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Houghton Hospitality: Representing Sociability and Corruption in Sir Robert Walpole's Britain

Introduction

One of the most frequently-quoted and influential accounts of Court Whig sociable practices during the ascendancy of Sir Robert Walpole is that provided by John, Lord Hervey in his correspondence with Frederick, Prince of Wales. Writing from Walpole's estate of Houghton in July 1731, Hervey describes a floor of the building largely given over to "hospitality, noise, dirt and business."¹ The phrase is appealing for many reasons: it gives a sense of Houghton's liveliness during the so-called Norfolk Congresses, of the era's coarse and contradictory modes of political sociability, and above all, of continuities between public and private worlds. Hervey's list chimes with suspicions, both contemporary and subsequent, concerning hospitality's value and propriety within political life. His coupling of dirt with business, however fortuitous, hints at the growing significance of corruption as a concept within partisan discourse—a concept whose significance was not necessarily agreed upon but which was nonetheless integral both to attacks upon the administration and defenses of it.² It is no surprise then, that Hervey's observation has in recent years been adopted as useful short-hand for the interconnectedness of parliamentary business and private life in Walpole's Britain. When Houghton in 2013 hosted a landmark exhibition of Walpole's art collection, on loan from the Hermitage, the quotation appeared both in the curator's introduction to the catalogue, and in much of the highly positive media coverage.³

It is tempting to read this letter and others sent by Hervey to Frederick that summer as asserting a particular Court Whig approach to the subject of sociability, the declaration of a

pragmatic philosophy wherein rural retreats fuel parliamentary deals, and a grand, hospitable location like Houghton becomes the hub, if not of corruption *per se*, then at least of an unashamedly mercenary mode of friendship. Such an attitude towards sociability would seem a natural corollary to Hervey's political ideology, characterized by Reed Browning as "the utilitarian version of Court Whiggery."⁴ Though hardly representative of all Court Whig apologists, Hervey's resistance to utopian thought and his tendency to prioritize ends over means are broadly in keeping with the most enduring perceptions of Walpole's regime.⁵ This article intends, however, to ask whether such perceptions do justice to sociability's political significance throughout the period, and whether by interpreting Houghton's hospitality primarily in terms of its ulterior motives, we miss out on the complexities of its representation in both pro-government and oppositional discourse. Undoubtedly, Houghton was—as one of Walpole's descendants has described it—"a centre for scheming."⁶ Yet its interest for the politically literate public and its value for Walpole's own acolytes superseded and sometimes subverted this purpose. Hospitality was not consistently subordinated to dirt and business either in reality or in the popular imagination. In the cracks between the stereotype of Court Whig sociability and the details of Houghton's literary representation, one finds a great degree of ambivalence towards the very concept of corruption, and uncertainty as to how political ideology should account for social pleasure.

We can understand such ambivalence, to some extent, as a response to the mixed philosophical heritage that Walpole's supporters were grappling with in the 1720s and 1730s. Just as Whigs in power found it necessary to adjust their principles concerning standing armies and the frequency of elections (to name just two key political issues),⁷ they were also faced with divergent traditions of sociability and with fresh dilemmas regarding the reconciliation of social

life with political activity.⁸ Various strands of the Whig inheritance emphasized the importance of politeness in shaping social identities, but disagreed on whether the appearance of politeness outweighed the actuality, and whether politeness was a quality inherently tied to the world of urban commerce or one equally compatible with courtly spheres.⁹ The model of sociability promoted by Joseph Addison, for instance, could be seen as the exclusive preserve of the tavern and coffeehouse, established in opposition to the manners of the court.¹⁰ The third Earl of Shaftesbury likewise offered a vision of sociability set at one remove from the sycophancy and self-interest of government; the “amicable collision” that he describes as the basis for polite conversation has “liberty” as its precondition, is only possible in private settings and is fundamentally dependent on the honesty of its participants.¹¹ In contrast with such standards of altruistic association, Walpole’s Whigs could also look to the more mercenary social ideas of Bernard Mandeville, controversial figure though he was.¹² In offering a view of politics in which “the pursuit of happiness replaced the pursuit of virtue,” Mandeville allowed for private corruption to support the public good and for sociability, by extension, to be defended as a political tool.¹³

The pre-eminent encapsulation of Whig sociability in the earlier decades of the eighteenth century had of course been the Kit-Cat Club, a group which counted Addison as a member and which was closely aligned with his ideals of civility and politeness. David Solkin has contrasted the club’s moderation with the “rough masculine pleasures of hunting and hard drinking”—precisely the pleasures that would come to define much Court Whig sociability during Walpole’s regime.¹⁴ And yet it is worth remembering that Walpole himself had been a part of the Kit-Cat project. The philosophical dilemmas central to the practice and representation of his hospitality at Houghton had already been explored in relation to the club, albeit resolved in

different ways and arguably with greater success.¹⁵ Moreover, while Walpole's Norfolk Congresses were not conceived along strictly Shaftesburian or Addisonian lines, they also cannot be entirely accounted for within a Mandevillian philosophical framework. They were escapes from parliamentary routine as much as they were extensions of it. Scholarly attempts to explain Walpole as part of a "Senecan moment" dominated by unapologetic corruption fail to recognize those elements of the Kit-Cat civic agenda that survived, though strangely transformed, in his displays of ministerial largesse.¹⁶ For all that his wider patronage networks were closely monitored and held "politically accountable," his role as host at Houghton preserved disinterested enjoyment as at least a potential factor in his sociable outlook.¹⁷ In a similar way, though Maynard Mack has famously described Walpole and Alexander Pope as "mighty opposites," with the temperaments of the politician and the poet epitomized in their contrasting approaches to rural entertainment, Walpole was not as consistently self-aggrandizing—nor Pope as unassuming—as such a summary suggests.¹⁸

It is uncertain when the Congresses first became established fixtures in the political calendar,¹⁹ but by the late-1720s, they were known widely enough to attract attention from the opposition press; indeed, it has been hypothesized that the name "Norfolk Congress" itself derived from an opposition pamphlet, a valuable indication of how the reality and the representation of the occasions were intertwined.²⁰ The Congresses took place twice a year, once in the early summer, following the recess of parliament, and then again throughout November. Hunting and feasting were the most obvious attractions, however significant political maneuvering may also have been. According to William Coxe, writing later in the eighteenth century, the June meetings included only close cabinet colleagues of Walpole, whereas the larger and longer autumn gatherings brought together a "mixed multitude [consisting of] his friends in

both houses, and [...] their friends.”²¹ Whether “friend” simply means “political ally” in this context, or whether the proliferation of friends detracts from a sense of political coherence is open to question, as is the reliability of a source published decades after the events themselves. Nonetheless, Coxe’s impression of the Congresses—his suspicion of their expense, scale and inclusivity²²—demonstrates the difficulty of reducing Houghton hospitality to its political function. Rather than attempt to answer definitively what this function was, the present article uses the example of the Congresses to explore how political discourse of the age navigated the awkward philosophical terrain already outlined. By first examining pro-Walpolian treatments of the subject and then turning to oppositional works, I will reveal surprising points of continuity between the two. Neither Walpole’s friends nor his opponents quite knew what to do with his love of sociability or his excessive generosity.

