

## **Joanidion Fielding’s *Account of the Comet* (1716): A Scriblerian Satire on John Flamsteed**

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*Mr. Joanidion Fielding His True and Faithful Account of the Strange and Miraculous Comet which was seen by the Mufti at Constantinople* appeared in London as a folio of six pages around the end of 1716. It carries the imprint of the Catholic bookseller Edward Ber(r)ington, who published mostly Tory and High Church items.<sup>1</sup> Today we might suppose that this odd title would immediately alert potential readers to the fact that they were encountering a hoax rather than a serious account of a modern wonder. Besides, careful students of contemporary literature might have thought that the supposed author, named as “E. Parker, Philomath,” looked a little fishy – for one thing, the label “philomath” had recently been used by Jonathan Swift as part of a joking pseudonym, as well as by the highly suspicious “Jeremy Thacker” in a satire on the quest for a way to find the longitude at sea (on the authorship see Lynall 4-6). However, this same descriptor was used by authentic mathematicians, while there was also a well-known author of astrological almanacs named George Parker. How could a customer in Berington’s shop rule out the possibility that this was one more dire warning, in the tradition of men like the celebrated astrologer John Partridge, whom Swift had consigned to a living death, just a few years before? The name “Joanidion” is admittedly bizarre, with a faint recollection of Jedidiah, but not much more outlandish than that of almanac-makers who had delighted in the names of Old Testament prophets such as Ezekiel Bretnor or Jeremiah Shakerley.

In addition, the pamphlet came out at a time when considerable interest had been aroused in Britain by recent celestial phenomena, including a total eclipse of the sun and a nova in the previous year, followed by a bright display of aurora borealis a few months later. The last of these was thought by many to be a comet, though Edmond Halley was able to give a more accurate description (see Halley 1162-83). The ever-excitable William Whiston, who had earlier suggested that the biblical Flood had been caused by the effects of a comet, was still promoting apocalyptic theories about cosmic events (Whiston 148). Moreover, considerable attention was given in the press to the military and diplomatic activities of the Ottoman empire in the Mediterranean and Balkan sphere. As a result, it was only if buyers were willing to fork out threepence to consult the text of the pamphlet that they could be sure that it was indeed entirely satiric in nature.

The work falls into two sections. The first part, running to about 1,200 words of continuous prose, is written in the voice of Joanidion Fielding, and sets out his claims to eminence before giving a description of a comet recently seen in Constantinople, together with reactions and interpretations in its aftermath. The remaining 660 words consist of brief gnomic prophecies regarding the impact of the comet on individuals and events in London. These resemble the utterances of traditional almanacs, but the closest parallel for those who have cracked the code will be Swift’s *Predictions for the Year 1708*, written in the guise of “Isaac Bickerstaff Esq.”

Little attention has been paid to the *True and Faithful Account*, as only three extant copies are known, and it has never been reprinted. Twentieth-century scholars briefly noted its possible association with the works of the so-called Scriblerian group

(Sherburn 182-3; Ault cxiii; Kerby-Miller 46), but only two sources provide more than a couple of sentences in passing. Marjorie Nicolson and G.S. Rousseau allot two pages to the topic, rightly identifying a newspaper story mentioned in the subtitle of the pamphlet, which read "As appears by the *Daily Courant* of last Month." They also located a link with a pamphlet believed to come from the Pope circle, *God's Revenge against Punning*, which had been published in early November 1716, and noted that Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, at this time a close friend and regular correspondent of the poet, was en route for Constantinople at this date (Nicolson and Rousseau 184-6). She had left London on 1 August with her husband, the new British envoy, but did not arrive in Turkey until March 1717. The main object of Edward Wortley Montagu's mission was to facilitate a truce in the long-running war between the Ottoman and Austrian empires. Subsequently Rousseau wrote an article entitled "Wicked Whiston and the Wits", reprinted in his collection *Enlightenment Borders* (1991), describing the role of William Whiston in the *True and Faithful Account*. He also suggested that John Gay, one of the Scriblerian group, may have been the principal author (Rousseau 333-4). The evidence presented here indicates that the main target lies elsewhere, and that the true author is probably one of Gay's colleagues.

There the matter has been left, with no full examination of the text or its context. A more complete analysis now enables us to go further in explicating the origin and workings of the pamphlet. Previously unexplored materials make it possible to understand its thrust and significance. This article will reveal the main object of the satire, as embodied in its fictive narrator, Joanidion Fielding; disclose the sometimes oblique relation of the events described to real-life Ottoman history; show the connection of this item with other productions, past and future, of the Scriblerian authors, as these reflect their pervasive concerns and goals; and offer a number of reasons to identify the likely author. The overwhelming favourite for this role is John Arbuthnot (1667-1735), the Scottish physician and writer who stood at the centre of the Scriblerian circle (Beattie provides valuable information, but discounts a number of solid attributions on the prejudiced word of the doctor's son George.) He served as Harveian Lecturer and Censor of the Royal College of Physicians, and for a number of years he was on the Council of the Royal Society. When the plague threatened to invade Britain in 1720, he was deputed to advise the government on quarantine measures. A genuine polymath, he maintained an informed interest in varied disciplines, several of which were among the subjects of his books. They include mathematics, probability, numismatics, nutrition, demography, music, philology, geology, ancient history and literature, physical anthropology, and theology. A friend of Handel, and correspondent of Hermann Boerhaave, he was also an acquaintance of the financier John Law. Though not an astronomer, he vetted the work of a great practitioner in that field, Flamsteed. Most to the point, he could not stop scribbling topical works in a satiric vein.

### John Flamsteed as Victim

Abundant signs exist to show that the principal target of the *True and Faithful Account* can only be John Flamsteed (1646-1709), the first Astronomer Royal from 1675. Clues begin to open up very early. The very first line on the title-page gives an intimation, with the initials J.F. pointing to only one individual with great prominence in astronomy, or within the sciences generally. The opening dateline of the text reads "*Greenwich, Dec. 10, 1716*". It was Flamsteed who laid the foundations stone of the new Observatory, completed in 1676, and who had helped with Robert Hooke to oversee the construction of Christopher Wren's building. At the start of the second paragraph, Fielding announces that his "Habitation [is] seated on a Hill" (3), just as the

Observatory was placed on a small eminence rising from the Thames. He boasts in flowery language that he had dwelt in a watch tower here, meaning the structure known as Flamsteed House, the first portion to be built. This was intended as a home for the Astronomer Royal, and Flamsteed lived on the site for most of the next forty years, together with family and servants. It consisted of three storeys, and a 27-foot telescope was mounted on the flat roof, to which two turrets gave access (a larger 60-foot telescope hung from an old ship's mast on the lawn below). On the first floor, the Great Room in the shape of an octagon, with its vaulted ceiling and tall windows, permitted extensive views of the sky. Flamsteed also carried out observations in two smaller buildings adjoining, picturesquely styled Sextant House and Quadrant House.<sup>2</sup> Fielding's allusion to his "House of Vision, elevated above the indented Protuberances of the visible Horizon" (3), is a ponderous but basically accurate description.

