex nihilo, nihil fit*'.<sup>62</sup> This line of mockery defined Pindar's entire subsequent dealings with Warton, and then with Pye: the laureates could make nothing, or nothing true or good, out of so barren a subject as George.

Peter Pindar did not actually present Whitehead, Warton, or Pye as bad poets; he even seems to have been fairly fond of the latter two. The modern notion of Pye's badness as a poet originates with those canonical Romantic writers who were cutting a swathe through as much of the *ancien régime* as they could wrap their scythes around; and if the criticisms of Pye's most influential critic, Lord Byron, were to be accepted, then Byron himself would be almost the only poet of the period left with any respectability at all.<sup>63</sup>

None of this is to say that Whitehead, Warton, and Pye should be granted a more favourable place in the history of English poets, or that their critics were objectively wrong. The point is that, in trying to re-establish what readers *at the time* thought of the laureateship and its holders, the initial view is clouded by a few isolated comments and the tenacious assumptions that those comments have engendered. Now that those comments have been contextualized, scrutinized, and reduced to their due proportion, the survey of the mass of evidence can begin.

## Public Opinions

From Whitehead's accession to Southey's, it is not hard to find comment, sometimes very extended, on the office of laureate and its holders, especially in the newspaper press. Some of the most significant trends will be discussed in due course; but first, the simple question needs to be asked, whether this diverse and often quite anomalous body of commentary suggests a positive or a

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<sup>62</sup> 'Out of nothing, nothing is produced.' Peter Pindar, *Lyric Odes for the Year 1785*, 'A New Edition' (1786; first published 1785), p. 38.

<sup>63</sup> Byron mocked Pye in 'The Vision of Judgement', in Lord Byron, *The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. by Jerome J. McGann, 7 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980-93), VI, pp. 309-45 (p. 341). He mocked almost everyone else in, for example, 'English Bards and Scotch Reviewers', I, pp. 227-64.



negative estimation of the office. On balance, it is probably about even, or – if the routine, prominent printing of the biannual odes is considered as an acknowledgement of the laureate's importance – tending more towards a positive estimation. Admittedly, it would seem to be the case that, when the office of laureate was specifically addressed as a subject in its own right, the attitude was more often negative, and would not uncommonly entail a call for some alteration or abolition of the office; but this is only to be expected of any institution, except those which are severely and evidently under threat. While the continuing existence of the office was being taken for granted, there would have been no real point for great vindications and endorsements of it to appear in print; only those people who wished for a change in the state of affairs – that is, for alteration or abolition – would have had any motive to address the subject of the goodness or badness of the office.

These negative judgements on the office took several main forms. One was the argument that the office was outdated and absurd, and was akin to the old court office of fool or jester. The manifestation of this antiquated foolery was usually identified as the biannual odes. Thus the *Morning Herald*, in 1785, mocked the odes as repetitive nonsense, and stated that they would remain the same 'to the end of time – if the office like that of the Fool is not exiled from Court.'<sup>64</sup> Criticisms of the laureateship would usually at least imply that the most disgraceful thing about the office was the requirement of writing odes, but there was nonetheless a significant, continuous body of opinion that held that the office ought to be abolished irrespective of that requirement. The *Morning Chronicle* asked, upon Whitehead's death, 'Why appoint any successor...? Why not finish at nothing, and leave the place unsupplied, and its functions abolished. Or if the functions are continued, let the odes be written by the *Deans and Chapters* of the different dioceses...'<sup>65</sup> But this notion of the odes continuing without the office was very rare. Normally, critics of the office either wished for the odes to be dispensed with so as to (at least partially) redeem it, or for the entire thing to be done away with, the odes and the office being inseparable, or the office having no purpose without the odes.

The complicating factor in attacks on the laureateship was that it was hard to detach the office from the poet currently holding it, or from the list of

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<sup>64</sup> *Morning Herald and Daily Advertiser*, 12 Sep. 1785.

<sup>65</sup> *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser*, 28 Apr. 1785.

poets, recent and not-so-recent, who had held it previously. This difficulty was particularly acute in the late eighteenth century, which saw a succession of three long-reigning laureates – Cibber, Whitehead, and Pye – with Warton’s five-year tenure the sole exception. From the standpoint of 1757, it must almost have seemed that there had only ever been one modern laureate, Cibber; his distant predecessor, Eusden, had been a more obscure and sheltered laureate, Rowe had only held the office briefly, and before Rowe (if anyone could remember back that far) had been Tate (whom no one could remember). Half a decade later, in 1813, Pye and Whitehead between them must likewise have loomed very large in understandings of the office, with the momentous events that Pye’s tenure had spanned having presumably added to the sense that he, in particular, had held the office forever.

On the other hand, the pseudo-history of the laureateship was widely known, and was often printed in papers, especially when a laureate died. Current laureates were almost invariably referred to as ‘(the) (poet) laureat(e)’ when mentioned in newspapers, whatever capacity they were being mentioned in, and sometimes without their actual name being given;<sup>66</sup> but so too were past laureates, including, most significantly, Cibber and Dryden. Especially during Whitehead’s time, when the memory of celebrity laureate Cibber was still fresh, and newspapers still delighted in reporting minor anecdotes of his life or quips that he had made, it was normal to find him named simply, ‘the late Laureat’, or some such thing.<sup>67</sup> Dryden was so heavily identified with his office that, in one report, he was referred to as ‘Erasmus Dryden, Poet Laureat to Charles II.’, suggesting his official status and royal connection to have been even more identifiable than his own first name.<sup>68</sup> Because of this heavy identification of

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<sup>66</sup> E.g. at least two papers reported, ‘We hear that the *Laureate* has lately visited Bristol, where he was favoured by Mr. Barret, who is publishing the *History and Antiquities* of that city, with a sight of some original parchments, which will probably renew the Chattertonian controversy, and open a new field of discussion for the critics in our ancient poetry.’ Thus even in the matter of the Chatterton/Rowley debate – in which Warton had been a key participant prior to becoming laureate, having discussed them at some length in the second volume of his *History of English Poetry*, but which was unrelated to his laureate duties – Warton was called ‘the *Laureate*’ in preference to his actual name. *Bath Chronicle*, 11 Sep. 1788; *Public Advertiser*, 11 Sep. 1788. For Rowley/Chatterton, see Thomas Warton, *The History of English Poetry, Vol. II* (1778), pp. 139-64.

<sup>67</sup> E.g. *London Chronicle* 18-21 Feb. 1764; *Public Ledger*, 25 Sep. 1765; *Lloyd’s Evening Post*, 26-29 Feb. 1768.

<sup>68</sup> *World and Fashionable Advertiser*, 30 Apr. 1787. ‘Erasmus’ was in fact the name of Dryden’s grandfather, father and one of his sons.

office with office-holders, there were many variants and subtleties as to the ways in which the office might be viewed.

For example, it was a fairly common line of complaint that the office had become degraded in recent times, or even, especially after Cibber's tenure, that it was 'blasted'. Interestingly, few observers seem to have linked this idea of degradation to the idea of its being outdated; instead, the degradation was located in the quality of the office-holders, principally Eusden and Cibber (whose contemporary critics had initiated the 'degradation' idea) and then, in a more complicated way, Whitehead and Pye, whose critics did not tend to see them as so much culpable for the degradation in their own right, as rather mediocre poets who had taken on a degraded office and were happy to fulfil its disgraceful duties for money.<sup>69</sup> Those duties were heavily associated with Cibber, because his time in office had seen the odes printed more widely and recurrently than ever before, and because they had drawn such opprobrium from his enemies, meaning that there was some sense in which the degradation was associated with a particular practice as well as with (a) particular person(s). Equally, though, no one in the late eighteenth century was actually aware of when the laureates had begun writing the odes; Cibber's *Egotist* (1743) claimed that even Dryden had written them.<sup>70</sup>

Thus the variation and gradation in manners of scorn for the laureateship. For some observers, its degraded state was directly attributable to the poets who held or had recently held it, or to the odes (which were themselves uncertainly but indelibly associated with Cibber), and it could therefore be redeemed, and brought back into line with the office it had supposedly been in the seventeenth century (even if no one really knew what that office had been, other than by reference to Spenser, Samuel Daniel, Jonson, Davenant, and Dryden). Once a great poet took the office again, or once the odes were dispensed with – which dispensation would probably encourage or follow on from the appointment of a great poet – the laureateship would shine forth again in all its native splendour.

However, other observers felt the degradation to be fatal; the modern laureates had disgraced the office too far, and it ought to be abolished. Even to

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<sup>69</sup> E.g. *London Evening Post*, 6-8 Apr. 1773; *Middlesex Journal or Universal Evening Post*, 20-22 Apr. 1773; *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, 18 Nov. 1776; *World*, 24 Mar. 1790.

<sup>70</sup> Colley Cibber, *The Egotist: Or, Colley upon Cibber* (1743), pp. 49-50.

clear away the odes would not clear away the taint of Cibber (or, perhaps, of Whitehead or Pye). Lastly, there were those observers who thought the office was a discredit to those with whom it was associated; not just to Whitehead, Warton, and Pye, but even (as in Gibbon's comment) to the king. Because the odes were such a silly and laborious task, and because the office-holder's prominence subjected them to constant mockery and envy from other poets, no laureate could keep hold of his dignity while in office, and it was not fair or fitting to inflict a twice-yearly blast of tedious panegyric on so perspicacious a prince as George.<sup>71</sup>

The newspapers reveal, then, that there was certainly a significant trend of criticism, scorn, and disrespect for the office running throughout the late eighteenth century. The office's reputation was tarnished; in some people's eyes it was an almost abominable institution, standing as a garish disgrace to the nation, or to the literary world, or even to the laureates and king themselves. But what the newspapers also reveal is a pervasive and almost a complacent trend of exactly the opposite opinion. It has already been mentioned that the space afforded printings of the odes (which are even found, without any kind of adverse commentary, in radical and opposition papers during times of crisis), and the sheer volume of reportage on the laureates, suggest a certain respectability of standing for the office; clearly, people were interested in it, and thought it an important aspect of literary life and of the court's interface with the public.<sup>72</sup>

However, there is also a great deal of more explicit evidence as to the laureateship's positive reputation, and even, perhaps surprisingly, the positive reputation of the laureate odes. The newspapers would often give such reports as the following (1762): 'Same day the Ode for the New Year, composed by William Whitehead, Esq: Poet Laureat, and set to music by Dr. Boyce, was rehearsed at the Turk's Head Tavern, in Greek-street, Soho, to a crowded audience.'<sup>73</sup> As early as 1765, the fare was being expanded upon: 'This day the Ode for the New Year, composed by William Whitehead, Esq; Poet Laureat... will be rehearsed at the Turk's Head Tavern in Gerrard-street, Soho, and to-

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<sup>71</sup> For some varieties of opinion on the office, in addition to those already cited, see e.g. *Diary or Woodfall's Register*, 5 Jun. 1790; *Diary or Woodfall's Register*, 11 Jan. 1791.

<sup>72</sup> For radical and opposition papers blithely printing the odes, see e.g. *Middlesex Journal or Chronicle of Liberty*, 29 Dec.-1 Jan. 1770.

<sup>73</sup> *Gazetteer and London Daily Advertiser*, 31 Dec. 1762.

morrow the same will be again rehearsed at Hickford's room in Brewer-street.'<sup>74</sup> The nature of these rehearsals seems to have varied a little over time; a 1766 newspaper described a 'private' performance at the Turk's Head, followed by 'a publick Rehearsal at Hickford's Great Room',<sup>75</sup> and in 1769 the *Middlesex Journal* (a radical paper) advertised the two rehearsals without distinguishing whether they were private or public. Interestingly, it then added that 'on Monday [the ode] will be publickly performed in the Great Council Chamber at St. James's'; the royal performance was thus designated as 'publick' and situated as the third performance in a sequence, rather than as something distinct from the London performances.<sup>76</sup>

These rehearsals were, throughout the tenures of Whitehead, Warton, and Pye, both advertised beforehand and reported on as news. In their evident popularity (which reached a height in the 1790s, as will be discussed below), they exemplify one of the major themes of this thesis: the strong relationship between courtly culture and commercial. The public was so interested in these courtly odes, which were composed specifically by the king's laureate for the king, that even the printing of the words in the newspapers was not enough; they had also to have their own public renditions of them, thus experiencing courtly culture for themselves. This would certainly suggest that not everyone in George III's Britain thought the laureate and his odes to be either outdated or disgraceful.

Furthermore, rather than there existing a simple distinction between hostility to the odes and more positive interest in them, there was actually a powerful strand of critical interest, in which each ode was read and commented upon as an individual effort within a valid literary genre, and in which many of those odes were commended as successful poems. Whitehead was the first laureate for whom this was consistently the case, and it will become most apparent in the discussion of Warton below, but it is worth briefly quoting a specifically negative (and even quite mocking) comment on Warton's first ode, so as to stress the fact that a negative critical judgement on some aspect of the laureateship could exist within a wider framework of more positive engagement. The *Morning Herald* remarked in 1785 that 'A variety of comments on *Warton's*

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<sup>74</sup> *Public Ledger*, 30 Dec. 1765.

<sup>75</sup> *Public Advertiser*, 30 Dec. 1766.

<sup>76</sup> *Middlesex Journal or Chronicle of Liberty*, 28-30 Dec. 1769.

Ode have appeared in the different prints', and then, after jovially criticizing the ode, it advised '*Master Laureat*' that 'the best mode of defence is to write a better next year.'<sup>77</sup> This is not the best example of the odes being taken seriously – far better will come below – but its negativity is instructive, in that it shows how even such negative judgements could partake of a wider literary interest in the odes, in which individual responses were made in accordance with a genuine appraisal of each ode's literary merits. The odes, then, aroused a great measure of public interest, both as written poems and as musical performances, and even elicited the critical engagement of a discerning reading public.

As explained above, there are not so many explicit positive appraisals of the office in general as there are negative; for example, upon Whitehead's death, no one bothered to suggest that the office should be continued, because the suggestion would have been redundant. But there are more obliquely positive comments, like this one following Warton's death: 'Many persons have been spoken of as being intended to fill the vacant place of Laureate, among whom it is surprizing that Mr. Warton's brother has not been mentioned. This gentleman's talents are well known, and his genius for poetical composition is equal to that of the late Laureate.'<sup>78</sup> Not only does this report indicate the public excitement and interest in the laureateship, but its suggestion was clearly founded on the assumption that the laureate should have a strong talent for poetry; the phrase 'poetical composition' even called to mind the compositional requirements of the office, which were thus assumed to require, and presumably not to disgrace or corrupt, a distinguished poetic 'genius'.

Obviously, since the office was so heavily identified with whoever happened to be holding it at the time, and, to a diminishing extent, with its previous holders stretching back through the centuries, any attempt at establishing how contemporaries judged and understood the office must also consider the reputations of the individual laureates themselves. This has partly been done in the previous chapter, but only for the laureates' reputations prior to their appointment; now, their reputations while in office will be described. The supposed pre-eighteenth-century laureates were essentially thought of as great poets – Chaucer, Spenser, Jonson, and Dryden – or at least eminently talented

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<sup>77</sup> *Morning Herald and Daily Advertiser*, 4 Jul. 1785.

<sup>78</sup> *Diary or Woodfall's Register*, 7 Jun. 1790.

– Skelton, Daniel, and Davenant – and their association with the laureateship factored strongly in its favour. But the early eighteenth-century laureates served the opposite function. Presumably due to his short tenure, it was often forgotten that Rowe had even been a laureate;<sup>79</sup> and the eighteenth-century laureateship was therefore defined, from the standpoint of 1757 or 1760, by two faintly risible unknowns, Tate and Eusden, and by Cibber, for whom the late eighteenth-century had a good opinion as a dramatist, and even a certain fondness for as a sort of celebrity laureate, but who had never been much respected for his laureate compositions.

The rest of this chapter will consist of more in-depth explorations of how Whitehead, Warton, and Pye were perceived and responded to as individual laureates, with each poet revealing a very different and very instructive set of circumstances. It therefore makes sense, before continuing on with the exploration of individual laureates, to pause and offer some intermediate conclusions on what has been seen so far. Clearly, the standing of the laureateship in the late eighteenth century was neither resoundingly negative, nor resoundingly positive. There was certainly a strong, and probably well-known, trend of mockery and disapproval towards the office, which in some ways had begun during the Exclusion Crisis as part of Dryden's public battles with his literary and political enemies, but which had reached maturity during Cibber's time in office, and had then progressively set in and hardened over the late eighteenth century. It centred on the very old idea that laureates (and indeed poets in general) were paid flatterers;<sup>80</sup> on the related idea of the laureateship as an outdated office, no longer suited to a commercial society, a new conceptualization of literature, and a proud and free British nation; and on the idea that the office had been made contemptible by the low quality of its recent occupants.

On the other hand, there seems to have been an entirely opposite point of view which was equally viable and widespread, and perhaps more so: that

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<sup>79</sup> See e.g. lists of laureates in *Morning Herald and Daily Advertiser*, 3 May 1785; *Whitehall Evening Post*, 3-5 May 1785; *Public Advertiser*, 5 May 1785. Johnson's biography of Rowe only remarks on his appointment as laureate in passing, and does not discuss the odes. Johnson, 'Rowe', p. 587.

<sup>80</sup> Prior to becoming laureate, Shadwell himself had given powerful articulations of the negative stereotype of poets as mercenary figures whose words were superficially attractive but void of truth and meaning: 'Ninny' in *The Sullen Lovers* (1668) and 'Poet' in *The History of Timon of Athens* (1678).

the laureateship and its odes were respectable and interesting, and formed an important part of the literary landscape and of the interface between court and public. Certainly the office might have been held by some sub-par versifiers, and the requirement for biannual panegyric odes would sometimes lead to risible results; but the office itself was still one of value and honour, its previous holders including many of the great names of English literature; and the odes, like any form of poetry, could be good as well as bad. Between these two poles of opinion, there was a spectrum of vagaries and variations, partly because of the difficulty of detaching office from office-holder, but more so for the simple reason that the office was a prominent institution, and thus gave rise to a variety of responses and interpretations. In any case, it was clearly a much bigger feature of the public world, or public consciousness, than scholars of the late eighteenth century, or even of the laureateship itself, have realized. The public knew about it, cared about it, and subscribed to the biannual ritual of reading the odes that it produced (perhaps also going to see them performed). It is not clear whether George III himself would have viewed the laureateship as the cornerstone of court culture, but that is how it would have appeared to the public; in a sense, it was the cornerstone of a *public* court culture. It demonstrates that public, commercial culture and patronal, court culture were not two separate entities, but that the court exercised its cultural role as a key player within a commercial, public culture, just as that culture retained space for the sorts of behaviours and beliefs characteristic of the courtly-patronage mode of cultural production and consumption.

### **Whitehead's Reception**

Having sketched out this general picture, it is time to look at the public lives of Whitehead, Warton, and Pye. The attempt will be made to establish their individual reputations as laureate, and to investigate their experiences at the hands of the press, each of which, in different ways, is highly significant for the themes of this thesis.

Whitehead's reputation as a lyric poet and a poet laureate was generally far higher than his predecessor's. Following his appointment, he did not publish a great deal of new work (other than the odes), and even some of these few



publications were anonymous; but he was known and respected on account of that which he had published before. His most prominent and lasting works were his three full-length plays, and especially *The Roman Father*, which was revived periodically throughout his tenure as laureate, sometimes with certain alterations provided either by the company or by Whitehead himself, and with renewed notices, reviews, and approbation each time. It was considered his magnum opus, and was a repertory work beyond his death.<sup>81</sup> He was also well-regarded as a laureate, especially at the start and end of his tenure. Richard Berenger wrote to Robert Dodsley on Whitehead's appointment, 'The Laurel has at last been properly bestow'd, and Parnassus should make bonfires and rejoicings'.<sup>82</sup> In 1764, one correspondent to a newspaper voiced the fairly standard distinction between Cibber and Whitehead, saying that Whitehead's odes 'are as much above Criticism, as those of his immediate Predecessor were below it.'<sup>83</sup> A few years earlier, another correspondent had helpfully dubbed Whitehead, 'the respectable Laureat';<sup>84</sup> and another, the year before that, had talked about 'one of the finest Odes that ever appeared in any language, written by the present ingenious Poet Laureat.'<sup>85</sup>

However, the most interesting and extended example of praise for Whitehead's laureate work came in a letter of 1758 from 'Zeno' to *Owen's Weekly Chronicle*.<sup>86</sup> 'I have frequently perceived a judicious selection of some pieces of poetry inserted in your paper,' Zeno began (referring to the increasingly widespread and regular trend for newspapers to set aside dedicated poetry sections), 'which makes me expect to find Mr. Whitehead's Birth-day Ode in your next, with the following remarks.' Less than a year after Cibber's death, Zeno was thus taking it for granted that Whitehead's laureate ode would naturally be placed amongst 'a judicious selection' of poetry in the newspaper. Zeno then went on to contrast Whitehead and Cibber, much to the

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<sup>81</sup> Bod, Eng misc d. 3844, f. 123b; Bod, Eng misc d. 3845, ff. 7b-8, 9-10b, 61; Bod, Eng misc d. 3846, ff. 26, 28-b, f. 84b. *Public Advertiser*, 3 Mar. 1764; *Public Advertiser*, 8 Oct. 1777; *Morning Post and Daily Advertiser*, 29 Oct. 1777; *Whitehall Evening Post*, 21-23 Apr. 1785. 'Whitehead Memoirs', p. 55.

<sup>82</sup> 'Richard Berenger to Robert Dodsley', *Electronic Enlightenment Scholarly Edition of Correspondence* <<https://0-www-e-enlightenment-com.lib.exeter.ac.uk/item/dodsroCU0010325a1c/?letters=corr&s=dodsrober001326&r=421>> [accessed 24 September 2019].

<sup>83</sup> *Public Advertiser*, 13 Jul. 1764.

<sup>84</sup> *St. James's Chronicle or the British Evening Post*, 8-10 Sep. 1761.

<sup>85</sup> *Lloyd's Evening Post and British Chronicle*, 19-21 Nov. 1760.

<sup>86</sup> *Owen's Weekly Chronicle or Universal Journal*, 11-18 Nov. 1758.

former's advantage, and opined that Whitehead's ode 'is founded upon a pretty historical event, which is delicately heightened by the graces of poetical fiction, and the whole is truly classical.' However, he had noticed that a couple of Whitehead's phrases were not ideally suited to a musical setting, and he therefore gave Whitehead a couple of pointers as to how best to write for music. This last point suggests, again, the sense that the laureate ode form was a valid artistic genre with its own special formal requirements, and that a certain bent of poetic talent and artifice was necessary to succeed most highly in it.

However, 'if [Whitehead's mistakes] are blemishes, they are immaterial, and last among the beauties of this Ode'. Zeno, it appears, felt that true poetic talent was more important than, and even transcendent of, the stricter formal requirements he had just pointed out. Going into detail on Whitehead's ode, Zeno then observed that, in the fifth stanza, 'The Laureat... has happily imitated what we have always admired in Virgil, Milton, and Shakespear'. Without any sense of incongruity, Zeno was comparing Whitehead to perhaps the three greatest figures in the literary canon, and the two supreme titans of English literature. The laureate's ode was a valid and even a commendable work of poetry within a framework of value and meaning set by Virgil, Milton, and Shakespeare.

Zeno continued, 'The address to the King breaths that simplicity which is one of the greatest ornaments among the ancient classics; and here again the author seems to have Virgil in his eye... The conclusive stanza bears a fine poetical compliment to the monarch, without the glare of adulation from the Laureat; without making the King more than a god; and even without noticing that his majesty is lineally descended from Julia the sister of Caius Julius Caesar, which is historical fact, and I hope will be regarded as such by Mr. Whitehead at another time.' Zeno then gave a paragraph illustrating this lineal descent, before signing off; his letter was followed by the printing of the ode in question. Here, then, is found a sense of literary quality and national pride which, rather than being held in contradistinction to laureates and royal panegyrics, actually was felt as going hand-in-hand with such things. Whitehead's address to George was classical and Virgilian, and his panegyric was not venal flattery, but 'a fine poetical compliment'. Clearly, Zeno would not have wished to see anything too fulsome in its praise; he noticed approvingly that Whitehead had not succumbed to 'the glare of adulation', and had not

deified George. Equally, though, Zeno was happy to see George complimented within the bounds of plausibility, and even felt that Whitehead could have gone further in this respect; hence his long detailing of the lineal connection between Caesar and George, which almost constituted an oblique manifesto for panegyric in and of itself, supporting, as it did, the idea that laureate poetry would actually derive power from an appropriate, historically-grounded rhetoric of praise. As long as the poet did not make George 'more than a god', panegyric could be great poetry, as determined by the standards of classical literature and the British literary heritage. As long as a poet like Whitehead, rather than Cibber, was laureate, then the odes could amount to such great poetry, presenting a subject of great interest and even of pride to the reading public.

