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late works.

## JOHN DRYDEN

### SELECTED POEMS

*Edited with an Introduction and Notes by*  
STEVEN N. ZWICKER and DAVID BYWATERS

PENGUIN BOOKS

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THE EPILOGUE SPOKEN TO THE  
KING AT THE OPENING THE  
PLAYHOUSE AT OXFORD ON  
SATURDAY LAST, BEING  
MARCH THE 19<sup>TH</sup>, 1681

As from a darkened room some optic glass  
Transmits the distant species as they pass,  
The world's large landscape is from far descried,  
And men contracted on the paper glide,  
Thus crowded Oxford represents mankind,  
And in these walls Great Britain seems confined.  
Oxford is now the public theatre,  
And you both audience are and actors here.  
The gazing world on the new scene attend,  
Admire the turns, and wish a prosperous end.  
This place, the seat of peace, the quiet cell  
Where arts removed from noisy business dwell,  
Should calm your wills, unite the jarring parts,  
And with a kind contagion seize your hearts;  
Oh! may its genius like soft music move,  
And tune you all to concord and to love.  
Our ark, that has in tempests long been tossed,  
Could never land on so secure a coast.  
From hence you may look back on civil rage  
And view the ruins of the former age.  
Here a new world its glories may unfold,  
And here be saved the remnants of the old.  
But while your days on public thoughts are bent  
Past ill to heal and future to prevent,  
Some vacant hours allow to your delight:  
Mirth is the pleasing business of the night,  
The king's prerogative, the people's right.  
Were all your hours to sullen cares confined,  
The body would be jaded by the mind.  
'Tis wisdom's part betwixt extremes to steer:  
Be gods in senates, but be mortals here.

ABSALOM AND ACHITOPHEL.  
A POEM  
—*Si Propius stes*  
*Te Capiet Magis—*

*To the Reader*

'Tis not my intention to make an apology for my poem: some  
will think it needs no excuse, and others will receive none.  
The design, I am sure, is honest; but he who draws his pen  
for one party must expect to make enemies of the other. For  
wit and fool are consequents of Whig and Tory, and every  
man is a knave or an ass to the contrary side. There's a treasury  
of merits in the fanatic church as well as in the papist; and a  
pennyworth to be had of saintship, honesty, and poetry for  
the lewd, the factious, and the blockheads; but the longest  
chapter in Deuteronomy has not curses enough for an anti-  
Bromingham. My comfort is, their manifest prejudice to my  
cause will render their judgement of less authority against  
me. Yet if a poem have a genius, it will force its own reception  
in the world. For there's a sweetness in good verse which  
tickles even while it hurts, and no man can be heartily angry  
with him who pleases him against his will. The commendation  
of adversaries is the greatest triumph of a writer, because it  
never comes unless extorted. But I can be satisfied on more  
easy terms: if I happen to please the more moderate sort, I  
shall be sure of an honest party and, in all probability, of the  
best judges, for the least concerned are commonly the least  
corrupt; and, I confess, I have laid in for those by rebating  
the satire (where justice would allow it) from carrying too  
sharp an edge. They who can criticize so weakly as to imagine  
I have done my worst may be convinced, at their own cost,  
that I can write severely with more ease than I can gently. I  
have but laughed at some men's follies when I could have

## READER.

Is not my intention to make an Apology for my Poem:

Some will think it needs no Excuse; and others will receive none. The Design, I am sure, is honest: but he who draws his Pen for one Party, must expect to make Enemies of the other. For, Wit and Fool, are Consequents of Whig and Tory: And every man is a Hazare or an Als to the contrary side. There's a Treasury of Merits in the Phannick Church, as well as in the Papist; and a Pennyworth to be had of Simplicity, Honesty, and Poetry, for the Least, the Facitious, and the Blockheads: But the longest Chapter in Detraction, has not Curles enough for an Anti-Bromingham.

Confessing his pen drawing his pen for a Party

Confessing himself

Let him write, who can

My Comfort is, their manifest Prejudice to my Cause, will render their Judgement of less Authority against me. Yet if a Poem have a Genius, it will force its own reception in the World. For there's a sweetness in good Verse, which Tickles even while it Hurts: And, no man can be heartily angry with him, who pleases him against his will. The Commendation of Adversaries, is the greatest Triumph of a Writer; because it never comes unless Extorted. But I can be satisfied on more easy terms: If I happen to please the more Moderate sort, I shall be sure of an honest Party; and, in all probability, of the best Judges; for, the least Concert'd, are commonly the least Corrupt: And, I confess, I have laid in for those, by rebutting the SATYRE, (where Justice would allow it) from carrying too sharp an Edge. They, who can Criticize so weakly, as to imagine I have done my Worst, may be Convinced, at their own Cost, that I can write Severely, with more ease, than I can Gently. I have but laugh'd at some mens Follies, when I could have declaim'd against their Vices; and, other mens Vertues I have commended, as freely as I have tax'd their Crimes. And now, if you are a Malitious Reader, I expect you should return upon me, that I affect to be thought more Impartial than I am. But, if men are not to be judg'd by their Professions, God forgive you Common-wealths-men, for professing so plausibly for the Government. You cannot be so Unconscionable, as to charge me for not Subscribing of my Name; for that would reflect too grossly upon your own Party, who never dare, though they have the advantage of a Jury to secure them. If you like not my

declaimed against their vices, and other men's virtues I have commended as freely as I have taxed their crimes. And now, if you are a malicious reader, I expect you should return upon me that I affect to be thought more impartial than I am. But if men are not to be judged by their professions, God forgive you commonwealthsmen for professing so plausibly for the government. You cannot be so unconscionable as to charge me for not subscribing of my name, for that would reflect too grossly upon your own party, who never dare, though they have the advantage of a jury to secure them. If you like not my poem, the fault may possibly be in my writing (though 'tis hard for an author to judge against himself), but more probably 'tis in your morals, which cannot bear the truth of it. The violent on both sides will condemn the character of Absalom as either too favourably or too hardly drawn. But they are not the violent whom I desire to please. The fault on the right hand is to extenuate, palliate, and indulge, and to confess freely, I have endeavoured to commit it. Besides the respect which I owe his birth, I have a greater for his heroic virtues, and David himself could not be more tender of the young man's life than I would be of his reputation. But since the most excellent natures are always the most easy and, as being such, are the soonest perverted by ill counsels, especially when baited with fame and glory, 'tis no more a wonder that he withstood not the temptation of Achitophel than it was for Adam not to have resisted the two devils, the serpent, and the woman. The conclusion of the story I purposely forbore to prosecute, because I could not obtain from myself to show Absalom unfortunate. The frame of it was cut out but for a picture to the waist, and if the draught be so far true, 'tis as much as I designed.

Were I the inventor, who am only the historian, I should certainly conclude the piece with the reconciliation of Absalom to David. And who knows but this may come to pass? Things were not brought to an extremity where I left the

story: there seems yet to be room left for a composure; hereafter, there may only be for pity. I have not so much as an uncharitable wish against Achitophel, but am content to be accused of a good-natured error, and to hope, with Origen, that the devil himself may at last be saved. For which reason, in this poem, he is neither brought to set his house in order nor to dispose of his person afterwards as he in wisdom shall think fit. God is infinitely merciful, and his vicegerent is only not so because he is not infinite.

The true end of satire is the amendment of vices by correction. And he who writes honestly is no more an enemy to the offender than the physician to the patient when he prescribes harsh remedies to an inveterate disease, for those are only in order to prevent the surgeon's work of an *ense rescindendum*, which I wish not to my very enemies. To conclude all, if the body politic have any analogy to the natural, in my weak judgement, an Act of Oblivion were as necessary in a hot, disempered state as an opiate would be in a raging fever.

### *Absalom and Achitophel. A Poem*

In pious times, ere priestcraft did begin,  
Before polygamy was made a sin,  
When man on many multiplied his kind,  
Ere one to one was cursedly confined,  
When nature prompted, and no law denied  
Promiscuous use of concubine and bride,  
Then Israel's monarch, after heaven's own heart,  
His vigorous warmth did variously impart  
To wives and slaves, and, wide as his command,  
Scattered his Maker's image through the land.  
Michal, of royal blood, the crown did wear,  
A soil ungrateful to the tiller's care;  
Not so the rest, for several mothers bore  
To godlike David several sons before.  
But since like slaves his bed they did ascend,  
No true succession could their seed attend.