The signs mount as we go through the text. Fielding presents himself as a master of the universe, able to unlock the mysteries of space and to bring them to a grateful world. His manner parodies Flamsteed's notorious arrogance and touchiness with regard to potential rivals, for example when he issues a warning to "all Pretenders not to invade my Ætherial Province, by presuming to level any Tube, of what Length soever, at any Star, Planet, Constellation, or Celestial Phenomenon" (3). Behind this sentence lie longstanding quarrels, above all with Isaac Newton and Edmond Halley, to which we shall return in the fourth part of this article. The phrase about the length of the "Tube" curiously foreshadows an event just twelve months later, when the old maypole in the Strand was taken down, bought by Newton, and reappropriated as the prop for a "Hugenian" telescope, erected at Wanstead for the use of the astronomer Rev. James Pound. Perhaps the author hidden behind the mask of Joanidion Fielding knew something of what was to come: subsequent references reveal that he was evidently an insider.

Despite its absurd exaggerations, the character displayed in the narration does fit that of Flamsteed in several other particulars. His interest in comets went back at least as far as 1681, when he proposed that two bodies observed in the previous year were not separate bodies, but rather a single comet (see Flamsteed 1: 749-50, 764-78). The debates he had with Newton on this point lay at the beginning of his estrangement from the great physicist and from Halley. More widely, the predictions Fielding offers may seem to resemble those of an astrologer rather than an astronomer in the modern sense. However, it must be remembered that Flamsteed, like his two illustrious contemporaries just mentioned, had a well-developed interest in relevant matters: his library contained Vincent Wing's *Ephemerides*, one of the best known almanacs, among other works of this nature (Capp 191). Moreover, he is generally accepted as the author of *Flemstadts most Strange and Wonderful Prophecy, Foretelling what may be the Wonderful Effects and Continuance of this Present Frost and Great Snow: With an Historical Account of the Several Great Frosts, since the Conquest* (1695). This short and orthodox set of predictions based on astrological data fails to add much to his reputation, if authentic, but the author of the *True and Faithful Account* would not have cared either way.

One feature of Flemstadt's prophecy does ring true. It is an epigraph on the title-page, "Canst thou Bind the sweet Influences of Pleiades? Or loose the Bands of Orion?" This comes from the book of Job (38:31), and it provides a reminder that Flamsteed had taken deacon's orders in 1675, before serving from 1684 until his death as rector of Burstow in Surrey. That might be a reason why Fielding is given his odd Christian name, redolent of the biblical prophets. The suggestion of a jeremiad from the Old Testament hardly accords with Joanidion's addiction to classical mythology, as he

refers to "my Sovereign Mistress the Moon" (3), while in the main text he shows no sign of viewing the universe as God's handiwork – but that of course may be part of the fun at Flamsteed's expense.

In the following section, we learn of various events that the astronomer has somehow omitted to notice. These cast doubts on his capacities as an observer, as in this passage: "I was not so happy as to see the Procession of our Glorious Monarch from *Greenwich*; but I have seen the *Satellites of Saturn*" (4). This supports a pretence that Flamsteed is totally cut off from the real world, like the abstracted virtuosi who blunder their way round in satires of the day. It indicates that he neglected to witness the triumphant entry of the new king, George I, when he arrived in England on 18 September 1714 – unless the joke is that this great observer of the spectacle of the skies could not see a brilliant throng who welcomed the royal party when their barge arrived at Greenwich, owing to a thick fog that enveloped the riverside (the fog was real). There is no doubt regarding the point of the last part of the sentence: in 1684 Flamsteed had supplied Isaac Newton with information about the two satellites of Saturn, discovered by Christiaan Huygens in 1655 and Giovanni Cassini in 1684. Contrary to his lengthy vision around the cosmos, Fielding appears to have short sight on earth as he tells us that "I have not observ'd the New Buildings at *Greenwich* Hospital; but I beheld the New Star in the *Swan*" (4). In reality Flamsteed did not discover the star Cygni within the Cygnus constellation, which is visible to the naked eye, but he did catalogue it and it was later given the name Cygni68 in the Flamsteed designation system. None of the buildings erected around Flamsteed House at this date was of any size. Another nearby incident overlooked by Fielding comes in the admission, "I have not seen the Irruption of the Tide into *Dagenham* Beach; but I did see the Halo about the Moon before the great Storm" (4). Many readers will spot the mention of the Great Storm that caused so much havoc in southern England in November 1703, described in a famous collection made by Defoe of eye-witness observations, and often recalled in the wake of a similar storm in October 1987. Less familiar is the breach of the Thames seawall in 1707, that caused Dagenham marshes to be extensively flooded. Further damage occurred in 1714, and the repairs by the engineer John Perry were not completed until 1720. Newspapers and pamphlets gave extensive coverage to this episode, and the *Tour of Great Britain* devoted a paragraph to "the famous *Breach*" (Defoe 1: 54-5).

A geological description of the site was given in 1712 by a local vicar William Derham, FRS, one of those who sent an account of the eclipse in 1715 to Halley, and whose *Astro-Theology* (1715) seems to underlie some of the cosmic musings in the *Memoirs of Scriblerus*, belatedly published by Pope in 1741 (198).<sup>3</sup> The point is that the breach occurred no more than five miles downriver from Greenwich. To miss this, Flamsteed would need to have had his eyes permanently turned towards the zenith (as one of the Laputan optics was, in the third part of *Gulliver's Travels*), and to lack the services of a "Flapper" (Swift 226-7).

In the same way, Fielding ridiculously purports to have missed a major episode that passed under his own nose, stating, "I did not see the famous total Eclipse of the Sun in 1714, being 7 Minutes too late; but I beheld, with *Bajazet*, Two Suns combating for the Right Hand in the High-way of the *Ecliptick*" (4). The eclipse took place in April 1715, something that all residents of London and its environs (let alone the keenest observer of the skies) knew about as a result of the extensive publicity before and after the event. Whiston later claimed that "this most eminent Eclipse, 1715, was exactly foretold by Mr. Flamsteed, Dr. Halley and myself" (Whiston's *Memoirs* (1749), qtd. in Nicolson and Rousseau, 156). It was characteristic of the Scriblerians to dot their parodies of know-all writers with blunders of this kind: *God's Revenge against Punning*

(1716), attributed to "J. Baker, Knight," gives the same erroneous date. As for the concluding reference, this draws on a couplet in the third act of Nicholas Rowe's tragedy *Tamerlane* (1702), spoken by the evil Bajazet: "As if two Suns should meet in the Meridian,/ And strive in fiery Combate for the Passage" (Rowe 1: 42).

