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On the Genealogy of John Wesley's Miltonism

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One god-like monarch all that pride confounds,
He whose long wall the wandering Tartar bounds.
"Heavens! what a pile! whole ages perish there
And one bright blaze turns Learning into air.

The Dunciad, Book the Third

Most scholars of *Paradise Lost* are aware that in 1791 John Wesley published a truncated and simplified version of the poem called *Extract from Milton's Paradise Lost, with Notes*. They may be less aware that throughout his long life Wesley displayed an intense interest in Milton's epic. As a student at Oxford he was already annotating the poem. The third entry in the voluminous journal he started keeping in 1725 speaks of transcribing his Milton notes, and a few months later he's preparing a precis with extracts. In 1730 his diary speaks of preparing explanatory notes on Milton to use with his pupils. When he set out as a missionary to Georgia in 1735 he took Milton with him. Upon his return, as his Holiness Society grew into "a people called Methodists" and he set out to make them "a reading people," among his first collections for them was *Moral and Sacred Poems*, published in three volumes, that begins with lengthy extracts from *Paradise Lost*. In 1748 he felt the need to establish a school for Methodists, and its curriculum, which he wrote, features the memorization of large passages of *Paradise Lost* as a weekly exercise.

Wesley insisted that Methodist ministers read *Paradise Lost*, and it was to toward this end that he produced the edition above, though it must be noted that the book first appeared in 1763, when it was called

Paradise Lost Improved. In the preface to this work Wesley states the high value he places on Milton's epic: "Of all the poems which have hitherto appeared in the world, in whatever age or nation, the preference has generally been given, by impartial judges, to Milton's '*Paradise Lost*.'" Once Wesley had his own edition of the poem, he insisted that his ministers carry copies with them, one to study and the others to sell. Copies were kept for reading and purchase in the Methodist Reading Rooms.

Beyond Wesley's proprietary interest in Milton, indicated by this summary, there is the great expanse of Miltonic allusions in his sermons, journals, and the legions of hymns which he co-wrote with his brother Charles (a swamp I don't propose to enter). Suffice it to say that Wesley made Milton the principal Bard of Methodism (relegating Charles to the job of providing the sound track), and the effects in the realm of educational traditions within Methodist universities around the world are discernible down to the present. All this has been extensively documented.¹

Fantasies of Fortunes vs. Disparity and Dissension

What cannot be documented is the claim on the part of the hagiographical traditions of Wesleyan biography that Wesley's ancestors touched the hem of Milton's garment. This notion needs to fall into the same oblivion that swallowed the fantasy about "the Irish inheritance," whereby Charles was supposedly offered the kingdoms of this world but refused on the grounds that riches might be an impediment to his salvation. This is a very fortunate refusal for us all, because the heir who was in fact selected became the grandfather of the Duke of Buckingham, and without the Duke at Waterloo we might all be speaking French.

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1. See Baker, Herbert, Molin, Rogal, Shawcross, Sherwin, Stevenson, Telford, and Tyerman. A panel on "Milton and Methodism" was offered at the International Milton Symposium, Tokyo, August 2012, which discussed the Milton-Wesley connection. It included an "extract" from the present essay.

The genealogy that matters here is not fantasies of *sang real* but a style of analysis we associate with Michel Foucault: "Genealogy is gray, meticulous, and patiently documentary...It opposes itself to the search for origins...What is found at the historical beginning of things is not the inviolable identity of their origin; it is the dissension of other things. It is disparity...Genealogy seeks to reestablish the various systems of subjection: not the anticipatory power of meaning, but the hazardous play of dominations" (139-42, 148). Against the will-to-believe that has dominated the study of Wesley, genealogy juxtaposes a hermeneutic of doubt. In place of triumphalism, a history of subjection: the domination of the father over the son produces as a reaction-formation the son's will to beget himself, to dominate souls, and to author/ize texts without regard for their earthly creators.

A genealogy of Wesley's Miltonism finds its first clue and its formula in a story whose origins are lost but which has been repeated enough to acquire the status of myth. When John passed from the tutelage of his mother at the age of ten, he entered Charterhouse. There, a master named Rev. Andrew Tooke

was struck with the fact that, though Wesley was remarkably advanced in his studies, yet he constantly associated with the inferior classes, and was accustomed to harangue a number of the smaller boys surrounding him. On one occasion Tooke broke in upon him in the midst of an oration...and addressing him, asked how it was that he was so often found among the boys of the lower forms, and sought not the company of the bigger boys, who were his equals? To which the young orator replied, "Better to rule in hell than to serve in heaven."² (Tyerman 20)

Here at the outset we establish the central pattern of the development of Methodism during the lifetime of its founder, John's need to dominate

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2. Tyerman gives the source as "an old Methodist pamphlet" and cites it as "A Letter to the Rev. T. Coke, L.L.D., and Mr. H. Moore, by 'An Old Member of Society'" (20). He adds that Rev. Took may have been an usher rather than a master.

and the consequent policy of keeping his social and intellectual equals out of the organization. The Miltonic reference displays the genealogical fantasy through which the ruler begets and authors himself by eliminating the father.

Unsurprisingly, the fantasy arises out of a need that develops first in the family, dominated by the sharp beak of Samuel Wesley's ego, a matter that can be suggested here in a line from father to son written in 1724 (when John was 21) warning him to obey, "for I will bear no rivals in my kingdom" (Tyerman 30). And its consequence can be briefly indicated as well. When Samuel, grown old and ill, expected one of his three sons to take over the Epworth Curate, he asked each of them in turn, and each refused. Samuel Jr., the eldest, because his income as Head Usher at Westminster School supported the Epworth family. The younger sons, John and Charles, each had their own kingdom and would not abdicate to rule a smaller one. Harold Bloom quotes Shelley's remark that "The Devil owes everything to Milton" (98). In the Epworth Rectory, both the Devil and Milton owed everything to Samuel Wesley.

Our Milton Who Art in Heaven

Nothing could be less surprising than the discovery of the Oedipal triangle at the base of John Wesley's life. What makes this triangle worthy of a genealogical investigation is that Samuel Wesley, the father, is a screen for John Milton, the source of his authority. Samuel is also the covering cherub, the Exterminating Angel who guards the Tree of Life and blocks the return of his son to Paradise. Milton is the old man's God, and it is Milton whom the son through his textual methodism will emasculate.

