

EARLY MODERN LITERARY STUDIES



‘Tis not true reason I despise, but yours’: The Influence of the Civil War ‘Satire against’ Verse Form (1640s) on the Restoration ‘Pamphlet War’ of 1679-81

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Whereas later sixteenth century critics follow classical precedent when considering satire as intended to ‘laugh folly out of court’,¹ individuals writing on the cusp of civil war show a readiness to take advantage of the print medium to circulate a suite of ‘Satire against...’ verses, intended for political instruction of ‘the people’ and an incitement to action. The use of dialogue as a means to articulate writers’ opposing positions is established early on, with the ‘satyr against separatists’ (1642) being answered by the ‘satyr against cavaliers’ (1643), for instance.² This demonstrates the role that print propaganda plays in parallel with the physical onset of civil war, and registers the importance accorded to harnessing popular opinion for the political fight. The ‘satyr against’ form identifies this as a vehicle for both orthodox and subversive voices, in contest with each other: this, then, also suggests an early stage in the establishment of a literary public sphere, with its gesture towards a reading ‘public’, whom the writers assume to be politically active and open to influence.³

¹ Philip Sidney, *A Defence of Poesie and Poems*. (London: Cassell and Company, 1891), p. 41.

² Abraham Cowley (‘A.C. Generosus’), *A satyre against seperatists*, (London: Printed for A.C., 1642). Anon, *Satire against the Cavaliers penned in opposition to the satyre against Separatists*’ (London, s.n., 1643).

³ The idea of a reading ‘public’ develops rapidly during this time; see Steven N. Zwicker, ‘The Constitution of Opinion and the Pacification of Reading’, in *Reading, Society and Politics in Early Modern England*, ed. by Kevin Sharpe and Steven N. Zwicker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 295-315 (p. 297). Peter Beal notes that ‘Paying readers evidently included both men and women and comprised a fairly wide social spectrum of people’; see ‘John Wilmot, Second Earl of Rochester’, *Catalogue of English Literary Manuscripts 1450-1700* (CELM), available at <http://celm2.digium.kcl.ac.uk/introductions/RochesterJohnWilmot.html> > [accessed 20/3/17] (CELM).

The Earl of Rochester's reinvigoration of this 'satyr against' form in the early 1670s, to articulate resistance to religious hegemony, also came to signal his primacy as a key satiric commentator of the era. The subsequent release of his 'Satire against reason and mankind', as a broadside in 1679, marks the start of years of 'pamphlet war' in which the battle for literary and political authority rages.⁴ This re-plays the earlier propagandist 'war of words' that complemented the start of civil war. In the face of increasing anxiety at the threat to order, symbolised by this literary-political turmoil, Dryden's satiric masterpiece *Absalom and Achitophel* (1681) cautions the King to consider 'when should People strive their Bonds to break, / If not when Kings are negligent and Weak?' (ll. 387-8), and pleads for a reassertion of 'manly Force' and strong leadership.⁵ That this also announces Dryden's accession to a position of literary 'authority', as a commentator on and for the time, underlines the perception of how intimately woven literary and political power are considered to be in this era.⁶ Ultimately the wider influence of the 'Satire against' verse form during the latter half the seventeenth century reveals popular recognition of the value of witty repartee over dogmatic preaching when literature engages in political dialogue.

Civil War Print Propaganda

It was during the 1640s in England that turbulence within politics and society occasioned the popularisation of printed 'Satire against...' works. In the sixteenth century, the perception of satire as subversive and therefore dangerous to the governing elite exerted a strong self-censoring influence on writers.⁷ This was formalised in the physical

⁴ Earl of Rochester, 'Satire against reason and mankind', in *The Complete Poems of John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester*, ed. by David M. Vieth (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1962). Line numbers cited parenthetically hereafter.

⁵ John Dryden, 'Absalom and Achitophel', in *John Dryden: The Major Works*, ed. by Keith Walker (Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 2003), pp. 177-204. Line numbers cited parenthetically hereafter.

⁶ For discussion of the literary/political partisanship in Restoration theatre, see Susan J. Owen, *Restoration Theatre and Crisis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); and for further on the lines of satiric influence from Restoration to modern day political commentary, see Christopher Yu, *Nothing to Admire: The Politics of Poetic Satire from Dryden to Merill* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

⁷ Regarding self-censorship enacted by writers in the late-sixteenth century, see *Censorship and Interpretation: The Conditions of Writing and Reading in Early Modern England* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984). Clegg notes it is the entry into print that represents the biggest threat, as letters, for instance, 'did not find their way into print and so risk widespread distribution'; see Cyndia Susan Clegg, *Press Censorship in Elizabethan England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 132. This indicates a fear at the perceived lack of control over readership. Richard McCabe details the works that were included in the Bishops Ban (1599); see 'Elizabethan Satire and the Bishops' Ban of 1599', *Yearbook of English Studies* 11 (1981), 188-93.

