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[See table of contents](#)

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Article abstract

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This paper examines the language of defamation in these pamphlets, their antecedents and their political purchase. Although the *Jockey Club* proved a resounding success, its sequel was less so; and this fact raises the question of why sexual scandal ultimately proved a more potent weapon of political criticism in late-eighteenth century France than in Britain. One reason is related to Britain's counter-revolution, to the reaction of the propertied classes towards French revolutionary violence, however critical they may have been to aristocratic libertinism. But another has to do with the nature of political society in France, the closer articulation between the "noble body" and the body politic. In Britain's more pluralist society, dominated by Parliament rather than the Court, attacks on the morals of the aristocracy were less politically damaging than they were in the France of the ancien regime.

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NICHOLAS ROGERS

Résumé

Charles Pigott hailed from a Shropshire gentry family that made the transition from Jacobitism to Jacobinism in the eighteenth-century. A bon vivant and man of the turf, Pigott scandalised the establishment by exposing the decadent habits of the landed aristocracy in the Jockey Club and the Female Jockey Club. These scurrilous exposés brought Pigott fame and persecution; they also established him as one of the first radical writers to make political capital out of the "boudoir politics" of the aristocracy.

This paper examines the language of defamation in these pamphlets, their antecedents and their political purchase. Although the Jockey Club proved a resounding success, its sequel was less so; and this fact raises the question of why sexual scandal ultimately proved a more potent weapon of political criticism in late-eighteenth century France than in Britain. One reason is related to Britain's counter-revolution, to the reaction of the propertied classes towards French revolutionary violence, however critical they may have been to aristocratic libertinism. But another has to do with the nature of political society in France, the closer articulation between the 'noble body' and the body politic. In Britain's more pluralist society, dominated by Parliament rather than the Court, attacks on the morals of the aristocracy were less politically damaging than they were in the France of the ancien regime.

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Charles Pigott était originaire d'une famille de la haute-bourgeoisie du Shropshire qui avait fait la transition du Jacobitisme au Jacobinisme. Bon vivant, habitué des courses de chevaux, il réussit à scandaliser l'establishment en dépeignant les mœurs décadentes de l'aristocratie foncière dans deux ouvrages intitulés Jockey Club et Female Jockey Club. Ces exposés injurieux lui apportèrent à la fois gloire et poursuite judiciaire; ils en firent aussi l'un des premiers auteurs à se constituer un capital politique en utilisant la «politique de boudoir» de l'aristocratie. Cet article étudie la langue diffamatoire de ces pamphlets, leurs antécédents et leurs conséquences politiques. Si Jockey Club rencontra un triomphe percutant, ses séquelles ne subirent pas la même sort, un fait qui porte à se demander pourquoi le scandale de mœurs pouvait, dans la France de la même époque, constituer une arme plus puissante de critique politique. Certes, l'une des explications relève de la contre-révolution britannique, la réaction des classes nanties à la violence révolutionnaire française les portant à mettre de côté leur désapprobation du libertinage des aristocrates. Mais il est une autre qui renvoie cette fois à la nature de la société

politique en France, à l'articulation plus étroite entre le «corps noble» et le corps politique. En Grande-Bretagne où la société, davantage pluraliste, était dominée par le Parlement plutôt que par la cour, les dénonciations des moeurs de l'aristocratie se révélèrent moins préjudiciables pour l'ordre politique qu'elles ne le furent dans la France de l'Ancien Régime.

Charles Pigott occupies only a marginal place in the history of late eighteenth-century British radicalism. He is not mentioned in the *Dictionary of British Radicals* and references to him in specialized monographs are brief and cursory. Yet in his day Pigott was regarded as a dangerous radical whose exposé of the sexual habits of the aristocracy drew anger, alarm, and libellous action. His most notorious work, *The Jockey Club*, was regarded by one reviewer as “one of those daring attacks on the aristocracy of this kingdom, to which the revolution in France has given birth.”¹ Second only to Paine’s *Rights of Man* in its intrepidity and sometimes coupled with that infamous tract,² *The Jockey Club* ran into eleven editions in its first year and was quickly republished in radical circles in New York. It was a best-seller that conservatives found hard to ignore.³

Pigott has been marginalised in the historical literature because he does not obviously contribute to the grand narrative that has dominated accounts of late eighteenth-century radicalism; that is, to the making of working-class identities in the vortex of the French and industrial revolutions. To begin with, Pigott was born and bred a gentleman. The younger son of a Shropshire baronet who owned landed estates in Shropshire and Huntingdonshire and who entered parliament shortly before the Hanoverian accession, Pigott was educated at Eton and Cambridge before dabbling in journalism.⁴ This by itself should not disqualify him from historical significance, for there were a number of gentlemen who made a contribution to popular radicalism, among them John Horne Tooke and John Thelwall. Indeed, Pigott was well connected to popular radical circles, being both a member of the *Society for Constitutional Information* and the more plebeian *London Corresponding Society*.⁵

Yet Pigott does not appear to have played a very visible role in either society; and his *Jockey Club*, and its sequel, *The Female Jockey Club*, was principally pitched at a genteel or a middle-class rather than plebeian audience. For all the pungency of its satire, neither pamphlet was written in the plain, forthright style of Paine and neither circulated

1. *Monthly Review*, 7 (1792): 466.

2. See Anon., *The British Constitution Invaluable* (London, 2nd ed., 1792), 34.

3. For one letter to John Reeves, the ‘grand master’ of the loyalist associations, recommending a suitable antidote to Pigott’s ‘poison’, see British Library (BL), MS. 16.923 f. 198.

4. Pigott wrote for the *Morning Post*. See Lucyle Werkmeister, *The London Daily Press 1772-1792* (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1963), 358. On Pigott’s educational background, see *Alumni Cantabrigienses part II 1752-1900*, comp. J. A. Venn (Cambridge, 1953), 5: 124.