Of all this numerous progeny was none  
So beautiful, so brave as Absalom:  
Whether, inspired by some diviner lust,  
His father got him with a greater gust,  
Or that his conscious destiny made way  
By manly beauty to imperial sway.  
Early in foreign fields he won renown  
With kings and states allied to Israel's crown;  
In peace the thoughts of war he could remove,  
And seemed as he were only born for love.  
What'er he did was done with so much ease,  
In him alone 'twas natural to please.  
His motions all accompanied with grace,  
And paradise was opened in his face.  
With secret joy, indulgent David viewed  
His youthful image in his son renewed;  
To all his wishes nothing he denied,  
And made the charming Annabel his bride.  
What faults he had (for who from faults is free?)  
His father could not, or he would not see.  
Some warm excesses which the law forbore  
Were construed youth, that purged by boiling o'er,  
And Ammon's murder, by a specious name,  
Was called a just revenge for injured fame.  
Thus praised and loved the noble youth remained  
While David undisturbed in Sion reigned.  
But life can never be sincerely blest;  
Heaven punishes the bad and proves the best.  
The Jews, a headstrong, moody, murmuring race  
As ever tried th' extent and stretch of grace,  
God's pampered people, whom, debauched with ease,  
No king could govern nor no god could please  
(Gods they had tried of every shape and size  
That god-smiths could produce, or priests devise),  
These Adam-wits, too fortunately free,  
Began to dream they wanted liberty;  
And when no rule, no precedent was found  
Of men by laws less circumscribed and bound,

55 They led their wild desires to woods and caves,  
 And thought that all but savages were slaves.  
 They who, when Saul was dead, without a blow  
 Made foolish Ishbosheth the crown forgo,  
 Who banished David did from Hebron bring  
 And, with a general shout, proclaimed him king:  
 60 Those very Jews who, at their very best,  
 Their humour more than loyalty expressed  
 Now wondered why so long they had obeyed  
 An idol monarch which their hands had made,  
 65 Thought they might ruin him they could create  
 Or melt him to that golden calf, a state.  
 But these were random bolts: no formed design  
 Nor interest made the factious crowd to join;  
 70 The sober part of Israel, free from strain,  
 Well knew the value of a peaceful reign  
 And, looking backward with a wise affright,  
 Saw seams of wounds, dishonest to the sight,  
 In contemplation of whose ugly scars  
 75 They cursed the memory of civil wars.  
 The moderate sort of men, thus qualified,  
 Inclined the balance to the better side,  
 And David's mildness managed it so well  
 80 The bad found no occasion to rebel.  
 But when to sin our biased nature leans,  
 The careful devil is still at hand with means  
 And providently pimps for ill desires:  
 The Good Old Cause revived a plot requires.  
 85 Plots, true or false, are necessary things  
 To raise up commonwealths and ruin kings.  
 Th' inhabitants of old Jerusalem  
 Were Jebusites, the town so called from them,  
 And theirs the native right –  
 But when the chosen people grew more strong,  
 90 The rightful cause at length became the wrong,  
 And every loss the men of Jebus bore,  
 They still were thought God's enemies the more.  
 Thus, worn and weakened, well or ill content,  
 Submit they must to David's government;

95 Impoverished and deprived of all command,  
 Their taxes doubled as they lost their land,  
 And, what was harder yet to flesh and blood,  
 Their gods disgraced, and burnt like common wood.  
 This set the heathen priesthood in a flame,  
 100 For priests of all religions are the same:  
 Of whatsoe'er descent their godhead be,  
 Stock, stone, or other homely pedigree,  
 In his defence his servants are as bold  
 As if he had been born of beaten gold.  
 105 The Jewish rabbins, though their enemies,  
 In this conclude them honest men and wise,  
 For 'twas their duty, all the learned think,  
 T' espouse his cause by whom they eat and drink.  
 From hence began that plot, the nation's curse,  
 110 Bad in itself but represented worse.  
 Raised in extremes and in extremes decried;  
 With oaths affirmed, with dying vows denied.  
 Not weighed or winnowed by the multitude  
 But swallowed in the mass, unchewed and crude.  
 115 Some truth there was, but dashed and brewed with lies  
 To please the fools and puzzle all the wise.  
 Succeeding times did equal folly call  
 Believing nothing or believing all.  
 Th' Egyptian rites the Jebusites embraced,  
 120 Where gods were recommended by their taste;  
 Such savoury deities must needs be good  
 As served at once for worship and for food.  
 By force they could not introduce these gods,  
 For ten to one in former days was odds.  
 125 So fraud was used, the sacrificer's trade:  
 Fools are more hard to conquer than persuade.  
 Their busy teachers mingled with the Jews  
 And raked for converts even the court and stews,  
 Which Hebrew priests the more unkindly took  
 130 Because the fleece accompanies the flock.  
 Some thought they God's anointed meant to slay  
 By guns, invented since full many a day:

Our author swears it not, but who can know  
 How far the devil and Jebusites may go?  
 This plot, which failed for want of common sense,  
 Had yet a deep and dangerous consequence,  
 For as, when raging fevers boil the blood,  
 The standing lake soon floats into a flood,  
 And every hostile humour, which before  
 Slept quiet in its channels, bubbles o'er,  
 So several factions from this first ferment  
 Work up to foam, and threat the government.  
 Some by their friends, more by themselves thought wise  
 Opposed the power to which they could not rise.  
 Some had in courts been great and, thrown from thence,  
 Like fiends were hardened in impotence.  
 Some, by their monarch's fatal mercy grown,  
 From pardoned rebels, kinsmen to the throne,  
 Were raised in power and public office high:  
 Strong bands, if bands ungrateful men could tie.  
 Of these the false Achitophel was first:  
 A name to all succeeding ages curst.  
 For close designs and crooked counsel fit,  
 Sagacious, bold, and turbulent of wit,  
 Restless, unfix'd in principle and place,  
 In power unpleased, impatient of disgrace.  
 A fiery soul, which, working out its way,  
 Fretted the pygmy body to decay  
 And o'er-informed the tenement of clay.  
 A daring pilot in extremity,  
 Pleas'd with the danger, when the waves went high  
 He sought the storms but for a calm unfit  
 Would steer too nigh the sands, to boast his wit.  
 Great wits are sure to madness near allied,  
 And thin partitions do their bounds divide:  
 Else why should he, with wealth and honour blessed,  
 Refuse his age the needful hours of rest?  
 Punish a body which he could not please,  
 Bankrupt of life, yet prodigal of ease?  
 And all to leave what with his toil he won  
 To that unfeathered, two-legg'd thing, a son,

Got while his soul did huddled notions try  
 And born a shapeless lump, like anarchy.  
 In friendship false, implacable in hate,  
 Resolved to ruin or to rule the state,  
 To compass this the Triple Bond he broke,  
 The pillars of the public safety shook,  
 And fitted Israel for a foreign yoke.  
 Then, seized with fear, yet still affecting fame,  
 Usurped a patriot's all-atoning name.  
 So easy still it proves in factious times  
 With public zeal to cancel private crimes;  
 How safe is treason, and how sacred ill,  
 Where none could sin against the people's will,  
 Where crowds can wink, and no offence be known,  
 Since in another's guilt they find their own.  
 Yet fame deserved no enemy can grudge;  
 The statesman we abhor, but praise the judge.  
 In Israel's courts ne'er sat an Abbehdin  
 With more discerning eyes, or hands more clean:  
 Unbribed, unsought, the wretched to redress,  
 Swift of dispatch and easy of access.  
 Oh, had he been content to serve the crown  
 With virtues only proper to the gown,  
 Or had the rankness of the soil been freed  
 From cockle, that oppressed the noble seed,  
 David for him his tuneful harp had strung,  
 And heaven had wanted one immortal song.  
 But wild ambition loves to slide, not stand,  
 And fortune's ice prefers to virtue's land:  
 Achitophel, grown weary to possess  
 A lawful fame and lazy happiness,  
 Disdained the golden fruit to gather free  
 And lent the crowd his arm to shake the tree.  
 Now manifest of crimes contrived long since,  
 He stood at bold defiance with his prince,  
 Held up the buckler of the people's cause  
 Against the crown, and skulked behind the laws.  
 The wished occasion of the Plot he takes,  
 Some circumstances finds, but more he makes.