A clinching point concerns the evident distaste shown for Edmond Halley, who is mentioned in two successive paragraphs:

I was not an Eye-Witness of those Armies that contended in the Air before the Destruction of *Jerusalem* by *Vespasian*; but I did see Mr. *Halley* (whom indeed I never had a good opinion of) lying in a fiery Chariot over *Greenwich-Park*.

I did not see the Antartick Constellations, nor do I believe Mr. *Halley* did; but I did see, what I'm sure he did not, the North Pole Star shift its Place by the Annual Motion of the Earth. (4)

The opening allusion is to the sacking of Jerusalem by Titus, son of the emperor Vespasian, in AD 70: Josephus briefly describes how "a Vision so uncommon" appeared prior to the siege, when "a little before the Sun went down there were seen here and there up and down in the Air, Chariots and Men in Armour that spread all over the Country, and hover'd in the Crouds round about the City" (Josephus 178). The remainder of the cited passage consists of crude thrusts at Halley by his antagonist "Fielding", based on the well documented quarrels between Flamsteed and his former acolyte, which went back at least as far as 1684. It is indeed the case that the older man harboured many criticisms of the observations Halley made of the southern constellations during his voyage to St Helena in 1677-78; but he was ready to castigate almost everything about his rival, accusing him of arrant atheism, and once remarked bitchily in connection with the Savilian chair at Oxford, "Dr Wallis is dead – Mr Halley expects his place – who now talks, swears and drinks brandy like a sea captain" (cited by the prime source used for Halley here, Cook 321). Obviously, Fielding is a caricature throughout the text, but at moments like this in Scriblerian satire the underlying truth sometimes pops out disconcertingly.

What of Whiston? He cannot be regarded as the main target, although he suffers small collateral damage. He receives two brief mentions in the *True and Faithful Account*, with the first alluding to the aurora observed in March 1716: "I did not see the late Coruscations, which Mr. *Whiston* rightly judges to be the Fire-works of Aerial Spirits, being intent upon my erroneous Catalogue of the fixed Stars" (4). This supplies an unmistakable reference to Flamsteed's *magnum opus*, that is *Historia Caelestis Britannica*, at this date available only in the truncated version published by Newton and Halley in two volumes (1712). The other reference occurs in one of the predictions: "Mr. *Whiston*'s Scheme of Primitive Christianity shall not prevail this Year; so that it will be more for his Profit to meddle only with the Inspiration of the Air-Pump at *White-Hall*" (5). The sentence concerns two largely unrelated activities on Whiston's part. In the sphere of religion, this involves his heterodox views causing him to set up a society for promoting primitive Christianity, on which he gave public lectures in London and elsewhere from 1715. As regards science, we are reminded of his "course of mechanical, optical, hydrostatical, and pneumatical experiments", with demonstrations of an air pump newly developed by Francis Hauksbee, and explanatory lectures by Whiston, delivered in the autumn of 1714. This is evidently Hauksbee the Younger (1689-1763), since his uncle had died in April 1713. Francis Hauksbee the Elder, FRS (1660-1713) was an eminent physicist and instrument maker, who had served as

Newton's assistant (see the article in *ODNB* by Stephen Pumfrey). He brought out his *Physico-Mechanical Experiments on Various Subjects* in 1709, containing among other things a description of his new air pump. Whiston's lectures took place at the residence of Hauksbee the Younger in Crane Court, off the north side of Fleet Street, close to the home of the Royal Society from 1710. It is unclear what is meant by the "Inspiration" (blowing up) of the pump at Whitehall: it may be a generic joke at the expense of politicians as windbags.

Famously, Whiston had written some dramatic millenarian tracts following the appearance of a comet (strictly a *nova*) in June 1715. But though he was a skilled mathematician, who had succeeded Newton in the Lucasian chair at Cambridge, and commented freely on astronomical matters, he was not an observer in the sense that Flamsteed – and on his own showing Fielding – was. Whiston ventured to offer corrections of Flamsteed's star tables in an appendix to his own Cambridge lectures, published in 1715 by R. [*recte* John?] Senex and William Taylor, two important figures in cartography and geographic publication (Taylor would go on to issue *Robinson Crusoe* four years later); but he never attained comparable standing as an astronomical cataloguer. Moreover, he had no connection of any sort with the royal observatory. His workplace was not in the dignified surroundings of Greenwich, but amid the bustle of central London in the coffee-houses and bookshops around Fleet Street and Covent Garden. He had been ordained as a young man, but by the time he was expelled from Cambridge he had effectively burnt his bridges in the church. Equally, he had no special grudge against Halley. Fielding boasts of his power and influence, attributes to which Whiston, whatever his qualities, could no longer seriously claim. All in all, he seems marginal in the text of the *True and Faithful Account*.

### The Ottoman Background

We come to the most puzzling segment of the pamphlet. This section, focusing on events in the Ottoman world, draws not only on a favourite satiric topos of the age involving bogus prophecies, but also invokes key matters relating to the political, military and diplomatic issues of the moment – a deliberate emphasis of the author throughout. The coverage was inspired by a story in the press, first identified by Nicolson and Rousseau:

They write from Malta, that an English Ship arrived there from the Isles of the Archipelago reports, that there had been seen at Constantinople for eight Days, a Comet, hairv, with a long Tail, which appeared soon after Sun-rising, and extended itself from North to South. This very much frightened those People, who are not used to such Appearances in the Heavens. (185)

This appeared in the *Daily Courant* on 16 November, and in practically identical form the next day in Read's *Weekly Journal* and the *Weekly Packet*. The comet held no outstanding interest to British astronomers, but as we shall see in the next section it did touch on some current concerns of the Scriblerian group. Underlying the treatment in the *True and Faithful Account* are events in the wars that the Ottoman empire was conducting both with the Austrian empire and the republic of Venice. The course of these disputes was regularly reported in the London press.

Fielding begins by remarking, "As to the *Phænomenon*, which is the Subject of my present Paper, I can't properly say that I did see it, or that I did not see it, as you shall hear hereafter; but who did see it, and that in its full Glory, I now proceed to inform you" (4). This studied vagueness is perhaps meant to suggest some ambiguity as to the

reliability of Flamsteed's observations. The narrator then launches into a quasi-scriptural passage employing archaic poeticisms:

The *Mufti* of this Metropolis who is equal in Dignity to an Archbishop, has a pleasant Seat on the Banks of the *Hellespont*, not unlike unto *Lambeth*. Here, as he was pensively musing, his Favourite Mute came unto him, and said Behold, thou High Priest of *Allah*, how the Light streameth out of Darkness, and the Firmament blazeth as a Topaz! At this the High-Priest of *Mahomet* lifted his Eyes from the Ground, and lo! he beheld a palish Light, like the Crescent of the Imperial Turbant; it soon shot itself forth into the Form of a Comet, whose Body appeared two Degrees Diameter; and its Tail in the Form of a Paraboloid, shot up within 20 Degrees of the Zenith; so that it appeared like the One-ey'd *Polyphemus*, in a Full-bottom'd Perriwig. (4)