5. On these affiliations, see Public Record Office (PRO), TS 11/962/3508 f. 103v, and *Selections from the Papers of the London Corresponding Society 1792-1799*, ed. Mary Thrale (Cambridge, 1983), 112.

in cheap, popular editions.⁶ It was only with the posthumous publication of his *Political Dictionary* in 1795 that Pigott's works really penetrated the world of the radical artisan, being reproduced in abridged and accessible editions, price 1d., by "Citizen" Richard Lee at the "British Tree of Liberty" in Berwick Street, Soho.⁷

Pigott certainly deserves more recognition than he has received for his efforts to reconstitute British popular political culture in a Jacobin idiom. His *Political Dictionary* opened with "Adam" as the "only *man* of his time, a true *Sans-Culottes*, and the first revolutionist," moving quickly on to a definition of "Aristocrat" as a "fool, a scoundrel . . . a monster of rapacity, and an enemy to mankind," whose code of "honour" consisted of "debauching your neighbour's wife or daughter, killing your man, and being a member of the Jockey Club."⁸ Indeed, Pigott's contribution was noteworthy in precisely this closely related context; that is, in the relationship of sexuality and more generally, manners and morals, to political virtue.

Pigott was not singular in this respect. Historians have recently recognized the degree to which the battle over democratic rights and popular sovereignty so central to the French revolution involved issues of gender, family, and private morality. In France the attack upon the old regime involved a ritualised parricide and a sexual defamation of the court that in its train intensified the debate over family politics.⁹ In Britain, the language of rights spilled over into the domestic sphere and led both radicals and conservatives to rethink the role of women and family within the political nation.¹⁰ Such links between private and public virtue were not new, but during the French revolution they were more sharply articulated than ever before.¹¹

Pigott's contribution to this debate had little to do with new definitions of womanhood. Rather his intervention was directed at the licentious habits of the

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6. The cost of Pigott's pamphlets was 4s. each, the daily wage of a London artisan in the 1790s. See *The World*, 27 Feb., 8 May, 10 Sept., 1792 and L.D. Schwarz, *London in the age of industrialisation: entrepreneurs, labour force and living conditions 1700-1850* (Cambridge, 1992), fig. 6.1.
 7. Lee produced at least nine different editions of Pigott's *Political Dictionary* with ironic titles such as *The Rights of Nobles*, *The Rights of Princes*, *The Wrongs of Man*, *The Blessings of War* &c. On Lee, see Gwyn A. Williams, *Artisans and Sans-Culottes* (London, 1968), 73, 96, 98, 103.
 8. Charles Pigott, *A Political Dictionary: Explaining the True Meaning of Words* (New York, 1796), 3, 6, 71.
 9. See Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (Berkeley & Los Angeles, 1992).
 10. Susan Brown, "'Rational Creatures and Free Citizens': The Language of Politics in the Eighteenth-Century Debate on Women," *Historical Papers/Communications historiques* (1988): 35-47.
 11. G.J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility. Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago, 1992); Linda Colley, *Britons. Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (New Haven and London, 1992). ch. 6.

aristocracy and their hangers-on. Like the French *libelles* that deluged the market after 1789,¹² Pigott sought to discredit the aristocracy's right to rule and to trumpet the downfall of what he saw as an undeniably decadent order. From a purely political point of view this objective had been Paine's. In the *Rights of Man* the former artisan-turned-journalist had denounced the jobbery of Old Corruption, the punyism of hereditary titles, and the tyranny of primogeniture which denied younger sons and daughters their full patrimony.¹³ Pigott carried this critique to the boudoir, the faro-table and the racetrack. A former gentleman gamester who occasionally wrote for a gossipy newspaper closely associated with the racing world, he was well placed to highlight the follies of the *bon ton*.¹⁴

Pigott's first broadside appeared on 27 February 1792. Entitled *The Jockey Club: or, A Sketch of the Manners of the Age*, it was principally directed at the fashionable racing set whose love of the turf and extravagant gambling served as an entry into the metropolitan-based aristocratic culture of the late eighteenth century. The Jockey Club referred initially to that coterie of London gentlemen who, from 1750 onwards, met at Tattersall's on Hyde Park Corner to revel and gamble on the races that their horses ran at Newmarket. Unlike other Georgian race meetings, which were county-based events for all classes, Newmarket served as the exclusive preserve of the quality, a symbol of the aristocratic dominance of horse racing and a fixture to which the fashionable world flocked.¹⁵ The Jockey Club, which by 1790 had become the formal sponsors and arbitrators of the classic racing calendar, what one writer termed "a court of honour on what may be called fair or foul play,"¹⁶ was therefore a fitting metonym for the pleasurable *beau monde*.

Pigott's pamphlet emerged in the wake of two public scandals involving the Prince of Wales. The first concerned the accusation that the prince's jockey, Sam Chifney, had fixed a race at Newmarket in October 1791 in order to raise the odds on the royal mount, *Escape*, an incident that led to a Jockey Club inquiry and a public reprimand for the prince.¹⁷ The second involved the prince's debts. Although the heir apparent received £60,000 per annum from the civil list, his extravagant life-style at Brighton and Carlton

12. Robert Darnton, *The Literary Underground of the Old Regime* (Cambridge, Mass., 1982), ch. 1; Jeffrey Merrick, "Sexual Politics and Public Order in Late Eighteenth-Century France: The *Memoires secrets* and the *Correspondance secreete*," in *Forbidden History*, ed. John C. Fout (Chicago, 1992), 171-88.

13. Thomas Paine, *The Rights of Man*, ed. Henry Collins (Harmondsworth, 1969), 102, 105, 148.

14. On Pigott's past, see *The Jockey Club, part II* (London, 3rd. ed., 1792), 84 where he admits "his own innumerable follies and extravagancies," and Anon., *An Answer to Three Scurrilous Pamphlets, entitled the Jockey Club* (London, 1792). On the racing affiliations of the *Morning Post*, which specialised in scandal, see Lucyle Werkmeister, *A Newspaper History of England 1792-1793* (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1967), 35-6.

15. Richard Onslow, *Headquarters. A History of Newmarket and its Racing* (Cambridge, 1983), 18-19; Wray Vamplew, *The Turf. A Social and Economic History of Horse Racing* (London, 1976), 18.

16. *Gentleman's Magazine*, 71 (1792): 361.