Zeno was not the only observer impressed with Whitehead's maiden offering; even Gray, in letters to Mason, was to express admiration of the ode, and of some of Whitehead's subsequent work.<sup>87</sup> As the years passed, though, Whitehead was to find his reception less and less welcoming. Criticism of Cibber had received much of its motivation from his association with Walpole's regime; but although Whitehead was not personally as much associated with any regime as his predecessor had been, his time in office was to see the development of a furious new phase in oppositional writing, which was to identify Whitehead as one of its most promising targets. John Wilkes entered parliament in the same year as Whitehead's appointment (1757); the accession of George III was then soon followed by the controversies over Bute, and Wilkes's *North Briton*; the disputed Middlesex election came in 1769; and the 1770s and 1780s then witnessed something like a perpetual frenzy of Wilkesite agitation, the American crisis, and the Association movement, with a variegated and overlapping clamour of invective against the government and the king, and of demands for political reform. In tandem with these seismic events, the newspaper press was continuing to proliferate, and was perhaps becoming increasingly polarized in its views.<sup>88</sup> Whitehead, as a poet paid by the court and tasked with writing two very public odes a year, naturally found himself encompassed in the storm, despite his personal and political mildness. From

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<sup>87</sup> Gray *Correspondence*, pp. 602, 777, 789.

<sup>88</sup> On the substance, divisiveness, and outcomes of these various events, see Barker, *Newspapers Late Eighteenth-Century*, pp. 1-94; Conway, *American Independence*, pp. 85-165.

about the late 1760s, a series of scathing attacks and passing mockeries began appearing in the opposition press, taking a variety of forms.

On the most basic level, Whitehead was simply criticized as a bad poet, holding a ridiculous office and producing contemptible odes. In 1772 the *Middlesex Journal* published this squib, 'On reading the LAUREAT'S ODE: 'For two such meals of fulsome lies,/— [i.e. George] Pays an hundred pounds a year;/— For an OECONOMIST, he buys/Wretched provisions very dear!'<sup>89</sup> Not only was Whitehead false and venal as a poet, writing overpriced 'lies', but his badness as a poet, and the badness of his poetic role, was being characterized, here, by reference to the court which sponsored it. Another, longer squib, sent into the same paper by 'Paul Pinchwell', expanded on some of these themes:

Sweet Willy Whitehead who with medium stile,  
Can never force a tear, or win a smile:  
Most simply chaste – most delicately dull,  
Nearly o'erflowing, and yet never full.  
Sweet Willy Whitehead, first in rhiming sphere,  
Who smoothly balladizes twice a year,  
Teaching his laurell'd pension'd muse to sing  
The milkwarm praises of a milk-warm King;  
Welcomes the instant year, as custom claims,  
And hails in creeping measure royal names.<sup>90</sup>

In these lines, the laureate was being set directly at variance with standards of literary quality, and of the literary heritage which underlay those standards.<sup>91</sup> For one thing, Pinchwell was emphasizing the lack of emotive force and resonance in Whitehead's verse. For another, he was casting Whitehead on the wrong side of literary history; in the couplet 'Most simply chaste... never full', he was imitating *The Dunciad*, where Pope had adapted a famous couplet of John Denham's for an attack on Leonard Welsted.<sup>92</sup> Pinchwell then ironically highlighted Whitehead's status as the 'first in rhiming sphere', with a 'laurell'd pension'd muse', to contrast his official position in the literary world with the

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<sup>89</sup> *Middlesex Journal or Chronicle of Liberty*, 2-4 Jan. 1772.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> For more on these standards, the ideas that underlay them, and how and when they became significant in public discourse, see Chapter Five.

<sup>92</sup> Pope, *Poems*, ed. by John Butt, p. 410.

lowness of his literary talent. With the phrase ‘smoothly balladizes’, he further emphasized the idea of Whitehead as someone who could happily fulfil the formal act of versifying, but whose verse was empty of meaning or effect. The references to Whitehead’s regularity of output were intended to further distinguish him from the sincerity and spontaneity of literary production; and the end of the poem then relocated the insipidity of Whitehead’s verse to its subject matter, ‘a milk-warm King’ and ‘royal names’. The laurel was not in fact a mark of poetic achievement; it was merely a ‘pension’, and, because granted by and focused on the court, was necessarily associated with bad poetry. The court was therefore posited as forming a separate sphere and set of standards from that which the laureate was pretending to: literature.

This rhetoric of criticism was nothing new, but it was being developed in accordance with new circumstances. A picture was created in which the laureate was seen crawling off to court, hiding there from the patriotic public of the outside world. With this rhetoric, opposition writers effected a separation of the courtly on the one hand, from the public, the literary, and the patriotic on the other; they portrayed the court (here elided with the government) as a kind of self-contained echo-chamber, with no awareness of the people, no literary standards, and no patriotism. One of the main ways in which Whitehead was attacked was as an apologist for the government’s despotic policies, its disregard of national sentiment, and its hostility to reform. Because he was a pensioned writer, tasked with writing biannual odes that would be promulgated to the nation through the newspapers, he was supposed to be pedalling the court line on all national affairs, including, most critically, the American War; he took his cue from court and government figures, and was therefore a kind of propagandist hireling.<sup>93</sup>

The most interesting variant of this line came from a correspondent to the *Morning Chronicle*, calling himself ‘An Englishman’.<sup>94</sup> This correspondent painted Whitehead as someone who had fallen from his former principles, and had taken the government’s side against the public. Addressing Whitehead directly, he told him that his most recent ode ‘breaths a spirit of the most contemptible servility, and is unworthy of your name and character’; flattery was

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<sup>93</sup> In addition to the newspapers cited above and below, see e.g. *London Evening Post*, 7-9 Jun. 1774; *Morning Post and Daily Advertiser*, 5 Jun. 1776.

<sup>94</sup> *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser*, 10 Jun. 1774.

to be expected of a laureate, but it could be accomplished 'without insulting the people. In some of your former odes, the friends of their country have seemed pleased, that you, though a poet-laureat, appeared still to retain some principles not wholly unworthy of an Englishman.' But the last ode had proven otherwise. The Englishman then quoted one of Whitehead's former, supposedly more patriotic odes against him, observing that it had been written under George II, and that the times had now changed. He then further emphasized Whitehead's newfound antagonism with 'the people', claiming that Whitehead's ode insinuated 'that the people now begin to repent of their opposition'. But 'you have too much sense to believe this yourself, and should not endeavour to propagate so ridiculous a sentiment against others'. Whitehead was here posited as a government propagandist, pedalling arguments that he knew to be untrue.

The Englishman's letter went on in this vein, complaining about the 'shameful disregard' paid to the 'interests' and 'sentiments' of 'the people', and claiming that it was the government which was in need of 'repentance and reformation'. His observation that Whitehead's 'courtly muse would not chuse to recommend' such repentance and reformation was a further suggestion that Whitehead knew the truth of the situation, but was choosing to follow the government line due to his muse having been compromised by the court. The Englishman ended with a reminder 'that it is beneath the character of a man of genius, however he may be situated, to employ his talents in gross flattery and adulation; and... he should at least be cautious not to add insult to the distresses of his country.'

This letter is an interesting one, in that it allowed Whitehead a great deal more national sentiment, power of choice, and poetic talent – even 'genius' – than most of his critics were willing to allow him. With such comments as, 'however he may be situated', it even suggested that poets laureate could write in line with patriotism, public opinion, and literary genius if they only wanted to. Here, there was no necessity of the laureate siding with the government against the people. At the same time, though, the Englishman was emphatically clear on the division that currently existed, between a government on the one hand, and 'the people' on the other. The government was corrupt, tyrannous, and closed-off; 'the people' were patriotic, and represented all the historic qualities of Englishmen, primarily a love of liberty. 'The people' *were* the nation; even

literature was to be assessed and valued by reference to the sentiments, interests, and values of this English people. Whitehead, formerly an admirable poet by reference to these criteria, had now chosen wrongly. He had thrown his lot in with the government, and had therefore become a poor poet, operating in opposition to the patriotic people and to national feeling.

Most criticisms of Whitehead were less sophisticated and more snarky. One favoured line of attack was to point out the laureate's reticence or wrongness in points of fact and prediction.<sup>95</sup> In 1776, for example, came some short '*Extempore Verses*' on the New Year's ode, sneering at Whitehead's recent change in tone from bragging and belligerent to fearful and pacific, a change resultant on the poor fortunes of the war.<sup>96</sup> Another repeated tactic was to address the odes more directly, either by interlacing them with rebarbative commentary, printing parodies of them, or suggesting that the praise in the odes was actually more suited for the colonists than it was for the king.<sup>97</sup> In addition to these repeated tactics, the opposition press printed various other one-off angles of criticism and mockery, using the laureateship as a prominent, adaptable subject by which to express discontent with the government.<sup>98</sup>

Fairly consistent throughout, however, was the idea that the laureateship was a disgraceful post, used by the executive to glorify the regime and defend its policies, and necessarily filled by some bad poet who would take on any such mean, unpoetical job for money; but that there was something futile and ridiculous about the whole business, because the laureate could only ever operate in contradistinction to the true currents of public opinion, national sentiment, and literary quality. At its bluntest, the opposition argued that 'the ode is that species of poetry which has commonly been found least consonant to the taste of the English nation (and indeed the very name prostituted, as it annually is, by the soporific Laureat, carries disgust along with it)'.<sup>99</sup> Whitehead-

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<sup>95</sup> E.g. *Morning Herald and Daily Advertiser*, 26 Dec. 1780.

<sup>96</sup> *London Evening Post*, 9-11 Jan. 1776.

<sup>97</sup> E.g. there were at least three separate cases of Whitehead's odes being adapted into panegyrics of the Americans, or suggested as being more appropriately addressed to the Americans than to the king: *Middlesex Journal and Evening Advertiser*, 23-25 Jun. 1774; *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, 13 Jun. 1778; and *London Courant Westminster Chronicle and Daily Advertiser*, 3 Jan. 1782. Other sorts of parody can be found in e.g. *London Evening Post*, 11-13 Jan. 1774; *London Evening Post*, 7-9 Jun. 1774; *London Chronicle*, 11-13 Jan. 1776; *Morning Post and Daily Advertiser*, 5 Jun. 1776; *Morning Post and Daily Advertiser*, 4 Jan. 1777; *General Advertiser and Morning Intelligencer*, 12 Jun. 1778.

<sup>98</sup> E.g. *London Evening Post*, 16-19 Aug. 1777; *Morning Post and Daily Advertiser*, 20 Aug. 1777.

<sup>99</sup> *London Evening Post*, 29 Feb.-2 Mar. 1776.

the-laureate was both example and exponent of a system that was self-evidently wrong, irredeemably ridiculous, and antithetical to national sentiment, yet which was institutionally entrenched. It required a barrage of righteous and witty criticism to dislodge it.

Whitehead's reputation as laureate, then, was generally a reasonably good one; but it became thoroughly tarnished, in the eyes of the oppositional section of the public, during the middle of his tenure. The growth of the press, and the various political crises of these years, had engendered a more extremely polarized public discourse than had existed at the time of his appointment, meaning that this widely-acceptable and even -laudable laureate became a punching-bag for half of the country. He never ceased to be a 'respectable laureate', as such; Malone's comment about his having redeemed the office came at his death, and was the endorsement of a reputation that had been established over the previous thirty years. This reputation rested on the assumption that the court had a natural, important relationship with national identity, the public, and literature; it even served to bolster that assumption. But for those who felt that the laureateship and the system of which it formed a part to be unrespectable, Whitehead came to seem like one more bad laureate, promulgating government lies in bad verse in exchange for a court pension, and proving the discrepancy, or even the incompatibility, between court on the one hand, and the nation, the public, and literature, on the other.

### **Warton's Reception**

Although the laureateship was most often characterized by reference to the odes, there had always been an alternative understanding of the office: that it was not so much a functional position, as a mark of honour (and disinterested remuneration) for the nation's greatest poet. This had been the understanding on which Dryden, and his immediate pseudo-laureate predecessors, had received their pensions; and, as Chapter Three suggested, the honorific ideal persisted even after the ode-function became established, playing an important part in each laureate appointment process. By the time of George III's accession, the production of odes was dominant in the way that the public



viewed the office, but there was still a feeling that the office could be, or should be, or in fact was, a mark and reward for the greatest living poet.

Over the years, increasing numbers of observers started to notice a discrepancy between the functional requirement and the honorific ideal, or to stress these two different aspects of the office, or, most extremely, to express the desire that the ode-function be dispensed with specifically so as to render the office into a purely honorific position. Thus, the *Morning Chronicle* approved of Warton's appointment as laureate in terms of it being 'a reward of genius'.<sup>100</sup> In 1788, a correspondent named 'Candidus' gave the most suitably candid articulation of the argument for separating the function from the honour: 'For such a King does not want a Panegyrist, and such a Poet may be better employed... surely, if it is justifiable to convert any Office at Court into a Sinecure, it is in this Instance. Let the Poet Laureat be excused from rendering his annual Service of two Odes; but let the Salary be continued, as a Mark of royal Distinction conferred on Superiority of Talents.'<sup>101</sup> In this formulation, the court certainly had a role to play in the literary sphere, and 'Superior' merit would justifiably be brought into the sphere of royal patronage; but the connection ought to be a more abstract, honorific one, divested of any specific functional manifestation.<sup>102</sup>

This consciousness of a distinction between the office as functional and as honorific, and the opinion which sometimes followed – that the odes should be stripped away so as to let the honour shine forth – was to endure down to 1813, when Robert Southey accepted the office on the understanding that he could hold it as an 'honour', without being tasked with any odes.<sup>103</sup> However, a consciousness of the distinction between function and honour did not

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<sup>100</sup> *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser*, 29 Apr. 1785.

<sup>101</sup> *St. James's Chronicle or the British Evening Post*, 20-22 May 1788; also repeated, as a random paragraph in the news, rather than as a letter, in *Public Advertiser*, 23 May 1788.

<sup>102</sup> This observation was also sometimes made with regards to the office's history. A strange 'Epitaph' on literary matters, published in *Lloyd's Evening Post* in 1767, said of Dryden and Shadwell: 'Of whom one is Poet Laureat *de facto*,/the other *de jure*,/Were quarreling for the Empire of our two-headed Parnassus'; *Lloyd's Evening Post*, 8-11 May 1767. One correspondent, writing in 1777, went even further back, describing how Charles I had raised Ben Jonson's 'Salary of Poet-Laureate', proving Charles 'a Lover and Encourager of the fine Arts, and a Patron of Genius and Learning'; here, the seventeenth-century laureateship was viewed as a mark of disinterested royal patronage, rather than as an exchange of money for panegyric. *St. James's Chronicle or the British Evening Post*, 20-22 Feb. 1777.

<sup>103</sup> Initially he found that his understanding was not shared by the Prince Regent or other interested parties, and he was still expected to furnish the master of the king's music with biannual odes; but eventually, over the course of his tenure, the function was allowed to lapse, and the laurel was to be purely honorific thereafter. See Conclusion.

necessarily entail the abolition of the odes. With both Whitehead and Pye, there can also be identified some sense that the function and the honour were natural partners. Zeno's commentary on Whitehead's ode, quoted above, would seem to suggest an understanding that the odes ought to be written by a great poet, and that the biannual ode format gave a great poet the opportunity to write great poems.

This sense of union between function and honour reached its highest pitch with Thomas Warton. During his tenure, the office and the odes attracted new heights of attention, interest, admiration, and respect, and the diligence and talent with which he fulfilled his duties meant that he was able to unite the functional and honorific aspects of the office into a seamless whole (in the eyes of most observers), becoming a sort of genuine national voice. (He was also helped by the relative mildness of the political climate.) Mockery did not cease, of course, and it was during Warton's time that Gibbon published his hopes that the odes would finally be dispensed with; but even if there were limits to Warton's achievement, it was a resounding achievement all the same. Between 1785 and 1790, the laureateship was arguably the most important aspect of the literary landscape, and each new ode was consumed avidly by the reading public.

It helped that Warton already had an impressive reputation, and that he continued his scholarly works throughout his tenure. Indeed, those scholarly works were followed with great interest by the newspapers, and were even associated with his position as laureate; several newspapers reported that Warton had kept up his work on Milton directly at the king's request, or 'was honoured by a Royal injunction to complete his annotations upon this mighty Bard.'<sup>104</sup> But what brought Warton and his office the greatest renown was the odes themselves. After his first, poorly-received offering, he managed to produce a sequence of odes which, even when they did not command universal admiration, generated widespread critical engagement and discussion. The reading public always looked forward to their appearance. In December 1788, the *Morning Post* read, 'If the Laureat's New Year Ode, said to have been prepared before his Majesty's illness, is not to be performed at St. James's [because of the illness], the lovers of true poetry flatter themselves, that it will at

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<sup>104</sup> *Public Advertiser*, 2 Jun. 1790. See also *St. James's Chronicle or the British Evening Post*, 5-7 Jul. 1785. For more on Warton's work on Milton, see Rounce, 'Scholarship', p. 690.

least be given to the Public by the usual channel.<sup>105</sup> Likewise the *General Advertiser*: 'The subject of the New Year Ode has excited the curiosity of the Literati; the Laureat's annual tribute to Majesty, will, we hear, at this melancholy period, be dispensed with.'<sup>106</sup> Warton's odes, although here described as 'tribute[s] to Majesty', their performance or non-performance determined by the king's disposition, were nonetheless being identified and valued in terms of their distribution to 'the Public' and to 'the Literati'. The king's illness thus served to deprive the reading public of the 'true poetry' it had come to look forward to twice a year. Warton's laureate odes were important business in the literary world, and their fixed regularity of appearance only enhanced their status as literary events.

There was a continuous welter of positive remarks on the laureate's odes and talents in these years. 'The Laureat has undoubtedly added much to his fame by his second Ode', said the *Morning Chronicle*.<sup>107</sup> 'The *Laureat's Ode*, the best publication of the New Year, was reviewed in the *WORLD*, and with repeated approbation on the 3d of Jan', read the *World* itself, apparently feeling the need to draw extra attention to its own praise;<sup>108</sup> it then reviewed the ode again the next day, this time pointing out some of its flaws, but stating, 'Wharton's Ode, which though already much praised, may here meet with further panegyric, without our justly incurring the censure of adulation, is undoubtedly the happiest Lyrick, the happiest Laureate Lyrick at least, that ever flowed from his pen.'<sup>109</sup> More unequivocal was the praise of the *St. James's Chronicle*: 'The Odes of the late Laureate, Mr. Whitehead, are confessedly superior to any of the Odes of his Predecessors: And among these predecessors, are the conspicuous Names of Dryden and Rowe. But what official Ode of Whitehead comprehends so much Variety and Vigour of Imagery, as Mr. Warton's last Ode?' It then gave an extended sequence of praise for the various beauties and ingenuities of the ode in question.<sup>110</sup> By the end of Warton's tenure, papers were able to make casual remarks about 'the sublime

<sup>105</sup> *Morning Post and Daily Advertiser*, 3 Dec. 1788.

<sup>106</sup> *General Advertiser*, 12 Dec. 1788.

<sup>107</sup> *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser*, 9 Jan. 1786.

<sup>108</sup> *World and Fashionable Advertiser*, 10 Jan. 1787.

<sup>109</sup> *World and Fashionable Advertiser*, 11 Jan. 1787.

<sup>110</sup> *St. James's Chronicle or the British Evening Post*, 12-14 Jan. 1786.

flights and stateliness of Birth Day Odes', or to group Warton's productions with 'the best Odes in our language', comparable to 'the Odes of Gray'.<sup>111</sup>

There was also a tendency for deeper and more variegated literary debate and discussion. The *General Evening Post* observed, 'It is a matter of no small entertainment and curiosity, to compare the different criticisms in the newspapers on the Laureat's late Ode'; it then gave a list of all the contradictory things, positive and negative, that had been said on this single ode, before concluding that, 'as the Ode is so much the object of public attention, and as abuse is too commonly excited by excellence, we may easily perceive what is its real character.'<sup>112</sup> Clearly, there was a vigorous interest and debate about Warton's laureate offerings. One of the best examples came in the *Gazetteer* of 1786, precisely because it started out on a negative note, and evinced the sort of oppositional attitude that Whitehead had so much suffered by. 'Warton's Ode – with all its imperfections on its head – claims applause; but applause only as a party poem'. It was, the paper insisted, an unwarranted 'panegyrick upon the present Administration'; its 'execution' was 'well', and certain parts were 'extremely poetical' and 'extremely spirited'; however, there was a general want of originality throughout. Following this even-handed, ambivalent, and sometimes disapproving scrutiny, though, the *Gazetteer* concluded by saying, 'our present Laureat... is certainly superior in poetical abilities to his predecessor; and Whitehead excelled Colley Cibber. Whatever the splenetic may assert to the contrary, literature was never more encouraged, nor ever flourished as she does at present.'<sup>113</sup> Thus, even when an individual ode came in for some negative criticism, it took part in a wider climate of debate and approval which can leave no doubt as to the high regard in which Warton-as-laureate was held by his contemporaries.

Warton's reception is also interesting in terms of what criteria he was being judged by and for what factors he was being celebrated. One correspondent in 1785, defending Warton's ode from a charge made by a critic in another newspaper – that its opening lines were ambiguous – argued instead that the lines in question led 'naturally' to Warton's 'main argument', which argument was 'exemplified in a general display of two distinguished parts of the

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<sup>111</sup> *World*, 23 Jun. 1788 and *Morning Herald*, 26 Jun. 1788; *Public Advertiser*, 10 Jun. 1789.

<sup>112</sup> *General Evening Post*, 14-17 Jan. 1786.

<sup>113</sup> *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, 7 Jan. 1786.

King's character, his patronage of the arts, and the decorum of his domestic life. And surely, in this display, elegance and imagery are united with perspicuity. Through the whole composition, one subject is uniformly pursued, judiciously conducted, and happily illustrated.<sup>114</sup> Warton's ode was being subjected to critical literary analysis, and was found entirely successful. Moreover, it achieved literary success as an illustration of the king's qualities, and particularly of his role as a patron and as a father (in which latter capacity he was both a father to the nation, and an exemplar of a middle-class domestic ideal). There was no sense here, as there had been in some of the attacks on Whitehead, that praise of the king was inherently unliterary, or that a laureate ode could only ever have been vacuous. Instead, this exemplary prince and patron of the arts formed perfect subject matter for an admirable piece of poetry. Fittingly, the correspondent in question took the name 'Verax', as if intentionally refuting the old complaints about the laureate's supposed falseness.

Still more emphatic in praising Warton's ode by reference to notions of literary greatness and national character was the *St. James's Chronicle*. 'As the situation of a Poet Laureate is very similar to that of Pindar... might not our Birth-Day Odes be rendered more interesting, by interweaving agreeable Digressions [as Pindar did], and striking Parts of English History with the usual Compliments of the Day? Most of Mr. Warton's Odes have been written on this Plan; and such a Plan alone is calculated to render those periodical Productions, not only a classical Entertainment for the present Time, but a permanent and valuable Acquisition to Posterity. We are happy to hear, that Mr. Warton has very successfully pursued this Idea in his next Ode.'<sup>115</sup> Here, the newspaper showed awareness of the potential transience and quotidian nature of laureate odes, and yet expressed the belief that they could transcend this fate and enter the literary canon, if they were written according to Pindar's example and if they engaged with English history. Warton, the newspaper emphasized, was doing just this. His odes were being praised not just as

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<sup>114</sup> *Public Advertiser*, 15 Jun. 1785.

<sup>115</sup> *St. James's Chronicle or the British Evening Post*, 20-23 Oct. 1787. Other than in its concluding opinion, this statement was a heavy paraphrase of something that Henry James Pye himself had published elsewhere, here given without acknowledgement of its origin. The relevant lines by Pye will be addressed in Chapter Five. Pye, *Poems On Various Subjects*, I, pp. 195-6.

successful examples within a limited genre, or for their courtly nature; they were being praised by reference to those public, national, and literary qualities that Whitehead's enemies had claimed to be incompatible with the laureateship.

One final, interesting variation to note came in 1788, when the same paper observed that Warton had been 'accused of treating the transcendent and numerous Virtues of his Royal Master with a Parsimony of Panegyrick'. For some readers, the laureate was not being sycophantic enough. But the *Chronicle* defended him, insisting, 'the Composition turns on a very seasonable and well-chosen Topick, the singular Happiness enjoyed by the People of England, under a King, who promotes and preserves the original and constitutional Compacts of his Kingdom', which, the *Chronicle* noted, was in contrast to the despotic behaviour of Louis XVI.<sup>116</sup> The patriotism of the laureate could not be doubted; nor could the unison between 'People' and 'King', which was celebrated, and in some sense enacted, in his odes.

Warton-as-laureate, then, was perhaps the most important figure in the literary landscape from 1785 to 1790. He stood prominently before the public, and his courtly odes were regarded as highly significant events, as well as highly accomplished poems, deserving of critical engagement. Mockery and negativity did not disappear; but it seems unarguable that, under Warton, the laureateship occupied a position of importance and respectability that would not be expected from current scholarly narratives. More surprisingly still, the odes were central to this; Warton's achievement was to render the functional and the honorific notions of the office seamlessly compatible, and thus to turn the laureateship into a sort of national voice, speaking equally for king and people. Whitehead's role in doing something similar, and in preparing the way for Warton, should not be neglected; but he was never quite as highly regarded, and had to deal with the more factional reception provided by a more violently factional public. It was Warton who succeeded most emphatically in setting courtly culture in harmony with ideas of literature, patriotism, and public opinion. When Bishop Richard Mant came to publish Warton's *Poetical Works* in 1802, he introduced them as 'the poems of the late Laureate', and he placed the laureate odes as the culmination of Warton's lyrical poetry. In the 'Memoirs' which opened the volume, Mant waxed lyrical about these laureate lyrics, which

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<sup>116</sup> *St. James's Chronicle or the British Evening Post*, 24-27 May 1788.

he discussed lengthily after having first surveyed the rest of Warton's English-language poetry. 'The Laureate Odes', he claimed, 'are the most striking testimony of the strength of Warton's poetical genius.'<sup>117</sup> It would not have been a controversial opinion.

