

‘Marvell, Nicolas Chorier, and the earl of Rochester: state satire and pornography in the dissenting academies’

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In February 1698, the Anglican clergyman, Samuel Wesley (1662-1735) delivered a sermon in Westminster and the City on the reformation of manners. His text was Psalm 94, verse 6: ‘*Who will rise up for me against the Evil-doers, or who will stand up for me against the Workers of Iniquity?*’¹ One of his principal targets was ‘our **infamous Theatres**, which seem to have done more Mischief, than *Hobes* [sic] himself or our new *Atheistical Clubs*, to the *Faith and Morals of the Nation*’.² He went on to elaborate his claim about the moral dangers of theatregoing at some length:

What *Communion* hath the *Temple of God* with *Idols*, with those abominable *mysteries of Iniquity* which outdo the old *Fescennina* of the Heathens, the lewd *Orgies of Bacchus*, and the impious *Feasts of Isis and Priapus*? I know not how any Persons can *profitably*, or indeed *decently*, present themselves here before Gods *Holy Oracle*, who are *frequently* present at those *Schools of Vice*, and *Nurseries of Profaneness and Lewdness*, to unlearn *there* what they are *here* taught, out of Gods *Holy Word*.³

Yet what could a Lincolnshire cleric – two of whose sons, moreover, were the founders of Methodism – know about ‘the lewd *Orgies of Bacchus*, and the impious *Feasts of Isis and Priapus*’? The answer is, more than one might think.

It is true that the least familiar term in Wesley’s denunciation of the theatre, *fescennina*, had recently been discussed by John Dryden in the ‘Discourse concerning the Original and Progress of SATIRE’ that he prefixed (by way of a dedication to the Earl of Dorset) to the translations of Juvenal and Persius published in 1693. Tracing the ‘first Rudiments of Poetry’ in Italy back to harvest festivals, Dryden quotes from Horace’s epistle to Augustus: ‘*Fescennina per hunc inventa licentia morem*’ (‘From flowing Cups defaming Rhymes ensue’) (Epistles II.1.145). However, Horace adds, when such verbal *libertas* eventually turned rabid (‘*In rabiem verti*’; Epistles II.1.149) it became

¹ Samuel Wesley, *A Sermon Concerning Reformation of Manners, Preach’d at St. James’s Church, Westminster, Feb. 13. And afterwards at St. Bride’s, to one of the Religious Societies* (London, 1698), 1. The verse is from the King James Bible, but Wesley then adds, ‘Or as ’tis in the Old Translation. *Who will rise up with me against the Wicked, and who will take my part against the Evil-doers?*’. This follows Coverdale, but apparently as reworked in the 1662 Book of Common Prayer (which, however, has ‘or’ for ‘and’). My thanks to Gordon Campbell for advice on this point.

² Wesley, *Sermon*, 20 (bold substituted for black letter type).

³ Wesley, *Sermon*, 21.

punishable by law. Dryden also draws a contrast between the ‘saturnian’ verses the ancient Romans ‘us’d in the solemn part of their Ceremonies, and the *Fescennine*’ ones that featured ‘in their Afternoons Debauchery, because they were scoffing, and obscene’. This ‘Gross and Rustick kind of raillery’ derived its name, he said, from the town of Fescenina where it was ‘first practis’d’.⁴ Surprisingly, having invoked debauchery and obscenity, Dryden does not go on to canvass the alternative etymology in which *fescennina* was derived from *fascinum*, the Latin word for the phallic emblem that warded off evil.⁵ This form of *licentia* was associated especially with marriage festivals, as seen in the epithalamia of Claudian and Catullus; ‘Let the ribald Fescennine / Jest not be silent longer’ (‘ne diu taceat procax / Fescennina iocatio’), as the latter puts it.⁶