Genealogy as such demands that we take up John's mother Susanna before his father, for the claims to a material link to Milton are made on her side. The first claim is minor and not disputed: In 1658 her father Samuel Annesley was appointed to St. Giles Cripplegate, where John Milton was buried. This fact is saved from total insignificance by another:

that both Samuel and Susanna turned their back on Dissent.

The second claim is more important. Wesleyan biographers and scholars interested in his Miltonism repeat that her father, Samuel Annesley (1620?-1696), was a nephew of Arthur Annesley, the first Earl of Anglesey (1614-1686), who befriended Milton in the troubles following the Restoration and was even entrusted with certain manuscripts. This sounds glorious enough, when the *DNB* says it. The problem is that it is not true. Arthur Annesley was not kin to Susanna's father Samuel.

The *DNB* describes Samuel Annesley as a prominent Puritan and Dissenter, best known for the sermons he collected as the series of *Morning Exercises*. In 1657 he was nominated by Oliver Cromwell as lecturer of St. Paul's, and in 1658 was presented by Richard Cromwell to the vicarage of St. Giles, Cripplegate. He was presented again there after the Restoration, but was ejected after the Act of Uniformity 1662. He preached semi-privately, but his goods were distrained for keeping a meeting-house. Honored as the "the St. Paul of Dissent," he died on the last day of the year 1696. Daniel Defoe, a member of his congregation, wrote an elegy on his death.

What was his connection to Milton's friend Arthur Annesley? It was fabricated by a spelling change. Susanna's father's name was originally Anerlye not Annesley, for he was the son of John and Judith Anerlye. This John Anerlye was not the brother of Lord Anglesea. According to the Annesley pedigree in Lodge's *Peerage of Ireland* (1789), Lord Anglesea had only one full brother to leave issue, John Annesley (1616-1695) of Ballysonan, co. Kildare. But neither this John Annesley or his son John can be identified with Susanna's uncle John, who kept the name Anerlye. Anthony à Wood attests this name change. In his *Fasti* he describes Susanna's father Samuel Aneley as a "person, who wrote himself afterwards, and was called, by the name of Annesley, because it is the same with a noble Name" (Wood 114; cited in Evans). Charles Evans, the scholar who reported this data in the pages of *Notes and Queries* in 1948, concludes, "Certainly the relationship...of the Aneleys to

the Annesleys...seems neither proved nor probable" (259).³

Still, the story of the Wesleys connection to Arthur Annesley remains important, because the Wesleys believed it. Susanna sometimes sealed her letters to her sons with the Annesley seal. John and Charles told their wives and followers. The early biographers picked it up, principally from Charles's daughter Sally Wesley, keeper of the family traditions in the early 1800s (Rack 123). And when it came time for Methodist scholars to investigate Wesley's Miltonism, they picked it up from the biographers. None of the three published studies of Wesley's redaction of Milton refers to the Evans' article cited above.

Susanna and the Eradication of Desire

To take away the mantel of Milton from Susanna, however, is not to leave her threadbare. She was an educated woman of unusual strength and intelligence, and though she was not a follower of her son John she may rightly retain the title not of "the Mother of Methodism" but of "the mother of John's methodism." While the term *method* was a Puritan catchword a century before the world had heard of Methodists, Susanna invigorated it for the eighteenth century by teaching her sons what Max Weber calls "a systematic method of rational conduct with the purpose of overcoming the *status naturae*." Weber compares this to the "active self-control, which formed the end of the *exercitia* of St. Ignatius" and whose "most urgent task" was "the destruction of spontaneous, impulsive enjoyment" (118-19). John started to Oxford with a copy of Thomas a Kempis in his pocket.

It would be hard to be derisive about Susanna's methodism, for it was arrived at through the direst kind of exigency. She bore nineteen children, of whom nine survived to adulthood. Her husband, the bumbling Rector of Epworth, deeply in debt and hated by his

3. Evans also notes that in Stevens 1876 *Memorials of the Wesley Family* all of the genealogical pages which precede the section called "The Epworth Family" should be discarded.

parishioners, earned hardly more than 50 pounds a year, and was too busy trying to win fame and preferment as a second Milton to concern himself with household affairs. Method was the only thing that could keep her children from perishing. "She alone dressed and undressed her infants, all at fixed hours of the day. She rocked each child to sleep at a specified hour." The child had to ask before it received. She prohibited any eating and drinking between meals. Evening prayers at 6:00 p.m. preceding dinner. At 7:00 she preparing a bed for each, the youngest first. By 8:00 all the children were in their "queer confined cradle to remain there until the inevitable hour of resurrection" (Harrison, *Son* 26). At the center of her method was an iron demand for obedience. As she explained it in her latter years, "I insist upon conquering the will of children⁴ ...because this is the only strong and rational foundation of a religious education, without which both precept and example will be ineffectual" (Rogal 81). Among the bylaws she enumerates, I mention only one, for its humanity: "no girl to be put to work [sewing] before she could read."⁵

Where the statement originates, I don't know, but beginning at least as early as Telford's 1898 biography more than one biographer reports—in a spirit of admiration!—that "the Epworth Parsonage, though full of children, was as quiet as if there had not been one in the house" (Telford 13). It is also Telford who tells the story about Samuel getting irritated at Jackie's precocious air of calm reason and saying to his wife, "our Jack would not attend to the most pressing necessities of nature unless he could give a reason for it" (22). Jackie is a classic instance of "that thorough destruction of the spontaneity of the *Status naturalis*" which Weber called "worldly asceticism" (127) and Tawney "practical

4. See Wesley's sermons "On the Education of Children" and "On Obedience to Parents," where the refrain is "Break their wills betimes."

5. In 1732, when John asked her to provide her philosophy of education, she wrote him: "The putting children to learn sewing before they can read perfectly is the very reason why so few women can read fit to be heard and never to be well understood" (in Knights 17).

asceticism" (191).