ensorship exerted by the Bishop's Ban of 1599. Taken together, this context dissuaded writers from openly trumpeting their works as satires. However, D'Addario notes that 'With the outbreak of hostilities in the battlefield as well as in the print stalls of London, and the attendant breakdown in the mechanisms of censorship in 1642, the 1640s and 50s represent a significant chapter in English print culture', with Lake and Pincus noting the 'feverish levels of public discussion' that took place during the 1640s and 1650s.⁸ In this context, we see a handful of works specifically advertise their status as satire, trumpeting their 'Satire against...' specific groups or behaviours considered to be disruptive to social and political order. These then also appear in easily distributable form, as print is co-opted for propaganda purposes by both sides in the Civil War.⁹

Cowley's *A satyr against separatists* (1642) is released shortly after the abolition of pre-publication censorship in 1641, and attendant upon the formal start of Civil War. Direct response to this is seen in the *Satire against the Cavaliers penned in opposition to the satyre against Separatists*, in 1643. Cowley's *Ad populum: or a Lecture to the People* appears in 1644.¹⁰ Here, then, we witness the beginnings of a 'public sphere', in which

⁸ Christopher D'Addario, 'Echo chambers and paper memorials', *Textual cultures: Texts, Contexts, Interpretation*, 7.2 (2012), 73-97 (p. 77); Peter Lake and Steven Pincus, 'Introduction' in *The Politics of the Public Sphere in Early Modern England*, ed. by Peter Lake and Steven Pincus (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), pp. 1-30 (p. 11). Cf. Smith (1994) and Zwicker (1996) Regarding the impact of civil war on the development of print and its readership, see Nigel Smith, *Literature and revolution in England, 1640-1660* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994); and Zwicker, *Lines of Authority: Politics and English Literary Culture 1649-1689* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996). D'Addario notes the diversity and complexity of print publications seen during the 1640s; see *Exile and journey in seventeenth-century literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) pp. 57-62. Ariel Hessayon records that 'Between 1641 and 1660, an estimated 32,238 titles were published in the British Isles or by English speakers elsewhere in the world. That is roughly 26% of the total amount of such publications between 1475 and 1700'; see 'Book burning and censorship in Revolutionary England', (2014) available at http://www.academia.edu/7944417/Book_burning_and_censorship_in_Revolutionary_England [accessed 19/3/17], 3.

⁹ Sharpe and Peacey note how print was co-opted for use as propaganda during the Civil War years. See Kevin Sharpe, *Reading Revolutions: The Politics of Reading in Early Modern England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), and Jason Peacey, *Politicians and pamphleteers : propaganda during the English civil wars and interregnum* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004).

¹⁰ The authorship of these pieces has been debated. It is attributed to Peter Hausted (and appears as such in the British Library catalogue), however the title page carries the pseudonym 'A.C. Generosus'. Noyes and Mead (144) make a convincing case for this poem being the work of Cowley, based on recognition of his other works from the time; see George Noyes and Herman Mead, 'An Essay Upon Satyr, London, Dring, 1680', *University of California Publications in English*, 7.3 (1948), 139-56. Available at <http://archive.org/stream/essayuponsatyr00noye/essayuponsatyr00noye_djvu.txt> [accessed 20/3/17] (pp. 144-5). Similarly, with the 1644 edition of *Ad Populum*, Hausted is shown as author, although it has also been attributed to John Taylor (1580-1653) and Cowley: though Madan asserts that it is the association

‘debate, argument and the public airing of differences’ can be seen to take place.¹¹ Lake and Pincus also note how writers at this time value the emerging literary public sphere as a place where public discussion is a means to discover truth, ‘not through the victory of one side over the other, but through the cut-and-thrust of argument and the dialogic interrogations of plausible hypotheses’.¹² This was then to be a key influence on the way in which literary and political life intersected and developed under the restored court.¹³

In Cowley’s *A satyr against separatists* (1642) we see the first-person satiric instructor teaching through negative exemplar: ‘I have been where so many Round-heads dwell, / That there are only more of them in Hell’ (ll. 1-2). The strength of this narrative voice encourages us to share his viewpoint, as ‘... To Church I’ll go, / Where (that we men more patiently may hear / Nonsense) to Heaven at first he speaks it...’ (ll. 12-14). His satiric jibes against ignorance and excess in the people he meets there is all the more effective for its witty tone and use of bathos to undermine and mock the behaviours witnessed: ‘he cries / Lukewarmnesse: And this melts the Womens eyes. / They sob aloud, and straight aloud I snore’ (ll. 25-7). However, the patronising, haughty tone of this ‘cavalier’ speaker is then a key target in subsequent satires against entitled nobility.

In direct response to this verse, then, a broadside is anonymously released, called a *Satire against the Cavaliers penned in opposition to the satyre against Separatists* (1643). Printed as two columns on one page, it is intended for quick reproduction, suggesting an intention to reach a wide reading audience. The poetry is more directly political, addressing key figures in the ruling elite by name, and using oxymoron to strike a strident position in opposition to those ‘too-loyal infidel’ who ‘calls grave men’s resolutions for the truth / Rebellion’ (ll. 10, 13-4). In opposition to the figure of ridicule in the earlier satire, here we are drawn instead to accord with the ‘grave men’ who stand in juxtaposition with the ‘desperate’ nobility, who, with ‘loyal treasons hug our King / Unto his own and Kingdoms ruining’ (ll. 19-20). Thus, a key part of the early development of

with the ‘Satyr against Separatists’, in the reprints of 1660 and 1675, that designates Cowley as author of both (in Noyes and Mead, 147).

