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“A Welshman coming to London and seeing a Jackanapes...” : how jokes and slang differentiated eighteenth-century Londoners from the rest of Britain

London experienced complex and dramatic demographic change during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and its population grew from approximately 200,000 in 1600 to around 900,000 by 1800, by which time it was acknowledged as the pre-eminent city in Europe.¹ As an urban centre London left the rest of Great Britain in its wake. In 1700 the second biggest city in England, Bristol, had a population of just thirty thousand.² Such high levels of population growth were sustained, in spite of high levels of mortality, by large numbers of immigrants pouring into the city.³

London therefore was a city teeming with outsiders. A survey of three thousand residents in 1781 found that only one quarter were London-born. It is estimated that over the century at least half of London's population were born outside the metropolis.⁴ Some of these immigrants came from abroad, yet the vast majority of newcomers came from closer to home: the near and far counties of England, and the nations of Wales, Ireland and Scotland.⁵ They came to a place where the language was (mostly) familiar, but the buildings, sights, customs, codes of behaviour, rituals and work patterns were unlike anything they had seen before. These newcomers to the city had to learn its social codes and modes of living, adapt to its speed and bustle, and learn to speak its language before they could become assimilated, and leave behind the mantle of naïve *arriviste*. They brought also their own accents and dialects, customs and habits, which contributed to the sense of flux and change on the bustling streets of the growing Metropolis.⁶

The majority of immigrants were young (typically aged fifteen to twenty-two), and with their youth came energy and ambition. Many, though not all, were driven by poverty or lack of opportunity elsewhere. They sought betterment through the variety of work and trade apprenticeships London offered, its higher wages, and the atmosphere of freedom, vibrancy and lack of small-town restraint.⁷ This was in contrast to the desperate subsistence migration, arising from widespread destitution and declining wages, which characterised many migrants before 1650.⁸ Eighteenth-century London, even for the poor, offered opportunities to pursue dreams of wealth and status in what was effectively a new land. Yet these newcomers were perceived as gaping and gawking awkwardly in the face of the sheer noise they encountered, the great buildings, the crowds, the ships, carriages, filth and opulence, which nothing in their previous experience could have prepared them for. Despite this overwhelming introduction to the city, many, over time, became established denizens of London in their own right, marrying fellow immigrants or native Londoners and establishing households in London for the rest of their lives.⁹ A process of assimilation and integration clearly therefore took place. It is difficult to identify precisely how this came about.

London's physical shape and extent were changing. It was becoming, as Merritt has described it, 'a complex web of interwoven communities'¹⁰ which by the late seventeenth century was extending east, west and south far beyond the walls of the original City.¹¹ As the physical topography changed, the meaning of what constituted 'London' came under challenge. There was not yet a sense that these growing suburban areas were necessarily connected as one city, despite their increasing physical connectedness. There were oppositions, with distinctive social dynamics, between east and west, centre and suburbs, and an evolving language of differentiation between the 'Court' (Westminster, or parts of it), the 'Town' (the West End) and the 'City'¹² The idea of the parish was changing, with new, larger, and more densely populated suburban parishes very different in atmosphere to the highly localised communities of common worship to be found in the remaining small, traditional City parishes.¹³ It is questionable therefore whether there was yet a unifying metropolitan-wide idea of 'London' at the beginning of the eighteenth century, but ideas about the developing cityscape, and what it meant to live in it, were changing.

There were no doubt many complex ways in which new and old residents of London built their sense of identity and place. The inhabitants of the city were, as Merritt has pointed out, active participants in its changes, not passive observers.¹⁴ I will argue that part of this process of establishing identity and status for those living in the burgeoning metropolis involved self-presentation in opposition to negative characterisations of those from outside, particularly visitors or recent arrivals. Somehow both the newly-arrived and the settled individuals living in this growing city needed to make some sort of sense of the urban environment in which they found themselves, with its disparate areas slowly joining together and the cacophony of languages, dialects, cultures and behaviours on its teeming streets. They had other loyalties, their places of origin, fellow countrymen, their guilds, trades or occupations, sometimes their immediate neighbourhoods, yet they found themselves living in something much larger and harder to define, a city that was 'extended, amorphous, inadequately underpinned by formal structure.'¹⁵

An important part of this construction of an identity through a negative characterisation of outsiders was to mock and laugh at non-Metropolitans and the newly arrived through the use of jokes and derogatory slang terms. By doing this, people identified themselves as confident, established, settled and worldly-wise inhabitants of the city, against the naivety, gullibility and low intelligence of the incomers they ridiculed. Their mockery focused on the bewilderment, incredulity and confusion of newcomers and visitors in the face of the immense energy that London exuded. Immigrant Londoners, once established, therefore adopted the same sharply humorous characterisations of those who came after them that they had had to endure themselves, expressed through a certain level of humiliation, derision and belittlement. This use of humour against outsiders, cruel and shocking as it may at times sound to modern ears, should not be understood as a blanket objectification of the stranger and the different, or as necessarily characterising strangers as 'transgressive, ugly and inherently worthy of contempt', as one historian has summarised

the ideology of eighteenth-century humour.¹⁶ It could at times be a form of mediation, whose purpose was to establish the joke-teller as one who had come to belong, and the newcomer (the object of the joke) as a person who needed to undergo the same transformative process. There were times when certain immigrant groups were perceived as a threat to stability and the social order and in such cases - particularly the Scots throughout the century and 'Negroes' at the end of the century – the humour took a more abusive and objectifying turn. However I will argue that for the most part the humour was concerned more with creating self-identity for those living in the city than at belittling those who were its object. The humour of jokes and slang also expressed the ways in which people at the time sought to categorise and make sense of the diversity in London's chaotic daily street life. Finally it helped to create a shared sense of place and identity for those who chose to live there. It was in this way that those who lived London, many of them originally from elsewhere, referred to Taffys from Wales, Sawneys from Scotland, Paddy-whacks from Ireland and the churls, clumps, clod hoppers, hicks, joskins, natives, Johnny Raws, rustics and youkells (*sic*) of the English provinces.¹⁷