Pro-Walpole Texts

In returning to the 1731 correspondence between Hervey and Frederick, one finds ample evidence, even in ostensibly private and personal texts, of Houghton’s problematic nature. Writing to the Prince a week after his initial report from Norfolk, Hervey describes the lavish sociability of the place, only uneasily linking it back to the parliamentary agenda of his party:

Our company at Houghton swelled at last into so numerous a body that we used to sit down to dinner a little snug party of about thirty odd, up to the chin in beef, venison, geese, turkeys, etc. and generally over the chin in claret, strong beer and punch. We had Lords spiritual and temporal, besides commoners, parsons and freeholders

innumerable. In public we drank loyal healths, talked of the time and cultivated popularity: in private we drew plans and cultivated the country.²³

Even by the standards of his era, Hervey is a writer obsessed with syntactical balance and phrasal contrast.²⁴ Pope's famous attack upon the courtier as "one vile Antithesis" can be understood as referencing these stylistic habits even as it alludes more generally to sexual indeterminacy and moral hypocrisy.²⁵ Often in Hervey's memoirs and correspondence, contrast serves to impose rational order, distinguishing one person's interests from those of another and demonstrating the author's own superiority to the competing absurdities of courtly life.²⁶ In the passage above, however, the succession of contrasts—the situation "up to the chin" and "over the chin"; the "public" and the "private" activities—offers little sense of order or of Hervey's own authority.

Much hinges on the fragile distinction Hervey makes between what is public and what is private business in Walpole's domain. His mention of plans being drawn up and the country being cultivated is ambiguous, perhaps alluding to nothing more momentous than Walpole's interest in landscape design, a familiar topic of conversation at Houghton.²⁷ However, if we read a greater sense of collective purpose into Hervey's language and see it as the nation being cultivated, plans for government being drawn up, then we are left with an increasingly unstable idea of what "public" and "private" mean here, and what the relationship might be between Houghton's surfeit of social enjoyment and the effective management of the state. The contrast is barely a contrast at all in this reading, as the public becomes implicated in the so-called private. The presence of the freeholders and parsons becomes a matter of maintaining electoral interests both locally and nationally. The open cultivation of popularity facilitates the cultivation of the country behind closed doors, and in their wider repercussions both activities must ultimately be seen as public endeavors, albeit obscured from public view. Indeed, the Houghton that Hervey

describes offers little prospect of intimate association at all. His ironic description of the dinner party as “snug” only serves to emphasize the lack of familiarity at these occasions; the subsequent listing of guests by their rank renders them as numerous and individually unexceptional as the dishes they feast on. It is a vision of anonymity which Hervey had likewise flirted with in a preceding letter: “We have a whole house full of people, but everybody does so much what he pleases, that one’s next room neighbour is no more trouble to one here than one’s next door neighbour in London.”²⁸

On one level, such assertions seem to confirm that Houghton is nothing more than a site of business, a place where social nicety is secondary to political pragmatism and where the lessons of Mandeville trump those of Shaftesbury. We might feel that the sociable pleasure offered in these circumstances is nothing more than an excuse for politicking, and that Walpole’s feasts and hunts simply constitute elaborate bribes to his supporters. Yet, from another perspective, the pervasive sense of anonymity in Hervey’s descriptions creates the opposite impression. If the activities and the intentions of his “next room neighbour” remain a mystery to Hervey, and if the dinner guests are so many and so various that one cannot keep track of their individual agendas, then how can anyone, even Walpole himself, remain sure of hospitality’s end results? One of Hervey’s modern biographers has described the Norfolk Congresses as offering something like “an eighteenth-century party conference,” but the analogy implies a structure and transparency that are not in evidence here.²⁹ When the cultivation of the country takes place not through a unified, well-managed conversation, but in many, nominally private ones, the monitoring of that process accordingly becomes a far more haphazard enterprise. Walpole’s program of patronage starts to look less systematic than was commonly alleged, and it breaks with Mandeville’s model of human society insofar as individual vices cease to be generally

productive, failing to push individuals into company and into a common cause.³⁰ More crucially, Hervey's letters refuse to illuminate the relationship between social enjoyment and political strategy. Though the opposition would insinuate that corruption was itself a pleasurable occupation for Walpole and his minions,³¹ the task of locating pleasure in Hervey's accounts is not so simple. One cannot even say whether social pleasure is the ultimate aim of the Court Whig ascendancy—reward for the political stability it guarantees—or primarily an instrument in its formation.³²

Of course, part of the explanation for such ambiguity can be found in the nature of the correspondence itself and the particularities of Hervey's friendship with Frederick. It would have been very peculiar for him to confess to outright venality and to revel in Houghton's social corruption when writing to a royal friend at one remove from these circles. Frederick would not be co-opted as figurehead of the Patriot opposition until much later in the decade, but already we sense that Hervey is wary of potential tensions arising from his closeness with the prince.³³ At their most defensive, his letters seem to acknowledge politics as a rival to personal attachment, and so their hesitation in pinpointing the political import of Walpole's gatherings looks like a necessary step in reassuring the prince and proving worthy of his friendship:

When you imagine, Sir, that politics can put my old friends (as Your Royal Highness is pleased to call them) out of my head, you very much mistake both me and our employments here. Politics have very little share in our conversation, and the friend you mean so great a share in my heart that he is in no danger of being dislodged by that or any other force.³⁴

Hervey's foremost biographer Robert Halsband takes him at his word here, viewing the letter as confirmation that "politics was not much discussed" at Houghton.³⁵ This seems overly trusting,

particularly given the highly calculating nature of Hervey's language, the prudent way he evaluates his conversational and affective "shares" and the ease with which a parliamentary understanding of disempowerment—"being dislodged"—is applied to a private relationship. However, this does not mean that we should reject Hervey's claims entirely. Nor should we assess their value only insofar as they reflect the actual experience of Walpole's hospitality. Just as important is the very fact that Hervey would try to defend Houghton's sociability on the grounds of its disinterest and impartiality, a rhetorical stance which contradicts the ideological models normally used to explain Court Whig discourse and one which epitomizes the awkward approach to sociability's merits throughout the series of letters.

For an equivalent complication of the Court Whig discourse on a more public level, we can turn to ballads written by Walpole's supporters, works which not only take the joys of the Norfolk Congress as their subject matter but which may well have featured in the festivities themselves, being sung at the very occasions they describe. One such ballad is "The Norfolk Garland: or, The Death of Reynard the Fox," published in a politically variegated miscellany of 1730 and probably written by politician and poet, Sir William Yonge.³⁶ In many respects, it is an unremarkable piece. Like other ballads of its genre, it uses the hunt to frame its exploration and celebration of a particular county's landscape.³⁷ It hounds Reynard through rural Norfolk with a refrain of "And a hunting we will go." But the ballad most expressly grabs our attention and reflects upon the political alignments of its day by situating the hunt within the context of the Norfolk Congresses. Where other, less flattering pieces in this miscellany censor the names of their characters, here only the author's name is obscured. The ballad reads for the most part as a proud commemoration of Sir Robert's Norfolk hospitality and the sense of partisan identity fostered by it. Though Walpole does not seem to take part in the hunt directly, the pursuit is led

by prominent political figures such as his son-in-law, Lord Malpas, and Thomas Spence, Serjeant of the House of Commons.³⁸ At the close of the ballad, when the huntsmen return to Houghton Hall, the excitement of the hunt gives way to the excesses of the dining table, much as they would later be catalogued by Hervey and regretted by Coxe:

With Stomachs sharp and keen,
 Then away to Houghton Hall,
 Where Pudding, Beef, and Hogen
 Were welcome to us all.