¹¹ D’Addario, ‘Echo Chambers’, 80. Cf. Lake and Pincus, and Jeffrey Doty, ‘Shakespeare’s *Richard II*, “Popularity”, and the Early Modern Public Sphere’, *Shakespeare Quarterly* 61 (2005), 183-205, regarding the concept of a ‘public sphere’ arising at this time. Robert Wilcher notes the emergence of a public sphere ‘created by rising literacy and the availability of cheap print, as a significant feature of the nation’s political and social life’; see *The Writing of Royalism 1628-1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 3.

¹² Lake and Pincus, p. 14.

¹³ Wilcher helpfully charts how literature during the middle of the century helped to forge a sense of ‘a party committed to the military defence of royalist values and determined to sustain them in defeat’ in *The Writing of Royalism 1628-1660* (2001).

printed ‘satire against...’ verse is the concept of reply and debate, significant both for the dialogue that exists between the writers, but also the implications this has for how the function of reading is understood to be an active, even interactive, process.¹⁴

After two years of hard warfare, the satirist of *Ad populum* (1644) feels justified in returning to a more direct, vituperative attack on a treacherous citizenry, stridently proclaiming against ‘Ye dull Idolaters, have ye yet bent / Your Knees enough to your Dagon-Parliament?’ (ll. 1-2). The speaker clearly feels that the only chance for a ‘cavalier’ victory lies in mobilising the people to rise against the parliamentary forces, again seeking to draw action from negative exemplum:

And now your journeys to the Market Towne
Are not to sell your Pease, your Oates, your Wheat,
But of Nine Horses stolen from you t’entreat
But one to be restor’d: and this ye do
To a buff’d Captain, or perhaps unto
His surly Corporal, with the same degree
Of Cringing and sordid Idolatry
Ye used in the former days to fall
Prostrate unto your Land-Lord in his Hall (ll. 118-26)

The decision to formalise parliamentary forces in the shape of a New Model Army in the middle of this year is alluded to through the image of the forces seizing property, but is linked through imagery to the idea of a spoiling of the land, as the market is simultaneously stripped bare of its produce. With its ironic gesture to the fallacious ‘argumentation ad populum’ (‘if many believe so, it is so’), and the haranguing tone of an authority figure attempting to move men to belief and action, we can see an example of the character type that appears in Rochester’s later ‘satire against’ verse.

But the end of warfare does not register the end of the form, with, for instance, John Phillips’s lengthy *Satyr against hypocrites* appearing in 1655: this demonstrates the enduring perception of the value of this verse form for reforming ‘disorderly’ behaviours, and as a means for targeting positions of political and religious resistance. But this can

¹⁴ D’Addario notes that although by 1661 Naude’s *Advice on compiling a library* recommends ‘bringing together books with opposing viewpoints’; see ‘Echo Chambers’, 81. The majority of the Folger collections he analyses demonstrates that readers only sought out materials that equate to one perspective on an issue, and are therefore operating like an echo chamber. However, this does suggest that readers are playing an active process in the production of meaning; see Michel de Certeau, ‘Reading as Poaching’, in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. by Steven Rendell, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), pp. 165-76.

work both ways, and the usefulness of the ‘satire against...’ verse as propaganda made it an important tool in the machinations by which monarchical restoration could be achieved: in 1660 there is a reprinted edition of *Ad Populum*, reminding the people of ‘th’blessed Influence of a Monarch’s Crowne’ (l. 39). These early examples of satiric jousting in print are precursors to the political dispute recorded through the later ‘pamphlet war’ of the late 1670s.

The Restoration of the ‘Satire against...’ Form

Rochester’s revivification of the ‘satire against’ form following the Restoration acknowledges the founding principles of dialogue within this form as a means for presenting an oppositional stance. Bardle notes that ‘the engine which sustained this oppositional culture [following the Restoration] was the underground printing press and its numerous personnel’ that arose in response to the Licensing Act of 1662. The link suggested by the earlier ‘satire against’ tracts between the written word and public political action in fact directly influences the re-imposition of the Licensing Act, with the chief regulator, Roger L’Estrange, ‘convinced an unlicensed press would result in a re-run of the civil wars, with politically subversive and religiously heretical ideas gaining credence amongst an uncivil and untrustworthy population’. The form in itself then advertises the controversy of its intention to engage in public debate about matters crucial to society and politics: ‘embracing one of the most contentious of Commonwealth innovations, popular participation in politics’.¹⁵ Rochester takes this one step further, satirising the presumption of individuals who seek to persuade others to their viewpoint: his is a satire against reason itself.