Susanna's method seems to have been applied most rigorously to the two older male children, Samuel Jr. and John. Samuel because he was the first born and would have to follow in his father's path, entering the church and seeking preferment in order to help support his siblings, and John because he was her Benjamin and best beloved, "the branch saved from the burning" in the famous parsonage fire of 1709, when he was six years old. Susanna didn't save him, but she suspected Samuel Sr. was more intent on saving his books and papers than on saving his children, and this impression was conveyed to John. Thereafter, as she herself stated, he was her favorite, the one on whom she concentrated her attentions. John was the "son of Susanna," not of Samuel.

What her method was for John his whole life exemplifies, and sermons like "On the Education of Children" and "On Obedience to Parents" refine the discipline urged by Susanna with counsels that clearly come from experience: "A wise parent should begin to break [the child's] will the first moment it appears...Never on any account, give a child anything that it cries for...No mother need suffer a child to cry aloud after it is a year old" (*Works* 7.92-93). That these teachings are effective we cannot doubt for our author declares, "I am a witness." Since we are in large part concerned with Wesley as a reader of Milton and as a writer, one more refinement must be noted. "A wise and kind parent will be...cautious of feeding 'the desire of the eyes' in her children," he declares. "She will give them no pretty playthings, no glittering toys, shining buckles or buttons, fine or gay clothes; no needless ornaments of any kind: nothing that can attract the eye" (7.96). One doubts that this was fit preparation for a boy who would grow up to edit *Paradise Lost*, a poem notorious for the gaiety of its language and the glitter of its ornament. William Empson, trying to explain the poem's "barbaric" power, compared it to "Aztec or Benin sculpture" and declared himself "suspicious of any critic who claims not to feel anything so obvious" (13).

Samuel, Sr.'s Miltonism: From Dissent to *The Dunciad*

Of the early life of Samuel Wesley Sr., Rector of Epworth (1662-1735), the most important point to note is that his father and grandfather were both dissenting ministers and both were rejected from their livings as a result of the Act of Uniformity of 1662. Samuel was reared in Dissent and educated in Dissenting academies. He shared this background with his wife, but it had an importance for him it never had for her. She broke from Dissent when she was thirteen years old. She did so for reasons of principle, which she wrote out with such force of logic as to win the acceptance of her father. The break was simple, fully resolved, and final. Samuel's break, by contrast, was conflicted, and the conflicts were never fully resolved.

His father John Wesley (1636-1670) had given his life in the service of Dissent, grievously fined and four times imprisoned. Samuel relates that his father died in 1670 (*ae.* 34) as result of imprisonment (cited in Beecham 83). His Dissenting friends came to the relief of his wife and provided the funds that allowed Samuel to get to London to continue his education (Stevenson 54). In 1684 he entered Oxford as a servitor and quickly became a member of the Established Church. At Oxford he was mocked for his dissenting background, as later he was hated by his parishioners at Epworth, who saw him as a traitor to the cause.⁶ To the end of his life he was surrounded by the suspicion that he had joined the Anglicans in hope of preferment. Certainly, the elaborate dedications to royalty that marked his poetic works and his epitaphs on eminent figures like Queen Mary and Archbishop Tillotson lent substance to those who charged him with ambition. Whatever the truth of his motivations might be, there is little doubt that this background combined with his lack of preferment to render him a bitter and resentful man—a "poor five feet in stature" but "with a pride like Lucifer's" and as his daughters said "an

6. His apostasy is remembered as late as 1978 by Donald Davie in *A Gathered Church: The Literature of the English Dissenting Interest, 1700-1930* (39).

unaccountable love of discord" (Harrison 15, 33). His daughters hated him for his irascibility and egotism, for his refusal to exert himself to see that they were decently fed and clothed, and for his partiality to his sons, whom he trusted one day to glorify their earthly father.

From these household scenes, we turn with relief, as Samuel must have done himself, to questions of Milton and poetry. As a Dissenter, Samuel's Milton was the polemicist rather than the poet, and an early letter acquaints us with the fact that Milton's prose works were popular with the students at the dissenting academies—especially his defense of regicide. When he became an Anglican, however, Samuel's Milton became the poet of *Paradise Lost*, and the Rector of Epworth strove to outdo in heroic couplets what Milton had done in blank verse—erasing the regicide Milton honored by Dissenters and replacing him with a sanitized image of Milton the Moralist, England's foremost writer of epic. His concern would be not Milton's politics but his poetics.

Samuel's poetic career began in 1685 with a collection of short hudibrastics, pindarics, and poetic dialogues entitled *Maggots: or Poems on several subjects*. In 1693 he published *The Life of Our Blessed Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*, an epic in ten books issued as a hefty folio of 350 pages and 9,000 lines, with sixty copper-plates and a dedication to Queen Mary. Written in heroic couplets, it begins with "An Essay on Heroic Poetry." As if in reply to critics who had accused Milton of irregularities in his verse, he states that "*Paradise Lost* is an Original, and indeed [Milton] seems rather above the common Rules of Epic than ignorant of them," and he adds with disarming candor, "It's I'm sure a lovely poem, by what ever Name it's call'd." On the warmly debated matter of blank verse, he finds himself "of a different mind from most others, and think [it] rather excuse [s] his uncorrectness than the contrar [y]." He finds it easier "to run into [error], in that sort of Verse, than in Rhyming Works" because in heroic couplets the rhyme checks the thought, whereas in blank verse "the Fancy flows on, without check or controul" (*Essay* 23-24).

In 1700 Samuel published *An Epistle to a Friend Concerning Poetry*,⁷ one of the many imitations of Horace in which the period from 1650 to 1725 was rich (Hardison 172). Samuel's version owes a large debt to Dryden's translation of Boileau, but he "improves" (to use a Wesleyan word) Dryden by adopting a high moral tone, attacking the morals of the theater and anathematizing the deists, pausing midway to praise Milton's epic for its superior morality. A dull and pedantic poem, for the most part, but Pope paid him the complement of reading it, and he would "improve" on it in his *Essay on Criticism* ten years later. The work also earned Samuel a place in the earliest edition of *The Dunciad*, where Pope refers to the title of Samuel's first book of poetry. Pope writes:

Maggots half-formed, in rhyme exactly meet,
And learn to crawl upon poetic feet.