It should first be emphasised that London as a city of outsiders, subject to large inflows of immigrants, was not a new phenomenon peculiar to the eighteenth century. Even Norman London had inflows of Norwegian, Danish, French and Flemish traders with some rights of residence.¹⁸ The late fourteenth century saw discernible flows of provincials of both the labouring and merchant classes to London as the city lived on after the devastation of the plague.¹⁹ New arrivals were coming in so rapidly from every part of England, as well as abroad, in the late sixteenth century that Elizabeth I issued proclamations on overcrowding and new building.²⁰ London jokes and slang about outsiders were already prevalent in seventeenth-century London.²¹ Criminal canting slang had always divided the world into London (Romeville), and everywhere else (Deusa Ville).²² Yet over the eighteenth century there emerged a sense of a type of person who was capable of living in the city, part of a collective identity, actively engaged in the life of the city, rather than a passive presence as an inhabitant. When the simple country boy Will is caught *in flagrante* with Cleland's fictional prostitute Fanny Hill, he is sent back to the country by his master as 'the town is no place for such an easy fool as thou art.'²³ To belong in the metropolis demanded capabilities and commitment, which marked the individual out as a citizen. There was of course a long-standing dichotomy between town and country, urban and rural, in which urban dwellers classed themselves as intelligent, quick-witted and sophisticated, against the slow-witted stupidity of the countryman. Likewise the country dweller could be characterised as honest, blunt and sincere, against the corruption, duplicity and mendacity of the urbanite. None of this was new to the eighteenth century or applied only to London. However, an explosion of print in the eighteenth century, together with an expansion of literacy, enabled the jokes and slang which expressed these ideas to become widely held and influence opinion. Because of the overwhelming dominance of the city both as an urban centre and as the

centre of the printing trade in Britain, these widely disseminated urban jokes became almost synonymous with London jokes. At the same time, the population of London, or what was slowly becoming London as its suburban parts began to link, had reached such a stage that old constructions of identity were diminishing in significance, and new formations were needed. Understandings of the Metropolis were altering to fit the changing shape of the city.²⁴ Shared humour was just one small but possible way in which inhabitants of London could feel commonality.

The humour of the eighteenth century has survived in the jest books and chapbooks which were produced in their tens of thousands throughout the century and in dictionaries of slang terms from the London streets, assiduously collected and published by antiquarian gentlemen, most famously Francis Grose in his *Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue*, (1784). There were hundreds of different jest book titles, and while it is difficult to ascertain precisely the extent of readership, they were clearly popular and widely read, as each season mainstream publishers issued reprints of old favourites and up to twenty new titles.²⁵ They would not, it can be assumed, have done this had demand not existed. They came in a range of genres from bound book form, retailing often at around a shilling and targeted at those with disposable income; to penny chapbooks; to single quarto sheets (with titles such as *The penny budget of wit*), sold for as little as a farthing by chapmen door to door or on the streets, and affordable even by the barely literate poor. The humour cut across classes, with the same jokes appearing in the more expensive books and the cheaper pamphlets, and some fashionable jestbooks abridged as chapbooks or sold in weekly parts to poorer consumers.²⁶ The consumption of humour, therefore, was an activity that could appeal to London's disparate populations and classes. Some were read aloud by literate members of local communities, others were specifically designed to be carried around in the pocket to provide a supply of ready wit for those about to join company.²⁷

Because it is historically contingent, humour has come to be seen as an important medium for gaining insight into historic mentalities. Changes in what constitutes humour can give, as Thomas has noted, some insight into the fundamental values and innermost assumptions of past societies, and their changing sensibilities.²⁸ Bremmer more recently has seen humour as a gateway to unlocking the changing cultural codes of the past, and historians have rejected Freud's notion of humour as an unchanging, universal, ahistorical ontology.²⁹ Gatrell, in his work on late-eighteenth-century humour, has argued that 'the reflex of laughter is controlled by mental processes; and mental processes have *histories*... studying laughter can take us to the heart of a generation's shifting attitudes, sensibilities and anxieties just as surely as the study of misery, politics, faith or art can.'³⁰

Jokes and laughter are also social and communicative. Jokes in particular can create a form of group harmony, and reveal the psychological arenas, with their shared, implicit assumptions, within which these groups operate.³¹ We cannot of course read jokes as if they are 'unproblematic indicators of social reality,'³² as by their nature they simplify, subvert, fantasise and create absurdity. Their meanings change according to nuance and intention, who is telling, who is listening, and why.³³ However, people 'joked about what they saw'³⁴ and the joke could only do its work if teller and receiver shared broad normative social and cultural assumptions. Freud noted the role of the joke as an important social signifier, with its 'fascinating attraction... passed on from one to another like news of the latest victory.'³⁵

