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POEMS ON AFFAIRS OF STATE (London, 1689–1716 and New Haven, 1963–1975)

Steven N. Zwicker

The mixing of popular and elite forms is often thought the very signature of literary modernism, but relations between the high and the low are nowhere more striking than in the decades between the Restoration and the demise of Stuart monarchy, and nowhere better observed than in the collections of verse called *Poems on Affairs of State*.¹ These miscellanies were originally published at the close of the seventeenth century and recreated in the middle of the twentieth century by George deForest Lord, his co-editors, and Yale University Press.² Here we might enjoy all the brilliant

¹ *Poems on Affairs of State* numbered some thirty volumes published between 1687 and 1716; for bibliographical information, see Arthur E. Case, *A Bibliography of English Poetical Miscellanies 1521–1750* (Oxford, 1935), 147–53; and George deForest Lord, *Poems on Affairs of State: Augustan Satirical Verse, 1660–1714* (New Haven and London, 1963), vol. 1, 445–48.

² *Poems on Affairs of State: Augustan Satirical Verse, 1660–1714*, vol. 1, 1660–1678, ed. George deForest Lord (1963); vol. 2, 1678–1687, ed. E. F. Mengel, Jr. (1965); vol. 3, 1682–1685, ed. H. Schless (1968); vol. 4, 1685–1688, ed. G. M. Crump; vol. 5, 1688–1697, ed. W. J. Cameron (1971); vol. 6, 1697–1704, ed. F. H. Ellis (1970); vol. 7, 1702–1714, ed. Ellis (1975).

vacillations of Restoration culture: its libels and local colors, its easy counterpointing of street language and literary allusion, its steady traffic between pornography and political theory, and between the brothel and the court. The sexualized body politic may not have been invented by Restoration courtiers and wits, but "affairs of state" had never before (or since) enjoyed quite so luminous and so scabrous a discursive life.

And yet, for all their obvious allure, the years between the return of monarchy and the creation of the Georgian state long seemed an uneasy place, or rather a gap, in our teaching and scholarship. Attention had been focused to either side of the Restoration: on the culture wars, spiritual strivings, and political innovations of the mid-seventeenth century, or on the exuberance of Georgian politics, commerce, and corruption. But in the past decade or two, and in both literature and history, things have begun to change. The Restoration has emerged—and its culture and intellectual projects recognized—as central to our understanding of early modern Britain. These were, after all, the years of Milton's greatest poetry, of Dryden's invention of modern prose, of Locke's political theory and psychology, and of those civilizing innovations: religious toleration and party politics.

Indeed, the whole of this world is now being recharted by students of both its literature and history, and, signally, of relations between the two; and the quality of this scholarship is very high. Witness the California editions of Pepys and Dryden; Pierre Danchin's volumes of Restoration theatrical prologues and epilogues; the biographical work on Restoration Members of Parliament by the History of Parliament Trust; the two editions of Donald Wing's Short-Title Catalogue, and the Short-Title Catalogue of British Newspapers and Periodicals, 1641-1700.³ These projects have been critical to our re-reading

³ Edward N. Hooker, H. T. Swedenberg, Jr., et al., eds., *The Works of John Dryden* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1956—); *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, 11 vols., ed. Robert Latham and William Matthews (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1970-1983); *The Prologues and Epilogues of the Restoration, 1660-1700*, 7 vols., ed. Pierre Danchin

of the words and lives of Restoration England, but at the center of such re-reading stand the Yale *Poems on Affairs of State*. They recover for us a broad range of texts, they invite us to imagine the force of these texts as initially conceived and consumed, and they enable us to hear the steady inflection of Restoration aesthetics by politics, and at every level, from ballad, litany, and broadside to panegyric and pindaric ode.