The Bumper being drank,
 Then Sir Robert wish'd for Young [sic],
 For he, to Crown the Day,
 Should have sung his Hunting-song.³⁹

It would be perverse to argue that there is anything especially anxious or conflicted in these lines. The writer is not obviously troubled by the repercussions that this drunken exuberance might have for Court Whig ideology, and the ballad seems unashamed in its open association of Walpole with a profusion of food and drink. It is important to be clear, though, that the ballad is not celebrating corruption as such, in spite of Yonge's own reputation for venality.⁴⁰ The relationship the work posits between social activity and political identity is generally of a more positive nature. The hunt is portrayed as a natural expression of Court Whig solidarity just as the feast is an honest response to the healthy hunger of "keen" stomachs. In this sense at least, the ballad and the rationale behind its publication again seem to owe more to Shaftesbury than to more mercenary formulations of Whiggish sociability. This need not be seen as a brashly

Epicurean tribute to pleasure for its own sake, but as a hymn to more humble and detached rural satisfaction, fitting into the classical tradition of the “*beatus ille*” that had been adopted and adapted by Shaftesbury among others.⁴¹

In order for such an interpretation to be viable however, readers (and singers) of the ballad needed a sensitive grasp of where different philosophical traditions intersected and a sense for how these could co-exist without undermining each other. Sociability’s utility is not ignored completely in the text. Indeed, at one crucial moment as Reynard nears the estate of High House, the ballad draws our attention to the persistence of self-interest in the midst of the sports:

Some staid to save their Horses,
 And some to make their Court,
 Lord Walpole, Spence, and Edgcombe,
 Were all that saw the Sport.

Political pragmatism surfaces here, in opposition both to the enjoyment of the hunt for its own sake and to the coherence of the ballad’s narration. If no one sees the sport besides the three named individuals,⁴² then we must assume that the speaker of the ballad has likewise stayed behind as part of the impromptu networking occasion that is described, and the reliability of his account is accordingly compromised. Again, to observe this is not to identify the ballad as a source of guilt or uncertainty—that would be to misunderstand the function and the tone of the text entirely. Rather, the brashness and apparent extemporaneity characteristic of drinking songs allow and enable the balancing of conflicting social impressions.⁴³ A contradiction between mercenary values and indulgent sociability which could elsewhere pose problems for the Court Whig project is here made acceptable through the very casualness of the form. The narrator of the work is sometimes part of the hunt, sometimes watching from afar, sometimes speaks of the

sportsmen as us and sometimes as them, without these inconsistencies damaging the spirit or momentum of the song.

Similar effects can be observed in other Houghton drinking songs penned by supporters of Walpole. Prosperity to Houghton is a ballad inspired by the strong beer, Hogen, which was mentioned in “The Norfolk Garland” and was apparently a popular staple of Walpole’s cellars. The word “Hogen” was derived from “Hogen Mogen,” itself a corruption of the Dutch “Hoogmogendheiden” (literally “High Mightinesses,” the formal title of the Dutch States General). The phrase had been used in English from the seventeenth century to refer to strong alcohol, but was also applied derogatorily to the Dutch, to the powerful or those who pretended to power, and—through a conflation of these categories—to Whig politicians aligned with the cause of William III. The use of the word to describe Houghton’s favorite beverage therefore points to the strength of the drink while also suggesting a certain self-deprecation on the part of its champions, the reclamation of an offensive term and revelry in the very qualities for which their party had historically been attacked.⁴⁴ Such potential for self-deprecation is consistent with the overall tone of the song and its treatment of inebriation as both help and hindrance to Court Whig interests.

The author of the song, his name given as Philip Floyd in one annotated copy,⁴⁵ argues in the second stanza of the work that Houghton’s Hogen is responsible for instilling courage and defiance in those who imbibe it:

HAD the Trojans Drank Hogen those Blades of Renown,
 They’d ne’er suffer’d the Greeks t’have Demolish’d their Town,
 But have fought all like furies, inspir’d with this
Paris long kept his Life and his Favourite Miss[.]⁴⁶

Walpole's Whigs are distinguished from the ill-fated Trojans in this imagined scenario, and their cause is by implication shown to be worthier than the reckless defense of a prince's mistress. Neither do they resemble the conniving Greeks of legend, though. As the stanza continues, Floyd insists that those who drink Hogen are not able "to sneak." For a political faction so often associated with carefully managed stability and underhand schemes, the Court Whigs make surprising spokesmen for the virtues of open bluster. As so often in these pro-Walpole works, their rhetoric owes debts across political and philosophical lines, perhaps in this instance drawing on the old Tory figure of the "good fellow."⁴⁷

However, the association of Walpole's merry-makers with a certain type of brash and unapologetically violent political expression does not last for long in Floyd's ballad. No sooner has the prospect of drunken strength been invoked than the song starts to push back against it, revealing contradictions that are broadly characteristic of Court Whig sociability as a whole. The song acknowledges in its third stanza that Hogen debilitates as readily as it emboldens. Not one of Homer's heroes "[c]ould tip off four Bottles and then stand his Ground." Even the great Achilles would soon have been "made a Lamb" upon consuming the drink. As with "The Norfolk Garland," these assertions do not pose problems of a magnitude likely to disrupt the enjoyment of the song in the moment. The Horatian epigram that precedes the work ("Nunc est bibendum") is itself an exhortation to spontaneity, even if an awareness of its classical context might encourage some limited reflection on the political accomplishments that make celebratory drinking possible.⁴⁸ For the most part, the logical discrepancies found in Prosperity to Houghton are indicative not of severe anxieties within Court Whig discourse but of a greater ironic and self-deprecating capacity than has often been claimed for it.⁴⁹ Given the song's professed interest in Hogen as an emblem of Walpole's hospitality and the close association it builds between a

man's Court Whig credentials and his enjoyment of this particular drink, Floyd's admission that politically-endorsed inebriation can be counter-productive demonstrates that these guests do not take entirely seriously the claims to political utility that might be made on behalf of the Norfolk Congresses. If, as a number of recent scholars have established, eighteenth-century alcohol consumption needs to be understood as a custom tied to "individual and collective identities," then the song leaves us with a vision of Court Whig identity both immersed in hedonism and skeptical of hospitality's political efficacy.⁵⁰ When in its penultimate stanza, it wishes that Walpole's enemies may "die in a Noose" and that Houghton "flourish" for generations to come, it adopts these positions less from a desire for long-term political stability and the security of the Hanoverian succession, and instead, expressly, so that there will still be someone in charge "to keep full the Vaults."

We return then to the question of whether drinking songs like these and the events which they commemorate had any stable role within Walpole's allegedly comprehensive systems of political control, or whether, on the contrary, they represented a weakness in the Court Whig machine, instances of unnecessary indulgence. In a third song, sometimes grouped with "The Norfolk Garland" and Prosperity to Houghton, the question is posed, though not answered, through a pun that plays on the idea of a mutual dependency between Walpole and his allies. Houghton Hare-Hunting is in many ways a less interesting and less politically engaged song than either of those already discussed. It does however make reference to both of those songs (in its second and third stanzas respectively) and it has been suggested that the broadside versions of all three works were printed together later in the century at Horace Walpole's Strawberry Hill press.⁵¹ If that was indeed the case, then the circumstances of the songs' publication, as well as their composition, distinguish them from the majority of published drinking songs, which arose

more directly from the tavern and alehouse, and could be taken to reflect the beliefs and preoccupations of the wider public with greater accuracy.⁵²

As with Reynard's sympathetic treatment in "The Norfolk Garland," Houghton Hare-Hunting seeks to honor the prey of Norfolk's huntsmen, this time "poor Puss" who is chased across the nearby areas of Fring and Tows-Hill, exhausting her aristocratic pursuers and ruining their horses in the process:

Since then a Hare shews Sport enough,
 To make Fox-hunters sob,
 Why should she not be sung by them,
 And with them bear a Bob?⁵³