Slang, like jokes, built group identity, with its origins in the canting language of criminals, devised to deceive, defraud and conceal as well as create a distinctive alternative subculture.³⁶ The ability of slang to hide meanings from the unsuspecting meant that it was ideally applied against outsiders and highlighted their oddity, their vulnerability and their unfamiliarity with the shared cultural codes and practices of London's inhabitants.³⁷ Slang was therefore a rich source of popular opinion about the looks and behaviour of the idiotic, dull-witted, exploitable outsiders who blundered onto the London streets. They were the 'culls' and 'bubbles', 'silly easy fellows' who could be easily 'buttoned' or drawn in. Slang, like fashion, is used 'to define in-groups and out-groups'.³⁸ It is of course not uncomplicated as a source. The very moment in 1699 when the gentleman called 'B.E.' created his dictionary of *The terms ancient and modern of the canting crew* or when, in 1784, Grose published his *Classical dictionary*, marked the point at which this language passed from the private, concealed sphere to the public realm. It was appropriated by the gaze of the wealthier classes, frozen on the printed page, and so denuded of its *raison d'être*. Yet prior to this public revealing it was drawn, at least in part, from authentic sources. Grose, it was claimed, toured the back slums and drinking dens of St Giles, the notorious poverty-stricken and crime-ridden area around present-day Tottenham Court Road, with his man, Batch, and from 'these nocturnal sallies, and the *slang* expressions which continually assaulted his ears',³⁹ he compiled his dictionary, laying before the world the secret codes of plebeian London.

Residents of London found much to laugh at. Gatrell has described most of the eighteenth century as a time in which 'laughter flowed around other people's appearances, mishaps and affectation', when London was the 'city of laughter.'⁴⁰ Humour was taken very seriously and attracted intellectual attention. Thomas Hobbes in 1651 had defined humour as an expression of superiority and contempt, a delight in the failings and miseries of others brought on by observation of their misfortunes.⁴¹ Eighteenth-century commentators and theorists, in this town of 'absurdities... smutty jests',⁴² built on Hobbes's superiority theory.

Corbyn Morris argued in 1744 that humour came from observation of others: it was ‘any whimsical oddity or foible appearing in the temper or conduct of a person in real life’,⁴³ these oddities and foibles enhancing the observer’s feeling of personal superiority. Francis Hutcheson drew attention specifically to the humour to be derived from the humiliating deficiencies in the speech and actions of those from rural areas:

If then along with our notion of wisdom in our fellows, there occurs any instance of gross inadvertence, or great mistake, this is a great cause of laughter. Our countrymen are very subject to little trips of the tongue, and furnish of these, some diversion to their neighbours, not only by mistakes in their speech, but in actions.⁴⁴

Bemused newcomers to London, gaping-mouthed at the surrounding sights, dressed in the style of the bumpkin or distant lands such as Ireland or Wales, falling on their backsides as they were jostled by the crowds in the unfamiliar streets, were therefore intrinsically amusing to the established Londoner, because of the whimsicality and singularity of their behaviour. Matters became even more amusing, according to Morris, if similar or opposite subjects were unexpectedly juxtaposed with the main object of the laughter.⁴⁵ A bedraggled, slow-witted countryman or Celt wandering the streets of London was amusing because of his inherent oddity. He became hilarious when placed in opposition to some of the unique features of London, such as its exotic animal pets, its grand buildings, its dandies and its frantic, bustling street life.

The humour was not necessarily aggressive or hostile. There were subtle differences and gradations in types of humour, and the levels of laughter they elicited. These ranged from the gentle amusement of raillery, which was ‘a genteel, poignant Attack of a Person upon any slight Foible, Oddities or Embarrassments of his’ to the hilarity of ridicule, which ‘is justly employ’d, not upon the Vices, but the *Foibles* and *Meanness* of Persons.’⁴⁶ A person who stood out because of their intentional conduct or behaviour was worthy of greater ridicule than those who, like most newcomers to London, behaved in a strange way unconsciously or unintentionally. However, even ridicule did not imply hatred or loathing for its object. It was ‘directed not to raise your *Detestation*, but your *Derision* and *Contempt*.’⁴⁷ Contempt had a very specific meaning at this time: it was an action, the direction of derisive laughter against someone because of something about them, rather than its far more pejorative modern usage.⁴⁸ When a country person or a Celt was ridiculed or laughed at, they were not generally being hated or loathed; their oddity and strangeness were being observed, noted and categorised as an object for amusement, and also as a reinforcement of the group identity of those who were laughing. As Gatrell has said, ‘there was candour in eighteenth-century laughter – incorrectness, and an inability to be mealy-mouthed.’⁴⁹

There was, however, some concern that to laugh at people simply because of their natural state, to ridicule them because of who they were, was wrong. Was it acceptable for those in London to laugh at those who lived elsewhere and, consequently in their opinion, were not as mentally agile or smart? Blackmore counselled heartless wits that ‘to make a

man contemptible... by deriding him for his... low degree of Understanding, is a great abuse of ingenious faculties.⁵⁰ The German philosopher George Friedrich Meier echoed this, insisting that 'when a droll and ridiculous form is merely a natural defect, it claims our compassion and forbearance.'⁵¹ However, the threshold was set very high for the point at which ridicule should give way to compassion. Meier himself argued that 'many Failings and Miscarriages deserve a slight Ridicule', and that for the humour to work 'the ridiculous, which is exposed by the jest, must be actually in the object.'⁵² It was acceptable to laugh at people because they were different from those who were laughing. To comment humorously on a person's difference, to ridicule and mock, was not regarded as necessarily pitiless or objectifying, unless it attained a high level of violent abusiveness. Everybody, for one reason or another, was subject to ridicule. People who lived in London could laugh at outsiders, according to this theory, without being pitiless or cruel. It was, however, further understood that, at a certain level, humour could be used as a tool of denigration and condemnation: yet this was the exception rather than the rule.