### **Pye's Reception**

Last of the eighteenth-century laureates was Henry James Pye, whose reputation is usually thought to have been dismally low, but whose public reception was actually a fascinating mixture of Whitehead's and Warton's. Undoubtedly, there were a large number of readers who considered him a meagre poet, including the circles of William Godwin, Southey, and Byron.<sup>118</sup> Equally, the sorts of negative press that Whitehead came in for during the crises over Wilkes, America, and reform were repeated for Pye during the crisis years of the 1790s, when the French Revolutionary Wars were raging, the Jacobin scare was at its height, and Pitt's government was implementing its 'Terror'. This aspect of Pye's public reception can be found in abundant evidence and diversity in the opposition press, but its tone and trends were sufficiently similar to Whitehead's for it to warrant nothing more here than a hefty footnote; the only major difference was that the king and court were no longer being much targeted as part of these attacks, with Pitt's ministry instead having become posited as Pye's nefarious backers.<sup>119</sup> During Pye's twenty-three years as laureate, he and his office clearly had a very bad reputation in some quarters, with the sorts of criticism that have been surveyed previously being given a shriller airing than ever before. And yet, the most striking thing about Pye's tenure is that, unlike Whitehead, he thoroughly embraced the potentials of his position. Rather than sitting there meekly while the opposition press castigated him, he made himself into a champion of loyalism, proudly placing himself at the

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<sup>117</sup> Mant, 'Preface', p. i; Mant, 'Memoirs of Warton', pp. clvi-clix.

<sup>118</sup> E.g. there is a scornful reference to Pye, using him as a short-hand reference for bad poetry, in a letter from Thomas Lawrence to William Godwin. Bod, MS Abinger c 15, f. 40.

<sup>119</sup> See e.g. *World*, 3 Jan. 1794; *Morning Post*, 8 Jan. 1794; *Morning Post*, 22 May 1794; *Morning Post and Fashionable World*, 29 Jan. 1795; *Morning Post and Fashionable World*, 29 Sep. 1795; *Oracle and Public Advertiser*, 20 Jan. 1796; *Morning Chronicle*, 25 May 1796; *Morning Chronicle*, 15 Jun. 1796; *Morning Chronicle*, 19 Jan. 1797; *Morning Chronicle*, 5 Nov. 1799; *Morning Post and Gazetteer*, 2 Jan. 1800.

head of loyalist culture and being celebrated as such by the loyalist press. He became a voice of the nation, as Warton had been, but within the context of a more partisan politics.

Partly, this was because he joined his role as laureate with a range of other loyalist activities. He became a Westminster magistrate in 1792, and seems to have been a tenacious official in the battle against crime and Jacobinism; in 1808, he published a *Summary of the Duties of a Justice of the Peace out of Sessions*.<sup>120</sup> He also wrote two anti-Jacobin novels, *The Democrat* (1795) and *The Aristocrat* (1799); plays and epic poems on patriotic, belligerent, and loyalist themes; and various pieces of conservative non-fiction, including a translation of *Xenophon's Defence of the Athenian Democracy... With Notes, and An Appendix* (1794), over half of which consisted of Pye's commentary in defence of the existing British system of government. Alongside these various conservative, loyalist, and Pittite endeavours, there were of course the biannual odes.

Pye's public reception was exactly as he would have wished. Due to his institutional position and spirited publications, he was accepted by the loyalist press, especially in the 1790s, as a champion of the cause, and was held up as a national bard of paramount importance. His every non-official publication was commented upon, praised for its fine loyalist tendencies, and predicted to make some practical contribution to the anti-Jacobin cause.<sup>121</sup> The laureate was fulfilling a new role through his publications: 'To excite the military and patriotic ardour of his countrymen'.<sup>122</sup> Apparently, one line in Pye's tragedy, *The Siege of Meaux* – 'Think not your private meetings are concealed from our enquiring eye', which was an allegorical reference to the government's crackdown on Jacobin activities – produced 'one of the most marked plaudits we ever heard in

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<sup>120</sup> Leigh Hunt's autobiography tells an anecdote in which Pye was too engrossed reading to bother with his work arresting criminals. Leigh Hunt, *The Autobiography of Leigh Hunt*, ed. by J.E. Morpurgo (London: The Cresset Press, 1948), p. 196. Apart from this, though, the evidence seems to suggest Pye to have been a diligent magistrate, and his writings evince great fervour for the anti-Jacobin cause. He appears performing his work as a magistrate in various official records of the time: TNA, C 12/683/18; C 12/683/29; C 202/181/2; HO 42/22/36, ff. 94-5; HO 42/23, ff. 30-2; HO 42/45/2, ff. 8-19; HO 42/45/10, ff. 131-159; HO 42/77, ff. 178-9; HO 47/21/1; HO 47/32/16.

<sup>121</sup> E.g. *Oracle and Public Advertiser*, 15 Apr. 1794; *London Chronicle*, 20-22 May 1794; *Star*, 19. Jan 1798; *Lloyd's Evening Post*, 27-29 Jun. 1798; *Oracle and Public Advertiser*, 23 Aug. 1798; *True Briton*, 9 Oct. 1798; *True Briton*, 29 Jul. 1800; *Oracle and Daily Advertiser*, 30 Jul. 1800.

<sup>122</sup> *Whitehall Evening Post*, 29-31 Jan. 1795 and *St. James's Chronicle or the British Evening Post*, 3-5 Feb. 1795.



a Theatre';<sup>123</sup> and at least one newspaper printed Pye's verses on 'the late Glorious Victory obtained by the British Fleet' of June 1794, which (it explained) had been sent by Pye to Drury Lane Theatre for a public recitation there.<sup>124</sup>

Meanwhile Pye made appearances at various gatherings in London, some of a very courtly character, others of a broader cultural interest, successfully enacting the role of a bard of public importance and a central figure in loyalist culture. His attendance at royal Levees was reported on;<sup>125</sup> so too his appointment as a Justice for the Westminster Police in 1792;<sup>126</sup> he was numbered amongst various other 'lovers and patrons of the Arts' at the Royal Academy's annual dinner;<sup>127</sup> he gave a recitation at the 1799 anniversary dinner of the Literary Fund;<sup>128</sup> and at the same event the following year, 'A poem by Mr. Pye, the laureat, was recited by another Gentleman', before a rendition of 'God Save the King'.<sup>129</sup> Pye even became a sort of celebrity figure, with papers reporting on his movements, whereabouts, and appearances in public.<sup>130</sup>

The odes attracted clamorous attention in somewhat of a similar way to Warton's, but with a more partisan bent. As the *Sun* put it, 'The learning, the talents, and the respectable character of Mr. Pye, the Poet Laureat, cannot exempt him from the abuse of the Seditious Prints, because his Muse is devoted to Loyalty, and because his heart feels upon that subject all that is suggested by his imagination. But the abuse is as dull as it is malignant'.<sup>131</sup> The products of this loyalist muse seem to have been received eagerly by certain sections of the public. In January 1792, when there was no New Year's Ode, at least two newspapers filled the gap by presenting one of Pye's earlier, non-official odes, '*Written at EAGLEHURST, which commands a View of Spithead, October 10, 1790*', in which Pye celebrated the British fleet; the *Oracle* proclaimed in preface to the ode, 'The People shall not be disappointed of an

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<sup>123</sup> *Times*, 20 May 1794.

<sup>124</sup> *Whitehall Evening Post*, 8-10 Jul. 1794.

<sup>125</sup> *Public Advertiser*, 25 Feb. 1792; *Morning Chronicle*, 25 Feb. 1792; *Star*, 25 Feb. 1792.

<sup>126</sup> *World*, 5 Jul. 1792.

<sup>127</sup> *Oracle and Public Advertiser*, 28 Apr. 1794.

<sup>128</sup> *Morning Herald*, 3 May 1799.

<sup>129</sup> *London Packet or New Lloyd's Evening Post*, 23-25 Apr. 1800.

<sup>130</sup> E.g. *Star*, 26 Mar. 1792; *Times*, 10 Aug. 1796; *St. James's Chronicle or the British Evening Post*, 5-7 Jul. 1798; *Morning Herald*, 12 Jan. 1799; *Morning Post and Gazetteer*, 17. Jan 1799. Several papers even reported of a minor accident suffered by 'Mr. Pye, brother to the Poet-Laureat': *Lloyd's Evening Post*, 30 Apr.-2 May 1800; *Whitehall Evening Post*, 1-3 May 1800; *Morning Post and Gazetteer*, 3 May 1800.

<sup>131</sup> *Sun*, 10 Jul. 1798.

ODE from the LAUREATE – We present them with the following; much of which is very Poetical, in the WHITEHEAD way, and very pleasing.<sup>132</sup>

The partisan bent to Pye's public reception was not much to his cost; if anything, the necessities of partisan debate seem to have elevated the standing of the laureateship to greater heights than ever before. For example, the public rehearsals of the odes became increasingly popular and prominent events. 'The annual poetic tribute of the Laureat... yesterday was rehearsed at the Music Rooms, in Tottenham-street, to a polite and numerous audience', reported the *Morning Herald* in 1793.<sup>133</sup> By 1795, the rehearsals were being witnessed by 'a crowded attendance of Musical Cognoscenti and Ladies', and being 'received with great applause, and though a gratuitous performance, some parts were unanimously *encored*.'<sup>134</sup> Apparently, the conductor had transitioned this ode's conclusion into 'the popular air of *Rule Britannia* with peculiar felicity and effect', further establishing the odes' position amongst a booming loyalist culture.<sup>135</sup> In 1799, 'Fifteen hundred persons' attended.<sup>136</sup> 'The Room was, indeed, more crowded than ever we remember on any similar occasion... The whole was received with warm applause – an applause that was the due tribute to Taste, to Science, and to Genius.'<sup>137</sup>

Pye's odes also started cropping up in other contexts. At the 1794 annual dinner of the Royal Academy, 'Some of the chief attendants' read out 'the first two Stanzas of the Laureate's coming Ode.'<sup>138</sup> In 1795, numerous adverts started appearing for public, commercial vocal concerts which included a 'Selection from the Ode for the New Year (by permission of the Poet Laureat and the Master of His Majesty's Band)', alongside works by such composers as Handel and Bach.<sup>139</sup> Likewise, in 1799, Ranelagh Gardens advertised the following: 'The Manager respectfully informs the Public, that by particular desire of many Persons of Distinction', he had brought in a four-year-old 'Phoenomenon' to perform 'a Concerto of Haydn's on the Grand Piano Forte; recite Collins's Ode on the Passions; and the Birth-Day Ode by the Poet-

<sup>132</sup> *Oracle*, 6 Jan. 1792; *Public Advertiser*, 9 Jan. 1792.

<sup>133</sup> *Morning Herald*, 3 Jan. 1793.

<sup>134</sup> *True Briton*, 1 Jan. 1795; *Sun*, 1 Jan. 1795.

<sup>135</sup> *True Briton*, 2 Jan. 1795; *Sun*, 2 Jan. 1795.

<sup>136</sup> *Observer*, 20 Jan. 1799.

<sup>137</sup> *Sun*, 18 Jan. 1799; also in *True Briton*, 18 Jan. 1799.

<sup>138</sup> *World*, 28 Apr. 1794.

<sup>139</sup> E.g. *Morning Chronicle*, 30 Jan. 1795; *Oracle and Public Advertiser*, 5 Feb. 1795. The 'Bach' in question was not specified.

Laureat.' George III's birthday would also be honoured (the advert continued) with a firework display, and a 'RURAL MASQUERADE' would be put on under the patronage of the Prince of Wales.<sup>140</sup> The same four-year-old musical prodigy then popped up again in other adverts, performing Pye's ode and the two other pieces at Covent Garden Theatre, as part of a performance of *Lover's Vows* put on under 'the Patronage of HER MAJESTY'.<sup>141</sup>

Nor did Pye and his supporters allow the opposition to separate the courtly sphere from the spheres of public opinion, patriotism, and literature, as they wished to do. Instead, for the loyalist public, notions of patriotism and literature were more closely bound up with the court than ever before; they even attained their highest and most natural expression in the context of courtly culture. One birthday ode was commended, as poetry, by reference to its anti-Jacobin politics: 'The Laureat's poetical description of the turbulent and dreadful situation of affairs upon the Continent, compared with the happy and harmonious agreement of all ranks to support the Constitution of Great Britain, is described in the most beautiful and impressive language.'<sup>142</sup> Pye's partisan, patriotic subject-matter made the perfect subject matter for fine poetry. A few years later, another ode received an even more rapturous response: 'The Poet-Laureat's address, in converting the attack on his Majesty into a compliment, has been noticed; but a Correspondent wonders that the beautiful conclusion of the Ode, which sings the birth of the young Princess, should have gone without some publick tribute of praise. Mr. PYE has narrated this joyful event in the true style of Poetry. To repeat his verse, will be to invite our readers to a repetition of pleasure.'<sup>143</sup> Here, Pye's courtly verse was found truly poetic, and emphatically pleasurable to readers, on account of its treatment of royal persons and events.

The response to Pye's special *Carmen Seculare* – an ode for the new century – was, in some quarters, even more emphatic on his literary accomplishments. 'The whole of the work is written with true lyric enthusiasm. GRAY is the model whom the Laureat has evidently studied on the present occasion, and there are many passages in this SECULAR ODE which would not suffer even in comparison with some of that admirable Poet's happiest

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<sup>140</sup> *Star*, 5 Jun. 1799.

<sup>141</sup> *Morning Chronicle*, 10 Jun. 1799.

<sup>142</sup> *Diary or Woodfall's Register*, 24 Dec. 1792.

<sup>143</sup> *St. James's Chronicle or the British Evening Post*, 28-30 Jan. 1796.

flights.<sup>144</sup> This courtly, patriotic ode could stand proudly alongside the great works of Gray (whose scornful comments on the office had by this time been public for twenty-five years). Meanwhile, when the opposition press tried to distinguish between courtly interests and literary quality, the loyalist press reacted with sovereign complacency: ‘*A Party Scribbler* says, that the Laureat’s Ode smells of *the oil of influence* – This can only mean *the soft influence of the Muses*, a compliment of which the Laureat has some reason to be proud.’<sup>145</sup> It was the opposition, not Pye, whose literary discernment was corrupted by factional feeling; they served a ‘*Party*’, he served ‘*the Muses*’.

This sort of evidence has not been much noticed by historians. Even where Pye is enlisted as an exemplar of loyalist sentiment, his role and reputation are dealt with dismissively. Bainbridge ends a brief discussion of him by deeming him a ‘failure’ in his attempts to inspire the national war effort.<sup>146</sup> Kevin Gilmartin, in his monograph on literary conservatism during this period, barely mentions Pye. Where he does, he calls Pye ‘the much-maligned Poet Laureate and occasional *Anti-Jacobin* reviewer’, and only discusses him as a representative writer of anti-Jacobin novels.<sup>147</sup> He does not elaborate on how much or how universally Pye was maligned, instead simply echoing a longstanding assumption; and he subsumes Pye’s importance as an anti-Jacobin figure within the activity of the much better-known *Anti-Jacobin Review*. Grenby’s treatment of Pye is more interesting. Surveying the reception of anti-Jacobin novels in the major review periodicals, he gives a nuanced, sensitive discussion of how political principles factored into matters of aesthetic criticism. However, after noting the positive reviews that Pye’s anti-Jacobin novels garnered, he expresses bafflement. ‘Could it really be the so much maligned and notoriously dreary Henry James Pye... whose *Aristocrat* (1799) was called ‘agreeable’, ‘remarkably well-written’, ‘pleasing’, ‘the elegant amusements of a well-informed and accomplished writer’[?]. But the answer to Grenby’s question is straightforward: yes. There was no widespread negative opinion of Pye’s quality as a writer, except amongst those of opposition political tendencies.

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<sup>144</sup> *Sun*, 18 Jan. 1800.

<sup>145</sup> *True Briton*, 27 Jan. 1797.

<sup>146</sup> Simon Bainbridge, *British Poetry and the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars: Visions of Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 48-50 (p. 50 for quotation).

<sup>147</sup> Kevin Gilmartin, *Writing Against Revolution: Literary Conservatism in Britain, 1790-1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 158.

Even at the start of the 1790s, Hayley and Cowper had had a high opinion of Pye;<sup>148</sup> Isaac Disraeli had published a poetical address to him in which he had extolled him above the majority of his poetic contemporaries and identified him as a tutelary figure;<sup>149</sup> and the *Public Advertiser* had said upon his appointment, 'No man in Great-Britain, perhaps, could have accepted the post of Poet Laureat with so much propriety as Mr. PYE. His merits, as a Bard, are universally allowed to be striking...The Monthly Critics...have always spoken highly of his works'.<sup>150</sup> As the 1790s progressed, the tendencies of Pye's work and his position as laureate then caused him to become a champion of loyalist culture. Any positive reviews that his work might have attracted in these years should not be seen through the lens of Romantic scorn; they should be taken as evidence of Pye's complicated but very prominent standing.

During the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, then, the previous trends of public opinion towards the laureateship reached their head. For many observers, the laureateship was entirely execrable, and, as a courtly office which only hireling poetasters would accept, it could only ever be so. But for others, the laureate Pye was a loyalist champion, and his odes formed the centrepiece of loyalist culture; they were not at odds with ideas of national identity or literature, but in fact were entirely suitable with such ideas, because the court, and a spirit of loyalty to the court, were central to public opinion and national identity, and even, perhaps, to the arts. When Pye recovered from an illness in 1798, one newspaper was able to report, without a hint of irony, that 'Many of the *Literati* were wishing for his distinguished office.'<sup>151</sup> Thus the laureateship became, during Pye's tenure, subject to a polarization of public opinion, its reputation divided and extreme. But there can be no doubt that the office was a highly significant feature of the cultural landscape and of public consciousness. It played a key part in focusing and articulating loyalist sentiment, and it cemented the role of the court with regards to the public, national identity, and literature. The reception to Pye and his odes demonstrates that eighteenth-century Britain had not in fact transitioned from a courtly culture

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<sup>148</sup> Pye, *Poems on Various Subjects*, I, p. 49; Cowper, *Letters and Prose Writings*, IV, pp. 123-4.

<sup>149</sup> Isaac Disraeli, *Specimens of a New Version of Telemachus. To Which is Prefixed, A Defence of Poetry. Addressed to Henry James Pye, Esq. Poet-Laureat*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (1791). Looking back from 1826, John O'Keeffe stated in passing, 'Mr. Pye deservedly succeeded Warton'. O'Keeffe, *Recollections*, II, p. 133.

<sup>150</sup> *Public Advertiser*, 26 Jul. 1790.

<sup>151</sup> *Oracle and Public Advertiser*, 17 Jan. 1798.

to a post-courtly, commercial, or public culture. Instead, commercial, public practices, and associated ideas of national identity, literature, and the national literary heritage, had grown up and evolved with the court in their midst, interacting fruitfully with the more traditional agencies of courtly patronage. The logistical and ideological challenges of the French Revolutionary Wars caused this relationship to become all the clearer and all the more important, energizing a public loyalist sentiment that looked to the court, and to its poet laureate, for its voice in matters of national identity and literature.

## **Conclusion**

The laureateship, it is evident, was of much greater prominence, and much greater diversity of reception, than has been previously realized. There was certainly a powerful strain of mockery against the office, included in which were genuine appeals for its abolition; yet most of the criticism was against the manner in which the office was currently being occupied, and the way that the biannual odes were being written, or constituted that sort of gentle mockery that continues to gather about the British royal family without involving any serious opposition to it. The office attracted comment of all sorts, positive and negative, because it was an important institution in British public life.

In terms of the scholarship discussed at the start of this chapter, the foregoing evidence furnishes a number of arguments. For one thing, it contributes to the scholarship on George III, demonstrating further the multifariousness of George's own public reputation and the diverse means by which his subjects discussed, conceptualized, and understood him. During Whitehead's tenure, George's official patronage of Whitehead was perceived by the opposition in a similar way to his patronage of the Royal Academy (as shown by Hoock): as evincing despotic intentions, poor taste, and lack of Britishness. Unlike the Royal Academy, however, the laureateship was also perceived as a kind of far-reaching propaganda machine, with George actively using the biannual laureate odes to spread his malign interpretation of affairs to the nation, and to promulgate a servile attitude to the court. At the same time, other observers responded to the laureateship as a fine, worthy piece of patronage, which revealed George's paternal, patronal, and patriotic

characteristics. The evidence of the odes also adds to the picture of George's 1790s 'apotheosis', which has been so well drawn by Colley and Morris; it demonstrates that the elision between patriotism and loyalism had become powerfully manifest throughout public life by this time, with the poet laureate serving as a sort of celebrity archbishop (if that is not too hideous an image) to an apotheosized king. But the evidence likewise bears out Ditchfield's suggestion that the contrast between the first and second halves of George's reign has generally been overstated. Even in the 1760s and 1770s, the laureate attracted great interest and approval, and George was commended as a patron; even in the 1790s and early 1800s, there were many people who attacked the laureate and the belligerent loyalist culture that he was espousing.

As for the wider themes and fields of scholarship with which this thesis is engaging, the evidence is more resounding still. The public reception of the laureates shows that the court had a more complex and fruitful relationship with the newer agencies and developments of British society than scholars have tended to postulate. There certainly were people who saw the court as existing separately from the currents of national identity, public opinion, and literature that were gaining continual ground in terms of their cultural valence and economic agency, and there certainly were people whose oppositional political position made them as keen to stress that separation as possible. Yet the court clearly also had a critical role within the commercial public sphere, and the commercial public sphere was likewise of critical importance to the way that the court operated and was perceived. The laureate odes, although produced for performance at court, were published and read increasingly widely in newspapers, and were performed in public settings with increasing popularity. The more loyalist tendency of public opinion – understood as something like one end of a spectrum, rather than as one of two opposing attitudes – perceived the court as something with a public face, a national importance, and a continually critical role in the production of culture, especially when the king was so discerning an artistic patron as George III. The office of poet laureate was perhaps the prime symbol of this unity, at least in the realm of literature. It was a courtly office which yet occupied a pre-eminent place in the public and literary life of the nation. It proved the court's continuing role with regards to Britain, its people, and its literary heritage, and it proved that role to be both crucial and positive.





**Chapter Five. “But Odes of S----- almost choakt the way”:  
Laureate Writings of the Long Eighteenth Century**

The most prominent aspect of the eighteenth-century laureateship was the biannual laureate odes. This had not been the case during Dryden’s tenure; he had not written any of these odes, and only in a loose sense had he written any *ex cathedra* poetry at all. His immediate successors, Shadwell and Tate, then involved themselves in the production of these odes, without yet being considered solely or even usually responsible for them; but from the start of Rowe’s tenure to the end of Pye’s, the odes constituted the laureate’s exclusive and comprehensive duty. Year after year, the laureate provided texts which, set to music by the master of the king’s music, would be performed at court as part of the festivities of New Year’s Day and the royal birthday. As a matter of course (increasingly so as the century wore on), they would also be printed for public consumption in their textual form. The odes only came to an end with George III’s final incapacity and the heel-dragging of Robert Southey, who, in typical Romantic fashion, disliked the idea of writings odes to order.

In this chapter, the odes themselves will be examined. There is a great number of them: two a year for almost a century, preceded by the initial, patchy spate produced between 1689 and 1715. On a few occasions across the eighteenth century, a New Year or a Birthday ode was not produced, due to some remission of the customary festivities; and the odes were not always published prior to 1730, meaning that there are gaps in, particularly, the surviving outputs of Tate and Eusden. But the body of surviving pre-1730 material is nonetheless large, and sufficiently representative to allow for generalizations to be made, while the post-1730 material provides an essentially unbroken run of between seventy and eighty odes.

In studying this mass of material, certain decisions of focus must therefore be made. The first is a simple one: all odes written by non-laureates have been left out. This means not only those courtly odes written before the laureates were given exclusive responsibility for the task, but also the more anomalous, voluntary odes that are found published in periodicals for New Year’s Day and the royal birthday throughout the long eighteenth century, sometimes published alongside the laureates’ own official productions, and none of them ever set to music. These volunteer efforts make up an interesting

body of material in their own right, and testify to the popularity of the form, but any discussion of them would take up space that would be better devoted to the actual laureate odes, and would probably provide more of a distraction than a foil. The focus of this chapter will be entirely on the biannual courtly odes written by the laureates, and the context in which these odes will be situated is the history of the eighteenth-century laureateship, as it has appeared in the foregoing chapters.