So closes a light, frivolous song that takes pleasure in the embarrassment of its human protagonists (named as Lord Lifford and Richard Edgcumbe) and leaves in doubt whether the hare in question was eventually caught or not.⁵⁴ But the final line of the song is replete with double meanings which complicate, albeit in a good-humored fashion, our understanding of its overall purpose and intention. To bear a bob is to sing the refrain or burden to a song; in this sense, the hare is being invited into the act of singing, becoming one with the chorus of huntsmen in a maneuver which emphasizes enjoyment of the gathering for its own sake. It would have been impossible in the political climate of the 1720s, however, not to be familiar with "Bob" as a nickname for Walpole himself, one used predominantly by oppositional writers and most notoriously brought to the public's attention by John Gay in The Beggar's Opera (1728).⁵⁵ As we read the final line with this meaning in mind, it makes a more significant claim for its own political relevance: the singers, the song-writer and even the hare itself are involved in upholding Walpole's cause, bearing in the sense of carrying, and recognizing and subtly celebrating their

own importance to the Court Whig interest. The earnestness of such celebrations can certainly be queried when we consider the generally negative associations of the nickname in political parlance. Moreover, there are other ways of reading the line that would emphasize instead the ordeal of Walpole's sociability (to "bear" as to "tolerate") or the necessary violence of political engagement (a "bob" as "a blow with a fist" or "a sharp rebuke").⁵⁶ Yet this appetite for ambivalence and self-mockery itself epitomizes the awkward self-perception of Walpole's guests: at once allies in a crucial political cause and drunken refugees from political life, who draw on eclectic, barely consistent traditions of rural sociability and partisan identity.

Anti-Walpole Texts

When the debauchery of the Norfolk Congresses is deployed in oppositional works, the same issues arise, with writers needing to come to terms with the contradictions in Walpole's hospitality, or to focus on one aspect of his reputation at the expense of others. The complex picture of the minister that would be given by William Coxe later in the century—a stubborn fusion of bad behavior, political expedience and genuine love of company—can rarely be fully harnessed by Walpole's enemies, and often results in texts of more irony and intricacy than one would expect from political propaganda.⁵⁷ The idea that writers of the opposition set out to craft a monster in their representations of Walpole is certainly valid, but this monster needed to be constructed in the same gaps between philosophical traditions and different political discourses that confronted the defenders of the Congresses.⁵⁸ In pointing out the complexities of such negotiations, I am building on my previous published research into Walpole's ambivalent public persona.⁵⁹ This analysis can also be used to shed light on works which have been only tentatively

linked to the opposition movement – works such as Henry Fielding’s Joseph Andrews (1742), which will be briefly considered in the coda to the article.

One of the most sophisticated and creative of the opposition’s attacks upon Houghton’s hospitality was a prose tract entitled The Norfolk Congress, possibly the origin of the term itself. This work was popular or contentious enough to have warranted two pamphlet editions printed in around 1728. Whether these were rival editions or prepared separately for other reasons is not clear; both claim to be the work of the same printer and they use the same text, but are differentiated by a number of typographical discrepancies and the insistence on the title page of one edition that it is “not sold by the Booksellers of London and Westminst[er].”⁶⁰ The text was later printed in the Monthly Chronicle for November 19th 1728. It was included in the first edition of the anti-ministerial anthology of ballads and treatises, Robin’s Panegyrick, and also occasioned a likewise anonymous versification.⁶¹ There has been some doubt about the date of the work’s first composition; J. H. Plumb asserts that it was being circulated in manuscript form as early as 1725, but if so the substance of the text must have been substantially different, since the versions which have reached us include specific references to the opposition journal, The Craftsman, only launched in December 1726.⁶²

What lends The Norfolk Congress its strength is that it treats with considerable seriousness the honorable traditions of Whig sociability that Walpole’s retreats might be expected to continue. In fact, it takes some time for the satirical intent of the tract to become apparent, so committed is its endorsement of sociable ideals. It starts out with the assertion that feasting, hunting and hospitality are not luxuries but privileges, even duties, of the political elite: “it hath always been customary, in this kingdom, for Great Men, in times of publick prosperity, to give Feasts unto the People and make publick Rejoycings”.⁶³ It then raises a similar but not

identical point in its conviction that “great and able Men, who by their Industry and Application have procured many Blessings to their Country, should sometimes relax their Minds and share those Blessings.”⁶⁴ These outlooks represent a useful reconciliation of Shaftesburian and Mandevillian stances, preserving the former’s insistence on virtue, while allowing for an implicit relationship between private enjoyment and the public good, in keeping with the latter. The author’s central means of attacking Walpole will not be to contradict this basic premise, so much as to question the extent of Britain’s actual public prosperity and the minister’s genuine contribution to the nation’s well-being. Meanwhile, the text will also go on to condemn the minister for a lack of taste and morality in his execution of country hospitality, thereby revealing Walpole as an inadequate heir to Shaftesbury as well as to Mandeville.

The author’s interrogation of national prosperity is largely carried out through a series of ironic paeans to the wonderful success of Walpole’s foreign policy. The great man is allowed to enjoy his friendly feasts because he has guaranteed Britain’s “present Tranquility [sic]” by ensuring peace with Spain.⁶⁵ It is only when declaiming on the good fortunes of the merchant who now “saileth with Safety” that the author reveals the barb behind this praise.⁶⁶ Though the text seems to have predated by some years the capture and torture of Captain Jenkins that would eventually lend weight to the opposition’s campaign for war, there is already a strong sense that Walpole has neglected the interests of British traders in his approach to the limited naval conflict with Spain and his maneuvers towards an ignoble peace.⁶⁷ The merchant, particularly if he has interests in the Americas, cannot actually find safety from Spanish pillage, and the interchangeable “f” and “s” reveal the closeness of he who “sails” to he who “fails” in the current commercial situation. From this perspective, Walpole’s rural excursions are shown not as a worthy reward for service, symptom of the nation’s happiness, but as a sign of serious political

complacency, with extra-parliamentary sociability unjustified by the minister's actual achievements.

The text's attack on Walpole's faculty of taste is in part founded on the same sense of snobbery towards his relatively humble class background that motivated many other oppositional works.⁶⁸ However, it also arises from a more general frustration with Walpole's elusiveness and with the very aspects of ambiguity and contradiction that this article has identified within his social reputation. Thus, when the work targets his appetites as a source of derision, it is not only because they are vulgar but because they are also overly eclectic and at times obscure:

The Breakfast or Prelliminary [sic] Course is made up of cold Venison Pasties, Ham, Tongues, Tea, Chocolate, with a Mixture of many other Delicacies, insomuch that it hath been generally called an Ambigu, which being interpreted in our Language signifies something doubtful in its Nature or which nobody knows what to make of.⁶⁹

What the text says here about the choice of food might just as aptly be said of Walpole himself and his modes of sociability: the writer is not entirely sure what to make of him in his hospitable aspect. The breakfast offered is characterized by mess and confusion, but in its individual elements, it is not conspicuously disgusting or incriminating, and it might even be perceived as a generous accommodation. Gilly Lehmann has seen the author's sneers at Walpole's "ambigu" and the later derogatory reference to a "Hotch-Potch" of European dishes as very literal attacks upon the continental culinary fashions followed at Houghton under the aegis of Walpole's main chef, Solomon Sollis.⁷⁰ Undoubtedly, while the likes of Prosperity to Houghton could revel in the Dutch inspiration for Walpole's beer of choice, there was political capital to be made from claiming that the prime minister was not sufficiently patriotic in his favored cuisine. However, aside from insinuations of treachery and the symbolic allusion to an overly placatory foreign

policy, the fundamental problem with Houghton's food is that "few People relish'd it; for it could not sit well on the stomachs."⁷¹ There is too much going on at Walpole's table, too many ideas, however appealing in isolation, too much scope for political implication and too many conflicting interests that can scarcely be satisfied either by selfless generosity or calculated corruption.