Jokes and ridiculing slang were at least a form of bestowing attention on those to whom they were directed, in a world in which humour was highly prized. To be ignored, not included in the ridiculing culture, was the cruellest, most marginalising fate. As Corbyn Morris put it in 1744, 'the biggest challenge to ease in relationships is not Disrespect but Negligence and Disregard... an inconvenience arising from the *Respect* which is paid to us may be easily excused; but ... *Neglect*... gives a lasting offence.'⁵³ It was better to be seen and 'jeered' than to be ignored and, ultimately, forgotten. In 1783, Samuel Johnson echoed Morris: 'I hope the day will never come when I shall neither be the subject of calumny or ridicule, for then I shall be neglected and forgotten.'⁵⁴ The ridicule of outsiders and newcomers by those who lived in London at least acknowledged their existence, which opened up the prospect of acceptance one day.

Humour, then, could be an important shared experience in this city of new arrivals with their roots elsewhere, and a signal of identity. Jestbooks were a means both of capturing the humour of the streets and of producing and circulating new humour. Their titles ranged from the mercilessly jocular – *Joaks upon joaks or no Joak like a true Joak* (1720) – to the cosy – *The winter evening's entertainment* (1737) – to the patriotic – *England's genius or wit triumphant* (1734). Sometimes they offered simple cheer to the downhearted, as in *The lottery jest book: or fun even for the losers* (1777). Many of the jokes were constantly recycled, some even from the smaller number of books that had been published in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, showing that jokes made in London about outsiders were not a new thing. However their circulation in print and public reception was now much wider, given growing literacy (particularly in London) and an explosion of cheap printed material after the expiration of press licencing in 1695.⁵⁵ Some specialised, such as *The Irish Miscellany: or Teagueland Jests* (1746) and *The sailors jester: or merry lad's companion* (1790). For the most part, however, these simply infiltrated hapless Irish and sailor characters into existing well-worn jests. Above all these jest books

were urban creations: they were urban jokes, invented and told by urban people, from an urban point of view.⁵⁶ And, given the size and dominance of London against other urban centres of Britain in the eighteenth century, for most, urban meant London. There is a sense in the jokes of inhabitants of the Metropolis being on the inside: urbane, witty, knowing and superior, whatever their class and wherever they originally came from. Alongside the jokes, and often part of a process of cross-fertilisation, was the slang, invariably specifically London slang, collected and published in the slang dictionaries.⁵⁷

Slang terms were invariably disparaging about places, people and goods from outside London. Non-Londoners were seen as the opposite of Londoners: slow, dull, unintelligent and strange in their habits and appearance. Rural visitors and newcomers were boobies, bumpkins, chaw-bacons, clodpates, country puts, hick jops, clouted shoons, hobinails, milestones and clowns. The rustic was barely distinguishable from the animals and birds amongst which he dwelt. He was a bull calf, a donkey, a pea goose and a sheep's head. Popular rural names became nouns to denote stupidity; a Ben, Dick, Roger, Sam, Jack Adams, Johnny Raw, Simon or Donkey Dick. They had thick skulls and little brain: they were hulver-heads, hulver being Norfolk dialect for a hard, solid wood, and Norfolk being the epicentre of rural stupidity. Beat a rural blockhead, fat head, loggerhead or thick head with a cudgel and he would simply come back for more. He was about physicality, not brain power – his brains, it was suggested, were in his ballocks.⁵⁸

Eighteenth-century London pulled in foodstuffs and raw materials from the rest of Britain, much of which was transformed, embellished and re-exported by artisans and craftsmen.⁵⁹ Slang therefore defined the people of London as inhabitants of a superior space, as more knowing and dynamic people, and producers and consumers of high quality goods. Those from elsewhere, conversely, were seen as consumers and suppliers of low quality goods, and there were specific characterisations for inhabitants of different regions. Bristolians, the nearest rivals to London as occupants of a large trading city, were dismissed as slothful, unproductive drinkers of 'Bristol milk' – meaning sherry. This, said Grose, was 'much drank at that place, especially in the mornings.' The people of Birmingham were mean with poor taste, producers of 'Brummagem wine', the term used by Londoners for small beer, the weak and insipid beer which rogue landlords tried to pass off as the real thing. Regional, non-London, accents were a target for ridicule. Northumberland was 'Croakumshire', because of the perceived peculiar croaking in the pronunciation of people from Newcastle, known to Londoners because they shipped their coal. The products of other places were derided. Calves, supplied to the London slaughterhouses from rural Essex, were 'Essex Lions'. A 'Durham man' was a knock-kneed man: Durham supplied London with its mustard, and Durham men became knock-kneed through a life of rubbing mustard seeds between their legs. Norfolk was seen as the home of the most egregious form of stupid person, epitomised as the Norfolk dumpling, ('a term of jocular reproach to a

Norfolk man' as Grose put it), as well as the hulver-head, who was unique to the county. (see *illustration1*). From Ireland came Irish apricots, which were of course potatoes, from Wales came the Welsh comb – a thumb and four fingers – while the Scots brought Scotch chocolate, a foul-tasting concoction of brimstone and milk. While different regions were characterised in different ways, these characterisations were unified by a sense of London superiority to the inferior minds, ridiculous habits and worthless products offered up from elsewhere.