In later editions, however, this reference was removed by Pope at the request of Samuel Jr., with whom he was acquainted, thus canceling Samuel Senior's primary claim to literary fame. *The Epistle to a Friend* was followed by four other volumes of verse. "His poetry appears to have had readers on a certain level," according to a modern editor, but stirred little pleasure "among wits, writers, and critics." He was satirized as a mere poetaster not only in the *Dunciad* but in Garth's *Dispensary* (1699) and in Swift's *The Battle of the Books* (Hooker 1).

Sufficient evidence of the way Milton dominated Samuel's muse may be found in the aforementioned epic *Life of Jesus Christ*. Though in his Preface on heroic poetry, Samuel had made the usual observation that *Paradise Regained* was much inferior to *Paradise Lost*, in his epic Samuel extends the poem the sincere flattery not just of imitation but

7. The friend, "Brother Prynne," named in the first line of the poem, is William Prynne (1600-1669), branded, lopped of his ears, and exiled for his attacks on Archbishop Laud. Though Prynne had been dead thirty years by the time of *An Epistle*, Wesley sees himself and Prynne as kindred poets suffering exile to an island. (The Epworth curate was surrounded by a network of rivers, making it something like an island.). Wesley's point seems to be that he is denied preference, thus exiled and persecuted, for his early upbringing in Dissent.

also of extensive borrowing. He includes the extra-Biblical material that comes from Milton and imports whole lines. With more honesty than consistency he marks these lines with initial quotation marks. To mention one example only, he borrows the storm Satan generates when he fails to tempt Jesus to turn stones to bread. Indeed, he borrows about twenty lines, but in a footnote frankly confesses that he borrowed them "for a very good reason, because they're extremely fine, and I could not get near so good of my own." Again one notes the candor and the assumption of modesty.

Samuel's overt homage to Milton includes a section of eighty lines where he abandons heroic verse for blank verse. And in another passage where Samuel is in the full swing of his rhyming couplets he imports four whole lines of Milton's blank verse without turning them to rhyme. He couldn't improve on them, he says, and he refused to try.⁸ As poetry it's not a draught from the springs of Helicon, but it's an honest admission. Having wrestled with Milton in verse, he spent the last twenty years wrestling with Job, spending the family's resources in a monumental study of *Job* that collated the most ancient Greek and Hebrew manuscripts.

The final evaluation of Samuel's career can rest with the judgment of his brother-in-law, John Dunton the book seller, who was also his publisher. Dunton writes: "Mr. Wesley had an early Inclination to Poetry, but he usually writ too fast to write well. Two hundred Couplets a Day are too many by two thirds..." (in Beecham 92).

To turn now to John Wesley's siblings, at least three merit attention: Samuel Jr., Charles, and Hetty. We know *Paradise Lost* was central to the daily life of the family. We know it was read aloud in the family circle, and it is evident that the children could cite it almost as freely as they

8. This paragraph and the above are much indebted to Samuel Smith's unpaginated 2005 presentation called "Samuel Wesley's 1693 reading of Milton's *Paradise Regained*."

could cite Holy Writ. Of the six girls who grew to adulthood, we will allow Hetty to represent them. The females make a woeful contrast with the males. Not in terms of their gifts, which were comparable, but in terms of their opportunities to develop them, which were not.

Samuel, Jr.: Saving Daddy from *The Dunciad*

Samuel Wesley Jr. (1689-1739), the oldest of the nine children who survived to adulthood, was a High Churchman and a minor poet. Keeping his distance from Methodism, he remained loyal to the sort of idealized image of the father that oldest sons often have. He burlesques Miltonic blank verse by his Miltonics, but "in sacred poetry as in Churchmanship, he is his father's son" (Fairchild 301). Nor is he less so in his verse, which never rises above the competence of unilluminated wit. Socially, he moved in the penumbra of Pope, Swift, and Tory politicians. His acquaintance with Pope, as noted above, got his father removed from the *Dunciad*. His versification of Addison's "Battle of the Sexes" was one of the most popular poems of the century, to judge by its many reprints, but it was rarely linked to his name.

His most admirable piece of verse may be his epitaph on Samuel Butler, whose diction and hudibrastics his father had employed in his 1685 *Maggots*.

While BUTLER, needy wretch! was yet alive,
No gen'rous patron would a dinner give:
See him, when starv'd to death and turn'd to dust,
Presented with a monumental bust!
The poet's fate is here in emblem shown,
He ask'd for bread, and he receiv'd a stone.

One notes that its complaint about Butler's lack of patronage reflects Samuel Sr.'s own failure to procure a patron—a bitter result for a man who thought himself as a second Milton. Samuel Jr.'s epitaph reflects a filial sympathy.

Samuel the Younger died in 1739, at the age of fifty, throwing the

Epsworth household into deeper penury, for he had regularly sent money to assist them. Though the money went for his brothers' education, or for his father's lengthy stays in London and into the bottomless pit of his *Job* project, rather than to shoe his barefoot sisters—of the three Wesley brothers he had the most filial piety.⁹

King Charles: Buckling on the Boilerplate of the Lord

The Miltonism of Charles Wesley (1707-1788), the youngest of the three sons and the poet laureate of the Methodist revival, consists of a saturated allusiveness similar in kind to that of his father's poetry and John's sermons but denser than either and coupled to an excessive productivity which seems like the product an Oedipal rivalry with "the second Milton." For many years, the traditional figure for the number of hymns written by Charles was 6,000 or 6,500. The count in the latest biography is up to 9,000 (Tyson ix), which would mean that over the 25 years of Charles' hymn writing he was averaging one a day. How in this heaped profusion could the reader expect to find anything more than what Pope called "the art of sinking," much less those qualities of care and craft that distinguish art from mere competence? One remembers John Dunton's judgment of Samuel Sr.: "Mr. Wesley had an early Inclination to Poetry, but he usually writ too fast to write well."