Indeed, Lehmann does not acknowledge the sheer extent to which the political world seeps into The Norfolk Congress, particularly by way of puns. The enjoyment of Walpole and his guests is repeatedly tarnished, though not completely effaced, by the potential for double meanings. Walpole's guests, standing less in the position of friends and instead assuming the mantle of long-suffering subjects, are force-fed "Peace-Soop, with Balls of Forced meat"; meanwhile the master of the house gluts himself on "STOCK-Fish and PLUMB-Dumpling," in reference to the corrupt fortune he has supposedly made from the collapse of South Sea stock.⁷² There is room for more or less direct allegations that the festivities are themselves fueled by mercenary ambition. We are told that the "Sallad [sic] consisted entirely of SALLARY [sic] and PENNY-ROYAL, which all the Guests devoured very greedily."⁷³ Yet the prospect of such ulterior motives does not dominate proceedings. Rather, it is one of several interpretations swarming the text, making Walpole's household truly inhospitable not through the threat of self-interest alone but through suffocating ambivalence, the certainty that no single interpretation can do justice to Houghton's malignancy or its perverse appeal. This is the underlying message when the text offers a thoroughly convoluted and inconsistently allegorical account of Walpole's hunts.⁷⁴ It is also the prevailing sense when, towards the end of the pamphlet, the author comments that "[t]he Wines, which came from all parts of the World, were like the Master, rich and generous."⁷⁵ The

simile is problematic; it makes a criticism of Walpole's unstable tastes dependent on an acknowledgement that he does after all know something of true generosity.

In other texts reprimanding the luxury of the Norfolk Congresses, writers are often more single-minded in explaining the events with reference to Walpole's scheming nature, but even here a sense of mystery and confusion can persist, combined with an uncomfortable awareness of Houghton's many attractions. One such work is A New Norfolk Ballad, a broadside apparently printed in 1730 and declaring its author to be the ghost of Sir Francis Walsingham.⁷⁶ Like The Norfolk Congress, this ballad is respectful of sociable tradition and wary of appearing to condemn the simple pleasures of country life. It sets its scene back in "the Days of bluff Harry" (presumably Henry VIII), when "Good old Hospitality [...] was in Fashion." Later in the song, the author protests that "there is no Man alive / But would willingly see Hospitality thrive." Yet in spite of such avowals, the ballad cannot approve of the "Carnival" regularly staged by a certain "State Politician." One reason is a suspicion that duties have not been paid on the copious amounts of wine and brandy consumed at these events. This allegation of hypocrisy would take on greater meaning in light of 1733's excise crisis, in which Walpole's attempts to reform taxation on both of these commodities (as well as tobacco) led to public hostility and eventual embarrassment.⁷⁷ Still, the balladeer's objections to the congresses cannot be reduced to a simple matter of crooked accounting. Throughout the work, there is an ominous sense that hospitality is being made to serve some darker purpose, though the author cannot bring himself to say with any certainty what this purpose might be:

But what is the Ultimate End and Design

Of the States-Man so great, you nor I can divine;

Some say it is one thing, and some say another,

Surmises are fruitless, and vain is a Pother.

The same sense of mystification and bafflement in the face of Walpole's generosity is repeated in the ballad's penultimate stanza:

We talk and we guess at the worst and the best

The secret the Great Man does keep in his Breast:

I Prophecy e're a few Months are blown over,

That we shall the deep hidden Secret discover.

There is something here that almost anticipates the gothic innovations of Walpole's son, Horace, a surprising preoccupation with secrets and the unknowability of another human being's true designs. Clearly the ballad is committed to demonstrating the falseness of Walpole's hospitality and of his social pleasure, but the fact that it cannot put a name to his precise motive and that it settles instead for a portrait of obscure malevolence is indicative of the more general dilemmas posed by its subject matter.

Coda: Houghton and Fielding

It would be a mistake to argue that all anti-Walpole works followed the same template, or indeed that all of his supporters adopted Lord Hervey's strategies for negotiating his hospitable reputation. There are many pieces of opposition writing which pursue their target in less nuanced terms, with less sense of ambivalence and irony, and generally with less lasting interest for either literary scholars or historians.⁷⁸ Court Whig treatments of Houghton are less common, but similarly, one should take care not to regard the few works discussed above as representative of the whole party's political discourse. That said, this article has aimed to reveal depths and

conflicts within political writing of the time which were definitely more familiar to authors and readers than the stereotype of the corrupt prime minister would lead us to believe. Though many of the texts that have been discussed are by nature non-canonical and ephemeral, I would close by pointing out how an appreciation of the full repercussions of Houghton hospitality can likewise assist our readings of well-known, recognizably literary texts.

Echoes of Houghton—often vague enough to be denied or confused with other locations entirely—creep into a number of high-profile satirical works from the 1730s and early 1740s. Pope’s Epistle to Burlington is one such text, its mockery of Timon and his villa often interpreted as an attack on his friend the Duke of Chandos, but just as susceptible to oppositional readings.⁷⁹ A later work, its pertinence to Walpole and Houghton just as if not more contentious, is Henry Fielding’s Joseph Andrews, whose publication coincided with Walpole’s final resignation and its immediate aftermath.⁸⁰

This is not the place to insist on Walpole’s centrality to Fielding’s novel. Morris Golden has argued tentatively for viewing the obnoxious and unnamed squire of Book III as a representation of the prime minister, but he acknowledges that the depictions of the squire’s lifestyle, his love of hunting and his disorderly modes of hospitality are general enough to apply also to “the Prince of Wales, Bolingbroke, Pulteney, any of the broiling Patriot leaders in 1741.”⁸¹ Moreover, Martin Battestin’s still persuasive work on Fielding’s political allegiances would seem to suggest that the author was no longer opposed to the Court Whigs by the time the work was produced.⁸² This lack of clarity regarding the text’s political agenda is disconcerting but perhaps consistent with the self-same discursive ambivalence which this article has been concerned to trace in earlier works. The interest of Fielding’s abusive “Hunter of Men” is, ultimately, not that he stands in for Walpole directly, but that the language used of him and of his

sociable practices testifies to the broader relevance of those issues confronted in pro-Houghton and anti-Houghton texts.⁸³

The legacy of Houghton is felt most keenly when the good Parson Adams, victim rather than beneficiary of the squire's hospitality, begins to speak of the proper social duties of "great Men."⁸⁴ He and his fellow travelers have been attacked by the squire's hunting party in the previous chapter. He has already had ample opportunity to observe that his host is not a model of virtue and that he has little respect for the "Laws of Hospitality" which Adams himself cherishes.⁸⁵ However, Adams's response to the abuse he receives is itself utterly inadequate. At first, he preaches, lamenting that the most powerful within society should waste their time on "Cards and other idle Passtime."⁸⁶ Then, when it is already clear that his advice is not being taken seriously, he re-enacts an absurd masque-like ceremony together with his host and one of the other guests. As a substitute for the raucous sociability favored both at the squire's residence and at Houghton, it is a ridiculous exercise. It ends, predictably, in humiliation for Adams as he is submerged in a tub of water, the dignity of his intellectual demonstration completely forgotten. This is where Adams's response is most telling, for as he falls he makes a grab for his host, "caught hold of him before he descended from his Throne, and pulled him in with him, to the entire secret Satisfaction of all the Company."⁸⁷

The secret motivations and opinions that lie beneath the surface of the squire's gathering offer one way of observing Houghton's influence. The sense that Fielding and Adams are probing the integrity of hospitality, searching for meaning in this place of retreat, shows that the questions posed by both pro-ministerial and oppositional writers persisted beyond narrowly propagandistic works. However, most significant at the last is the fact of Adams's physical confrontation with his host, not because this scene is somehow enacting the fall of Walpole

himself, but because in forsaking reasoned debate and instead manhandling the crafty squire, the parson comes up with the only satisfying answer to the frustrating questions of what rural sociability is for and what its political purpose might be. As Adams sinks to the squire's level—and the squire literally sinks to his—Fielding responds to ambivalence with plain violence, and mocks the whole logic of meaningful political hospitality as he does so.

