

## Vents of Trade

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This paper attempts to formulate a certain figuration of the sublime in terms of colonial mimicry and Common-wealth representation. The bodies involved in this odd interplay include one suggested by Thomas Hobbes, one intimated by John Locke, one formulated by Queen Anne's Wits and one mysteriously arising on the horizon of colonial consciousness in a dance ritual of the Cherokee in 1714.

In *A Tale of a Tub* Swift begins a process of colonial reflection on the bodies of the colonized which will continue to haunt his work. Swift writes of

"That highly celebrated Talent among the Modern Wits, of deducing Similitudes, Allusions, and Applications very Surprizing, Agreeable, and Apposite, from the Genitals of either Sex, together with their proper Uses. And truly having observed how little Invention bears any Vogue, besides what is derived into these Channels, I have sometimes had a Thought, That the happy Genius of our Age and Country, was prophetically held forth by that antient typical Description of the Indian Pygmies; whose Stature did not exceed above two Foot (but whose genitals were thick and reached all the way to their ankles."<sup>1</sup>

For Swift the Pygmie body comes to represent a feature of the English Common-wealth which determines its drive to create new commercial ventures. A primitive sexuality, akin to a brute force, is translated by Wit into a critique of current, meaning 1696, market conditions.

When Swift gives oversized genitals to his Common-wealth body he is merely providing an anatomically correct part to otherwise unsexed philosophical speculations. Yet the idea of the Common-wealth as an ungainly monster was not foreign to such theories. In describing the Common-wealth Hobbes is drawn to translate the image of the three personed God, the father, the son and the holy ghost, into its material counterpart:

And therefore if the King bear the person of the People, and the general Assembly bear also the person of the People, and another Assembly bear the person of a Part of the people, they are not one Person, nor one Sovereign, but three Persons, and three Sovereigns.... To what disease in the Natural Body of man, I may exactly compare this irregularity of a Common-wealth, I know not. But I have

seen a man, that had another man growing out of his side, with an head, armes, breast, and stomach, of his own: If he had had another man growing out of his other side, the comparison might then have been exact.<sup>2</sup>

Hobbes' famous giant on the frontispiece of the Leviathan, one monarch composed of crowds of citizens, is here split into three persons, three heads, fitting into one body. Hobbes is aware that his figuration of the one nation under god concept is threatened by the actual functioning of independent political and commercial forces functioning within that one body. His siamese triplet is a response to the desire to maintain one functioning system whereby all channels are eventually joined in the one Common-wealth. This single triple body can then be anatomized and shown to be nourished by a unitary system of trade. Trade is the life blood of the nation, in fact Hobbes' writes that money is blood, that it flows through the channels of trade in the Common-wealth and into the public treasury.

The Conduits and Wayes by which it is conveyed to the Publique use, are of two sorts; One, that Conveyeth it to the Publique Coffers; The other, that Issueth the same out againe for publique payments.... And in this also, the Artificiall Man maintains his resemblance with the Naturall; whose veins receiving the Bloud from the severall Parts of the Body, carry it to the Heart; where being made Vitall, the Heart by the Arteries sends it out again, to enliven and enable for motion all the Members of the same<sup>3</sup>.

This artificial body proceeds from a metaphor of unification, the coming together of the Common-wealth through trade. Hobbes extends the metaphor to calling colonies and plantations the children of the commonwealth. This returns me to Swift. How are these colonial children conceived? Can a siamese triplet find a mate? How does a body held together by the flow of commodities join itself to other bodies? Finally, what happens in the "heart" of the Common-wealth to revitalize the commodity flow? Already emerging here is the idea of a kind of Freak Show embodied in the Common-wealth. The grotesquely sexed Indian pygmic hiding somewhere deep within the English genius seeks to procreate, to revitalize commodity bodies. The commodity must find its vent.

In the case of silver this external vent was most famously Mt. Potosi in the Bolivian Andes. Silver from Potosi fueled the Spanish economy in the 16th and 17th centuries.<sup>4</sup> It was this flow of silver, largely converted and financed for the Spanish by the Dutch, which John Locke was attempting to regulate into the silver standard, his universal measure of value in the banking crises of the 1680's and 90's in England. Locke's 1691 and 1693 essays on money helped form the ideological and financial background for the incorporation of the Bank of England in 1694. Financial vents, the flow of money through and out of the Common-wealth are an

integral part of Locke's argument.

