

SATIRE AND SECRECY IN ENGLISH
LITERATURE FROM 1650 to 1750

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MELINDA ALLIKER RABB

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Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 2007 978-1-4039-8434-0

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First published in 2007 by

PALGRAVE MACMILLAN™

175 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10010 and

Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, England RG21 6XS

Companies and representatives throughout the world.

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ISBN 978-1-349-53991-8

ISBN 978-0-230-60997-6 (eBook)

DOI 10.1057/9780230609976

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Rabb, Melinda Alliker.

Satire and secrecy in English literature from 1650 to 1750 / Melinda Alliker Rabb.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references (p.) and index.

1. English literature—Early modern, 1500–1700—History and criticism. 2. English literature—18th century—History and criticism. 3. Satire 4. Secrecy in literature. 5. Great Britain—Intellectual life—17th century. 6. Great Britain—Intellectual life—18th century. I. Title.

PR431.R33 2007

820.9'004—dc22

2007016424

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Design by Newgen Imaging Systems (P) Ltd., Chennai, India.

First edition: December 2007

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

In memory of my parents
Mollie Hollander Alliker and Morris Joshua Alliker



The Screen: A Simile, 1741

Behind that SCREEN there stands a Wight,
 Safely conceal'd from public Sight:

 And by his secret Strings he still
 Governs the others as he will.

—*The Screen: A Simile (1741)*

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Preface

While writing what I thought was to be a book specifically on Delarivier Manley, the general concept of secrecy, prominent in her writing, began to change my perception of her contemporaries and of the period in which she worked. Dissatisfaction with the critical paradigm of public (political, masculine) versus private (domestic, feminine) yielded to a new set of terms: public versus secret. After showing my manuscript to my friend and former teacher Michael V. DePorte who agreed on the importance of the idea, I made the decision to set Manley aside temporarily and to discover the secret history of satire. Over the years of work that have resulted in this project, the relationship between secrets, aggression, and authority has asserted itself repeatedly in current events. Who could have known, while I was in a library, safely writing about the efficacy of secrecy as a means of attack in literature, that my own country would fall victim to a fiendishly clandestine terrorist plot, or engage in its own damaging secret practices? A sense of many parallels between the two periods and cultures (“Augustan” and “Postmodern”) will be perceptible to my readers. It has not been possible to represent directly all of the research or every secret history of the hundred or so I have read. While many other texts might have been included, many also resist my mode of analysis, which I offer as *a* key, but not the only key for unlocking the “hidden springs” of satire. A few discussions of secrecy appeared after my argument was already well-developed [Harold Love, *English Clandestine Satire 1660–1702* (Oxford, 2004); Michael McKeon, *The Secret History of Domesticity: Public, Private, and the Division of Knowledge* (Hopkins, 2005)], and I now publicly join my voice to the critical debate.

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Acknowledgments

Thanks are due to a number of colleagues, friends, and students who read parts of this project as it evolved and who offered information, criticism, and support in matters large and small: Michael DePorte, Heather Dubrow, William Keach, Susan Staves, George Landow, James Engell, Laurence Stanley, Marie Henson, Kevin Sparks, Sarah Eron, and Patrick Louis. I also would like to express appreciation to the staffs of Houghton Library and Child Memorial Library.

Passages from chapters 5 and 6 appeared in *ELH* 73 (2006): 325–354. Earlier versions of my introduction and conclusion were included in *The Blackwell Companion to Satire Ancient and Modern*, edited by Ruben Quintero (2006) and in *Reading Swift: Papers from the Fifth Munster Symposium on Jonathan Swift*, edited by Hermann Real (Wilhelm Fink, 2008). I am grateful to these publishers for permission to reprint material here. Permission to reproduce the image for the cover illustration was kindly granted by Houghton Library, Harvard University.

A book about secrecy cannot issue forth into the public domain without full disclosure of those whose support and love has never been concealed, even during the occasional dark hour: Daniel, Sam, Sophia, and especially Jim.