Even apart from excess productivity, the hymns present a difficulty for the secular critic called upon to consider them as poetry, for like Charles's and John's sermons they are written for seekers and believers. The secular soul is not part of the intended audience. The Miltonic allusiveness, as the editors of the Oxford edition note, belongs to the period: "Milton's prestige was so immense in the eighteenth century that...his diction came to constitute a very large part of the poetic vocabulary of the time" (Hilderbrandt and Beckerlegge 39). This makes

9. In the 1910s Samuel was the subject of a series of finely detailed biographical studies in the pages of *The Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, and more detailed accounts can be found there.

it difficult to quantify. The Oxford edition of the *Works of John Wesley* now includes the 1780 *Collection of Hymns for Methodists* (volume 7, 1983), which provides figures that may serve as a rough indication. Though the editors state firmly that they have not tried to note every allusion, the index for the 525 hymns shows 57 hits for Milton (46 from *Paradise Lost*), as compared to 27 for Alexander Pope and 19 for Edward Young. These figures pale in comparison to scriptural allusions, whose double-columned listing runs 27 pages.

The saturated allusiveness is hard to quantify but not to evaluate. It has a clear purpose, one that links it to eighteenth-century writing practice. The editors compare it to that of Dryden and Pope, citing Brower's *The Poetry of Allusion*. Brower states that Pope learned from Dryden "how to imitate without loss of originality, how to make use of the resources of other poets...and yet remain himself and the same"; and "Allusive imitation of Virgil or Dryden or Milton is the basis of[Pope's] heroic style whether he is making a serious translation of writing a parody..." (1-2, 153).

Brower's argument cannot be faulted, but it's application to Charles Wesley can be. An overwhelming majority of Charles' allusions are to scripture, extending a practice that is as old as the sermon. The density of allusion is created by swatches of fixed locutions that are inserted at any point where the thought or the prosody allows it. In the minds of the faithful, this boiler-plate produces the blessed assurance of being told what they already believe. In the mind of the secular reader, it produces an intense ennui or annoyance, exacerbated by Charles's mind-numbing habit of rhyming every line of a quatrain. Whereas other hymnodists were satisfied to rhyme only the second and fourth lines, the Oxford editors state with apparent pride that Charles "never wrote an unrhymed line" (46).

The last word on Charles may be given to his older brother John in the latter's Preface to the 1780 *Collection of Hymns for the People Called Methodist*. There he reveals that the hymns are not conceived as poetry

but as "a little body of experimental and practical divinity." He shows the shakiness of his own aesthetic sense when he proclaims that "By labour a man may become a tolerable imitator of Spenser, Shakespeare, or Milton." John's intention is to distinguish such labors from "the genuine spirit of poetry," but he removes himself from the ranks of those who can speak with authority of Spenser and Milton by separating two things which for them were one: "What is of infinitely more moment than the spirit of poetry is the spirit of piety" (*Oxford Works* 7.73) There speaks the son of Susanna.

Hetty: "The woe of these women that waneth in cots"

To my knowledge the first scholar to seriously study the Wesley women was Elsie Harrison, whose 1937 *Son to Susanna* gives the mother and her daughters serious attention. Harrison's attitude is caught, and her conclusions suggested, in an early and eloquent passage:

John Wesley would never meet better-educated women than his own sisters and yet he would never meet more tragic ones. With minds stored with the music of Homer and hands working to the pageantry of Milton's verse, they were condemned to be hen-girls and swine-herds on the filth of the water-logged flats of Lincolnshire. Their brothers all passed into their appointed place in the bosom of Mother Church, but Emily, Sukey, Molly, Hetty, Patty, and Kezia all knew the reality of Piers Plowman's lament for "The woe of these women that waneth in cots." (30)

Mehetabel, known as Hetty, was probably the most talented and surely the most miserable of the sisters of John and Charles, and may be allowed to represent all six, none of whom had a happy lot.¹⁰ Hetty's is a story that goes from great promise to great grief. At the age of eight she was already reading and writing Greek, and until her expulsion from the family garden she functioned as her father's chief amanuensis. Samuel

never trusted her high spirits; for him she was what Pope designated "That dang'rous Thing, a female Wit." The crisis comes when she tries to choose a husband, and Samuel objects. The man of her choice leaves her in shame, and Samuel, laying on her his heaviest curse, marries her off to a drunken half-literate plumber. Living next to the lead fumes of the plumbing shop in London, she loses all six of the children she bears.

Elsbeth Knights, the critic who has done the most to lift Hetty from the slough into which her father and brothers let her sink, writes:

Mehetabel Wesley's first, most influential and most violent biographer was her father. His character of her was such a vitriolic exercise in defamation that her younger brother, John Wesley...later censored it. As befitted a daughter who was "lost though she's not so well as dead," the single and pregnant Mehetael (Hetty) Wesley could in 1725 no longer be named by her father. She was a cipher, "Yr mb S-n D.H." [Your once Sister and my Daughter, Hetty]...With self-pity, self-righteousness and rage, her father rejected her: 'Gangrene farewell!' (Knights 15)

Knights has restored to Hetty a part of her dignity by presenting "manuscript versions of eight *Poems by Mrs Wright, Sister of the Reverend Mr Samuel Wesley*" discovered among the papers of the novelist Samuel Richardson, that "friend of the sex." The poems as Hetty wrote them, says Knights, unaltered by her brothers' pious "improvements," speak with "a simplicity, directness and emotional force" (20). These are qualities displayed by none of the "polished" publications of the family's four male Miltonists.

Not that any connection to Milton is intended here, neither to the man nor to the writer, but a text once sent out into the world acquires a life of its own. In some sense, the cruel melodrama played out in Hetty's life is an adaptation of *Paradise Lost*, that story so central to the Wesleys' early home life: the father and younger sons vie for the part of Satan, in order

10. See Rogal, "Epworth Women." Emelia, the eldest daughter, would be an apt choice also, for her detestation of her father is outspoken.

to rule in a kingdom of their own making, while the daughters must be submissive Eves, since there is no other female role in the play. Eve is joined to a drunken Adam, who earns his bread by the sweat of his brow, something no Wesley male ever did or would have considered doing. And Susanna's role in this drama? She did what the weak do to survive: she joined the strong, rejecting her daughter as completely as Samuel had. On 2 August 1725 she wrote to John, "We should be easy to part with her, being quite tired out with her very licensuous[sic] and scandalous adventures" (in *Knights* 38-39).