Not of course that the original volumes in *Poems on Affairs of State* were primarily aesthetic venture—and especially not at their inception in 1689—or particularly attractive objects. Unlike the Yale volumes with their uniform typeface and binding, their careful glossing, their textual apparatus, and their disinterested headnotes, the original collections were often hasty and always polemical affairs—full of libel and gossip. And yet for all the distinctions we might make between the original spirit of *Poems on Affairs of State* and the aims of their twentieth-century editors, the Yale volumes simulate the broad and important intersections of Restoration literature and partisanship. They begin with the events of the early 1660s and they unfold the brilliant and complex play of text and event across the next five decades. In so doing, they offer a superb sense of the density of paper warfare, and of the conditions of many kinds of writing in the Restoration.

This was a world that registered the names Milton, Marvell, Dryden, and Rochester first as political markers, and understood not only *Annus Mirabilis* and *The Last Instructions* but as well *Paradise Lost* and *All for Love* as instruments of contest. *Poems on Affairs of State* illuminates every angle of such contest.

(Nancy, 1981–1988); *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons 1660–1690*, ed. Basil Duke Henning for the History of Parliament Trust, 3 vols. (London, 1983); Donald G. Wing, *Short-Title Catalogue of Books Printed in England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, and British America and of English Books Printed in Other Countries 1641–1700* (New York, 1945–1951, 2nd ed. Charlottesville, 1972–1988, and 2nd ed. newly revised and enlarged (New York, 1994); Carolyn Nelson and Matthew Seccombe, eds., *British Newspapers and Periodicals, 1641–1700: A Short-Title Catalogue of Serials Printed in England, Scotland, Ireland, and British America* (New York, 1987).

But there is another, and as important, characteristic of Restoration aesthetics here revealed, for *Poems on Affairs of State* also demonstrates the importance of miscellany to the whole enterprise of Restoration politics and aesthetics. One of the striking features of publishing in these years was the renewed importance of the miscellany, and *Poems on Affairs of State* is our most convenient point of entry to the genre, its quality and variety. And beyond documenting a literary type and a publishing venue, the miscellany points to an aesthetic, even an epistemological, condition of this world. In its assembled fragments and casual juxtapositions—the interleavings of lyric and libel, of theatrical prologue and religious devotion—the miscellany suggests relations between a particular literary form and the larger aesthetic configurations of the age.

The Yale volumes evidence a literary and political culture and provide the tools for its analysis: the stable texts, the names, dates, and complicities necessary to work through the topical puzzles and tactical maneuvers of this world. As important for our continued use of the volumes is the sense they convey of how literature reached and was used by consumers. Here I believe the Yale volumes will continue to play an important role in our understanding of the cultural and intellectual past, and especially in the construction of a history of early modern reading. This potential of the Yale volumes has gone largely unnoticed, and I want here to suggest a few of the ways in which *Poems on Affairs of State* might contribute to the history of the book and the history of reading. In both these endeavors the physical evidence of surviving copies of books provides a crucial archive. Book collections, collations between manuscript and print copy, and manuscript markings on printed books have revealed to us a good deal about the making and marketing of books, the uses of print, and the intellectual habits of readers. Indeed, the manuscript markings of readers have come to seem central to our reconstruction of the history of reading, and in this work *Poems on Affairs of State* promises to play a crucial role. I refer to two kinds of

materials in the Yale volumes: the footnotes scattered through the volumes which preserve the evidence of seventeenth and early eighteenth-century manuscript marginalia (in both early print and scribal editions) and which use them to supply the identities of persons and events wholly veiled or merely hinted at in the verse itself; and, secondly, the textual notes at the back of each volume that indicate the kinds and numbers of texts that circulated among seventeenth-century readers.