Disease, particularly venereal disease, known as the scratch or the itch, was almost always described by Londoners as an import. Sometimes it had exotic foreign origins in the form of the French disease or Spanish gout. Unfortunates might suffer 'a blow over the snout by a French faggot stick', meaning that they had lost their nose as a result of the pox.⁶⁰ However, more commonly sexual diseases were deemed to come from the different parts of Britain. Thus Scotland was known as Itchland or Scratchland, and the carelessly promiscuous were in danger of acquiring the Welsh fiddle or the Scotch itch. Parts of London, of course, retained their own distinct identities, and residents could acquire the clap from locals, but only if they were careless enough to consort with a Covent Garden nun, (a prostitute), in which case they might catch the Drury Lane ague.

Many of the jokes expressed the pride of Londoners in the overwhelming scale and exoticism of their city. Harding has noted a shift in emphasis from the later seventeenth century, from fearfulness and resistance to the growth of London, to a celebration of its size and different parts.⁶¹ In jestbooks there was joy at the gaping-mouthed bewilderment of country visitors, who gazed 'mouths half-cockt' at the sights that assaulted their eyes. A startling sight of the river below London Bridge was the densely packed shipping, alongside the warehouses, shops and fine houses.⁶² A recurring joke has a countryman seeing the huge ships in the London docks and on being told (by an inhabitant of the city of course) they are a year old, wonders how large they will be by the time they are adults.⁶³ They observe the towering new St Paul's being built and marvel that it must have cost even more than the forty shillings they spent on their new barn.⁶⁴ 'Ignorant clowns' misread signs with comical effects, and fall on their backsides on London's streets, shouting 'London can kiss my arse'.⁶⁵ They visit the theatre, wide-eyed, only to leave when the actors appear on stage, as they do not wish to disturb 'the gentlemen... talking about business.'⁶⁶ The country idiot was not simply a witty conceit but occupied a meaningful space in people's consciousness; amused Old Bailey juries would acquit an accused thief on the grounds that 'he was a poor silly country fellow and might be easily drawn in'.⁶⁷

The exoticism and new sights of London overwhelmed visitors to such a great extent that they began to lose their grip on reality, to the amusement of Londoners. Monkey jokes

were common and involved bewildered newcomers being unsure as to who was human and who was not, in this city of wonders. Hutcheson commented that it was the ingenuity of monkeys in coming 'near to some of our own arts' that 'very often makes us merry.'⁶⁸ Monkeys, also known as jackanapes and commonly kept as pets in London, were mistaken by ignorant visitors for servants, foreigners, page boys and the Indian ambassador.⁶⁹ A monkey sitting astride a dog was taken for a hairy jockey.⁷⁰ Sometimes the jokes fondly satirised the people of London themselves as well as the newcomers. A country fellow delivers a letter to a monkey at a gentleman's door because, as he explained later, 'Truly sir... I thought it was your son, it was so like you.'⁷¹ A 1773 jest book was dedicated entirely to the 'Macaroni dandy', the most outrageous of all of London's dandies, who wore flamboyant costumes based on sailor uniforms, and wigs so tall that they would use a sword to perch a small hat on them. A country gentleman encounters two 'Macaronis' on the street and, on seeing them, he offers to buy them, because 'I kept a Monkey at home, but I never see one so big as them before.'⁷² A Welshman, coming to London for the first time and called, in the joke-writer's excruciating approximation of a Welsh accent, Shon ap Shenkin, (John ap Jenkins), goes into a shop and hands money to the pet jackanapes, mistaking it for the owner's aged father, then complaining that 'hir won't give hir my shange', ('he won't give me my change').⁷³

Non-Londoners, as well as being deceived by what they saw, were also deceived by London's inhabitants. The practical joke was highly prized. The reformer Francis Place described how as a youth in the 1780s he and his gang would nail the coats and dresses of unsuspecting window shoppers to wooden shop fronts.⁷⁴ These practical jokes were all the funnier if played on the 'bubbles', the easy prey newcomers and visitors to the city, 'soft easy fellows' who were 'fit to be imposed upon, deluded or cheated'.⁷⁵ One joke featured an Irishman visiting London for the first time. He decides to take his first ride in a sedan chair, a symbol of the capital's sophisticated transport system. The wily operators of the chair, the chairmen, prepared for just such a dull-witted visitor, have a specially adapted sedan where the floor has been sawn out. The visitor gets in, but his feet are of course on the ground, and the chairmen parade him to his destination, he walking inside the chair to keep up with them, to the mirth and derision of the mob. At the end the Irishman pays his fare, but expresses bewilderment that Londoners should be so unkind to themselves as to use such a tiring mode of transport, when they could be riding on horseback.⁷⁶ This joke was so popular that it was produced as a print for sale, *Paddy Whack's first ride in a sedan*, by Isaac Cruikshank in 1800 (see illustration 2).

Each of the nations of the kingdom was characterised in certain ways by jokes showing amused and bewildered Celts in London. The Irish were amusingly illogical, literal and, as the sedan chair jest illustrates, easy prey to practical jokes. They were often referred

to in jests as 'honey', as this was frequently the term they used to address others. In this way, a 'poor honey' acquired the meaning of a 'harmless, foolish, good-natured fellow'.⁷⁷ The characterisation was largely affectionate, although a hint of danger lurked beneath, as the Irish were feared as inveterate brawlers on the London streets. This ambivalence was summed up in the term 'it's all honey or all turd with them', which referred to those who 'are either in the extremity of friendship or enmity, either kissing or fighting.'⁷⁸ Welsh people were characterised as garrulous, whimsical, credulous and naïve, and joke writers gave them comedy accents. If somewhat witless, the Welsh were overwhelmingly harmless and well-intentioned.