Fielding goes on to describe how the phenomenon seemed to hang over the Holy Grand Mosque, Hagia Sophia, and how the ladies of the seraglio, affected by the comet, fell without provocation on the eunuchs who guarded their quarters, and killed most of them before fleeing the city to seek protection among the imperial army. This was led by Prince Eugene of Savoy (1663-1736), long a hero with the Whigs for his part in the War of the Spanish Succession, but much less so with the Tories. Fielding drily wonders if this was all a deliberate ploy of the Mufti "to let loose those Beauties, in order to weaken the Uncircumcised" (5). At this point an astrological interpretation is posted:

This dreadful Appearance (no doubt intended to warn the Unbelievers) was in a most Antichristian manner concealed nine Days by the *Turkish* Ministry; but it was not long e're *Temeswaer* taught them what it is to despise the Signs of Heaven; and that the Tail of a Comet can at any time affect the Head of a Grand Vizier. Moreover, this illustrious Tail proved to be the Horse-Tail of War hung forth in the Heavens beyond all Contradiction; the *Turkish* Boys never using Lanterns to their Kites. (5)

Here Fielding links the appearance of the comet to the battle standard of the Muslim forces, a horse tail, broadly corresponding in shape with the holy Islamic symbol of the scimitar. More topically, he refers to the outcome of the siege of Temeşvar, which had ended with the capitulation of the Turkish defenders on 12 October 1716, one of several victories for Prince Eugene. People in Britain were fully aware of what was going on: for example, the lead story in the *Daily Courant* on 6 November concerned the peace terms then under negotiation.

The Sultan now calls together his soothsayers and wise men, to interpret the import of the astral phenomenon. First Muley Hamet suggests that it "portended the Conversion of the *Free-thinkers of Great-Britain*", and that the Sultan would be receiving the foreskins of "T----d and C-----s" in a gold box (the freethinkers John Toland and Anthony Collins, familiar targets of Swift and his friends).<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, Usmael Bachir affirmed that "it warned the mighty Emperor of the *East* of a fiery Tail in the *Seraglio*. But this Prognostication cost him dear; for he was immediately strangled, and thrown into the *Bosphorus*" (5). Western commentators frequently played on the stereotypes of Muslim cruelty, and delighted in reports such as those of drownings and beheadings carried out on bassas and fallen favourites at court (for Islamophobia in the period, see Cahill). Finally, we get a direct clue as to the origins of the pamphlet, when Sannadrim offers a more acceptable prognostication, that the sign

from the sky indicates "the Arrival of a *British* Ambassadors of marvellous Beauty, with a long Train of Attendants" (5), an unmistakable reference to Lady Mary (Halsband 55-7, 74-8; and Grundy 113-14, 141, 150-62).<sup>5</sup>

We could annotate this passage with a description of known figures at the heart of the Ottoman court at this date, including the Sultan Ahmed III, the Grand Vizier Hacı Halil Pasha, and the Grand Mufti, perhaps Menteszade Abdurrahim Efendi. But these are no more than straw men. The real purpose of the exercise is to prepare the way for a familiar baneful prediction, cast in the form often used by the Scriblerians at this period. Indeed, we shall soon see that it appeared in almost identical words in another of their offerings:

But tho' the Effects of this portentous *Phaenomenon* shall prove most fatal to the Infidels; let not! ah, let not the poor deluded Christians flatter themselves that they are out of Danger! Ah, heedless Brethren! think not that this baleful Dog-Star, of so prodigious Magnitude, only shaketh its Tail at you in Waggery; no, it shaketh it as a Rod. It is not a Sporting Tail, but a Fiery Tail; yea, such a Tale as may reach and be told to all Posterity. (5)

The aim is to associate judicial astrology with the tone of ranting sermons, wild jeremiads, and other modes of enthusiastic prophecy. This connection could reasonably be made in terms of some of Whiston's more speculative writings, even though they rested on solid astronomical data. It could be applied to the more extreme theories of Dr John Woodward, another radical theorist who incurred the scorn of the Scriblerus party. But it is not fair at all in the case of Flamsteed, despite his often intemperate language and behaviour, since almost everything he wrote derived from hard observation. Neither in the past nor in the present has fairness been a concern of satirists.

### Scriblerian Sightings

There cannot be a shadow of doubt that the *True and Faithful Account* came from the group made up of Pope and his friends. Commentators have suggested as much, but no full explanation has been offered (the first to see the link was Sherburn 182-3). The evidence, which can be found in every paragraph of the pamphlet, takes several forms. First, connections with other items that the group produced at this juncture. Second, use of recurrent motifs found in their work more widely, including the use of an absurdly named narrator. Third, the choice of satiric targets they attacked elsewhere. Fourth, references that parallel the interests that they displayed in this phase. Fifth, one item of external commentary links them to the production. Collectively, the presence of these elements in the text of the *True and Faithful Account* serve to establish broad congruence with the aims of the Scriblerian project of ridiculing abuses in learning.

Many of these indicators are found in the list of thirty-six predictions that occupy the last page and a half of the pamphlet. The segment is introduced with the words, "Proceed we now, according to our first Proposal, from what we have seen, and what we have not seen, to foretell what will be, and what will not be" (5). This allots responsibility to the supposed narrator, Joanidion Fielding, but the items closely resemble those assigned to "J. Baker, Knight" in *God's Revenge* and might seem to proceed from the editor named on the title-page, "E. Parker, Philomath." In effect, the two figures have merged.

The immediate link is closest with *God's Revenge against Punning*, which came out a few weeks earlier. It subsequently gained a place in the third volume of the



*Miscellanies* of the satirists in 1732 – decisive confirmation of its authorship, whether sole or collective. As noted by Nicolson and Rousseau, the *True and Faithful Account* picks up on two references in the earlier pamphlet, both alluding to the great eclipse. But *God's Revenge* itself has links with a third item, that is *A True and Faithful Narrative of What Passed in London*, first published in the same volume of the *Miscellanies* (the authorship is disputed, but is now generally allotted to Gay). We can hardly miss the similarity of that formulaic title to that of the *True and Faithful Account*. (The cadence and syntax follow the precise rhythm used by Pope in the title of his *Full and True Account of ... Edmund Curll*, published only a few months before.) The *Narrative* also singles out the comet and Whiston's lectures, as well as freethinkers such as Thomas Woolston. A figure dubbed "Sir James Baker" had first turned up in commendatory verses addressed to "Esdras Barnivelt, Apoth.," the pseudonymous author of *A Key to the Lock* (dating from April 1715), really a delicious spoof of over-reading *The Rape of the Lock* as a Jacobite allegory secretly put out by Pope.

