

Dorset could be, upon occasion, satiric – though many would find such poems mere scurrilous *ad hominem* lampoons (“To Mr. Edward Howard, On His Plays” and “On Mr. Edward Howard upon his *British Princes*”). Dorset was doubtless at his best in writing little biting, acerbic “songs,” such as “Dorinda’s sparkling wit, and eyes.” Here, the flashy beauty overwhelms her would-be suitors: “Her Cupid is a black-guard boy,/That runs his link full in your face.”

James Sutherland has aptly summed up Dorset’s performance: “the satirical song is his special contribution to English poetry,” and his shaped argumentation in verse “gives to the Restoration lyric its characteristic form: what is said, no matter how trivial or specious, is said with grace and control and finality” (*English Literature of the Late Seventeenth Century*). For a minor poet, that is a fairly impressive achievement.

—John R. Clark

DRYDEN, John. English. Born in Aldwinckle All Saints, Northamptonshire, 19 August 1631. Educated at Westminster School, London (King’s Scholar), 1646–50; Trinity College, Cambridge (pensioner), 1650–54, B.A. 1654. Married Lady Elizabeth Howard in 1663. Remained in Cambridge, 1654–57; settled in London, 1657, and possibly held a minor post in Cromwell’s government; thereafter supported himself mainly by writing plays. Appointed Poet Laureate, 1668, and Historiographer Royal, 1669; converted to Roman Catholicism, c. 1685, and lost his royal offices at the accession of William and Mary, 1689. Member, Royal Society, 1660. *Died 1 May 1700.*

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Collections

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- Poems*, edited by James Kinsley. 4 vols., 1958.
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Fables Ancient and Modern. 1700.
Ovid's Art of Love, Book 1, translated. 1709.
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Plays

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The Indian Queen, with Sir Robert Howard (produced 1664). In *Four New Plays*, by Howard, 1665.
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An Evening's Love; or, The Mock Astrologer (produced 1668). 1671; in *Works* 10, 1970.
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Marriage A-la-Mode (produced 1672). 1673; in *Works* 2, 1978.
The Assignment; or, Love in a Nunnery (produced 1672). 1673; in *Works* 2, 1978.
Amboyne (produced 1673). 1673.
Aureng-Zebe (produced 1675). 1676; edited by Frederick M. Link, 1971.
The State of Innocence and Fall of Man. 1677.

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Other

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Reading List: *The Poetry of Dryden* by Mark van Doren, 1920, revised edition, 1931; *Dryden · Some Biographical Facts and Problems* by J. M. Osborn, 1940, revised edition, 1965; *Dryden and the Conservative Myth* by B. N. Schilling, 1961; *Life of Dryden* by Charles E. Ward, 1961; *Dryden's Imagery* by Arthur W. Hoffman, 1962; *Essential Articles for the Study of Dryden* edited by H. T. Swedenberg, Jr., 1966; *Dryden's Major Plays* by Bruce King, 1966; *Dryden's Poetry* by Earl Miner, 1967; *Contexts of Dryden's Thought* by Philip Harth, 1968; *Dryden · The Critical Heritage* edited by James and Helen Kinsley, 1971; *Dryden* by William Myers, 1973; *Dryden and the Development of Panegyric* by James Dale Garrison, 1975; *Dryden, The Public Writer 1660–1685* by George McFadden, 1978.

John Dryden's life is largely obscure until he commences as author. He was born on 19 August 1631 at Aldwinckle All Saints in Northamptonshire, and about 1646 he entered, as a King's Scholar, Westminster School under the famous master Richard Busby. Much later he recalled that about 1648 he had translated Persius's third satire as a Thursday night exercise for the school. His first published poem, "Upon the Lord Hastings," appeared in 1649; on 18 May of the following year he was admitted as pensioner to Trinity College, Cambridge, proceeding B.A. in 1654. The next years are yet more obscure. Some color is given to the tradition he served the Protectorate by the publication in 1659 of the *Heroique Stanza's* on Cromwell's death.

His career may be said to begin, however, with the Restoration, and its first period to run from 1660–1680. Early in these years he published poems on the new order, bringing together historical, political, religious, and heroic elements. Although such a poem as *Astraea Redux* is inferior to the poem on Cromwell, it is more ambitious. Somewhat of the new effort succeeds in *Annus Mirabilis*, whose year of wonders (1666) included the second naval war with Holland and the Great Fire of London. Dryden seeks too hard to connect these diverse events, and his execution is uneven. But it has bounding energy and is his sole fully narrative poem till far later. His talents were being recognized – in 1668 he succeeded Davenant as poet laureate, and in 1669 Howell as historiographer royal. By the end of this period he had completed but not published his first poetic masterpiece, *Mac Flecknoe*. If Elkanah Settle was its first dunce hero, Thomas Shadwell finally gained the honor. The poem assesses good and bad art, using a mock coronation skit. Father Flecknoe abdicates for his son (Shadwell). Art, politics, and religious matters combine with paternal love to assess both the dunces and true drama. Flecknoe is "King by Office" and "Priest by Trade." He passes to his son *Love's Kingdom*, his own dull play, as "Sceptre." From "this righteous Lore" comes Shadwell's soul, his opera *Psyche*. Humor and allusion combine to establish the true canons of drama and to fix Shadwell immemorially.