¹ Hervey to Frederick, July 14th 1731, in Earl of Ilchester, Lord Hervey and his Friends, 1726-1738 (London: John Murray, 1950), 71.

² This trend in public discourse is typified by a pamphlet war in which Hervey had recently been engaged. In his Remarks on the Craftsman's Vindication of his Two Noble Patrons (London: J. Peele, 1731), he accused Lord Bolingbroke of having demonstrated "Corruption, Perfidiousness, Wantonness, and Iniquity" (17) during Queen Anne's reign. William Pulteney's reply to this work stated that Hervey's "private Indolence [had] grown as insupportable as [his] publick Corruption." See [William Pulteney,] An Answer to one Part of a Late Infamous Libel (London: R. Francklin, 1731), 3. J. G. A. Pocock identifies this discursive shift as characteristic of neo-Harringtonian political thought: "[t]he antithesis of virtue ceased to be fortuna, but became corruption instead." J. G. A. Pocock, The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1975), 402. For detailed discussion of how the subject of corruption was navigated by the Court Whig press under Walpole, see Tone Sundt Urstad, Sir Robert Walpole's Poets: The Use of Literature as Pro-Government Propaganda, 1721-1742 (Newark: Univ. of Delaware Press, 1999), 141-47.

³ See Thierry Morel, "Houghton Revisited: An Introduction," in Houghton Revisited (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2013), 30-43 (40); also Robert Conway Morris, "A Magnificent Collection Comes Back to England," New York Times, May 20th 2013, and Robin Lane Fox, "Houghton Hall Showcase is Tribute to Sir Robert Walpole's Good Taste," Financial Times, August 16th 2013.

⁴ Reed Browning, Political and Constitutional Ideas of the Court Whigs (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1982), 66.

⁵ Isaac Kramnick typifies assumptions about the venality of the administration when he identifies the defense of corruption as "the heart of [Walpole's] political thought." Isaac Kramnick, Bolingbroke and His Circle: The Politics of Nostalgia in the Age of Walpole (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1968), 121. Such arguments are assisted

by the long-standing association of Walpole with the axiom, “those men have their price,” a saying whose implications were nonetheless disputed by the politician’s eighteenth-century biographer. See William Coxe, Memoirs of the Life and Administration of Sir Robert Walpole, Earl of Orford, 3 vols (London: T. Cadell, Jr. and W. Davies, 1798), I: 757.

⁶ Marquess of Cholmondeley, “Introduction,” in Houghton Hall: The Prime Minister, the Empress and the Heritage, ed. Andrew Moore (London: Philip Wilson, 1996), 9-10 (9).

⁷ The debt of Walpole’s Court Whigs to a traditionally Tory outlook on issues such as these has long been recognized. See for example, J. P. Kenyon, Revolution Principles: The Politics of Party 1689-1720 (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1977), 182, 188; J. A. W. Gunn, “Court Whiggery: Justifying Innovation,” in Politics, Politeness, and Patriotism, ed. Gordon J. Schochet (Washington, D.C: The Folger Institute, 1993), 125-56 (126); H. T. Dickinson, Liberty and Property: Political Ideology in Eighteenth-Century Britain (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977), 157-58.

⁸ I have made this argument previously in my monograph, Friendship and Allegiance in Eighteenth-Century Literature: The Politics of Private Virtue in the Age of Walpole (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 11. In the present article, I seek to build upon the approach to sociability and political interest that I set out in that work.

⁹ For more discussion of these disagreements, see Markku Peltonen, “Politeness and Whiggism, 1688-1732,” The Historical Journal 48 (2005), 391-414 (402-9).

¹⁰ Nicholas Phillipson, “Politeness and Politics in the Early Reigns of Anne and the Early Hanoverians,” in The Varieties of British Political Thought 1500-1800, ed. J. G. A. Pocock (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1997), 211-45 (225-26). See also Lawrence E. Klein, “Coffeehouse Civility, 1660-1714: An Aspect of Post-Courtly Culture in England,” Huntington Library Quarterly 59: 1 (1996), 30-51.

¹¹ Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury, Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times, ed. Lawrence E. Klein (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1999; originally published 1711), 31, 36, 65.

¹² See Thomas Horne, “Politics in a Corrupt Society: William Arnall’s Defense of Robert Walpole,” Journal of the History of Ideas 41: 4 (1980), 601-14 (612-13); also, Peltonen, 402.

¹³ M. M. Goldsmith, “Liberty, Luxury and the Pursuit of Happiness,” in The Languages of Political Theory in Early-Modern Europe, ed. Anthony Pagden (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1997), 225-51 (251).

¹⁴ David Solkin, Painting for Money: The Visual Arts and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century England (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1993), 99.

¹⁵ Elaborating on Solkin's work, Abigail Williams observes that the "very conviviality" of the Kit-Cats could potentially be "in conflict" with the club's goals of moral and civil reformation, and thus required discreet representation. Abigail Williams, Poetry and the Creation of a Whig Literary Culture, 1681-1714 (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2005), 162.

¹⁶ For the "Senecan moment" and its supposed alignment with Walpole's reputation and political tactics, see Edward G. Andrew, Patrons of Enlightenment (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 2006), 27, 67.

¹⁷ Williams articulates the generally accepted view that Kit-Cat literary patronage was more impartial (and accordingly more culturally informed) than that of Walpole in power. See Williams, Whig Literary Culture, 243.

¹⁸ Maynard Mack, The Garden and the City: Retirement and Politics in the Later Poetry of Pope, 1731-1743 (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1969), 201, 206-11.

¹⁹ J. H. Plumb asserts that "the Norfolk Congresses were in full swing by 1727." See Plumb, Sir Robert Walpole: The King's Minister (London: Allen Lane, 1960), 82.

²⁰ A. A. Hanham, "Norfolk Congresses (*act.* 1722-1741)," ODNB (entry published online, May 2009). The pamphlet in question is entitled The Norfolk Congress, or, A Full and True Account of Their Hunting, Feasting and Merry Making [...] (London: Printed by R. Lightbody, [1728?]).

²¹ Coxe, I: 758.

²² Coxe goes on to describe scenes of "riot and misrule" which seemingly resulted from Walpole's overly welcoming approach. He also notes that Walpole's brother-in-law and neighbor, Lord Townshend, disapproved of the occasions, even as others saw them as "analogous to the spirit of ancient hospitality." See Coxe, I: 758-59.

²³ Hervey to Frederick, July 21st 1731, in Ilchester, Hervey and his Friends, 73-74.

²⁴ Hervey's tendency towards contrast and parallelism is made immediately apparent in the titles of several published works, for instance, Ancient and Modern Liberty Stated and Compar'd (London: J. Roberts, 1734) and The Difference between Verbal and Practical Virtue (London: J. Roberts, 1742), both published anonymously.

²⁵ Alexander Pope, An Epistle from Mr. Pope, to Dr. Arbuthnot (1735), in The Poems of Alexander Pope, ed. John Butt (London: Routledge, 1963), 597-612 (608); the phrase does not appear in the poem as first published but features in the second volume of the poet's Works published the same year. A number of historians of sexuality

have examined the links between public allegations of sodomy made against Hervey and more general notions of Court Whig corruption. Considering the exclusion of women from the Norfolk Congresses, it is possible that these events were also interpreted in the light of such suspicions; however for the purposes of the present article, one can distinguish between the reputation of Hervey and his immediate circle and that of Walpole's wider Court Whig milieu. For the relationship between sexuality and the perception of "a homosocial system of sycophancy and abuse," particularly with reference to Hervey, see George E. Haggerty, Men in Love: Masculinity and Sexuality in the Eighteenth Century (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1999), 70-73; Jill Campbell, "Politics and Sexuality in Portraits of John, Lord Hervey," Word and Image 6: 4 (1990), 281-97.