So, thirty years after Cowley’s first ‘Satire against’ verse, and in the very different context of the ‘restored’ court of the Merry Monarch, the Earl of Rochester revisits this verse form in order to communicate resistance to religious hegemony, and to expound a contrasting libertine ethos of action over knowledge. However, his ‘Satire against reason and mankind’ (1674) also suggests a more fundamental rupture occasioned by the preceding civil war. Whereas the Civil War propagandists sought through their satires to engender wider belief in a cause, and to justify incitement to physical aggression on the basis of religious and political belief, Rochester’s entry to the ‘satire against...’ form underscores the pointlessness of ‘belief’ in anything other than action for personal satisfaction. The lesson that Rochester derives from consideration of the use of verse as

¹⁵ Stephen Bardle, *The Literary Underground in the 1660s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 2, 3, 4.

propaganda is the necessity of resisting attempts to lead us by false reason to blindly follow ideologies that lead to personal loss.

This proved to be his most popular verse, with Peter Beal identifying fifty-two manuscript versions.¹⁶ In this, Rochester demonstrates his influence from a number of sources, including Hobbes's philosophical writings, but the work is in essence an imitation of Boileau's 'Satire VIII' (which was circulating in 1668). However, the adaptations Rochester makes are striking.¹⁷ In particular, Boileau's speaker is shown to be engaged in a lengthy dialogue with a 'Doctor of the Sorbonne', and his attack takes in not only the church, but also academic institutions and philosophers, as well as politicians and the monarchy. Rochester's much shorter satire condenses the essence of the message of the primacy of libertine 'reason' as action over knowledge:

thoughts are given for action's government,
Where action ceases, thoughts impertinent.
Our sphere of action is life's happiness,
And he who thinks beyond, thinks like an ass (ll. 94-7).

He focusses on attacking a religious authority ('tis not true reason I despise, but yours', l. 111), that encourages man to live 'a tedious life in misery, / Under laborious mean hypocrisy.' (ll. 151-2). His work responds to the context of earlier propagandist 'satire against' works by articulating the futility and destructiveness of adhering to religious and political systems that require the individual to act and be acted upon for the furtherance of a cause, ending in loss and death. Where 'reason' forms the basis of a persuasion to act, through the auspices of a propaganda that seeks to manipulate men to particular ways of thinking, Rochester's response then is to retaliate with his 'satire against reason'.

Given Rochester's development of this form, to register resistance to religious hegemony, it is unsurprising that an early response to his manuscript, critiquing it as subversive, appears from the Anglican preacher Edward Stillingfleet. He refers to the text and its author ('it is a pity such had not their wish, to have been Beasts rather than men... that they might have been less capable of doing mischief among mankind'), during his *Sermon preach'd before the King, Feb. 24, 1674/5*:

¹⁶ In Nicholas Fisher 'The contemporary reception of Rochester's "A satyr against mankind"', *Review of English Studies* NS 57.229 (2006), 185-220 (p. 186).

¹⁷ Cf. Fisher for a lengthy discussion of the relationship between the Boileau and Rochester versions.

And because it is impossible to defend their extravagant courses by Reason, the only way left for them is to make Satirical Invectives against Reason... and yet they pretend to show it in arguing against it... by representing all the excellencies of human nature, which are Reason, and Virtue, and Religion, but as more grave and solemn fopperies. But how hard are such men put to defend their vices, that cannot do it, without trampling under foot the most noble perfections of their own nature! These however are the more ingenuous sort of sinners, that yield Reason and Religion to be of Virtue's side; but there are others that make use of some shallow pretences of Reason to excuse themselves in their sins: which is the second way whereby sin deceives men, viz. 2. By false Reasonings.¹⁸

This literally plays out the dialogue with the 'formal band and beard' that Rochester foreshadows in his work. Within the poem, Rochester ventriloquizes his attacker, and thus with a satire that functions primarily through irony, he presents his challenge to those who are hypocritical and vain enough to presume to take on this role as Puritanical, satiric instructor:

For I profess, I can be very smart
On wit, which I abhor with all my heart.
I long to lash it in some sharp essay,
But your grand inquisition bids me stay,
And turns my tide of ink another way
(*'Satire against reason and mankind'*, ll. 53-7).

The engulfing sweep of the pretending satirist's 'tide' of ink is underlined, and with the pun on lash as both attack and confinement within the clergyman's 'sharp' essay, Rochester demonstrates his wider contempt for the earlier use of the 'satire against...' verse as propaganda in service of the religious and political hegemony.

Thus, we can see how Rochester's response in his 'Satire' emphasises the presumption and vanity of those he sees as seeking to use this form for morally didactic purposes. Rochester's approach, in contrast, is intentionally provocative. The structural movement from broad commentary on the state of mankind (ll. 1-47) to a lengthy imagined dialogue with his 'mighty man' from l. 48, allows the latter two thirds of the poem to challenge the listener to engage with his ideas through dialogue. When he demands, 'defend [man] if you can' (l. 113), or presents the challenge to 'Be judge your self, I'll bring it to the test'

¹⁸ Edward Stillingfleet, *A sermon preach'd before the King, Feb. 24, 1674/5* (Rob White, London, 1675), p. 33.