However, while it is possible that Wesley was alluding to Dryden or Catullus, it is far more likely that at the back of his mind was a book – a different kind of satire – to which he had been exposed some fifteen years or so earlier, but which also, as we shall see, cropped up in a letter he wrote to his friend Dr Charles Goodall (1642-1712), Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians and friend of John Locke, only a few months after delivering his sermon to the Society for the Reformation of Manners: namely, *Aloisæ Sigææ Toletanæ Satyra Sotadica, de Arcanis Amoris et Veneris. Aloisia Hispanicè scripsit. Latinate donavit Joannes Meursius* (c. 1665). The claim being made on the title page is to the effect that this sotadical satire – alluding to Sotades, an obscene and subversive Alexandrian poet of the third century BCE – on the secrets of Love and Venus had originally been written in Spanish by Aloisia Sigæa of Toledo and then translated into Latin by Johannes Meursius. Although Louise Sigée and Jan van Meurs were real enough (both were humanists of some distinction) this was a double fabrication. The actual author was Nicolas Chorier (1612-92), a Dauphinois lawyer and historian and ‘the most important erotic writer of the period’, according to James Grantham Turner.⁷ Originally comprised of six dialogues between the experienced Tullia and the inexperienced Octavia in which the latter is sexually initiated by the former, Chorier later added a seventh: ‘COLLOQUIUM VII. FESCENNINI’.⁸ During this fescennine exchange, Octavia quotes Claudian and Chorier further contrives a scenario where, as Turner describes it, ‘nuns gather round the bed of the freshly deflowered Mother Superior and “sing

⁴ *The Satires of Decius Junius Juvenalis translated into English Verse. By Mr. Dryden and Several other Eminent Hands. Together with the Satires of Aulus Persius Flaccus. Made English by Mr. Dryden* (London, 1693), title page, xvii-xix, xxii.

⁵ See Horace, *Epistles Book II and Epistle to the Pisones* (‘*Ars Poetica*’), ed. Niall Rudd (Cambridge, 1989), 98-9.

⁶ Catullus, *The Complete Poems*, ed. Guy Lee (Oxford, 2008), 64-5 (LXI, 119-20).

⁷ James Grantham Turner, *Schooling Sex: Libertine Literature and Erotic Education in Italy, France, and England 1534-1685* (Oxford, 2003), 17; and see 166-9.

⁸ Nicolas Chorier, *Aloisæ Sigææ Toletanæ Satyra Sotadica, de Arcanis Amoris et Veneris. Aloisia Hispanicè scripsit. Latinate donavit Joannes Meursius* (n.p., c. 1665; British Library, shelfmark P.C.30.i.13.), sig. A1 (Pars III).

Fescennine songs”⁹. As this suggests, the work has a strongly anticlerical and anti-Catholic dimension; for example, its interest in flagellation – in the fifth dialogue, Octavia and her mother Sempronia are whipped before an altar by the priest, Theodorus – can be construed as a subversion of the catholic doctrine of penance.¹⁰ That said, it is unlikely to have been the doctrinal implications of the *Satyra Sotadica* that primarily interested the young Wesley.

The evidence that Wesley knew Chorier’s work comes from the horse’s mouth. Indeed, it became a matter of public record during a pamphlet exchange over dissenting academies that was sparked by the controversy over “occasional conformity” following the accession of Queen Anne in 1702.¹¹ Three times between 1702 and 1704 the Tories introduced a bill to prevent nonconformists from circumventing the provisions of the Corporation and Test Acts (1661 and 1673) by conforming occasionally to Anglican rites while for the rest of the time worshipping in their own meeting houses or chapels. The reason why the academies were drawn into this larger debate was because their *raison d’être* was precisely that of supplying the children of nonconformists with a type of education from which they were otherwise precluded by the requirement to conform at Oxford and Cambridge; much to the annoyance of High Church Tories, it was yet another way in which the penalties for nonconformity were routinely being side-stepped. And it was into this furore, at its height in 1703, that an anonymous pamphlet by Wesley was launched, addressed to the parliamentary Grand Committee on Religion and laying bare the moral and political failings of these nonconformist institutions: *A Letter from a Country Divine to his Friend in London. Concerning the Education of the Dissenters in their Private Academies in Several Parts of this Nation. A Letter from a Country Divine to his Friend in London. Concerning the Education of the Dissenters in their Private Academies in Several Parts of this Nation.*

Wesley’s father had been one of the ministers ejected on St Bartholomew’s Day in 1662 with the result that Samuel was sent to Theophilus Gale’s dissenting academy in London in March 1678, as both a godly alternative to the supposedly debauched universities and to prepare for the Independent ministry, only to find upon his arrival that Gale had died. After a further spell in his old grammar school, he attended Edward Veal’s academy in Stepney and, two years later, Charles Morton’s establishment in Newington Green, where he remained for another two years.¹² But, says

⁹ Turner, *Schooling Sex*, 176.

