Three Latin Poems Doubtfully Attributed to Samuel Johnson

ROBERT BROWN

*The “Poems of Doubtful Authorship” in modern editions of Samuel Johnson’s poetry include three Latin poems that were first associated with Johnson in 1856. This article reveals the weakness of this alleged “attribution” and discusses the arguments for and against Johnson’s authorship of each poem in turn. While certainty is impossible, it concludes that he possibly wrote the translation Ex cantico Solomonis but that Venus in Armour and The Logical Warehouse are unlikely to be his.**

It is notoriously difficult to validate or disprove contested literary attributions, especially in the case of an author like Samuel Johnson (1709-1784), who was not only prolific but reluctant to publicize his authorship of some early and minor works. The Yale and Oxford editions of Johnson’s poetry each contain a sizeable collection of “Poems of Doubtful Authorship”;¹ indeed, the authorship even of some allegedly authentic poems has been questioned.² In most cases, the doubt arises from anonymity in the original publication, dubious attribution in subsequent printings, or unsupported claims made elsewhere. Some of the doubtfully Johnsonian poems are in Latin, for Johnson composed Latin verse throughout his life, from his schoolboy exercises to the prayer he wrote eight days before his death.³ The later poems were usually composed for himself or the private enjoyment of his friends, but several were pub-

* I am grateful to the anonymous referees for their helpful suggestions.

¹ E.L. McAdam, Jr., G. Milne (ed.), *The Works of Samuel Johnson*. 6. *Poems*, (New Haven, 1964), 361-389; D. Nichol Smith, E.L. McAdam (ed.), *The Poems of Samuel Johnson* (Oxford, 1974²), 445-459. For a digital version of the Yale edition of Johnson’s works, see <http://www.yalejohnson.com/frontend>. The Oxford edition of Johnson’s poetry is available at <https://www.oxfordscholarlyeditions.com/>.

² See especially A. Sherbo, “Samuel Johnson and Certain Poems in the May 1747 *Gentleman’s Magazine*,” *Review of English Studies* 17 (1966), 382-390.

³ For editions of Johnson’s Latin poems, see B. Baldwin (ed.), *The Latin and Greek Poems of Samuel Johnson* (London, 1995); N. Rudd, *Samuel Johnson. The Latin Poems* (Lewisburg, 2005). For appraisals, see A.J. Wiesenthal, “On the Literary Value of Samuel Johnson’s Latin Verse,” *Humanistica Lovaniensia* 28 (1979), 294-30; D. Money, “Samuel Johnson and the neo-Latin Tradition,” in J. Clark, H. Erskine-Hill (ed.), *Samuel Johnson in Historical Context* (Basingstoke, 2002), 199-221.

lished in the early stages of his career. One of these was his first contribution to the *Gentleman's Magazine* (henceforth *GM*), the ode *Ad Urbanum* – an encomium of its editor, Edward Cave – which appeared in March 1738.⁴ In fact, the 1738 volume of the *GM* contains as many as twenty-six different Latin poems.⁵ The authors of eleven of these are identified by full name, partial name, or initials; three are signed with pseudonyms; and twelve are unsigned. Some of the anonymous poems have been confidently, and some doubtfully, attributed to Johnson, who in mid-1738 began to act as an assistant to Cave. The Yale and Oxford editions of Johnson's poetry broadly agree on his authorship of poems addressed to or concerning Richard Savage (210), Elizabeth Carter (210, 372), and "A Lady who Spoke in Defence of Liberty" (211). Three others – *Epigramma* (214), which may be conveniently referred to as *Venus in Armour*, *Ex cantico Solomonis* (215), and *The Logical Warehouse* (271) – are linked to Johnson in the anonymous "The Autobiography of Sylvanus Urban",⁶ a history of the magazine's early years that is probably the work of John Gough Nichols (1806-1873), who had followed in the footsteps of his grandfather and father as sole editor of the *Magazine* from 1850 to 1856. On the year 1738 he writes the following:⁷

[Johnson] sent to us several short pieces of poetry, which were interspersed with those of our other contributors. They were all without signature; and whilst many have been identified, some perhaps have escaped detection. Indeed, these pieces have never been properly edited in Johnson's collected Works, though most of them are placed in Croker's edition of Boswell. In April, 1738, were inserted two Latin lines addressed to Savage, a Greek epigram to Miss Carter [...], a Latin translation of the same, and a Latin couplet which Johnson had addressed some years before to Miss Mary Alston. These are known and ascertained; but in the same number are also, unclaimed, a Latin epigram on Venus in armour, and some Latin lines *Ex cantico Solomonis*. In May appeared the following epigram [here he quotes

⁴ *GM*, 8 (1738), 156. For a facsimile of the first edition of *GM* in its early years, see T. Keymer (ed.), *The "Gentleman's Magazine" in the Age of Samuel Johnson, 1731-1745*, 16 vol. (London, 1998).

⁵ For an overview of the contributions to *GM* in 1738, see the database of Emily Lorraine de Montluzin at <https://bsuva.org/bsuva/gm3/GM1738.html>.