17. Onslow, *Headquarters*, 30-31.

House quickly exhausted his income, and by early 1792 he was selling off his stable amidst great parade in the hope that parliament would discharge his debts.¹⁸

Pigott began his exposure of the aristocracy with precisely this incident. In his view it was a scandal that the nation should be required to pay the prince's debts over and above the annual sum allowed him by parliament, especially when he appeared devoted to "the meanest pursuits and the meanest society" rather than his patriotic duty.¹⁹ Pigott was especially critical of the Commons' willingness to discharge the royal debts without any real assurances that this state of affairs would change, a situation that underscored the political elite's endorsement of gentlemanly excess and fundamental class affinity with the aristocracy.²⁰ The indulgences of the ruling class would not be tolerated much longer, he warned, for as in France, "the people" would "soon revolt against the influence of corruption, and extirpate the infamous doctrine of the many being sacrificed to swell the pride and pamper the luxury of the few."²¹

If Pigott raised the tocsin of popular radicalism in his pamphlet, he also indulged his readers with the depravities of the rich. In a series of character sketches that were loosely related to his opening political theme, he chronicled the degenerate pleasures of the Newmarket set, its proclivity for vice, its lack of real benevolence, its dissipation of talent. At a time when Edmund Burke was vindicating the virtues of aristocratic trusteeship as the foundation of the social and political order, Pigott sought to tarnish the image of landed paternalism by exposing the self-indulgent extravagance of the ruling class, its obsession with gaming, intrigue, and sexual licence. Within this context the Duke of York was written off for his "pretty frequent relaxations amongst the nymphs of Berkeley Row."²² The Duke of Bedford was condemned for using his vast wealth to "serve no other purpose than to promote his own sordid views."²³ Lord Egremont was exposed for his gluttony; the Duke of Queensberry for his unbridled lust, which in old age he tried to sustain with vast draughts of fortified wine; and Charles Bunbury, MP for Suffolk and the leading steward of the Jockey Club, for his cuckoldry and sexual slumming with streetwalkers.²⁴

A host of other voluptuaries were also subjected to Pigott's blistering satire: from the nabob General Richard Smith, whose avarice was lampooned on the stage as Samuel Foote's character, Sir Matthew Mite, to boon companions of the Prince such as Colonel Fitzpatrick, who relished the voyeurism of watching his mistress sell her sexual favours to his creditors.²⁵ Within this dissolute world of noblemen, nabobs, courtesans, jockeys,

18. Werkmeister, *A Newspaper History*, 55-58.

19. Charles Pigott, *The Jockey Club, or A Sketch of the Manners of the Age* (London, 1792), 11.

20. *Ibid.*, 7.

21. *Ibid.*, 181.

22. *Ibid.*, 15.

23. *Ibid.*, 17.

24. *Ibid.*, 2-5, 17-19, 93-6.

25. *Ibid.*, 52-3.

black-legs,²⁶ and fashionable flunkies was also to be found Charles James Fox, whom Pigott believed to be as ardent a punter as he was “ambitious in the race of politics” and at best a superficial reformer.²⁷ The same was largely true of George Brinsley Sheridan, whose prodigious talents as a parliamentary debater and playwright had been dissipated by high living. “Although his face and person are much disfigured by nocturnal orgies,” Pigott remarked of this star of the *beau monde*, “his address and ingenuity surmount every physical disadvantage, and his amours are not of that sordid, low description which most of his friends are so eager to cultivate.”²⁸

Pigott’s pamphlet brought him notoriety because Sir John Lade threatened him with a libel suit for suggesting that his wife had been the common whore to a highwayman hanged at Tyburn. Yet he must also have known that his pamphlet would register with a public that had become absorbed with the relationship between private and public morality. Before 1770 public figures had rarely been taken to task for their private vices. Demotic politicians had sometimes positively gained from them, John Wilkes being admiringly described by a drayman in 1768 as “free from cock to wig.”²⁹ But thereafter an increasingly vocal middle-class public preferred sobriety and regularity in their leaders. In 1778 the Evangelical merchant, John Thornton, complained bitterly of the licentiousness of General Howe’s quarters in New York, where the former mistress of Lord Pembroke had been “at the head of the Genl’s Table, seraglio and dispenser of his favors, but since ret[ire]d to make place for another favorite Sultana.”³⁰

Thornton was predictably at the vanguard of the war upon vice, but writers on the same theme often found an appreciative audience. Vicessimus Knox, whose *Essays* ran into nine editions in as many years, strenuously asserted that luxury and libertinism were incompatible with liberty and took the aristocracy to task for their voluptuous living. “If a peer of the realm were as willing to give his presence to a charity sermon as to a horse race,” he quipped, “perhaps he would find himself no loser even in the grand object of his life, the enjoyment of pleasure.”³¹ By 1784, Charles James Fox, whose private life was as dissolute as Wilkes’, was openly condemned for his gambling and whoring. “No honest man can behold a profligate Gambler passing from the Gaming Table to the Counsels of his Sovereign, and the important concerns of the Nation, without feeling a strong Disgust in his Mind and a sympathetic Nausea at the Stomach,” wrote Thomas Northcote. “It is an Example repugnant to all Principle and subversive of all moral Character.”³²

26. Swindlers of the turf.

27. *Ibid*, 68. See also *Jockey Club, part II*, 3rd ed. (London, 1792), 180.

28. *Ibid*, 60.

29. Cited in Richard Sennet, *The Fall of Public Man* (New York, 1974), 103. See also John Brewer, *Party Ideology and Popular Politics at the Accession of George III* (Cambridge, 1976), 171, 196-7.

30. Cambridge Univ. Lib., Add. MS 7674/1/x/44, 1. I am grateful to Susan Foote for this reference.

31. Vicessimus Knox, *Essays Moral and Literary*, 3 vols. (London, 9th ed., 1787), 1, 191.

32. *Public Advertiser*, 15 Feb. 1784.