¹⁰ John R. Yamamoto-Wilson, *Pain, Pleasure and Perversity: Discourses Suffering in Seventeenth-Century England* (Farnham, 2013), 101

¹¹ See John Flaningham, ‘The Occasional Conformity Controversy: Ideology and Party Politics, 1687-1711’, *Journal of British Studies*, 17 (1977): 38-62.

¹² For details of Wesley’s biography, see H. A. Beecham, ‘Samuel Wesley Senior: New Biographical Evidence’, *Renaissance and Modern Studies* 7 (1963): 78-109, and Henry D. Rack, ‘Wesley, Samuel (bap. 1662, d. 1735)’, *ODNB*; for Morton, see Mark Burden, *A Biographical Dictionary of Tutors at the Dissenters’ Private Academies*,

Wesley in the *Letter*, discussing Morton's academy, 'the more I saw into what was about me, the more, I confess, I disliked it, and began to doubt whether I was in the right'. Morton personally was not the problem; it was the ethos of the student body to which Wesley belonged: 'We almost universally entertained a Mortal Aversion to the EPISCOPAL ORDER, and very few but Equally abhorred MONARCHY it self' – indeed, 'KING-KILLING DOCTRINES were generally received and defended' (Wesley 1703, 6-7; cf. Wesley 1698b, 105). In response, Wesley turned his thoughts to Oxford, where he matriculated as a servitor at Exeter College in 1684, took his BA in 1688, was ordained a deacon by Thomas Sprat, Bishop of Rochester in August 1688, and was ordained a priest in 1689 by Henry Compton, Bishop of London. Now a loyal servant of the Church of England, Wesley had an intimate knowledge of what went on in the dissenting academies that could be deployed to blacken their reputation – even if to do so necessarily meant implicating himself in what he condemned.

The composition of the *Letter* actually predated its publication by several years. Wesley later disclosed that in the early 1690s he had been asked by 'a Gentleman of the Church of *England*' (presumably Goodall) to supply an account of the dissenters' teaching methods in the academies, but held off doing so until 1693 when he happened to meet some former dissenting acquaintances and was profoundly disgusted by their '*lewd and profane*' discourse and antimonarchical '*railing*'.¹³ He drafted the text of what became the *Letter* that very night but was dissuaded from sending it to Goodall the next day by a dissenter (possibly his own mother). However, at some point Goodall did receive the papers before returning them to Wesley to see whether he still stood by what he had said. After duly reviewing their contents, Wesley sent them back to Goodall in October 1698, and even discussed their publication in the covering letter:

At length I am as good as my word, & have by Gainsborough Carrier, which Inns in Aldersgate street at the Red Lyon, sent you back ye Papers, I have reviewed them carefully, & the matter of fact is true, & I am not unwilling any passages therein should be public, if don by a prudent Hand & for the service of the Church, tho I dare say you will not let every one see them, or make use of them, or of my Name in them.¹⁴

1660–1729 (Dr Williams's Centre for Dissenting Studies, 2013), 381-94, <<http://www.qmulreligionandliterature.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/bd.pdf>>.

¹³ Samuel Wesley, *A Defence of a Letter Concerning the Education of Dissenters in their Private Academies: With a More full and Satisfactory Account of the same, and of their Morals and Behaviour towards the Church of England: Being an Answer to the Defence of the Dissenters Education* (London, 1704), 4; see Beecham, 'Samuel Wesley Senior', 80-83.

¹⁴ Copy of a letter from Wesley to Charles Goodall, 29 October 1698, with enclosures, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson C.406, fo. 109 (this passage was excluded from the 1703 *Letter*).