⁶ *GM* 201, n. s. 1 (July-December 1856), 3-9, 131-140, 267-277, 531-541, 667-677; *GM* 202, n. s. 2 (January-June 1857), 3-10, 149-157, 282-290, 379-387.

⁷ *GM* 201, n. s. 1 (September 1856), 272.

The Logical Warehouse]. All of these, if I recollect rightly, were supplied by Johnson, as were the copies in the same numbers, of some Latin lines on Dr. Radcliffe [215-216], by Noel Broxholme and of some on the death of George Prince of Denmark [271, repeated 541], by Dr. Aldrich.

Modern editors claim on this basis that Nichols attributes *Venus in Armour*, *Ex cantico Solomonis*, and *The Logical Warehouse* to Johnson. This is strictly untrue. Nichols is tentative in his approach: “whilst many have been identified, some *perhaps* have escaped detection” (my emphasis). He goes on to include the three above poems in a list of items “*supplied* by Johnson,” not “*authored* by Johnson” (my emphases). While he may have believed that Johnson was the author, he stops short of a direct attribution. The description “unclaimed” reveals that no one has previously claimed them as Johnson’s. And, by his own evidence, the fact that Johnson supplied poems is no guarantee that he wrote them, as in the case of the last two pieces by Broxholme and Aldrich.⁸ The qualification, “if I recollect rightly,” shows that he lacked hard evidence and was relying – perhaps inaccurately, by his own admission – on remarks made by others (presumably his father or grandfather). We should bear in mind that the luster accruing to the *GM* from the identification of unrecognized works by Samuel Johnson gave its editors a powerful incentive to discover them.

The flimsiness of Nichols’s evidence means that the case for ascribing these poems to Johnson must rest primarily on other criteria. I will examine them one by one.

1. *Venus in Armour*

The text of this Latin epigram is followed below by my literal translation and the verse translation accompanying it in the *GM*:

⁸ Even Nichols’s claim that Johnson supplied these is doubtful, according to T. Kaminski, *The Early Career of Samuel Johnson* (New York – Oxford, 1987), 210 n. 50. He calls it a “conjecture [...] probably based on Johnson’s offer of 1734 to provide Cave with ‘poems that deserve revival.’”

Armatam Pallas Venerem conspexit, et “eia
 nunc age, certamen nunc ineamus,” ait;
 dulce Venus ridens, “lorica nil opus,” inquit,
 “vincere te potui nuda, quid arma geram?”

Pallas [Athena or Minerva] saw Venus in armor and said, “Well! Come on now, let us enter into a contest now.” Venus, smiling sweetly, replied, “I have no need of a breastplate; I was able to defeat you naked – why should I bear arms?”

Venus in armour Pallas chanc’d to view,
 And dar’d her much th’ old quarrel to renew;
 Love’s queen reply’d, and smil’d a world of charms,
 Naked I conquer’d you, what need of arms?

The Yale and Oxford editions include it among “Poems of Doubtful Authorship” without expressing an opinion.⁹ Kaminski believes that the poem “has a strong claim to being Johnson’s,” citing Johnson’s many later translations from the *Anthologia Graeca*.¹⁰ Baldwin states that, if it was influenced by its Ausonian and pseudo-Ausonian predecessors (for which see below), “it would suggest, though not prove, Johnsonian authorship.”¹¹ Rudd is critical of the poem but does not pronounce a verdict.¹²

The poem is based on one of several epigrams in the *Anthologia Graeca* relating to the cult of an armed Aphrodite at Sparta (*Anthologia Graeca* 9.320, 321; 16.171-177):¹³

⁹ McAdam, Milne 1964 (as in n. 1), 365; Nichol Smith, McAdam 1974 (as in n. 1), 446.

¹⁰ Kaminski 1987, 22. However, Johnson’s interest was by no means unusual; see L. Bradner, *Musae Anglicanae. A History of Anglo-Latin Poetry 1500-1925* (New York, 1940), 7: “Of all Greek writings the Anthology exerted the greatest and most pervasive influence on neo-Latin poets.” Several textbooks of selections from the *Greek Anthology* existed for use in schools; this epigram appears, for example, in the Westminster School *Anthologia* (Oxford, 1724), 50.

¹¹ Baldwin 1995, 180.

¹² Rudd 2005, 135.

¹³ See S. L. Budin, “Aphrodite *Enoplion*,” in A.C. Smith, S. Pickup (ed.), *Brill’s Companion to Aphrodite* (Leiden, 2010), 79-112.

Παλλὰς τὰν Κυθήρειαν ἔνοπλον ἔειπεν ἰδοῦσα,
 Κύπρι, θέλεις οὕτως ἐς κρίσιν ἐρχόμεθα;
 ἢ δ' ἄπαλὸν γελάσασα, τί μοι σάκος ἀντίον αἶρειν;
 εἰ γυμνὴ νικῶ, πῶς ὅταν ὅπλα λάβω;
Anthologia Graeca 16.174

Pallas, seeing Cytherea [Aphrodite] in armor, said: “Cypris, are you willing to go to a judgment like this?” Smiling gently, she replied: “Why should I raise a shield against you? If I win when I’m naked/unarmed, how will it be when I’m bearing arms?”