Pigott could hope to draw on this changing moral climate; he could also draw on the market for sexual prurience. Since the beginning of the century there had been a steady trade in aristocratic erotica inspired by the French *chronique scandeleuse*, and from the 1770s onwards there was a growing market in criminal conversation literature, that is, in trials pertaining to common-law actions for trespass brought by husbands against their wife's lover. Such suits had been rare before 1760; but they increased dramatically thereafter, bringing a flood of scandal publications in their wake.³³ Among them was the *Bon Ton Magazine; or Microscope of Fashion and Folly*; and the *Town and Country Magazine*, which sold prodigiously from 1769 until 1790. In the latter readers were not only treated to reports of crim. con. trials at the King's Bench, but to amorous tête-à-têtes between the "Legal Adulterer and The Pliant Fair," "The Seducing Syren and The Melting Musician," "The Incautious Celia and The Auxiliary Lover," and so on, accompanied by engraved portraits of the couples involved. Some of these intrigues were fictional but many were clearly not. Indeed, as many as twenty of Pigott's Jockey Club characters were previously featured in the *Town and Country*: from grandees such as Lords Derby, Dorset and Grosvenor; to demi-reps like Mrs Armitstead and 'Perdita' Robinson; to M.P. Charles Wyndham, whose affair with the wife of Anthony Hodges, Esquire, formed the narrative of the "Legal Adulterer and the Pliant Fair."³⁴

To what degree Pigott availed himself of this literature in constructing his vignettes remains a moot point. Contemporaries certainly noted the affinity between the *Jockey Club* and the *Town and Country*, and Pigott periodically assumed that his readers were cognizant of this literature as he did of the scandal that surrounded Edward Onslow's homosexuality.³⁵ Yet he also claimed access to insider information, if not personal acquaintance,³⁶ and his narratives were constructed somewhat differently from those of the *Town and Country*: Pigott sought to give a political edge to his sexual scandals, an edge that had been present in the early issues of the *Town and Country* but had softened over time.

More than that. Whereas the *Town and Country* had focused upon the sexual dalliance of major political figures and the diverse ways in which social ambition and

33. On this literature and its market, see Peter Wagner, *Eros Revived. Erotica of the Enlightenment in England and America* (London, 1988), 100-113, 122-133, and Lawrence Stone, *Road to Divorce. England 1530-1987* (Oxford, 1992), 246-62.

34. *Town and Country Magazine*, 23 (1791): 98-101. Pigott did not specifically mention this episode, but he did allude to Wyndham's gallantry. See *Jockey Club part I*, 44. The parties in the tête-à-têtes in the *Town and Country* can be identified in the *Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires* eds. F.G. Stephens & M. D. George (London, 1883-1938) vols. 4-6.

35. *Jockey Club, part I*, 159-62; on this scandal, see Karen Stanworth, "Picturing a Personal History: the Case of Edward Onslow," *Art History* 16 (1993): 408-23. I thank Karen Stanworth for bringing this episode to my attention.

36. In *The Jockey Club part III*, 3rd. ed. (London, 1792), 216, Pigott admitted that he had the "misfortune" to know most of the people whom he criticised. For references to the "Scandalous Chronicle," see *Jockey Club part I*, 45. For comparisons between Pigott's work and the magazines, see *British Constitution Invaluable*, viii.

sexual intrigue were combined, Pigott set his sights higher.³⁷ He was not interested in titillating the public with tales of the rich and famous. Rather his aim was to reveal how aristocratic culture was politically and socially decadent and fundamentally incompatible with the new age of democracy that was blooming in France and America. For all his salacious revelations about sexual excess and incapacity, Pigott strove to emphasize the disastrous effects of play and high living upon the political fibre of the ruling class. The degenerate life-style of the gentleman-MPs and landed heirs who formed the Jockey Club, the squandering of their wealth on horses, gambling and women, was symptomatic of a rotten old regime.

At the same time, Pigott clearly recognised the enormous popularity of scandal literature and used this as a ruse to draw his readers' attention to the political implications of high-class dissipation. The manner in which the *Jockey Club* was publicised clearly illustrates this, for each advertisement highlighted the celebrities under review, as if to whet the reader's appetite for more salacious gossip about the *beau monde*. The fact that Pigott's bookseller, Henry Symonds, also produced the *Town and Country Magazine* did little to detract from this impression. Nor did the retention of the title *Jockey Club* to subsequent productions, despite their purely incidental relationship to that racing fraternity.

In popular discourse, to "jockey" meant to beguile, to cheat, to manoeuvre, to act fraudulently. Horace Walpole once wondered whether a monarch could be "perfectly accomplished in the mysteries of Kingcraft . . . unless he is initiated in the arts of jockeyship."³⁸ To "jockey" also meant to "ride" not only a horse but a woman, as Rowlandson's pornographic print, "The Gallop," made manifestly clear.³⁹ As a noun "jockey" also referred rather contemptuously to "a man of the common people," a meaning that Pigott must have relished in light of Burke's eulogy of the aristocracy in his *Reflections of the Revolution in France* and his corresponding dismissal of the lower class as the "swinish multitude."⁴⁰ Clearly the "Jockey Club" was a useful floating signifier for Pigott, replete with ironic as well as expansive overtones; its slippage in meaning was tellingly pertinent to his exposé of high-class society.

There is no indication that Pigott intended to write a sequel to his original *Jockey Club*, but its very rapid popularity, with five editions in less than three months, encouraged him to do so. In part II, Pigott directed his attention to the "Jockeys and Jugglers in Courts, in Politics and the Law" rather than to the "Jockeys and Jugglers at

37. See, for example, the vignettes on Lords Grafton, Halifax, Holland, Northumberland and Queensberry, *Town and Country Magazine* (1769) 1: 114-6, 227, 281-3, 338-9, 394-6.

38. W.S.Lewis (ed.) *Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, 35: 329.

39. Rowlandson's print is reproduced in Wagner, *Eros Revived*, 285. For the range of meanings associated with jockey, see *OED* and Eric Partridge, *A Dictionary of Slang*, 8th ed. (New York, 1984), 622-3.

40. For Pigott's hostile and ironic reflections on Burke's use of the term "swinish multitude," see *The Jockey Club part III*, 3rd. ed. (London, 1792), 43-4.