(l. 127), Rochester widens his provocations to draw in his listeners, thus standing in contrast to satires which represent a closing down of voice, through their attempts to lecture rather than debate.¹⁹ He is, of course, drawing on Boileau's dialogue form from 'Satire VIII', but manipulates this, and even though condensing the format he still manages to interpellate a wider audience for his provocations. Interestingly mirroring the early development of this form for prompting debate, the print history of Rochester's 'Satire' also indicates the development of this more complex relationship between writer and reader, as we see a number of textual responses to the wider circulation of this work at the end of the decade.

As Rochester 'apparently "published" his poems either by giving copies to his friends or by leaving them anonymously in what was called the "Wits' Drawing Room" (one of the public rooms in the Palace of Whitehall)', this would appear to correspond to manuscript circulation in 'coterie groups', suggesting delineation based on class and gender lines.²⁰ However, this 'Satire against Reason and Mankind' suggests otherwise. Although Walker and Fisher note it is perhaps 'unsurprising' that Stillingfleet had access to an early copy, working as one of the King's chaplains, the manner in which the preacher alludes to key ideas from Rochester's verse suggests he is addressing an audience already aware of the content. That this sermon then appears in print in 1675 would surely have added to the original 'Satire's' notoriety. Beal notes it is entirely possible that any number of these manuscripts would be passed on to those producing 'so-called "factory manuscripts" rapidly produced in back-street scriptoria or stationers' shops) for remunerative distribution to a fairly large and receptive public in town and country alike'.²¹ Indeed,

¹⁹ This is not just in relation to the number of verse responses that Rochester's 'Satire' prompts, but there is evidence that it influenced a much wider variety of texts: Hammond and Kewes (2000) have recently identified its influence on six plays from the 1670s; see Brean Hammond and Paulina Kewes, 'A Satyre against Reason and Mankind: From Page to Stage', in *That Second Bottle: Essays on John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester*, ed. by Nicholas Fisher (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 133-52.

²⁰ Keith Walker and Nicholas Fisher (eds.) *John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester: The Poems and Lucina's Rape*, (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), p. 58 Blackwell Reference Online.

<http://www.blackwellreference.com/subscriber/book.html?id=g9781118438794_9781118438794> [accessed 20/3/17]. Harold Love has suggested that Rochester collected a small number of manuscripts together to give to friends and lovers, or to be added to music; see 'The Scribal Transmission of Rochester's Songs', *Bulletin of the Bibliographical Society of Australia and New Zealand*, 20 (1996), 261-80 (pp. 265-6). Also cf. Love regarding the production of MS within the 'communal' environment of Court, and particularly the Whig 'faction'; 'Scribal Texts and Literary Communities: The Rochester Circle and Osborn b. 105', *Studies in Bibliography* 42 (1989), 219-35. Love's 1996 essay explores the tension between the issue of 'public' and 'private' in relation to Rochester's 'publishing' of his work; 'Refining Rochester: Private Texts and Public Reader', *Harvard Library Bulletin* 7.1 (1996), 40-9.

²¹ For an introduction to the issue of 'scribal publication', see Harold Love, *Scribal Publication in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

Rochester's delivery of the 'Addition', in answer to his critics (circulating in manuscript c. 1675), suggests he relished this process of provocation and debate, even if he himself would not stoop to direct publication.²² More interesting, perhaps, is that this 'Addition' allows his original 'Satire' to more clearly define itself in Horatian terms;²³ marking an understanding of satire as didactic in its exhortation to turn away from the negative exemplars and to embrace the path of the final, positive model of behaviour: 'If upon earth there Dwell such God-like men, / I'll here recant my paradox to them /.../ and with the rabble world, their laws obey.' (ll. 47-50).

But Horace was not simply a model for Restoration poets' satires; he became symbolic of the battle for literary primacy during this decade, which mirrored the time's political turmoil more generally. Rochester was originally a patron of the young John Dryden, who had gained the position of Poet Laureate in 1670. However, a split arose following Dryden's use of Horace's Book 1 'Satire 10' to take a swipe against the 'crudeness' of his literary predecessors: 'Thus Jonson did mechanic humour show, / When men were dull and conversation low. / The comedy was faultless, but 'twas coarse'.²⁴ Rochester was one of those who railed against the presumption of this assertion: 'Well sir, 'tis granted I said Dryden's rhymes / Were stolen, unequal, nay dull many times'.²⁵ The split was publicly declared in 1675, with Dryden's dedication to *Aureng-Zebe* signifying his change in allegiance from Rochester to the Earl of Mulgrave, (the then 'Gentleman of his Majesty's Bed-chamber', a position formerly held by Rochester). As Walker and Fisher note, this series of events gestures to the literary partisanship existing by the middle of the decade. However, this held a political dimension: following Buckingham's removal from his post by Charles II in 1674, Rochester aligns himself with courtiers who were leading opponents of the King's policies, and are therefore placed in opposition to the Earl of Mulgrave and Dryden. This increasing bipolarity at court 'would be formalised

²² The 1673 'satyr against scribbling' suggests the way in which print was perceived as a form of prostitution:

The Press, vile Engine! Which more hurt hath done
Than Hells invention of the murdering Gun:
Shall every wanton witty Fop one meets
Soil with his Surquedies my cleaner sheets? (p. 6)

However, what is perhaps more interesting here is not an absolute rejection of print, but an assumption that this is too open to 'the wrong kind' of wit: this, then, fits more clearly with the battle for primacy between the amateur vs the professional writer during the 1670s. Cf. Love (1985) For a discussion of why Rochester chose MS over print, see Harold Love, 'Manuscript versus Print in the Transmission of English Literature, 1600-1700', *The Bibliographical Society of Australia and New Zealand Bulletin* 9 (1985), 95-107.