The poem alludes of course to the Judgment of Paris, and its punchline turns on a wordplay, for γυμνός (and *nudus*) can mean “unarmed” as well as “nude.”¹⁴ The joke is illogical, but the point is that Aphrodite succeeds in defeating Athena yet again, this time through a display of wit. The Greek epigram was imitated by Ausonius in late antiquity:¹⁵

Armatam vidit Venerem Lacedaemone Pallas.
 “Nunc certemus,” ait, “iudice vel Paride.”
 Cui Venus, “Armatam tu me, temeraria, temnis,
 quae quo te vici tempore nuda fui?”

Pallas saw Venus armed in Sparta. “Let us compete now,” she said, “even with Paris as judge.” Venus replied: “Rash one, do you scorn me when I’m armed, who was naked/unarmed when I defeated you?”

Another version found its way into the collection of seventy epigrams discovered at Bobbio in 1493.¹⁶ It was attributed to Ausonius in the

¹⁴ As did “naked” as late as the time of Johnson: see his *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755), s.v. sense 2; *Oxford English Dictionary* s.v., A.II.6b.

¹⁵ R.P.H. Green (ed.), *The Works of Ausonius* (Oxford, 1991), 81 (Epigram 59). For commentary, see N.M. Kay, *Ausonius. Epigrams* (London, 2001), 190-192. Ausonius elaborates on the original by mentioning Sparta and Paris. The Spartan cult was known at Rome (cf. Quint. *Inst.* 2.4.26), but even a reader lacking this knowledge could appreciate the aptness of an armed Venus within the military culture of Sparta – she was following the “dress code,” in the words of an anonymous referee.

¹⁶ F. Munari (ed.), *Epigrammata Bobiensia* (Rome, 1955), vol. 2, 65 (Epigram 14); for commentary see F.R. Nocchi, *Commento agli “Epigrammata Bobiensia”* (Berlin, 2016), 125-130.

Renaissance and often printed next to the authentic version¹⁷ but is now thought to be by an imitator who was striving to outdo Ausonius in fidelity to the Greek.¹⁸

Armatam Pallas Venerem Lacedaemone visens,
 “vis nunc iudicium sic ineamus?” ait.
 Cui Venus arridens: “Quid me, galeata, laceassis?
 Vincere si possum nuda, quid arma gerens?”

Pallas, seeing Venus armed in Sparta, said, “Are you willing now to enter into a judgment?” Venus replied, smiling: “Why do you challenge me in your helmet? If I can defeat you naked/unarmed, how will it be when I’m bearing arms?”

There also exist many neo-Latin, Italian, and French versions, for the Greek poem was one of the most imitated epigrams during the Renaissance and beyond.¹⁹

The fact that the poem was not linked to Johnson until 1856 sets a high standard for those who would defend the 1856 “attribution” on the strength of internal evidence. In my opinion, the quality of the poem falls well below what we would expect of Johnson on the basis of the Latin poems that he is known to have composed up to this date.²⁰

First, it is little more than a cento stitched together from the Ausonian and pseudo-Ausonian versions. Here it is again with words and morphemes deriving from the Ausonian versions underlined:

¹⁷ See, e.g., J. Soter, *Epigrammata Graeca veterum elegantissima* (Cologne, 1528 [USTC 651030]), 273-274; J. Floridus (ed.), *D. Magni Ausonii Burdigalensis Opera* (Paris, 1730), 34 (this is the Delphin edition, which quotes the Greek original in the notes); G. Ogle, *Antiquities Explained. Being a Collection of Figured Gems Illustrated by Similar Descriptions Taken from the Classics* (London, 1737), vol. 1, 13-15. In Thomas Farnaby’s popular anthology, only the pseudo-Ausonian version is paired with the Greek: *Florilegium epigrammatum Graecorum* (London, 1629), 23, 25 (Greek), 22, 24 (Latin).

¹⁸ See Kay 2001, 191; Nocchi 2016, 128.

¹⁹ For versions by Italian poets, see J. Hutton, *The Greek Anthology in Italy to the Year 1800* (Ithaca, 1935), 104-105, 636-637; for French and Dutch poets, the same author’s *The Greek Anthology in France and in the Latin Writers of the Netherlands to the Year 1800* (Ithaca, 1946), 795. In England the epigram was translated by Richard Crashaw and parodied by Matthew Prior (see below).

²⁰ These include *Messia*, a translation of Pope’s *Messiah* that he wrote at college, and the aforementioned ode *Ad Urbanum* (GM 8 [1738], 156).

Armatam Pallas Venerem conspexit, et “eia
nunc age, certamen nunc ineamus,” ait;
 dulce Venus ridens, “lorica nil opus,” inquit,
 “vincere te potui nuda, quid arma geram?”