The natural value of money, as it is apt to yield such a yearly income by interest, depends on the whole quantity of the then passing money of the kingdom, in proportion to the whole trade of the kingdom, i.e. the general vent of all the commodities. But the natural value of money, in exchanging for any one commodity, is the quantity of the trading money of kingdom, designed for that commodity, in proportion to that single commodity and its vent.<sup>5</sup>

Locke is describing the nature of venture capital and its fluctuation around fashion and trade. Locke simply expands on Hobbes' figuration of the Common-wealth in order to further explore the necessity of regulating its flow of trade/blood. Locke is, in essence, civilizing the commodity by holding it up to a universal standard: "Silver is the instrument and measure of commerce in all the civilized and trading parts of the world."<sup>6</sup>

The raw bullion of silver had to be stamped with the public stamp, according to Locke, in order to be put into circulation. This stamp is crucial to the understanding of what a commodity is. I would argue that it is this public stamp which lies at the "heart" of the English Common-wealth. Locke writes that mankind has "consented to put an imaginary value upon gold and silver," which must then be stamped by the mint before it can be put into circulation.<sup>7</sup> Entering into the imaginary, silver is coined in order to make the raw material a civilized standard of exchange. The imaginary triple headed body of the commonwealth comes into contact with raw bullion and transforms it into blood through an imaginary process called "minting" or stamping coins with signs of public authority.

So far there is an Indian Pygmie, a siamese triplet and a national body with multiple vents loose in this paper, all imaginary projections of the genius behind the English Common-wealth. In order to join these bodies, to show how the imaginary in Wit reinscribes the commodity with its primitive raw material, with its body, I wish to examine Jonathan Swift's use of Locke's vent and Hobbes' channels in a combined sexual/commercial word, the vent.

In *A Tale of a Tub* Swift writes, "my Friends will never trust me alone, without a solemn Promise to vent my Speculations in this, or the like manner, for the universal Benefit of Human kind."<sup>8</sup> Swift is engaging in a rhetorical trope whereby his speculations are to be vented anatomically and vended commercially. Swift's Wit is proposed as a commodity of the spirit. Swift expands the conceit around the Critical words vend and vent. In "The Mechanical Operation of the Spirit" Swift describes a system of trade in materials of the mind. The intellectual operations governing the discourse of Modernity, as put in place by Hobbes and Locke, Swift converts into commodities to be channelled through the Common-wealth. "British Workmen" he writes invoking the design of the modern Common-wealth, are engaged in the "whole

Course and Method of this Trade."<sup>9</sup> Swift's puns are the tokens of exchange here directed at the business of vending "Spiritual gifts." Swift's pun on Venting links his speculations on the course and method of the trade in intellectual capital to his speculations on anatomy, on the body, on the "Mystery of Vending".

I am resolved immediately, to weed this error out of Mankind, by making it clear, that this Mystery of venting (vending from the 4th edition onward) spiritual Gifts is nothing but a Trade, acquired by as much Instruction, and mastered by equal Practice and Application as others are.<sup>10</sup>

Between 1711 and 1715 a new body emerges to bring together all the vented speculations of Wit. This is a body trapped between trade and anatomy. The genitals act as the ducts and vents through which this Wit can sell its speculations on the Common-wealth's commodity body. This body is always searching for external, uncivilized vents, the raw materials for the driving of its sophisticated economy, whether silver, spices or beaver. The exchange between the primitives and the Wits will take up the remainder of this paper and will center on the commodity of beaver, as exploited by the Hudson's Bay Company.

The Hudson's Bay Company was granted its charter May 2nd of 1670 by Charles II. The rent was set at "two elks and two black beavers" whenever the Hudson's Bay territory was entered, notice the vent, by the monarch. Granted the charter through the absolute authority of the monarch, rent is to be paid upon the monarch physically entering, joining the Royal body to its imaginary offspring, on the chartered territory. The beaver, logically enough, is the emblem of this transaction.

The English monarch will be paid upon arrival in his own territory with beaver, the symbol of his interest in the territorial economy. The charter is granted to the company to monopolize an economy of beaver and translate that monopoly back into an English economy based on silver and gold, not "yards of wampompeak," as Locke names the Native American tokens of exchange.<sup>11</sup> Inosculation occurs in the formation of the company and in the joining together of two separate economies, fur and money through the body, primarily, of the beaver. In North America the beaver was the fundamental fur unit, against which all others were traded. "Two otter skins, eight pair of moose hooves or ten pounds of goose feathers equalled one made beaver," writes Peter Newman in his history of the Hudson's Bay Company.