The next issue is what sort of focus will be applied to these laureate odes themselves. In part, this chapter will have the rather simple intention of describing the general form, content, and developments of the odes; its analysis of the odes will be concerned with forms and tropes, rather than with any overly theoretical framework. Jack Lynch, introducing the recent *Oxford Handbook of British Poetry, 1660-1800*, notes that the volume has 'more pages on formal and generic questions than in any book on eighteenth-century literature in many years', reflecting a rebirth of formalist scholarship, in which questions of form have been addressed in new ways, and plugged in to an appreciation of the contexts in which poetry was created and experienced;<sup>1</sup> and the approach taken here continues that trend. The analysis of form, genre, and tropes will be the platform by which more far-reaching arguments are offered. The laureate odes have never attracted much attention by historians or literary scholars; they have generally been considered poor, repetitive productions, and have therefore been neglected.<sup>2</sup> Historians of the court, of individual monarchs, of politics, of national identity, of war, of culture, of class, of the public, or of any other subject which the odes touch upon, have almost never investigated this body of material for what it might have to say; and literary scholars have likewise passed over the laureate odes as if they played no part in the themes and developments that they have been studying.

On the brief occasions that a laureate ode is made use of, it is generally lumped together with writings by other poets as a brief, dull exemplar of typical tendencies in loyalist or conservative verses. Sharpe and Winn refer to works

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<sup>1</sup> Jack Lynch, 'Introduction', in *British Poetry, 1660-1800*, ed. by Lynch, pp. xix-xxi (xx-xxi; xxi for quotation). See especially 'Part IV. Poetic Form' and 'Part V. Poetic Genres' in this volume.

<sup>2</sup> McGuinness, who has carried out the only study of the odes, has done so with a primarily musical interest, analysing their development as a genre of musical performance; her short chapter on 'The Texts' is scathing and dismissive of them as poetry, and claims them to be tedious to the point of indistinguishability. McGuinness, *Court Odes*, pp. 62-76.

by Shadwell and Tate several times as part of their broader discussions of how poets celebrated later Stuart regimes; Bainbridge glances dismissively at Pye's work while giving an overview of patriotic rhetoric in 1790s poetry; and Morris quotes one of Pye's odes as an example of a poetic celebration of Prince George's marriage with Caroline.<sup>3</sup> Griffin goes further, arguing the laureate odes to 'constitute [a] form of patriotic verse', some of which 'had considerable reputations in their own day and are worth a critical look'; but he then only gives a very brief discussion of Whitehead's odes, notes Mason's dislike of the laureate ode format, and seems to tentatively endorse that dislike, stating that the wider genre of 'the panegyric ode had by 1750 become a genre to be used cautiously. Of the major poets, only Gray and Smart attempt it'.<sup>4</sup> In all these works, the poets' laureate status is usually mentioned in passing, but not explored or attributed significance. This chapter will explore and attribute significance. While it will not be able to demonstrate the entire potentials of the laureate corpus in all the respects just mentioned, it will hopefully do something to indicate them in the course of its descriptions and arguments. In particular, it will aim to show the potentials of taking an interdisciplinary approach, and of using material that suits itself particularly well for such an approach, in answering the questions that interest both historians and literary scholars.

Primarily, the odes will here be discussed in terms of their situation between court and public. This chapter will ask how the laureates navigated the relationship between prince and people in their odes, and how they mediated that relationship to their readers; it will be asked what this can demonstrate about the role of the laureate and the standing of the court, especially with regards to commercial practices and contemporary notions of 'the public' and 'the nation'. The major argument of this chapter is that the laureate odes underwent certain fundamental changes over the course of their existence, the overall tenor of which was guided by a reconceptualization of that relationship between prince and people. Initially, the texts of the odes enacted a ceremony that was located firmly within the physical confines of the court; readers were given a vicarious entrance into the court to witness the ceremony, to appreciate

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<sup>3</sup> Bainbridge, *Visions of Conflict*, pp. 48-50 (p. 50 for quotation); Morris, *British Monarchy*, p. 167; Sharpe, *Rebranding Rule*, pp. 373-82; Winn, *Queen Anne*, pp. 278-9, 323, 369, 418-22, 462-3, 545-6.

<sup>4</sup> Griffin, *Patriotism and Poetry in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 34, 48-50 (p. 50 for quotation).

their superhuman prince, and to endorse the laureate's praises. By the time of Pye's death, the odes were doing something very different. They were eliding the court with the nation, and were portraying the king as a man amongst his subjects: human, sympathetic, and patriotic. Where the earlier odes had sought to show the dominance of the court and its physical, ceremonial practices over the nation, the later odes sought to show that the court had a public face, a patriotic character, and an active appreciation of British literature.

These developments are highly significant for the thesis's overall arguments. They prove that the court and its prime office of specific cultural patronage, the laureateship, were highly sensitive to rise of the public, to national identity, and to standards of literature, responding to these phenomena and successfully staying abreast of them. Coupled with the evidence from Chapter Four, this further proves the importance of the laureateship and the continuing role of the court with regards to the public and its associated commercial, patriotic, and literary practices and beliefs. The court's role in society did not become outdated and negligible, but evolved and adapted; the laureateship was the prime emblem and instrument of this.

In making its arguments, this chapter will first survey the relevant scholarship, and then, at greater length, will explore the history of the odes, proving that the laureate odes do indeed represent deliberate attempts to portray the prince, the people, and the relationship between them. It will explain the various factors which rendered the laureate ode a format that was highly sensitive to the relationship between prince and people, uniquely well-positioned to comment on that relationship, intrinsically concerned to find some way of negotiating that relationship, and increasingly responsible for mediating that relationship to a reading public. At the same time, it will also show that the odes were a constantly evolving format, the demands upon which became more numerous and more complex over time; and it will explain what this means for a reading of the odes. Once this has been done, the bulk of the chapter will be made up of the examination of the odes themselves, using the frameworks proposed above, and (as in the thesis as a whole) adopting a somewhat chronological, somewhat thematic structure. The odes will be divided into two main phases, pre-1757 and post-1757, with special attention given in sequence to Cibber, Whitehead, Warton, and Pye, each of whose odes represent

important developments. Lastly, the chapter will reaffirm its arguments in the conclusion.

### The Progress of Poetry

Naturally, this chapter will engage with that same body of scholarship which was discussed in the Introduction and which has provided the framework for every chapter since: the scholarship positing eighteenth-century Britain as post-courtly, with a heavily middle-class public exercising an increasing importance in all matters social, economic, political, and cultural, and with developments in ideas of national identity and literature rooted in this public rather than in the court. More particularly, though, this chapter will engage with three strands of poetry scholarship. The first is that which seeks to understand the changes in poetic taste and trends over the course of the long eighteenth century, and which plots certain distinct changes in the sorts of poetry that were being written and valued, from panegyric and harsh satire in the late seventeenth century, through the didacticism, refined wit, and polished couplets of the early eighteenth century, to the metrical experiments, lyricism, and increased emphasis on passions and sentiment after mid-century, and at last to Romanticism. The mid-century fulcrum will prove especially significant to this chapter. It has been variously characterized by such terms and ideas as 'preromantic', 'Gothic', 'Graveyard poetry', 'passions', 'sentimental', 'genius', 'originality', 'inspiration', 'retreat', 'introspection', and 'a reaction against Pope'. Whatever the case, it is seen as a time of new practices and ideas, justified by reference to notions of an original spirit of poetry, uncorrupted by modern refinements.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Most of the contributions to the recent *Oxford Handbook of British Poetry, 1660-1800*, work on the basis of, and reinforce, this narrative, which is the same as appears in older general works. See especially the chapters by Marshall Brown, 'The Poet as Genius,' pp. 210-27 (pp. 216-27); Lora Clymer, 'The Poet as Teacher', pp. 179-94 (pp. 188-93); Sandro Jung, 'Ode', pp. 510-27; Jennifer Keith, 'Lyric', pp. 579-95 (pp. 580-2); Ashley Marshall, 'Satire', pp. 495-509; David Hill Radcliffe, 'Pastoral', pp. 441-56 (p. 451); David F. Ventura, 'Poems on Poetry', pp. 269-85 (pp. 281-2). See also Marshall Brown, *Preromanticism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991); John Butt, *Mid-Eighteenth Century*, pp. 1-4, 57-8, 64-78, 82-6, 94; Hammond, *Hackney for Bread*, p. 83; Clifford Siskin, 'More is different', pp. 797-809; John Sitter, 'Political, satirical, didactic and lyric poetry (II): after Pope', in *English Literature, 1660-1780*, ed. by Richetti, pp. 287-315.

In 1984, Roger Lonsdale presented a challenge to this narrative with his anthology, *The New Oxford Book of Eighteenth Century Verse*, in the introduction to which he argued that scholars still know very little about the overall terrain of eighteenth-century poetry, and that the standard narrative belies a greater diversity of poetic output than has been recognized. However, he also admitted that the poetry which challenges modern notions of eighteenth-century verse tended to fall into obscurity soon after publication, and the modern narrative is in fact founded on the popular anthologies and compilations of the middle to late eighteenth century; the narrative was created by eighteenth-century poets, critics, publishers, and readers themselves.<sup>6</sup> Partly for this reason, while Lonsdale's anthology has been important and instructive in subsequent attitudes to this period, the broad outlines of eighteenth-century poetics have remained mostly unchanged, and scholars' energy has been focused rather on filling out those outlines with new materials and new perspectives.<sup>7</sup> David Fairer, writing one of the more recent and insightful works on eighteenth-century poetry as a whole, observes that Lonsdale ushered in exciting new approaches to the subject which circumvented the familiar stereotypes, and he situates his own book in relation to such scholarship. He then duly offers highly original arguments, observations, and frameworks for, in particular, the early eighteenth century.<sup>8</sup> Yet as Fairer approaches the middle and later eighteenth century, he too identifies and explores the same sorts of poetic trends that form the backbone of earlier works: experiments in form, new ideas about the essence of poetry, and a reconnection with the poetry of the past.<sup>9</sup>

This chapter will follow Lonsdale's and Fairer's lead in using new angles and long-neglected poetry to better understand the nature of the major trends and developments in eighteenth-century poetry. The odes, it will be shown, were entirely abreast of the developments that concerned eighteenth-century readers and writers, and can therefore better illuminate the nature, purposes, motivations, and contexts of those developments. Whereas the nature of the

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<sup>6</sup> Roger Lonsdale, 'Introduction', in *The New Oxford Book of Eighteenth Century Verse*, ed. by Roger Lonsdale (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. xxxiii-xxxix.

<sup>7</sup> E.g., most of the references used above to support the overall narrative of poetic trends and developments came from works published after Lonsdale's.

<sup>8</sup> Fairer, *English Poetry*, pp. ix, 2-4, 12-6, 103-11.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 144-69.

mid-century developments (in particular) has generally been sought in those forms and agencies that seem new, this chapter will reveal that newly-articulated and newly-popular ideals of poetry were in fact fully evidenced in the official, courtly framework of the biannual odes; an understanding of mid-century poetic developments is therefore not complete without due consideration of how it manifested there.<sup>10</sup> The idea that mid-century poetry (including the non-laureate ode form itself) turned away from public declamation towards personal feeling, for example, will be proven a partial truth at best.<sup>11</sup> The post-1757 laureate odes embody a new aesthetic of poetry that harked back to both the 'Gothic' English past and to ancient Greece, and an ideology that sought to use heavily pictorial means to activate a sympathetic, emotive response in readers. The appointment of Warton as laureate, and the great acclaim that his odes received, was no accident; in fact, 1785-90 was perhaps the crowning moment of this new aesthetic. The odes thus suggest a reconsideration of the motives and purposes behind the mid-century developments, and, in particular, question the idea of these developments as being bound up with reclusiveness, introspection, disengagement from society, and the unbridled spontaneity of genius.<sup>12</sup> If the middle to late eighteenth century was preromantic, then it was as much the Romantic apostasy of Southey, Coleridge, and Wordsworth as anything else.

The second relevant strand of poetry scholarship is that on conservative and loyalist poetics. Recent years have seen scholars become increasingly interested in those tendencies of thought and action that support that status quo, and this interest has borne fruit in several significant works on eighteenth-century literature. At one end of the period is Abigail Williams's study of Whig

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<sup>10</sup> Butt's discussion of mid-century odes does include a mention of Whitehead's laureate odes, as exemplars of the tendency towards a more rigorous form of Pindaric ode, but only in passing; the emphasis is on Collins and, especially, Gray. He does not discuss or speculate on the significance of the laureate odes taking this form. Fairer, Sandro Jung, and Marcus Walsh do not mention Whitehead in their discussion of mid-century odes. Butt, pp. 70-8; David Fairer, 'Modulation and expression in the lyric ode, 1660-1750', in *The Lyric Poem*, ed. by Thain, pp. 92-111; Jung, 'Ode', pp. 519-26; Marcus Walsh, 'Eighteenth-century high lyric: William Collins and Christopher Smart', in *The Lyric Poem: Formations and Transformations*, ed. by Marion Thain (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 112-134.

<sup>11</sup> This claim is made by, for example, Sitter, 'After Pope', pp. 309-15. However, it has been somewhat refuted by Rounce, who argues that Mark Akenside's political odes have been neglected by subsequent generations specifically because they were politically-engaged. Adam Rounce, 'Akenside's Clamours for Liberty', in - *Cultures of Whiggism*, ed. by Womersley, pp. 216-33.

<sup>12</sup> In this respect, this chapter follows on from Dustin Griffin, *Patriotism*, pp. 3-5.

poetics in the reigns of William and Anne; at the other is Matthew Grenby's monograph on anti-Jacobin novels and Kevin Gilmartin's on literary conservatism during the Romantic period.<sup>13</sup> All three books reconstitute the powerful currents of conservative literature, documenting its forms and tropes, and also showing great attention to the practical networks, motives, and agencies by which such literature was produced. This chapter will follow on from such work, but with a slight difference; it will seek to integrate such writing more firmly into the wider narratives of poetical change described above. Scholars of conservative literature generally study it as a body of work somewhat apart from the more canonical and avant-garde work that had occupied scholarly attention before them.<sup>14</sup> By contrast, this chapter will argue that conservative writing should not be understood as existing separately or antagonistically from the wider currents of literary production of the time; there was, for example, far more overlap between the laureate odes and the works of Thomas Gray than there was between the laureate odes and the *Anti-Jacobin Review*. In the end, perhaps even the idea of conservative literature is a little misleading.

Lastly, this chapter engages with that recent scholarship which has sought to understand poetry by some sense of physical situation, whether that means the poetry being situated in the context of its consumption, or the poetry itself constituting a physical space, or indeed a blurring of the two. This scholarship is particularly evident in *The Oxford Handbook of British Poetry, 1660-1800* (2016). Its opening chapters, such as William Donaldson's 'Poems on the Streets' and Cynthia Wall's 'Poetry on the Stage', illuminate eighteenth-century poetry by reference to the physical settings of its consumption, which were often fluid and quotidian.<sup>15</sup> Meanwhile, Moyra Haslett's chapter, 'The Poet as Clubman', follows on from her earlier monograph in locating the eighteenth-century trend towards clubbability not *outside* the texts (as a historical or biographical context) but *within* and *between* texts: a poem could enact a society, poems published in response to each other could constitute an

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<sup>13</sup> Gilmartin, *Literary Conservatism*; Grenby, *Anti-Jacobin Novel*; Williams, *Whig Literary Culture*.

<sup>14</sup> Again, this follows on from Dustin Griffin, who, investigating the eighteenth-century 'discourse of patriotism' which has been scorned and neglected by previous scholars, does situate it firmly in the mainstream and canon of eighteenth-century poetry. Griffin, *Patriotism*, especially pp. 2-5, 7-8.

<sup>15</sup> William Donaldson, 'Poems on the Streets', in *British Poetry, 1660-1800*, ed. by Lynch, pp. 3-22; Wall, 'Poems on the Stage', pp. 23-39.



imagined community, and the act of reading was itself a way for readers to enter a nationwide community.<sup>16</sup> This approach is hugely useful for the laureate odes, which, it will be shown, enacted a sort of physically-proximate relationship between prince and people, and did so, especially early on, by reference to a court which was both an actual physical space (within which the odes were performed) and an imagined space (constituted by the odes themselves). By approaching the odes in this way, their purpose and importance can be fully understood. This, and the other ancillary arguments mentioned above, in turn support the main argument of this chapter: that the manner in which the laureate odes presented the relationship between prince and people shows the court to have occupied a continually central role with regards to the public, national identity, and literature.

### The Onus of the Odes

There were several main factors which determined the character of the odes as negotiations of the relationship between prince and people.<sup>17</sup> The first is that they were a form of panegyric verse, and, as such, were following a genre that was not simply concerned with making exorbitant praise, but which in fact centred on the idea of a public engagement between prince and people, in which the poet mediated between the two so as to effect national harmony. The best study of the panegyric tradition and of its manifestation in the later Stuart period comes in James D. Garrison's monograph, *Dryden and the Tradition of Panegyric*.<sup>18</sup> Garrison shows that the idea of panegyric originated in the ancient

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<sup>16</sup> Haslett, *Pope to Burney*, especially pp. 1-6, 17-25, 50-4; Haslett, 'The Poet as Clubman', in *British Poetry, 1660-1800*, ed. by Lynch, pp. 127-143. See also Ezell, 'Gentleman's Journal', pp. 323-40; Fairer, *English Poetry*, p. x; Dustin Griffin, 'Social world of authorship', pp. 37-60.

<sup>17</sup> The term 'prince' will be preferred in this chapter, despite the heavier use of 'king' and 'monarch' in previous chapters, because it is slightly more appropriate in terms of the traditions of panegyric. See Garrison, cited below.

<sup>18</sup> For this and the following paragraph, see James D. Garrison, *Dryden and the Tradition of Panegyric* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), pp. 3-15, 20-32, 38-108. Several essays in *Stuart Succession Literature*, ed. by Kewes and McRae, also offer useful discussions of the traditions, theories, and practises of panegyric poetry in the Stuart period, each citing and engaging with Garrison: Kewes and McRae, 'Introduction', pp. 11-12; Richard A. McCabe, 'Panegyric and Its Discontents: The First Stuart Succession', pp. 19-36; McRae, 'Welcoming the King', pp. 187-204. McRae argues that Garrison focuses too heavily on panegyric as a 'compliant' genre, sidelining those poets who used it for debate, confrontation, and contestation; pp. 187-8. But the difference between Garrison and McRae is essentially between the identification of the mainstream, hallmarks, traditions, and certain uses of the genre that were

world, as a public address given to a prince on a festive occasion, in which, though the prince would be lavishly praised, and the loyalty of his people lavishly promised, he would also be reminded, through that praise and that promise, exactly how he should be ruling so as to remain praiseworthy and so as to retain the obedience of his people; he would be shown a princely ideal to live up to. At the same time, the panegyrist would be setting out that princely ideal to the rest of the people in attendance, making it clear to them that it was their duty, and the duty of the prince's subjects as a whole, to revere and obey that ideal prince. The panegyric would thus constitute a sort of idealized contract between prince and people, promising them each good things, and good things for the nation as a whole, so long as they stayed true to it. Over time, individual panegyrics became less likely to be genuinely performed on any sort of public or festive occasion, and the genre, or discourse, became increasingly text-based; but it nonetheless retained the idea of being a public address, performed to the prince on behalf of his subjects.

By the late seventeenth century, the form had become heavily associated with verse (rather than with non-metrical oratory, or prose), and it was becoming more diluted or corrupted as a genre. It was no longer reserved for princes, or even for prominent statesmen and military men; the sense of its being a public address was less and less frequently visible; and various of its standard tropes were falling out of fashion. Essentially, the strict identity of panegyric as a form of discourse was being lost, and the idea of 'panegyric' as merely the hyperbole of 'praise' was gaining ground. Nonetheless, the traditional panegyric discourse was still visible in at least some of the late-seventeenth century poems that were called or intended as 'panegyrics'; and the laureate odes, being genuine public addresses to the prince, were on this account (at least) more firmly linked to the traditional discourse than were all other contemporary panegyrics. The laureate odes were thus rooted in a tradition of mediating between people and prince by means of the articulation of ideal forms of behaviour for both parties and of an ideal form of relationship between the two.

Perhaps of greater importance than the traditions of panegyric, though, was the nature of the position of laureate. As established in earlier chapters, the

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novel to the seventeenth century on the one hand (Garrison), and certain other uses of the genre that were novel to the seventeenth century on the other (McRae).

prestige and material substance of the laureates' position was based on an appeal to both the court and the public; in a sense, it was based upon their ability to trade off their success with each body so as to appeal to the other. The most obvious signals of this were the title pages to their commercially produced, non-laureate works, where their status as poet laureate would feature heavily;<sup>19</sup> their stature in the world of letters was in no small part determined by their official position as king or queen's poet. The laureates therefore had a clear incentive to make much of their prince, and of the prince's relationship with the people, even to the reading public. It was in this way that they could appeal to both court and public, and it was also in this way that they could emphasize the importance of their own position, as the prime representative or medium of the relationship between prince and people.

The reception of the odes themselves further demonstrates the onus on the laureates to try to mediate that relationship in their official productions. Chapter Four has already shown that the reading public of the late eighteenth century did have a strong, enduring interest in the odes; but there is also evidence for something similar at the start of the century, before the publication of the odes had become widespread or routine. One newspaper printed Tate's 1715 birthday ode with the following introductory note from a correspondent: 'Since Mr. Tate, the Poet Laureat, is so modest as not to publish the Song which he compos'd on Occasion of His Majesty's Birth-Day, 'tis hop'd you will oblige the Publick, by inserting it in your Paper.'<sup>20</sup> Eusden's 1729 birthday ode was printed in one newspaper as part of a similar letter: 'Please to insert in your Paper the following ODE... and you'll oblige, with many others of your Readers, Sir, *Your very humble Servant*, A. B.'<sup>21</sup> Such sentiments were certainly more unusual in the time of Tate than in the time of George III, but there were clearly at least some readers who felt the publication of a laureate ode to be 'oblig[ing to] the Publick'. Indeed, it was not until Whitehead's tenure that copies of the odes were specifically handed out to the newspapers; prior to that, their increasingly widespread and routine newspaper publication came by the agency of non-official sources and the newspaper publishers themselves.<sup>22</sup> There were

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<sup>19</sup> E.g. Eusden's *Three Poems* (1722); Whitehead's *Plays and Poems: Vol. II* (1774); Warton's posthumous *The Poems on Various Subjects* (1791).

<sup>20</sup> *The Flying Post*, 9-11 Jun. 1715.

<sup>21</sup> *Universal Spectator and Weekly Journal*, 1 Nov. 1729.

<sup>22</sup> *Warton Correspondence*, 486 (pp. 535-6).

always readers in wait for the laureate odes; in the early eighteenth century, demand was greater than supply.

The reading public, then, had an interest in the odes even when they had not been specifically designed for publication. They must therefore have been interested in them as odes addressed to the prince and sung before him at court. Chapter Four has noted that Warton's odes were criticized in some quarters for not being sufficiently warm in their praises of George III, and it is also worth reiterating that, especially in George III's reign, the odes were often printed in the newspapers as part of long, detailed descriptions of the entire courtly festivities that had taken place on the day in question. Clearly, there was a strong desire amongst the reading public to stand witness to the praises being sung to the prince, to some extent in a spirit of tacit endorsement and demonstration of loyalty; clearly, part of the odes' appeal was that they were panegyrics to the prince. The laureates would thus have been conscious that they were writing for an audience which, at least in part, wanted the odes to articulate some particular ideal of the prince, and wanted the odes to bring the prince and people closer together, allowing the people (in some sense) to partake of the courtly festivities. The laureates were *selling* the idea of 'a panegyric to the prince' as much as they were effecting it.

For various reasons, then, there was an onus on the laureate odes not just to sing the praises of the prince, but to pay attention to the public, and to engage with the relationship between prince and people. In his official productions, the laureate had to mediate between the two, and to write in accordance with some conception of their relationship. He was an interface and an interpreter, rendered so by his position, by his readers, and by his required form of poetic composition.

Having established this, though, the point now needs to be made that the laureate was not simply having to negotiate between two static interest groups; rather, he was having to deal with a constantly evolving, expanding set of expectations, imposed upon him by an increasing diversity of interest groups. Because the odes became so prominent, they elicited a series of new demands for which the form was not originally designed, and yet which it was now the laureate's duty, in many people's eyes, to cater for. Originating to fulfil a particular role, they did fulfil that role, became popular and durable, and therefore came to be read without due concern for or appreciation of their

context of origin, becoming subject to criteria of judgment which they were not initially intended to have much to do with. This is partly why the odes were eventually mocked and criticized in certain quarters: despite having only limited and particular original functions, they became highly prominent as part of the newly developing relationship between court and public culture, and were continually adapted, renewed, and transformed, taking them further and further from their original context of creation and purpose.