In the event, Goodall waited until 1703 before publishing the *Letter*, though Wesley's phrasing was opaque enough for him subsequently to be able to claim with a degree of plausibility that this had been done without his consent.¹⁵

Wesley also took the opportunity in the covering letter to reply to a query from Goodall about the Newington Green students' extra-curricular reading:

As for what you desire concerning the Bookes we generally used to read, you may easily beleieve that the space of almost Twenty years blotts many things out of our minds, but what little scatterings remain I will freely give you. We had severall of us. Lucius Junius Brutus among us Milton's Apology was In deliciis with most of us. I am apt to beleive poor Will: Jenkins formed his Latin style very much by reading him, for He had a very good one. We had also Eiconoclastes. Som of y^e Lads had Meursij Elegantiæ. Aloysia Sigilla Terentia and octavia, & the most lewd abominable Bookes that ever blasted christian Ey. These you will beleive our Tutors knew not of, nor did they direct us to the former.¹⁶

These 'scatterings' constitute an eclectic mixture of politically and sexually radical materials. Nathaniel Lee's *Lucius Junius Brutus* was suppressed by the Lord Chamberlain as an 'antimonarchical play' in December 1680, though it was printed the following year.¹⁷ Milton's *Eikonoklastes* (1649), burnt by the executioner at the Old Bailey in 1660, was another notoriously antimonarchical work. 'Apology' sounds like it ought to be Milton's *Apology against a pamphlet* (1642). But even though the appeal of a prominent anti-prelatical tract to dissenters is obvious, the phrasing of the compliment ('In deliciis') and the otherwise puzzling remark about how William Jenkins had 'formed his Latin style' in imitation of Milton's point instead to one of Milton's Latin defences of the 1650s, like *Defensio pro populo Anglicano*, which might be construed broadly as an "apology". And it is striking that when Wesley later quoted from *A Defence of the People of England*, the 1692 English translation of the *Defensio*, he called Milton the 'Apologist'.¹⁸ Nor is it at all impossible that there is

¹⁵ See Wesley, *Defence*, sig. A2r.

¹⁶ Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson C.406, fo. 109; this passage made its way into the *Letter*.

¹⁷ Nathaniel Lee, *Lucius Junius Brutus*, ed. John Loftis (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1967), 12. For the (implausible) suggestion that this refers to Charles Blount's anonymous pamphlet, *An Appeal from the Country to the City, for the Preservation of His Majesties Person, Liberty, and the Protestant Religion* (London, 1679), which is signed 'Junius Brutus', see Lew Girdler, 'Defoe's Education at Newington Green Academy', *Studies in Philology* 50.4 (1963): 573-91 (at 575). However, one cannot exclude the possibility that Wesley was referring to *Vindiciae contra tyrannos* (1579), the classic of Huguenot resistance theory, which was signed 'Stephanus Junius Brutus' (probably Philippe du Plessis Mornay).

¹⁸ See Samuel Wesley, *A Reply to Mr. Palmer's Vindication of the Learning, Loyalty, Morals, and Most Christian Behaviour of the Dissenters towards the Church of England* (London, 1707), 79.

an element of misdirection here, with Wesley simulating an imperfect recall of youthful peccadilloes that had thankfully failed to make a permanent impression upon him.

Something similar may be at work in the running together of the original title of Chorier's work (*Aloisiae Sigæe Toletanae Satyra Sotadica*) and the blander one under which it later circulated more freely (*Joannis Meursii elegantiae latini sermonis*) as 'Meursij Elegantiae. Aloysia Sigilla Terentia and octavia'.¹⁹ Since the letter in the Bodleian is only a copy of Wesley's original, it is unclear whether he or the transcriber was responsible for the errors whereby the surname Sigæa improbably becomes 'Sigilla' ('little images', 'statuettes') and 'Toletanae' turns into 'Terentia' (possibly informed by a subliminal association with 'Octavia'; Cicero's wife and daughter were called Terentia and Octavia respectively). The confusion – or deliberate obfuscation – was partially undone by the printer in 1703, who, perhaps working from a more accurate copy text, rendered the phrase in question as '*Meursii Elegantiae, Aloysia Sigæa Terentia and Octavia*'.²⁰ The italics now made clear that a further and separate work had featured in the students' clandestine reading: namely, the anonymous and derivative *Aloisia, or, The Amours of Octavia Englished* (1681).²¹ What is striking is that Wesley switches in the course of the passage from the inclusive pronoun 'we' to talking about the 'Lads', thereby – so the implication seems to be – excluding himself from the circle of those who read Chorier, before resuming with 'us', which is to say the body of students not directed to antimonarchical works by their tutors. One might deduce from this that, for Wesley, politically radical material was less compromising than what was sexually transgressive.