²³ Cf. Paul Davis, *Rochester: Selected Poems*, (Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 2013), p. 115.

²⁴ Dryden, 'Epilogue' to *The Conquest of Granada* (1671), ll. 3-5 (in Walker, op. cit.).

²⁵ Rochester, 'Allusion to Horace', ll. 1-2 (in Davis, op. cit.).

by the end of the decade as the “Whig” and “Tory” parties’.²⁶ The concept of a literary ‘battlefield’, on which political resistance and competition could be enacted, had been previously witnessed in Civil War propagandist uses of print. What is striking is the formalisation of political ‘party’ effected through use of literary satire to articulate opposing camps.

So, on the back of the response to his ‘Satire’, and the recent political machinations at court, we see Rochester lead the charge on a new era for satire, through a return to the ‘bitter poeme called the old Comedy’, wherein biting satiric portraits and attacks are made against named individuals.²⁷ With his ‘Allusion to Horace’, circulating by 1676, Rochester wields his satire as a tool for correction more vehemently than before. Ironically, then, given his attack on the presumption and hypocrisy of the Civil War propagandists, it is Rochester’s satires from the early 1670s that act as a provocation for the propagandist ‘pamphlet war’ that would rage throughout the remainder of the decade, but particularly over the years 1679-81.

The 1679-81 ‘Pamphlet War’

Notable early responses to Rochester’s throwing down of the gauntlet with his ‘Allusion to Horace’ include Scroope’s ‘In defence of Satyr’ (dating to summer-autumn 1676), wherein he acknowledges that:

Nothing helps more, than Satyre, to amend
Ill manners, or is trulyer Virtues friend.
Princes may laws ordaine, Priests gravely preach,
But Poetts most successfully will teach
So, when a Vice ridiculous is made,
Our Neighbours shame keeps Us from growing bad (ll. 6-13)²⁸

The authority with which this invests the poet is striking, in juxtaposition with ‘princes’ and ‘priests’. Under the guise of a quite formulaic articulation of the instructive nature of satire, in fact we see here assertions of the political role of literature. So, whilst Scroope

²⁶ Walker and Fisher, *John Wilmot*, p. 62.

²⁷ George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie* (London: Richard Field, 1589)

²⁸ Full text available in Walker and Fisher, op. cit.

is concerned to underline the essential didacticism of the satiric verse, the following lines indicate a more pressing desire to engage with Rochester specifically, as one:

Who, for the sake of some ill-natur'd *Jeast*
Tells, what he should conceale, invents the rest,
To fatall midnight frolicks can betray
His brave Companions, and then runn away,
Leaving him, to be murd'red in the *Streete* (ll. 50-4)

The inclusion of specific reference to the death of Billy Downs (on June 27th 1676), shows the development of this form of satire as a means to enact the kind of ‘mudslinging’ commonly used to undermine another politician’s standing. Indeed, what is striking about this is Scroope’s claim to be acting specifically in ‘defence of Satyr’; which is therefore used to undermine Rochester’s literary authority: ‘This, this is he, you should beware of all, / Yet him a witty pleasant Man you call’ (ll. 56-7). Rochester’s reply is, faithful to character, humorous yet cutting: ‘when in thy person wee more clearly see, / Satyrs are of Divine authority, / For God made one on Man, when he made thee.’ (‘On the supposed author of a late Poem in defence of Satyr’, ll. 4-6). The concept of dialogue that forms the heart of such satiric sparring again mirrors the sparring of propagandist satires from the Civil War period.

Following the Popish Plot (1678), and in context of questions as to royal succession, the political side to the primarily literary debates become more urgent, and we witness a literary war of words. Bardle identifies these ‘occasions’, or ideal moments in history for political change, as a time when the underground press ‘was at its most active, building upon a policy begun during the civil wars of timing publishing campaigns to take advantage of moments of national weakness’.²⁹ A key tool in the royalist propagandist’s arsenal, *Ad Populum* is reprinted again in 1678, forming part of the advanced guard of the ‘pamphlet war’ that raged throughout 1679-81, during which time c. 500 pamphlets were published.³⁰ Amongst these, Whiggish politics and positions were formalised and more widely disseminated, and commentators drew parallels between the situations of 1641 and 1681.

This political pamphleteering is mirrored by events in literary-political circles. The on-going dispute between Rochester and Dryden comes to a head in 1678 with Dryden’s

²⁹ Bardle, p. 8.