Baker flits in a mysterious way through the pamphlet literature of the day, so it is hard to know exactly what to make of his momentary appearance in the *True and Faithful Account*: "Sir J. Baker shall be found to be a Spy of the King of Spain, but shall make great Discoveries, on the Promise of a Reward of 15s." (6). All we can say is that members of the Pope circle were always ready to pooh-pooh the scare stories of Jacobite plotters that went around in the wake of the Rising, and which intensified after the arrest in January 1717 of Count Karl Gyllenborg, the Swedish ambassador to London, who had been implicated in espionage on behalf of the Stuart cause. A few years later, the poet's friend Bishop Francis Atterbury, was convicted and exiled for his involvement in a more substantial plot, after "great Discoveries" by paid snitches. It may be worth adding that parliament passed laws to allow informers to be given substantial monetary rewards for turning in ordinary criminals such as highwaymen and receivers of stolen goods. We cannot doubt that anyone who acted as a delator in cases involving the capital crime of treason would be very well looked after.

Among the characteristic features of works produced by the group associated with Pope, one obvious example is the adoption of a persona bearing a suspiciously unreal name. This is not unique to the writings they produced, but it does take a very distinctive form in their case, with some regular patterns visible. We have already encountered Swift disguised as "Isaac Bickerstaff", and Pope as "Esdras Barnivelt", while the corporate sponsor "Martinus Scriblerus" underlies the whole enterprise that these authors had undertaken. Other names employed are collected in Arbuthnot's *Miscellaneous Works*, almost all on solid grounds: "Sir Humphrey Polesworth" (a certain ascription, 1712); "Jeremy Thacker" (a highly probable one, 1714); "Dr. Technicum" (1719); "Abraham Gunter" (1722, generally attributed to Arbuthnot, with possible collaboration by Pope); "Doctor Bantley" (?1726); and "John Ginglicutt" (1731). Other strong possibilities include "Nickydemus Ninnyhammer, F.G." (1715). Meanwhile Swift came up with fake IDs ranging from "T.N. Philomath" (1709) to "Simon Wagstaff" (1738). Of course, we encounter the supreme fiction among this group of authors in "Lemuel Gulliver", a name so familiar it hardly seems an artificial construct. Within this company we must surely number Joanidion Fielding and E. Parker, Philomath. It is noteworthy that many of the names have biblical overtones (Isaac, Esdras, Jeremiah, Abraham, Nicodemus, Lemuel), suggesting some antediluvian quality. There is also a striking fondness for the <er> phoneme, in an unstressed medial or final position (Bickerstaff, Scriblerus, Thacker, Gunter, Ninnyhammer, Doctor, Baker, Parker, Gulliver).

The typical role of such oddly named figures is to act as the deluded expositor of some wild and woolly theory for the improvement of the world. Sometimes the speaker is anonymous, and once more we look to Swift for the classic examples, the hack who narrates *A Tale of a Tub* (1704) and the unhinged deviser of *A Modest Proposal* (1729). In other cases the victim may be presented in the third person, as Whiston is in some of the satires already mentioned, or as Woodward is in the merciless account of his sickness and death, which is most likely to be Arbuthnot's handiwork (1719). The most common format, and the one most relevant here, is that of bogus prophecies by an overreacher, based on fallacious interpretations of celestial signs to foretell some apocalyptic future. This line stretches back to John Partridge, "T.N. Philomath", and William Whiston, and it would come to include *Annus Mirabilis*. These confident prognostications may be falsified, as at the end of *A True and Faithful Narrative of What Pass'd in London*, or left to hang in the air, as with the *True and Faithful Account*.

A sequence of predictions based on the style of the Book of Revelation had appeared in *A Wonderful Prophecy taken from the Mouth of the Spirit of a Person, who was Barbarously Slain by the Mohocks*, set in 1712 but first published in the *Miscellanies* fifteen years later, and now generally attributed to Gay and/or Pope. This has direct echoes in the *True and Faithful Account*, not previously remarked on. The first passage runs as follows:

Lo! the Comet appeareth in the South! yea, it appeareth exceedingly. Ah poor deluded Christians! Ah blind Brethren! Think not that this baleful Dog-Star only shaketh his Tail at you in Wagery; no, it shaketh it as a Rod. It is not a sporting Tail, but a fiery Tail, even as the Tail of an Harlot: Yea such a Tail as may reach, and be told, to all Posterity. (*Miscellanies: The Second Volume*, 263)

This is almost identical to the passage in the *True and Faithful Account*, cited above (8). The same applies to a second excerpt: "The Time is at hand when the Free-thinkers of *Great-Britain* shall be converted to *Judaism*, and the *Sultan* shall receive the *Fore-skins of T----d and C-----ns* in a *Box of Gold*" (*Miscellanies: The Second Volume* 263-4). The natural assumption would be that the earlier passage in each case is the one found in *Wonderful Prophecy*, since this is stated on the opening page to have been "Breath'd forth in the Year 1712," and the text clearly hinges on a supposed gang of street ruffians causing alarm in London that year. The problem is that we have no idea what degree of tinkering went on before the *Miscellanies* appeared, and so cannot be sure whether the items just quoted were recycled from the *True and Faithful Account*. What can be stated with total conviction is that the two texts emerged from the same matrix, namely the circle of allies centred on Pope who were active in 1716.

A third set of markers that relates the *True and Faithful Account* to other productions of the Scriblerian group concerns their choice of victims. Among the predictions we encounter several familiar faces, most obviously the bookseller Edmund Curll, the impresario of opera and masquerades John James Heidegger (three references), and the actor-dramatist Colley Cibber, each of whom underwent a regular buffeting at the hands of the satirists, culminating with his appearance in *The Dunciad*. Pope himself is fitted unto the picture, along with two of his recurring adversaries and poetic rivals, Thomas Tickell and Ambrose Philips: "If the Pope be not Eat up by Punaises, for Anathema's that he never denounc'd, he shall at least be Tickled to Death, or receive a Phillip from St. *Ambrose*" (5). The sentence incorporates its own puns,

starting with the French word *punaises*, meaning bugs or insects, while it supplies a reminder of the preceding pamphlet, *God's Revenge against Punning*, where the author dreaded "Anathema's" to be expected from the Almighty. The same device is used in the line, "Thrice shall *Heideker* beshit himself, without changing his Countenance or his Linen" (6), an allusion to the showman's notoriously ugly features. A further case is found in the prophecy, "Neither *Asgil* nor *Lucan* shall be translated this year" (5). This clever syllepsis links John Asgill, author of a tract that enjoyed brief fame if not widespread acceptance, *An Argument Proving that, According to the Covenant of Eternal Life Revealed in the Scripture, Man may be Translated from hence into that Eternal Life without Passing through Death* (1700), together with the poet and playwright Nicholas Rowe, then embarked on his translation of Lucan's *Pharsalia*. Pope had seen early excerpts from his friend's work in progress, but the complete version was not published until after Rowe died in 1718.

