

"More Truth than Poetry": Parody and Intertextuality in Early American Political Song

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Abstract: Musical parody was integral to early American political culture. Focusing on political songs designated "parodies" in early American newspapers, this article demonstrates how parodists representing competing political parties balanced mimesis and critique to mock political adversaries, refute opponents' arguments, and expose political "truths." These parodists used mimesis, structural manipulation, reductive dichotomies, exaggerated claims, and extreme levels of intertextuality in groups of related parodies. As erudite satire declined in appeal, parodists carried elements of early American humour into more accessible genres. While individual parodies may seem ephemeral, a holistic examination demonstrates the genre's integrality and adaptation within early American political culture.

Résumé : La parodie musicale faisait partie intégrante de la culture politique américaine dès l'origine. En se penchant sur les chansons politiques qualifiées de « parodies » dans d'anciens journaux américains, cet article met en lumière la façon dont les parodistes, représentants de partis politiques rivaux, parvenaient à équilibrer mimésis et critique pour tourner en dérision leurs adversaires politiques, réfuter les arguments de leurs opposants et exposer des « vérités » politiques. Ces parodistes employaient la mimésis, la manipulation structurelle, les dichotomies réductrices, les affirmations outrancières et d'extrêmes niveaux d'intertextualité dans des groupes de parodies de même nature. À mesure que la satire érudite perdait de son attrait, les parodistes firent passer certains éléments de cet humour américain des débuts dans des genres plus accessibles. Et tandis que les parodies individuelles peuvent paraître éphémères, un examen d'ensemble démontre que ce genre s'est intégralement adapté dès le début à la culture politique américaine.

On Sunday morning, August 19, 2018, jaws dropped as US President Donald Trump's attorney Rudy Giuliani proclaimed on national television that "Truth isn't truth." *Meet the Press* host Chuck Todd quickly retorted, "Truth isn't truth? ... I think this is going to become a bad

meme.” Giuliani’s proclamation became the year’s “most notable quote” for its reflection of the zeitgeist and a “dramatic decline in respect for truth in politics.” Giuliani stressed that “nowadays,” facts are “in the eye of the beholder” (Phillips 2018). But portraying this as a contemporary phenomenon is misleading, for intense, explicit political battles over “truth” date back to the nation’s first party system, a time when — just as Todd noted of 2018 — parodic offspring were central to the discourse of political truth-telling.

While today memes and social media amuse consumers of political truth-battles, 200 years ago the leading mass medium for parodic political discourse was the newspaper. Read aloud in public spaces like taverns, newspaper content was accessible to both the literate and illiterate. Ordinary newspapers in small towns and major seaboard cities overflowed with political content. The poetry column and even the first pages of newspapers featured song lyrics, and some songs were explicitly designated “parodies.” These parodies ranged from humorous commentaries on women’s and men’s fashion to scathing political criticism. Political parodies’ “truth-telling” function gained value in the 1790s as the first party system formed in the United States and impartial journalism was eroded by the exposé style of vituperative writer and editor William Cobbett. Members of the nation’s first two political parties used parody to promulgate their views. By introducing one parody, with emphasis, as “More *Truth* than Poetry,” the editor of the *Salem Gazette* highlighted the genre’s political value. Early political commentators made their cases in parody by advancing their truth-claims and rejecting those of opponents in entertaining ways. One writer began by addressing the songwriter whose work he was parodying, “Dear Sir, you are wrong / To tell lies in a song” (Embargo Parodied 1808).

Despite the circulation of many song parodies in these early American newspapers, they have largely been overlooked in contemporary scholarship. One reason is music scholars’ greater attention to sources such as sheet music, songsters, and broadsides. Another reason is a modern scholarly usage of “parody” as a synonym of “contrafact,” meaning new lyrics written to a familiar tune. Americans of many professions wrote new lyrics for familiar melodies; these contrafacta regularly circulated in newspapers, broadsides, and song collections. Writers of contrafacta emulated an earlier song’s poetic metre, rhyme scheme, musical metre, and, perhaps, its refrain. Writers of songs explicitly designated “parodies” went further by also establishing a close connection to the model’s words and ideas and adapting them to a new purpose, whether humorous or serious (Johnson 1755).¹ Scholars’ use of “parody” in a general sense as a synonym of contrafact has delayed attention to these songs that were historically deemed parodies in a narrower sense. By sustaining a clear connection to the original while adapting it to a new subject or argument, early parodists balanced the

creation of similarity and difference, or mimesis and critique (Williams 2011: 8). Parody therefore proved difficult for some. As the editor of the *Balance* (Albany) admitted of his own parodic effort, “I found I could not consistently compel the original to bend to my purpose: I therefore abandoned the attempt, after finishing the few verses which follow” (Wreath 1811).

Largely overlooked by scholars, musical parody in this narrower sense became integral to early American political culture during the first party system, which extended from the 1790s through the 1810s. Drawing primarily on representative examples of political songs designated “parodies” in American newspapers and indexed in the *America’s Historical Newspapers* database, this article demonstrates how early parodists representing competing political parties balanced mimesis and critique of their models to mock political adversaries, refute opponents’ arguments, and expose “truths” obscured by their rhetoric. The first section provides essential background on early American newspapers, political parties, and the appeal, basis, and focus of song parodies. The three subsequent sections focus on representative examples that illustrate specific aspects of parodic songwriting. Arranged chronologically, these examples demonstrate how song parody persisted and how writers adapted it to a changing political landscape. The second section explores how parodists from both parties used mimesis, structural manipulation, and intertextuality to expose political “truths” based on reductive dichotomies and exaggerated claims. The third section highlights how political songwriters cultivated extreme levels of intertextuality in individual songs and groups of related parodies. In the final years of the first party system, erudite satire declined in appeal, and the final section illustrates how song parodists carried elements of early American humour into more accessible genres. While individual song parodies may seem ephemeral, a holistic examination demonstrates that through print, performance, collection, and electioneering, the genre remained integral to and adaptable within early American political culture.

Newspapers, Song Parody, and Political Culture in the Early United States

Often written in response to local, current events, song parodies were integrated with political culture in several ways. Circulated in newspapers, they provided amusement for readers, who were expected to peruse, say, or sing the verses (Electioneering Song 1812; New Song 1816; Poetical 1809). While many individual newspapers were aimed at local or state audiences, collectively, newspapers carried information farther through interstate circulation and the

ubiquitous reprinting of content from other papers. Newspapers also provided important connections between text and performance. Delivered to post offices that often doubled as taverns, newspapers carried song parodies and related political editorials to gathering spaces where political commentary, reading aloud, carousing, and singing were the norm (John and Leonard 1998: 87, 93; Lohman 2020; Thompson 1999: 97-98, 137, 141, 165). Many of these parodies were created for performance in community political rituals, such as partisan celebrations and commemorations of national holidays. Parodies also circulated in political song collections. They were important enough for Thomas Jefferson to collect from newspapers and preserve in a scrapbook and for an octogenarian to interpret in detail decades later (Duane 1803: 81-82, 118-20; Ebsworth 1801: 62-64, 109-11; Kirtland 1874).