Baldwin rightly observes that “such concordances are pretty well inevitable in Latin translations in the same metre of the same Greek original.”²¹ In this instance, however, the ratio of shared to unique words exceeds the possibility of coincidence: counting partial words, or morphemes, it is 16:10. The similarity to the pseudo-Ausonian version is striking, what with the identical opening (“armatam Pallas Venerem”), the same verb *ineamus*, and the almost identical last line. Moreover, the list provided by Hutton of the opening phrases of other versions in the Italian Renaissance shows that considerable variety was possible, even under the constraints noted by Baldwin.²² Compare, for example:

Armatam Venerem cernens
 Aemula conspiciens
 Armatam Venerem aspiceret
 Vidit ut armatam

Elsewhere I find:

Viderat armatam Venerem²³
 Armatam ut vidit Venerem²⁴

It is obvious that the translation in the *GM* is heavily indebted to the two versions that went under the name of Ausonius, especially the spurious one. The sole innovation of substance is the replacement of Pallas’s helmet (*galeata*) with Venus’s breastplate (*lorica*). As for its relation to the Greek original, the only feature that appears in the *GM* but not in the two Ausonian models, and which was possibly prompted by the Greek, is *dulce* in the phrase “dulce [...] ridens” (sweetly smiling): cf. ἀπαλὸν

²¹ Baldwin 1995, 180.

²² Hutton 1935, 636-637.

²³ Nocchi 2016, 128, quoting a translation in Vatican City, BAV, Vat. lat. 2836.

²⁴ H. Wellesley (ed.), *Anthologia Polyglotta. A Selection of Versions in Various Languages, Chiefly from the Greek Anthology* (London, 1849), 398, which gives eleven versions of the poem in several languages; this Latin one is attributed to P. Francius.

γελάσασα (gently smiling). But the expression goes back to Catullus (51.5) and Horace (*Odes* 1.22.23) and was trite by the eighteenth century.

Not only is the epigram unoriginal but line 2 is sub-standard, and line 4 replaces the Greek pun with an inferior joke. As Rudd observes, “the two *nunc*’s [in line 2] are inelegant.” He concedes that the second *nunc* might differ from the first and mean, “now that we are both in armor,” in contrast to the previous occasion – or, in other words, “now that we are dressed for a proper contest, unlike the Judgment of Paris.”²⁵ This is possible, but it seems too subtle and does little to offset the awkwardness of the repetition.²⁶ I would add that *nunc age* is otiose after *eia*, and that *et eia* makes a weak ending to line 1.²⁷ As for line 4, the point of the Greek is that, if Venus can defeat Pallas naked, she will do so even more easily bearing arms – a joke depending on the aforementioned pun on γυμνός in the senses of “naked” and “unarmed.” If it only meant “naked,” Aphrodite’s retort would be senseless, since by arming herself she is more likely to obscure than enhance the beauty that gained her the previous victory. Matthew Prior brings this out in his parody, *Pallas and Venus*, wherein Athena gets the last word:²⁸

The Trojan Swain had judg’d the great Dispute;
and Beauty’s Pow’r obtain’d the Golden Fruit;
when Venus, loose in all Her naked Charms,
met Jove’s great Daughter clad in shining Arms.
The wanton Goddess view’d the Warlike Maid
from Head to Foot, and Tauntingly She said:

Yield, Sister; Rival, yield; Naked, You see,
I vanquish: Guess how Potent I should be;
if to the Field I came in Armour drest;
dreadful, like Thine, my Shield, and terrible my Crest.

²⁵ My expansion of Rudd’s comment is indebted to the words of a referee.

²⁶ One wonders if the second *nunc* resulted from an editor’s or printer’s slip and should be emended to *sic*, as in the pseudo-Ausonian version.

²⁷ Contrast Hor. *Sat.* 1.1.18-19, “vos hinc mutatis discedite partibus. Eia, / quid statis?” (change roles and be off with you. Come on! Why are you standing still?). The composer of our epigram may have remembered this line but failed to capture Horace’s lively conversational manner.

²⁸ H. Bunker Wright, M.K. Spears (ed.), *The Literary Works of Matthew Prior* (Oxford, 1971²), vol. 1, 229-30.

The Warrior Goddess with Disdain reply'd;
 Thy Folly, Child, is equal to thy Pride:
 let a brave Enemy for once advise,
 and Venus (if 'tis possible) be Wise.
 Thou to be strong must put off every Dress:
 Thy only Armour is thy Nakedness:
 and more than once (or Thou art much bely'd)
 by Mars himself That Armour has been try'd.

The versions of Ausonius and pseudo-Ausonius both honor the Greek pun. But the Latin version and its translation in the *GM* obliterate it. This becomes clear if one attempts to apply the double meaning. It would be one thing for Venus to say "I was able to beat you naked/unarmed, so why I should bear arms?" if she was naked, and Athena had challenged her to put on armor for a new contest, but the premise of the poem is that she is armed already. As Rudd says, "we are left wondering why she should have put on armor at all. Was it just to see how she looked?" One should not insist too strictly on the logic of a humorous poem, but the fact remains that the author has sacrificed a clever pun for a cruder joke, though one, perhaps, more understandable and congenial to the readers of the *GM*. Venus is saying, in effect, "I don't need this armor for a contest but rely on the 'armor' concealed beneath it. I can defeat you merely by stripping it off."²⁹ This makes some sort of sense but strikes me as less incisive than the Greek original and its Ausonian and pseudo-Ausonian versions. I suspect that the Latin version in the *GM* was influenced by a poem by "Scheamwel Penink" that had appeared – hardly by coincidence – in the same periodical a year before, under the title "From the Greek of Julian. On the Statue of an arm'd Venus at Sparta. Attempted."³⁰ It is based on the same Greek epigram that was imitated by Ausonius (*Anthologia Graeca* 16.174), but it is here mistakenly attributed to Julian, the author of the previous epigram (*Anthologia Graeca* 16.173):³¹