Behind the jokes about the Welshman and the monkey and the Irishman and the sedan chair, lie some intimations of public attitudes towards these immigrants. Given the simple-mindedness and gullibility with which they were characterised, the Welsh were a favourite and frequent butt of the metropolitan joke, seen as hailing from a land where tall, and long, stories were told, (and believed), about dragons and ghosts. A long and tedious story was known as a 'Welch mile'.⁷⁹ However, the large Welsh population in the capital was popular. One of a number of great seasonal migrations into the metropolitan area consisted of hundreds of Welsh women, who would come, on foot, from North Wales to work in the market gardens feeding the city, from spring through to autumn. They picked fruit, gathered peas, made hay and then carried the loads of fruit on their heads from areas such as Ealing or Brentford to Covent Garden, sometimes twice each day. They were attractive to Londoners, who admired their gay, healthy appearance and neat clothes.⁸⁰ One admirer wrote: 'for beauty, symmetry and complexion they are not inferior to the nymphs of Arcadia... their morals are exemplary.'⁸¹ The London Welsh were an accepted, unthreatening and integrated presence in London communities, supplying 'pettifogging solicitors' as well as chairmen, footmen, milkmaids and porters.⁸² Their prevalence in the street-portering trade was the source of a joke about a nobleman sending out his Irish footman to get a porter, meaning a draught of strong beer, and his coming back with a Welshman.⁸³ The telling of jokes about the Welsh was clearly not a matter of uncomplicated dislike, othering, or marginalisation. The jokes were part of a construction of a metropolitan identity against naïve outsiders. The outsiders came in many forms: as silly Welshmen, dim countrymen, mean 'Brummagem' folk, Irish honeys, Cornish hags, Norfolk hulver heads and dumplings, and Yorkshire tykes. Their unifying feature was that they were not from London, and therefore offered just cause for derision to the urbanites who lived there, of all classes.

It is significant that the butt of the sedan chair joke was an Irishman. There were some chairmen of other nationalities – two chairmen who gave evidence in a civil court case in 1733 for example were Welshmen called Evan Evans and Evan Davis⁸⁴ – but many chairmen were themselves Irish.⁸⁵ In a notorious incident in 1763 there was a pitched battle between a party of sailors and a number of Irish chairmen in Covent Garden ending with the sailors demolishing every one of the Irishmen's sedan chairs they could find.⁸⁶ In people's

minds chairmen were associated with the Irish population, and in their reading of the joke therefore they would have envisioned Irish inhabitants of London making a fool of Irish visitors to London. Seen in this way, the joke can be understood as an example of London immigrants who have attained a place in the citadel and are both consolidating their own position and instructing those who come after them. They remain Irish, (chairmen were strongly identified as such⁸⁷) but also present as assimilated urbanites, who know the ways of the city and who have become smart and knowing, They would mercilessly dole out the same harsh lessons to their fellow-countrymen newcomers as they once had to endure themselves. The jokes told about 'others' in London, and the tricks played on them, were often perpetrated by those who had once been 'others' themselves. In the land of the newcomer, occupation was all, and the city of immigrants glared down from the high ground of their newly-won, and hard-won, status, and laughed at those who remained outside, or struggled to establish themselves inside.

If most jokes and slang terms about outsiders were affectionate, or at least relatively harmless, forms of ridicule, there was a point, and were there particular groups, where the line between ridicule and hostility was crossed. There was certainly a harsher, more demeaning and abusive tone to jokes about Scots. An iterative jest asked why there were no lice in Scotland, the answer being that they always travel south (meaning to London).⁸⁸ Scots were seen as a greater threat to the status quo than either the Welsh or Irish and therefore attracted a more vituperative tone in both jokes and slang. They were associated with Jacobitism, 'Popery' and France, and there were strong anti-Scottish reactions in London after both the 1715 and 1745-46 Jacobite rebellions. Anti-Scottish feeling peaked in London in the 1760s, all Scots condemned by association, as the hated chief minister and favourite of George III, the Earl of Bute, was attacked and pelted with mud by the mob in 1761.⁸⁹ '*Scotland sends us Pedlars, Beggars, and Quacks*' claimed an anonymous polemicist in the year before the second rebellion.⁹⁰ The truth was very different. There was in fact a high level of envy towards Scots, who supplied London with influential politicians, intellectuals, architects, artists and other professionals.⁹¹ Furthermore, due to the superiority of Scottish education, their boys were in demand as shop and office workers.⁹² 'Sawneys' and 'Sandys' were often portrayed in a vengeful way, joyless, dour, cold, characters threatening the vivacious spirit of London, and a 'scotch warming pan' was a wench,⁹³ the implication being that Scotsmen were strictly functional in their relationships, strangers to joy and passion. The tone and nature of the humour attached to a group varied, according to where they stood on a commonly understood scale of potential harmfulness.

This was also evident in a sharp change in tone towards the 'Negro' population in jokes from the 1780s onwards. In the earlier part of the century, although there was a reasonably substantial black population in London, they were rarely the butt of jokes. They were acknowledged in slang but, by eighteenth-century standards, this was quite mild in