Why were musical parodies part of this political culture? Musical and poetic expression made political arguments more memorable (Poetry 1808). In addition, musical parody's derivative creation put its writing, reading, and performance in reach of many Americans. Most song parodies circulated in print anonymously or pseudonymously. However, based on those parodists who were named or known and those Americans who wrote contrafacta, including lawyers, craftsmen, teachers, actors, and actresses, many parodists were likely neither professional musicians nor "politicians" in our contemporary sense. Appreciation by general readers and performances by amateurs were aided by reliance on familiar tunes. This familiarity can be seen in the fact that a parody's model was rarely printed with it. Exceptionally, when a parodist misjudged the public's familiarity with the model, or where printers wanted to ensure their readers' comprehension and enjoyment, the model and parody were printed together (From the *Columbian* 1812). With the model's recollection or reprinting, general readers and hearers could consider how the parody related to it in structure, tone, vocabulary, and imagery.

Musical parody was ideal for partisan debates in the nation's first two-party system. Following the conclusion of debates over ratification of the Constitution, in the 1790s two parties emerged: Federalists and Republicans. Leading Federalists included Alexander Hamilton and John Adams, and leading Republicans, who were also called Democrats, included Thomas Jefferson and James Madison. Federalists and Republicans were associated with different principles, such as order and freedom, strong federal government and states' rights, and elitism and populism, respectively. By substituting keywords, an argument could readily be adapted to fit the other party. Musical parody increased once Jefferson was elected president, the Federalist party declined in national presence, and literary-oriented periodicals grew. While Federalists were especially fond of satire, both Republicans and Federalists wrote parodic songs

(Kerber 1970). Such songs were prominent in New England, where Federalists faced increasing Republican organization. Another key source was New York, where intra-partisan Republican intrigues and proliferating partisan newspapers fueled the cultivation and circulation of parodic political song (Baker 2011; Brooke 2010; Cunningham 1963; Strum 1979).

Musical parodists provided narratives that helped communities comprehend a rapidly changing political landscape. As the 19th century neared, this entailed a major shift in values, such as growing emphasis on individual freedoms, declining deference to elites, and greater popular political participation. In response, community members leveraged recent events and repurposed familiar songs to craft powerful narratives in musical and parodic form.

Parodists aimed their musical truth-telling, mockery, argumentation, and narratives at several targets. Most common was the opposing party. Parodists targeted Jefferson, Republican festivals, and the partisan press (From the [N.J.] Centinel of Freedom 1802; Giant's Parody Return'd 1811; Jefferson's Confession 1809; Murder in the Salt-Box 1806; Parody 1800; Parody on "Erin Go Brah" 1808; Poetical Effusions 1803). Parodists commonly focused on specific political issues and recent political events, including controversial legislation, the navy, the judiciary, trade restrictions, US foreign relations, and congressional salaries (Interlude 1802; New Song 1816; Parody of a Federal Song 1799; Parody on a Song 1798; Parody on "God Save the King" 1811; Rob, Britannia! 1809). Songwriters also used parody to recruit soldiers, laud naval heroes, narrate history, record war, and celebrate peace (American Soldier 1807; From the Columbian 1815; Honest Days of Seventy-Six 1801; More Truth than Poetry 1814; Parody 1812; Parody 1814a; Parody 1814b; Parterre 1815; Song 1813; Sweet Blessings of Peace 1815; Thalia 1812).

Regardless of topic, a parodist's play with a model's words was central to presenting a political development in a new light. An effective parody required retaining key words from the model within a new, coherent argument. Through this word play, a parodist set a new song in a "dialogical relationship" with its model (D'Angelo 2010: 33). The parody's reader or hearer needed to know the model to understand this word play (Weinbrot 1966: 444). Therefore, the parodist's model had to be recent or circulated enough through print and/or oral transmission to be well-known. Political parodists' models included 18th-century American, English, and Scottish songs. Models ranged from nursery rhymes to songs of national stature like Thomas Arne's "Rule Britannia" (1740) and "God Save the King" (Grand Federal Edifice 1788; Interlude 1802; Parody 1814a; Rob, Britannia! 1809; Satirical Poem 1804). Models also included popular songs of the recent British stage and older British models like "Derry

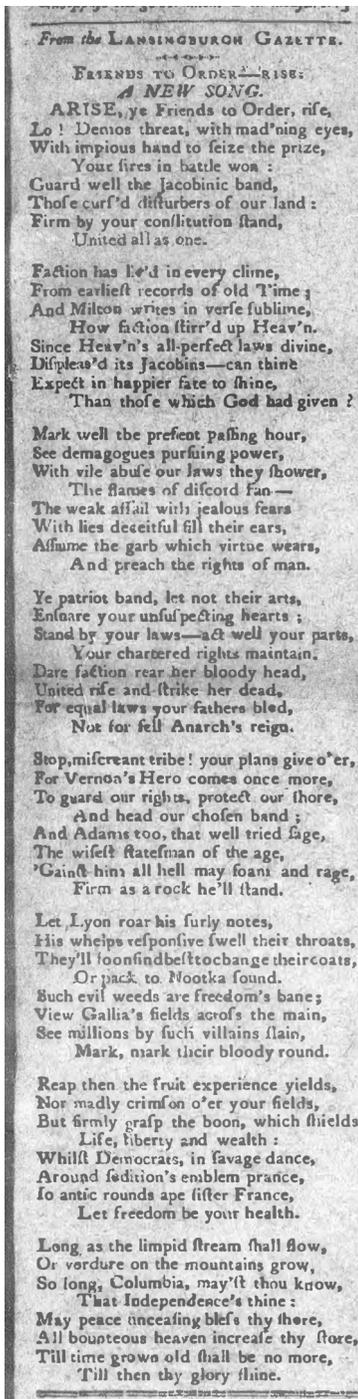
Down” and “The Vicar of Bray” (Poor Kit 1810; Tit for Tat 1802; Parody of the News-Mongers’ Song 1787). Such reliance on British models paralleled the frequent use of British songs for American contrafacta more broadly. American songs like Timothy Dwight’s “Columbia, Columbia, to Glory Arise” (1777) and John M’Creery’s “The American Star” (1808) were also chosen as models (From the Columbian 1815; Sweet Blessings of Peace 1815). Song parodists worked with these models in varied ways. Parodists drew on and extended their models through imitation, alteration, quotation, adaptation, allusion, substitution of characters or subjects, changes in tone or diction, and textual rearrangement. Through these techniques, their parodies ridiculed, exaggerated, caricatured, created incongruity, and paid homage in articulation of their political views (D’Angelo 2010: 33, 38; Hariman 2008: 250; Kiremidjian 1969: 235, 241). While songs designated as parodies were often humorous, critical, satirical, or mocking, this designation was also applied to serious and hortative songs.²

Parodic “Truth-telling” and Intertextuality in the Two-Party System

Political songwriters of both parties commonly used two approaches to parody. Some parodists simply addressed or mocked their targets through song, selecting as a model an existing song not inherently related to the political target or subject. A noteworthy example is Federalist Theodore Dwight’s “Moll Carey,” a scandalous parody of a religious song. Other parodists also mocked a song while mocking their political target. In these cases, a *political* song was both the catalyst and model for the parody. An example is an anonymous Republican’s “Parody of a Federal Song.” As these two examples illustrate, parodists supporting both parties used mimesis, structural manipulation, and intertextuality to expose political “truths” based on reductive dichotomies and exaggerated claims.