- 210 By buzzing emissaries fills the ears  
Of listening crowds with jealousies and fears  
Of arbitrary counsels brought to light  
And proves the king himself a Jebusite:  
215 Weak arguments! which yet he knew full well  
Were strong with people easy to rebel.  
For, governed by the moon, the giddy Jews  
Tread the same track when she the prime renews,  
And once in twenty years, their scribes record,  
220 By natural instinct they change their lord.  
Achitophel still wants a chief, and none  
Was found so fit as warlike Absalon,  
Not that he wished his greatness to create  
(For politicians neither love nor hate),  
225 But for he knew his title not allowed  
Would keep him still depending on the crowd,  
That kingly power, thus ebbing out, might be  
Drawn to the dregs of a democracy.  
Him he attempts with studied arts to please  
And sheds his venom in such words as these.  
230 'Auspicious prince! at whose nativity  
Some royal planet ruled the southern sky,  
Thy longing country's darling and desire,  
Their cloudy pillar and their guardian fire,  
Their second Moses, whose extended wand  
235 Divides the seas and shows the promised land,  
Whose dawning day, in every distant age,  
Has exercised the sacred prophet's rage,  
The people's prayer, the glad diviner's theme,  
The young men's vision, and the old men's dream!  
240 Thee, saviour, thee, the nation's vows confess,  
And, never satisfied with seeing, bless:  
Swift, unspoken pomps thy steps proclaim,  
And stammering babes are taught to lisp thy name.  
How long wilt thou the general joy detain,  
245 Starve and defraud the people of thy reign?  
Content ingloriously to pass thy days  
Like one of virtue's fools that feeds on praise,

- 250 Till thy fresh glories, which now shine so bright,  
Grow stale and tarnish with our daily sight.  
Believe me, royal youth, thy fruit must be  
Or gathered ripe, or rot upon the tree.  
Heav'n has to all allotted, soon or late,  
Some lucky revolution of their fate,  
255 Whose motions, if we watch and guide with skill  
(For human good depends on human will),  
Our fortune rolls as from a smooth descent  
And from the first impression takes the bent;  
But if unseized, she glides away like wind  
And leaves repenting folly far behind.  
260 Now, now she meets you with a glorious prize  
And spreads her locks before her as she flies.  
Had thus old David, from whose loins you spring,  
Not dared, when fortune called him, to be king,  
At Gath an exile he might still remain,  
265 And heaven's anointing oil had been in vain.  
Let his successful youth your hopes engage,  
But shun th' example of declining age:  
Behold him setting in his western skies,  
The shadows length'ning as the vapours rise.  
270 He is not now as when on Jordan's sand  
The joyful people thronged to see him land,  
Cov'ring the beach and black'ning all the strand,  
But, like the prince of angels, from his height  
Comes tumbling downward with diminished light,  
275 Betrayed by one poor plot to public scorn  
(Our only blessing since his curst return);  
Those heaps of people which one sheaf did bind,  
Blown off and scattered by a puff of wind.  
280 What strength can he to your designs oppose,  
Naked of friends and round beset with foes?  
If Pharaoh's doubtful succour he should use,  
A foreign aid would more incense the Jews:  
Proud Egypt would dissembled friendship bring,  
285 Foment the war but not support the king;  
Nor would the royal party e'er unite  
With Pharaoh's arms t' assist the Jebusite;



Or if they should, their interest soon would break  
 And with such odious aid make David weak.  
 All sorts of men by my successful arts,  
 Abhorring kings, estrange their altered hearts  
 From David's rule, and 'tis the general cry,  
 "Religion, Commonwealth, and Liberty."  
 If you, as champion of the public good,  
 Add to their arms a chief of royal blood,  
 What may not Israel hope, and what applause  
 Might such a general gain by such a cause?  
 Not barren praise alone, that gaudy flower,  
 Fair only to the sight, but solid power;  
 And nobler is a limited command  
 Giv'n by the love of all your native land  
 Than a successive title, long and dark,  
 Drawn from the mouldy rolls of Noah's ark.  
 What cannot praise effect in mighty minds  
 When flattery soothes and when ambition blinds!  
 Desire of power, on earth a vicious weed,  
 Yet, sprung from high, is of celestial seed:  
 In God 'tis glory, and when men aspire,  
 'Tis but a spark too much of heavenly fire.  
 Th' ambitious youth, too covetous of fame,  
 Too full of angel's metal in his frame,  
 Unwarily was led from virtue's ways,  
 Made drunk with honour, and debauched with praise.  
 Half loath and half consenting to the ill  
 (For royal blood within him struggled still),  
 He thus replied, 'And what pretence have I  
 To take up arms for public liberty?  
 My father governs with unquestioned right,  
 The faith's defender and mankind's delight,  
 Good, gracious, just, observant of the laws,  
 And heav'n by wonders has espoused his cause.  
 Whom has he wronged in all his peaceful reign?  
 Who sues for justice to his throne in vain?  
 What millions has he pardoned of his foes,  
 Whom just revenge did to his wrath expose?

Mild, easy, humble, studious of our good,  
 Inclined to mercy, and averse from blood.  
 If mildness ill with stubborn Israel suit,  
 His crime is God's beloved attribute.  
 What could he gain his people to betray,  
 Or change his right for arbitrary sway?  
 Let haughty Pharaoh curse with such a reign  
 His fruitful Nile and yoke a servile train.  
 If David's rule Jerusalem displease,  
 The dog-star heats their brains to this disease.  
 Why then should I, encouraging the bad,  
 Turn rebel and run popularly mad?  
 Were he a tyrant who, by lawless might,  
 Oppressed the Jews and raised the Jebusite,  
 Well might I mourn, but nature's holy bands  
 Would curb my spirits and restrain my hands;  
 The people might assert their liberty,  
 But what was right in them, were crime in me.  
 His favour leaves me nothing to require,  
 Prevents my wishes, and outruns desire.  
 What more can I expect while David lives?  
 All but his kingly diadem he gives,  
 And that, but there he paused, then sighing said,  
 'Is justly destined for a worthier head.  
 For when my father from his toils shall rest  
 And late augment the number of the blest,  
 His lawful issue shall the throne ascend,  
 Or the collateral line where that shall end.  
 His brother, though oppressed with vulgar spite,  
 Yet, dauntless and secure of native right,  
 Of every royal virtue stands possessed,  
 Still dear to all the bravest and the best.  
 His courage foes, his friends his truth proclaim,  
 His loyalty the king, the world his fame.  
 His mercy even th' offending crowd will find,  
 For sure he comes of a forgiving kind.  
 Why should I then repine at heaven's decree,  
 Which gives me no pretence to royalty?

Yet oh, that fate, propitiously inclined,  
 Had raised my birth or had debased my mind;  
 To my large soul not all her treasure lent  
 And then betrayed it to a mean descent.  
 I find, I find my mourning spirits bold,  
 And David's part disdains my mother's mould.  
 Why am I scantied by a niggard birth?  
 My soul disclaims the kindred of her earth  
 And, made for empire, whispers me within:  
 "Desire of greatness is a godlike sin."

Him staggering so when hell's dire agent found,  
 While fainting virtue scarce maintained her ground,  
 He pours fresh forces in and thus replies:  
 'Th' eternal God, supremely good and wise,  
 Imparts not these prodigious gifts in vain;  
 What wonders are reserved to bless your reign?  
 Against your will your arguments have shown,  
 Such virtues only given to guide a throne.  
 Not that your father's mildness I condemn;  
 But manly force becomes the diadem.

'Tis true, he grants the people all they crave  
 And more perhaps than subjects ought to have,  
 For lavish grants suppose a monarch tame  
 And more his goodness than his wit proclaim.  
 But when should people strive their bonds to break  
 If not when kings are negligent or weak?  
 Let him give on till he can give no more;  
 The thrifty Sanhedrin shall keep him poor,  
 And every shekel which he can receive  
 Shall cost a limb of his prerogative.

To ply him with new plots shall be my care,  
 Or plunge him deep in some expensive war,  
 Which, when his treasure can no more supply,  
 He must with the remains of kingship buy.  
 His faithful friends our jealousies and fears  
 Call Jebusites and Pharaoh's pensioners,  
 Whom, when our fury from his aid has torn,  
 He shall be naked left to public scorn.