tone; 'chimney-chops' was a nickname used for black people and 'St Giles blackbirds' were black beggars in the poorest part of town.⁹⁴ After 1783 there was an influx of black soldiers who had fought on the British side in the revolutionary war, who quickly fell into destitution and beggary. 'Negro' jokes entered the jest book from 1790, and the Negro became a much-used stock character from the 1800s. They were portrayed as buffoonish, simple-minded and comedy-accented, blundering their way through life misunderstanding what was going on around them and calling out to 'Massa' for help. They gulped down grog too quickly and found it was 'too 'trong Massa',⁹⁵ and they worried that in the dark the Devil might 'take away de poor negro man.'⁹⁶ Negroes were even humorous when about to be flogged, seemingly as impervious to pain as the previous century's bone-headed yokel: 'Massa, if you flogee flogee; or if you preachee preachee; but no preachee and flogee too!'⁹⁷ It is unlikely to have been coincidental that the Negro became a target of the jest book shortly after black beggars became a visible presence on London's streets. They had been an unremarkable part of the population who attracted general sympathy and support until the 1780s.⁹⁸ This new vagabond presence may have begun, the tone of the jokes suggests, to transform perceptions from tolerance and acceptance to threat. Threatening populations such as Scots and Negroes needed to be demeaned and admonished through the joke. Communities who carried less threat, such as the Welsh, the country bumpkins and to a large extent the Irish, (although they were perceived as a threat to indigenous worker's wages), could simply be ridiculed.

The fate of the Scot and the Negro in the jest book would become part of a wider general discursive shift in the constitution of humour linked to the 'evangelical awakening' of the early nineteenth century. In Gatrell's words, 'in and after the 1820s low life was increasingly represented as a terrain of anxiety and didactic moralisation; it became less and less funny.'⁹⁹ The displaced comic bumpkins and Celts began to exit the jest book. These moralising changes within the realm of the joke were accompanied by the sanitisation of the slang dictionary, which rejected much of the bawdy and sometimes obscene street language of Grose in favour of 'flash', the stylish 'slick lingo of London's ultra-fashionable world.'¹⁰⁰ All this was accompanied by a wider conceptual change in the idea of humour, or of what was suitable to make people laugh. Gatrell has observed that although there were continuities in what constituted humour, there was a 'significant change that happened quite quickly' around the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries. This included the emergence of taboos about sexual and scatological humour and squeamishness about the lower body parts in particular, and disorder in general.¹⁰¹ External decency of behaviour was now more generally expected and a drive for improvement in manners and morals was linked to a campaign for a more disciplined urban order, which aimed to leave behind the rude excesses of the Georgians.¹⁰² This left little space for discourse about unruly and unpredictable out-of-town newcomers who deviated from expected norms. These now faced what has been called a general 'cleansing process',

sustained by 'a deepening wish to control, moralise and pathologise those who defied that process.'¹⁰³

All of this diminished the role of the joke, and of slang, in helping to make sense of the bewildering, plural and amorphous space that London became from the later seventeenth century and throughout the eighteenth. It signalled an exit from the jest book of a whole cast of other characters: idiots, bawdy prostitutes, urinating drunks, comic cripples and dwarfs, bamboozled deaf and blind people and lusty women. These were the comedy cast of the eighteenth-century London street, recognisable to those who inhabited and moved around the city. Their demise meant, in the end, the demise of the jest book itself, the jokes 'consigned to oblivion or cleaned up as children's literature.'¹⁰⁴ Joe Miller's jest book of 1836 dropped its most tasteless jokes in deference to 'the greater delicacy observed in modern society and conversation.'¹⁰⁵

However before their suppression in a newly polite and moral London, jokes and slang supplied those who inhabited this bewildering urban environment with the ability to laugh at outsiders, and sense both their difference and superiority over them. They played a small part in allowing a growing, diverse and constantly changing population to define itself against the rest. (7467 words)

¹ See: V Harding, 'City, Capital and Metropolis: the changing shape of seventeenth-century London', in (ed.) J F Merritt, *Imagining Early Modern London: perceptions and portrayals of the city from Stow to Strype 1598-1720*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001), 117; R Shoemaker, *The London Mob: violence and disorder in eighteenth-century London*, (Hambledon and London, London, 2004), 10; T Hitchcock & R Shoemaker, *London lives: poverty, crime and the making of a modern city 1690-1800*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge), 2015, 29-30; V Harding, 'The population of London 1550-1700: a review of the published evidence', *London Journal*, 15:2, 1990, 111-128; P Earle, *A city full of people: men and women of London 1650-1750*, (Methuen, London, 1994), 16

² J. White, *London in the eighteenth century: a great and monstrous thing* (London, The Bodley Head, 2012), 3.

³ Hitchcock and Shoemaker, *London Lives*, 30-31, Earle, *City full of people*, 18-38

⁴ White, *London in the eighteenth century*, 90-91.

⁵ Shoemaker, *London Mob*, 14, 24; Earle, *City full of people*, 42, 49; Hitchcock and Shoemaker, *London Lives*, 31,

⁶ Hitchcock and Shoemaker, *London Lives*, 31

⁷ Earle, *City full of people*, 49-50; Shoemaker, *London Mob*, 14

⁸ Earle, *City full of people*, p. 49

⁹ *Ibid.*, 46

¹⁰ J F Merritt, 'Introduction: perceptions and portrayals of London 1598-1720', in (ed.) J F Merritt, *Imagining Early Modern London: perceptions and portrayals of the city from Stow to Strype 1598-1720*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001), 13