Newmarket," a shift of emphasis that led him to focus rather more on the officers of the state than the Newmarket set.⁴¹ This did not mean that he abandoned sex for politics. Far from it. Pigott still retained a good ear for sexual scandal, and he made good use of it. He portrayed the Duke of Dorset as an idle and dissolute ambassador in Paris, too readily consumed with billiards, hazard, and womanizing. He reported that the Lord of the Admiralty, Lord John Townshend, had seduced the Duchess of Rutland while enjoying her husband's hospitality, and that the Lord Chancellor, Edward Thurlow, had debauched the sister of a friend; an act of gallantry, he quipped, that eminently qualified him for sitting in judgment on divorce petitions.⁴² He also sardonically noted that General Dalrymple, a hero of the American war and a rake for whom "love and war take turns by day and night." had married "a young lady who had been much celebrated for the admirable dexterity of certain manual operations, still remembered with a kind of pleasing melancholy by several gentlemen now living."⁴³

Pigott could tease, if not enrage the aristocracy with these sorts of disclosures,⁴⁴ but in part II of the *Jockey Club* he was more preoccupied with the loaves-and-fishes aspect of British politics than hitherto. Among other things he revealed how eighteenth-century sinecures, sustained on the backs of a tax-paying, working public, buoyed up aristocratic licentiousness. His most damning remarks, however, were reserved for the Law, which Pigott saw as having a hegemonic presence in English society equivalent to priestcraft in earlier centuries.⁴⁵ In a series of vignettes on the legal profession he attacked the "enormous expenses" of the law that precluded "the lower classes of society from a chance of justice," as well as its arcane jargon and interminable delays.⁴⁶ He was especially critical of the debtor laws, which he had experienced first hand, believing them to be very oppressive and socially discriminatory.⁴⁷ Of lawyers, Pigott had nothing good to say. Even Thomas Erskine, a champion of progressive causes, was condemned for defending "vile seducers" in one breath and demanding their imprisonment in another, plying a lucrative trade in suits for criminal conversation.⁴⁸

To Pigott, the law was one part of Britain's "Gothic" government that must inevitably succumb to reason and freedom, to a "radical spirit of reformation" so visible

41. See also his comment in *The Jockey Club, part III, ii*: "the whole human species may be fairly considered and treated as Jockeys, each running his race to the best advantage."

42. *Jockey Club part II, 23, 36, 105-7.*

43. *Ibid.*, 171.

44. Lord Grosvenor was apparently "sorely irritated" by Pigott's remarks about him in part I, and he mentioned in the preface how "persecution and prosecution, personal castigation and every species of vengeance" had been threatened against him. *Jockey Club part II, ii & 79.*

45. *Ibid.*, 125.

46. *Ibid.*, 127-9.

47. *Ibid.*, 157-8.

48. *Ibid.*, 131, 156; on the case of *Parslow v Sykes*, where Erskine advocated imprisonment for seducers who could not pay the damages for criminal conversation, see Stone, *Road to Divorce*, 274-5.

in France.⁴⁹ Four months later he reiterated this plea with renewed urgency. "At this critical juncture," he remarked in part III of the *Jockey Club*, "every day is pregnant with revolution and events."⁵⁰ The summer of 1792 had seen some dramatic developments in French politics, culminating in the deposition of the king and the establishment of a republic. It also saw, in the storming of the Tuileries on 10 August and in the gruesome slaughter of over 1000 Parisian prisoners in early September, an escalation of popular violence that troubled many Englishmen and women, including some radicals.⁵¹

In part III, Pigott's political line is bolder, dramatic and Jacobinical. The French revolution is defended and its violence exonerated from the charge of plebeian barbarity.⁵² Even the September massacres, which Pigott must have heard about as he was writing his last pages, are interpreted as a desperate response to counter-revolutionary activity rather than revolutionary anarchy; a line of argument that was not dissimilar to Mary Wollstonecraft, who urged a friend "not to mix with the shallow herd who throw an odium on immutable principles, because some of the mere instrument of the revolution were too sharp."⁵³ For Pigott the course of events in France had polarised into a struggle between Despotism and Liberty.⁵⁴ There was no middle ground.

Pigott's bold line was also reflected in his character sketches. Despite the groundswell of public opinion that was beginning to build for King and Country in Britain, Pigott asserted that the era of monarchy was over and looked forward to the day when the sovereignty of the nation resided in its real "CREATOR, the PEOPLE."⁵⁵ Louis XVI was denounced as a traitor; George III was cast as the dupe of Bute and the enemy of liberty and America, while his sons were remarkable only for their profligacy.⁵⁶ As for Marie Antoinette, Pigott raked the gutter press to blacken her character, chronicling her "career of unbounded prodigality and inordinate excesses" in a style that emulated the French *libelles*.⁵⁷ At a time when the scandals of the French Queen were billowing in France, Pigott transcribed them for an English audience, refusing to pour "insipid, venal adulation" on kings and queens.⁵⁸ In a sharp rejoinder to Burke's chivalric portrayal of

49. *Ibid*, 162, 185. See also *Jockey Club, part III*, 44, where Pigott argues that English laws were framed in "Gothic barbarism," the revolutionary French in "patriotism, experience, and philosophy."

50. *Jockey Club, part III*, v.

51. See Clive Emsley, "The Impact of the French Revolution on British Politics and Society" in *The French Revolution and British Culture*, eds. Ceri Crossley and Ian Small (Oxford, 1989) 39-40; Claire Tomalin, *The Life and Death of Mary Wollstonecraft* (New York, 1976) 117.

52. *Jockey Club, part III*, 31-46.

53. Tomalin, *Wollstonecraft*, 117.

54. *Jockey Club, part III*, 208-14.

55. *Ibid*, 218.

56. Cf. Pigott's definition of 'Prince' in his *Political Dictionary* (London, 1795), 124: "A being nursed by Luxury, reared by Affluence, educated by Flattery, and degraded by Servility."

57. On the scandals implicating the French Queen, see Lynn Hunt, *Family Romance*, ch. 4 and *Eroticism and the Body Politic*, ed. Lynn Hunt (Baltimore and London, 1991), chs. 3 and 5.

58. *Jockey Club, part III*, 76.

the Queen in *Reflections*, where she was metaphorically raped by the Parisian horde who marched on Versailles,⁵⁹ Pigott exposed her incestuous relationship with the Comte d'Artois, her nocturnal orgies at Trianon, her lesbianism, her seduction of Lafayette, her purported complicity in the Diamond Necklace affair.⁶⁰ He even implied that she had seduced a clerk at the secretary of war's office, "whose vigorous athletic appearance announced all the *essential* qualities of recommendation," only to conspire in his murder when d'Artois' nose was put out of joint.⁶¹ All of this was scurrilous hearsay fanned by French revolutionary chauvinism and an antipathy to Antionette's interventions in high politics, but it served Pigott's theme of how sexual degeneracy fuelled political corruption and why the aristocracy should lose their presumptive right to rule.