²⁶ Camille Paglia's comparison of Hervey to Oscar Wilde may be relevant on this front, though one may take issue with her view of literary style as an inevitable extension of sexuality. See Camille Paglia, "Lord Hervey and Pope," Eighteenth-Century Studies 6: 3 (1973), 348-71 (359, 363).

²⁷ In a letter from later in the same year, Sir Thomas Robinson describes taking part in a conversation with Walpole and his celebrated gardener, Charles Bridgeman: "at every angle there are to be obelisks, or some other building." See Robinson to Carlisle, December 9th 1731 in Carlisle Manuscripts, Fifteenth Report, Appendix, Part VI.

²⁸ Hervey to Frederick, July 16th 1731, in Ilchester, Hervey and his Friends, 73.

²⁹ Lucy Moore, Amphibious Thing: The Life of Lord Hervey (London: Viking, 2000), 99.

³⁰ For the importance of common purpose in Mandeville, see Malcolm Jack, Corruption and Progress: The Eighteenth-Century Debate (New York: AMS Press, 1989), 59.

³¹ Urstad comments that Walpole was characterized and is remembered as "a man so cynical that he found the exercise of large-scale corruption entirely congenial." Urstad, Walpole's Poets, 142.

³² Daniel Baugh discusses related issues in "Introduction: The Social Basis of Stability," in Aristocratic Government and Stability in Eighteenth-Century England: The Foundations of Stability, ed. by Daniel A. Baugh (New York: New Viewpoints, 1975), 1-28 (18). See also J. H. Plumb, The Growth of Political Stability in England 1675-1725 (London: Macmillan, 1967).

³³ For Frederick's significance within the Patriot movement from 1735 onwards, see Christine Gerrard, The Patriot Opposition to Walpole (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 41. In examining Frederick's friendship with Hervey in the early 1730s, Hannah Smith and Stephen Taylor emphasize how Hervey sought to occupy the role of court favorite. They focus on the ways that this role conflicted with the prince's later claims to independence. See Hannah Smith

and Stephen Taylor, "Hephaestion and Alexander: Lord Hervey, Frederick, Prince of Wales, and the Royal Favourite in England in the 1730s," English Historical Review 124: 507 (2009), 283-312 (290).

³⁴ Hervey to Frederick, July 16th 1731, in Ilchester, Hervey and his Friends, 73.

³⁵ Robert Halsband, Lord Hervey: Eighteenth-Century Courtier (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 121.

³⁶ See A New Miscellany (London: A. Moore, 1730), 13-18. The author's name is given as "Sir W—m Y---ge". For details of Yonge's affiliation with Walpole and his literary activities, see H. T. Dickinson, "Sir William Yonge," ODNB 60 (2004), 820-823; and Romney Sedgwick, "William Yonge," in The House of Commons, 1715-1754, ed. Romney Sedgwick (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1970), II: 567-68.

³⁷ Compare with the praise of Yorkshire hunting in a contemporaneous publication, attributed to "Mr Bright's Hounds": The Famous Ballad of Badsworth Hunt: Or, The Fox-Chace ([London?]: c. 1730). For further background on hunt literature in the early eighteenth century, see Donna Landry, The Invention of the Countryside: Hunting, Walking and Ecology in English Literature, 1671-1831 (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001).

³⁸ George Cholmondeley, Viscount Malpas was at this time master of the horse to Prince Frederick as well as MP for Windsor. His involvement in the hunt might thus validate Houghton's festivities by association with royal equestrian culture in the years prior to Frederick's involvement in the opposition. See Eveline Cruickshanks, "Cholmondeley, Hon. George," in The House of Commons, I: 551.

³⁹ A New Miscellany, 18.

⁴⁰ In Hervey's Memoirs, he notes that Yonge's name "was proverbially used to express everything pitiful, corrupt, and contemptible," though he insists that the man was no more corrupt than many other parliamentarians who escaped such a reputation. See John, Lord Hervey, Some Materials towards Memoirs of the Reign of King George II, ed. Romney Sedgwick (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1931), I: 36. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu implicitly acknowledges Yonge's reputation for political maneuvering in a poem written from the perspective of his first wife, whom he divorced very publicly in 1724: "Go; Court the brittle Freindship [sic] of the Great, / Smile at his Board, or at his Levée wait." See "Epistle from Mrs. Y[onge] to her Husband" [1724] in Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Essays and Poems and Simplicity, A Comedy, ed. Robert Halsband and Isobel Grundy (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 230-2 (232).

⁴¹ See Maren-Sofie Røstvig, The Happy Man: Studies in the Metamorphoses of a Classical Ideal: Volume II – 1700-1760 (1958; repr., Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1971), 25.

⁴² Lord Walpole refers to Sir Robert's son, Robert, Viscount Walpole, later second Earl of Orford (1701-1751). Edgcombe appears to be an alternative spelling of Edgcumbe, referring to Richard Edgcumbe (1680-1758), close ally and friend of Sir Robert, and MP for Plympton Earle at the time the ballad was produced. For more details of Edgcumbe's allegiance to Walpole and his responsibility for protecting the Court Whig interest in Cornwall, see Eveline Cruickshanks, "Richard Edgcumbe," in The House of Commons, II: 3-4.

⁴³ For the "contrarities of good fellowship and violence" that likewise characterized the related custom of loyal-health drinking through the seventeenth century and into the eighteenth, see Angela McShane, "Material Culture and 'Political Drinking' in Seventeenth-Century England," Past and Present 22 (2014), supplement 9, 247-76 (266).

⁴⁴ Angela McShane notes a trend in broadside drinking songs of the seventeenth century to attack Whigs and Republicans as moderate beer drinkers, cut off from the tradition of heavy wine-drinking that came to demonstrate "loyal obedience" in Tory circles. In this light, the excessive consumption of Hogen at Houghton represents both an inversion of past stereotypes and an ironic corroboration of them. See Angela McShane, "Drink, Song and Politics in Early Modern England," Popular Music 35: 2 (2016), 166-90 (180-2).

⁴⁵ The annotation is by Sir Robert Walpole's son, Horace, the copy in question held at the Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University. See Note 51 for further details. I am grateful to the anonymous reviewers at Eighteenth-Century Studies for the very plausible suggestion that the author of the ballad was in fact Philip Lloyd, MP for Aylesbury at the likely time of the work's publication. For his association both with romantic misdemeanors and competitive drinking, see Eveline Cruickshanks, "Philip Lloyd," in The House of Commons, II: 220.

⁴⁶ Quotations are from a broadside copy of the ballad held at the British Library. [Philip Floyd], Prosperity to Houghton ([n. p], [1729?]).

⁴⁷ McShane describes this as a "popular character" in Restoration-era drinking songs, his "excessive drinking" rendering him "incapable of political designs and plotting." McShane, "Drink, Song and Politics," 178.

⁴⁸ The phrase, meaning "Now is the time to drink," opens Horace's Ode I: 37. The ode goes on to clarify that this drinking is in response to news of the defeat and death of Cleopatra, and so the work is considerably more grounded in its specific historical context than its initial words suggest.

⁴⁹ For the standard interpretation of Walpole and his defenders as opponents of wit and satire, see Bertrand A. Goldgar, Walpole and the Wits: The Relation of Politics to Literature, 1722-1742 (London: Univ. of Delaware Press, 1976), 11-23.