The next successor, whom I fear and hate,  
 My arts have made obnoxious to the state,  
 Turned all his virtues to his overthrow,  
 And gained our elders to pronounce a foe.  
 His right, for sums of necessary gold,  
 Shall first be pawned and afterwards be sold,  
 Till time shall ever-wanting David draw  
 To pass your doubtful title into law;  
 If not, the people have a right supreme  
 To make their kings, for kings are made for them.  
 All empire is no more than pow'r in trust,  
 Which, when resumed, can be no longer just.  
 Succession, for the general good designed,  
 In its own wrong a nation cannot bind;

If altering that the people can relieve,  
 Better one suffer than a nation grieve.  
 The Jews well know their pow'r: ere Saul they chose,  
 God was their king, and God they durst depose.  
 Urge now your piety, your filial name,  
 A father's right, and fear of future fame:

The public good, that universal call  
 To which even heav'n submitted, answers all.  
 Nor let his love enchant your generous mind;  
 'Tis Nature's trick to propagate her kind.  
 Our fond begetters, who would never die,  
 Love but themselves in their posterity.

Or let his kindness by th' effects be tried,  
 Or let him lay his vain pretence aside.  
 God said he loved your father; could he bring  
 A better proof than to anoint him king?  
 It surely showed he loved the shepherd well,  
 Who gave so fair a flock as Israel.  
 Would David have you thought his darling son?  
 What means he then to alienate the crown?  
 The name of godly he may blush to bear:  
 'Tis after God's own heart to cheat his heir.  
 He to his brother gives supreme command,  
 To you a legacy of barren land,

Perhaps th' old harp on which he thrums his lays,  
 Or some dull Hebrew ballad in your praise.  
 Then the next heir, a prince severe and wise,  
 Already looks on you with jealous eyes,  
 Sees through the thin disguises of your arts,  
 And marks your progress in the people's hearts.  
 Though now his mighty soul its grief contains,  
 He meditates revenge who least complains.  
 And, like a lion, slumb'ring in the way,  
 Or sleep dissembling while he waits his prey,  
 His fearless foes within his distance draws,  
 Constrains his roaring, and contracts his paws;  
 Till at the last, his time for fury found,  
 He shoots with sudden vengeance from the ground,  
 The prostrate vulgar passes o'er and spares  
 But with a lordly rage his hunters tears.  
 Your case no tame expedients will afford;  
 Resolve on death, or conquest by the sword,  
 Which for no less a stake than life you draw;  
 And self-defence is nature's eldest law.  
 Leave the warm people no considering time,  
 For then rebellion may be thought a crime.  
 Prevail yourself of what occasion gives,  
 But try your title while your father lives,  
 And, that your arms may have a fair pretence,  
 Proclaim you take them in the king's defence,  
 Whose sacred life each minute would expose  
 To plots from seeming friends and secret foes.  
 And who can sound the depth of David's soul?  
 Perhaps his fear his kindness may control.  
 He fears his brother, though he loves his son,  
 For plighted vows too late to be undone.  
 If so, by force he wishes to be gained,  
 Like women's lechery, to seem constrained:  
 Doubt not, but when he most affects the frown,  
 Commit a pleasing rape upon the crown.  
 Secure his person to secure your cause;  
 They who possess the prince, possess the laws.'

He said, and this advice above the rest  
 With Absalom's mild nature suited best;  
 Unblamed of life (ambition set aside),  
 Not stained with cruelty, nor puffed with pride,  
 How happy had he been if destiny  
 Had higher placed his birth, or not so high?  
 His kingly virtues might have claimed a throne  
 And blessed all other countries but his own;  
 But charming greatness since so few refuse,  
 'Tis juster to lament him than accuse.  
 Strong were his hopes a rival to remove,  
 With blandishments to gain the public love,  
 To head the faction while their zeal was hot,  
 And popularly prosecute the Plot.  
 To farther this, Achitophel unites  
 The malcontents of all the Israelites,  
 Whose differing parties he could wisely join  
 For several ends to serve the same design.  
 The best, and of the princes some were such,  
 Who thought the power of monarchy too much:  
 Mistaken men and patriots in their hearts,  
 Not wicked, but seduced by impious arts.  
 By these the springs of property were bent  
 And wound so high they cracked the government.  
 The next for interest sought t' embroil the state,  
 To sell their duty at a dearer rate,  
 And make their Jewish markets of the throne,  
 Pretending public good to serve their own.  
 Others thought kings an useless heavy load  
 Who cost too much and did too little good.  
 These were for laying honest David by  
 On principles of pure good husbandry.  
 With them joined all th' haranguers of the throng  
 That thought to get preferment by the tongue.  
 Who follow next a double danger bring,  
 Not only hating David, but the king.  
 The Solymean rout — well versed of old  
 In godly faction, and in treason bold,

- 515 Cow'ring and quaking at a conqueror's sword,  
But lofty to a lawful prince restored –  
Saw with disdain an ethnic plot begun  
And scorned by Jebusites to be undone.  
Hot Levies headed these, who pulled before  
From th' ark, which in the judges' days they bore,  
Resumed their cant and, with a zealous cry,  
Pursued their old belov'd theocracy,  
Where Sanhedrin and priest enslaved the nation  
And justified their spoils by inspiration;  
For who so fit for reign as Aaron's race  
If once dominion they could found in grace?  
These led the pack, though not of surest scent,  
Yet deepest mouthed against the government.  
A numerous host of dreaming saints succeed  
Of the true old enthusiastic breed:  
'Gainst form and order they their pow'r employ  
Nothing to build and all things to destroy.  
But far more numerous was the herd of such  
Who think too little and who talk too much.  
These, out of mere instinct, they knew not why,  
Adored their fathers' God and property,  
And, by the same blind benefit of fate,  
The devil and the Jebusite did hate:  
Born to be saved, even in their own despite,  
Because they could not help believing right.  
Such were the tools, but a whole Hydra more  
Remains of sprouting heads too long to score.  
Some of their chiefs were princes of the land;  
In the first rank of these did Zimri stand:  
A man so various that he seemed to be  
Not one, but all mankind's epitome.  
Stiff in opinions, always in the wrong,  
Was everything by starts and nothing long,  
But, in the course of one revolving moon,  
Was chemist, fiddler, statesman, and buffoon:  
Then for all women, painting, rhyming, drinking,  
Besides ten thousand freaks that died in thinking.

- 555 Blest madman, who could every hour employ  
With something new to wish or to enjoy!  
Railing and praising were his usual themes,  
And both (to show his judgement) in extremes:  
So over-violent, or over-civil,  
That every man, with him, was God or devil.  
In squand'ring wealth was his peculiar art:  
Nothing went unrewarded but desert.  
Beggared by fools, whom still he found too late,  
He had his jest, and they had his estate.  
He laughed himself from court, then sought relief  
By forming parties, but could ne'er be chief;  
For, spite of him, the weight of business fell  
On Absalom and wise Achitophel:  
Thus, wicked but in will, of means bereft,  
He left not faction, but of that was left.  
Titles and names 'twere tedious to rehearse  
Of lords below the dignity of verse.  
Wits, warriors, commonwealthsmen were the best,  
Kind husbands and mere nobles all the rest.  
And therefore, in the name of dullness, be  
The well-hung Balaam and cold Caleb free,  
And canting Nadab let oblivion damn,  
Who made new porridge for the Paschal Lamb.  
Let friendship's holy band some names assure,  
Some their own worth, and some let scorn secure.  
Nor shall the rascal rabble here have place,  
Whom kings no titles gave, and God no grace:  
Not bull-faced Jonas, who could statutes draw  
To mean rebellion and make treason law.  
But he, though bad, is followed by a worse,  
The wretch who heaven's anointed dared to curse.  
Shimei, whose youth did early promise bring  
Of zeal to God and hatred to his king,  
Did wisely from expensive sins refrain  
And never broke the sabbath, but for gain;  
Nor ever was he known an oath to vent  
Or curse, unless against the government.