All this prehistory of the vented body is transformed in the Wit of the Scriblerus Club. The "Double Mistress Episode," originating in the Wit of the Scriblerian Club in the second decade of the 18th century, explores a fascination with vented or multi-orificial bodies in the Common-wealth. Martinus Scriblerus is the icon, the emblematic cartoon character of the Scriblerus Club, including Jonathan Swift, Alexander Pope, John Gay, Dr. Abuthnot and most significantly the Chancel-

lor of the Exchequer, Robert Harley. The figure to emerge from this company of wits, Martinus Scriblerus, is an adventurer and a scholar, a philosopher and a miles gloriosus. He is a purveyor of the Wits speculations on a society driven by the stock market. He is the Wits equivalent, the unseemly side, of Robinson Crusoe.

Martinus Scriblerus encounters the twins Lindamira and Indamora "whose common parts of Generation had so closely allied them, that Nature seem'd here to have conspired with Fortune, that their lives should run in an eternal parallel,"<sup>12</sup> at a freak show, a "Scene of Wonders." Two women share the same "parts", as if engineered to confound proper metaphysical speculation. In terms of the conundrum, to begin with by "parts" what is meant? Genitalia? Ovaries? womb? The genitals are obviously the external sign of the oneness of the two women. They share the same vagina, the same external vent.

Scriblerus, the Modern philosopher, is intrigued, his faculty of desire driven, by this two in one, the doubleness, the natural productivity, divisibility of Lindamira/Indamora. "For how much soever our Martin was enamour'd on her as a beautiful Woman, he was infinitely more ravish'd with *her* as a charming Monster."<sup>13</sup> Scriblerus is in love with an "object" of doubleness. Yet from this origin the text immediately divides itself, unable to decide how to express this double love. Scriblerus calls the "double object" one, Lindamira/Indamora, *her*. The more Nordic blonde, blue eyed, rosy checked Lindamira, the first named, wins his affections, but her opposite, also called *her*, the pale, "raven tressed", dark eyed Indamora will inevitably shadow the relationship. There is one *her*. two heads, four arms, but one vagina, one point of possession.

This is the structuring of a language of origin upon and engineered body/book of double origins. A bodily tautology, Lindamira is Indamora, to Wit, only in so far as she is her organs, her "common parts of generation" and vice versa. Scriblerus is distinctly aware of the conundrum, recognizing it as the proper problem for a philosopher. "Nature forms her wonders for the Wise, and such a Master-piece she could design for none but a Philosopher."

Scriblerus has a rival for the affections of the Double Mistress in the person of the "Black Prince, Ebn-Hai-Paw-Waw." The multiple body of the primitive is here signified by hyphenation, the joining of dissimilars. The name brings together a black prince, one would think African, particularly with the success of the black prince Oroonoko in England, but also an Arab, the Ebn-Hai, and an American Indian, Paw-Waw, as rival for the love of the Double Mistress. Scriblerus has a triple rival, presumably representing natives of the East India, the Africa and the Hudson's Bay zones of economic influence. Lindamira/Indamora knows the black Prince Ebn-Hai-Paw-waw from the Freak Show, the "Scene of Wonders" to which they both belong. Thereby the lovers, Scriblerus and Ebn-Hai-Paw-Waw are battling for a very rare female commodity, one which will drive several economies.<sup>14</sup>

On a market level, the analogy is simple, Scriblerus, the adventurer, is engaged in a struggle with a representative of a triple land, North America, Africa and Persia for possession of a fetishized commodity. However, as a test case for this form of analysis, the Wits analysis of a body of exchange, I wish to use North America and the exchange between the Puritans and Paw-Waw, which means a "conjurer" or "medicine man" as a background.

In Jonathan Goldberg's recently published essay, "Bradford's "Ancient Members 15" the legacy of buggery in New England is traced through the execution of Thomas Granger for having sex with a horse, a "mare", in 1642. Buggery, as opposed to sodomy, meant specifically sex with an animal.

Legally, sodomy and bestiality were synonymous, both "fearful to name." both warranting death. However, in New England, a distinction was made between male-male sexual misconduct and having sex with an animal. As Robert Oaks remarks, "Puritans were less hesitant to punish buggery with death than they were sodomy".

Buggery, or sex with an animal, became the worst of sexual crimes, according to Goldberg, for "fears of monstrous offspring that such matings with animals were thought to produce." Goldberg then argues that sex with animals was associated by the Puritans with Indians.