From the salacious gossip of the French court Pigott moved back to familiar territory. "The late titled debauchees of Paris and Versailles have paid dearly for their insolent barbarous excesses," he declared, "Let the *grandees* of this country look to themselves and tremble."⁶² Among those slated to tremble in this round of character assassination was the Prince of Wales' morganatic wife, Mrs Fitzherbert, who was allegedly blackmailed by a French Count for "venial irregularities" during her travels in Europe. Her indiscretions were minor compared to those of Lady Craven, "a democratic in love" who leap-frogged from a lacklustre marriage over the backs of several distinguished lovers to hold court at Brandenburgh House as the wife of the aging and fabulously wealthy Margrave of Anspach.⁶³ In this rogues' gallery she was followed by the Duke of Marlborough, the aristocrat of aristocrats, whose vast estate at Woodstock was surrounded by deplorable poverty, and whose annual Christmas doles were pretentiously paraded as genuine paternalism. None of these nobles had the nobility of spirit of Tom Paine, Pigott believed, "a Noble of Nature" whose devastating critique of British politics and its constitutional complacencies offered the one "ray of real light" over Gothic darkness. Shall "birth and fortune" in Britain, he rhetorically asked, "for ever maintain their cruel empire over human opinion?"⁶⁴

Pigott's *Jockey Club* became more political over time, more radical in emphasis, and more admonitory as the French revolution entered its more sanguinary phase. Even the *Analytical Review*, which shared many of Pigott's political sympathies, began to distance itself from a publication that it saw as both reckless and libellous.⁶⁵ As for the Prince of Wales, he described the *Jockey Club* as "the most infamous & shocking libellous

59. Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) in *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke*, 8, ed. L.G. Mitchell (Oxford, 1989), 121-2.

60. See Sarah Maza, "The Diamond Necklace Affair Revisited (1785-1786): The Case of the Missing Queen," in *Eroticism and the Body Politic*, 63-89.

61. *Jockey Club*, part III, 82.

62. *Ibid.*, 158.

63. Lewis Melville, *Regency Ladies* (London, 1926), 186-207.

64. *Jockey Club*, part III., 163-5, 195.

65. *Analytical Review*, 13 (1792): 342, 14 (1793): 345. See also *Critical Review*, 6 (1792): 476, and *Gentleman's Magazine*, 72 (1792): 1116.

production yt ever disgrac'd the pen of man" and urged the Queen to prevail on the Secretary of State to prosecute its author.⁶⁶ Yet despite the fact that the pamphlet was placed in the hands of the Attorney General, Pigott escaped prosecution for his authorship of the *Jockey Club*, probably because as an anonymous author, no-one could pin him down. None the less at least four booksellers were prosecuted for selling Pigott's work, two in London and two in the Midlands. Of the Londoners, Henry Symonds was indicted for selling the *Jockey Club* along with Paine's *Rights of Man*, part II, and within three months, so, too, was James Ridgway. Both pleaded guilty and were sentenced to two years in Newgate.⁶⁷

Pigott did not escape entirely. On 30 September he was arrested along with William Hodgson, a hatter and fellow member of the London Corresponding Society, for toasting the French Republic and calling the king a "German hog butcher" who had sold his Hanoverian subjects to the British for thirty pieces of silver. Bail was set at the incredibly high sum of £500 each and both were remanded into custody.⁶⁸ Both men attempted to secure their release on a writ of Habeas Corpus on the grounds that they had been arrested on an *ex officio* information and because excessive bail was a violation of the Bill of Rights. The judges rejected both pleas and sent them back to Newgate to await trial.⁶⁹ Pigott's indictment was eventually thrown out by a grand jury, but not before he had spent a month in gaol. As for Hodgson, he was sentenced to two years' imprisonment and a fine of £200, a sum large enough to keep him in Newgate beyond the expiry of his sentence in December 1795.⁷⁰

Pigott's brief encounter with the law did not unsettle his radical resolve. Far from it. He viewed his imprisonment as a form of legal entrapment and made much of the fact that his arrest in the London Coffee House had been urged upon the landlord by local loyalists on the flimsiest of evidence.⁷¹ In the next few months he persisted with his exposé of high society. In the *Whig Club*, he depicted the Foxites as a degenerate set of gamblers whose subservience to vice incapacitated what small claim they had to be reformers — in the process disassociating himself from conservative attempts to link the Whig aristocracy's licentious revels, its disorderly body, with the radical cause.⁷² In the *Female Jockey Club* he did for the ladies what he had done for the gentlemen: bring their libertinage on the carpet.

66. *The Correspondence of George, Prince of Wales 1770-1812*, ed. A. Aspinall, 8 vols. (London, 1963-71), 2: 285-7, 298, nos. 694 & 702.

67. Werkmeister, *Newspaper History*, 234, 268, 269. For the prosecution of Richard Phillips of Leicester and William (or James) Belcher of Birmingham, see PRO, TS 11/578 & 937.

68. *Ibid.*, 403; *Papers of the London Corresponding Society*, ed. Thale, 112n.

69. *Gentleman's Magazine*, 74 (1793): 954.

70. Werkmeister, *Newspaper History*, 435, 453; *Papers of the London Corresponding Society*, ed. Thale, 112n. William Hodgson, *The Case of William Hodgson* (London, 1796).

71. Charles Pigott, *Persecution. The Case of Charles Pigott* (London, 1793), 5-23.

72. David Bindman, *The Shadow of the Guillotine* (London, 1989), 19-20, 115, 128. See also Ronald Paulson, *Representations of revolution, 1789-1820* (New Haven, 1983).