One of the predictions make fuller sense if we relate it to Arbuthnot. It reads, "Happy the Man who punts upon a Knave during the Month of *January*, or sets on 6 upon *Twelfth Night*" (6). The underlying circumstances can be gauged by reference to this paragraph in the *Weekly Packet* on 15 January 1715: "It being customary for the Kings of Great Britain to be present at the Groom-Porter's on Twelfth-Night, we hear his Majesty King George, and the Princess of Wales, honour'd a great Assembly of the Nobility there, with their Royal Presence; and that the King threw off 200 Guineas, but her Royal Highness won three times as much." We have a contemporary account from a Lady of the Bedchamber, Mary Cowper, who states, "This was Twelfth Night, and such a Crowd I never saw in my Life. My Mistress and the Duchess of Montague went halves at Hazard, and won 600*l*" (Cowper 43). In the game of hazard, roughly equivalent to modern craps, two dice are thrown, with the player staking money on the total score against the "setter," that is the banker. Arbuthnot was an addicted gambler, who is reputed to have often played in Slaughter's coffee house in St Martin's Lane with another pioneer of probability theory, the Huguenot mathematician Abraham de Moivre, FRS (1667-1754), born just a month after the doctor. De Moivre was another friend of Halley and Newton. By contrast Pope and Gay had absolutely no interest in gambling. Equally, Arbuthnot was *persona grata* with Princess Caroline, whose physician he would become in the years both before and after her husband ascended to the throne. It was he who introduced Swift to the Princess when the Dean came to England in 1726, and who discussed *Gulliver's Travels* with her (Ross 264-9).

A fourth category among the clues contains some intensely topical references that chime with the writers' current concerns. An awareness of Ottoman affairs can be found in several late productions, even before the departure of Lady Mary for Constantinople in August 1716. Writing to her in October, Pope states that "While all people here are exercising their speculations upon the Affairs of the Turks," he has no intention of "forming prospects of the general Tranquility of Europe" (*Correspondence* 1: 363, one of many allusions in the succeeding weeks). More than once he links the names "Pope and Turk" (i.e. Sultan) in his verse and correspondence, and it was in 1716 that he first drafted the lines on Atticus that later figure in his *Epistle to Arbuthnot* (1735), charging Joseph Addison that he was able to "Bear, like the Turk, no Brother near the Throne" (Ault 143; see also *Correspondence* 1: 306) – obviously the group had been following reports of dissensions among the ruling elite in Constantinople.

The clearest indication comes in a ballad entitled "The Monster of Ragusa", first appearing in *Poems on Several Occasions* (1717), which contained several poems by Pope. He probably served as editor, and there are more than enough reasons to believe he was the author of this particular item. Like the *True and Faithful Account*, the work

had its origin in a newspaper story from the Mediterranean – this time a paragraph in the *Flying Post* on 21 February 1716, containing details of how a Levant trader who had docked at Ragusa (modern Dubrovnik) came back with a tale of a giant creature that had emerged from the sea. The monster wreaked havoc among the frightened populace as earthquakes and fires followed in his wake, "So that all these Prodiges had struck the whole Country with the utmost Dread and Desolation." Few things delighted the satirists as much as opportunities afforded by accounts of natural wonders – the more spectacular in appearance and the least cogently described in scientific terms, the better. The opening of the *True and Faithful Account* affords a case in point. "The Monster of Ragusa" ends with the creature voiding a mighty dragon, larger even than the worm extracted by the quack "Doctor" John Moore, celebrated in Pope's poem *The Worms*, published six months earlier, which would prove to be the most frequently reprinted of all his works during his lifetime (see Pope, *Minor Poems*, 161-4).

The strongest external support for an attribution derives from a short poem in couplets under the title *The Drury-Lane Monster*. This came out as a single sheet in February 1717, following the controversial production of *Three Hours after Marriage*, which had been staged at Drury Lane theatre on seven tumultuous occasions that month. The monstrous object this time is the farce itself, dissected (so we are told) by Dr Woodward as the combined effort of "Three Mongrels" acting as a "Triple Alliance," a joke referring to the diplomatic entente between Britain and France to which the Dutch acceded on 4 January 1717. John Woodward was caricatured as the protagonist of the drama, a credulous antiquarian named Dr Fossile. The trio of authors are then described in easily recognizable terms as Pope, Gay and Arbuthnot. The final couplet reads, "Let the Crocodile weep and Pug make a Leg, / Sing *Johanninidion* (sic) and his Sister *Peg*." The crocodile comes from farcical action in *Three Hours*, while Sister Peg is the name that Arbuthnot had given to John Bull's sister, Scotland, in his satirical allegory. Most scholars credit Gay with the major share in composing the play, but it may hold some significance that the writer of *The Drury Lane Monster* refers to Arbuthnot as "the third and chief Parent" of *Three Hours*. Whatever the truth or otherwise of that assertion, the doctor is the prime candidate for the authorship of the *True and Faithful Account*.

### John Arbuthnot as Author

The evidence in support of this case includes Arbuthnot's extensive and generally uneasy dealings with John Flamsteed; his long friendship with Edmond Halley; his involvement in astronomical issues more widely; his background in mathematical studies; his history of teasing colleagues in the Royal Society; his record as a debunker of pretentious twaddle in the guise of some self-vaunting pedant, often under a preposterous pseudonym; his fondness for inventing fantastic natural cataclysms; and his habit of repeating certain items in his prolific output – a fecundity on which contemporaries remarked, though an incalculable number of short squibs have defied recognition to this day.

No comparable claim can be made for any of the others among the group of friends who briefly met as the Scriblerus Club in 1713-14, and carried their shared ambition to produce "Works of the Unlearned" into a variety of satiric offerings over the next two decades (for the formation of the enterprise and its aims, see Kerby-Miller 1-41). As already noted, some of Fielding's predictions match certain activities in which Pope, especially, was engaged around 1715 and 1716, and it is entirely possible that he made some contribution to the pamphlet. However, we have to be aware that the three men still based in England met frequently, as well as exchanging ideas with

their colleagues in Ireland through correspondence. It is no surprise to find that *Annus Mirabilis*, always assigned to Arbuthnot, carries a joke advertisement at the end ostensibly by John Moore, Pope's frequent butt (*Annus Mirabilis* 6). Equally, there is a sequel printed in the *Miscellanies* (1732) to two attacks by Pope on Curll, dating from 1716 (*Miscellanies; The Third Volume* 43-51). This item was seemingly published in 1720 (all copies are lost) under the title *A Strange but True Relation how Edmund Curll...was Converted from the Christian Religion*, and it has understandably been assumed to come from the same hand. Close examination of its text reveals that the *Relation* contains material in which Arbuthnot had a strong interest and expertise, where Pope did not. The early editors who assigned the work to the doctor, as a skilful parody of the manner of Pope's earlier pamphlets, may well have been right.