Thus heaping wealth by the most ready way  
 Among the Jews, which was to cheat and pray,  
 The City, to reward his pious hate  
 Against his master, chose him magistrate:  
 His hand a vare of justice did uphold,  
 His neck was loaded with a chain of gold.  
 During his office, treason was no crime.  
 The sons of Belial had a glorious time:  
 For Shimei, though not prodigal of pelf,  
 Yet loved his wicked neighbour as himself;  
 When two or three were gathered to declaim  
 Against the monarch of Jerusalem,  
 Shimei was always in the midst of them.  
 And, if they cursed the king when he was by,  
 Would rather curse than break good company.  
 If any durst his factious friends accuse,  
 He packed a jury of dissenting Jews,  
 Whose fellow-feeling in the godly cause  
 Would free the suff'ring saint from human laws.  
 For laws are only made to punish those  
 Who serve the king and to protect his foes.  
 If any leisure time he had from power  
 (Because 'tis sin to misemploy an hour),  
 His business was by writing to persuade  
 That kings were useless and a clog to trade;  
 And, that his noble style he might refine,  
 No Rechabite more shunned the fumes of wine.  
 Chaste were his cellars, and his shrieval board  
 The grossness of a City feast abhorred:  
 His cooks with long disuse their trade forgot,  
 Cool was his kitchen, though his brains were hot.  
 Such frugal virtue malice may accuse,  
 But sure 'twas necessary to the Jews:  
 For towns once burnt such magistrates require  
 As dare not tempt God's providence by fire.  
 With spiritual food he fed his servants well  
 But free from flesh that made the Jews rebel,  
 And Moses' laws he held in more account  
 For forty days of fasting in the mount.

To speak the rest, who better are forgot,  
 Would tire a well-breathed witness of the plot;  
 Yet, Corah, thou shalt from oblivion pass;  
 Erect thyself, thou monumental brass,  
 High as the serpent of thy metal made,  
 While nations stand secure beneath thy shade.  
 What though his birth were base, yet comets rise  
 From earthy vapours ere they shine in skies.  
 Prodigious actions may as well be done  
 By weaver's issue as by prince's son.  
 This arch-attestor for the public good  
 By that one deed ennobles all his blood.  
 Who ever asked the witnesses' high race,  
 Whose oath with martyrdom did Stephen grace?  
 Ours was a Levite, and, as times went then,  
 His tribe were God Almighty's gentlemen.  
 Sunk were his eyes; his voice was harsh and loud:  
 Sure signs he neither choleeric was, nor proud;  
 His long chin proved his wit; his saintlike grace  
 A church vermillion, and a Moses' face;  
 His memory, miraculously great,  
 Could plots exceeding man's belief repeat,  
 Which therefore cannot be accounted lies,  
 For human wit could never such devise.  
 Some future truths are mingled in his book,  
 But, where the witness failed, the prophet spoke:  
 Some things like visionary flights appear;  
 The spirit caught him up, the Lord knows where,  
 And gave him his rabbinical degree  
 Unknown to foreign university.  
 His judgement yet his memory did excel,  
 Which pieced his wond'rous evidence so well  
 And suited to the temper of the times,  
 Then groaning under Jebusitic crimes.  
 Let Israel's foes suspect his heav'nly call  
 And rashly judge his writ apocryphal,  
 Our laws for such affronts have forfeits made:  
 He takes his life who takes away his trade.

Were I myself in witness Corah's place,  
 The wretch who did me such a dire disgrace  
 Should whet my memory, though once forgot,  
 To make him an appendix of my plot.  
 His zeal to heav'n made him his prince despise  
 And load his person with indignities,  
 But zeal peculiar privilege affords,  
 Indulging latitude to deeds and words.  
 And Corah might for Agag's murder call  
 In terms as coarse as Samuel used to Saul.  
 What others in his evidence did join  
 (The best that could be had for love or coin)  
 In Corah's own predicament will fall,  
 For *witness* is a common name to all.  
 Surrounded thus with friends of every sort,  
 Deluded Absalom forsakes the court,  
 Impatient of high hopes, urged with renown,  
 And fired with near possession of a crown;  
 Th' admiring crowd are dazzled with surprise  
 And on his goodly person feed their eyes;  
 His joy concealed, he sets himself to show,  
 On each side bowing popularly low,  
 His looks, his gestures, and his words he frames,  
 And with familiar ease repeats their names.  
 Thus, formed by nature, furnished out with arts,  
 He glides unfelt into their secret hearts,  
 Then, with a kind compassionate look,  
 And sighs bespeaking pity ere he spoke,  
 Few words he said, but easy those and fit,  
 More slow than Hybla drops and far more sweet.  
 'I mourn, my countrymen, your lost estate,  
 Though far unable to prevent your fate;  
 Behold a banished man, for your dear cause  
 Exposed a prey to arbitrary laws!  
 Yet oh! that I alone could be undone,  
 Cut off from empire, and no more a son!  
 Now all your liberties a spoil are made,  
 Egypt and Tyrus intercept your trade,  
 And Jebusites your sacred rites invade.

My father, whom with reverence yet I name,  
 Charmed into ease, is careless of his fame  
 And, bribed with petty sums of foreign gold,  
 Is grown in Bathsheba's embraces old,  
 Exalts his enemies, his friends destroys,  
 And all his pow'r against himself employs.  
 He gives, and let him give my right away,  
 But why should he his own and yours betray?  
 He, only he, can make the nation bleed,  
 And he alone from my revenge is freed.  
 Take then my tears' (with that he wiped his eyes);  
 'Tis all the aid my present power supplies;  
 No court informer can these arms accuse,  
 These arms may sons against their fathers use,  
 And 'tis my wish the next successor's reign  
 May make no other Israelite complain.'  
 Youth, beauty, graceful action seldom fail;  
 But common interest always will prevail,  
 And pity never ceases to be shown  
 To him who makes the people's wrongs his own.  
 The crowd (that still believe their kings oppress)  
 With lifted hands their young messiah bless,  
 Who now begins his progress to ordain  
 With chariots, horsemen, and a numerous train;  
 From east to west his glories he displays  
 And, like the sun, the promised land surveys.  
 Fame runs before him as the morning star,  
 And shouts of joy salute him from afar;  
 Each house receives him as a guardian god  
 And consecrates the place of his abode,  
 But hospitable treats did most commend  
 Wise Issachar, his wealthy western friend.  
 This moving court, that caught the people's eyes  
 And seemed but pomp, did other ends disguise:  
 Achitophel had formed it with intent  
 To sound the depths and fathom, where it went,  
 The people's hearts, distinguish friends from foes,  
 And try their strength before they came to blows;

745 Yet all was coloured with a smooth pretence  
Of specious love and duty to their prince.

Religion and redress of grievances,  
Two names that always cheat and always please,  
Are often urged, and good King David's life  
Endangered by a brother and a wife.

750 Thus, in a pageant show, a plot is made,  
And peace itself is war in masquerade.  
O foolish Israel! never warned by ill,  
Still the same bait and circumvented still!  
Did ever men forsake their present ease,  
In midst of health imagine a disease,

755 Take pains contingent mischiefs to foresee,  
Make heirs for monarchs, and for God decree?  
What shall we think! Can people give away,  
Both for themselves and sons, their native sway?  
Then they are left defenceless to the sword  
Of each unbounded, arbitrary lord,

760 And laws are vain by which we right enjoy  
If kings unquestioned can those laws destroy.  
Yet if the crowd be judge of fit and just,  
And kings are only officers in trust,  
Then this resuming cov'nant was declared

765 When kings were made, or is forever barred;  
If those who gave the sceptre could not tie  
By their own deed their own posterity,  
How then could Adam bind his future race?  
How could his forfeit on mankind take place?

770 Or how could heavenly justice damn us all,  
Who ne'er consented to our father's fall?  
Then kings are slaves to those whom they command  
And tenants to their people's pleasure stand.  
Add that the pow'r for property allowed

775 Is mischievously seated in the crowd,  
For who can be secure of private right  
If sovereign sway may be dissolved by might?  
Nor is the people's judgement always true:  
The most may err as grossly as the few.

And faultless kings run down, by common cry,  
For vice, oppression, and for tyranny.  
What standard is there in a fickle rout,  
Which, flowing to the mark, runs faster out?

785 Nor only crowds, but Sanhedrins may be  
Infected with this public lunacy  
And share the madness of rebellious times  
To murder monarchs for imagined crimes.  
If they may give and take when'er they please,  
Not kings alone (the Godhead's images),  
But government itself at length must fall  
To nature's state, where all have right to all.

790 Yet, grant our lords the people kings can make,  
What prudent men a settled throne would shake?  
For, whatso'er their sufferings were before,  
That change they covet makes them suffer more.  
All other errors but disturb a state,  
But innovation is the blow of fate.

800 If ancient fabrics nod and threat to fall,  
To patch the flaws and buttress up the wall,  
Thus far 'tis duty; but here fix the mark,  
For all beyond it is to touch our ark.

805 To change foundations, cast the frame anew,  
Is work for rebels who base ends pursue,  
At once divine and human laws control,  
And mend the parts by ruin of the whole.