It is true that there is a residual ambiguity about what Wesley means when he goes on to say '& the most lewd abominable Bookes that ever blasted christian Ey'. In a recent article, Nicholas D. Nace assumes that Wesley can only have been referring to other erotic works in addition to those already named; Wesley, he says, 'is not at first specific about these "lewd abominable Books" but implies that they must exceed even the excesses of Chorier'.²² For Nace, then, the "and" is simply connective (OED, *conj.*¹ 1.a). Seventeenth-century usage would suggest instead that it is being deployed by way of introducing an amplificatory clause, as when, to adopt the OED's example, Gonzalo says in *The Tempest*, 'I heard a humming (And that a strange one too)' (OED, *conj.*¹ 9.a). At this stage, therefore, Wesley was not hinting at further revelations that might be made but underlining just how obscene he thought Chorier and his anonymous imitator were.

¹⁹ See, for example, Chorier, *Joannis Meursii elegantiae latini sermonis* (n.p.1670), title page and sig. a4r/7.

²⁰ Wesley, *Letter*, 14.

²¹ See Girdler, 'Defoe's Education', 576; I therefore cannot agree with Turner when he says of the 1703 text that 'the editor multiplied the titles of iniquity' (*Schooling Sex*, 262): the plurality was there from the start.

²² Nicholas D. Nace, 'The Author of Sodom among the Smithfield Muses', *Review of English Studies*, page 21 of 16; advance access, published 3 August 2016, doi:10.1093/res/hgw083. Nace's discussion of Wesley was only published online after the proceedings at Mulhouse and Strasbourg in June 2016.

Wesley's attack on the academies was, however, soon picked up by Daniel Defoe and Samuel Palmer.²³ At the time, Palmer was a dissenting minister though he was to take Anglican orders later in the decade.²⁴ In his *Defence of the Dissenters Education in their Private Academies*, Palmer countered these allegations about the 'lads' by imagining what their counterparts at Exeter College would have read: not only orthodox works like Salmasius's *Defensio regia* and *Eikon Basilike*, but also heterodox ones like 'the State Poems, and Rochester's Sodom'.²⁵ Wesley obligingly rose to the bait; in this oddly back-to-front competition, it was now incumbent upon him to show that these heterodox texts too had been available at Newington Green, even though it meant implicating himself more deeply still in questionable reading practices.

At the same time, we should be glad he did so, because in the process he supplies invaluable information about the dissemination and reception of Marvell's satires, as well as poems on affairs of states more generally, *before* they made their way into print and became much more easily accessible at the time of the Glorious Revolution. Wesley had earlier confessed to having been one of those who composed 'the bitterest & most scandalous & ill mannerd sarcasms' against the clergy and liturgy of the established church, but now claimed that he had merely been following the example of his elders and betters.²⁶ 'I cannot tell', he claimed,

whether the *most famous* among the Dissenting Ministers were the *most Provok'd* of their Party; but this I'm sure of, that they were the Men from I learnt this *way of Writing*. That in their Hands I first saw the *Lampoons* which were then most famous against the *Government*; that I've heard these often repeated from their Lips, *Oaths* and all, so often that some of 'em yet *stick in my Memory*. I wish I knew how to get them out gain, particularly that zealous and religious Prayer "*Noah be----- and all his Race accurs'd; ----* which that *Good Man* from whom I learnt it, can scarce forget, if still living, since he had that very Line so often in his Mouth: And 'twas the *hearing* these so frequently *repeated* and *applauded*, that kindled an *Emulation* in me, and set me on *Imitation*, in Hopes to be a *Marvel*, or some such notable Fellow amongst 'em.²⁷

²³ See Daniel Defoe, *More Short-Ways with the Dissenters* (London, 1704).

²⁴ See S. J. Skedd, 'Palmer, Samuel (d. 1724)', ODNB.

²⁵ Samuel Palmer, *A Defence of the Dissenters Education in their Private Academies: In Answer to Mr. W---y's Disingenuous and Unchristian Reflections upon 'em. In a Letter to a Noble Lord* (London, 1703), 16.