The decisive evidence lies elsewhere, mostly in the first half of the *True and Faithful Account*. Arbuthnot had every reason to follow the workings of the Greenwich observatory – indeed his public appointment as an official visitor required him to do so. Pope and Gay had no sort of connection with the institution. Crucially, from the end of 1704, Arbuthnot had served on a committee set up by the Royal Society to inspect Flamsteed's great catalogue of planetary objects, with a view to eventual publication. Other members of this group were Christopher Wren and Arbuthnot's friend, the brilliant expositor of Newtonian astronomy David Gregory, but it was Newton who was the real instigator of this move. The funding would come from the queen's consort, Prince George, whose physician Arbuthnot had recently become. His qualifications for the role have been set out by Alan Cook:

Arbuthnott and Gregory were both undergraduates at Aberdeen and were close friends at Oxford. Arbuthnott...had a medical practice in London, as did Gregory. Gregory, as tutor to Queen Anne's son, the Duke of Gloucester, may have introduced Arbuthnott to the court, where he was appointed first a physician extraordinary, and later, in 1709, physician ordinary. Halley knew him before that, and when at sea in 1699 had asked him to act as Clerk to to the Royal Society...Arbuthnott was in Queen Anne's train when she visited Cambridge in 1705 and dubbed Newton knight. He was one of those on whom the University conferred the degree of Doctor of Physic. He was a competent mathematician and had written on the history of the earth. He was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1704. He seems to have been the link between Prince George and the Royal Society in the Flamsteed business. (Cook 384)

We could add to the roster of attainments Arbuthnot's service in 1712 on the committee that Newton stage-managed to settle the priority between Leibniz and himself in respect of the invention of differential calculus – a packed jury that would return the expected verdict.

What Cook calls "the Flamsteed business" went on for several years (Cook 80-92). Printing of the catalogue began in 1706, but it was delayed by the death of Prince George and Gregory in 1708, as well as some intransigence on the part of both Flamsteed and Newton. In due course Newton arranged for publication to go ahead under the supervision of Halley, certainly with Arbuthnot's knowledge, but without Flamsteed's consent. A number of letters survive in which Arbuthnot tried as a referee to forward Newton's plan, resisting the other man's efforts to keep control of the material on the grounds that his own commission extended only to the material assembled before Prince George died, so that he could not assist in making the changes

that Flamsteed obviously wanted to introduce (Beattie 8-20; Ross 118-47). While this disingenuous process went on, relations between the two men were not improved by Arbuthnot's appointment to a Board of Visitors to the Observatory in 1710, along with Wren, Halley, the physician Richard Mead and others (Laurie 169-73). Predictably the Astronomer Royal considered this a derogation of his function. As his dealings with Newton and Halley grew more strained, so his attitude to Arbuthnot, never warm, seem to have become more frosty. As a result, the doctor had ample opportunity to witness Flamsteed in some of his well attested outbursts, something that may have inspired the frenzied tone of the opening paragraphs in the *True and Faithful Account*.

The animus that had grown up between the rival men of science can be seen in an outburst in 1720 against John Senex (1678-1740), mapmaker and engraver, who had been associated with many works spreading the Newtonian gospel (to some of which Arbuthnot subscribed). The writer was Joseph Crosthwaite, an assistant of Flamsteed at Greenwich for many years, and the letter to his colleague Abraham Sharp (1653-1742) relates to efforts made with the help of his widow Margaret Flamsteed to produce an "authentic" edition of *Historia Cælestism* which would finally appear in 1725:

Senex is so much a tool of Dr. Halley's, and affronted Mr. Flamsteed so much in his life-time, by engraving the *Zodiacus Stellatus*, and putting his own name to it, in order to screen Dr. Halley from the law, that I am afraid he is not to be trusted. Besides, he is reputed the very worst engraver in London; and is never reckoned amongst the persons famous in that way. (Baily 340)

The reference is to *Zodiacus Stellatus Fixas Omnes Hactenus Cognitas*, issued under the name of Senex in 1718, and consisting of three strips along two sheets. Flamsteed's allies claimed that the astronomic information had been filched from his catalogue by Halley. Crosthwaite's words go further, representing a naked assault on the reputation of Senex, based chiefly on his links with Halley and Newton, and they illustrate the chasm that had opened up among the three principals in this quarrel. As we might expect, Arbuthnot possessed a copy of *Historia Cælestis* in his library (see *Catalogue* 14: his part in seeing the project through to publication is acknowledged in the preface). His interest in the subject is confirmed by other items in the collection, most relevantly the *Machina Cælestis* (1673) of Johannes Hevelius, the great Polish astronomer whom Halley had once visited in Danzig on behalf of the Royal Society, and who had written extensively on comets. Implausibly, Flamsteed had even passed on a groundless tale by Thomas Hearne that Halley carried on an affair with the young wife of Hevelius (Cook 102, 327). If any doubt should remain about the attention that Arbuthnot paid to these matters, we have only to turn to a letter that he sent to his friend Swift just a year before the *True and Faithful Account* was published, at the height of speculation about the nova and other astral phenomena: "I should have the same concern for things as yow, were I not convince'd that a comet will make much strange revolutions upon the face of our Globe, than all the petty changes that can be occasioned by Gover[men]ts & Ministrys, and yow will allow it be a matter of importance to think of Methods to save ones self &and family in such a terrible shock this whole earth will turn upon new poles & revolve in a new orbite" (Ross 213). It is most unlikely that the doctor harboured any serious fears: the passage continues in the style of persiflage he commonly adopted in writing to Swift. Indeed, the reference to cosmic upheavals belongs to a vein of straightfaced ridicule that the Scriblerians reserved for the apocalyptic predictions of astrologers, along with the millenarian theories expounded

by scientifically trained observers such as Whiston, who were characterised long ago as "the world makers" (Tuveson).

Some of Whiston's ideas were so wild that a layman could easily show them up in a ridiculous light. It was not the same with Flamsteed, a distinguished observer who met Newton and Halley on equal terms during the controversy over *Historia Cælestis*. It needed someone with an insider's grasp to depict the astronomer's monomaniacal self-belief, as well as the fantastic imagination and verbal exuberance Arbuthnot's satires display, especially in its opening sentences:

I, JOACHIM FIELDING, Ranger of both Hemispheres, Surveyor of the Zodiack, House-keeper of the Twelve Apartments of the *Primum Mobile*, Comptroller of the Sun and Moon, Inspector of the Luminaries Errant, with their several Attendants, Pursuivant of the Blazing Stars, with their Train, Lord of the Parallax of the Pole-Star, Quarter-Master-General of the Heavenly Host, and Retailer of their Influences to the Inhabitants to the Earth, hold myself in Duty and Conscience bound, in Imitation of my Sovereign Mistress the Moon, to borrow Light from Above, and dispense it to Mortals Below. (3)

Among the characteristic features of the wordplay here is the literalization of the "houses" of the Zodiac as apartments at Greenwich. That may suggest that the astronomer had been allocated unduly grand quarters – but this is patently unfair, because the living space was not especially luxurious, and anyway Arbuthnot had enjoyed a lodging at St James's Palace in the latter years of Anne. The heraldic term "Pursuivant" neatly combines the idea of an official post with the etymological root of follower, that is one tracing the stars.