810 The tampering world is subject to this curse,  
To physic their disease into a worse.  
Now what relief can righteous David bring?  
How fatal 'tis to be too good a king!

815 Friends he has few, so high the madness grows,  
Who dare be such must be the people's foes:  
Yet some there were, ev'n in the worst of days;  
Some let me name, and naming is to praise.

In this short file Barzillai first appears,  
Barzillai crowned with honour and with years;  
Long since, the rising rebels he withstood  
In regions waste beyond the Jordan's flood;



Unfortunately brave to buoy the state,  
But sinking underneath his master's fate,  
In exile with his godlike prince he mourned,  
For him he suffered and with him returned.

825 The court he practised, not the courier's art,  
Large was his wealth, but larger was his heart,  
Which well the noblest objects knew to choose,  
The fighting warrior and recording muse.

830 His bed could once a fruitful issue boast:  
Now more than half a father's name is lost.  
His eldest hope, with every grace adorned,  
By me (so heav'n will have it) always mourned  
And always honoured, snatched in manhood's prime  
By unequal fates and Providence's crime;

835 Yet not before the goal of honour won,  
All parts fulfilled of subject and of son,  
Swift was the race, but short the time to run.  
Oh narrow circle but of pow'r divine,

840 Scanted in space but perfect in thy line!  
By sea, by land, thy matchless worth was known,  
Arms thy delight, and war was all thy own:  
Thy force, infused, the fainting Tyrians propped,  
And haughty Pharaoh found his fortune stopped.

845 Oh ancient honour, Oh unconquered hand,  
Whom foes unpunished never could withstand!  
But Israel was unworthy of thy name:  
Short is the date of all immoderate fame.

850 It looks as heaven our ruin had designed  
And durst not trust thy fortune and thy mind.  
Now, free from earth, thy disencumbered soul  
Mounts up and leaves behind the clouds and starry pole:  
From thence thy kindred legions mayst thou bring  
To aid the guardian angel of thy king.

855 Here stop, my muse; here cease thy painful flight;  
No pinions can pursue immortal height:  
Tell good Barzillai thou canst sing no more,  
And tell thy soul she should have fled before;  
Or fled she with his life, and left this verse  
To hang on her departed patron's hearse?

860 Now take thy steepy flight from heav'n, and see  
If thou canst find on earth another he;  
Another he would be too hard to find;  
See then whom thou canst see not far behind.

865 Zadock the priest, whom, shunning power and place,  
His lowly mind advanced to David's grace;  
With him the Sagan of Jerusalem,  
Of hospitable soul and noble stem;  
Him of the western dome, whose weighty sense  
Flows in fit words and heavenly eloquence.

870 The prophets' sons, by such example led,  
To learning and to loyalty were bred,  
For colleges on bounteous kings depend,  
And never rebel was to arts a friend.

875 To these succeed the pillars of the laws,  
Who best could plead and best can judge a cause.  
Next them a train of loyal peers ascend:  
Sharp-judging Adriel, the muses' friend,

880 Himself a muse – in Sanhedrin's debate  
True to his prince, but not a slave of state,  
Whom David's love with honours did adorn  
That from his disobedient son were torn.

885 Jotham of piercing wit and pregnant thought,  
Endued by nature, and by learning taught  
To move assemblies, who but only tried  
The worse awhile, then chose the better side,  
Nor chose alone, but turned the balance too;  
So much the weight of one brave man can do.

890 Hushai, the friend of David in distress,  
In public storms of manly steadfastness,  
By foreign treaties he informed his youth  
And joined experience to his native truth.

895 His frugal care supplied the wanting throne,  
Frugal for that, but bounteous of his own;  
'Tis easy conduct when exchequers flow,  
But hard the task to manage well the low,  
For sovereign power is too depressed or high  
When kings are forced to sell, or crowds to buy.



Indulge one labour more, my weary muse,  
For Amiel, who can Amiel's praise refuse?  
Of ancient race by birth, but nobler yet

In his own worth, and without title great.  
The Sanhedrin long time as chief he ruled,  
Their reason guided and their passion cooled;

So dexterous was he in the crown's defence,  
So formed to speak a loyal nation's sense,  
That as their band was Israel's tribes in small,  
So fit was he to represent them all.

Now rasher charioteers the seat ascend,  
Whose loose careers his steady skill commend:  
They, like th' unequal ruler of the day,  
Misguide the seasons and mistake the way,  
While he withdrawn at their mad labour smiles  
And safe enjoys the sabbath of his toils.

These were the chief, a small but faithful band  
Of worthies in the breach who dared to stand  
And tempt th' united fury of the land.

With grief they viewed such powerful engines bent  
To batter down the lawful government.  
A numerous faction, with pretended frights,  
In Sanhedrins to plume the regal rights.  
The true successor from the court removed,  
The Plot by hiring witnesses improved.

These ills they saw, and as their duty bound,  
They showed the king the danger of the wound:  
That no concessions from the throne would please,  
But lenitives fomented the disease;

That Absalom, ambitious of the crown,  
Was made the lure to draw the people down;  
That false Achitophel's pernicious hate  
Had turned the Plot to ruin church and state;  
The council violent, the rabble worse;  
That Shimei taught Jerusalem to curse.

With all these loads of injuries oppressed,  
And long revolving in his careful breast  
Th' event of things, at last his patience tired,  
Thus from his royal throne, by heav'n inspired,

The godlike David spoke: with awful fear  
His train their Maker in their master hear.

'Thus long have I, by native mercy swayed,  
My wrongs dissembled, my revenge delayed,  
So willing to forgive th' offending age,  
So much the father did the king assuage.

But now so far my clemency they slight,  
Th' offenders question my forgiving right.  
That one was made for many, they contend,  
But 'tis to rule, for that's a monarch's end.

They call my tenderness of blood, my fear,  
Though many tempers can the longest bear.  
Yet since they will divert my native course,  
'Tis time to show I am not good by force.

Those heaped affronts that haughty subjects bring  
Are burdens for a camel, not a king:  
Kings are the public pillars of the state,  
Born to sustain and prop the nation's weight.

If my young Samson will pretend a call  
To shake the column, let him share the fall:  
But oh that yet he would repent and live!  
How easy 'tis for parents to forgive!

With how few tears a pardon might be won  
From nature, pleading for a darling son!  
Poor pitied youth, by my paternal care  
Raised up to all the height his frame could bear,

Had God ordained his fate for empire born,  
He would have given his soul another turn;  
Gulled with a patriot's name, whose modern sense  
Is one that would by law supplant his prince,

The people's brave, the politician's tool,  
Never was patriot yet, but was a fool.  
Whence comes it that religion and the laws  
Should more be Absalom's than David's cause?

His old instructor, ere he lost his place,  
Was never thought endured with so much grace.  
Good heavens, how faction can a patriot paint!  
My rebel ever proves my people's saint!

975 Would *they* impose an heir upon the throne?  
Let Sanhedrins be taught to give their own.

A king's at least a part of government,  
And mine as requisite as their consent;  
Without my leave a future king to choose  
980 Infers a right the present to depose;

True, they petition me t' approve their choice,  
But Esau's hands suit ill with Jacob's voice.

My pious subjects for my safety pray,  
Which to secure they take my power away.

985 From plots and treasons heav'n preserve my years,  
But save me most from my petitioners.

Unsatiate as the barren womb or grave,  
God cannot grant so much as they can crave.

990 What then is left but with a jealous eye  
To guard the small remains of royalty?

The law shall still direct my peaceful sway,  
And the same law teach rebels to obey;

Votes shall no more established pow'r control,  
Such votes as make a part exceed the whole;

995 No groundless clamours shall my friends remove  
Nor crowds have power to punish ere they prove:

For gods, and godlike kings, their care express  
Still to defend their servants in distress.

1000 Oh that my power to saving were confined:  
Why am I forced, like heav'n, against my mind,

To make examples of another kind?  
Must I at length the sword of justice draw?

O curst effects of necessary law!  
How ill my fear they by my mercy scan:

1005 Beware the fury of a patient man.  
Law they require; let law then show her face;

They could not be content to look on grace  
Her hinder parts, but with a daring eye

1010 To tempt the terror of her front, and die.  
By their own arts 'tis righteously decreed

Those dire artificers of death shall bleed.  
Against themselves their witnesses will swear,  
Till viper-like their mother plot they tear

1015 And suck for nutriment that bloody gore  
Which was their principle of life before.

Their Belial with their Beelzebub will fight;  
Thus on my foes, my foes shall do me right;

Nor doubt th' event, for factious crowds engage  
1020 In their first onset all their brutal rage.