It is not clear why Pigott wrote this last pamphlet, for in some ways it was déjà vu. Perhaps Pigott was hard up. Perhaps he renounced an earlier decision to spare the *belles*, having previously blackmailed them, or so it was alleged.⁷³ Perhaps he simply wanted to thumb his nose once again at the establishment. Whatever the reason, he entertained his audience with the amorous adventures of the ladies of quality. Among other things he alleged that the aging Duchess of Bedford dispensed her patronage to young men in return for sexual favours. He also recounted how Lady Wallace was caught *in flagrante delicto* with the Abbé de St Farre in her Parisian apartments.⁷⁴

This sort of salacious smut could be found in the *Town and Country* and elsewhere, but the one saving grace of the *Female Jockey Club* was that it brought greater coherence to the predicament of women within the fashionable world. Like Hogarth's *Marriage A La Mode*, Pigott recognised that marriages of interest within high society quickly compromised the chances of domestic felicity, leaving each partner to pursue their whimsical, if not wanton pleasures at will. He also acknowledged the indecency and hazards of high-born women having to perform their conjugal duties with rakish husbands, and how widowhood often presented them with their one source of freedom, however libertine a fashion it might be exercised.⁷⁵ Within the sexual politics of the *beau monde*, Pigott understood that time was on the gentleman's side. Women might dazzle and intrigue successfully for a time, but age was an enemy of fashionable liaisons for women in ways that it was not for men, who could more easily pay for their sexual pleasures. As Mary Wollstonecraft remarked: when "superannuated coquettes" found they could "no longer inspire love, they pay for the vigour and vivacity of youth."⁷⁶ Indeed, Pigott claimed that by their early twenties many women of quality were so jaded by the competitive world of fashion that they privately wished they were men.⁷⁷ Within this class, he reflected: "Female vanity never dies, and when personal charms are faded, nor adorers to be met, still it delights in dissipated scenes, and finds a resource in the spectacles of the theatre or in the tumultuous croud [sic] and distractions of a gaming-house."⁷⁸

73. *The British Constitution Invaluable*, 31. According to one member of the Jockey Club, Pigott extorted £5000 to exclude the ladies, although this allegation may well have been malicious. See *An Answer to Three Scurrilous Pamphlets*, 14.

74. *The Female Jockey Club, or, A Sketch of the Manners of the Age* (London, 1794), 81, 191-2.

75. *Female Jockey Club*, 66-71. Cf. the comment of the Marquise de Merteuil to Valmont in Choderlos De Laclos, *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, trans. P.W.K. Stone (London, 1961), letter 152. "Do you know, Viscomte, why I never married again? It was certainly not for lack of advantageous matches: it was solely so that no one should have the right to object to anything I might do."

76. Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (London: Everyman, 1982), 77; *Female Jockey Club*, 80-1, 149-150, 176-8.

77. *Ibid.*, 81.

78. *Ibid.*, 152.

Despite these insights, Pigott never fully recognized the extent to which fashionable society was constituted by gender as much as class. He had nothing to say about the double standard, how reputation and the need for legitimate progeny compromised a woman's capacity to play the field like her male counterparts. Pigott never mentioned the social ostracism that sometimes accompanied a woman's libertinage, or even her divorce.⁷⁹ Nor did he see, in as lucid a manner as Wollstonecraft, how wealth made women slaves to "voluptuous notions of beauty."⁸⁰ In fact he never understood how women, especially the demi-mondaines, were part of the political economy of libertine society: to be coveted, conquered, displayed, discarded and exchanged.⁸¹ Certainly Pigott had a sense of how important companionate marriages could be in countering this sexual masquerade and he commended the few examples of conjugal felicity that he found among the aristocracy.⁸² But he underestimated the rising appeal of domesticity in British society and never appreciated, as did Wollstonecraft, the possibilities of reconstituting womanhood through rational education, radicalism, and a politically-rejuvenated middle class.⁸³

Pigott's mentality was still intrinsically rooted to the gentlemanly world, however much he deplored its excesses and exposed its vices. Unlike Wollstonecraft, he did not demonstrably privilege companionship over passion in human relationships and he did not disapprove of the generous gallant, who, like the jockey and racehorse-owner Tommy Panton, accepted some responsibility for his amours.⁸⁴ In fact, he tended to ignore the phenomenon of the gentleman as sexual predator, especially upon women in socially dependent situations, focusing rather upon upper-class cuckoldry, impotence and sexual dissipation. Pigott's sexuality was altogether more chauvinist and hedonistic than that of the radical feminist, who, while recognizing that women had the same drives as men, saw their regulation as a necessary means to women's empowerment and a better society.⁸⁵ Ironically, Pigott's greatest praise was conferred upon Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire, a woman admired for her literary patronage, her political interventions, and her ability to transcend the vapidity of the fashionable world.⁸⁶ He was silent about her reckless extravagance, her gambling debts, her *ménage à trois* with the Duke and Lady Elizabeth Hervey, her own amours, and her illegitimate child with Charles Grey.⁸⁷ The

79. See Lawrence Stone, *Road To Divorce*, 341-4.

80. Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman*, 156.

81. On this theme, see Anne Deneys, "The Political Economy of the Body in the *Liaisons dangereuses* of Choderlos de Laclos," in *Eroticism and the Body Politic*, 41-62.

82. *Female Jockey Club*, 202.

83. *Rights of Woman*, 63, 151-63.

84. *Jockey Club*, part I, 92.

85. Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman*, 143. For eighteenth-century notions of sexuality, see Roy Porter, "Mixed feelings: the Enlightenment and sexuality in eighteenth-century Britain," in *Sexuality in Eighteenth-Century England*, ed. Paul-Gabriel Bouce (Manchester, 1982), 1-27.

86. *Female Jockey Club*, 48-56; see also *Jockey Club*, part I, 110-11.

87. See Brian Masters, *Georgiana. Duchess of Devonshire* (London, 1981).

Devonshire household could have been an exemplary case of much that Pigott condemned, but he was clearly too captivated by the Duchess to develop it.

The *Female Jockey Club* sold well, moving into four editions within the space of a year. But in July 1794, one month after Pigott's death, Lord Kenyon declared it "a gross libel"⁸⁸ and the reviewers carefully avoided it. Consequently the *Female Jockey Club* failed to win as large and appreciate an audience as its predecessors, a fact that raises some questions about the role of sexual scandal within British radical discourse during the era of the French revolution and the different response to such literature in France itself.

It could be argued that Kenyon's judgment intimidated printers and booksellers from vigorously promoting the *Female Jockey Club*, especially in view of the successful prosecution of Symonds and Ridgway two years earlier. It might also be claimed that the attack upon aristocratic ladies was regarded as an unchivalrous, unmanly assault upon "helpless, unresisting women," a line of reasoning that Pigott himself anticipated.⁸⁹ Both arguments are not without their merits, but there were other reasons why Pigott's exposé of aristocratic vice did not quite achieve the objective he hoped and why he devoted his last months to producing a Jacobin primer for radical artisans and labourers on the threshold of political literacy.