Mac Flecknoe shows that Dryden's chief interest in these decades is the stage. After a first comedy, he turned to the rhymed heroic play, rising to the high astounding terms of the two-part *Conquest of Granada*. He approached earth thereafter. *Marriage A-la-mode* consists of a mingling of serious and comic plots especially congenial to him, and a favorite still. In the Prologue to his heroic play *Aureng-Zebe*, he professes himself "weary" of rhyme, and in *All for Love* he wrote a blank verse tragedy on Antony and Cleopatra, thought by many his finest play. His collaboration with Nathaniel Lee for *Oedipus* altered his smooth earlier blank verse style to a harsher, more various medium that appears again in his adaptation of *Troilus and Cressida*. After his enormously popular *Spanish Fryar* (1680), he wrote no plays single-handedly till 1689.

The next period, 1680–1685, is dominated by engagement with the tumultuous times. In the state of near revolution over the Popish Plot and efforts to seize power from Charles II, Dryden published *Absalom and Achitophel*, his poem most admired today. Using the biblical parallel of the plot against David (Charles), Dryden creates an epic-historic-satiric blend for the machinations of Achitophel (Earl of Shaftesbury) and his dupe Absalom (Duke of Monmouth). The Chaucer-like portraits of individuals and the personal statement on government (ll. 751–810) show Dryden in full command of a public poetry.

1682 brought Dryden further attention. *Mac Flecknoe* now first appeared in print, pirated. When Shaftesbury was released from prison by a Whig jury in November 1681, a triumphant medal was struck. Next March Dryden's one bitter poem, *The Medall*, appeared. Perhaps his anger was feigned. His usual composure is evident in *Religio Laici*, his first religious poem, which curiously begins with rich imagery and progresses to a direct, non-metaphorical style unique in his poetry. In 1684 he published one of his poems most popular today, "To the Memory of Mr. Oldham," on a young poet recently dead. In that year and the next he joined the bookseller Jacob Tonson in putting out the first two of a series of "Dryden miscellanies," collections of poetry by various hands. Charles II died, and James acceded, in 1685. Dryden celebrated these events in *Threnodia Augustalis*, his first pindaric ode after one of his finest poems, the translation of Horace, *Odes*, III, xxix.

The next period, 1685–1688, coincides with the brief rule by James II. Probably about the summer of 1685 Dryden became a Roman Catholic, and in 1687 published his second religious poem, *The Hind and the Panther*, whose 2592 lines make it his longest poem apart from translations. Its style is as complex as that of *Religio Laici* had been simple. Using sacred zoögraphy (the Hind represents Catholicism, the Panther Anglicanism, etc.), fables, myth, allusion, allegory, and the slightest of plots, Dryden sets forth a timeless version of the times, including the recent and distant past (Part I), present contentions (II), and the ecclesiastical as well as national future (III). Each part has a moving personal passage and those who have most opposed Dryden's doctrine or his fable have often called the style of this poem his finest. The poetic and personal confidence thereby implied finds expression in the ode, so praised by Dr. Johnson, on Anne Killigrew, whose small poetic abilities nonetheless may represent the artist's high vocation. Music is an equally confidently used metaphor in *A Song for Cecilia's Day*, which enacts history from Creation to Judgment.

When James fled late in 1688, and when William and Mary were invited as sovereigns by Parliament, Dryden entered into the most difficult period of his career, 1688–1694. Stripped of offices and denied full engagement with his times, he turned again to "the ungrateful stage." Two plays that now seem his greatest resulted: *Don Sebastian*, concerned with tragic fate, and *Amphitryon*, a very bleak comedy. Both deal with human identity in a hostile world. In 1691 he enjoyed a fortunate collaboration with Henry Purcell on *King Arthur*, an opera. In 1694, his last play, *Love Triumphant*, featured a happy ending engineered by an unconvincing change of heart. Such doubts and sputters in these years had fullest exercise in the *Satires* of 1693 (translating Juvenal and Persius) and the Preface to *Examen Poeticum*, the third miscellany.

In the last period, 1694–1700, Dryden worked through his problems. If he could not address all his contemporaries, he could focus on individuals. In 1694 two of his finest poetic addresses appear: "To my Dear Friend Mr. Congreve" and "To Sir Godfrey Kneller." Gloom remains in both, but the gloomier "Kneller" shows chastened faith even in "these Inferiour Times." The "Congreve" bears uncanny resemblance in motif to *Mac Flecknoe*. Drama is again the topic, with comparisons again settling values. Now Dryden must abdicate and Congreve have legitimate succession, even if a usurper should sneak in for a time. The "son" merits, however, and the "father" loves.