The misery of the Epworth women wasn't noticed by the Wesleyan hagiographers, but it was picked up in 1903 by Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch when he made Hetty the subject of a documentary novel. He recognized in her story paradigmatic elements of the sentimental novel and he had the integrity to follow the documents rather than supply a happy ending or impose a moral. He notices the prominence of Milton in the family life, and allows Hetty to make a brilliant application of *Paradise Lost* by recognizing that her father's ego was the family Satan, "the old genuine Serpent" in the garden of Epworth (Quiller-Couch 34). "Every Methodist child," remarks Harrison of the Brontës' Haworth Parsonage, "was a connoisseur of Satan." It was Hetty also who in the heyday of Methodism added the sobriquet "King" to her brothers' first names.

King John: Emasculating Father Milton

Almost every admirer of John Wesley expresses amazement at his enormous productivity—the 225,000 miles traveled on horseback, the 40,000 sermons preached, and the 371 titles published under his name (Molin 8)—but in the context of genealogy, there's little cause for surprise. His productivity is on par with that of Charles with his 9000 hymns, and that of Samuel Sr., out-Miltoning Milton with his epics and endless collation of *Job*. It takes its place as part of an Oedipal project to secure his own kingdom against those primal contenders. Likewise motivating the massive production is his childhood fear of falling back

into the fire his mother rescued him from. Production of books and harvests of souls provide his assurance of salvation, an assurance which he needs all the more for not having had the deeply felt conversion experience which he learned to induce in his followers (Knox 434-39).

In John and Charles' drive to textual and soteriological productivity was a strong residue of the old Puritan need to believe that one was chosen for salvation and that success in one's calling provided the assurance of God's grace, the social-economic dynamic anatomized by Weber and Tawney and updated for Methodism by E. P. Thompson. Wesley adds little new to the picture, but since Weber and Tawney didn't go beyond 1700 and Thompson starts about 1790, it seems worthwhile to at least note that Wesley's life (1703-1791) fills the gap and that Wesley is an almost platonic image of Weberian man engaging the working poor under conditions of declining agriculture and rising industry.

Though John Wesley never claimed to have undergone conversion, when he joined Whitefield in field preaching, his success provided all that he required as an assurance of salvation. The ascetic practices of the Holiness Society became secondary when Wesley learned how "the emotional act of conversion" could be "methodically induced" (Weber 143) by first applying terror (talk of Death, Hell, and the Judgment) and then offering the cup of Free Grace. His success was such that his finest critic, the theologian Ronald Knox, begins his profile of him by marveling that "in all the hesitations of a lifetime [he] never asked himself by what right he ruled, or on what basis of intellectual certainty he believed" (423). In some ways, Wesley is the English counterpart of his exact contemporary, Benjamin Franklin. Although Franklin's opposite in his relationship to the Puritanism of their fathers, Wesley was as much a pragmatist and experimentalist as Franklin, the chief difference being that Franklin did not need to produce the electrical phenomena he investigated, while Wesley in order to study the magnetic and mesmeristic phenomenon of crowd hysteria had first to produce them.

Though the Wesleys emphasized the doctrine of "free" grace, the

brothers were as much organizers of time and means as Franklin. Time was money, even when "money" meant storing up riches in Heaven. Their harvesting of souls in the greatest possible number was rationally and systematically organized with tickets and subscriptions and prayer groups assigned to report on their members—"spiritual police," Southey called them (382)—in the manner of social engineers serving the god of efficiency. They outdid Franklin, in fact, for Franklin had the modesty to believe he would never succeed in "the arduous project of moral perfection," but the Wesleys needed to believe that they could, and from that need proceeded their doctrine of a second work of grace, or sanctification. The doctrine served to keep the fire of conviction burning in their post-conversion followers. For the Wesleys to have allowed the principle of sin in their flock would have been to admit another potentate, and they would bear no rivals in their kingdom.

An additional socio-economic parameter of Wesleyan textual production is the circumstances of the writer in the early and mid 1700s. As Ian Watt argues in *The Rise of the Novel*, "once the writer's primary aim was no longer to satisfy the standards of patrons and the literary elite, other considerations took on a new importance. Two of them...were likely to encourage the author to prolixity: first, to write very explicitly and even tautologically might help his less educated readers to understand him easily; and secondly, since it was the bookseller, not the patron who rewarded him, speed and copiousness tended to become the supreme economic virtues" (56). Clearly both of these considerations were operating in John Wesley's case.

As the authoritative monograph on Wesley's editorial method states, "he relied mainly on using the written word of others because it was the quickest means for him to distribute his own message. The compelling urges of his life were, first, to distribute that message, and second, to that end to organize his time as efficiently as possible" (Molin 9-10). Since the message is religious rather than secular, the calculus of efficiency might suggest not only Benjamin Franklin but, nearer to home, Daniel

Defoe.

As writers, Wesley and Defoe emerge from a background of Dissent into the new society of economic individualism, there to subdue all family ties to the pursuit of the kind of profit which is their only vocation while producing astonishing numbers of books. Closer even to Wesley than Defoe is that type of *homo economicus*, Robinson Crusoe. For Wesley the harvest fields of England constitute an island kingdom like Crusoe's. Both Wesley and Crusoe are blind to aesthetic experience, both prone to Bibliolatry—quoting scripture on all occasions and using it for divination—and both likely to see women as packages of qualities more or less useful for the profits of their commerce.

Wesley excessive production must also be considered as a textual method—textual methodism. Just as Methodism reduced 1500 years of Christian theological discourse to the single question of soteriology, likewise textual methodism reduced the corpus of literature to a digest of some 275 volumes. For this massive production Wesley relied on two techniques, extraction and condensation, which account for three-fourths of his production. We know that *Paradise Lost* was where he first worked out this methodology. Oedipally, the textual method emasculated the Father, the godlike imago which Samuel derived from Milton, and it defeated any fraternal competitors. In the practical world, the method allowed him to avoid the charge of “enthusiasm” by educating his ministers and making Methodists “a reading people” (cited Baker, *Milton* xvn.4).