When war's stern maid love's tender queen beheld
 her lance protended, and her high rais'd shield,
 compleat in all the terrors of the field,

²⁹ I am indebted here to the comments of a referee.

³⁰ *GM* 7 (1737), 446.

³¹ The error may derive from Farnaby's anthology (1629, 23), which ascribes the poem to Julian.

her blissful breast with the broad cuirass swell,
 (her blissful breast, where softest passions dwell);
 around her brighter brow the helm bright beam,
 and pendent on her thigh the fauchion flame,
 bare to the knees the figur'd busks embrace
 her legs, in act to stride with gallant grace;
 with hints of old resentment, thus she spoke,
 in spleenful laughter, and sarcastick joke:
*Say, goddess, shall we in this modest guise
 of precedence in charms dispute the prize?*
 T' whom *Venus* with a smile; *So conquer you,*
arms I need none, when naked I subdue.

The climax, “Arms I need none, when naked I subdue,” anticipates the Latin and English translations printed in the following year: “Vincere te potui nuda, quid arma geram?” and “Naked I conquer’d you, what need of arms?”³² There are other possible echoes. The phrase “love’s tender queen” may have suggested “Love’s queen,” and perhaps Venus’s “broad cuirass” prompted the mention of a breastplate in the Latin (“lorica nil opus”), which, as noted previously, is the author’s only major alteration to the Ausonian and pseudo-Ausonian versions. *Lorica* could be considered an improvement on *galeata* (in the latter version) since it draws attention to Venus’s breasts.³³ However, the credit for this may belong to the author of the earlier English poem, who archly observes the swelling of Venus’s “blissful breast” beneath her cuirass.

The derivative language and unsatisfying climax of the Latin epigram make it unlikely that Johnson was the author. A third criterion is the quality of the English translation. Latin poems in the *GM* are often accompanied by an English translation. Sometimes they are by the same author, and his or her signature is placed beneath both poems or just the

³² However, in the 1737 version the prefatory words, “So conquer you,” smooth the transition to the last line: “You prevail when you are wearing arms,” says Venus; “I do not need them; my naked beauty is sufficient.” The humor of the last line is more strained in the Latin and English versions of 1738.

³³ I owe this point to a referee.

translation.³⁴ Sometimes the translation is signed by another person.³⁵ When unsigned original Latin poems are followed by an unsigned translation, as in this case, the natural assumption is that the same poet composed both.³⁶ In some cases the editor may have been responsible, but Johnson had by now become acquainted with Edward Cave and it seems probable that Cave would have solicited a translation from Johnson himself, if he was the author of the Latin poem. Whatever the case may be, the present translation is undistinguished. The words “much” and “Love’s queen” are fillers, and “a world of charms” is a well-worn expression.³⁷ One would expect more flair from Johnson.

2. *Ex cantico Solomonis*

Surge, soror dilecta, mihi lux, gaudia, vita;	
haud mora, surge, soror!	
Aspice, diffugiunt ignavae frigora brumae;	
ver geniale venit.	
Turbidus imber abest; mittit rosa roscida gemmas,	5
sole fovente, suas.	
Veris, io! venit alma dies! Philomela canorum	
fundit ab ore melos,	
aeriaeque columbae, dantes oscula, iungunt	
oribus ora suis.	10
Iam teneros fructus detrudit lactea ficus	
arboreasque comas;	
munera luxurians dat pampinus, et generoso	
subrubet uva mero.	

³⁴ Confining myself to volumes close in date to 1738, cf., e.g., Vol. 5 (1735), 44, 104 (from the *Grub-Street Journal*); Vol. 6 (1736), 287; Vol. 7 (1737), 183; Vol. 8 (1738), 43, 429. Occasionally the Latin is signed but not the English; in at least one case, the editor seems to have supplied the latter: Vol. 7 (1737), 754: “English’d thus for the present.” In Vol. 9 (1739), 268, it is unclear whether “Archilochus” composed the English as well as the Latin, but the provision of a title, *The Disappointment*, suggests that he did.

³⁵ E.g., *GM* 4 (1734), 621; 5 (1735), 214; 8 (1738), 371-372.

³⁶ E.g., *GM* 4 (1734), 622; 5 (1735), 158, 160; 7 (1737), 56; 11 (1741), 47.