Bradford, after all, believes that Indians are "wild beasts," "savage and brutish men." In his bestiality, Granger momentarily - and finally - steps into that lethal space in Bradford's text reserved for the bodies of Indians.<sup>16</sup>

The implications of native Americans, buggery and sex with animals leads into a bizarre history of cultural translation. The language of encounter is haunted by a "Bogey Man", a misshapen creature searching for a body, any body, to penetrate, to join, to anastomose. Linguistically the word "Bugger" is a hybrid bug/bogey/bugbear/bugger/buggery. It is a corruption whose etymology is formed to suit political needs in terms of national identity. In other words, its origin shifts according to the discourse in which it is being used, whether race, religion, commerce, or state. Yet this kind of linguistic corruption, of which "Buggery" is an example, will come to cannibalize whole languages, forcing entire nations to speak a form of pidgin English.

The Cherokee Booger Dance brings the speculation on buggers and Englishman into a new light, that of the booger, another variation on bugger and close to bogeyman. In fact the Cherokee Booger Dance seems to reflect, as in a mirror, the Puritan fear of a misshapen body. As reported by missionaries in 1714 the Cherokee performed a very peculiar dance,

Presently in came five men dressed up with feathers, their faces being covered with vizards made of gourds;... having wooden falchions in their hands (such as stage fencers commonly use); in this dress they danced an hour, showing many strange gestures, and brandishing their wood weapons as if they ware going to fight each other;... again turning their bodies, arms and legs into such frightful postures that you would have guessed they have been quite raving mad...<sup>17</sup>

The Booger Mask, described by the missionaries as a gourd, is in fact a false penis tied to the face of a character often chalked with white dust. The dance portrays invasion by Europeans as a sexual attack on Cherokee women and the attempts of the men to fight them off. The Cherokee portray the invaders with phal-luses as the primary characteristic, the fundamental point about, not only the English, but all colonizing powers.<sup>18</sup> The Booger Mask, the stranger coming out of the shadows, is a mask which mimics the cultural signs of foreigners. A mask that is a mirror for the "Other" develops in the cultural "encounters", in which "Primitive" is a term by which each side designates the other as overtly brutish and sexual.

Goldberg does not emphasize the point of trade with the Indians in his discussion of "buggery" among the Puritans. He notes in passing, "the Massachusetts Bay colony fears that "the Indians will abuse us in trade"<sup>19</sup> but fails to develop the implications of the body of the bugger as implicating the body of exchange, cultural and commercial in the Common-wealth.

Returning to Lindamira/Indamora and the "Double Mistress Episode", a legal battle ensues upon the "Black Prince" marrying Lindamora after Martin marries the Nordic Indamira. The battle for the prize continues in court. Martin's lawyer makes the argument that Lindamira/Indamora are one individual because they share the same "Organs of generation." A "Jury of Matrons" is called to do a physical examination to determine whether or not Lindamira/Indamora has/have (a) distinct organ(s) of generation. The assumption being, as the reader already knows there is only one vagina, the vagina and the organs of generation, the cervix and the ovaries, are distinct entities. The "Jury of Matrons" reports that in fact there are two "organs," supposedly two cervixes, two sets of ovaries, and two uteruses.<sup>20</sup>

As a result of this trial Lindamira/Indamora are granted distinct individualities, property to be possessed by both men. However, Martinus obviously will not be content with anything but sole ownership of the disputed possession. A second court overturns the first. The higher court decides "two persons could not have a Right to the entire possession of the same thing, at the same time; nor could one so enjoy his property, as to debar another from the use of his, who has an equal right."<sup>21</sup> This second judgement, against the divisibility of the Double Mistress, hinged upon one vaginal entrance making impossible the deployment of two male proprietors. "Therefore the Lords, with great Wisdom, dissolv'd both Marriages, as proceeding

upon a natural, as well as legal Absurdity."<sup>22</sup>

This absurdity in the colonial context suggests the incompatibility of the two economies, incorporated European monetary standards and native American "wampompeak" in the body of the commodity, whether beaver, or the "Double Mistress."