Part of the reason related to the medium rather than the message. Pigott declared in the preface of the *Jockey Club* that his intention was to "to hold the mirror up to Nature, to shew Vice in its own image." His mission would be accomplished, he said, if he could belittle aristocratic grandeur in "the eyes of the multitude."⁹⁰ Without doubt such a diminution of influence occurred. In Norwich a handbill described the king as a "despotic whelp" who had dragged "the sovereign people" into an "unjust and ruinous war." Further north, in the Durham coalfield, the rector of Walsingham grew alarmed by the spread of radical ideas among the pitmen:

They talk of equality and expect that all property will be divided in case of a republic. They murmur against the heavy taxes which they suppose to arise from the extravagance of the Prince of Wales and the rest of the royal family. And as they hear that his Royal Highness has got into much debt at present they suppose that their burdens will be still increased in order to pay it off.⁹¹

Clearly there was fertile ground to sow for a concerted attack upon the aristocracy. Yet the cost of Pigott's publications, which amounted to a day's wages for many artisans, and the witty, elaborate style in which they were written, precluded a genuinely popular

88. *Papers of the London Corresponding Society*, ed Thale, 204n. For the only review I have located, see *Analytical Review*, 18 (1794): 521-2.

89. *Female Jockey Club*, v.

90. *Jockey Club*, part I, i-ii.

91. BL, Add. MS 16, 925, f. 171; 16,927, f.61.

audience. Even within the middle class, some people must have been shocked by the sheer scurrility of his revelations. Pigott's *Jockey Club* could have been viewed as a tonic to vice rather than its antidote, not only because of its dubious moral tone, but because its loose, rambling structure allowed one to gloss its politics and revel in its exposés. In this respect it is instructive that the popularity of the *Jockey Club* waned as its politics became more pronounced. The inescapable conclusion is that Pigott's pamphlets sometimes reached the wrong audience for the wrong reasons.

But quite apart from the intrinsic problems of writing radical smut, there were other reasons why Pigott's tracts did not achieve the impact of their French counterparts. In France the king and the court was the centre of politics. Its decadence was a telling commentary upon the corruption of the political system and any scandalous tales were likely to subvert its power. In Britain the political system was more pluralist. Political power was concentrated in the hands of parliament not the court, and so "boudoir politics" did not have the same discursive significance or political charge. One index of this was the declining influence of royal wives or mistresses in British politics and the willingness of parliament to expose royal dukes if their mistresses stepped out of line. Thus in 1809, when the Duke of York's mistress, Mrs. Clarke, was revealed to be trafficking in army commissions, His Royal Highness was forced to resign as commander-in-chief of the army in order to pre-empt an humiliation in the Commons.⁹² Furthermore, while the aristocracy held considerable power with the political arena, it did not do so exclusively. To put it another way, there was a less explicit articulation between the body politic and the noble body in Britain than in France, a fact that rendered any social criticism of the aristocracy or Court less politically damaging. In any case, there was arguably enough evidence of aristocratic activism in the spheres of politics and philanthropy, not to mention companionate marriages, to question the representative nature of Pigott's broadsides and the presumption that the rot had set in. In fact, precisely at the time that Pigott was writing, Evangelicals were exhorting the aristocracy to a greater sense of public service and invigorating upper-class stewardship in conservative and morally-desirable directions. As Thomas Gisborne wrote of the nobleman: "Let his mode of life, while suited to his place in society, be under the control of an unfeigned spirit of moderation."⁹³

If this seemed self-serving, there were basic economic affinities of interest between the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie that demanded reaffirmation in the wake of the French revolution. British radicals continued to insist that property was protected in France, but many of the propertied in Britain thought otherwise. By the time Pigott came to write the *Female Jockey Club*, the reaction against political change had set in. It only required

92. On the Mrs. Clarke affair, see Harriet Martineau, *Introduction to the History of the Peace. From 1800 to 1815* (London, 1851), ccxlv-ccxlix.

93. Thomas Gisborne, *An Enquiry into the Duties of Men in the Higher and Middle Classes of Society in Great Britain* (London, 1794), 115-6.

the publication of Godwin's memoir of Wollstonecraft to turn vice upon the radicals.⁹⁴ Within four years of Pigott's death it was the conservatives rather than the radicals who were making political capital out of sexual freedom, vigorously trumpeting the values of domesticity as an antidote to Jacobinism and immorality.

Two prints survive of Charles Pigott. Both portray him in the relaxing company of gentlemanly radicals on the state side of Newgate, drinking wine, reading newspapers, talking politics.⁹⁵ They carry the imputation of a social elite who could afford to hold unorthodox views and suffered few deprivations for doing so. In fact things were not so simple for the members of this well-known Shropshire family, one that made the transition from Jacobitism to Jacobinism during the course of the century. Pigott's eldest brother, heir to the Chetwynd estate and at one time a potential parliamentary candidate for the county, sold up his patrimony in disgust during the American war and ended his days "Revolution mad" as an exile in France. Charles, himself, who similarly rejected the landed aristocracy for radical politics, had to endure the obloquy of his class as "louse Pigott," a nickname he reputedly gained at Eton, but one which remained with him for betraying his roots in his blistering exposés.⁹⁶

Those exposés, I have suggested, had a mixed reception, partly for reasons of style and presentation, but also because of the political conjuncture in which they were disseminated. And yet Pigott deserves some credit for being the first writer to fashion a forthright, genuinely political critique of aristocratic vice, adapting the genre of scandalous chronicles for radical purposes. It was an attack that would be renewed in the aftermath of the Regency era, this time within a discourse of popular constitutionalism rather than revolution. What Pigott bequeathed to the radicals of the early nineteenth century was a social satire of the aristocracy, sensationalist and sometimes pornographic in tone, but not one that in his own time served as a sharp spur to radical change.

94. For the conservative attack upon Godwin's *Memoirs*, see *Gentleman's Magazine* (1798) 68: 186-7, *Anti-Jacobin Review* (1798) 1: 94-102.

95. See *Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires, VII 1793-1800*, ed. M.D. George (London, 1942), nos. 8339 & 8342.

96. On Charles' nickname, see *Times*, 2 July 1794, and *An Answer to Three Scurrilous Pamphlets*, 12. On his brother, Robert Pigott (1736-1794), see *DNB*, *The Correspondence of George, Prince of Wales 1770-1812*, 2: 140, no. 570, *The Later Correspondence of George III*, 5 vols. (Cambridge, 1962), 1: 517-8.