³⁷ Cf., e.g., Aphra Behn, *The Amorous Prince* (London, 1671), 24; Nathaniel Lee, *Mithridates, King of Pontus* (London, 1678), 32; James Carlile, *The Fortune-Hunters* (London, 1689), 71; Joseph Addison, *Cato* (London, 1713), 18; Matthew Prior, *Poems on Several Occasions* (London, 1723), II, 290; Richard Savage (ed.), *Miscellaneous Poems and Translations by Several Hands* (London, 1726), 307.

Suaviter exhalant violaria grata, Sabaeo
spirat odore botrus.

15

Huc, soror alma, veni! pernicious ocior Euris
huc, soror alma, veni!

From *The Song of Solomon*

Arise, dear sister, my light, my joy, my life! Arise, sister, without delay! Look, the chill of idle winter is dispersing; merry spring is coming. The stormy rain has gone; the dewy rose puts out its buds beneath the warming sun. Oh joy, the lovely season of spring is coming! Philomela pours a tuneful melody from her throat, and, in the air, doves kiss one another, joining beak with beak. Now the milky fig thrusts forth its tender fruits and leafy tresses; the luxuriant vine provides its gifts, and the grape turns red with choice wine. The lovely beds of violets breathe a sweet aroma, the grape-bunch breathes with the scent of Sheba. Come here, dear sister! Come here, dear sister, more quickly than the swift east winds!

The translation is an amplification of *Cant.* 2.10-13:

(10) My beloved spake, and said unto me, Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. (11) For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; (12) The flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land; (13) The fig tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grape give a good smell. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away.

The Yale and Oxford editions place the translation among poems of doubtful authorship without comment.³⁸ Baldwin observes that “this piece is, in spirit and some details, generally comparable to Johnson’s translation of Pope’s *Messiah*” and concludes that “on balance, Johnson has a reasonable claim to this poem.”³⁹ Rudd leans in the same direction, making reference to the influence of Hor. *Carm.* 4.7 (discussed further below): “These Horatian features are quite compatible with Johnson’s authorship; for he translated the whole ode in 1784 [...]. Here, however, he naturally draws only on the joyful half of the poem, omitting the

³⁸ McAdam, Milne 1964 (as in n. 1), 365-366; Nichol Smith, McAdam 1974 (as in n. 1), 446-447.

³⁹ Baldwin 1995, 182-183.

somber conclusion.”⁴⁰ On the other hand, he follows Baldwin in noting an uncharacteristic metrical blemish in line 9.⁴¹ The lifting of the phrase “subruba uva mero” from Ovid *Ars* 2.316 may also raise an eyebrow.⁴²

The lyrical nature of the *Song of Solomon* (or *Song of Songs*) made it a popular subject for poetic translation and paraphrase. Theodore Beza made a version in trochaic dimeters (*Canticum Canticorum Solomonis*, Geneva, 1584), the Scottish poet Arthur Johnston, one in elegiac couplets (*Cantici Salomonis paraphrasis poetica*, 1633); another Scottish poet, John Ker, printed two paraphrases in the same volume, one in a variety of meters, the other in Horatian Sapphics (*Cantici Solomonis paraphrasis gemina*, 1727).⁴³

The meter of the translation is the rare First Archilochian, comprising a dactylic hexameter followed by half a pentameter. Horace composed only one poem in this meter (*Carm.* 4.7) – the most famous of his “Spring” odes – and the only other Latin example known to me in antiquity is Ausonius, *De Bissula* 2. Neo-Latin examples include seventeenth century poems by Jakob Balde (*Odes* 4.22, *Silvae* 8.8, 13, 22) and Maciej Kazimierz Sarbiewski (1595-1640), also known as Casimir or Casimire (*Odes* 4.21).⁴⁴ The *Song of Solomon* translation in the *GM* uses not only the meter of the Horatian ode but also some of its language.⁴⁵ Johnson made a fine translation of this poem in 1784 and had doubtless admired it since his schooldays. But while this is consistent with his authorship of *Ex cantico Solomonis*, it is far from proving it.

There are, however, two previously unnoticed features that are relevant to the question of Johnson’s authorship. First, the translation is

⁴⁰ Rudd 2005, 136-137.

⁴¹ “*Columbae* destroys the normal caesura after the first syllable of the third foot, and gives the false impression of a hexameter ending;” cf. Baldwin 1995, 183. The flaw is absent from the 119 hexameters of Johnson’s earlier *Messia*, though by itself it is insufficient to rule out Johnson’s authorship. A referee suggests that the lack of a caesura may be intended to express the union of the doves.

⁴² The verb *subrubeo* seems to be an Ovidian coinage and is very rare; the *Oxford Latin Dictionary* cites only two uses, both by Ovid. Johnson routinely echoes classical phrases but I know of no other case where he fills a whole line with a borrowed phrase.

⁴³ The Johnston and Ker versions were reprinted in *Poetarum Scotorum Musae Sacrae* (Edinburgh, 1739).

⁴⁴ One of the unsigned Latin poems in *GM* 1738, “Ad F.S. Epistolae Miltonianae Editorem” (November, 601), is in the same meter; it plagiarizes the work of Jakob Balde (*Silvae* 8.22) and is definitely not by Johnson.