¹¹ Harding, 'City, Capital and Metropolis', 118

¹² *Ibid.*, 131, 146

¹³ *Ibid.*, 138-139

¹⁴ Merritt, 'Introduction', 23

¹⁵ Harding, 'City Capital and Metropolis', 143

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- ¹⁷ All in: F. Grose, *A classical dictionary of the vulgar tongue*, 2nd edn. (London, 1788).
- ¹⁸ F. Stenton, 'Norman London: an essay' in W. Fitz Stephen, *Norman London* [c. 1183] (New York, Italica Press, 1990), 27-28.
- ¹⁹ P. Ackroyd, *London: the biography* (London, Chatto and Windus, 2000), 89.
- ²⁰ Ackroyd, *London*, 103-105.
- ²¹ See for example: Anon, *Jests to make you merry* (1607), Robert Armin, *A nest of ninnies* (1608) and Anon, *Tarlton's jests* (1611).
- ²² Grose, *Classical dictionary*.
- ²³ J. Cleland, *Fanny Hill, or memoirs of a woman of pleasure*, [1748/49] (Penguin, London, 1994), 110.
- ²⁴ Merritt, 'Introduction', 3
- ²⁵ S Dickie, *Cruelty and laughter: forgotten comic literature and the unsentimental eighteenth century*, (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2011)
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, 21, 30
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, 32-33
- ²⁸ K. Thomas, 'The place of laughter in Tudor and Stuart England', *Times Literary Supplement*, 21 January 1977, 77.
- ²⁹ J. Bremmer, 'Introduction' in (eds.) J. Bremmer & H Roodenburg, *A cultural history of humour*, (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1997), 3; S. Freud, *The joke and its relation to the unconscious*, [1905], (London, Penguin, 2002) .
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- ³¹ J. Brewer, 'Prose jest books, mainly in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries in England', in Bremmer & Roodenburg, *Cultural History*, 90, 96.
- ³² A. Korhonen, 'Disability humour in English jestbooks of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries', *Cultural History*, 3.1, 2014, 29.
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- ³⁴ Korhonen, 'Disability humour', 28.
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- ³⁹ P. Egan, *Grose's classical dictionary of the vulgar tongue, revised and corrected* (London, 1823), xxxvi –xxxvii.
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- ⁴¹ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 1651, 1:6:42 (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996), 38
- ⁴² Anon, *Hell upon earth: or the town in an uproar* (London, 1729) *Frontispiece* & 5.
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- ⁴⁴ Frances Hutcheson, 'Reflections upon laughter', 1750 , 111
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 1.
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- ⁵¹ G. F. Meier, *The merry philosopher: or thoughts on jesting*, (London, 1764), 189-190
- ⁵² *Ibid*, 111-112.
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- ⁵⁶ Gatrell, *City of laughter*, 10, 85.

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- ⁶² Earle, *City full of people*, 3
- ⁶³ J. Taylor, *Wit and mirth* (London, 1630), jest 256.
- ⁶⁴ Anon. *England's Merry Jester*, (London, 1694) 31, jest 36.
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- ⁶⁸ Hutcheson, *Remarks*, 105
- ⁶⁹ Anon, *Coffee house jests* (London, 1760), p. 109; *Merry Jester*, 102, joke 133 & 157, bull 16.
- ⁷⁰ *Coffee house jests* (1760), 46, joke 89.
- ⁷¹ *Ibid.* 11, joke 16.
- ⁷² Anon. *The macaroni jester and pantheon of wit* (London, 1773), 13.
- ⁷³ *Merry Jester*, 102-103, joke 134.
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- ⁷⁵ Entries for 'bubble': B. E. (Gent), *A new dictionary of the terms ancient and modern of the canting crew* (London, 1699); *New canting dictionary* (London, 1725).
- ⁷⁶ Anon. *The Irish Miscellany, or Teagueland jests* (London, 1746), 44.
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- ⁸⁰ Dorothy George, *London Life in the eighteenth century*, (Penguin, London, 1965), 145.
- ⁸¹ R. Phillips, *A morning's walk from London to Kew*, (London, 1817), 225.
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- ⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 125.
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- ⁸⁹ George Rudé, *Hanoverian London 1714-1808*, [1971] (Sutton, Stroud, 2003) 99, 211.
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- ⁹¹ White, *London in the eighteenth century*, 94-99.
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- ⁹⁵ *The sailor's jester: or merry lad's companion*, (London, 1790), 3.
- ⁹⁶ 'Joe Miller', *Joe Miller's complete jest book*, (London, 1832), Joke 583, 178.
- ⁹⁷ *The lively jester: or complete museum of fun*, (London, 1800), 33.
- ⁹⁸ George, *Daily Life*, 140
- ⁹⁹ Gatrell, *City of laughter*, 547.

¹⁰⁰ Colman. *Slang dictionaries, Vol. II*, 259

¹⁰¹ Gatrell, *City of Laughter*, 425.

¹⁰² *Ibid*, 419-421.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, 432

¹⁰⁴ Dickie, *Cruelty and laughter*, 22

¹⁰⁵ 'Miller', *Jest book*, Preface.

Suggested Illustrations

Illustration 1 referenced on page 9

James Gillray, *Charles Howard, 11th Duke of Norfolk (A natural crop: - alias a Norfolk Dumpling)*, 1791

For Londoners the 'Norfolk dumpling' was a particularly egregious form of rural idiot. The reference to a 'natural crop' suggests the Duke of Norfolk's idiocy.

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Illustration 2 – referenced on p. 11

Isaac Cruikshank, *Paddy Whack's first ride in a sedan*, 1800

This practical joke featured in numerous jest-books and was so popular that Isaac Cruikshank produced it as a print for sale in 1800

(Walpole Library Yale University will supply high resolution tiff at no charge – request they are credited as follows: 'Courtesy of the Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University))



PADDY WHACK'S FIRST RIDE IN A SEDAN.

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Arrah! my dear Honey - to be sure I'd rather walk, if it wasn't for the Fashion of the thing.

Published at 5, Pall Mall, by LAURIE & WHITTLE, 53 Fleet Street, London.

Not in BM L.A. Vol. VIII. 1600