The anonymous Republican parodist refuted the claims of the political model he chose to parody: “Friends to Order — Rise.” This latter Federalist song circulated in New York, Massachusetts, and Connecticut in early 1799 before elections for the New York state assembly. In writing “Friends to Order — Rise,” an anonymous Federalist songwriter had called fellow Federalists, the “friends of order,” to oppose Republicans. The Federalist songwriter portrayed Republicans as lying demagogues who abused the laws and strove to “ensnare” the “unsuspecting hearts” of voters (see Fig. 1).

To refute the Federalist’s argument, the Republican offered a parody to the influential New England periodical *Bee*. As seen in Fig. 2, simply by changing a single word in each of several key lines, the Republican parodist transformed the Federalist’s critique of Republicans into a critique of Federalists and their values



(Parody of a Federal Song 1799). This “quick change” approach to parody worked because stark dichotomies were central to partisan discourse. The partisan press used contrasting pairs of keywords to bluntly summarize the choice offered by Republican and Federalist candidates. Republican newspapers visually clarified how “An Association of all that is Bad in Human Nature *Leagued* Against all that is Good” by arranging fifteen pairs of opposing characteristics in two columns. These columns set falsehood against truth, dullness against talent, and faction against justice (From the *Aurora* 1800). The columns expanded on dichotomies associated with Federalists and Republicans earlier in the 1790s, such as order vs. freedom, and monarchy vs. anarchy.

The Republican parodist used such dichotomies to balance efficiently mimesis and critique of the model. The parodist substituted “freedom” for “order” in the first line, addressing Republicans as “ye friends of freedom.” Retaining the end of the first stanza, “Firm by your constitution stand, / United all as one” (now addressing Republicans), the songwriter countered Federalist claims that Republicans were anarchists who rejected all laws. The parodist turned the Federalist’s command to voters to

Fig. 1. An anonymous Federalist wrote “Friends to Order—Rise” to rally voters before spring elections. Reflecting the intensely partisan atmosphere of John Adams’s presidency, the song featured hyperbolic portrayals of Republicans, or “Demos,” like Vermont’s Matthew Lyon, as Jacobins inspired by the violent French Revolution, and referenced recent events, such as George Washington’s appointment as commander of a new national army. Although no tune was named, the poetic metre and rhyme scheme signaled that this was a contrafact of the popular song “Nancy Dawson,” which memorialized an 18th-century London dancer. *Albany Centinel*, March 1, 1799.

“Stand by your laws” into a Republican exhortation to voters to “Stand by your rights.” In commanding them to “Stand by your rights,” the Republican parodist called for opposition to the Alien and Sedition Acts, legislation that violated the Constitution and specifically the freedoms of speech and press guaranteed by the First Amendment. Federalists used this legislation to silence and intimidate their Republican opponents through arrests, fines, and imprisonment for seditious libel. The Republican transformed the Federalist’s rejection of “Anarchs reign,” a state of disorder attributed to Republicans, into a rejection of a “monarch’s reign,” a counterrevolutionary relapse blamed on Federalists (*Parody of a Federal Song* 1799). Such dichotomies facilitated the Republican parodist’s “truth-telling” and illustrated one of the simplest ways that a parodist “turns things upside down, inside out, and backward” (Williams 2011: 7).

To focus the audience’s attention on key Republican principles and an American future under Jefferson’s leadership, the Republican parodist significantly changed the model. The parodist halved the length, reduced the detail, and removed several intertextual references central to the model’s argument. By removing the model’s references to Milton’s *Paradise Lost* and the Connecticut Wits’ *Anarchiad* (1786-87), the parodist rejected its claims of Republican godlessness and the upholding of law and order by Federalists. Omitting the model’s references to George Washington, John Adams, and Vermont congressman Matthew Lyon, the Republican parodist focused on one national leader, Jefferson, who, instead of Adams, would stand “firm as a rock” (*Parody of a Federal Song* 1799). By altering this key line,

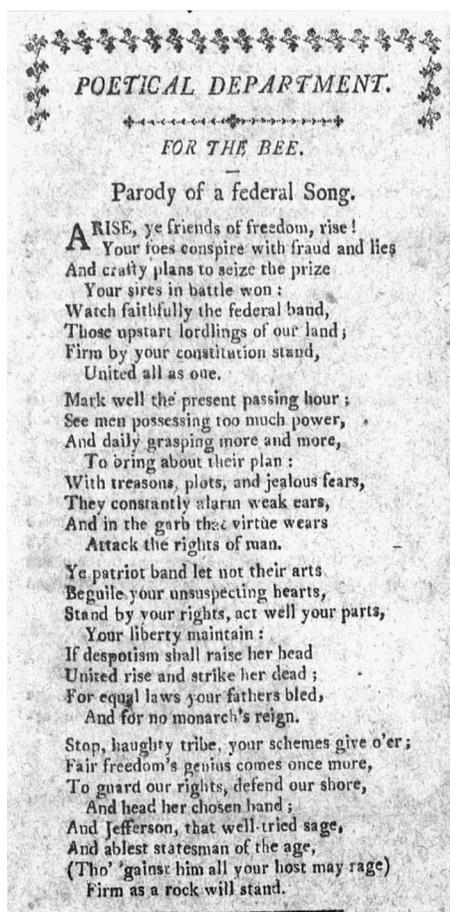


Fig. 2. An anonymous Republican parodist capitalized on widely used dichotomies, such as order vs. freedom, and monarchy vs. anarchy, to refute the narrative advanced in “Friends to Order — Rise.” *Bee* (New London), May 1, 1799.

through which the writer of “Friends to Order — Rise” had echoed the popular Federalist song, “Hail Columbia,” the parodist began a Republican repurposing of Federalist symbols and phrases that would intensify during Jefferson’s presidency (Lohman 2020).

Unlike the Republican parodist, Theodore Dwight did not parody a political song to make his partisan argument. Instead, Dwight selected a popular religious song: Isaac Watts’s 148th Psalm “Ye Tribes of Adam Join” (Watts and Barlow 1785). Dwight’s contemporaries recognized the parody as his work even though his name was not printed with it. Like other Federalists, Dwight used parody to respond to increasing Republican organization in traditionally Federalist New England (Patriotic Ode 1803; Witness 1806a). Republicans called Connecticut’s men and women to gather at New Haven on the anniversary of Jefferson’s inauguration in early March 1803. Like a festival in Wallingford two years earlier, the New Haven event sought to rally Republicans before April elections for governor and seats in the state’s lower house. The widely advertised festivities included a procession, oration, public dinner, dancing assembly, and vocal and instrumental music. Planned music included Watts’s psalm, reflecting a common entwinement of religious and political expression. Republicans advertised the festival — in both Republican and Federalist newspapers — as a celebration of Federalism’s national decline and local Republican ascent (Democratic Scheme 1803; Republican Festival 1803b). In a historically Federalist state, such aggressive Republican efforts presented an unwelcome challenge.

Dwight, one of the Connecticut Wits, parodied the Republicans’ celebratory psalm in “Moll Carey.” Moll Carey ran a New York brothel. With this song title, Dwight extended an attack begun upon the festival’s earliest advertisement in the Federalist press. The *Connecticut Courant* (Hartford) had printed a fictitious letter from “Molly Carey” seeking information about the “private houses” that Republicans promised as accommodations for ladies (presumably those attending the festival from out of town):

To the Democratic Committee at New-Haven.