³⁰ W.K. Thomas, W.K., ‘The Matrix of *Absalom and Achitophel*’, *Philological Quarterly* 49 (1970), 92-99 (p. 93).

‘Prologue’ to *All for Love* (1678), wherein he articulates his rejection of the ‘court poets’ in favour of professional writers ‘destined to rule the cultural world’.³¹ This is, then, no less than a competition over the rights and responsibilities for who will triumph as literary authority, in context of a time when political leadership is being shown, yet again, to be open to corruption and infirmity. Thus, with the release of Rochester’s ‘Satire’ in broadside form in 1679, we see a reaffirmation of the nihilistic and cynical satirist’s position in response to those who seek to inflict their ‘reason’ on an inherently corrupt human existence.³² The attendant print explosion of tracts in response to Rochester’s satire demonstrates the appetite for debate that characterises this form of literary endeavour during the latter years of the seventeenth century.³³

The rejuvenation of Rochester’s popular reputation as a leading satirist of the decade acts as a provocation to this literary ‘war’. Moreover, bound up with this is the issue of who can achieve satiric dominance. In 1679, the Earl of Mulgrave releases his ‘Essay on Satyr’, alluding to the ‘Satire against mankind’ in the opening lines: ‘How dull and how insensible a Beast / Is Man, who yet would Lord it o’re the rest?’ (ll. 1-2).³⁴ Attacks are made on a number of contemporaries, including Rochester and his circle, as well as the King. This translates into literal attack, however, as Dryden is ‘barbarously assaulted and wounded in Rose-street in Covent Garden, by divers men unknown’.³⁵ Irvine notes that this attack was ‘generally attributed to the hired ruffians of Rochester or Louise de Kerouaille’,³⁶ as Dryden had been originally suspected by Rochester and his circle of its authorship: ‘I have sent you herewith a Libel, in which my own share is not the least... The Author is apparently Mr. D[ryden]. His Patron my [Lord Mulgrave] having a Panegerick in the midst’.³⁷ This suspicion was raised as the passage handling the Earl of Mulgrave merely accuses him of being a cuckold (‘learn’d in all those Arts that cheat the Fair’, l. 195). However, there is evidence that it was exactly this ‘light’ treatment that

³¹ Davis, p. 100.

³² For a discussion of how Rochester’s ‘deconstructive’ satire juxtaposes with Dryden’s constructive approach, re-asserting ‘order’ on the world, see Rose A. Zimbardo, *At Zero Point: Discourse, culture and satire in Restoration England* (University Press of Kentucky, 2015).

³³ Walker and Fisher list four verse replies, in particular: Pockocke ‘Answer to satire against man’ (broadside July 1679); Lessey ‘Satyr, in answer to satyr against man’ (published in Barker, 1688, *Poetical Recreations*); Anon, 1699, ‘Corinna, human frailty, with an answer to Rochester’s Satyr against man’; Anon, ‘An Answer to a satyr against reason and mankind’. See their work for the list of manuscript versions and locations. See Fisher (2006) for a detailed analysis of the verse responses to Rochester’s ‘Satire’.

³⁴ In Anon, *The Fourth (and last) collection of poems, satyrs, songs, &c* (London, s.n., 1689).

³⁵ Reported in *The London Gazette*, 29 Dec 1679 (in Walker and Fisher, 2013).

³⁶ Maurice Irvine, ‘Identification of Characters in Mulgrave’s “Essay upon Satyr”’, *Studies in Philology*, 34.4 (1937), 533-51 (p. 533).

³⁷ In ‘Letter from Rochester to Henry Saville’, dated Nov 21 1679; see Noyes and Mead, op. cit.

led to Mulgrave being suspected of being the author: ‘a most scurrilous, libellous copy of verses was read, severe upon almost all the courtiers save my Lord Mulgrave... this brought him under suspicion’.³⁸

Nevertheless, as Irvine notes, the attack on Dryden seemed to fix the blame on him as author, as ‘satires of the time abound with references to Dryden as ‘the ungrateful libeller of his King’.³⁹ Mulgrave’s verse ‘Essay on Satyr’ therefore forms part of a very specific, literary campaign that sought to use satiric attack to undermine the combined literary and political standing of opponents.⁴⁰ Rochester’s response is typical of his satiric style: by ventriloquizing Mulgrave and Dryden in his ‘Epistolary Essay from M.G. to O.B. upon their mutual poems’,⁴¹ Rochester parodies the vanity and parochialism of his rivals: ‘Thus I resolve of my own Poetry, / That ’tis the best, and there’s a fame for me’ (ll. 77-8). Where the Civil War propagandists adopted a direct, attacking tone for their satiric instruction, Rochester responds with a more attractive satiric style that enacts resistance through a linguistic wittiness which undermines opposing viewpoints. In both his ‘Satire against reason and mankind’, and again during the ‘pamphlet war’, he effectively challenges direct attack and hypocrisy through ventriloquizing and ridiculing opposing voices. When read as a whole, it is hard not to be seduced by Rochester’s particular style of satiric *sprezzatura*, and be persuaded by the greater effectiveness of parody over direct attack, for the bringing low of opponents, or for articulating resistance to another’s agenda.