⁵⁰ Susanne Schmid and Barbara Schmidt-Haberkamp, “Introduction,” in Drink in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries, ed. Susanne Schmid and Barbara Schmidt-Haberkamp (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2014), 1-9 (5). For a similar argument concerning the ties between alcohol and principles of community in eighteenth-century georgic verse, see Kelly Ann McGuire, “‘Dire Computation’: Eighteenth-Century Georgics and the (Mis)Uses of Alcohol,” Lumen 23 (2004), 255-73 (264).

⁵¹ See Milton Percival, Political Ballads Illustrating the Administration of Sir Robert Walpole (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1916), 186-7. Percival does not reprint the songs in full but lists them in an appendix. Horace Walpole’s annotated copies of the three ballads are filed together under “Norfolk Verses” at the Lewis Walpole Library, having been found in Horace’s manuscript of Aedes Walpolianae (published 1747) by his twentieth-century editor.

⁵² For the usual responsiveness of published ballads to the print marketplace, see Angela McShane, “‘Ne sutor ultra crepidam’: Political Cobblers and Broadside Ballads in Late Seventeenth-Century England,” in Ballads and Broadsides in Britain, 1500-1800, ed. Patricia Fumerton and Anita Guerrini with the assistance of Kris McAbee (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 207-27 (225-6); also McShane, “Drink, Song and Politics,” 170.

⁵³ [Anon.], Houghton Hare-Hunting ([n. p], [1729?]).

⁵⁴ The Lord Lifford mentioned in the song is Frederic William de Roye de la Rochefoucauld (1666-1749), supposedly made Earl of Lifford in the Irish peerage by William III, but with the title never having been confirmed by patent. See The Complete Peerage, ed. H. A. Doubleday and Lord Howard de Walden (London: The St Catherine Press, 1929), vii, 650-51.

⁵⁵ In Act One, Scene Three of the highly successful play, Mr Peachum provides Gay’s most direct reference to Walpole: “Robin of Bagshot, alias Gorgon, alias Bluff Bob, alias Carbuncle, alias Bob Booty.” John Gay, The Beggar’s Opera (London: printed for John Watts, 1728), 3.

⁵⁶ These alternative meanings of “bob”, both dating from the sixteenth century, are given by the Oxford English Dictionary as bob, *n*³, 1 and 2 respectively.

⁵⁷ The breadth of Coxe’s assessment is encapsulated in one particular sentence: “But notwithstanding [...] the impropriety of such conduct, it undoubtedly gained and preserved to the minister numerous adherents, who applauded a mode of living so analogous to the spirit of ancient hospitality.” See Coxe, I: 759.

⁵⁸ For the view that opposition writers portrayed Walpole as “a grotesque, even bestial figure, a creature of enormous excesses,” see Jerry C. Beasley, “Portraits of a Monster: Robert Walpole and Early English Prose Fiction,” Eighteenth Century Studies 14: 4 (1981), 406-31 (419).

⁵⁹ See my discussion of the “criminal analogy” in Jones, Friendship and Allegiance, 165.

⁶⁰ Publication details, for which see Note 20, are otherwise identical. Subsequent quotations are to the edition not available from booksellers of London and Westminster.

⁶¹ Robin’s Panegyrick. Or. The Norfolk Miscellany (London: Printed for T. Tims, [1729?]), 85-88; The Norfolk Congress Versified (London: Printed for A. Moore, [1728?]).

⁶² See J. H. Plumb, King’s Minister, 89.

⁶³ Norfolk Congress, 3.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ The mistreatment of Captain Jenkins, who would eventually give his name to the War of Jenkins’ Ear (1739-45), took place in April 1731. It followed years of tension between Britain and Spain, including the British blockade of Porto Bello (1726-7) and the Spanish Siege of Gibraltar (1727), with relations only superficially improved by the Treaty of Seville (1729). See Brendan Simms, Three Victories and a Defeat: The Rise and Fall of the First British Empire, 1714-1783 (London: Allen Lane, 2007), 247-48.

⁶⁸ For instance, see the work that immediately follows The Norfolk Congress in Robin’s Panegyrick, a narrative entitled “The History of the Norfolk Steward.” This ridicules Walpole in the form of “Mr Lyn,” a humble steward who has become “immensely rich” and has lived lavishly through mismanagement of the landlord’s estate. See Robin’s Panegyrick, 89-92 (89).

⁶⁹ Norfolk Congress, 4.

⁷⁰ Norfolk Congress, 5. See Gilly Lehmann, “Politics in the Kitchen,” Eighteenth-Century Life 23: 2 (1999), 71-83 (74). For the hiring of Sollis in the wider context of French cuisine’s increasing popularity in early eighteenth-century Britain, see Rachel Laudan, Cuisine and Empire: Cooking in World History (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2013), 221.

⁷¹ Norfolk Congress, 5.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ With its mention of a “Vixen or She Fox” and “the He-Fox that belong’d to her” (Norfolk Congress, 4), the description of the hunt at first seems to reflect on Walpole’s use of Queen Caroline to influence George II. However, the allegory subsequently seems to move on to recent international history, the intervention in the hunt of “a large Eagle” (Norfolk Congress, 4) possibly symbolizing the Holy Roman Emperor’s claims to the Spanish throne. The reality of hunting at Houghton is entirely left behind at this stage.

⁷⁵ Norfolk Congress, 5-6.

⁷⁶ A New Norfolk Ballad. By Sir Francis Walsingham’s Ghost (London: Printed for A. Moore, [1730?]). This may be intended as a reclamation of Walsingham’s name from pro-government author William Arnall, who used it as a pseudonym in his journal The Free Briton (1729-1735). See Michael Harris, London Newspapers in the Age of Walpole (London: Associated Univ. Presses, 1987), 103.

⁷⁷ For Walpole’s proposals as an attempt to combat smuggling, see Paul Langford, The Excise Crisis: Society and Politics in the Age of Walpole (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 26.

⁷⁸ As one example, see The Norfolk Gamester: Or, The Art of Managing the Whole Pack (London: Printed for J. Dormer, 1734). This text caricatures Walpole as a cynical card sharp and Houghton hospitality as a scheme to swindle guests of their money.

⁷⁹ Alexander Pope, An Epistle to the Right Honourable Richard Earl of Burlington (London: Printed for L. Gilliver, 1731). For the argument that Pope intended Walpole and his “lavish entertainments” as his true satiric focus, see Kathleen Mahaffey, “Timon’s Villa: Walpole’s Houghton,” Texas Studies in Literature and Language 9: 2 (1967), 193-222 (196). Maynard Mack corroborates Mahaffey’s viewpoint and describes Pope’s suspicions that the misinterpretation of the poem had been deliberately cultivated by Walpole’s hirelings. See Mack, The Garden and the City, 122-26, 272-78.

⁸⁰ The novel was published on February 22nd 1742. Walpole had resigned on February 11th.

⁸¹ Morris Golden, “Public Context and Imagining Self in Joseph Andrews and Jonathan Wild,” Journal of English and Germanic Philology 88: 4 (1989), 487-509 (497-98). Golden’s main justification for drawing this parallel is the apparent resemblance between the squire’s uproarious household and “conditions at Houghton.”

⁸² Martin C. Battestin, “Fielding’s Changing Politics and Jonathan Wild,” Philological Quarterly 39 (1960), 39-55.

⁸³ Henry Fielding, The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews, and of his Friend, Mr Abraham Adams

(London: Printed for A. Millar, 1742), II: 97.

⁸⁴ Ibid., II: 119.

⁸⁵ Ibid., II: 114.

⁸⁶ Ibid., II: 120.

⁸⁷ Ibid., II: 122.