GENTLEMEN,

I OBSERVED with pleasure in the last American Mercury, your Notification for another *Democratic Thanksgiving*, and that PRIVATE houses are provided for such *Ladies* as may attend. I wish to be informed thro’ the same channel where these houses are situated, and who has the superintendance of them. Deacon Bishop, I think ought to be excused on account of his advanced age; but it is said we can enter with Abraham. If we hear nothing

further on this subject, we white folks shall apply to the Orator
of the day; the others will depend on Mr. Hylegar.

Your's,

MOLLY CAREY.

Jan. 31, 1803.

(To the Democratic Committee 1803; emphasis in original)

Through this inquiry, the *Courant* cast the festival as a site of prostitution. The charge was debated and expanded to general fornication, led, the Federalists claimed, by the festival's orator, Pierpont Edwards, whose libertine reputation only fueled the charges (Ben-Atar and Brown 2014: 64-66; Interesting Intelligence 1803; Kirtland 1874: 13; Molly Carey 1803; To the Democratic Committee 1803). The letter's racially charged language was sustained through the festival's reception (Republican Festival 1803b).

In the opening verse of his parody named for Carey, Dwight highlighted Republican debauchery through stark contrast with his model. While Watts's psalm called people to unite in sung praise of God, Dwight had Republicans calling their colleagues to join the brothel owner. By maintaining a close structural parallel to Watts's original, Dwight magnified his accusations of Republican dissolution.

YE TRIBES of Adam, join
With heaven, and earth, and seas
And offer notes divine
To your creator's praise.
Ye holy throng
Of angels bright,
In world of light
Begin the song.

YE tribes of Faction join,
Your daughters, and your wives,
MOLL CAREY's come to dine,
And dance with *Deacon* IVES.
Ye ragged throng
Of *Democrats*,
As thick as rats,
Come join the song

(Song 1803; emphases in original)

From his first verse, Dwight established perhaps the sharpest possible incongruity between his model and what he inserted into its structure through parodic adaptation (Kiremidjian 1969: 232-33).

Dwight then tripled his model's length to skewer the Republican festival and its organizers. In eight verses he attacked the festival's director and several members of its organizing committee. While these verses diverged dramatically from Watts's in topic, Dwight retained a connection to his model through simple language and imagery. That imagery was direct and taken from everyday life. Dwight conveyed in one- and two-syllable words a lurid fly-on-the-wall perspective: "Moll Carey leads the van, / And boldly scours the field, / She takes them, *Man* by *Man*, / And makes the stoutest yield. / Great Potter pants, / And Kirby crawls, / And Wolcott falls, / And Bishop faints" (emphasis in original). "Potter" was Dr. Jared Potter, a respected Wallingford, Connecticut physician. As Potter's octogenarian grandson explained decades later, nearly all these men were upstanding community members who were targeted for being active Republicans. The exception was Pierpont Edwards, a US Attorney General who had seduced a clergyman's daughter and left her to die in childbirth. Dwight's antipathy toward Republicans' organizing was so strong that he attacked Edwards, his own uncle, through the moniker "Old Porpoise" (Ben-Atar and Brown 2014: 64-66; Kirtland 1874: 5, 8-16).

The observational stance of Dwight's lyrics contradicted his positioning of the parody as a song to be sung at the festival. With this positioning, Dwight was parodying the Republicans' intended *performance* of Watts's psalm. But Dwight's song was read, interpreted, and remembered as a parody of the *psalm* itself. This ambiguity in what was being parodied — the text of Watts's psalm or a performance of it — enabled Republicans to attack Dwight immediately and for years to come.

Dwight's parody expressed the truth about his uncle's behaviour. So rather than disputing the charge against Edwards, Republicans seized on the intertextual link between Watts's psalm text and Dwight's new verses to expose the falseness of Federalist piety. That piety had been especially prominent in Connecticut, where power was wielded by a stable Federalist political and religious elite known as the "Standing Order" rooted in the Congregationalist Church. Commenting on Dwight's perceived act of parodying the psalm, one editorialist exposed the falseness of Federalist piety by asking: "Is there a man or woman in Connecticut, who in their sense, will justify the substitution of Moll Carey in place of the one infinite God?" (For the American Mercury 1803a). The Republican *American Mercury* decried such hypocrisy, blasphemy, and obscenity, noting the immorality of printing Dwight's song in newspapers that reached wives and daughters (For the American Mercury 1803a; For the Mercury 1803).

After recounting the Federalists' efforts to disrupt the festival, one Republican writer cast them as both offensive and ineffective.

Republicans bore [those efforts] with the consoling reflection that they were the last struggles of expiring Federalism. The black vomit is the sure sign of approaching dissolution. This last symptom was hourly expected, and at length appeared in the obscene and blasphemous parody on the 148th Psalm. Here federal cunning arrived at its height and showed its alliance with folly.... [T]he republicans became united as one man, and the public curiosity was excited beyond a parallel.... [A] procession was formed of Connecticut republicans, not exceeded in respectability nor half equaled in numbers since the settlement of the State. All the wall pews in the meeting-house and nearly one half of the front galleries were occupied by ladies as well-dressed and reputable as those who attend our Commencements and Elections. The exercises were perfectly satisfactory, and all was order and harmony. (For the *American Mercury* 1803b)

The editorialist continued, addressing the Federalists when recounting the futility of their disruption tactics.

Here was an answer to your *private houses*, your negro speeches, your mock processions, your petty larcenies, and your Moll Carey! — In the decencies of that day federal cunning met the thunder of annihilation, and from the 9th of March, 1803, may be dated the death stroke of Connecticut Federalism. (For the *American Mercury* 1803b; emphasis in original)

In Republican newspapers, “Moll Carey” and “Moll Carey songs” became shorthand for Federalist immorality and their disgraceful willingness to use any means to fight their opponents (*Burlesque Exhortation* 1806; *Federal Dictionary* 1806; *Witness* 1806b). Thomas Jefferson reportedly expressed shock at the debasement of Federalists and clergymen, saying of the song, “Avowed infidels could not have done worse” (*Bronson* 1877: 325-26). Dwight’s parody was memorialized in news carriers’ New Year’s addresses for two more years and remembered for decades (*Bronson* 1877: 305, 325, 328; *Parnassus* 1805; *Sketches of the Times* 1804). Dwight, in ridiculing Republican festival activities through parody, set himself and his party up for ridicule (Hariman 2008: 255).

In these two cases, the parodist's management of intertextuality was critical to the parody's meaning. The Federalist writer of "Friends to Order — Rise" referred to three other widely known texts to exhort fellow partisans to contest upcoming elections. His Republican parodist removed all but one of these references to simplify his argument when urging his fellow partisans, including less educated ones, to rally around Jeffersonian leadership. Dwight referred to four separate texts to craft his parody's message: Watts's psalm, the letter from "Molly Carey," the Republicans' festival advertisement, and another of the Republicans' planned songs, "Jefferson and Liberty" (Kirtland 1874: 15). This level of intertextuality was sustained and even surpassed by groups of parodies linked by a common song.