Addresses lacked the capaciousness to adjust new strains to old hopes. Such scale was achieved in the 1697 *Virgil*. Although it and his comedies most require re-assessment, it does seem that he darkens the second half of his *Aeneis* (as if the military and the public worlds do not quite merge), and that he renders the *Georgics* even more heroically and sympathetically than Virgil to show the terms on which hope remained. His real epic was to come in cento, *Fables Ancient and Modern* (1700). It combines seventeen poems made over from Ovid, Boccaccio, Chaucer, and Homer with four solely Dryden's: those two handsome ones to the Duchess of Ormonde and to John Dryden of Chesterton toward the beginning, as also *Alexander's Feast* and "The Monument of a Fair Maiden Lady" toward the end. In redoing the *Metamorphoses* as Milton had redone the *Aeneid* in *Paradise Lost*, Dryden relates his poems by links, themes, motifs, and central subject – the human search for the good life. A serene wisdom shows that such a life can finally be gained only on Christian terms. Yet the vain and sinful race continues to endear itself to the old poet. *Fables* is once again becoming a favorite of readers as it had been for the Romantics and Dryden's own contemporaries. He died on May Day 1700 of degenerative diseases, yet calm of mind to the end.

The limitations of such periodizing are represented by its failure to allow for his constant writing in "the other harmony of prose" (Preface to *Fables*). He was by no means the modern stylist some claim. He writes in numerous styles and sometimes shows no more knowledge than Milton of modern paragraph and sentence writing. In his styles, however, he established English criticism, struggling like others before him to create the critical essay. As early as *The Rival Ladies* (1664) he found his way in use of the preface, employing a method inquisitive, devoted to current issues, and yet enough assured to deal with general principles. *Of Dramatick Poesy. An Essay* is really a dialogue, his most elaborate criticism, a semi-fiction,

offering heroic debate on the proper character of drama. In the "Parallel Betwixt Poetry and Painting" (a preface to *De Arte Graphica* in 1695) we see most clearly his attempt to unite neo-Aristotelian mimesis with neo-Horatian affectivism. Once more he asserted the poet's right to heighten – to take a better or worse "likeness" and remain true, or to deal with the best "nature," unlike the scientist. In a way prescient for his career, the "Account" prefixed to *Annus Mirabilis* (1667) had placed historical poetry and panegyric (by implication satire also) under the aegis of epic. These prefaces, the *Dramatick Poesy*, and his poems as well dealt with the concept of hope for human progress, which was relatively new in England, and also introduced critical and historical principles. The element most neglected by historians of criticism was his historical understanding, which permitted him to compare and differentiate and evolve a historical relativism that would later undermine mimetic presumptions. To him we owe the concept of a historical age or period possessing its own temper or *Zeitgeist*, with all that such assumptions have meant to subsequent thought about literature.

Such diversity – there are over thirty plays, operas, and cantatas alone – yields to no easy summary. We can observe what joins him to, or differentiates him from, his great contemporaries – or the next century. Like Marvell, Dryden was a gifted lyric poet, although in odes rather than ruminative lyrics. Like Butler, he was a learned satirist, but where Butler degrades Dryden exalts. Like Milton, he excelled in varieties of narrative and drama, just as both also overcame crises toward the end of their lives. Dryden had what Milton lacked – wit, humor, and generosity. But his extraordinary intellectual power to liken and assimilate was incapable of Milton's higher fusion of all into a single intense reality. And where Milton, like Spenser, created an artistic language spoken by no one, Dryden like Donne and Jonson created a more natural language founded on actual speech. Born early enough to remember the outbreak of civil war (1642) and to live through four different national constitutions, Dryden wrote of subjects that no longer treat directly – the most momentous of their times. For all that, his powers took on greatness only in the second half of his life, developing to the end. He practiced every literary kind except the novel, never repeating himself except in songs for plays. He is a rare example of a writer whose finest work comes at the end of his lifetime, of a century, and of a distinct period of literature. The next equivalent of *Fables* is not heroic poetry but the novel.

—Earl Miner

DUCK, Stephen. English. Born in Charlton, Wiltshire, in 1705. Agricultural labourer after age 14. Married in 1724 (first wife died in 1730), three children; 2) Sarah Big, the Queen's housekeeper, in 1733. His literary efforts were encouraged by Queen Caroline, who gave him money and made him a Yeoman of the Guard, 1733, and Keeper of the Queen's Library at Richmond. Ordained in 1746: preacher at Kew Chapel, 1751; Rector of Byfleet, Surrey after 1752. *Died* (by suicide) 21 March 1756.

PUBLICATIONS

Verse

Royal Benevolence; A Poem on Providence. 1730.

Poems on Several Subjects. 1730.

To the Duke of Cumberland on His Birthday. 1732.

A Poem on the Marriage of the Prince of Orange; Verses to the Author by a Divine, with the Author's Answer; and His Poem on Truth and Falsehood. 1734.