This transformation was, in a sense, evident from the very start of the odes' history. The provenance of these biannual courtly entertainments are obscure, but they may have originated as part of the masques that were produced at Charles I's court for special occasions. At least one of the more popular songs from one of Ben Jonson's masques is known to have become a festive courtly entertainment in its own right, being performed on one of the occasions that was later dedicated to the performance of the odes; and Jonson also wrote a series of poems on royal occasions between 1629 and 1637, two of which seem to have been performed at court.<sup>23</sup> Following the Restoration, the first two decades of Charles II's reign have left behind intermittent evidence of the performance of songs at court on the birthday and on New Year's Day (none of which had any involvement from either Davenant or Dryden), and from 1681 onwards the practice seems to have become standard. Musically, these post-Restoration songs were similar to sacred music, and especially to anthems, but seem to have been generally intended as one-off performances.<sup>24</sup> The poets who wrote the words for them were a varying bunch, with no one poet writing very many of them until Tate, and there is only one, uncertain piece of evidence that any poet before Rowe was specifically commissioned.<sup>25</sup>

In the later Stuart period, then, the laureate odes were neither related to the laureateship, nor very often called 'odes'; they were more often entitled 'songs'. Insofar as the term 'song' was linked more widely to the term 'ode' in contemporary parlance, it was only in the sense that 'ode' was used loosely to refer to any kind of lyrical, loose, or non-couplet form of verse.<sup>26</sup> In the mid-eighteenth century, Johnson's definition was to indicate this slippage, an ode

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<sup>23</sup> McGuinness, *Court Odes*, pp. 1-11.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 9-11, 78-9.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 13-28, 49.

<sup>26</sup> Jung, 'Ode', p. 514.

being: 'A poem written to be sung to musick; a lyrick poem'.<sup>27</sup> Although the name 'ode' was starting to be used for the laureate odes by Shadwell's time, it was still not unusual for them to be entitled 'songs' even as late as Eusden's tenure. Only with Cibber's appointment did the laureate productions become fully and fixedly identified as 'odes'. However, it was also the case that, from at least Shadwell's time onwards, the texts to these productions were heavily associated with (or influenced by) the fashion for pseudo-Pindaric odes that had been brought about by Abraham Cowley's *Pindarique Odes* (1656) and by Boileau's translation of Longinus (1674). These 'Pindarics' were characterized by an exultant, effusive tone, digressive and suddenly-shifting content, praise of some great figure, and an irregularity of metre which went far beyond anything found in Pindar. The eighteenth century proper was to see increasing complaints and efforts to bring the ode form more into line with Pindar's own poetics (although there were other viable ode forms too, such as those of Anacreon and Horace), but the origins of the laureate odes were in the wild, 'sublime' pseudo-Pindaric tradition of the late seventeenth century, as well as in the older tradition of panegyric verse discussed above.<sup>28</sup>

Thus the 'odes' to which Shadwell and Tate turned their attention as laureates, and which they had important parts in the formation of, started out in a somewhat motley manner. Under Tate, the laureate odes then settled down into the form which was to endure to the time of Cibber's death, and which was especially consistent in its themes, tone, and language between about 1692 and 1730. This was the time when the odes were most fixedly and indeed most comfortably designed as courtly entertainments, their purpose being for a one-off performance at court on the two major festive occasions of the year, gratifying the prince and their courtiers and emphasizing, to all present, the baroque gloriousness of the prince. Sometimes they were published, sometimes not. Most of Shadwell's laureate odes appeared as independent, commercial publications, and Tate, Rowe, and Eusden then saw their own odes intermittently put into print, either as individual publications, or in periodicals, or both. Cibber's odes were almost all published in periodicals. Some of Tate's odes were published in *The Gentleman's Journal* by Peter Motteux, who had a

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<sup>27</sup> Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, 2 vols (1755-6), II, 'ODE'.

<sup>28</sup> Butt, *Mid-Eighteenth Century*, pp. 64-78; Fairer, 'Lyric ode 1660-1750', pp. 94-6; Jung, 'Ode'; Sitter, 'After Pope', pp. 309-15; Walsh, 'Eighteenth-century high lyric', pp. 112-14, 121; Weinbrot, *Britannia's Issue*, pp. 334-58.

close working relationship with Tate, suggesting that, in Tate's case at least, publication at this stage came with either the approval or the instigation of the laureates themselves.<sup>29</sup>

Yet it was the fact of publication which began generating the new expectations against which the laureate odes would come to be judged. Although they were published as documents of one-off musical performance – their success or failure determined by reference to this function – their appearance as text-based poetry rendered them liable to the same sorts of reading experience and judgement to which other text-based poetry was subject. The laureates were highly aware of this, and even showed some anxiety that their odes be understood in the correct way. In a prefatory note 'To the Reader', opening a publication containing two of his odes, Tate explained, 'The Glorious Occasion upon which these Odes were written, viz. His Majesty's *Birth-Day*, and the *New Year*, accompanied with the Consummation of an Honourable *PEACE*, requir'd the utmost Liberties of Poetry; but I was Confin'd (for the Present) to such Measures and Compass as the Musical Performance would admit; upon which Consideration the Reader's favourable allowance is requested'.<sup>30</sup> Tate was evidently impressed with the potentials for writing royal panegyric poetry in response to designated occasions, and he even imagined readers casting a critical eye over what he had produced, judging him on how well he had communicated such promising subject matter into textual, non-musical verse. But he also felt that the demands of musical performance restricted the 'Liberties of Poetry', and he was anxious to establish the proper expectations amongst his readers. Although these odes were being published purely as texts, they must be read as documents of performance. The title to this particular publication ended on the phrase, *Both Set to Musick, and Perform'd At KENSINGTON*; and it was commonplace for all ode publications up to 1757 to include notes and instructions on the manner of performance, setting out such things as which voices sung which verses, or when a passage was a 'Recitativo' or an 'Air'.

Several decades after Tate's address 'To the Reader', Cibber was to write something similar. In his prose publication, *The Egotist*, he defended his

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<sup>29</sup> E.g. *The Gentleman's Journal: Or the Monthly Miscellany*, Dec. 1692. For Tate's prominence in the pages of the *Gentleman's Journal*, see Ezell, 'Gentleman's Journal', pp. 332, 339.

<sup>30</sup> Nahum Tate, *The Anniversary Ode For the Fourth of December, 1697. His Majesty's Birth-Day. Another for New-Year's-Day, 1697/8* (1698), Sig. A2r.

odes from some of the attacks on them, making clear that he did not hold his own odes in contempt (as has sometimes been claimed by others), but that he believed that they needed to be understood in relation to their musical performance: 'without the Musick to them, they had but an *Adjective* Merit'.<sup>31</sup> Cibber did not push his argument further here, wanting, in typically evasive and self-deprecatory fashion, not to seem too concerned about his odes. Yet he did in fact put great effort and consideration into composing them, working on them for months and showing them to friends for feedback, as Johnson and a pseudonymous newspaper correspondent later attested.<sup>32</sup> This flags up another facet to the picture. Tate and Cibber wanted to ensure that their odes were read as the texts to courtly, musical performances, and they were keen to fend off the wrong expectations and the wrong forms of reading. But this emphasis on performance was also, potentially, something which *recommended* the textual poetry to readers. Fairer has emphasized the efforts of (non-laureate) ode-writers in the period 1660-1750 to incorporate musical, performative elements into their odes, so as to create 'the idea of lyric eloquence without thought of any musical setting' and trigger an 'audience response'.<sup>33</sup> The texts of the laureate odes were doing something similar, but starting from a very different proposition: that the odes had indeed been given their one, definitive performance already, at court in the prince's presence. To bring attention to their performative aspect was not only to defend them from judgements based on the wrong criteria; it was also to exalt them as texts by reference to the context of their creation and performance. The important thing was that everyone should remain aware of what the odes were, and what they were not.

Everyone did not remain aware. With print publication continuing to expand in extent and variety, and with the court's position with regards to the public having to evolve in correspondence with the growth of public, commercial agencies, the publication of the laureate odes became more regular. The reading public was understandably interested in the productions of that poet who held the only official claim to be the monarch of Parnassus, and in the chance of prying vicariously into the courtly festivities. When so high-profile a figure as Cibber took the baton, the demand for the odes became irresistible; it

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<sup>31</sup> Cibber, *Egotist*, p. 50.

<sup>32</sup> Johnson for the latter part of Cibber's tenure, the pseudonymous newspaper correspondent ('Nestor') for the earlier. Boswell, *London Journal*, p. 282; *Public Advertiser*, 13 Jul. 1764.

<sup>33</sup> Fairer, 'Modulation and expression', pp. 92-4.



was, from 1730 onwards, established as an expectation that the odes should be made available to the public. But the attendant expectation also became irresistible: these odes, being engaged with as texts, and indeed as the poetic productions of Parnassus's king, should function not merely, or even primarily, as texts for one-off musical performances, but as poems, and as poems worthy to have been published by Parnassian royalty. This was the decisive shift mentioned above: the point at which the odes became so popular and prominent, that they found themselves attracting that attention, that expectation, that demand, and thence that criticism, to be something other than what they were. The odes transcended their context of origin, not due to the poetic ambitions of the laureate, but because they were dragged out of that context by a thousand eager pairs of hands, and subjected to a centrifugal and transgressive transcendence.

Over the course of the early eighteenth century, the laureate's problems in this respect continued to intensify. Partly, this was because notions of literary quality – against which the odes were increasingly being judged – became more complicated, and developed a strain of suspicion for all forms of occasional verse. Pope led the Scriblerian effort to define good poetry both positively and negatively, and Shadwell, Tate, Eusden, and especially Cibber all fell foul of his pen.<sup>34</sup> After Pope's death, other writers started advancing standards of judgement that were conceived somewhat in opposition to Pope's style, seeking a greater play of fancy, imagination, and passion than was permitted in the narrow compass of Pope's couplets, and finding it in various works of older English poetry that had been at least partly scorned, and sometimes entirely unknown, by Pope and his contemporaries. These developments were especially important for the ode form, which, having been intensely discussed since the start of the century, now became seized upon by poets like Joseph Warton and William Collins as the ideal vehicle for fancy, imagination, and passion.<sup>35</sup>

At the same time, there was developing a comparatively understudied trend in favour of a newly rigorous engagement with the forms and techniques

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<sup>34</sup> Goldgar, *Walpole and the Wits*, pp. 89-98; Hammond, *Hackney for Bread*, pp. 2-6, 195-202.

<sup>35</sup> Brown, 'The Poet as Genius,' in *British Poetry, 1660-1800*, ed. by Lynch, pp. 216-27; Butt, *Mid-Eighteenth Century*, pp. 4-7, 57-8, 64-78; Clymer, 'Teacher', pp. 188-93; Jung, 'Ode', pp. 519-26; Rounce, 'Scholarship', pp. 685-700; Sitter, 'After Poetry', pp. 309-15; Weinbrot, *Britannia's Issue*, pp. 372-401.

of ancient Greek poetry, distinct from the neo-classicism of the early eighteenth century.<sup>36</sup> Whitehead and Mason were in fact two of the leading figures of this trend, especially in their plays;<sup>37</sup> but the most famous example of it was in Gray's two odes of 1757, which united a formal Pindaric rigour – the odes divided into metrically-identical sections, each with a strophe, antistrophe, and epode – with the sorts of themes and concerns that have been subsequently grouped together with those of Joseph Warton, Collins, and certain other young poets of the time.<sup>38</sup> The ode form was being used and scrutinized in ways very different from those that had prevailed in the seventeenth century, when the laureate odes had come into being. Meanwhile, notions of the British poetic canon were becoming more precise and more sophisticated. Whitehead socialized with at least some of the writers who were most prominently involved in these endeavours, and Thomas Warton was himself one of the most significant of them.<sup>39</sup>

The sorts of expectation against which the laureate odes were to be judged were therefore becoming more numerous, more complex, and more demanding. Because the odes were prominent and widely-read, because they were produced by the only poet in Britain to be officially elevated above his peers, and because he had been so elevated by court and government figures, a host of new expectations came to converge upon these biannual productions, almost entirely in disregard of those productions' original intended function. Cibber, fifty-nine years old when appointed and having never published much lyric poetry, somewhat disregarded these new expectations, writing the same, traditional sort of laureate odes throughout his tenure. He knew what the form was, and knew its purpose and its intended audience. Whitehead, however – born over forty years after Cibber – acceded to the laureateship with a very different attitude. He wrote in response to (and indeed in sympathy with) the

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<sup>36</sup> Fairer, *English Poetry*, pp. ix, 144-65.

<sup>37</sup> Whitehead's *The Roman Father* (1750) and *Creusa* (1754), and Mason's *Elfrida* (1752) and *Caractacus* (1759). *Elfrida* and *Caractacus* both bore the subtitle, *A Dramatic Poem: Written on the Model of The Ancient Greek Tragedy*, and the most obvious way in which they lived up to this subtitle was in the inclusion of a tragic chorus. For Mason's discussion of these matters, see the 'Letters' prefacing *Elfrida*, pp. i-xix; and see also Mason's insistence on the three unities, and his dislike of Johnson's repudiation of mythological subjects, in 'Whitehead Memoirs', pp. 56, 72-7.

<sup>38</sup> For more on the emergence of rigorous Pindaric odes, and Gray's pre-eminence in this respect, see Butt, pp. 70-8; Jung, 'Ode', pp. 519-26.

<sup>39</sup> Lynch, *Age of Elizabeth*, pp. 38-47; Terry, *Literary Past*, pp. 216-51, 287-323; Wellek, *English Literary History*, pp. 166-201.

new expectations to which the odes had become subject, sharing the sorts of principles and ambitions which underlay those expectations and (probably) fearing the criticism that Cibber had received. Whitehead's appointment therefore marks the second main phase in the history of the odes: he, Warton, and Pye would all produce odes that were intended to meet the new expectations that had been created by widespread publication, and which were, in particular, written on the understanding of the ode form as established by the poets and critics of mid-century. They were attempting to write poetry which situated itself consciously between the poetic heritage and posterity, which would impress a reading public, and which would espouse an appropriately patriotic spirit.

With Pye, the case was the most complicated, as the demands of the anti-Jacobin struggle encouraged him to position his odes as patriotic, popular songs; but it was also Pye who had, in 1787, written the following, in a preface to his own translation of some of Pindar's odes: 'As the situation of a Poet Laureat is something similar to that of our ancient Lyric Poet, might not our Birth Day Odes be rendered more interesting to the Public, by interweaving some of the popular stories which may be found in our annals, with the usual compliments of the Day? I think something of this kind was attempted by Mr. Whitehead. An idea of this nature in the hands of our present Laureat [Warton], might render those periodical productions not only a classical entertainment for the present time, but a permanent and valuable acquisition to posterity.'<sup>40</sup> Notwithstanding the slight unfairness here against Warton, Pye's argument demonstrated a clear sense that the odes were to be pitched as much (if not more) to 'the Public' than to the prince, and he felt that, if written with the classical heritage (Pindar) and British national history ('popular stories' from 'our annals') in mind, then the odes could become more than just 'a classical entertainment' (an interesting phrase in itself), but poems for 'posterity'.

By the turn of the nineteenth century, there were potent new strains of radical and Romantic thought which, on the whole, did not grant much allowance to the idea of biannual laureate odes, and which, in the appointment of Southey, contributed to the death of the odes. Up to and including that period, however, the laureates needed to remain sensitive to a host of evolving

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<sup>40</sup> These were the lines paraphrased by the *St. James's Chronicle*, as mentioned in Chapter Four. Pye, *Poems on Various Subjects*, I, pp. 195-6.

issues, or else see their work rendered ridiculous and irrelevant. Because of their great prominence, and because they were the official productions of the nation's only official poet, much was expected of them, and they were forced into a continual mutation. The form had not been brought about for any purpose other than as a one-off performance at court, and even its association with the laurel-crowned poet was itself a subsequent, accidental development. Nonetheless, over the course of the long eighteenth century, the odes became increasingly required to justify themselves without reference to their original context, and to undergo various contortions so as to suit themselves for the new, unforeseen purposes against which they were becoming judged. Throughout it all, it remained incumbent upon the odes to negotiate the relationship between prince and people, and to mediate that relationship to the reading public; but the way in which the laureates did so necessarily underwent huge changes, which are highly instructive in terms of the position of the laureate and the role of the court in British society.

### **Tate's Copy-Text**

It is now time to look at the odes themselves. This and the next two sections will survey the first phase of odes (pre-1757), showing how they presented the relationship between prince and people. It will be argued that this presentation of the relationship revealed a powerful notion of the court's significance in national life, but that this notion was very different from that which prevailed after 1757. Fundamentally, this earlier notion was that the court was a distinct, physical place, which directed affairs from above and to which the eyes of the people should be turned; its ceremonial and cultural life was at the heart of the nation's culture, just as its social and political primacy was unquestioned. The odes allowed the people to come to court, to witness their glorious prince, and to articulate their joy in his rule. After 1757, although the odes continued to express the court's importance, they did so according to a different conceptualization.

Some of the main characteristics of the first phase of odes can be seen in the following typical offering from Tate, which marked the 1693 New Year's Day. On this occasion it was entitled an 'Ode', rather than a 'Song', and it was

headed as being 'Performed Before their Majesties. *Set to MUSICK by Dr. Blow. The Words by N. Tate, Servant to their Majesties.*'

The Happy, happy Year is Born,  
 That wonders shall disclose;  
 That Conquest with fix'd Lawrels shall adorn,  
 And give our Lab'ring *HERCULES* Repose.  
 Ye Graces that resort  
 To *Virtue's Temple* blest *MARIA'S* Court,  
 With Incense and with Songs as Sweet,  
 The Long-Expected Season meet,  
 The Long-expected Season gently Greet.

*MARIA* (thus devoutly say)  
*MARIA* - ---Oh appear! appear!  
 Thy Softest Charms Display,  
 Smile and Bless the Infant Year;  
 Smile on its Birth in Kindness to our Isle,  
 For if this Genial Day  
 You Cheerfully Survey,  
 Succeeding Years in just Return, on You and Us shall Smile.

Thus, let Departing WINTER Sing,  
 Approach, Advance, Thou promis'd SPRING;  
 And if for Action not design'd,  
 Together soon Together bring  
 Confederate Troops in *Europe's* Cause combin'd.  
 A Busier Prospect SUMMER yields,  
 Floating Navies, harrass'd Fields.  
 From far the *Gallick* Genius Spying  
 (Of Unjust War the Just Disgrace.)  
 Their Broken Squadrons Flying,  
 And *Britain's Caesar* Lightning in the Chase.

But AUTUMN does Impatient grow  
 To Crown the Victor's Brow;  
 To Wait him Home Triumphant from Alarms  
 To *Albion* and *MARIA'S* Arms.  
 Then, to conclude the Glorious Scene,  
 To *Europe's* Joy let *Me* Return,  
 When *Britain's Senate* shall Convene,

To Thank their Monarch, and no more, no more his Absence mourn.  
 Their kind Supplies our fainting Hopes restor'd,  
 Their Inspir'd Counsels shall sure means afford,  
 To fix the Gen'ral Peace won by our Monarch's Sword.

CHORUS.

*While Tyrants their Neighbours and Subjects Oppress,  
 All Nations the Pious Restorer Caress.  
 Securely our Hero prepares for the Field,  
 His Valour his Sword, his Virtue his Shield:  
 He Arms in Compassion for Europe's Release.  
 He Conquers to Save, and he Warr's to give Peace.*<sup>41</sup>

The ode was typical of Tate's, and of all those from Shadwell to Cibber, in a number of ways. The form was a Cowleyan Pindaric, exultant and eulogistic in tone, with verses and lines of varying length, and with an irregular rhyme scheme; but it was also very patently designed for musical performance, with the performative elements even being emphasized for the reader's benefit (although not so much here as in some other odes). The reiterations of certain words and phrases ('Happy, happy', 'The long-Expected Season', 'MARIA... MARIA') were intended to create an air of overflowing joy and harmonious musicality, rather than to make for any particularly profound reading experience.

As for the content of the ode, the emphasis on the year and on the passing of time were likewise typical, both with the generic references to seasons and with the allusions to great contemporary events; it was rare for those allusions to be any more specific than Tate's were here, and, in fact, especially after Tate's tenure, it became rarer to find even references as specific as these, at least until the second phase of odes. Next, it was typical to have the prince celebrated as a superhuman figure ('HERCULES', 'our Hero'), and to be portrayed as something between an abstraction and a real human figure (as seen in William's peculiar ability to embrace both 'Albion' and 'MARIA'). Classical references were particularly favoured by Tate and Eusden ('Britain's Caesar'), but Cibber, despite being notorious for the frequency with which he dubbed George II as 'Caesar', did not greatly indulge in them.

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<sup>41</sup> Tate, 1693NY.

Various abstract qualities were usually assigned to the prince, with the qualities varying somewhat in terms of the prince being addressed and the laureate doing the addressing.<sup>42</sup> Here, Tate's keen eye for 'Virtue' was gratified with regards to both Mary and William. The royal family would often be celebrated in terms of ideal gender and family roles (William's virtue being found on his 'Shield', Mary's in a 'Temple' thronged with graces, incense, and sweet songs), with the accession of the prolific Hanoverians allowing for particularly great scope on this theme. While William, Mary, and Anne were on the throne(s), it was typical to emphasize the great European cause that they were fighting for, and all the peace, freedom, and happiness that was being brought to Europe (as in this ode); but this emphasis reduced drastically after the Hanoverian succession, resurfacing only vaguely and without conviction during times of war. Whereas William and (in a more complicated way) Anne were celebrated by reference to their actions and deeds, the Hanoverians tended to be celebrated on account of their passivity and stasis (although the word 'repose', which became one of the key words in this tendency, appears in this 1693 ode by Tate, too). In summary, the pre-1757 odes tended to hail their princes in exultant, musical, baroque effusions, and to paint them as glorious, semi-divine figures, sailing serenely through the skies, consorting with various allegorical figures, exemplifying various significant qualities, and generally resembling the portrait of William and Mary on the ceiling of the Royal Naval College's Painted Hall.

Tate also here demonstrated some of the more direct characteristics of the laureates' negotiation of the prince-people relationship. One was the idea that the prince was a sort of tutelary deity, guardian angel, or intercessionary saint on Britain's behalf, using the divine favour that was given to them personally as a way of bringing blessings upon Britain (here seen in the invocation to Maria, 'Smile and Bless the Infant Year... in Kindness to our Isle', because 'Succeeding Years in just Return, on You and Us shall Smile').

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<sup>42</sup> The qualities were often the sort that have been identified by recent historians as being of key and repeated importance to the way that the prince in question was celebrated and portrayed more widely, thus revealing the odes' continuities with the mainstream of courtly and loyalist rhetoric. However, due to the stated focus of this chapter, when these qualities are discussed it will be in the context of the history of the laureate odes, and of the laureate's particular aim in representing the relationship between prince and people, rather than in comparison to wider depictions of the prince in question. For those wider depictions, see particularly Sharpe, *Rebranding Rule*, pp. 373-82; Morris, *British Monarchy*, passim; Smith, *Georgian Monarchy*, pp. 21-58; Urstad, *Walpole's Poets*, pp. 164-5; Williams, *Whig Literary Culture*, pp. 93-134.

Another, associated idea was that the prince's actions would effect great results for Britain. In this instance, Tate's concerns were more for the effects of William's actions on Europe ('the Gen'ral Peace won by our Monarch's Sword'), but this too was part of a wider, recurrent theme, in which it was suggested that the prince was someone for the people to take pride in, as a sort of ambassador, representative, or champion of theirs, whose personal greatness reflected well on Britain and granted the nation an international pre-eminence. A related theme, not too overt in this particular ode, was that the qualities embodied by the prince were particularly British qualities, such as a love of freedom and a hatred of France ('the *Gallick* Genius').

A more explicit way in which the relationship between prince and people was dealt with in these odes was for the laureate to simply paint out some idealized picture of that relationship, partly in the manner of a historian and partly in the manner of a prophet. Tate's lines, 'When *Britain's Senate* shall Convene... Their kind Supplies our fainting Hopes restor'd,/Their Inspir'd Counsels shall sure means afford,/To fix the Gen'ral Peace won by our Monarch's Sword', suggested, again in idealized and somewhat allegorical form (Britain's '*Senate*'), a harmonious relationship in which both sides had their own particular roles, and worked in mutual contract towards some nationally-desirable end: the prince, funded by parliament, won peace by his sword, which parliament would then use its wisdom to fix in place. But the prince's interactions with the nation were cast on multiple different levels. As well as '*Britain's Senate*', William also here had intimate, pseudo-amorous dealings with an abstract '*Albion*'; while Tate's mention of 'Us', earlier in the poem, indicated still another conception of the British people, namely, the populace of which Tate himself formed a part. This latter idea, of the poet himself as a member, mouthpiece, and representative of the people, expressing their sentiments and emotions towards the prince and experiencing that prince's presence in some way, was also typical. In this context, it was especially common for the laureate to phrase the relationship in terms of emotion, and to express the great gratitude that the people had towards their prince (the British people having 'mourn[ed]' William's 'Absence', and wanting desperately 'To Thank their Monarch'). Considering the increasing desire of the public to read the odes, it may even be the case that some readers were very happy to find



the laureate thanking their sovereign on their behalf, and, by reading the odes, effected a tacit membership of that gratitude.

There were, in short, a range of ways that the laureate could approach the relationship between prince and people, and render it for their readers. A spirit of idealization lay behind much of this, but so too did a much more personal sense of emotion, or of emotional response; it could even be said that the rhetoric and form of the odes allowed for an affective symbiosis between (on the one hand) ideals and abstractions, and (on the other) the personal and the emotive. This sense would prove highly significant in the later history of the odes, coming to occupy a more central and sophisticated place in them after 1757. Now, departing from this ode of Tate's, which has so far been used as a kind of copy-text of the quintessential early ode, the various ways in which the prince-people relationship was envisioned in the early odes will be looked at in more detail.