Taking Intertextuality Further: "Truth-telling" in Parody Chains and Clusters

American political songwriters took intertextuality to new heights by creating chains and clusters of parodies that purported to expose political truths. A chain linked a model, its parody, and a parody of that parody through highly intertextual relationships. A cluster linked multiple parodies of one song, possibly written for different purposes. The act of parody became contagious through these chains and clusters, with several songwriters engaging in political debate on an issue through a series of parodic texts that collectively represented American politics "as a dynamic field of competing voices forever commenting on each other" (Hariman 2008: 257). "The Hobbies" and Henry Mellen's "The Embargo" illustrate the highly intertextual relationships created in parody chains and clusters and the wide range of literary, musical, and ritual texts to which songwriters referred in their individual parodies.

Songwriters from both political parties created a parody chain based on the popular American theatrical song "The Hobbies." "The Hobbies" was written and sung by John Brown Williamson in Boston's Haymarket Theatre in 1797 (Larkin 1798: 21-22, 1804: 101-02). Williamson's structure was ideal for political parody, as his list of targets — scolding wives, lawyers, "beaux," sailors, soldiers, and ladies, each of whom had their own "hobby" — could readily be changed while retaining the song's structure. This is precisely what Portsmouth lawyer and songwriter Jonathan Mitchell Sewall did in "The Hobbies, Parodied." Sewall focused on individuals like Theodore Dwight had in "Moll Carey." Partway through his parody, Sewall turned from praising a Federalist-claimed political lineage of George Washington, John Adams, and John Jay to targeting contemporary Republicans, Virginia Congressman John Randolph and

Secretary of War Henry Dearborn. Sewall abandoned his typically bombastic and imagery-laden style and instead employed intertextual references in a satirical song reflecting the influence of the Connecticut Wits. The Wits, who included John Trumbull, Timothy Dwight, Joel Barlow, David Humphreys, Lemuel Hopkins, Richard Alsop, and Theodore Dwight, were especially fond of satire, specifically erudite forms of verse satire filled with allusions to Augustan writers like Alexander Pope and Jonathan Swift (Briggs 1985). In his satirical song, Sewall invoked the comic novel *Tristram Shandy* and the biblical story of Samson and Delilah. The latter symbolized New Hampshire Federalists' silence in the spring election, silence that made Republican John Langdon governor. Sewall concluded by asserting New England's regional supremacy, exposing the hypocrisy of Southern Republicans (who claimed to be champions of freedom while perpetuating slavery), and ridiculing two Republican icons: Jefferson's coastally oriented defensive navy and Vermont congressman Matthew Lyon. In the final verse, Sewall proclaimed, "Our hobby's New England, who ne'er like a ninny, / Will submit to the nod of *slave-making* Virginia / 'Till Tom's doughty *gun-boats* and Matt's *wooden lance*, / Capture Britain's whole *navy*, and conquer all *France*" (Hobbies, Parodied 1805); emphasis in original). With the reference to Lyon's "wooden lance," Sewall wove into his lyrics a fourth text: a Federalist narrative of Lyon's dismissal from Revolutionary War service, for cowardice, that underscored Sewall's charges of inept Republican leadership.

While such song texts may seem intended merely for newspaper readers' enjoyment, they were also performed and preserved, signaling parody's importance in New England political culture. In New England, Federalists and Republicans celebrated Independence Day on July 4th separately and with harsh rhetoric. On July 4, 1805, Portsmouth Federalists enjoyed a performance of Sewall's parody by Samuel Larkin, a local bookstore owner, songbook compiler, and auctioneer. Sewall's song was circulated in Portsmouth, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New York, and Virginia (Hobbies, Parodied 1805; Poetry 1805a). Such parodies were also preserved in a personal account of lived political history on a national scale: Jefferson clipped Sewall's parody into his newspaper scrapbook of political songs, not once, but twice (*Jefferson-Randolph Family Scrapbooks* 1800-1808).

Sewall's parody prompted a Republican response: "A Parody Parodied or a New England Aristocratic Song, stripped of its fallacy, & dressed in the becoming garb of 'native truth and unaffected simplicity.'" Through the title, Sewall's parodist rejected Sewall's complex reference to the un-American *Tristram Shandy* and highlighted a key function of parody: exposing "flaws, mistakes, conceits, idiocies, absurdities, and plain wrong-headedness" (Kiremidjian 1969: 234). Sewall's parodist "corrected" the model's "fallacy" by reversing Sewall's

portrayals: Adams's hobby was no longer science, but dullness, and the liars were not Republicans, but Federalists. Sewall's parodist also recovered Jefferson's reputation. New lyrics placed Jefferson within Washington's political lineage and transformed the model's final verse into a critique of New England sectionalism rather than Republican ineptitude. As the parodist explained in the final verse, "The New-England-Man's hobby is still like a ninny, / To be bawling against *the slave-making Virginia*, / To quiet their clamors, I think the best way, / Were to give them safe conduct to *Botany-Bay*" (Parody Parodied 1805; emphasis in original). By invoking Botany Bay, the Republican likened Federalists to a recently convicted British swindler. Thus, the parodist ended as the descriptive title had begun — by underscoring Sewall's fallaciousness.

Parody's embeddedness in New England political culture can be clearly seen in other highly intertextual chains and clusters of parodies from New Hampshire. During Jefferson's final year in office, conflict over embargo legislation prompted much debate, including debate in song. Federalist lawyer Henry Mellen's "The Embargo," after being sung at Dover Fourth of July celebrations in 1808, was circulated in dozens of newspapers. New Hampshire writers responded with several parodies, one of which itself was parodied (Keller 2011: 29, 33-38). Parodies in this cluster were reprinted in newspapers across state lines throughout the fall election season. Several parodies were preserved by Jefferson in his book of newspaper song clippings (Gross 2006: 81-87).

These lyrics also circulated by post into the local backcountry for electioneering purposes. Anticipating this, Mellen and his Republican parodist "Simon Pepperpot, the Younger" ended their songs with reference to office-seeking (Embargo 1808; Embargo Parodied 1808). Mellen's parodist "Unus Plebis" noted this electioneering circulation of "The Embargo" when introducing his parody to a Walpole printer. Commenting on Mellen's song, Unus Plebis acknowledged that "such TRASH, it is well known, will have more influence upon the minds of some, than whole volumes of rational arguments, couched in the most elegant language" (Poetry 1808). While Unus Plebis dismissed the songs' poetic value, he confirmed their impact. The intense election season activity that Unus Plebis highlighted is captured in Krimmel's depiction of election day (see Fig. 3).