As a textual strategy, Wesley's methodology raised—and still raises—two important problems. The first is that of plagiarism, a charge that arose the more easily when in many of his productions Wesley chose not to include the name of the original author. Lest the charge seem an anachronism, it should be noted that the author's exclusive right to his work had been recognized by statute under Queen Anne in 1710, and in practice “property right in authorship” was valid for fourteen years.

The strategy got Wesley into serious trouble in two cases, both of them

instructive for the way they illustrate his refusal to concede his *authority* even over texts denied to him by law. The first was a suit brought by Edward Young's publisher Robert Dodsley when Wesley published "extracts" of *Night Thoughts*. In 1745 Wesley had to pay fifty pounds for infringing the copyright of *Night Thoughts* and some other works owned by Dodsley. In Wesley's letter acknowledging his obligation (8 Feb. 1744), however, he characteristically refers to his action not as something for which he might be blamable but as something done "inadvertently." The letter also includes a promise not to print the same again in any form whatever; yet, Wesley published extracts of the poem in 1770, though this time including Young's name.

The other case involves Samuel Johnson's 1775 tract *Taxation No Tyranny*, defending the Crown's right to tax the American colonies. Within a few weeks Wesley had prepared an ex-tract and republished it under the title, *A Calm Address to Our American Colonies*, sending a large number to the colonies. A Baptist minister of Bristol, Caleb Evans, published a series of letters attacking Wesley, eventually forcing him to admit he'd plagiarized Johnson's work. Had Wesley violated the law? "Almost certainly, yes," affirms Abelow in a separate study ("Wesley's Plagiarism," 79). But Wesley mollified Johnson with the gift of a Bible commentary, and when Johnson eventually wrote in thanks, he magnanimously waved the matter by saying he was happy to have his argument confirmed by such a sage. Wesley missed the Great Cham's irony (a modality for which true believers have no ear), and in later years referred to *A Calm Address* as something he himself had written.¹¹

The goal of this strategy is clear: Wesley wanted to make his followers a reading people, but he also wanted complete power to control what they read. One of his early textual projects, completed in 1750, was the Christian Library, fifty duodecimo volumes of over three hundred pages each, consisting of "Extracts from and Abridgments of the Choicest

11. See *Works* 9.129 where he still refers to this tract as one "I wrote." Ref. is to the 14-volume *Works*, 3rd ed., ed. Th. Jackson, 1829-31.

Pieces of Practical Divinity Which Have Been Published in the English Tongue." Abelove, in what may be the only biography of Wesley that attains a degree of objectivity, argues that there is "a thread, a pattern, that runs through the Christian Library and all the rest of the written material Wesley gave his flock...Everything that Wesley provided came through him. In every case he rewrote or abridged or pirated or plagiarized. To this general rule there are no exceptions" (85). By "through him," Abelove means that the material appeared under Wesley's name, making it not only authorized by him but more often than not *authored*. What was essential and most important, "was that Methodists should continue to look just to him" (86). No one would deny that in providing his people a Reader's Digest of books on divinity they would never otherwise read, Wesley's intention was benevolent. But functionally, in terms of the genealogy being constructed here, what he did with these 50 volumes and the 300 that followed was to build a Great Wall of China around his people's desire to read. Wesley's favorite and most-quoted phrase from *Paradise Lost* was "Parent of Good" (5.153) and doubtless that is how he saw himself (in contradistinction to his father Samuel, Parent of the Ills of Epworth Parish), but a hermeneutic of doubt must note that in playing the Parent of Good, Wesley was also playing God.

The second important problem raised by Wesley's editorial methods is the lack of aesthetic judgment displayed. Wesley's list of recommended works for Kingswood School:

The Life of God in the Soul of Man, Kempis, The Pilgrim's Progress, Mr. Law's Tracts, Beveridge's Private Thoughts, Heylin's devotional Tracts, The Life of Mr. Halyburton, and Monsieur De Renty. Bishop Pearson On the Creed, Bishop Fell On the Epistles, Mr. Boehm's and Mr. Nalson's Sermons, Mr. Pascal's Thoughts, our other tracts and poems, Milton's PL, Cave's and Fleury's Primitive Christianity, and Mr. Echard's Ecclesiastical History. (in Outler 163)

Though we recognize Boehm, Bunyan, Kempis, Law, and Pascal, Milton's epic is lost in the slurry. Samuel Wesley thought *Paradise Lost* a great poem. His son, it would appear, thought it a work of devotion belonging with "our other tracts and poems."

This failure to discriminate could be explained as residual Puritanism, and certainly it was that in part, but it also indicates an important absence in the methodism Wesley absorbed from his mother. From the description of her practice provided earlier, it is difficult to see how any child subjected to it could retain any capacity for spontaneous feeling, and as the brand saved from the burning John got the intensest dose of it. It is, surely, his early training which accounts for his incapacity for aesthetic response and that quality of calm and control that enabled him to be an observer of the paroxysms induced by his sermons. One of the rules he set himself in his private diary was "to avoid all manner of passion" (Lunn 27). He observed terrified audiences crying aloud "as if they were being put to the sword" while he stood making notes to publish in his *Journal* (Knox 451-52). Unfortunately for his readers, the same calm control he maintained in the hurly-burly of revival meetings characterizes every sentence he ever wrote.

At the same time, inside himself Wesley had to be aware of this loss and resent the parent he held responsible. In his child's mind, this could only be the father, who at the time of the fire (Susanna suspected) had been more intent on his papers than on his children. The dutiful son, which John had to be to please either of his parents, could not turn against his father. But he could turn against Milton. Not openly—Milton was too universally esteemed—but he could condense and make extracts of his work, and by so doing emasculate the god Samuel Wesley served. And when the time came, he could—and did—erase Samuel.

The Last Genealogical Fantasy: Deleting Daddy

Extraction may not be plagiarism when the source is named, but it is always the exercise of autocratic power over a text, a power that

correlates with Wesley's power over his followers. Tyerman, a friendly witness, cites John Hampson sounding the same note in his *Memoirs of the late Rev. John Wesley*, published the year of the evangelist's death. Hampson argued that Wesley's "temper was despotic, and that, during...fifteen years of his supremacy, he was the most absolute of monarchs...The love of power was the chief misery of his life; the source of infinite disgusts; and the most frequent cause of the defections of his friends" (Tyerman 2.579). Like his father, Wesley would suffer no rivals in his kingdom.