²⁶ Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson C.406, fo. 105; cf. Wesley, *Letter*, 7.

²⁷ Wesley, *Defence*, 50.

The line that the minister so frequently quoted, and that Wesley could not get out of his head, is from Marvell's *The Second Advice to a Painter* (1666), forming the opening salvo in the twenty-line curse delivered by one of the sea-sick 'gallants' off Lowestoft:

Noah be damn'd and all his race accurst
That in sea-brine did pickle timber first.
What though be planted vines! He pines cut down.
He taught us how to drink, and how to drown.
He first built ships, and in that wooden wall
Saving but eight, e'er since endangers all...²⁸ (Marvell 2007, 337; ll. 129, 135-40)

If we call to mind the readership of the advice-to-a-painter poems, then it would probably include Marvell's fellow-MPs, naval administrators like Pepys, Marvell's patrons such as Harley or Wharton, compilers of newsletters, those who managed scriptoria, and, quite possibly, Charles II himself. This is because state satire, as Harold Love points out, was 'addressing a much broader and less predictable audience than the courtiers' at whom court satire was aimed.²⁹ Even so, we are unlikely to think of dissenting clergyman like Charles Morton as having internalized satirical verses from the 1660s in this way. It seems reasonable to assume it *was* Morton in this instance because Wesley also referred to him as a 'Good, tho' mistaken man' in the 1693 text (adding nevertheless that he 'particularly cautioned us against Lampoons or Scandalous Libells ag^t superiors, & that from the Immorality, as well as danger of being the authors or dispersers of them').³⁰ Moreover, the fact that Morton had emigrated to New England in the mid-1680s would explain why Wesley was unsure in 1704 whether he was still alive or not (he had actually died in Charlestown in 1698).

It is surely significant that Wesley immediately goes to discuss his ambition to be another Marvell. Can this be taken as indirect confirmation of Marvell's authorship of *The Second Advice*? None of the printed editions of the work attributed it to Marvell.³¹ Had Wesley perhaps seen a manuscript with this attribution – if so, something of a rarity given that only one such is known to have survived?³² Or was Marvell's authorship just something that was widely known or presumed to

²⁸ Andrew Marvell, *The Complete Poems*, ed. Nigel Smith (Harlow, 2007), 337 (ll. 135-40).

²⁹ Harold Love, *English Clandestine Satire 1660-1702* (Oxford, 2004), 107.

³⁰ Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson C.406, fo. 105; cf. Wesley, *Letter*, 6.

³¹ See Martin Dzelzainis, 'Andrew Marvell and the restoration literary underground: printing the painter poems', *The Seventeenth Century*, 22.2 (2007): 395-410.

³² See Peter Beal, et al., *Catalogue of English Literary Manuscripts 1450- 1700*, MaA 334, <<http://www.celm-ms.org.uk/>>, and Marvell, *Poems*, ed. Smith 323, 330. This bears out Nicholas von Maltzahn's finding that the 'Restoration satires later associated with Marvell were seldom attributed to him before 1689, when most of them find their way into print for the first time, and in scribal publication they are for the most part

be the case in the early 1680s? At all events, Wesley does appear to have been unusually well-informed about Marvell and his writings. When Palmer, in a further contribution to the exchange, mentioned 'Mr. Baies', Wesley immediately picked up the allusion to Marvell's *The Rehearsal Transpros'd* (1672), and tartly reminded Palmer 'that *Marvel* is dead, and he must not pretend to *weild his Weapons* against the Church'.³³ Palmer also sought to defend dissenting authors from charges of subversion by counter-claiming that

a multitude of Factious and *Seditious Books* are *spawn'd* by the *Members* of the *Church of England*, and of the two *Universities*, and I'll name some of 'em in the *State Poems*, which are Damn'd for Sedition, and admir'd for their Wit. We find Mr. *Waller*, Mr. *Sprat*, and Mr. *South* writing Panegyricks upon *Cromwel* and *Rochester*, *Denham*, and *Marvel*, that strike so severely at the Conduct of *Charles II.* were of the *Universities*. (Palmer 1705, 39)