One feature of Arbuthnot's comic writing is his heavy use of obscene and scatological material. All the group of friends were capable of this, but he outdoes his colleagues (even Swift, noted for his "excremental vision") in the frequency with which he refers to body parts in stark physiological language, often disguising these as technical terms of medicine. (It may be relevant that his main clinical specialism lay in diseases of the gut and bowels.) This tendency is kept in check in the mostly good-humoured content of the *True and Faithful Account*, though we have noticed the joke about the foreskins of Toland and Collins. Still, a number of slightly indecent jests are apparent: "I have not seen the Hinder-Parts of my dear Wife for several Years; but I have seen the Back-Part of several Constellations, which no body ever saw but myself" (4); "Many Backsides shall be borrowed without leave of the Owner" (5); "He that frequenteth H---'s Masquerade, shall not piss the easier" (6); and "Beauties of the best Complexion shall this Year be ground by Two Stones" (6). It is likely that some other arcane predictions carry a hidden obscene meaning: "One *Cork* shall not stop *all Bottles*" (5) seems to rely on the same *doubles entendres* as the Scriblerian production *A Sermon on Glass-Bottles* from May 1715. Norman Ault attributed this to Pope, partly on the basis of quotations such as one from *The Rape of the Lock*: "And Maids turn'd Bottels, call aloud for Corks" (4: 54). The attribution may be correct, although the relentless battery of classical and biblical allusions seems more characteristic of the doctor, not least in a laboured passage on the female organ *Landica* (clitoris), citing the work of a fairly obscure Greek physician Soranus of Ephesus, dating from the second century AD. His *Gynæcia* was known only in a later Latin version, and not published in Greek until the nineteenth century. Gynecology and obstetrics made up another medical interest of Arbuthnot, and his library was well stocked with volumes in this field, ancient and modern.

Flamsteed was a new target for the group. There is a slight passing reference in Swift's poem "On the Progress of Beauty" (c.1720), but his name does not appear in the poetry, prose or correspondence of Pope or Gay. The lone exception comes in a passage in Chapter XVII of the *Memoirs* of Scriblerus, concerning the hero's "Discoveries and Great Works." The date at which this chapter was written is not known, but we do have a draft of a portion of Chapter XIV (containing the notorious "Double Mistress" episode that was omitted from later editions up to the twentieth century; the segment is reprinted in Kerby-Miller 364-9). From the corrections that Pope made to a manuscript in Arbuthnot's hand, we are able to infer that the revisions were entered on the text in the later part of 1717. This makes it likely that Chapter XVII was composed not far from the time that the *True and Faithful Account* appeared. The similarities with a section in the opening passage of the pamphlet, just quoted, will be immediately clear: "To him [Scriblerus] we owe all the observations on the Parallax of the Pole-Star, and all the new Theories of the Deluge" (Kerby-Miller 166). The modern editor explains that this relates to Flamsteed's observations of the Pole Star between 1689 and 1697, leading him to calculate that its parallax was about 40 seconds of the arc. This conclusion was promptly challenged by Cassini, and the answer deemed unsolvable by Halley with current methods. Kerby-Miller offers a judicious summary: "It is probable that Flamsteed's failure was singled out for satire not because it was particularly egregious (his observations had been extraordinarily accurate) but because it was well known and because Flamsteed had made himself extremely obnoxious to Arbuthnot and many other prominent scientists by his excessive jealousy and intransigence with regard to the publication of his catalogue of the stars" (329). This comment could be used to explain (if not, in the eyes of some, to justify) the satirists' willingness to align a distinguished scientist with the foolish sciolist whom they named Martin Scriblerus.

Another dig against Flamsteed, previously unremarked, comes later in the same chapter of the *Memoirs*, where we are told that Scriblerus brought forward a proposal "to pierce the first crust or *Nucleus* of this our *Earth*, quite through, to the next concentrical Sphere: The advantage he propos'd from it was, to find the *Parallax* of the *Fixt Stars*; but chiefly to refute Sir Isaac Newton's Theory of *Gravity*, and Mr. Halley's of the *Variations*" (Kerby-Miller 168). Only one eminent astronomer had a mission to confute Newton and Halley on all possible occasions, and only one satirist had the knowledge and ability to invent such a proposal. It is much the same with the *True and Faithful Account*: we need an author who rejoiced in high spirited lampoons assailing prominent scientists. He should preferably be a Fellow of the Royal Society along with Flamsteed – as was a favourite target Woodward, also a colleague of Arbuthnot in the Royal College of Physicians, and as was the engineer John Theophilus Desaguliers, portrayed as "an old Magician" in a pamphlet called *The York-Buildings Dragons; or, a Full and True Account of a most Horrid and Barbarous Murder* (1725), yet one more work that has been attributed on a variety of grounds to the prolific doctor (Rogers 335-69).

## Conclusion

In the light of the facts presented here, it is fair to conclude that Arbuthnot was the lone member of the group of satirists who possessed the interests, the personal experience, and the private obsessions which led the author to create the figure of Joanidon Fielding and to direct the opening salvos at an unmissable target. The predictions that form the last part of the *True and Faithful Account* seem to include items for which either he or Pope, less probably Gay, was responsible. It is idle to pretend that the work deals in a



serious manner with large issues in the history of science, or that the ridicule can blemish the reputation of its object as one of the greatest figures in British astronomical history. Indeed, the comic effect is to associate Flamsteed with fantastic astrological prophecies rather than with what could be termed legitimate observational techniques. The satire is personal, topical, opportunistic and local, rather than general or timeless. What we have is a sportive intervention on the side of Halley and Newton in their quarrel with Flamsteed. The significance of the *True and Faithful Account* lies in its almost entirely unnoticed contribution to the exercises of learned wit produced by a satirical team of especial literary talent, who were able to take advantage of unparalleled explosion in the sciences, not least astronomy.

## Notes

1. References in the text within parentheses are to the Berrington edition. One of the three known copies, at the University of Texas, is described as a second edition.

2. For the early history of Flamsteed House and its constituent parts, see an informative article titled "Flamsteed House" online at the website of the Royal Observatory Greenwich.

3. Derham had cited both Halley and Arbuthnot approvingly in his most famous work, *Physico-Theology* (1714), 25, 176.

4. The joke first appeared in [John Gay?], *A Wonderful Prophecy* (1712), 2.

5. Arbuthnot retained good relations with Lady Mary long after her break with Pope: they were still engaging in friendly correspondence as late as 1729. In Constantinople Lady Mary utilized the services of the embassy surgeon, Charles Maitland, to perform the controversial new inoculation operation on her small son. When they returned to England in 1719, both were active in promoting the innovatory technique, and Arbuthnot took Maitland's side in a sharp controversy over its merits, with a pamphlet entitled *Mr. Maitland's Act of Inoculating the Small Pox Vindicated from Dr. Wagstaffe's Misrepresentations* (1722): see Ross 298-9. Previous students of Arbuthnot including Beattie did not know of this intervention by the doctor.

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