To make their arguments appealing to voters, Mellen and his parodists relied on intertextuality. Mellen incorporated terminology used in musical texts, such as "Allegro" and "Largo," to wittily and self-referentially rhyme his musical critique of the embargo. He invoked Federalist editors' chelonian accusations — their claim that as trade ceased the embargo forced Americans to retire into their houses like turtles into their shells — and he turned their charges of withdrawal onto Republican politicians (Communications 1808; Mr. Ely's

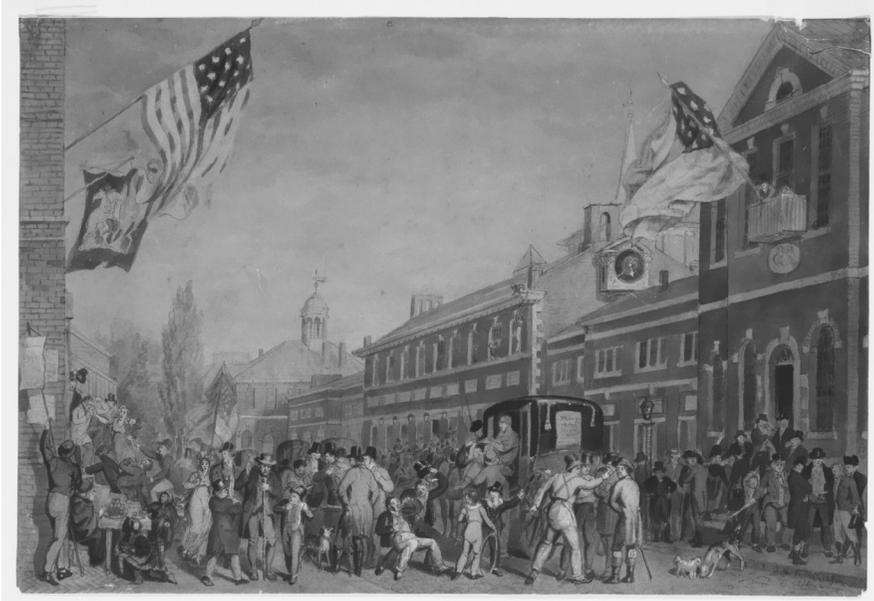


Fig. 3. *Election Day at the State House*. Watercolor, 1815, John Lewis Krimmel, HSP large graphics collection [V65], Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Krimmel captures election-day activities in Philadelphia, including a marching band, a vessel parading men down the street, poster-pasting, vendors selling refreshments, and partisan activists cajoling voters with pre-filled ballots.

Letter 1808; *Public Advertiser* [New York] 1808; *Portland Gazette* 1808). Mellen also played on a text frequently seen in newspapers, the toast to “The American Fair” given at convivial dinners. Mellen’s penultimate verse maintained that America’s women would save the country’s commerce (see Fig. 4). Through the American “fair,” Mellen invoked a widespread cultural utterance, one that his parodists deemed important enough to adapt to their arguments. Mellen’s Republican parodist *Unus Plebis* concluded with the imperative to not “let the fair go” and blamed British “Royal decrees,” the abolishment of which would unite Americans in hating the embargo (*Poetry* 1808). When refuting Mellen’s argument and defending Jefferson’s administration, parodist *Simon Pepperpot* stressed Jefferson’s determination to protect the American “fair” through the embargo. *Pepperpot*’s parodist, in refuting the Republican’s argument, moved his take on the “fair” to much earlier in his song. He made the country’s commerce “fair” and stressed the idea that American men had abandoned their wives by enlisting in foreign naval service to earn money as the embargo destroyed the country’s trade. Songwriters readily bent one model — and even one reference — to their political purposes while creating highly intertextual

Song	Argument for/against the embargo	Verse referring to the “Fair”
<p>“The Embargo” by Henry Mellen</p> <p>(The Embargo 1808)</p>	Against	<p>Thus <i>Tommy</i> destroys, A great part of our joys; Yet we’ll not let the beautiful fair go; They all will contrive To keep commerce alive, There’s nothing they hate like <i>Embargo</i>.</p>
<p>Parody of Mellen’s “The Embargo” by “Unus Plebis”</p> <p>(Poetry 1808)</p>	For	<p>Thus if folly “destroys” but our baubles and toys, We are wise if we don’t let the fair go— But when Royal decrees shall once quit the high seas, We’ll all join and hate the Embargo.</p>
<p>Parody of Mellen’s “The Embargo” by “Simon Pepperpot, The Younger”</p> <p>(The Embargo Parodied 1808)</p>	For	<p>Thus Tommy destroys Intriguers [Federalists’] chief joys; But to ruin will not let the Fair go; For he will secure Our damsels, so pure, By keeping off rogues with Embargo.</p>
<p>Anonymous parody of Pepperpot’s parody</p> <p>(The Parody on Henry Mellen 1808)</p>	Against	<p>Thus Tommy destroys Fair commerce high joys, See, to ruin he lets our brave tars go; For far from their wives, They enlist for their lives, Or starve through the starving Embargo.</p>

Fig. 4. Comparison of how songwriters handled the intertextual reference to the common toast to “The American Fair” in the cluster of parodies written in response to Henry Mellen’s song, “The Embargo.”

relationships with other songs and texts. And as Jefferson's scrapbook makes clear, these parodies were read and preserved together in ways that sustained these dialogic relationships.

From Satire to Puffery: Parodies of "Ye Mariners of England"

In 1811, Virginia's Republican congressman John Randolph catalyzed an even larger set of parodies when he used a musical quotation to oppose war with Britain. After years of failed negotiations and embargos in response to escalating British and French trade restrictions, Congress debated the prospect of war. Unlike many Republicans, Randolph opposed war, and he cited British naval strength to make his case. He quoted Thomas Campbell's "Ye Mariners of England" (1800) to invoke the legendary naval superiority of Britain, "Whose march is on the mountain wave, Whose home is on the deep." With these lyrics, Randolph implied certain American defeat (Campbell 1902: 94; Congress 1811; Poetical 1812; To the Editor 1812). Parodists quickly seized on Campbell's highly regarded song (see Fig. 5 and YouTube playlist) to comment on many national issues (Poetical 1812; Thalia 1812). As the first party system neared its twilight, these songwriters turned parody to varied, more accessible ends.

In "Ye Freemen of Columbia," New Yorker Henry Stanley refuted Randolph's antiwar argument. Stanley was a veteran of New York politics and intra-partisan intrigues. His parody was promptly featured in the first column of the *National Intelligencer* (Washington). From this unusually prominent placement, it promulgated a Republican pro-war stance (From the Columbian 1812). Stanley challenged the notion of British naval invincibility through calculated retentions and alterations of Campbell's lyrics (see Fig. 6). Stanley modelled his first verse after Campbell's, and, as Campbell had, Stanley invoked his audience's forefathers to inspire support for impending war. But Stanley focused his imagery on the land. The ghosts of American forefathers loomed over the fields where brave Americans died in battle; this imagery introduced Stanley's hortative lines "In your might shall you fight, / And force the foe to yield" (From the Columbian 1812). American bravery stemmed not from control of the vast ocean, as Campbell claimed for Britain, but rather from the continental breadth of American land. Countering Campbell's declaration that "Britannia needs no bulwark," Stanley declared that "Columbia fears no enemy" (From the Columbian 1812). Stanley refuted Randolph's grounding of his argument in certain American defeat and assuredly depicted a British defeat in which "Britain's tears may flow in vain" (From the Columbian 1812). Stanley's

Ye mar-i-ners of Eng-land, Who guard your na-tive seas, Whose
 5 flag has braved a thou-sand years, The bat-tle and the breeze: Your
 9 glo-rious stan-dard launch a-gain, To match an-oth-er foe, As ye
 14 sweep o'er the deep, As ye sweep o'er the deep, As ye
 18 sweep o'er the deep, When the stor-my tem-pests blow; When the
 22 bat-tle ra-ges loud and long, And the stor-my tem-pests
 25 blow! And the stor-my tem-pests blow!

2. The spirit of your fathers
 Shall start from every wave,
 For the deck it was the field of fame:
 And ocean was their grave,
 Where *Blake* and mighty *Nelson* fell
 Your manly hearts shall glow,
 As ye sweep o'er the deep
 When the stormy tempests blow;
 While the battle rages loud and long,
 And the stormy tempests blow!