### **The Early Odes**

The major vision of the relationship between people and prince presented in the early odes was that the two parties were joined up in perfect harmony and bliss, the prince fulfilling the ideal role of a prince in terms of his qualities, actions, and care for his people, the people fulfilling the ideal role of a people in terms of their obedience and their recognition of the happiness granted to them by their prince. This unity was emphasized as right and proper, and as the source of all good things; as long as it was maintained, the nation would prosper, and everyone would be happy. Yet the conditional sense was generally not explicit. Instead, the odes tended to present the relationship in a vague and idealized manner, expressing it as a sort of divine *fait accompli*, existing somewhat outside of temporality and causality. The poet expressed this relationship as a partaker of it, he recorded it as a bard, and he witnessed its future continuation as a prophet. As will be seen below, Cibber was particularly important in developing these ideas, and in basing them around the theme of mutuality.

In this ideal form of the relationship, the prince brought good rule and the people brought due obedience. The prince cared for his people: he 'make[s] the

Publick Good [his] Care'.<sup>43</sup> One recurrent idea was that the prince had saved Britain from recent distress, and protected it from future pain. 'Britannia, late oppress'd with dread,/Hung her declining drooping head:/A better visage now she wears... Safe beneath her mighty master,/In security she sits.'<sup>44</sup> Rowe's final ode included a hypnotic succession of swift, repetitive lines on this theme: 'More sweet than all, the praise/Of Caesar's golden days:/Caesar's praise is sweeter;/Britain's pleasure greater;/Still may Caesar's reign excel;/Sweet the praise of reigning well.'<sup>45</sup> George's praiseworthiness was bound up intimately with his good governance of Britain, and his 'praise' corresponded vaguely but inexorably with Britain's 'pleasure'. The shortness of the lines here, and the repetition of words and noises, served to blur the two strands together, removing any hint of causation, and certainly removing any hint that the praise was conditional upon the pleasure, while nonetheless making clear that the two were bound together.

However, what the people owed to their prince in return did not tend to be particularly active or onerous. Most often, the laureate stated that the people owed the prince nothing more than obedience, joy, and gratitude; and, because of the nature of the laureate odes, these debts were not so much demanded, as enacted. The laureate stood in between people and prince; the tone that the ode form lent itself to was the exultantly assertive and harmonious, rather than argumentative; and the laureate odes were sung at court by many different voices. The laureates therefore employed the odes to express what was supposedly the universal, joyous gratitude of the people towards the prince. 'Tis ANNA's Day, and all around/Only Mirth and Musick sound... Shouts and Songs, and Laughing Joys.'<sup>46</sup>

In one ode, Tate included a chorus part reading, '*What then should Happy Britain do?/Blest with the Gift and Giver too.*'<sup>47</sup> Apparently, there was nothing for Britain to do at all; it was in such a state of perfect happiness, as given it by its prince, that Tate found himself at a loss. However, after some more praise, he rallied with this final 'Grand CHORUS': '*Happy, Happy, past Expressing,/Britain, if thou know'st thy Blessing;/Home-bred Discord ne'er*

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<sup>43</sup> Tate, 1715BD.

<sup>44</sup> Rowe, 1717NY.

<sup>45</sup> Rowe, 1719NY.

<sup>46</sup> Tate, 1707BD.

<sup>47</sup> Tate, 1698NY.

*Alarm Thee./Other Mischief cannot Harm Thee./Happy, if you know'st thy Blessing./Happy, Happy, past Expressing.*<sup>48</sup> Again, there was nothing much for Britain to do: even words could not match up to Britain's happiness, since it was 'past Expressing'. Yet Tate was nonetheless suggesting one obligation that the people must pay, and which, the word '*if*' suggested, they might fall short of. Britain was required to '*know*' its blessing. This was the people's one active requirement in the relationship: they had to acknowledge the greatness of the prince and the happiness that the prince was giving them. Again, the issue of causality was sidestepped. The happiness was ever-present, yet only became true if it was acknowledged; the people were inexpressibly happy, yet would only experience their happiness if they joined Tate in his efforts to express it. It was not a hard task, Tate promised them. All they had to do was repeat after him: '*Happy, Happy... Happy, Happy...*'

The conditional clause ('*if*') was only mildly stated by Tate on this occasion, and it was never pushed very overtly by the laureates. In line with the odes' general inclination towards glorious assertion, rather than argumentation, the norm was for joy and gratitude to be expressed, rather than demanded. A good example came in Rowe's longest and most ambitious ode (his first). 'I hear the mirth, I hear the land rejoice,/Like many waters swells the pleasing noise,/While to their monarch, thus, they raise the public voice./Father of thy country, hail!... Joy abounds in ev'ry breast,/For thee thy people all, for thee the year is blest.'<sup>49</sup> In this passage, Rowe initially showed himself as someone catching the sound of the nation's happiness from afar, and used this conceit to build up towards a crescendo of joy in which he then switched role, and became the mouthpiece of that joyous 'public voice'. It was as if the joy from 'ev'ry breast' was pouring irresistibly into the court, confirming not just the people's grateful happiness, but that that happiness originated with the prince himself: 'For thee' the people were 'blest'. This was the great effect that was available to the laureates in their odes. By choosing to enact the people's emotional gratitude, rather than trying to convince the people that they ought to be grateful, the laureates made that gratitude seem like something natural; and they invited their readers to share in the great celebratory gratitude which, so it seemed, had always been there, and always would be. The idealized prince-

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<sup>48</sup> Tate, 1698NY.

<sup>49</sup> Rowe, 1716NY.

people relationship was one in which the people's gratitude was not conditional or dependent on variable causes, but was always forthcoming, and which found its articulation in the people's representative, the laureate.

As well as establishing this ideal form of the prince-people relationship, the odes also illustrated the good things that resulted from its successful functioning: peace, glory, and prosperity. '*Britannia* shall be shown/Still yearly with new Glories crown'd,/As *Brunswick's* Years roul on.'<sup>50</sup> Goodness would flow across the land, and this goodness was usually presented in abstract, traditional terms, drawing upon the classical ideas of a golden age or of halcyon days. 'And under Thee, our most Indulgent King,/Shall Industry and Arts increase;/Quiet we shall possess, but not Inglorious Ease.//Then shall each fertile Mead, and grateful Field,/Amplly reward our Care and Toil... Free from Invading force, and Intestine broil', was one typical illustration.<sup>51</sup> Rowe evoked the idea of halcyon days by speaking of 'the billows of the ocean' being laid to rest;<sup>52</sup> Tate was more explicit, hailing 'Halcyon Days of Peace'.<sup>53</sup> All laureates spoke of 'blessings'.<sup>54</sup>

The next major way in which the early odes envisioned the prince-people relationship was by relating the prince to British national identity. The sorts of qualities and frames of reference by which the prince was praised in the odes were diverse, some going back to the roots of the panegyric tradition. In terms of whether the relationship being posited was one between a prince and a people, or a prince and a British nation, the early odes did not lean towards the latter as much as did the later odes. Nonetheless, even from the time of Tate, and especially in Shadwell's odes, a significant trend was to praise the prince in ways that linked him to British characteristics and British history. Eusden described George I as being formed from 'the mix'd Ideas' of 'Edward, Henry, and the Lov'd Nassau' [William III],<sup>55</sup> and, later, stated that 'the rich Source of Freedom is the King.'<sup>56</sup> Shadwell claimed that Mary's rule eclipsed that of 'our

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<sup>50</sup> Eusden, 1729BD.

<sup>51</sup> Shadwell, 1690BD.

<sup>52</sup> Rowe, 1716BD.

<sup>53</sup> Tate, 1708NY.

<sup>54</sup> E.g. Rowe, 1716BD.

<sup>55</sup> Eusden, 1720NY.

<sup>56</sup> Eusden, 1730NY.

*Eliza*'.<sup>57</sup> More blandly, Tate wrote on one occasion, 'Fame and Fortune ever smile/On *Britain's* Queen, and *Britain's* Isle'.<sup>58</sup>

The prince thus became a sort of tutelary figure to the nation: a classical 'genius', or a patron saint. He symbolized and embodied the nation, and in some sense interceded for it with Heaven. Eusden concluded one ode by telling Britain's previous, allegorical 'Genius' that it was now no longer needed: 'thy Guardianship may'st spare,/Britain is a Brunswick's care'.<sup>59</sup> The use of the word 'Brunswick' to denote George I (the Hanoverians stemming from the House of Brunswick) alliteratively emphasized the idea that the prince had become the new genius of the nation. This idea reached its height with Cibber, and with the completion of the transition from an active king like William III to a passive symbol like George II.

However, if the odes were concerned to express a vision of the relationship between prince and people, they also negotiated that relationship in quieter, more implicit ways. The laureate was himself a prime instrument of that relationship, and it was textured throughout his odes. For one thing, the laureate's praise of the prince was not simply about gratifying him personally; it was about selling him to the reading public, and selling that public the appropriate attitude towards him. The laureate's odes were attempting to encourage a loyal awe and reverence for the prince (and in some ways for the prince's government of the day), and were attempting to define the manner in which that prince should be understood and responded to by his people. In so doing, he sometimes brought himself to the forefront as a prime intermediary between prince and people: leading, hearing, and voicing the praise.

Some forms of praise appeared in odes from all the laureates: the prince was often some great classical figure, with 'Caesar' and 'Augustus' being particularly favoured.<sup>60</sup> As mentioned above, Tate and Eusden were especially fond of classical references.<sup>61</sup> Other forms of praise were still more characteristic of individual laureates, with Shadwell emphasizing qualities relating William and Mary's rule to Whig principles, and Tate celebrating his

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<sup>57</sup> Shadwell, *Ireland*, p. 4.

<sup>58</sup> Tate, 1703NY.

<sup>59</sup> Eusden, 1720NY.

<sup>60</sup> E.g. Tate, 1693BD; Tate, 1694BD; Rowe, 1716BD; Rowe, 1718BD.

<sup>61</sup> E.g. Eusden, 1720NY.

prince in terms of their devotion to the cause of virtue.<sup>62</sup> Under the Hanoverians, the praise often focussed on aspects of family, fertility, and lineage.<sup>63</sup> One of the most interesting treatments of the theme came in Rowe's first ode. After hailing George I, 'Thou great Plantagenet! immortal be thy race!', the ode continued, 'See! see the sacred scyon springs,/See the glad promise of a line of kings!/Royal youth! what bard divine,/Equal to a praise like thine,/Shall in some exalted measure,/Sing thee, Britain's dearest treasure?... Still pour the blessing forth, and give thy great increase.'<sup>64</sup> In the previous line, Rowe had been addressing George I directly, but here the phrase 'See!... see' suggested that he was turning away to address a wider audience at this point, calling their attention to the prince's flourishing line of succession as a way of telling them how grateful and invested they should be in a prince who (for the first time since Charles I) had a legitimate, uncontroversial, filial heir. He then pivoted once again to address the future George II; having confirmed the people's approval, and thus his own role as an intermediary between prince and people, he was confidently able to dub the heir as 'Britain's dearest treasure', while also expressing the conventional idea of the poet's unworthiness to even sing about so great a 'thee'. In these lines, the Hanoverians were praised for their fecundity so as to sell the idea of a uniquely stable monarchy to the public; but the lines also showed the subtle footwork that was necessary to render such panegyric praise effective, with the laureate allowing himself a brief explicit appeal to his audience before twisting back around to face his royal patrons, and wrapping that appeal back up in the guise of an extravagant, supposedly consensual compliment. By such means, the voice of praise could come to seem like the voice of the people, even as it was being used to persuade the people as to the prince's glories (in this case, those of stability).

However, it was not just what the odes said about the princes which was designed to impress the right image of the prince on the people; it was also the way that it was said. Here, the ode form was crucial, because its tone was fundamentally different to that of rhyming couplets. The odes were not a place for argument or logical persuasion; they were a place for glorious assertion, presenting the prince in a blithe and providential fashion that suggested there

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<sup>62</sup> E.g. Shadwell, 1690BD; Tate, 1705NY.

<sup>63</sup> E.g. Tate, 1715BD; Eusden, 1720BD.

<sup>64</sup> Rowe, 1716NY.

was no other alternative than to worship him. Britain was '*Honour'd with the best of Kings*', and that (so far as the ideas went) was that.<sup>65</sup> Moreover, the odes were rendered effective as texts by the fact of their having been performed at court. As mentioned above, the publications tended to emphasize that they had been so performed, with notations marking out things like 'CHORUS' and 'First Voice',<sup>66</sup> and with little explanatory paragraphs setting out things like, 'On Monday the 6<sup>th</sup> of this Month, the Queen was graciously pleas'd to come from Kensington to St. James's; where the foregoing Ode, set to Mr. John Eccles, Master of Her Majesty's Musick, was Perform'd, to the Satisfaction of the whole Court, by Her Majesty's Servants.'<sup>67</sup> Sometimes the publications would even name the singers.<sup>68</sup> Thus the meaning of the odes was partly conditioned by the ability of the reader to reconstruct the performance, and by the sense that the prince himself had heard it: in the case quoted above, even 'the Satisfaction of the whole Court' was deemed worthy of note. The odes allowed readers to be present at a joyous, musical celebration of the prince's benign rule, and to participate in the enacting of an idealized prince-people relationship. Readers who were so transported were not expected to bring scepticism, criticism, or dispute. They were there to bathe in the golden splendour. They were there to add their voices to the shouts of grateful joy.

The early odes thus constituted an aesthetic that was overtly and unashamedly court-centred. It was a feature of court ceremony, it emanated from the court, and it transported its readers into the court so that they might partake of the court festivities and be introduced into the appropriate relationship with their prince. That relationship was one of a harmonious, joyous mutuality, in which a great, imperious prince, who embodied British qualities and cared for his people's wellbeing, received the awe, adulation, and obedience of his subjects, who then shuffled off out of the court and back to their homes, duly impressed with a sense of majesty. This was a poetry that was fully in line with some of the major currents of poetry identified by scholars as pertaining to this time: it was extravagantly panegyric, pseudo-Pindaric, and avowedly occasional, even seeking to recreate the occasion of its inception for its readers. In terms of the social and situational aspects of poetry, it also

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<sup>65</sup> Tate, 1715BD.

<sup>66</sup> E.g. Tate, 1711BD.

<sup>67</sup> Tate, 1707NY.

<sup>68</sup> E.g. Tate, 1711BD.

reflected the importance of the court, and court-based coteries of literary production, with which scholars continue to characterize the later Stuart period.<sup>69</sup> As such, it was fully attuned to the contemporary poetry landscape, and it proved the court to be no less attuned to national life. Yet if the relationship between prince and people revealed in these odes situated the court as having a central and continually relevant role in society, politics, and culture, then it did so with a sense that society, politics, and culture looked to the court for their lead, rather than vice versa. As it had been for centuries, the court of the laureate odes was a physical space, occupied by a prince, and it dictated the nation's affairs. The court presided over the nation.

### **Cibber's Odes**

The laureate who arguably took these themes the furthest was Cibber.<sup>70</sup> At the same time, however, his odes also began to signal some of the developments to come. In his hands, the pre-1757 odes reached a point of culmination and refinement, but with certain changes of emphasis, tending rather to dissolve the physical presence of the court and the practical agency of the prince into a hazier, more symbolic presence. Where the previous odes had invited their readers to court, Cibber's odes seemed to elevate that court into the clouds, and invited readers merely to look up towards it from wherever they happened to be sitting. Where the previous odes had articulated a relationship between prince and people in which the prince actively directed social, political, and cultural affairs, Cibber's prince instead became a more emblematic guarantee, or rubber-stamp, to affairs which were fundamentally being conducted by the people themselves. His forms, tropes, and techniques followed on from those of his predecessors, albeit with a narrowed range and some idiosyncratic

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<sup>69</sup> E.g. Ezell, 'Gentleman's Journal', pp. 323-40; Griffin, 'Social world of authorship', pp. 38-49.

<sup>70</sup> Cibber's odes show some consonance with the themes and imagery of the direct political, prose writers associated with Walpole's regime, as explored in Browning, *Ideas of the Court Whigs*. Again, though, the decision made here has been to focus on each laureate's odes within the context of the history of the form, and especially in relation to the presentation of the relationship between prince and people as conceptualized and negotiated in those odes; how Cibber's odes engage with partisan politics and constitutional theory has therefore not been considered here.



preferences on display; but the ideas began to shift towards those which would be characteristic of his successors.

The most significant characteristic feature of Cibber's odes was that they posited a distinct rhetoric of equilibrium, in which the court became more abstracted and the people's happiness became more heavily emphasized. This was the structuring ideology of Cibber's odes. Where the previous odes had generally sublimated the sense of argument, and had dampened the causal and conditional elements of the prince-people relationship, there had still been a (sometimes significant) tendency to show the prince as having achieved something through action – for example, William bringing liberty to Britain – and an implication that the people's gratitude and obedience flowed from the prince's qualities of rulership. With Cibber's odes, this tendency, and its attendant implications, were further negated. Cibber's rhetoric posited a prince and people in eternal, changeless, transcendental concord, where action was not only unnecessary, but even malign. Cibber thus turned his prince into a symbolic guarantee of the nation's happiness, and suggested that, so long as his readers endorsed his recognition of that happiness, all would continue to be well.

Cibber routinely mentioned such things as 'George's gentle sway';<sup>71</sup> his rule was mild, tender, and soft. There was certainly no sense of activity to his 'sway[ing]'. Although he was 'Born to protect and bless the land!', it was only in the following manner: 'And while the laws his people form,/His scepter glories to confirm,/Their wishes are his sole command.'<sup>72</sup> It was his people who made the laws, and their wishes which he followed; the diction of these lines even made it sound as if the laws in turn were 'form[ing]' the people, and that they were 'command[ing]' their prince, leaving even less room for any active princely rule. This rhetoric continued until Cibber's final ode: 'Our Rights, our Laws, our Liberty,/His Lenity so well maintains... So gently Caesar holds his Sway,/That Subjects with Delight Obey'. George's 'Lenity' meant that his rule was scarcely more than the confirmation of Britain's signal characteristics: rights, laws, and liberty. His subjects' 'Delight' was because they had essentially nothing to obey, and were left to their own native freedoms.

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<sup>71</sup> Cibber, 1733NY; the phrase 'gentle Sway' also used in, e.g., Cibber, 1739BD; Cibber, 1758BD.

<sup>72</sup> Cibber, 1732BD.

Thus Cibber's George became more of a symbolic tutelary figure than had the princes in his predecessors' odes. He guarded his people's happiness best by doing nothing to tamper with it, and his people responded with a grateful but cursory obedience. In another ode, Cibber wrote, 'Now shall commerce, sailing free,/Long the boast of *Britain* be;/While our *Caesar* guards the sea,/Can our beaten foes molest us?'<sup>73</sup> This was not a William, guarding Britain through his martial actions; nor was it even akin to Anne's husband Prince George, who had sometimes been hailed as a guardian of the seas on account of his genuine naval rank. Instead, it was simply George being invoked as a sort of guardian deity, and being used to give human form and some sense of a guiding spirit to such abstract British characteristics as 'commerce' and 'the sea'. The same ode ended, 'lo *Britannia*, lo *Caesar* sound', turning George II into an equal allegorical figure with Britannia, to be celebrated in the same breath.

Cibber depicted a king who sat happily on his throne while these verses were sung to him, smiling in vague benignity, accepting flattery for being a motionless monarch. The king thus served as Cibber's focal point for and embodiment of an ideal of national equilibrium. The people, meanwhile, were always happy, grateful, and obedient. 'Ye *Grateful* Britons' and 'happy *Britons*' were typical phrases.<sup>74</sup> They were also infinitely obliged to the prince for his benevolent rule. Yet however unpayable this obligation was, it was never very active; Cibber continuously invoked it, but also continuously paid it in the same breath. He positioned himself as some old Levite priest, making regular offerings on behalf of the nation, while all that the nation itself had to do was to nod its head in recognition of their involvement. They also had to be happy; but the happiness went hand in hand with the gratitude, and, as in the Tate ode quoted above, also required nothing other than the people's acknowledgement to remain efficacious. 'Awake the grateful song', Cibber called on one occasion, 'Sing, sing to George's gentle sway,/And joy for joys receiv'd repay.'<sup>75</sup> The people owed their joys to their prince; but repayment was effected simply by being joyous, and Cibber's 'grateful song' was the means by which such repayment would be made. '*Augustus*' sway demands our song,/And calls for universal cheer', Cibber insisted at the start of another ode, before going on,

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<sup>73</sup> Cibber, 1755BD.

<sup>74</sup> Cibber, 1731NY; for gratitude, see also, e.g., both the New Year's Day and birthday odes for 1755.

<sup>75</sup> Cibber, 1733NY.

What thanks, ye *Britons*, can repay  
So mild, so just, so tender sway?

*Air.*

Your annual aid when he desires,  
Less the King than land requires;

*All the dues to him that flow*

*Are still but Royal wants to you:*

So the seasons lend the earth

Their kindly rains to raise her birth;

And well the mutual labours suit,

*His the glory, yours the fruit.*<sup>76</sup>

Here, the obligation was impossible to discharge – ‘What thanks... can repay...?’ – but the debt was itself a very light one, being composed of mildness, justice, and tenderness. Moreover, the payment of the debt was not simply a payment to George, but a payment to the people themselves, from which they would reap the harvest. George’s only benefit was ‘*glory*’: again, an entirely abstract quality. The vague natural metaphors, and the refusal to be precise on the nature of an obligation which was being so insistently invoked, further created the sense that this transaction was all very abstract and mysterious. Thus the king became little more than a symbol of the harmonious, flourishing state of the realm. The same note was struck time and time again: ‘Here what you owe to Caesar’s sway,/In grateful song to Caesar pay... The grateful theme demands our lays.’<sup>77</sup> If ‘Caesar’ was so immaterial a taxman as to deal only in song, and if the songs themselves were almost spontaneous expressions of joy, then his function was little more than a confirmation or reminder of national wellbeing. He was a kind of imaginary quality, inspiring the proper workings of the nation; or a barometer of obligation, which proved to the people how happy they were by how high was the level of their debt.

Moreover, it was the laureate odes themselves which enacted this immaterial transaction (or which, to continue the metaphor, took the reading of the barometer). ‘Here what you owe’ would be paid; the ‘grateful theme’ demanded ‘our lyre’, but it was Cibber who held that lyre, however wide was the

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<sup>76</sup> Cibber, 1732NY.

<sup>77</sup> Cibber, 1736NY.

'our' of its ownership. Because the main substance of the transaction was joy, Cibber's odes thus became the site at which a nation's emotions would be enacted. 'The Date of Caesar's Sway... calls for universal Cheer', was the sort of sentiment with which Cibber often started his odes;<sup>78</sup> and he would often proceed by articulating great reams of joy, before climaxing in a thankful, joyous chorus.<sup>79</sup> The people were so happy that they had nothing else to do than to recognize the source of their happiness.

Thus Cibber's odes continued to portray the relationship between prince and people in the ways laid down by his predecessors, but with variations and new emphases that pointed the way ahead. As poetry, the odes remained somewhat responsive to the aesthetic climate in which they were being produced, but increasingly less so as the years passed, with Cibber's last efforts very similar to his earliest, and perhaps even somewhat less ambitious. Cibber maintained a poetics of courtliness, ceremony, and panegyric, and articulated the continuing importance of the court in national life both by the way that he portrayed the relationship between prince and people and by the manner of his writing. Yet the prevailing notion of that relationship began to evolve in his odes. His predecessors had granted the court a more active, tangible leadership over society, politics, and culture; they had served as a kind of a maitre d' to the court, beckoning readers inside and overseeing the relevant ceremonies; and they had at least suggested some sense of causality and practical consequence in the manner of the people's joy and obedience. Cibber turned the court into something more intangible and symbolic, trading in causality for a sort of divinely harmonious balance; and he dampened the prince's agency, while also arguing that such dampness rendered his reign happier than any other prince's. The court's role was not diminished, but was changing.

### **The Later Odes: Whitehead**

With Whitehead's appointment, the odes reached their second major phase, and the changes truly took effect. The court's role in society was no longer as a distinct, tangible entity towards which the nation looked for a lead; instead, it

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<sup>78</sup> Cibber, 1758NY.

<sup>79</sup> E.g. Cibber, 1755BD.

became more equably in tune with the nation, opening itself out to the public. Courtliness became, as it were, diffused and inherent throughout society; the laureate of the court was the laureate of the nation, and to celebrate either was to celebrate both. The aesthetic of the odes changed accordingly, bringing itself in line with the most recent developments in poetic theory and practice, and employing those developments so as to enact the celebration of court and nation. Whitehead's first birthday ode for George III (1761) ran thus:

## STROPHE.

'Twas at the nectar'd feast of Jove,  
 When fair Alcmena's son  
 His destin'd course on earth had run,  
 And claim'd the thrones above;  
 Around their King, in deep debate,  
 Conveen'd, the heav'nly synod sate,  
 And meditated boons refin'd  
 To grace the friend of humankind:  
 When, to mark th' advancing God,  
 Propitious Hermes stretch'd his rod,  
 The roofs with music rung!  
 'What boon divine would heav'n bestow?  
 'Ye gods, unbend the studious brow,  
 'The fruitless search give o'er,  
 'Whilst we the just reward assign:  
 'Let Hercules with Hebe join,  
 'And Youth unite with Power!