Palmer evidently had on his desk a copy of the 1703 *Poems on Affairs of State: From the Time of Oliver Cromwell, to the Abdication of K. James the Second* which allowed him to embarrass, among others, members of the Anglican establishment such as Thomas Sprat (currently Bishop of Rochester) and Dr Robert South (currently prebendary of Westminster and canon of Christ Church) by highlighting their protectoral verses.³⁴ Wesley's riposte – passing over in silence the names of Sprat and South – was to the effect that the universities had actually been

in the *Dissenters Power* when the Persons whom he mentions were Educated there, particularly *Rochester*, *Denham*, *Marvel* and the rest; the last of which one wou'd have thought they might have excepted for the *Faithful Service* he did the Dissenters all his Life, or

anonymous until after they are thus printed' (von Maltzahn, 'Marvell's Ghost', in *Marvell and Liberty*, ed. Warren Chernaik and Martin Dzelzainis (Basingstoke, 1999), 60).

³³ Samuel Palmer, *A Vindication of the Learning, Loyalty, Morals, and Most Christian Endeavour of the Dissenters toward the Church of England. In Answer to Mr. Wesley's Defence of his Letter concerning the Dissenters education in their Private Academies* (London, 1705), 63; Samuel Wesley, *A Reply to Mr. Palmer's Vindication of the Learning, Loyalty, Morals, and Most Christian Behaviour of the Dissenters towards the Church of England* (London, 1707), 114.

³⁴ This was a massive, 534-page, two-part compilation, *Poems on Affairs of State: From the Time of Oliver Cromwell, to the Abdication of K. James the Second. Written by the greatest Wits of the Age ... The Fifth Edition, Corrected and much Enlarged* (n.p., 1703); for Sprat, see 13-23. South's Latin contribution to an Oxford miscellany congratulating Cromwell on the Treaty of Westminster with the Dutch, *Musarum Oxoniensium ΕΛΛΙΟΦΟΡΙΑ. Sive, ob fœdera [sic], auspiciis serenissimi Oliveri Reipub. Ang. Scot. & Hiber. Domini Protectoris* (Oxford, 1654), was reprinted, with a translation, in the second part of the 1703 volume, which has a separate title page: see *State-Poems; Continued from the time of O. Cromwel, to the Year 1697* (n.p., 1703), 6-8. For South's neo-Laudian credentials, see Griggs 2004.

at least for the many Seditious *Satyrs* and Pamphlets which he wrote against his Prince, for which they so highly admired him.³⁵

Whereas Palmer viewed Marvell as a university man, Wesley thought of him as a fellow-traveller of the dissenters and therefore as someone who really should have been 'excepted' from Palmer's strictures. Indeed, Wesley underlined the point when subsequently discussing anti-episcopal satire; 'I believe *Marvel* himself was no *Profes'd Dissenter*, and yet how much he was their Friend and our Enemy, we have both cause to remember'.³⁶ As a summary of Marvell's religious commitments, this is hard to fault.

Palmer, as we saw, relied on one of the volumes of state poems printed in 1703 for a conspectus of subversive writings.³⁷ But here, too, Wesley was quick to claim priority.

As for the *State-Poems*, he may be pleas'd to take Notice, that scarce *One* of 'em was *extant* in those times, but what we had amongst us, either in *Print* or *Manuscript*; and that some of those *Manuscripts* I lately mentioned, are part of that *Choice Collection* which has been since Printed: And so much for his *State-Poems*.³⁸

The implication seems to be that the proliferation of printed collections of state poems from 1689 onwards was a misleading guide to the situation in the earlier years of the decade. Back then, such collections had to be assembled on an *ad hoc* basis from whatever print or manuscript versions of satires were to hand. To some degree, the survival of these texts was an achievement rather than something to be taken for granted, and one in which dissenting academies had played a crucial part.

The likelihood that Wesley was personally involved in the transmission of these materials becomes clear when he turns to the other item on Palmer's putative Oxford reading-list, the burlesque drama, *Sodom*.

As for what he call's *Rochester's Sodom*, tho' the *Lewdness* of it is so far beyond even *Rochester's*, and the *Sense* so far below him, that he has publicly *disclaim'd* it, I have this to say, That we had some *Copies* of it amongst us at *Newington Green*, tho' I don't remember I

³⁵ Wesley, *Reply*, 65.