The outcome of the Double Mistress trial revolves around the one in two, two in one paradigm, i.e., two males organs cannot fit in one female vent, not for the purpose of production, even if there are two organs, there is only one outlet, one productive duct. The point of joining, of inoculation, between possessor and possessed, cannot be determined because of the two openings to the reproductive lands. Scriblerus could possess the wrong land, the wrong future, the wrong womb and vice versa for Ebn-Hai-Paw-Waw, their economies are entirely and absurdly opposed. The engineering of the Double Mistress is off, the commodity resists legal definition. There is no legal issue to, or from the problem. The body of the Double Mistress generates the sublime pleasure/pain of a pun while short circuiting the proper vents of legal and metaphysical discourses.

Swift and the Scriblerians put together a portrait of a modern adventre capitalist, Martinus Scriblerus, in search of rare commodities. Scriblerus knows that bringing together the primitive and modern on the modern stock exchange inevitably fuels the excess that is necessary for an economy to grow. Yet he also knows that the original possessor's of wealth are not going to be conjured out of their possessions, not legally. In order for Scriblerus to possess the Double Mistress he will have to force one sister, the dark sister, to receive him unwillingly.

Sublimity in the Double Mistress Episode is reached when possession cannot be legally or philosophically obtained over the woman's body. The paradox of two wombs and one vagina leaves the investors empty-handed, only able to contemplate abstractly the inoculated abyss of meaning before them, or to act violently, violating the law in favour of the power of possession.

Coda:

The last time the beaver ceremony commemorating Charles II original chartering of St. Rupert's Land was performed two live beavers were given to Queen Elizabeth:

The ceremony, held on the rainy afternoon of July 14, 1970, on a dais outside Lower Fort Garry near Winnipeg, was unique in another respect. The animals were feeling particularly perky in the presentation tank that day, and just as the Queen bent over to accept the symbolic rent, the beavers, not versed in court etiquette, relaxed their tensions by first having a tussle and by making love. "Whatever are they doing?" Her Majesty demanded of Lord Amory, the HBC governor, who was presiding over the ceremony. "Ma'am, it's no good asking



me," intoned the Governor, peering down as his coupling charges with undisguised disgust. "I am a bachelor." The Queen assumed her customary mid-distance gaze and murmured, "I quite understand." p.91.

## ENDNOTES

1. Swift, *Tale of a Tub*, (New York: Norton 1973) 339.
2. Hobbes, ch.29, 373.
3. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, (New York: Penguin Books 1980) 301.
4. Jack Weatherford, *Indian Givers*, (New York: Ballantine Books 1988) 1-20.
5. "Raising the Value of Money," John Locke, p. 250.
6. John Locke, *Consequences of the Lowering Interest and Raising the Value of Money*, (London: Ward, Lock & Co. 1825) 313.
7. Locke, 233.
8. Swift, *A Tale of a Tub*, 355.
9. Jonathan Swift, *A Discourse Concerning the Mechanical Operation of the Spirit*, (Norton Critical Edition), 9. 402.
10. *Ibid.*, P.407.
11. John Locke, *Considerations of the Lowering of Interest and Raising the Value of Money*, (London: Ward, Lock & Co. 1825) 324.
12. Pope, *The Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus*, ed. Charles Kerby-Miller, (Oxford University Press 1951) 146.
13. *Ibid.*, p.147.
14. It is interesting to note the female character of the Bogeywoman among the northwest coast first nations: the Dzonokwa, or Sasquatch, is invariably female and often associated with wealth, as Levi-Strauss makes clear in *The Way of the Masks*.
15. Bradford's "Ancient Members," Jonathan Goldberg, journal, *Nationalisms & Sexualities*, Routledge, London, 1992. (Thanks to Robin Goodman for the reference.)
16. Jonathan Goldberg, "Bradford's "Ancient Members," p.68-69.
17. Frank G. Speck. Leonard Broom, Will West Long, *Cherokee Dance and Drama*, (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press 1983. *Civilization of the American Indian* series.
18. From Amerigo Vespucci onward, the phallus had been an object of great interest in describing the inhabitants of the new world.
19. Jonathan Goldberg, "Bradford's "Ancient Members" and "A Case of Buggery...Amongst Them." *Nationalisms and Sexualities*, ed. A. Parker, M.Russo, D. Sommer, P. Yaeger, (New York: Routledge 1992) 72.
20. One of the aspects of the Cartesian determination of the pineal gland as the seat of the soul involved the fact, as Kerby-Miller points out, that the pineal gland is "one": "it alone of all parts of the brain is single and thus is the only place from when thought, which is single, might emanate." p.287, Kerby-Miller.
21. *Memoirs of Scriblerus*, p.163
22. *Memoirs of Scriblerus*, p.163.