Perhaps the best known version of the first kind of evidence, the archive of marginalia, is to be found in copies of *Absalom and Achitophel*. The early issues and editions of the poem were covered by annotations supplying English identities for the poem's biblical characters, and, occasionally, topical or partisan comment. These busy markings reveal a striking interest among Dryden's contemporaries in national politics (even political theory); in gossip and scandal; and in the transactions—and frictions—between the particular and the theoretical. Dryden's characters and cartoons, as indeed his acts of allegory and analogy, transfixed his audience, and the evidence of numbers of surviving copies, of echoes and adaptations, of keys that translated manuscript notes into print and were then quickly and widely circulated, and especially of manuscript marginalia provide a fascinating window on habits of reading and modes of thought. Narcissus Luttrell wrote on his copy of *Absalom and Achitophel*, "An excellent poem agt ye Duke of Monmouth, Earl of Shaftesbury, & that party & in vindication of the King & his friends."⁴ In his *Brief Historical Relations of State Affairs 1678-1714* Luttrell noted the rush of pamphlets, cries of Protestant populism, and the coalescence of faction into party in the fall of 1681.⁵ Moving between marginalia and broader comment allows us to sense exactly how—and at what points—the personal was housed in the political. The Yale

⁴ See Hugh Macdonald, *John Dryden, A Bibliography of Early Editions and of Drydeniana* (Oxford, 1939), 20.

⁵ Narcissus Luttrell, *A Brief Historical Relation of State Affairs from September 1678 to April 1714*, 6 vols. (Oxford, 1857), 1:124.

volumes demonstrate the fluent and offhand knowledge of statecraft among the poem's readers, and the intricacy of a political world where the crucial players were often relatives and intimates of one another, and perhaps personally known, and surely often glimpsed, by the reading public.

And *Absalom and Achitophel* is anything but a unique event. The Yale notes across a broad spectrum of poems make clear how widespread were such habits of reading and annotating. Marginal annotation was of course hardly peculiar to the Restoration, and the records of annotation in *Poems on Affairs of State* show how Restoration habits grew out of earlier practices of commonplacing and commentary. And yet the fascination with the topical and the scandalous revealed in Restoration marginalia not only confirms, it maps the locations of political and aesthetic interest and action. Such evidence focuses us on the way the topical is so centrally situated, indeed privileged, in this culture, and not only in the world of "Lies and Libels."

The Beinecke Library's copy of *Paradise Lost* with annotations by Francis Atterbury offers intriguing evidence of that privileging. The Bishop of Rochester saw Milton's project embedded in a field of partisanship and party warfare, the poet's fallen angels conjuring nothing so much as the grandes and politicians of Milton's time.⁶ If there is a touch of anachronism about this late seventeenth-century re-reading of Milton's strenuous transcendentalism, we should remind ourselves—and nothing can serve us better in that remembering than volume 1 of *Poems on Affairs of State*—that *Paradise Lost* was published in a year of wonders and disasters. Whatever else we know of the months and years across which the epic was composed, we know it was written and published with a keen awareness of the ways in which religious polemics and political controversy had transformed print culture, and in turn the very acts of

⁶ John Milton, *Paradise Lost. A Poem in Twelve Books* (London, 1678), Osborn Collection, pb 9, Beinecke Library, Yale University.

writing and reading, into a species of armed conflict. In reassembling that world, *Poems on Affairs of State* is a singularly important resource, one of the few published repositories of the practices or marking and contesting texts. Without these volumes we could know of the world of manuscript marking—the breath as it were of the first readers of these texts—only by examining at first hand the copies of surviving texts at the Beinecke, Folger, or Huntington libraries in the United States or at similar repositories in Britain.

Perhaps as useful for our continued unfolding of Restoration culture is the second archive that *Poems on Affairs of State* provides. Here I refer to the textual notes at the back of each volume where lists of manuscripts, printed texts, and collations of important variations between the two are provided. In these notes we discover the varying character of manuscript and printed copies (and invariably the manuscript copies contained more specific and more libellous information), the number and kinds of texts that were in circulation, the relation of manuscript to print copy—and the permeability of both kinds of texts: of manuscripts deriving from print, of print being set from manuscript. For the Yale editors the richly detailed manuscript versions of the poems they print often supply the names, the offending epithets, at times the occasions and events that were not available in printed versions of the texts they consulted. Of course the use of manuscript copy in the formation of the printed text means that what we read is often an unhistorical composite: the names, expressions, and scandalous accusations that have become part of the Yale text were frequently available only in manuscript copy in the seventeenth century. But the textual notes enable us easily to reconstruct both the manuscript and the early printed versions of these texts.