Then let 'em take an unresisted course,  
Retire and traverse, and delude their force;

But when they stand all breathless, urge the fight  
And rise upon 'em with redoubled might,

1025 For lawful pow'r is still superior found;  
When long driven back, at length it stands the ground.

He said. Th' Almighty, nodding, gave consent,  
And peals of thunder shook the firmament.

Henceforth a series of new time began,  
The mighty years in long procession ran:

1030 Once more the godlike David was restored,  
And willing nations knew their lawful lord.

## THE PROLOGUE AT OXFORD (1680)

This Prologue was spoken before an Oxford performance of Elkanah Settle's *The Female Prelate*, a play written to take advantage of a supposed 'Popish Plot', whereby a group of Roman Catholics were thought to have conspired to assassinate the king and take over the country. By 1680 any reference to the Plot was deeply charged; Dryden associates the principles of the Whigs, who were using Plot propaganda to attack the court, with those of the rebels of the 1640s, who closed the theatres. See the notes to *Absalom and Achitophel*.

The text is from the first edition of *Miscellany Poems* (Macdonald 42a).

4. 'Thespis is said to have carried his poems in carts' (Horace, *Ars Poetica* 276).
- 5-6. According to Horace (*Ars Poetica* 278-9), after Thespis discovered tragedy, Aeschylus invented the tragic mask and robe, and built a stage of small boards.
8. Plays were frequently performed at Oxford in a tennis court - then an enclosed space with gallery.
12. The Presbyterians were the most numerous of the Dissenters; Tory propagandists sought to associate Whiggery in general with religious non-conformity.
18. *The Oxford Bells*, probably a propaganda piece, has not been traced.
20. To be carried off in a cart was to be carried to prison or the gallows.
22. The Prologue was spoken by an actor who portrayed a cardinal in the play, of which Pope Joan was the main character.
25. Duns Scotus, Francisco de Suarez and Thomas Aquinas were medieval scholars.

THE EPILOGUE SPOKEN TO THE KING  
AT OXFORD (1681)

This Epilogue was written for a performance of Charles Saunders's *Tamertam the Great*, staged at Oxford where Parliament was to meet on 21 March. This was the height of the Exclusion Crisis, in which the House of Commons supported and Charles II opposed a bill excluding from the succession Roman Catholics, and so Charles's brother and successor, James, Duke of York, who had converted by 1669. Some of the Exclusionist leaders appeared with armed retainers, and for a moment the country seemed on the verge of renewed civil war (cf. 19-20). In the event Charles dissolved

Parliament almost immediately, and the political tide turned against Exclusion. See *Absalom and Achitophel*, Dryden's great poem on the crisis. The text is from the first edition (Macdonald 95b).

1. The 'optic glass' is part of a camera obscura, which projects, through a lens, images of a 'landscape' and 'species' outside a room on to an interior surface.

## ABSALOM AND ACHITOPHEL (1681)

Dryden wrote *Absalom and Achitophel* as a piece of propaganda; he was poet laureate and historiographer royal, and between the late 1670s and the fall of 1681, when this poem appeared, Charles II, his Roman Catholic queen and his now Roman Catholic brother - and a number of their allies - were under attack in a crisis over the prospect of a Roman Catholic succession. Dryden may even have written the poem at the personal request of Charles II, or at the suggestion of one of his own patrons; he used the occasion to engage and to entertain the king and his allies, and to embarrass the Crown's enemies. In his portrayal of Charles, he sought not only to laugh away the king's sexual excess and the reproductive failures of the royal marriage but also to reclaim and refurbish the patriarchal authority of the monarch and to underpin the principles of passive obedience and lineal descent. He performed all these offices and more amidst tangled circumstances and under extraordinary partisan and civic pressures.

Charles had sired many children by many mistresses, but no heir by his wife. These habits and accidents of royal procreation had created a succession crisis: in the absence of a legitimate heir, the crown would pass to Charles's brother James, Duke of York, a professed Roman Catholic. This prospect excited every fear of absolute rule - of popery, slavery, subjugation to France and to Rome. The crisis, in turn, helped crystallize an opposition of Protestants, rebels, republicans and opportunists, who mustered support for an audacious proposal: exclude the duke from succession and appoint as substitute the dim but charismatic, Protestant but (alas) bastard, offspring of the king, James, Duke of Monmouth.

To bolster its programme, the opposition made ingenious use of a conspiracy theory, widely believed though largely false. In 1678 the mysterious murder of an eminent judge, a cloud of perjured witnesses, and a blizzard of broadsides, rumours and innuendos persuaded many that the queen, the Duke of York and a band of Jesuits had conspired in a 'Popish Plot' to kill the king and inaugurate Catholic rule. At the height of the mania, thirty-five Catholics were executed for their supposed complicity in

this 'Plot'. After the bloodletting, and in the face of much evidence to suggest that the 'Plot' itself was fiction, the rage subsided. The Whig opposition, now emerging from thuggery and faction into England's first organized political party, tested its powers by parliamentary manoeuvre. In 1680 its leader, the Earl of Shaftesbury, tried twice to pass a bill excluding James from succession. In 1681 Shaftesbury publicly urged Charles to legitimate Mommouth. The king had had enough: he dismissed Parliament in March, and on 2 July had Shaftesbury imprisoned on charges of high treason. Four months later, a packed jury refused to indict him.

Dryden's poem, appearing the week before the trial, told these stories in terms both daring and familiar. He cast the crisis as a scriptural drama and Dryden's audience eagerly identified the contemporary figures veiled beneath the biblical characters: Charles became King David, Mommouth David's wayward son Absalom, Shaftesbury the wily counsellor Achitophel. Factions of all sorts had long deployed parallels between England and Israel for instruction, for prophecy and exhortation, for mockery and even scandal, but no one had set all the possibilities of irony and celebration simultaneously in motion. Against the king's enemies Dryden turned their own rhetoric of scriptural sanctimony; in support of the king's friends he wrote hymns and elegies of praise; but on behalf of that most complex client, the king himself, Dryden discovered a way of portraying monarchy in a spirit at once appreciative, ironic and delicately abrasive. In the poem's mischievous opening lines we hear all these possibilities fully orchestrated. Charles's sexual energies, done up as divine fecundity, are simultaneously grand and titillating, munificent and comic. Such mixtures of tone suffuse all the actions and arguments of Dryden's poem – its images of authority, its satiric portraits, its theories of governance, its monologues and declamations – all the poem's traffic with the dangerous world of politics, plots and promiscuity.

The copy text is the first edition (Macdonald 12ai) supplemented with the sixteen lines added to the second edition (Macdonald 12ei). The following guide should help the reader navigate the poem's simultaneous allusion to the Bible and contemporary politics.

*Absalom* / *James Scott, Duke of Mommouth* (17-42 and passim). Absalom, David's third son, remarkable for his beauty and David's love for him, was forgiven for murdering David's eldest son Amnon in revenge for the rape of Absalom's sister Tamar. Some years later, he turned against David; his rebellious army forced David briefly to flee Jerusalem, but was defeated in battle soon after. During the battle Absalom was caught by his long hair in the branches of a tree, and killed against David's wishes by his general Joab. See 2 Samuel 13-19. Mommouth (1649-85), Charles's son by the actress Lucy Walter, enjoyed Charles's favour through most of the 1660s and

1670s. He married Anne, Countess of Buccleuch ('the charming Annabel', 34) in 1663, and distinguished himself as a soldier in Holland and Scotland during the 1670s – 'Amnon's murder' (39) has no clear referent in Mommouth's biography. Sent into exile at the Exclusion Crisis, Mommouth returned in defiance of Charles's wishes in 1679, made a public tour of the West Country in 1680 and appeared for the Oxford session of Parliament with an armed retinue in 1681 (see 682-752). Though not named in the Exclusion Bill, he was put forward by the Whigs as a suitable alternative to Charles's brother James, Duke of York (1633-1701), who had made a public avowal of conversion to Catholicism in 1672. The Duke of York was implicated in the Popish Plot by the discovery of correspondence between his secretary and Louis XIV's confessor. He has no biblical equivalent, and is mentioned in the poem only in Absalom's answer to Achitophel's temptation (353-60), Achitophel's rebuttal (441-54) and a summary of Absalom's public speeches (750).