## ANTISTROPHE.

O sacred truth in emblem drest! –  
 Again the muses sing,  
 Again in Britain's blooming King  
 Alcides stands confest,  
 By temp'rance nurs'd, and early taught  
 To shun the smooth fallacious draught  
 Which sparkles high in Circe's bowl;  
 To tame each hydra of the soul,  
 Each lurking pest, which mocks its birth,  
 And ties the spirit down to earth  
 Immers'd in mortal coil;  
 His choice was that severer road  
 Which leads to Virtue's calm abode,

And well repays the toil.  
 In vain ye tempt, ye specious harms,  
 Ye flow'ry wiles, ye flatt'ring charms,  
 That breathe from yonder bower;  
 And heav'n the just reward assigns,  
 For Hercules with Hebe joins,  
 And Youth unites with Power.

## EPODE.

O call'd by heav'n to fill that awful throne  
 Where Edward, Henry, William, George, have shone,  
 (Where love with rev'rence, law with pow'r agree,  
 And 'tis each subject's birthright to be free,)  
 The fairest wreaths already won  
 Are but a prelude to the whole:  
 Thy arduous race is *now* begun,  
 And, starting from a nobler goal,  
 Heroes and Kings of ages past  
 Are Thy compeers: extended high  
 The trump of Fame expects the blast,  
 The radiant lists before Thee lie,  
 The field is Time, the prize Eternity!  
 Beyond example's bounded light  
 'Tis Thine to urge thy daring flight,  
 And heights untried explore:  
 O think what Thou alone canst give,  
 What blessings Britain may receive  
 When Youth unites with Power!<sup>80</sup>

This was the style and manner of the late eighteenth-century odes. Evidently, there were still features in common with the previous odes: this particular example included a reference to music ringing out, and ended each section on a refrain; it compared George III to various classical figures, including Hercules, and to Britain's previous great kings; it was extravagant in its praise; it celebrated the prince for mild qualities like 'temp'rance'; it emphasized the freedoms of the British subject, and the balance between 'love with rev'rence, law with pow'r'; and it even included a Tate-like passage in which the prince was shown fighting 'each hydra of the soul' as part of his zeal for 'Virtue'.

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<sup>80</sup> Whitehead, 1761BD.

However, the entire cast of the ode was different. It was an ambitious, carefully-written poem, following the structure of a genuine Pindaric ode rather than suiting itself for musical performance. 'Strophe', 'Antistrophe', and 'Epode', for example, were the three sections that Pindar had used to divide his own odes, and which were each governed by a strict set of rules; earlier Pindaric writers, from Cowley onwards, had ignored them in favour of wildness and irregularity, but they had been rigorously re-applied by Gray and other mid-century poets. Whitehead's eagerness to use them as the governing principles of his laureate odes (rather than the old, performative divisions appropriate for music) indicated his desire to recapture the forms and methods of Greek lyricism and the supposed original spirit of poetry that certain writers were associating with it, and his attendant desire to throw the emphasis on the readable text (accessible across the nation) rather than on the musical performance (a one-off event at court).

Likewise, the ideas and imagery in the 1761 birthday ode were more strikingly-rendered, and more elaborately-figured than previously; Whitehead's image of Hercules labouring against 'each hydra of the soul' showed far more concern to draw out the evocative potentials of the metaphor than had Tate's cursory allusion. There was also a clear narrative to the poem, somewhat echoing Gray's 'Progress of Poetry': it started off with the original Olympian deities, then proceeded to Hercules, thence to English kings, and lastly to the future glories of George III. After the vague musical maunderings of Cibber, Whitehead was bringing the laureate odes in line with the works of his most ambitious contemporaries. He was followed in this respect by Warton (especially) and Pye. Once in office, both Whitehead and Warton put most of their poetic efforts into the odes; Whitehead published virtually no other work throughout his long tenure, and his most significant publication (other than the odes) was his *Charge to the Poets*, the title page reading 'Quasi ex Cathedrâ loquitur' (meaning that he was using his official position to address his fellow poets, albeit somewhat humorously). Warton as laureate worked very diligently on his odes, as can be seen in his correspondence and notebooks, and the only other work that he carried out during his laureate tenure was his edition of Milton's minor poems (which, as seen in the previous chapter, he was

apparently encouraged in by George III).<sup>81</sup> It was their laureate responsibilities which, as poets, the laureates took the most seriously.

This change had important ramifications for the prince-people relationship as it came across in the odes. For one thing, the laureate was now asserting himself *qua* laureate as an important, respectable poet; the court poet did not simply furnish tinkling little lines to be sung on festive occasions, but produced powerful poetry to which the reading public should pay heed. As will become more evident in some of the following quotations, the later laureates conceived their official poetry as great national addresses; they were the poets of the nation as much as of the court. Such being the case, the odes carried with them a sense that the prince had a central patronal role in his nation, not only anointing its national poet but contributing to the way in which the nation should conceive of itself and of contemporary affairs; yet he did so responsively and in harmony with national feeling.

The change in the style of the odes was also important for the way in which it portrayed the prince to the people. The previous odes, as documents of courtly performances, had suggested that readers could be vicariously present at those performances, paying their devotions and witnessing the splendour of the court. The later odes did something different. They removed the idea of courtly performance from the text itself, thus de-centring the prince: the physical space of his court was replaced with a more diffuse sense of the prince's presence. Instead of transporting the reader to the court, the odes rendered the prince to his people using a variety of newly-sophisticated pictorial and emotive methods, in the manner that has been so much noticed and explored in the scholarship discussed above, but which has generally been linked with new poetic forms and tendencies.<sup>82</sup> In the advertisement to his *Odes on Various Subjects* (1746), Joseph Warton, brother to the future laureate, had presented his work as a challenge to prevailing tastes, suggesting that his odes would be found 'too fanciful and descriptive'. Yet he was unrepentant: he 'looks upon Invention and Imagination to be the chief faculties of a Poet'.<sup>83</sup> These ideas would later be articulated more fully in *An Essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope* (1782), where Joseph Warton also made more explicit the need for a poet

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<sup>81</sup> Bod, Dep d. 615; Dep d. 616; *Warton Correspondence*, 523 (pp. 568-9), 525 (p. 572).

<sup>82</sup> For more on these developments, see references above.

<sup>83</sup> Joseph Warton, *Odes on Various Subjects* (1746), Sig. A2r.



to cast his ideas into fully-developed imagery, powerful and comprehensive enough to transport the reader to another place. 'The use, the force and the excellence of language, certainly consists in raising *clear, complete, and circumstantial* images, and in turning readers into spectators.'<sup>84</sup> By doing so, exponents of this rationale of poetry believed that the poet could trigger an emotional response in the reader that correlated with the poet's own ideas and emotions.<sup>85</sup>

The later laureate odes worked upon this rationale. They laboured to create elaborate, potent images by which their readers could envisage and understand the prince and his place in the nation, and, instead of simply enacting the joyous gratitude of the prince's subjects, they used a more deliberate sense of poetry's ability to communicate passions so as to create a more intimate emotional relationship between prince and people. Bainbridge has noted this function of poetry to have been especially important during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, with poets and critics conceiving poetry's chief, unique function to be its ability to mediate war to the public: it could transport readers onto the battlefield by the use of 'fancy' or 'imagination'.<sup>86</sup> But this function had already been present for several decades in the laureate odes, and it is therefore no wonder that, as shown in Chapter Four, laureate Pye became so central a figure to wartime loyalist culture.

Important to the later odes, then, was that the laureate was a kind of visionary, British bard, writing as much for his nation as for his prince. As seen above, the earlier odes had undoubtedly invoked British national identity and characteristics fairly regularly; but, in general, 'the people' had been figured as the prince's anonymous subjects, expressing generic praise and gratitude to so fine a prince. The later odes contained a firmer and more sophisticated sense of 'the people' as the British nation, and of the laureate as their British poet. Whitehead's 1759 birthday ode began, 'The bard whom liberty inspires/Wakes into willing voice th' accordant lays'.<sup>87</sup> He was not merely celebrating liberty, or thanking George II for his benign maintenance of it; liberty was his inspiration as

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<sup>84</sup> Joseph Warton, *An Essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope*, 2 vols (1756-1782), II, pp. 222-3. For more on theories concerning imagery and emotions in poetry at this time, see Walsh, 'Eighteenth-century high lyric', pp. 115-22.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> Bainbridge, *Visions of Conflict*, pp. 11-31.

<sup>87</sup> Whitehead, 1759BD.

a poet, and what gave him the bardic power to rouse voices into accordant music. Several years later, Whitehead described his laureate odes as proceeding from 'the *British* lyre'.<sup>88</sup> Sometimes, he would almost entirely forget about his prince in his fervour to sing for Britain; the 1760 New Year ode, very much addressing Britain, gave only one passing mention to 'thy monarch', and concluded on the bombastic strain, 'The land of freedom with the land of slaves [France],/As nature's friend, *must* wage illustrious war,/... 'Till not on *Albion's* shores alone,/The voice of freedom shall resound,/But every realm shall equal blessings find,/And man enjoy the birthright of his kind.'<sup>89</sup> Here, the old idea of freedom being spread to Europe had been resurrected; but, whereas the early odes had identified this as the work of the prince, Whitehead was here attributing it to the British nation itself, its prince not even functioning as an instrument of this glorious national mission.

However, if Whitehead's emphasis was more on Britain than its prince, the prince was nonetheless a central part to his idea of the British nation, and, especially in the birthday odes, could sometimes loom overwhelmingly large. On three separate occasions, Whitehead used his birthday ode as an attempt to establish the nature of the relationship between prince and people in far more of a systematic, explicit manner than any of his predecessors had attempted.<sup>90</sup> Thus the 1763 birthday ode proclaimed, 'Common births, like common things,/Pass unheeded, or unknown'; but 'Born for millions monarchs rise/Heirs of Infamy or Fame... 'Tis not our King's alone, 'tis Britain's natal morn.' The ode went on to elaborate on how 'Bright examples plac'd on high,/Shine with more distinguish'd blaze', and 'Public is the monarch's pleasure,/Public is the monarch's care', before ending on a description of the ideal prince, and a powerful climax which explicitly referenced Pindar with an asterisk: 'Such may *Britain* find her kings!—/Such the Muse\* of rapid wings/Wafts to some sublimer sphere:/Gods and heroes mingle there./... O such may *Britain* ever find her kings!'<sup>91</sup>

In line with the sorts of theory espoused by Joseph Warton, Whitehead also brought to the odes a new sense of the emotive power of poetry. When Whitehead's predecessors had defined the prince-people relationship by

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<sup>88</sup> Whitehead, 1765BD.

<sup>89</sup> Whitehead, 1760NY.

<sup>90</sup> Whitehead, 1763BD; Whitehead, 1773BD; Whitehead, 1784BD.

<sup>91</sup> Whitehead, 1763BD.

reference to an emotional transaction, they had done so in a fairly one-dimensional manner, focussing on the grateful joy of the people. Whitehead, in his more self-consciously poetic and modern odes, sought a deeper emotional response from his readers. He rendered the prince more accessible and sympathetic a figure, to whom readers could respond as a fellow man. Whitehead's George was the 'Father' and the 'Friend' of the British people.<sup>92</sup>

A good example came in 1765. After George III had recovered from an illness, Whitehead did his best to paint a touching scene of the emotional bonds between prince and people, in which George was not only the object of gratitude, but also of tenderer cares. 'To HIM we pour the grateful lay/Who makes the season doubly gay;/For whom, so late, our lifted eyes/With tears besought the pitying skies,/And won the cherub health to crown/A nation's prayer, and ease that breast/Which feels all sorrows but its own,/And seeks by blessing to be blest.'<sup>93</sup> Much of this echoed Cibber; but now the prince was being characterized as someone vulnerable and sympathetic – even 'pit[iable]' – and as someone who, in turn, was racked with the sorrows being felt by his subjects. Not long after, Whitehead was hailing George as 'Friend to the poor!... Friend to the poor', and, in celebration of a recent act of royal charity, telling of how 'His feeling heart/Inspir'd the nation's better part/With virtues like its own'.<sup>94</sup> Whitehead's George was a sentimental prince, not sitting airily in a court, but going about amongst his people, humbling himself to do them good, and inspiring them with the example of charity. Thus, he gave his readers a subject to whom they could have a deeper, more sincere emotional response than had previously been the case. They were not to be bound to their prince simply by reverence, gratitude, or even joy, but by the most tender and humane sentiment. He was a father and a friend to his people.<sup>95</sup>

The last thing to note is the manner in which Whitehead used his position as laureate to interpret the great ongoing events through which the nation was passing, often interpreting them by reference to his prince. In an ode towards

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<sup>92</sup> E.g. Whitehead, 1771BD; Whitehead, 1783BD.

<sup>93</sup> Whitehead, 1765BD.

<sup>94</sup> Whitehead, 1767BD.

<sup>95</sup> Incidentally, this ties into Ditchfield's argument, discussed in Chapter Four, that the first and second halves of George's reign were not so distinct as usually posited; the image of a middle-class, sympathetic, accessible, paternal George that has been identified as becoming so important in the 1790s was already being articulated in the early years of his reign in Whitehead's laureate odes.

the end of the Seven Years War, for example, he voiced his desire for peace, but also the need for all Britons to pull together against France, by reference to the marriage of George and Charlotte: 'Love commands, and beauty's queen/Rules the power who rules the sky.../..Let the war-torn legions own/Your gentler sway, and from the throne/Receive the laws of love.' But, he went on (now addressing 'ye British dames'), 'Should *Gallia*, obstinately vain,/To her own ruin urge despair', then the British womenfolk must follow the example of 'the ladies of Mecklenburg [Charlotte's homeland]', who, in 1395, had sold their jewels for the public good. Whitehead was confident that, inspired by their new 'fair instructress', Charlotte, Britons would 'unite [their] flame/To save the land of Liberty and Laws.'<sup>96</sup>

Whitehead's task became harder during the American Revolutionary War, but he persisted in interpreting events for the nation by reference to George III, and seeking to rally British hearts against France. Whitehead recurrently presented the American rebels as a prodigal son, who had cast off his filial loyalty, but who could perhaps be won back again by depictions of the love, sorrow, and affection of his parent; and the parent in question could variably be presented as Britannia or as George.<sup>97</sup> With France entering the fray too, Whitehead changed his tone markedly, harking back to all the old anti-France tropes and banging the drum for conquest.<sup>98</sup> When Britain then found Spain and the Netherlands also leagued against it, Whitehead became the poet of a distinct Britain-against-the-world sentiment, which Stephen Conway has identified as having seized the national mood at this time.<sup>99</sup> 'Still o'er the deep does Britain reign,/Her Monarch still the Trident bears:/Vain-glorious France, deluded Spain,/Have found their boasted efforts vain,/... The warring world is leagu'd in vain/To conquer those who know not fear!'<sup>100</sup> Through the years of great international event and crisis, Whitehead-as-laureate guided his nation, serving both to tell it how to understand what was going on, and as the voice of valiant belligerence during its darkest moments; and he used the prince as a flexible point of reference by which to carry out his task.

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<sup>96</sup> Whitehead, 1762NY.

<sup>97</sup> E.g. Whitehead, 1774BD; Whitehead, 1777NY.

<sup>98</sup> E.g. Whitehead, 1778BD; Whitehead, 1779NY.

<sup>99</sup> E.g. Whitehead, 1780NY; Whitehead, 1781NY. For Britain-against-the-world sentiment, see Conway, *American Independence*, pp. 197-202.

<sup>100</sup> Whitehead, 1780BD.

By doing so, he was continuing the transformation of the prince-people relationship: from one in which the court was a distinct, physical entity, within which the prince was sitting and towards which the nation looked for its lead, to one in which the court was diffused and elided with Britain as a whole, the human, patriotic figure of the prince walking freely throughout the land. Whitehead and his prince were still, at this point, standing in a position of eminence over the nation, guiding its sentiments; but the overall weight and tendency of those sentiments was that of the British nation as a whole. Whitehead and his prince only had any power or direction over those sentiments because they shared them too.

### **The Later Odes: Warton**

Warton continued Whitehead's efforts to render the odes as both 'classical entertainment[s] for the present time,' and 'permanent and valuable acquisition[s] to posterity' (as Pye had phrased it). However, whereas Whitehead had only intermittently structured his odes upon a distinct historical or pictorial conceit, and had not indulged too flamboyantly in the famous Pindaric digressions, Warton was (in these respects) more thorough-going. His odes thus resembled great poetic pageants of Britain, spreading their vision across time and space, centring on George III.<sup>101</sup> His first ode, which he had been rushed in writing, was the most directly focused on the prince, being an exalted description of George III's work as a patron. 'Tis his to bid neglected genius glow,/And teach the regal bounty how to flow./His tutelary scepter's sway/The vindicated Arts obey'.<sup>102</sup> Thereafter, he had time to paint on a much broader canvas. The 1786 New Year's Ode consisted of a glorious British pageant, looking back to the past, forward to the future, and across the world; and within this great vision was George situated: 'For our's the King, who

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<sup>101</sup> Interestingly, Fairer touches on this aspect of Warton's laureate odes in his discussion of 'prospect' poems. He identifies both Warton and Pye as writing 'prospect' works of a conservatively patriotic hue, in which a prospect of a certain geographical area is used to survey the nation as a whole and its past and future, and he notes that Pye succeeded Warton as laureate; but he focuses on examples of each man's pre-laureate writings, and especially Pye's *Farringdon Hill*. Fairer, *English Poetry*, pp. 205-7.

<sup>102</sup> Warton, 1785BD.

boasts a parent's praise,/Whose hand the people's sceptre sways'.<sup>103</sup> The following ode presented a pictorial history of freedom, bards, and 'virtuous kings', as seen in ancient Greece, climaxing on a celebration of George: 'Who, thron'd in the magnificence of peace,/Rivals [the Greek poets'] richest regal theme:/Who rules a people like their own,/In arms, in polish'd arts supreme;/Who bids his Britain vie with Greece.'<sup>104</sup> As in Whitehead's odes, the George being presented here was a patriot, a patron, and a sympathetic human figure; but Warton was more deliberate in using vast, pictorial backdrops to highlight these qualities, and to create a sense of George's importance to the nation.

Perhaps the best example came in the 1787 New Year's Ode, which told the history of one of Warton's favourite subjects: 'ancient Chivalry'. After surveying the 'Minstrel' and 'Bard of elder days' who had once sung to 'the Gothic Throne', Warton, becoming the bard himself, 'now... tunes his plausible lay/To Kings, who plant the civic bay;/Who choose the patriot sovereign's part,/Diffusing commerce, peace, and art;/Who spread the virtuous pattern wide,/And triumph in a nation's pride... To Kings, who rule a filial land,/Who claim a People's vows and pray'rs'.<sup>105</sup> Warton here summoned up a seductive, romantic vision of the British past, and thus created a sense that George's rule was rooted in this past, even as, by a poetic sleight of hand, he presented George's qualities as distinctly modern ones, which were best revealed against the contrast of 'the Gothic Throne'. George was a 'civic', 'patriot[ic]', parental prince, loved and cared for by his filial subjects; but he also possessed all the romance of his 'ancient' British predecessors.

An interesting variant was provided by the 1789 birthday ode, which followed George III's recovery from his first major incapacity. Here, Warton gave a humbler, darker pageant, surveying a nation in worry and mourning, and then showing the nation's celebration at George's recovery. The image of a poor peasant lighting a candle in thanks to Heaven – 'Meek Poverty her scanty cottage grac'd,/And flung her gleam across the lonely waste' – was found especially touching by the reading public, according to *The Public Advertiser*.<sup>106</sup> Indeed, the ode created a powerful sense of a nation all going through the same

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<sup>103</sup> Warton, 1786NY.

<sup>104</sup> Warton, 1786BD.

<sup>105</sup> Warton, 1787NY.

<sup>106</sup> *Public Advertiser*, 10 Jun. 1789.

emotional journey, passing from worry to exultancy, all concerned for the same subject; and that subject was George: 'its Father, Friend, and Lord,/To life's career, to patriot sway, restor'd.'<sup>107</sup> Here, again, was a visionary pageant. Here, though, the prince as a sympathetic, sentimental figure was placed at the centre of the pageant, and allowed to animate the whole, in a more emotive manner than ever before. He was a man known intimately to all of his subjects, and cared deeply about; not just the head, but the beating heart of the nation.

Like Whitehead, Warton had lofty ideas of the role of a poet laureate. But if Whitehead had devoted special attention to working out the relationship between prince and people, then Warton's special care was to work out where the panegyrist himself stood in this relationship. This theme was struck early on, when he insisted, 'The Muse a blameless homage pays;/To George, of Kings like these supreme,/She wishes honour'd length of days,/Nor prostitutes the tribute of her lays.'<sup>108</sup> But its most detailed treatment was in his 1787 birthday ode, which consisted of a survey of the laureateship itself. 'The noblest Bards of Albion's choir/Have struck of old this festal lyre', Warton began, leaving no doubt as to the high opinion he had of his office. He then gave a stanza each to Chaucer, Spenser and Dryden, considering the ways in which they had paid tribute to their princes, and how each prince had inspired their poetry.

Each poet, however, presented problems. Chaucer's martial, chivalric poetry had 'moulder'd to the touch of time'; Spenser's 'visionary trappings' had been 'flung' over Elizabeth, hiding the truth with fantasy; and Dryden had been worst of all: 'Does the mean incense of promiscuous praise,/Does servile fear disgrace his regal bays?/I spurn his panegyric strings,/His martial homage, turn'd to kings!/Be mine, to catch his manlier chord'. The final stanza then answered all these problems by granting panegyric its most fitting subject: George III. If they had been his laureate, Chaucer would have been able to write of peace and patriotism, rather than of so archaic a subject as war; Spenser would have been able to trade in 'Fiction' for 'truth'; and Dryden's flattery would have been no flattery, but 'his tribute all sincere!'<sup>109</sup> Thus, for all the fancy exhibited in his own laureate odes, Warton was keen to position himself as a painter of simple truth. George III did not repudiate panegyric;

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<sup>107</sup> Warton, 1789BD.

<sup>108</sup> Warton, 1785BD.

<sup>109</sup> Warton, 1787BD.

instead, like Jesus with the Old Testament law, he fulfilled it. Warton's role was to mediate faithfully between prince and people, using sincere panegyric to show them how their prince really was. Thus, again, Warton was able to infuse his subject with all the romance and splendour of the past – of a fanciful, visionary idea of that past – while also characterizing George as someone distinct from the downsides of that past. He was both a monarch to be revered, and a man to be loved. Warton was his faithful interpreter to the nation.

### **The Later Odes: Pye**

Pye, having set out his vision for the odes in preface to his earlier Pindar translations, duly followed on from Whitehead and Warton in his approach to the odes. His first ode was a typical Wartonian pageant, celebrating British expansion, commerce, and peace, employing conceits, digressions, and a narrative structure.<sup>110</sup> But his odes also saw highly significant developments, spurred by the political situation of the 1790s, with Britain facing the French threat abroad and the threat of reformers, radicals, and revolutionaries at home. Pye's odes thus re-embraced the musical potentials of the form, but without returning to the earlier emphasis on courtly performance; rather, Pye's odes became patriotic, popular musical pageants, with George III usually, but not invariably, figuring in some form or other. In style and language, Pye's odes were direct; in content, they mixed an earnest desire for peace with a tub-thumping jingoism; and in their musical form, they seem to have been set to existing patriotic melodies, thus enabling them to take up the important part in patriotic culture that they were shown doing in Chapter Four.

As early as 1792, Pye was beginning to dispense with the labour of elaborate conceits, and to favour simpler, more direct versification than had been normal for Whitehead and Warton. The 1792 birthday ode included a few ABAB lines, but was mostly written in couplets: 'Freedom on this congenial shore/Her holy temple rear'd of yore./... To welcome George's natal hour/No vain display of empty power,/In flattery steep'd, no soothing lay,/Shall strains of adulation pay;/But Commerce, rolling deep and wide/To Albion's shores her

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<sup>110</sup> Pye, 1791NY.



swelling tide,/But Themis' olive-cinctur'd head,/And white-rob'd Peace by Vict'ry led,/Shall fill his breast with virtuous pride,/Shall give him power to truth allied;/Joys, which alone a Patriot King can prove,/A nation's strength his power, his pride a people's love.'<sup>111</sup> Patriotic tropes came rolling along one after the other, with the prince's identity as 'a Patriot King' very much a commonplace by this point. It was as if Pye's predecessors had done all the hard work of establishing a set of ideas, and now Pye's job was simply to bash them out as merrily and as straightforwardly as possible.