When charged with the exercise of autocratic power at the 1766 Conference in Leeds and asked to explain "what *power* is this, which *you* exercise over all the Methodists in Great Britain and Ireland?" (emphases in the original), Wesley's self-vindication explains concretely in what his power subsisted:

What is that power? It is a power of admitting into, and excluding from, the societies under my care; of choosing and removing stewards; or receiving or not receiving helpers; of appointing them when, where, and how to help me; and of desiring any of them to meet me, when I see good. And as it was merely in obedience to the providence of God, and for the good of the people, that I at first accepted this power, so it is on the same considerations...that I use it at this day...Here commenced my power; namely, a power to appoint when, and where, and how [the Methodists] should meet; and to remove those whose life showed they had no desire to flee from the wrath to come. [Other persons came as ministers,] and they desired to serve me as sons, and to labour when and where I should direct...To me the preachers have engaged themselves to submit, to serve me as sons in the gospel."

One notes how this arrangement perpetuates family life as John had known it at Epworth, a father who rules absolutely and sons who obey unquestioningly.

Sons of Wesley were to be readers, but the Father determined what they read. "Like many another rule," writes an admiring scholar, "Wesley recognized and enlisted the effective power of the printed word...he established a printing house of his own, over whose productions he did exercise absolute authority. He went further. He made it a rule of the Conference...that no preacher, on pain of expulsion, might print anything whatever without his express approval" (Herbert 1). One begins to understand the necessity of Wesley's massive production of texts. Since his followers could read only what came from him and through him, he had to provide, provide.

Augustus Toplady would have been a Methodist but he refused to be a son of Wesley. He is the rare example of a fellow churchman and an intellectual peer who expected to enter the Methodist leadership. Of course he got an awakening, but even allowing for his consequent animosity, it's worth noting that his word for Wesleyan extraction is not plagiarism but *plundering*. Attacking Wesley's "plundering" of Johnson's tract, he described Wesley as "actuated by Satanic shamelessness and Satanic guilt." (Toplady 107). "Satanic" might be ignored as a term of abuse except that our context is *Paradise Lost*, where it suggests an ego inflation that refuses to recognize any Author—of Being or of Book—other than the revolted ego itself.

When Susanna died in 1742, John preached her funeral. Neither the sermon nor the passage about the funeral in his journal mentions that she had a husband and he a father. Nor does the inscription he later had placed on her tombstone, where she figures as "Mrs. Susannah Wesley, the Youngest and Last Surviving daughter of Dr. Samuel Annesley" (*Journal*, 3.31). That this double omission is the work of an Oedipal fantasy is corroborated by the fact that when John bought the burial plot his name was entered not as John but as Samuel Wesley. "It is recorded that way on the burial register," Stevenson states in his 1876 *Memorials*, and "it is carved that way on the granite pillar at the south front of the cemetery, in gold letters" (227). As G. Elsie Harrison implied in the title

of her 1937 biography, *Son to Susanna*, Wesley wasn't his father's son but his mother's.

Wesley's own fantasy goes further: self-begotten and self-authored, he will usurp his usurper. Abelow, cited above, spoke of plagiarism as the pattern of Wesley's work, but to stop with the theft of texts is to stop on the surface. Underneath lies that need to rule which is the basis of Wesley's autocracy. More precisely, it is the need to *author* in every sense of that word: to be the authority in the Kingdom of Methodism, to be the author of its texts, and to be the author of his own being and the being of his followers. In the pure good of theory Wesley's textual method, whether called *plagiarism* or *extractionism*, might be considered a seventh ratio in Harold Bloom's *Map of Misreading*.

We don't need to go to the Kabbahla to find a name for this trope: it is that good Miltonic word *usurpation*, here synonymous with the method of extraction and the Oedipal project. It places Wesley in a glorious line, for according to Bloom Milton was a usurper, and according to Milton both God and Satan were usurpers, God a successful one.

But humor is not the note with which to end a study of Wesley's Miltonism. Milton doesn't consciously associate "Usurpation" with God but with Satan and what he called "Gentile politics," the latter phrase meaning in Old-Testament terms the tyrannical practices of the king-worshipping nations who were the enemy of Israel. In *Paradise Lost* Satan is the prototype of Gentile politics, and Milton depicts Satan and his angels as longing to exercise dominion. Key texts in which Milton sees kingship as the practice of gentile politics can be traced from *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* in 1649 to *Samson Agonistes* at the end of his life, but because Wesley's claim to interest scholars of Milton rests on his edition of *Paradise Lost*, let it suffice to quote Michael's words from Book XI. There Michael speaks of "giants, men of high renown" for whom "the highest pitch / Of human glory" is

to be styled great conquerors,

Patrons of Mankind, gods, and sons of gods...¹²

However fettered Wesley's esthetic sense was by his childhood training, his early quotation of "Better to rule in Hell than serve in Heaven" shows that he felt the glory of Satan, but having fatefully severed the spirit of poetry from the spirit of politics, he could never understand the Miltonic vision that kept the two undivided through an act of creative Imagination.

It is this lack of the faculty of Imagination that explains both Wesley's failure to understand Milton and the 371 unreadable volumes of divinity which he produced to compensate for that failure. Wesley's Christian Library can be compared to the Chinese Wall built by the first Emperor, Shih Huang Ti, who as Borges relates the matter "also decreed the burning of all the books that had been written before his time." Albeit on a smaller scale, Wesley's Christian Library, omitting almost all Christian books before the advent of protestantism, was like the Emperor's book-burning which "ordered that history would begin with him." The wall gives a material form to what Foucault called the "hazardous play of dominations," and it exemplifies the Imagination's revenge upon those who choose to live in a world without Imagination. Borges wonders which came first in the Emperor's actions, the building of the wall or the burning of the books, for whichever was the second would be a consequence of the first. In Wesley's case the question is nugatory, for the two acts were one: the wall was built of books.

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12. I am borrowing an idea from the splendid argument of John Coffey in "Against Gentilism: Milton and the Politics of Jesus from Regicide to Restoration," a paper delivered at the International Milton Symposium, Tokyo, August 2012.

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