By allowing the comparison of manuscript and print copy, the textual notes reveal to us the comparative propriety of print culture, the daring of manuscript materials, and the alluring play of one kind of information against another. What print

often could not sustain—since most printed items contained the return address of publishers, printers, and booksellers and hence allowed the possibility of quick and brutal response to transgression—the world of manuscript indulged. And print and manuscript publication existed side by side.⁷ By following the variations between printed and manuscript copy we can form an understanding of the complimentary character of printed and manuscript texts, of the more generalized and covered nature of print, and of the scandalous exactitude of the huge quantities of political verse circulated in manuscript. *Poems on Affairs of State* reproduces the world of printed political poetry but it also allows us with more than a glimpse of the counterpart to print culture provided by the manuscript collections that have survived. In studying the history of early-modern books we have become sharply aware of how many of those books did not survive and in turn how much more precarious, then, was the life of the manuscript. The collections and individual copies of manuscripts that did survive, and the compilations of variants in *Poems on Affairs of State*, show us just how particular and how daring was the political culture of this Augustan England.

In respect to those crucial conditions of partisanship and miscellany, and of anonymity, secrecy, and juxtaposition, the Yale volumes of *Poems on Affairs of State* bring us into close proximity with the original conditions of writing, printing, and reading in the late seventeenth century. Perhaps too they begin to tell us something of the neutralizing spirit of aesthetics and commerce, perhaps of antiquarianism, that begins to appear late in the 1690s when the first books calling themselves *Poems on Affairs of State* were published. These volumes advertise both their historical and aesthetic force; they proudly claim verse

⁷ On the relations between early modern manuscript and print culture, see Harold Love, *Scribal Publication in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford, 1993); Arthur Marotti, *Manuscript, Print, and the English Renaissance Lyric* (Ithaca and London, 1995); and Barbara Benedict, *Making the Modern Reader: Cultural Mediation in Early Modern Literary Anthologies* (Princeton, 1996).

“From the Time of Oliver Cromwell, to the Abdication of K. James the Second. Written by the greatest Wits of the Age. Viz. Duke of Buckingham, Earl of Rochester, Lord Bu——st, Sir John Denham, Andrew Marvell, Esq; Mr. Milton, Mr. Dryden, Mr. Sprat, Mr. Waller, Mr. Ayloffe, &c. With some Miscellany Poems by the same: Most whereof never before Printed. Now carefully examined with the Originals, and Published without any Castration.”⁸ To bind together the Earl of Rochester and John Milton, or the Earl of Dorset and John Toland is to make a startling colloquy among contemporaries, and yet when we contemplate such juxtaposition as a gathering of “the greatest wits of the age” we begin to sense the logic of their proximity, perhaps even the way print and anthology, while seeming to fuel the paper scuffles and party projects, lend an aestheticizing argument to political verse. Such anthologies boldly proclaimed partisan allegiance, though it is clear from the number of issues and editions that the original motives of partisanship that drove the production of these volumes in the early 1690s must have been soon eclipsed by or perhaps absorbed into a broader market, indeed into a marketing of poems on affairs of state. The original goals of the 1689 volumes surely included the typing of court corruption as Stuart rule, the formation of a collective memory of that world of popery and tyranny so narrowly and so miraculously escaped. And yet the very act of printing and housing together such disparate spirits as these miscellanies soon came to include marked the translation of polemical into aesthetic and commercial venture. It is clear from the success of these volumes that late in the seventeenth century an appetite for poems on affairs of state had either been created or discovered (and no doubt both) by these very volumes. The Yale edition of *Poems on Affairs of State* enables us to appreciate in detail the unfolding of that story and the broader transformation of a courtly and aristocratic culture into a literary marketplace.

⁸ *Poems on Affairs of State* (New Haven and London), vol. 1:446.