³⁶ Wesley, *Reply*, 114.

³⁷ For a complete listing, see George DeF Lord (ed.), *Poems on Affairs of State: Augustan Satirical verse, 1660 - 1714*, Volume 1, 1660-1678 (New Haven and London, 1963), 445-7.

³⁸ Wesley, *Defence*, 52.

ever saw it *any where else*; and *One* of the Gent' there employed me to *transcribe* it for him, and I did accordingly *transcribe* it, for which *God forgive me!*³⁹

Yet again, Wesley cannot resist displaying his superior knowledge of heterodoxy, positioning himself as an aficionado of Rochester's writings such that his authorship of *Sodom* is declared unthinkable on grounds of the drama's excessive obscenity and lack of literary sensibility.⁴⁰ To the best of my knowledge, the possibility that Rochester was directly asked whether he had written *Sodom* has never been canvassed – still less the fact that, according to Wesley, he publicly disavowed it. At the very least, Wesley's claims need to be factored into the still-inconclusive debate over the attribution of *Sodom* (Nace, for example, does not consider the point as such). Quite apart from this, it is telling that class-divisions were carried over into the academy so that Wesley could be paid to transcribe *Sodom* by one of the gentleman students (Wesley mentions elsewhere that scions of the aristocracy like Lord Wharton's son, Henry ('Harry'), attended Newington Green).⁴¹ When Wesley later needed money to complete his studies at Oxford he 'was employd to transcribe som manuscripts in the Bodley' and, 'being out of place and business' in November 1689, found work 'correcting to a Press'.⁴² The various milieux in which texts, clandestine or otherwise, circulated and were reproduced were all familiar to Wesley.

There was a heavy price to pay for these damaging revelations about the academies. In April 1705, Wesley returned to his living in Epworth after spending several months in London where his hopes of preferment after publishing a poem on the victory at Blenheim, *Marlborough; Or, The Fate of Europe*, had been raised and then dashed. He found 'y^e face of things mightily altered' in the run-up to what was to prove a bitterly-contested general election. Not only were the 'Church, y^e Clergy, & Universitys openly insulted' but 'y^e Martyr's memory [was] affronted, & ye Usurper Oliver's vindicated by those from whome one would least expect it; y^t was grown a dangerous thing to write agst y^e dissenters or in vindication of y^e Church of England'.⁴³ His dissenting opponents had him arrested for debt on 23 June, and he was imprisoned in Lincoln Castle.⁴⁴ Four days later, he wrote to a fellow-divine explaining that 'my kind Friends y^e Whiggs haue thrown me into Gaol' on the grounds 'both of writing and preaching Treason'. He had been expecting it, he said, 'ever since I was in London', where he had come under severe pressure to 'Retract in Print w^t I had publish'd ag^t y^e

³⁹ Wesley, *Defence*, 52.

⁴⁰ For recent discussions, see *The Works of John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester*, ed. Harold Love (Oxford, 199), 496-8, and Nace, 'The Author of *Sodom*', 19-21.

⁴¹ See Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson C.406, fo. 106; cf. Wesley, *Letter*, 8.

⁴² Beecham, 'Samuel Wesley Senior', 106-7.

⁴³ Letter from Wesley to Colonel Whichcott, 11 April 1705, Bodleian Library, MS Ballard 34, fo. 90.

⁴⁴ See Adam Clarke, *Memoirs of the Wesley Family* (New York, 1824), 91 (letter from Wesley to the Archbishop of York, 25 June 1705).

Dissenters' but had steadfastly declined to do so.⁴⁵ Wesley's stubborn adherence to his principles surely adds to his credibility as a source of information about the ethos of Morton's academy and the insight that it affords into the afterlife of Marvell's writings (we should remember that Wesley was reading Marvell within a few years of his death at a time of extraordinary political tension; students from Newington Green were accused of supporting the Whig campaign in the London shrieval elections of 1681). What this altogether unexpected configuration of early-modern texts shows is that Marvellian state satire and pornography were (to borrow a phrase from Robert Darnton) the forbidden best sellers of pre-Revolutionary England.

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