Preface

That Dryden's late translations are not simply random selections from ancient and modern authors is not a wholly new critical discovery. In 1968, as Judith Sloman finished her University of Minnesota dissertation on the structure of the *Fables* under the direction of Samuel Holt Monk, Earl Miner, in his *Dryden's Poetry* (published in 1967), was arguing that this collection of translations did not show a decrease of poetic power, reflected in a need for the groundwork of an original, but was rather a reinvention of particular ancients and moderns for a seventeenth-century occasion. That occasion in turn both re-created and shared the borrowed origin and, in combination with the contexts chosen, made a new poem.

This technique is not really at odds with Dryden's usual practice. *Absalom and Achitophel* 'translates' biblical and Miltonic story and depends on the reader's response to Dryden's placing seventeenth-century events within the biblical experience of David's political crisis and then within Milton's larger biblical story. Both these contexts, in very different ways, also reassert and redefine doctrines of kingship, the state, and the role of those other members of the body politic who, if they no longer subscribe to earlier views about what the waters of the rough rude sea might do to an anointed king, are at least agreed that there is virtue to unity, not least for poetry. Dryden's only anxiety would be that this influence might go unrecognized, for, without this recognition, his poem would be merely propaganda. If his immediate design in *Absalom and Achitophel* was to hang Shaftesbury, that, as we know, failed. To argue, as Miner and Sloman do, that *Fables* and other 'collective translations' are deliberate choices from the tradition, which resonate and give the grandeur of generality to Dryden's immediate experience, is really only to reverse the process we can see easily in *Absalom and Achitophel*. The usual body of allusion forms the foreground of the main

story and Dryden's own experience acts as if it were biblical or Miltonic echo. The effect is the same. If the earlier satire is not merely propagandistic because it lives in a larger tradition, then the later poems are not merely translations because they have been given new life in a quite literal way. They are no longer just themselves for they have a new context which gives them different valence and, in addition to the altering neighbourhood of other poems, they also have the career of their translator as a ground for this new figure.

Our reading of Dryden has generally been too partial, as Jean Hagstrum's *Sex and Sensibility* with its emphasis on the more sensual passages in the plays and in the less read poems tells us, and the effect has been, through a concentration on the most famous satires and places in the prose, to lose sight of the complex wholeness of that writer who moved from lyric to play to satire to essay to translation, not necessarily in sequence. If we read him only in this limited way, we lose his ground and hence his figure. Part of Judith Sloman's concern for Dryden is her sense of the wholeness of the career and the appearance of the man who signs, she says in an early page, every line of his work; the direction we know from *Absalom* of *poeta loquitur* might be everywhere. Her account of these later poems as 'collective translations' is meant primarily to establish their integrity as poems in the way I have suggested above in my analogy with the allusive procedures of the early satires. She also wants to highlight a preoccupation that dominated his career, his fear of the disintegration of language and the consequent fragmentation of literary experience. Writing from an exceptional command of the canon, her allusions to works earlier than the translations suggest a poet (not unlike contemporaries who wrote about language) with what Sloman calls 'a near existential fear of the power of language' as this power might menace the state. Even as the plays with their array of split selves show, the days of real heroes were over, and with them, in her phrase, 'the spurious finality of epic.' If we see this point, then, it is easier also to read the *Religio*, a poem centred quite literally on Henry Dickinson, the only one who is not torturing a text or reaching, as he does so, for spurious finality. The loose form of the *Religio* and the fabular character of *The Hind and the Panther* are but conscious contrasts with those epic gestures Dryden had made in the early poems on Cromwell and Charles as he tried to create *anni mirabili*, with anointed kings to activate and to people them. His conversion, Sloman argues early, contributed to his interest, expressed in the lives of his heroes in the later plays, in examinations of consciences. Given his own Catholicism, Dryden would also be aware of the necessity of both a personal examination of conscience and of a depersonalization of self. In these terms he would look to the past not simply to ask with Chaucer's Parson (part of the *Fables*) which were the old ways, that he

might walk in them and find refreshment for his soul, but to find out how these old ways might illuminate the new. And as Sloman notes, he not only finds himself in the old; his translation depersonalizes the old as well. Indeed, everywhere in the canon, not just in the 'collective translations,' overactive, personalized characters are the most dangerous, for all, from the 'various' Zimri to the agitators in the *Fables*, have not only forgone common quiet but are also active disturbers of the peace whose chief aim is to invent noisy and spurious heroism. As such, they are obstacles to Dryden's ideal of the philosopher-king and his personal and correlative aspiration to a status above satire.

In addition to giving us a volume which asks for a different reading of the later Dryden, Sloman also sends us back to other places in his work and asks us to see them differently. Perhaps most critically, she tells us that we cannot read him in part, although the forms of his work, not just those of the later period but those of the earlier as well, have perhaps led us to assume that we can. Her careful study of the late poems, which often involves sharply pinpointing a particular political allusion, leads us not simply to appreciate these poems as sequential wholes (and to establish that sequence and whole are not mutually exclusive) but to go back, sometimes with helpful hints, sometimes because we now know that we must look, to the early career for instances of the same technique. Her argument, then, is not just for the late 'collective translations.' It is also for the collective Dryden, and it will, I hope, open fresh discussion of the late poems and some of the strategies of the earlier career that the technique of these late poems invites.

Had Sloman lived to make her own final draft, she would doubtless have made a variety of changes, but none, I think, to the main argument of her book. She might, for example, have reduced some places where there seems too much evidence adduced to establish the argument. Her style at its best is energetic and witty; more of the prose would have exhibited these qualities. She would also have wished to thank other scholars, notably Earl Miner, for help and perhaps especially for helpful disagreements.

Without one scholar's work the book would not exist. Anne McWhir of the University of Calgary, who came to know Judith Sloman well only two months before her death, accepted the task of seeing the manuscript through to publication. Perhaps aware of the need for haste, Sloman had written the text (some of her work had, of course, been published as articles and could be incorporated with changes) in a year's time. Some of the chapters were typed; other parts were handwritten in examination books. Some of the argument read well; other parts were clear but fragmentary, and final corrections had not been made. A pencilled conclusion was found in a filing cabinet. Professor McWhir has published in the eighteenth century, but her

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chief research interest is later and she was much aware of this factor as she edited the manuscript. She edited the prose with care and, once the version she sent to the University of Toronto Press had been forwarded to readers, worked to respond to their comments, especially to their objections, but only as these emerged from ambiguities in the prose. Even had she been a Dryden scholar, any further change would have been an interference in the author's intention. She also checked all the quotations and put the notes in order. Some of these were sketchily set down and thus hard to find in her own library and those to which she was obliged to travel. In addition, then, to editing the text, as she found it and as she incorporated the readers' comments, Professor McWhir had the considerable task of putting time-consuming finishing touches to the manuscript. She has also prepared the index. If the book makes, as I believe it does, a substantial contribution to our study of Dryden by restoring these later works to the centrality of his canon, we have Professor McWhir to thank. It is admirable that a young scholar should be generous enough to take time from her own work to make this study possible. I use that 'generous,' of course, in its full eighteenth-century sense.

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