3. Britannia needs no bulwark,
 No towers along the steep,
 Her march is o'er the mountain-wave,
 Her home is on the deep
 With thunders from her native oak,

She quells the floods below,
 As they roar on her shore
 When the stormy tempests blow;
 While the battle rages loud and long,
 And the stormy tempests blow!

4. The meteor flag of England
 Shall yet terrific burn,
 Till danger's troubled night depart,
 And the star of peace return.
 Then, then ye ocean-warriors!
 Our song and feast shall flow,
 To the fame of your name,
 When the storm has ceased to blow;
 When the fiery fight is heard no more,
 And the storm has ceas'd to blow!

Fig. 5. Thomas Campbell lauded the British navy in "Ye Mariners of England" on the prospect of war with Russia in 1800. This version of Campbell's lyrics circulated in America in early 1812.

Thalia.



The following parody on Campbell's beautiful Song "*Ye Mariners of England*," is from the pen of HENRY STANLEY, Esq. It is admirably calculated to suit the present times.

YE freemen of Columbia,
Who guard your native coast,
Whose fathers won your liberty,
Your country's pride and boast—
Your glorious standard rear again,
To match your ANCIENT foe;
As she roars on your shores,
Where the stormy tempests blow;
As she prowls for prey on every
shore.

Where the stormy tempests blow.

The spirits of your fathers
Shall hover o'er each plain,
Where in their injur'd country's
cause

The immortal brave were slain!
Where bold Montgomery fearless
fell,

Where carnage strew'd the field,
In your might shall you fight,
And force the foe to yield;
And on the heights of Abraham
Your country's vengeance wield.

Columbia fears no enemy
That plows the briny main,
Her home a mighty continent,
Its soil her rich domain!
To avenge our much lov'd coun-
try's wrongs,
To the field her sons shall fly,
While alarms sound to arms,
We'll conquer or we'll die;
When Britain's tears may flow in
vain,
As low her legions lie!

Columbia's Eagle standard
Triumphant then shall tower,
Till from the land the foe depart—
Driven by its gallant power.
Then, then, ye patriot warriors!
Our song and feast shall flow,
And no more, on our shore,
Shall war's dread tempest blow;
But the breeze of peace shall gen-
tly breathe,
Like winds that murmur low.

parody was praised as "admirably calculated to suit the present times" and well "adapted to American feelings," commentary that reflected a growing interest in American cultural production (Lohman 2020; Planters of Virginia 1813; Thalia 1812; Ye Freemen of Columbia 1812).

As partisan networks of newspapers carried Campbell's and Stanley's lyrics across the country, parodists in several regions turned these songs to other ends. One distant parodist was North Carolinian Alexander Lucas, editor and publisher of the Federalist *Raleigh Minerva*. Lucas offered his own highly intertextual parody titled "Ye Members of Congress" (1812a). Playing on Campbell's recurring reference to the ocean's "stormy tempests" and the common simile of the state as a ship, Lucas explained, "We wish to celebrate the glorious crew who are now guiding the vessel of state through the tempest of the times" (Ye Members of Congress 1812a). Lucas emulated and adapted elements of *both* Campbell's and Stanley's lyrics, which had circulated together in several newspapers. Targeting Congress's "storm of words," Lucas mockingly addressed its members, "With parchment proclamations / You'll drive [Britain] from the shore" (Ye Members of Congress 1812a). Lucas, like many Federalists, derided the War Hawks' plans to conquer Canada, America's peaceful northern neighbour.

Elsewhere, American parodists turned Campbell's song to other purposes. One parodist motivated Massachusetts voters in a "Song for Election Day." Another fomented sectional animosity in "The Planters of Virginia" as the nation battled Britain. Collectively, parodies of Campbell's song served wide-ranging purposes: rousing patriotic spirit for war, justifying war, deriding war plans, intensifying divisions, electioneering, humour, and advertising.

Fig. 6. Henry Stanley parodied Thomas Campbell's "Ye Mariners of England" in early 1812. Cooperstown *Otsego Herald*, February 29, 1812. NewsBank Readex.

Serving the latter purpose, the most accomplished parody came from John Richard Desborus Huggins, a New York barber, satirist, and parodist, and one of America's most skilled advertisers. Integrating politics and marketing, Huggins proclaimed himself "emperor of Hairdressers and king of the Barbers" (Huggins 1808: 9). Huggins derided the anticipated American invasion of Canada. Playing on barbers' shaving services and implicitly mocking the nation's nonprofessional militia in a prose piece, he facetiously planned to amass an army of over 14,000 barbers to "cut the throats" of 14,000 officers and soldiers before breakfast, then take Québec (Card 1812; *Conquest of Canada* 1812).

Shortly after these teaser proposals for his "Conquest of Canada" appeared, Huggins offered a musical parody, "Ye Shavers of Columbia. A Barber-ous Ode." Mocking the elaborate rituals of the New York Republican organization known as the Tammany Society and the offices that were commonly awarded to loyal political supporters, Huggins announced:

The following truly patriotic Song was composed and sung by our worthy and much esteemed friend, BILLY LUSCIOUS, at the wig-wham, with reiterated applause, and 11,500 shouts, in consequence of DESBORUS having Graciously appointed him Inspector General of the Ladies "body garments" agreeable to the Blue Laws of Pennsylvania.³ (*Bulletin of the Empire* 1812a)

Much of Huggins' humour came from his closely matching the syntax, line repetitions, internal rhyme, and argument of Campbell's song, all while shifting focus from intimidating naval dominance to hair cutting (see Fig. 7). This masterful balance between mimesis, on the one hand, and maximal contrast between the profound and the mundane, on the other, culminated in his final verse's reference to his comical plan to conquer Canada with his "barber-warriors," a passing reference that assumed knowledge of his recent teaser proposals (*Bulletin of the Empire* 1812a; Strachan 2007: 226-52). Bending Campbell's language to a new purpose, Huggins played with the contrast between the mundane acts of cutting, grooming, and styling hair and the serious, deadly, and costly prospects of war. He cleverly bridged these two phenomena with his imagery: just like Campbell's storms would keep blowing, customers' hair would keep growing, their tresses would keep flowing, and graceful curls would return like peace.

Such parodic skill illustrated the continuing influence of the Connecticut Wits. Strachan has suggested that Wits, including Theodore Dwight, may have written some of Huggins's material (2007: 235). The Wits' erudite satire had lost its relevance by the mid-1790s (Lee 1988: 36, 38), while parody gained



POETICAL.

[Campbell's celebrated song of "Ye Mariners of England" (published in our page 14) since the quotation from it by Mr. Randolph has been frequently parodied, particularly in "Ye Freeman of Columbia" by Mr. Henry Stanley; and "Ye Members of our Congress" by Mr. Alexander Linnæus, the former published in the New York Columbian and the latter in the Raleigh Minerva." Lately, John Desborus Huggins, Barber and Ladies Hair-Dresser in New York, a character more facetious and almost as famous as the Barber of Bagdat, has also entered the lists of wit and given in the New York Herald another parody on the same song: It follows.]

YE SHAVERS OF COLUMBIA.
A BARBER-OUS ODE.