⁴⁵ See Rudd 2005, 136, citing *diffugiunt*, *frigora*, *brumae* (3), *ver* (4), *alma dies* (7), and *comas* (12).

the bridegroom's initial summons: "surge soror dilecta [...] surge soror (1-2), "huc, soror alma, veni [...] huc, soror alma, veni" (17-18); compare, in Casimir, "surge, soror" (3), "surge [...] surge, age, cara soror" (55-56), "huc age [...] columbas / hospita flecte soror" (59-60). The combination of the unusual meter, the same biblical text, and the verbal echoes puts it beyond doubt that the translator was influenced by Casimir. What makes this interesting is that Johnson recalled the opening of another of Casimir's poems in his previously mentioned ode, *Ad Urbanum*, which appeared a month before *Ex cantico Solomonis*. The repetition of *Urbane* in lines 1-2 of Johnson's poem imitates the beginning of Casimir's ode to Pope Urban (*Odes* 1.3), where the same vocatives appear in the identical position.⁵⁰ Whether this supports the case for Johnson's authorship is hard to say. The imitation of a poem based on the same biblical text and in the same – uncommon – meter is more derivative than the reuse of a single expression in a different context. From this perspective, the imitation may even cast doubt on Johnson's authorship rather than support it, though this is debatable.

The second point has to do with Johnson's interest, or lack thereof, in the *Song of Solomon*. As Baldwin says, "The mature Johnson displays no particular interest in the *Song of Solomon*."⁵¹ He seems never to quote it in his prose works, and I am unaware of any allusions. However, he quotes it seven times in the *Dictionary*, and, of those seven citations, two are of verses translated in the *GM* (*Cant.* 2.12, under "sing"; *Cant.* 2.13, under "put") and one of a nearby verse (*Cant.* 2.15, under "take").

Although these facts are interesting and consistent with Johnson's authorship, they do little to advance the case in its favor. Casimir was popular in the early eighteenth century,⁵² and his odes on the *Song of Solomon* offered a ready model for any aspiring translator. As to Bald-

⁵⁰ Johnson also quotes from Casimir (*Odes* 1.4) in the Life of Cowley (Yale XXI, 60-61).

⁵¹ Baldwin 1995, 182.

⁵² Isaac Watts (1674-1748), in his popular *Horae Lyricae* (London, 1737⁶ [first published 1706]), xxvii, calls him the "noblest Latin poet of modern ages" and includes several of his own translations. For Casimir's influence on English poetry, see, e.g., D. Money, "Aspects of the Reception of Sarbiewski in England. From Hils, Vaughan, and Watts to Coleridge, Bowring, Walker, and Coxe," in P. Urbański (ed.), *Pietas Humanistica. Neo-Latin Religious Poetry in Poland in European Context* (Frankfurt a.M., 2006), 157-187; K. Fordoński, P. Urbański (ed.), *Casimir Britannicus* (London, 2010²), 20-27; G. Gömöri, "'The Polish Swan Triumphant': The English Reception of Maciej Kazimierz Sarbiewski in the Seventeenth Century," *Modern Language Review* 106 (2011), 814-833. *GM* 9 (1739), 433-434, contains a translation of *Odes* 4.4.

win's point that the poem is comparable to *Messia* (Johnson's Latin translation of Pope's *Messiah*), there is some similarity between the golden-age imagery of *Messia* and the spring imagery of the Latin verses from the *Song of Solomon*. However, *Messia* is swept along by a feeling of ecstatic prophecy that is absent from *Ex cantico Solomonis*. The sentimental prettiness of the latter – the dewy rose, tuneful Philomela, and kissing doves – recalls the manner of Casimir but seems alien to Johnson. It is nevertheless a competent and attractive poem.

3. The Logical Warehouse

This is signed by "Philologus," a pseudonym which is unique for poems in the *GM* of this era⁵³ and gives no clue about the author. The title is followed by the description, "Occasioned by an Auctioneer's having the Groundfloor of the Oratory in Lincoln's-Inn-Fields."

Dissimili domus una duos tenet arte tumentes;
 Praecones ambo, nummus utrique deus.
 Quaeris, quis prior est fama meritivse; superna
 cui pars verbosae, vel datur ima, domus?
 Supra praeco dei – strepit infra praeco bonorum:
 hic bona queis opus est venditat, ille sonum.

A single house accommodates two men puffed up with different occupations; both are auctioneers; cash is the god of both. You ask who is superior in reputation or worth; to whom the upper floor, to whom the ground floor of the wordy house is assigned? The auctioneer of god rants up above, the auctioneer of goods below. The latter sells goods that people need, the former, noise.

The poem is a satire on John "Orator" Henley (1692-1756), a dissenting clergyman who preached in what he called the Oratory, a meeting-room located first in Newport Market and from 1729 in Clare Market, near Lincoln's-Inn-Fields.⁵⁴ He enjoyed wide popularity but was criticized for charging an entry fee, his flamboyant style, and his unconventional

⁵³ A query on the pronunciation of some English words is signed "Philologus" in *GM* 7 (1737), 755.