Throughout this literary warfare, then, we can trace a common strand: an attempt to wrestle ground from literary rivals, and to establish a greater share of cultural cache. It is perhaps no surprise, then, to see Dryden respond to the events of 1679-81 with an articulation of his literary mastery. Framing his *Absalom and Achitophel* (1681) as ‘Varonian’ satire, Dryden makes use of the tools of facetiousness and ‘witty pleasantry’ to respond to the perceived time of crisis. Thomas notes that Dryden’s aim to ‘treat of many various subjects’ in fact indicates the specificity of his approach, in that ‘each of

³⁸ ‘Letter from Colonel Edward Cooke to the Duke of Ormonde’, dated 22 Nov 1679; see Irvine, 533.

³⁹ Irvine, 534.

⁴⁰ Although, as noted, these works were originally circulated in MS, it would appear that they had a far wider impact than the coterie audience for which they were presumably composed. Meads (California) notes how the publisher Peter Dring, having to hand a number of unsold copies of Cowley’s 1648 ‘Poem on the times’, replaced the title page of those copies with one advertising this as ‘An essay upon satyr’, instead including a copy of Cowley’s ‘An essay against separatists’. He published this composite edition in 1680, presumably in order to ‘piggy-back’ on popular interest in the recent Rochester-Mulgrave episode. Perhaps also in response to this new literary trend, a new edition of Boileau’s *A ternary of Satyrs* ‘now done into English’ appeared in 1679.

⁴¹ Autumn 1679, in Davis, op. cit.

the elements in Dryden's poem had formed the subject matter of a number of pamphlets that had contributed to [the preceding pamphlet] warfare'.⁴² Dryden, however, synthesizes and responds to them through masterful manipulation of allegory:

For as when raging fevers boil the blood
The standing lake soon floats into a flood
And every hostile humour which before
Slept quiet in its channels bubbles o'er;
So several factions from this first ferment
Work up to foam and threat the government. (ll. 136-41)

With imagery linking the 'factions' with a disruption of the correct order, akin to an imbalance in the humours, this situates correct 'government' with the triumphing of mental faculties over raging 'blood'. Forty years after the Civil War propaganda pieces popularised this form as a means for intervention and commentary upon a time in crisis, Dryden's work re-emphasises the relevance of the printed satire, and underlines through alliteration the danger of 'first ferment [working] up to foam'. More than this, however, in contrast to the recent slew of diatribe and polemic, Dryden reasserts his authority as a satirist presenting instruction through careful handling of imagery and symbol, and as such we see the triumph of his position as 'professional' writer and commentator on his time. This work, then, is not simply another entry into the catalogue of satiric 'essays' of the previous two years, but a symbolic declaration of his relative literary weight.⁴³ This is in response to his contemporaries – including, of course, the recently deceased Rochester – but is also, then, a declaration of his mastery over the use of satire for instruction.

With *Absalom and Achitophel*, Dryden proclaims his position as literary master, rather than grubby pamphleteer; and as someone calling for the restoration of political stability under the rule of an (ideally, reformed) King; as well as being, of course, a means to also restore his reputation away from the 'ungrateful libeller' of the 'Essay on Satyr'. Interestingly, however, he goes on to underscore his literary primacy by releasing his *The medal, a satyr against sedition, by the author of Absalom and Achitophel* in 1682, which of course engenders a mocking reply in Samuel Pordage's 'The medal revers'd a satyre

⁴² Thomas, p. 93.

⁴³ As Ward notes, 'In undertaking the composition of this great satire, whether or not at the request of Charles II, Dryden had found his great literary opportunity; and, of this, he took advantage in a spirit far removed from that of either the hired bravos or the spiteful lampooners of his age'; see A.W. Ward and A.R. Waller (eds.), *Cambridge History of English and American Literature: Vol. 8. The Age of Dryden* (New York: Bartleby.com, 2000) <<http://www.bartleby.com/cambridge/index.html>> [accessed 25/3/17].

against persecution, by the author of Azaria and Husai'. The lessons of literary-political sparring from the earlier part of the century have confirmed the 'satire against...' print publication as a vital medium for contemporary debate.

The 'satire against...' verses, which were popularised in a period of civil war and political upheaval in England, had a clear influence on the progress of literary and political debate in the latter half of the century. Awareness of the power of the written word for inciting political action leads to reprinted editions of key 'satire against' texts shoring up the political movements of later times with, for example, the movement to the Restoration becoming linked with the '*ad populum*' argument, which is then reprinted at the time of the Exclusion Crisis. However, Rochester's response to the tradition, presenting a libertine resistance to religious hegemony, resurrects this form as the locus for a farther-reaching literary 'warfare', mirroring the political crisis toward the latter half of the 1670s. The rhetorical battle for literary/political authority rages through the 'pamphlet war' at the end of the decade, where Rochester's position at the heart of this war of words underlines the triumph of a ready wit over polemic moralising for the better instruction of 'mankind'.