As the 1790s wore on, Pye drew his odes more explicitly in line with the existing culture of patriotic songs. William Parsons, the master of the king's music, began setting the odes to pre-existing tunes, and the texts of the odes began making this clear to readers. The final stanza of the 1797 New Year ode, after alluding to such things as Edward III, Agincourt, and Elizabeth, climaxed with the chorus to 'Britons, Strike Home', with a footnote explaining that: 'These last lines were inserted at the desire of the King'.<sup>112</sup> The ode itself did not actually mention George III, because, by this point, there was no need to; the laureate's patriotic songs were being sponsored and even directed by his patriotic prince. The 1797 New Year ode was then the first in many years to be printed in sections marked 'AIR', 'TREBLE, RECITATIVE', and suchlike; and it ended on a section marked, 'AIR AND CHORUS; *Tune, Rule, Britannia*', which duly closed on a quotation of that song's refrain. 1800's birthday ode was not so explicit, but clearly ended on Pye's own version of 'God Save the King', given in three stanzas of different metre from the rest of the ode.

For the most part, though, Pye's odes read as simple roll-calls of loyalist rhetoric, in which patriotism and the prince had become one and the same thing. 'The notes of Triumph swell again!/Lo, Windsor boasts as high a train/Of Royal Youths, as brave as those/Who frown'd defeat on Edward's foes;/Of Royal Nymphs, as fair a race/As crown'd Philippa's chaste embrace;/Around their King, their sire, they stand,/A valiant and a beauteous band...'<sup>113</sup> The crown had become the most potent, but also the most natural of patriotic symbols. Its identity was seamlessly bound up with the identity of the British

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<sup>111</sup> Pye, 1792BD.

<sup>112</sup> Pye, 1797NY.

<sup>113</sup> Pye, 1805BD.

nation, and it was the perfect material for Pye to use in his rolling, straightforward couplets.

There is a sense with Pye's odes, then, that the relationship between prince and people was finally settled. He was 'the royal Patriot'; 'a Patriot King'.<sup>114</sup> Pye's role accordingly became settled as the official British bard, and as a national cheerleader. Because he was the poet of a patriot king, who loved his subjects and had their love in return, Pye's role was to celebrate the nation, and to stir its martial spirit. There was still praise due to George III, but it was invariably a sort of national praise, channelling the nation's love and celebrating George by reference to his patriotism. 'Then let the Muse, with duteous hand,/Strike the bold lyre's responsive strings,/While ev'ry tongue through Albion's land/Joins in the hymn of praise she sings,/... A nation's votive breath by truth consign'd/To bless a Patriot King—the friend of human kind.'<sup>115</sup> The prince as he appeared in this formulation also represented the sympathetic, human figure, but perfectly united with the symbolic, allegorical function that Cibber had wished upon George II. He was the genius of Britain, precisely because he was every Briton's most intimate friend. 'Faithful to him their hearts approve,/The Monarch they revere, the man they love;/Britannia's sons shall arm with patriot zeal,/Their Prince's cause their own, his rights the general weal.'<sup>116</sup>

As laureate, Pye held 'the British muse'.<sup>117</sup> Although his poetic efforts were not as much focussed upon the odes as Whitehead's and Warton's had been, he conceived of all of his productions as forming a united, patriotic programme. In one ode, he referred to his long poem, *Naucratica*, with a footnote making the reference explicit, and also reminding the reader that *Naucratica* had been 'dedicated, by permission, to his Majesty'.<sup>118</sup> That poem had 'Sung of the wreaths that Albion's warriors bore' and of 'The naval triumphs of her George's reign'; but now, Pye observed, 'Still higher deeds the lay recording claim,/Still rise Britannia's Sons to more exalted fame.'<sup>119</sup> The laureate was the chronicler of British glory.

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<sup>114</sup> For these and similar terms, see e.g. Pye, 1796NY; Pye, 1797BD; Pye, 1797NY; Pye, 1803BD.

<sup>115</sup> Pye, 1803BD.

<sup>116</sup> Pye, 1793NY.

<sup>117</sup> Pye, 1804NY.

<sup>118</sup> Pye, 1806NY.

<sup>119</sup> Pye, 1806NY.

He duly commented on all the ongoing events: the first horrors of the French Revolution, the Battle of the Nile, union with Ireland, the Battle of Copenhagen, and all other such great occasions.<sup>120</sup> He actually expressed quite ardent wishes for peace, and Bainbridge's suggestion that there was something cursory, or insincere, about these wishes, seems unfair, even if it is true that Pye's pacifist imprecations were often mixed with such comments as, 'Yet, if the stern vindictive foe,/Insulting, arm the hostile blow,/Britain, in martial terrors dight,/Lifts high th' avenging sword, and courts the fight.'<sup>121</sup> But perhaps his most passionate commentary came after the Battle of Trafalgar. 'NELSON!', Pye exclaimed; 'while a people's paeans raise/To thee the choral hymn of praise,/And while a patriot Monarch's tear/Bedews and sanctifies thy bier,/Each youth of martial hope shall feel/True Valour's animating zeal;/With emulative wish thy trophies see;/And Heroes yet unborn shall Britain owe to thee.'<sup>122</sup> These lines came at the end of the ode in which Pye had highlighted his own role as chronicler. As laureate, Pye led the people's 'paeans', weaving their emotions together into a 'choral hymn of praise'; as laureate, he cast Nelson's fame forwards to future generations, that they might be inspired to patriotic zeal. Fittingly, at the centre of the image was the 'patriot Monarch'. He was not sitting imperiously on the throne, or exacting a debt of gratitude from his people; he was crying alongside his people, his tears falling upon Nelson's bier.

Thus under Whitehead, Warton, and Pye, the odes were transformed from what they had been pre-1757. Employing a new aesthetic of poetry, which was concerned to recapture a supposed original spirit of poetry and to stimulate the passions accordingly, these laureates continued to articulate the central role of the court in matters of public importance, but conceptualized that role in a very different way. In their version of the relationship between prince and people, the prince was an intimate, human figure, caring for his people and being cared for by them on a person-to-person level, even as he occupied a position of majesty which was imbued with all the weight of British history, literary expressiveness, and prophecy. The new aesthetic was particularly in tune with this conceptualization, because it reached back explicitly to the past, and because it carried with it an ambitious sense of the poet's powers to paint

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<sup>120</sup> Pye, 1793BD; Pye, 1799NY; Pye, 1801NY; Pye, 1801BD.

<sup>121</sup> Pye, 1795BD. For peace, see, e.g. Pye, 1794NY; Pye, 1796NY. For Bainbridge, see *Visions of Conflict*, pp. 48-50.

<sup>122</sup> Pye, 1806NY.

pictures, evoke passions, create sympathy, and predict the future. The poet could create pageants that spanned time and space; in Warton's odes especially, he did so, and he set the court at the centre of them. Thus the prince was envisioned as being at one with his people, and the court as being the symbolic, patriotic heart of national life, essential both to ideas of national identity and to literary production.

## **Conclusion**

The laureate odes showed great changes over the course of the long eighteenth century, with a continuing sense of the need to articulate the relationship between prince and people, and a continuing conviction as to the centrality of the court to national life, but with evolving conceptualizations of these matters, in line with the changes taking place in British society as a whole. The odes moved from courtly splendour and ritual, and an aesthetic appropriate for these themes, to a conscious effort at bringing the prince before the people, employing a new aesthetic that was appropriate for this new emphasis. After 1757, the odes responded to modern literary demands, and were moulded into a form which elided courtly panegyric of the prince with patriotic panegyric of the British nation.

A study of the odes therefore reveals the increasing demands and pressures on the laureateship, the changes to which it was required to subject itself, and the manner of its resultant adaptation. This further demonstrates that the court and its prime office of specific cultural patronage, the laureateship, were highly sensitive and responsive to the relevant developments, and stayed abreast of them. As the odes themselves argued, the court continued to occupy a central role in cultural production and consumption, and in public affairs and national identity; its role was not being occluded by new developments, but was changing and adapting to suit those new developments. The laureateship was the prime emblem and instrument of the court's continually important, but evolving cultural role.

Likewise, the developments that scholars have recognized in the fields of poetry, national identity, and the public sphere, cannot be completely understood without reference to the laureate odes. Those odes were regularly-

produced and widely-read, and they entailed a continual effort to navigate these very issues, concerned particularly to understand how they related to the court. The laureate odes show that, although the middle decades of the eighteenth century were indeed of huge importance in the types of poetry being produced and the ideals of poetry being conceptualized, these developments were not exclusively associated with experimental new forms, or with Romantic notions of poetic independence and the spontaneity of inspiration. Instead, what may have been the most familiar form in which these ideas were developed was the laureate odes, produced on set occasions, twice a year, by a courtly poet. The new aesthetic of poetry was sponsored by the court and celebrated the court, culminating in Warton's representations of a prince who somehow embodied the most admirable qualities of ancient Greece, the 'Gothic' national past, and the modern world at the same time, and in Pye's depictions of a sympathetic patriot king. This was a form of conservative, loyalist poetry that was not only coterminous with non-courtly and non-conservative forms, but even, in some ways, stood at the head of them.

The history of the relationship between prince and people, as articulated by the odes, developed in tandem with the manner and aesthetic of articulation. At the start of the eighteenth century, the odes had been centred on the physical space of the court, forming a one-off musical performance to which the printed texts served as an imagined, carefully-controlled invitation. The reading experience itself was only viable because the court's importance as a physical space was taken for granted, and because it was self-evident that a reader would wish to partake of courtly festivities and prostrate themselves before the throne. By the end of the eighteenth century, the case was otherwise; the reading experience had to stand up on its own terms, affecting the reader through the poet's imagination, imagery, and emotional resonance, rather than by notes and directions pertaining to musical performance. The physical space of the court was no longer of such importance. Instead, the reader wished to be shown the glories of British history, British literature, and the British people. This transformation did not mean that the court or the king had been rendered irrelevant; instead, it meant that courtliness was now diffused throughout the nation, and the prime object and exemplar of British patriotism was the king himself. The court was a public court; the king's laureate was the voice of the nation.

## Conclusion

I then wrote to Croker saying that as for writing odes, like exercises, the time was past when I could do such things either with readiness or propriety; that unless I could do credit to the office, the office could do none to me; but that if it were understood this idle form was to be dropt & I were left on great public events to commemorate them in verse, or not, as the spirit moved, in that case I should willingly accept the situation as a mark of honourable distinction, which it would then become.<sup>1</sup>

In 1813, Robert Southey was appointed to the office of poet laureate. He accepted on the understanding that the laureate would no longer be tasked with writing the biannual odes, but that he would instead be allowed to write ‘on great public events... or not, as the spirit moved’. The king’s final descent into illness had already caused the odes to fall into a partial abeyance; yet Southey was initially disappointed in his expectations. Barely had he been installed as poet laureate when a letter reached him from the master of the king’s music, William Parsons, requesting that he send the text for 1814’s New Year’s Ode as promptly as possible, so as to give Parsons sufficient time to write the music.<sup>2</sup> On this occasion, ‘the spirit’ seemed to be ‘mov[ing]’ anyway, and Southey therefore wrote a ‘Carmen Triumphale’ for the new year, longer and more ambitious than almost any laureate ode had ever been, leaving Parsons to decide how much of it to set to music. Over the next thirty years, Southey would write several more ambitiously *ex cathedra* poems, but he continued to resent his paymasters’ efforts to have him write odes at stated intervals. Just as Rowe’s appointment had confirmed the identification between laureate and biannual odes that Tate had partially effected, so too did the process reverse itself over a hundred years later. Following Southey’s resistance, Wordsworth accepted the office in 1843 with the firmer stipulation that he would never be required to write any official poetry. From that point on, the office was definitively a sinecure.

Southey’s tenure therefore heralded a new era for the laureateship; the office as it had been created between 1668 and 1715 was finished. It is therefore fitting that this thesis should come to an end here. Yet it is not the end

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Southey to Charles Watkin Williams Wynn, 20 September 1813. *CLRS*, 2305.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Southey to Herbert Hill, 16 November 1813, *CLRS*, 2330.

that might be expected from the tenor of Southey's words, or from the manner in which he struggled against the eighteenth-century traditions of the office: it is neither a whimpering, nor an acrimonious end. Southey disliked being required to write odes to order, and looked disdainfully on several of the eighteenth-century laureates; and he shared these feelings with many of his contemporaries. Yet his willingness to accept the office, and his belief that it could become an 'honourable distinction' if the biannual odes were dispensed with – not *all* laureate writing, or even all laureate odes, but merely the biannual stipulation – indicates not so much the failure, as the success and importance of the eighteenth-century laureateship. Not only was it a prominent, significant feature of the cultural landscape, but it was also something that clearly had the potential for adaptability, and something which many people believed ought to be continued in a new form. The fact that it was adapted, rather than abolished, shows that it had served its function admirably up to that point, and had proven itself capable of continuing to function admirably if only certain adjustments were made to it.

Thus, the biannual odes were discontinued. While the court transitioned into an essentially symbolic part of British society and culture, the laureateship evolved into a primarily honorific position. Tennyson and Wordsworth, and even Ted Hughes, Carol Ann Duffy, and Simon Armitage, were happy and honoured to accept the position.<sup>3</sup> In retrospect, it was convenient to believe that the eighteenth-century version of the office had received nothing but mockery, and had been deserving of nothing more, from Shadwell's appointment to the death of Pye; this belief was what lubricated the changes that the office underwent after Southey's appointment, and it gelled perfectly with the ideas which developed thereafter concerning literature, national identity, the monarchy, and the character of the eighteenth century. Even Broadus, the office's foremost historian, believed 'that Warton's appointment had turned a good poet into a bad laureate', 'crystalliz[ing]' contemporary opinion against the office.<sup>4</sup> In fact, however, the case was very different.

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<sup>3</sup> For various reasons, however, some nineteenth-, twentieth- and twenty-first-century poets have turned down offers of the laureateship; e.g., in recent years, Seamus Heaney and Imtiaz Dharker. *Financial Times*, 30 Aug 2013, < <https://www.ft.com/content/ab96a37c-116b-11e3-a14c-00144feabdc0> > [accessed 29 September 2019]; *The Guardian*, 3 May 2019 < <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/may/03/hunt-next-poet-laureate-imtiaz-dharker-carol-ann-duffy> > [accessed 29 September 2019].

<sup>4</sup> Broadus, *Laureateship*, p. 154.

As this thesis has argued throughout, the eighteenth-century laureateship was a highly prominent, highly respectable, and highly significant office. It was perfectly in line with the sorts of practice and belief that were widespread at the time concerning culture and the court (both individually, and with regards to each other), and it served as a key emblem and instrument of those sorts of practice and belief. It was the defining element in a system of cultural production and consumption in which the court and the public were nestled together, the court's agency continuing to operate from 1668 to 1813 and interacting fruitfully with the newer agencies that were becoming more powerful as the period wore on. Chapter One showed that the office was initially brought about as part of the court's attempt to define and exercise its cultural role in a world where such definition had become newly (and repeatedly) necessary, due to the ruptures between courts and the increasing power of a commercial, middle-class public. The laureateship was then fixed into a certain place within the household structure, and tasked with a specific function, in response to the court's continuing need to define its cultural role. Yet this process was not the result of any long-term courtly sentence. Instead, a variety of agents, standing in a variety of relations with regards to the court, contributed to the definition of the court's cultural role, and the (trans)formation of the laureateship, by their efforts to exploit the court's putative cultural centrality for their own gain.

These conclusions were then developed in Chapter Two. By a close reading of the works of George I's poets laureate (primarily Nicholas Rowe), it was shown that literature of the time was not merely produced for and consumed by a commercial, middle-class public, but that the courtly-patronage model remained very much in operation, continuing to dictate the practices of writers and the ideals by which their work was valued. Yet the courtly-patronage model itself was now bound up with the practices and ideals that related to the commercial, middle-class public; writers like Rowe succeeded by pitching their work to both court and public, and by appealing to each through means of the other. Essentially, they were working according to a set of practices and beliefs that were determined by court and public working in tandem. The laureateship was the prime element of this mixed system, being positioned at the interface of court and public. The writers appointed laureate under George I – Rowe, Cibber, and to some extent Eusden – were receiving their due reward, and



appropriate co-option, for having succeeded so well according to the standards of this system.

Chapter Three then adopted a longer timeframe, exploring all of the laureate appointments from Rowe to Southey. By taking this long view, and seeking to establish patterns across the period, it revealed that those writers chosen for the laureateship actually tended to be amongst the few most successful and highly-esteemed writers of their day, and that their appointments correlated closely to the ebbs and flows of literary taste, political power, and individual royal personality. It demonstrated how the laureateship could bring various different networks into play, each attempting to access and employ it for different ends, and how, following on from this, there were different ways by which the 'merit' which determined the bestowal of the laureateship might itself be determined. Ultimately, it offered two major conclusions: that the appointment of a laureate confirmed the court's centrality to society, in that it placed a courtly validation on those networks and ideals that had the greatest valence at the time; and that the superficial randomness in the sorts of writer who were appointed laureate is in fact a reflection of how literature was valued in the eighteenth century, when there many different possible agencies trying to make their claim for the understanding and dictation of cultural affairs.

In Chapter Four, the emphasis was on the public character of the laureate, and on the office's standing in the eyes of the reading public, during the reign of George III. Here was perhaps the most conclusive evidence as to the importance of the eighteenth-century laureateship. In exactly that period which might have been expected to see the triumph of the public, commercial culture, British identity, and middle-class assertiveness, the laureateship was found to have held a massive presence in the very medium which might have been expected to reveal that triumph best: the newspapers. Moreover, although mockery and hostility were certainly apportioned to the office in good supply, so too were approval, respect, consideration, esteem, enjoyment, and even a sort of reverence. Vast swathes of the reading public – perhaps a majority of those people who were interested in literature – read the laureate odes with eagerness, judging them by the highest standards and often finding them worthy. For Whitehead and especially Warton, it was widely felt that an honourable office had been honourably bestowed; while Pye, taking the office at the start of the French Revolutionary Wars, soon became a central figure in

loyalist culture, his odes guiding the nation in its celebration of a patriot king. Thus the newspapers reveal the court's cultural role, and its central role in society more generally, to have been alive and well, while also continuing to adapt; and they reveal, again, the importance of the laureateship in forming the interface between court and public.

Finally, Chapter Five surveyed the odes produced by the laureates. Here, the laureates were found continually negotiating the relationship between (in the phraseology appropriate for the panegyric tradition) prince and people, and mediating that relationship to the people themselves. It was shown that, over the course of the long eighteenth century, the odes continued to affirm the centrality of the court to society, and its role in the production and consumption of culture, but that the ways in which it did so communicated an understanding that the court and society, and their relationship with each other, were evolving. At the start of the period, the court's importance was a more traditional, hierarchical sort of importance, in which the court was a discrete location to which the rest of society actively looked for a lead; there was no greater privilege than going to court, no greater cultural product than court ceremony, and the laureate odes offered these two things to their readers. By the end of the period, however, the court had (in some sense) diffused across the land. Courtliness and Britishness were one and the same, and a human, sympathetic, patriot king stood at one with his people, sponsoring a literature that was produced according to the highest, most ambitious, and most modern understanding of literary value. The court was still of central importance to society, and the laureateship to literature; but while the one was undergoing an 'apotheosis' by which its centrality to the British nation would become exclusively symbolic, the other was on the verge of being occupied by Southey, and thus translated into a purely honorific position.

Ultimately, then, a history of the laureateship reveals that British society of the long eighteenth century remained (in part) defined by the court, and by associated attitudes, practices, and ideals. In that sense, Clarissa Campbell Orr is right to suggest that eighteenth-century society cannot be understood without keeping the court in the picture, and J.C.D. Clark's reminders as to the persistence of the traditional are shown to be valid. Yet by the same token, the laureateship and the court themselves suggest something almost contrary: that British society changed drastically between 1668 and 1813, with the increasing

development and assertiveness of a British public, in response to which the laureateship and the court were forced to adapt. The history of the eighteenth-century laureateship is of an office, and of a court, courting the public: both in the actual sense of the word 'courting', and in the more punning sense of keeping the public courtly.

It is the nature of this courting that now needs to be explored further. While the laureateship can undeniably stand as a key element in the courting, it is not the only one; there were, for example, many more odes and poems published in affirmation of the court than came from the laureates' pens alone. Works by the likes of Hannah Smith and Holger Hoock, cited throughout this thesis, have also indicated where such exploration might be targeted, and indeed have commenced that exploration themselves. Research framed by the question of courting will allow for the nature of British society and culture to be understood in a more penetrating, more nuanced manner; it will reveal how that society and that culture functioned, and how the eternal dialectic of old and new played out in the long eighteenth century. The laureates, as revealed in this interdisciplinary study, were the royalty of a public, courtly culture, but they were far from absolute. It is now to the expansive, anarchic realms of that culture that attention must turn.

## Bibliography

### The Biannual Laureate Odes

For a fairly comprehensive, very useful, and highly meticulous catalogue of the surviving laureate odes and where they might be found, see Rosamond McGuinness, *English Court Odes: 1660-1820* (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1971), pp.13-43. The body of published laureate odes upon which this thesis draws comprises the following (only one source given for each ode):

#### Thomas Shadwell

Shadwell produced a variety of odes and non-ode poems for royal occasions, but the only published odes of his which specifically addressed a royal birthday or New Year's day were the following (published as independent publications):

*Ode on the Anniversary of the King's Birth* (1690)

*Ode on the King's Birth-Day* (1692)

#### Nahum Tate

*An Ode Upon the New Year* (1693)

*An Ode Upon His Majesty's Birth-Day* (1693)

*An Ode Upon His Majesty's Birth-Day* (1694)

*The Anniversary Ode For the Fourth of December, 1697. His Majesty's Birth-Day. Another for New-Year's-Day, 1697/8* (1698)

*An Ode Upon the Assembling of the New Parliament. Sung before His Majesty on New-Years-Day. 1702* (1702)

*The Song for the New-Years-Day, 1703* (1703)

*The Triumph, Or Warriours Welcome: A Poem On the Glorious Successes Of the Last Year. With the Ode for New-Year's Day. 1705* (1705)

'Song. For New-Year's Day, 1707', in *The Muses Mercury: Or, Monthly Miscellany*, Jan. 1707, pp. 8-9.

'Song. For Her Majesty's Birth-Day, February the 6<sup>th</sup>, 1707', in *The Muses Mercury: Or, Monthly Miscellany*, Feb. 1707, pp. 27-8

*Song for the New-Year 1708* (1708)

*The Song for Her Majesty's Birth-day, February the 6<sup>th</sup>, 1710/11* (1711)

'Mr. Tate, the Poet Laureat's Song, for His Majesty's Birth-Day, May the 28<sup>th</sup>. 1715', in *The Flying Post*, 9-11 Jun. 1715

### **Nicholas Rowe**

Rowe's published odes are most easily accessible in Nicholas Rowe, *Poems on Several Occasions, and Translations* (Glasgow: 1751): 'Ode For the New Year, 1716', pp. 105-11; 'Song For the King's Birth-Day, 28<sup>th</sup> of May, 1716', pp. 112-4; 'Ode For the New Year, 1717', pp. 115-7; 'Ode To Peace for the Year, 1718', pp. 118-20; 'Ode For the King's Birth-Day, 1718', pp. 121-3; and 'Ode To the Thames for the Year, 1719', pp. 124-6.

### **Laurence Eusden**

'Ode for the New Year, sung before the King, Jan. 1. 1720', in *Weekly Journal or British Gazetteer*, 9 Jan. 1720

'A Song sung at Court, on his Majesty's Birth-Day', in *Weekly Journal or British Gazetteer*, 4 Jun. 1720

'Ode for the Birth-Day, 1729', in *Universal Spectator and Weekly Journal*, 1 Nov. 1729

'The Ode for the New Year', in *Grub Street Journal*, 15 Jan. 1730

### **Colley Cibber**

Cibber's first two odes appeared as independent publications, *An Ode To His Majesty, For the New-Year, 1730/31* (1731), and *An Ode For His Majesty's Birth-Day, October 30, 1731* (1731). Thereafter, his odes are most readily and consistently accessible in *The Gentleman's Magazine*, in its January editions for the New Year odes and in its October or November editions (or even, in 1748, in its December edition) for the birthday odes. Odes that do not appear in *The Gentleman's Magazine*, and need to be found elsewhere, are:

'Ode for the King's Birth-Day, 1733', in *London Evening Post*, 27-30 Oct. 1733

'[Birthday ode for 1734]', in *London Evening Post*, 29-31 Oct. 1734

'The [birthday] Ode [for 1735]', in *Daily Gazetteer*, 31 Oct. 1735

'Ode for his Majesty's Birth-Day, 1736', in *London Evening Post*, 30 Oct.-2 Nov 1736

'Ode for the Birth-day', in *Grub Street Journal*, 3 Nov. 1737

'The [birthday] Ode [for 1739]', in *London Evening Post*, 30 Oct.-1 Nov. 1739

- 'The [birthday] Ode [for 1740]', in *London Evening Post*, 30 Oct.-1 Nov. 1740
- 'An Ode for New-Year's-Day', in *London Evening Post*, 1 Jan. 1741
- 'An Ode for New-Year's-Day', in *Daily Post*, 2 Jan. 1742
- 'Ode For His Majesty's Birth-Day, 1746', in *London Evening Post*, 13-15 Nov. 1746
- 'Ode For the New-Year, 1746-7', in *General Advertiser*, 2 Jan. 1747
- '[Birthday] Ode [for 1749]', in *Whitehall Evening Post or London Intelligencer*, 28-31 Oct. 1749
- 'Ode for the New-Year', in *London Evening Post*, 30 Dec. 1749-2 Jan. 1750
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