⁵⁴ See G. Midgley, *The Life of Orator Henley* (Oxford, 1973); P. McDowell, *The Invention of the Oral. Print Commerce and Fugitive Voices in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago, 2017), 115-161.

topics. Henley was satirized by Pope (*Dunciad* 3.195-212), among others, and caricatured in an engraving attributed to Hogarth. In terms resembling those of our poet, Christopher Smart referred to the Oratory as the “Temple of Noise and Nonsense.”⁵⁵

The Yale and Oxford editions take no position on authorship.⁵⁶ Kaminski expresses doubt.⁵⁷ Baldwin concedes that “Johnson is obviously not the only person who could have written this piece [...]. However, in terms of its manner, language and correlations with *London* [lines 37, 178], Johnson’s claims are, to say the least, valid.”⁵⁸ Rudd declares himself unqualified to say “how far the swipe at preachers is characteristic of Johnson.”⁵⁹

The poem is skillful, witty (in a heavy-handed way), and obviously the work of a Londoner familiar with the location and practices of the Oratory. Line 74 of Johnson’s recently completed satire *London*, “And strive in vain to laugh at H—y’s [*sic*] jest,” probably refers to Henley.⁶⁰ Johnson also mentions Henley in his *Life of Savage*⁶¹ and quotes a “ludicrous distich” of his in the *Life of Broome*.⁶²

On the other side of the scale, the mockery seems harsh for Johnson, especially since Henley had lost his wife the year before.⁶³ A cruel mock-obituary, which Johnson must have read, had been reprinted in the *GM* early in the year (January 1738, 25). The original had appeared in *Common-Sense* (December 31, 1737) and it provoked a protest from Lady Mary Wortley Montagu in her short-lived periodical, *The Nonsense of*

⁵⁵ *The Midwife*, Vol. 3 (1753), 41; for ridicule of Henley, see McDowell 2017, 152-160.

⁵⁶ McAdam, Milne 1964 (as in n. 1), 366; Nichol Smith, McAdam 1974 (as in n. 1), 447.

⁵⁷ Kaminski 1987, 210 n. 50: “[This poem] has less claim to being Johnson’s than those of the month before [i.e., *Venus in Armour* and *Ex cantico Solomonis*]. The others have the strength of their appearance together in one issue and their anonymity. There is no evidence to corroborate the word of Nichols in this case.”

⁵⁸ Baldwin 1995, 185.

⁵⁹ Rudd 2005, 137.

⁶⁰ D.J. Greene, *The Politics of Samuel Johnson* (Athens, 1990²), 307-308. Some excerpts from *London*, not including line 74, appear two pages before *The Logical Warehouse* (*GM* 8 [1738], 269).

⁶¹ Yale XXII, 962.

⁶² Yale XXIII, 1031. Johnson’s *Dictionary*, under “oratory,” also cites Pope, *Epilogue to the Satires*, “Dialogue I,” 65-66: “Come, harmless characters that no one hit; / come Henley’s oratory, Osborne’s wit!”

⁶³ See Midgley 1973, 254-257.

Common-Sense (January 17, 1738).⁶⁴ Unlike the partly concealed and light-hearted reference to Henley in *London*, the epigram precisely identifies his place of business and impugns not only his ideas but his integrity. Another obstacle is the paradoxical and opaque title, *The Logical Warehouse*. Ostensibly this means “The warehouse of logic (or reason)” and is a sneering reference to Henley’s sermons, which are lumped together with the goods hawked by the auctioneer on the ground floor. Another suggestion is that “logical” plays on Greek *logos*, “word,” hence “warehouse of words.”⁶⁵ In either case, it seems, the pseudonym Philologus – “lover of language, or literature” – picks up the word “Logical” from the satirical title and expresses a distinction between the poet and his ranting subjects. However, the forced wordplay seems uncharacteristic of Johnson, who famously disdained “quibbles” in his *Preface to Shakespeare*.⁶⁶ I think the poem most unlikely to be his.

Conclusion

Barring the discovery of new evidence, it is impossible to determine the authorship of these three poems. Any or all of them may or may not be Johnson’s, not to mention the possibility of a grey area, in which he may have corrected and improved the submissions of others in his capacity as an editorial assistant to Edward Cave. It should be remembered, however, that the only basis for including them at all in past editions of Johnson’s poetry has been the evidence of “The Autobiography of Sylvanus Urban,” which I have shown to be shakier than previously represented – in fact, I suspect, little more than a guess on the part of its author. This raises the bar for proof of Johnsonian authorship, and, based on other criteria, one cannot but remain skeptical. It is conceivable that he composed *Ex cantico Solomonis*, but, in my opinion, the case for *Venus in Armour* and *The Logical Warehouse* is tenuous at best.

Vassar College
robrown8288@gmail.com

⁶⁴ R. Halsband and I. Grundy (ed.), *Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. Essays and Poems and Simplicity, a Comedy* (Oxford, 1976), 127-128.

⁶⁵ Rudd 2005, 137: “The title would be more intelligible if ‘logical’ was a learned joke based on *logos* = ‘word’; the ‘wordy warehouse’ would then anticipate ‘verbosae domus’ (4); the piece was signed ‘Philologus’.”

⁶⁶ Yale VII, 74.