Ye Shavers of Columbia!
That guard our native *hale*,
Whose *steel's* have scrap'd a thousand chins,
And human beards control.
Your glorious razors whet again
To match the bridled foe!
And with care weave the hair,
While the stormy tempests blow,
While the beards are growing hard and long,
And the stormy tempests blow.

II

The spirits of your fathers
Shall rush upon your sight!—
For the shop it was their field of fame,
And *wigs* their first delight.
Where mighty HUGGINS wields the blade
Your barber-ous hearts shall glow,
As you top round the shop.
While the curly whiskers grow;
While the beards are sprouting thick and long
And the curly whiskers grow.

III.

DESBORUS needs no trumpet,
No bard his fame declare;
His march is o'er the face divine
His home among the fair.
With ringlets of his magic form,
The heavenly neck shall glow—
As they part by his art,
Shall the tresses graceful flow;
Where the hair was floating loose and long,
Shall the tresses graceful flow.

IV.

The meteor songs of HUGGINS,
Shall yet terrific burn;
Till rude and tangled heads depart,
And the curl of grace return.
Then, then, ye barber-warriors!
Our song and feast shall flow,
To the fame of MY name,
When the beard has ceas'd to grow;
When the knotted locks are seen no more,
And the beard has ceas'd to grow.

Fig. 7. New York barber John Richard Desborus Huggins presented a clever parody of Thomas Campbell's "Ye Mariners of England" as part of his trademark puffery. *Star* (Raleigh), March 6, 1812. NewsBank Readex.

prominence. Whether "Ye Shavers of Columbia" was written by Huggins, Dwight, or another writer, the parody extended the Wits' satirical tradition in a modern, populist, more accessible way as part of Huggins's trademark puffery, paralleling the rise of comic periodicals like George Helmbold's *Tickler* (Philadelphia) (Sloane 1995; Winter 2009). Huggins's celebrity status and self-interested publications contradicted the disinterest of the Wits' heyday, which required avoiding the appearance of self-interest, even when seeking office. Yet Huggins's publications carried the Wits' literary tradition of satire and textual allusions into a contemporary and more accessible American discourse that linked advertising, politics, and unabashed self-interest (Strachan 2007: 227-28, 247, 250). Perhaps the sharpest sign of that accessibility was Huggins's printed call for the performance of "Ye Shavers of Columbia" in Philadelphia's Olympic Theatre (*Tickler* [Philadelphia] 1812).

While Huggins (or his ghostwriter) parodied Campbell's song on the prospect of war, others did so to comment on the war once it was underway. "A Citizen of Monmouth" cheered the war's beginning in "To the Soldiers of America." Six months and several naval victories later, the *Essex Register* shared "A Parody" proclaiming, in a modification of Campbell's

third verse, “Columbia needs no bulwark, / Along the stormy coast, / Her gallant seamen are her walls, / The country’s pride and boast” (*Columbian Naval Melody* 1813: 57-58; Parody 1813). Such verses held enough popular appeal to draw criticism. As Washington Irving declared, “Nothing is more offensive than a certain lawless custom which prevails among our patriotic songsters, of seizing upon the noble songs of Great Britain, mangling and disfiguring them, with pens more merciless than Indian scalping knives, and then passing them off for American songs” (1814: 244-45). In Irving’s assessment, such practices not only signaled a poverty of American expression, but also denied the war’s reality. In 1814, when early American naval victories were superseded by a tightening British Atlantic blockade and mid-Atlantic coastal raids, Irving chided, “It is really insulting to tell this country, as some of these varlets do, that she ‘needs no bulwarks, no towers along the steep,’ when there is a cry from one end of the union to the other for the fortifying [of] our seaports and the defence of our coast” (244-45). Criticizing derivative emulation of British verse like Campbell’s, Irving maintained, “If we really must have national songs, let them be of our own manufacturing, however coarse. We would rather hear our victories celebrated in the merest doggerel that sprang from native invention, than beg, borrow, or steal from others” (244-45). After decades of contrafacta and parodies of British models, Irving’s criticism was one of several efforts to improve the quality of American song and stimulate its creation, as seen in many “American” and “Columbian” song collections and national song contests (Lohman 2020; National Airs 1808; To Readers and Correspondents 1813).

Conclusion

As these examples illustrate, parodic song was a powerful and appealing means of exposing political truths during the first party system. Parodists went to great lengths of intertextuality, humour, and caustic critique when bending their models to suit either Federalist or Republican political goals. Their song parodies were regularly circulated in newspapers, performed at political gatherings, used in electioneering, preserved in printed and personal political song collections, and used as political dialogue. They became vehicles for exceptional levels of intertextual argumentation and proved well-suited to the political arguments of the opposing parties. While parodies that circulated only in oral transmission cannot be recovered to enrich this contemporary analysis, further attention to parodies preserved in music manuscripts and circulated in broadsides, newspapers, and song collections from the colonial era and later in the 19th

century can help develop a fuller picture of the place of parodic expression and its role in American political truth-telling.

Although song parodies designed “to suit the present times” and “excite temporary interest” may seem ephemeral, they were not always forgotten (For the Gazette of the United States 1800; Thalia 1812). Some parodies, like one based on “The Galley Slave,” were reprinted — sometimes years later — and they inspired new parodies adapted to new contexts (Drunken Soldier 1801; Parody on the “Death of General Wolfe” 1787). A case in point was Theodore Dwight’s parody “Moll Carey,” which was parodied in the violently anti-Republican *Northern Whig* (Hudson, New York) over a decade after he wrote it (Fourth of July 1816). Dwight’s parodist targeted Hudson’s upcoming Republican-dominated 1816 celebrations of the nation’s independence, celebrations that, in paralleling those of Connecticut Republicans in 1803, called him to parody “Moll Carey.” The New York songwriter emulated Dwight’s attacks on state Republicans by associating them with figures of ill-repute and winced at celebrating independence under the oppression of Virginian leaders who reached office with help from the three-fifths compromise that factored slave populations into the apportionment of presidential electors. So, Dwight’s parodist not only carried the Wits’ influence into the post-war period (misleadingly dubbed the “Era of Good Feelings”), but also carried the seeds of the sectional rift that would culminate in the Civil War.

Americans’ ongoing use of political parodic song in the nation’s first decades supports Hariman’s assessment of parody as “essential for an engaged, sustainable, democratic public culture” (2008: 248). Early American political parodies help us understand the efficacy of recurring political tactics when delivered in entertaining form. As songwriters carried parody from the elite satirical traditions of the Wits to more populist and self-interested forms of political rhetoric, they also carried staples of political rhetoric: reductive dichotomies, name-calling, the near-instantaneous boomeranging of accusations back onto one’s opponents, and, as a result, contradictory claims of truth-telling by opposing partisans. Even when seen as lacking in aesthetic quality, these parodies were engaging expressions of recurring and still-dominant techniques of American political rhetoric, circulated in entertaining song form and the socially oriented media of their day. 🍀

Notes

1. As defined by Samuel Johnson in 1755, parody was “A kind of writing, in which the words of an author or his thoughts are taken, and by a slight change adapted to some new purpose.”

2. Political songs designated parodies in this period thus spanned a broader range of tone and function than later definitions of parody would suggest, such as Rose's definition of parody as "the comic refunctioning of preformed linguistic or artistic material" (1993: 52).

3. Proposed state laws governing women's attire.

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