*Achitophel* / *Anthony Ashley Cooper, Earl of Shaftesbury* (150-542 and passim). Achitophel was a counsellor of David who joined Absalom's rebellion and hanged himself when it failed (2 Samuel 15-17). Shaftesbury (1621-83) fought on both sides in the Civil War in the 1640s, served and opposed Cromwell in the 1650s, worked for the Restoration in 1660, served in Charles's ministry as chancellor – 'Abbedin' in Dryden's parallel (188) – from 1670 to 1674, and opposed Charles thereafter. He led the fight for the Exclusion Bill, and awaited indictment in the Tower of London on charges of high treason when Dryden's poem appeared.

*Amiel* / *John Sheffield, third Earl of Mulgrave* (877-81). Adriel married Saul's daughter Merab, whom Saul had previously offered to David. No one knows why Dryden should have identified him with Mulgrave (1648-1721), a minor poet, a friend of James, an enemy of Mommouth and one of Dryden's chief patrons.

*Amiel* / *Sir Edward Seymour* (899-913). There are two Amiels in the Old Testament: Machir son of Ammiel brings David supplies in 2 Samuel 17:27; Ammiel is the sixth son of a gatekeeper of the Temple in 1 Chronicles 26:5. Seymour (1633-1708), speaker of the House of Commons from 1673 to 1679, opposed Exclusion.

*Amnon* (39). See *Absalom*.

*Annabel* (34). See *Absalom*.

*Balaam* / *Theophilus Hastings, seventh Earl of Huntingdon* (574). In Numbers 22-4, Balaam, a gentile, tries to curse the Israelites, but God forces

him to bless them. Huntington (1650-1701) was a minor supporter of the Exclusion Bill.

*Barzillai* / *James Butler, Duke of Ormonde* (817-59). Barzillai, an eighty-year-old Gileadite, assists David during Absalom's rebellion (2 Samuel 17:27-9, 19:31-9). James Butler, Duke of Ormonde (1610-88), an Anglo-Irish nobleman, remained consistently loyal to both Charles I and Charles II, fighting for the father in Ireland in the 1640s and advising the son during his exile in the 1650s. His eldest son, Thomas Butler, Earl of Ossory (who has no biblical equivalent), had died in 1680 at the age of forty-six. In 1679 Ossory delivered a famous speech defending his father against Shaftesbury and opposing the Exclusion Bill. Both father and son were Dryden's patrons, as would be the grandson, the second Duke of Ormonde (see p. 573).

*Bathsheba* / *Louise de Kéroualle, Duchess of Portsmouth* (710). Bathsheba was one of David's wives, and the mother of Solomon. Portsmouth was, from her arrival in England in 1670, Charles's favourite mistress. She had been sent by Louis XIV and was suspected of intriguing in the French interest.

*Caleb* / *Arthur Capel, Earl of Essex* (574). Caleb (Numbers 13-14) is a good man; Dryden's choice of biblical analogue here is puzzling, based perhaps on the near anagram with Capel. Essex (1631-83) was an exclusionist lord.

*Korah* / *Tinus Oates* (632-81). Korah, a Levite, leads a conspiracy against Moses and Aaron as the Jews are wandering in the wilderness until God comes, and, at Moses' request, has the earth swallow him alive (Numbers 16). Oates (1649-1705), a weaver's son, was ejected from various appointments in the Church of England for sodomy and perjury. In 1677 he converted to Catholicism and was sent by the Jesuits to seminaries in Spain and, in 1678, Flanders, from both of which he was expelled (he later claimed to have got a doctorate from the University of Salamanca: see 658-9). On his return to England he pretended knowledge of a Roman Catholic plot to assassinate the king, usurp the government and convert or massacre the Protestant population. This came to the attention of the government in September 1678; Oates made a legal deposition, and eventually various arrests were made and trials held on the strength of his testimony and that of other witnesses, who offered their services after Oates's success became known. His written account of the Popish Plot grew eventually to eighty-one articles, all set out with elaborate circumstantial detail.

*David* / *Charles II* (1-10 and passim). The career of David, King of Israel, is recounted in the two books of Samuel. Absalom's rebellion against him appears in 2 Samuel 15-19. By the early 1680s Charles II (1630-85) had earned the disfavour of a great many of his subjects by a variety of means: his dalliance with his mistresses, his attempts to abrogate the Penal Laws against the Catholics, his alliance with France, and his various quarrels with Parliament over prerogative, privilege and money.

*Egypt* / *France* (118, 283, 705). In Exodus, Egypt enslaves the Jews until Moses leads them to the promised land. France was unpopular in England for its Catholicism and for the absolutist rule and imperial ambitions of Louis XIV (1638-1715), who appears in the poem as Pharaoh (281-6, 331, 398, 843). His is the 'foreign yoke' for which Shaftesbury is accused of preparing England when he broke the Triple Bond, England's alliance with Holland and Sweden, formed in 1668 and abrogated in 1670 in the Treaty of Dover, allying England with France.

*Gath* / *Brussels* (264). David spends part of his exile in Gath (1 Samuel 27: 1-7), Charles part of his in Brussels.

*Hebrew Priests* (128). See *Jews*.

*Hebron* / *Scotland* (59). David was made King of Judah in Hebron some years before becoming King of Israel on the death of Ishbosheth (see 2 Samuel 2:4, 5:3). Though Charles came to England from Holland in 1660, he had been crowned in Scotland in 1649.

*Hot Levites* / *Presbyterian Clergymen* (519). The Levites, descended from Aaron (cf. 525), were the tribe of Israel responsible for priestly functions. The Presbyterian clergy were excluded from the Church of England by the Act of Uniformity in 1662.

*Hushai* / *Laurence Hyde, Earl of Rochester* (888-97). Hushai, a friend of David, offers to accompany him into exile; David has him stay behind in Jerusalem in order to 'defeat the counsel of Ahithophel' (2 Samuel 15:34). Laurence Hyde, Earl of Rochester (1641-1711), the eldest son of the Earl of Clarendon, was made first lord of the Treasury in 1679. He was one of Dryden's patrons.

*Ishbosheth* / *Richard Cromwell* (58). Ishbosheth, Saul's son, was assassinated by David's supporters (2 Samuel 3-4). Richard Cromwell, Oliver's eldest son, was named Protector at his father's death but soon forced to retire by various army generals competing for Oliver's position.

*Issachar* / *Thomas Thynne* (738). In Genesis 49 Jacob mocks his son Issachar

for his laziness. Thynne (1648-82) was a friend of Monmouth, known mainly for his great wealth.

*Jehusites* / *Roman Catholics* (85-133 and passim). The Jehusites were non-Jewish people allowed by 'the children of Benjamin' to remain in Jerusalem (Judges 1:21); they try to prevent David's entry into Jerusalem, and he invites his followers to 'smite' them (2 Samuel 5:6-8). Roman Catholics were popularly regarded in seventeenth-century England as ruthless, conspiratorial bigots; Dryden's portrait is mild by contemporary standards: he emphasizes the silliness of their belief in transubstantiation (118-21) and the greed their clergy shares with Protestant clergy. After his initial show of impartiality in describing the Popish Plot (108-17) Dryden mentions it only to ridicule its implausibility (122-3, 130-33, 632-81).

*Jerusalem* / *London* (85).

*Jews* (45-66 and passim). At times Dryden uses the term to refer to the English in general, and at times to the Protestant English - 'Jewish Rabbins' (104) and 'Hebrew Priests' (128), for example, are Protestant clergy - at times specifically to the Whigs, the supporters of Exclusion.

*Jones* / *Sir William Jones* (581-2). The biblical name seems chosen here for its sound alone. Jones, attorney general 1675-9, was notorious for his violent prosecution of those charged with complicity in the Popish Plot. He was elected to the House of Commons in 1680, where he worked for Exclusion.

*Jordan's sand* / *Dover* (270). At the Restoration, Charles's landing at Dover was greeted by enthusiastic crowds.

*Jotham* / *George Savile, Marquis of Halifax* (882-7). In Judges 9, Abimelech usurps the throne, but Jotham, his youngest brother, makes a long speech against him. Halifax (1633-95), a nephew of Shaftesbury, was an important opponent of the court until 1679, when he became one of Charles's trusted ministers. His brilliant speeches during a debate with Shaftesbury in November 1680 were credited with securing the defeat of the Exclusion Bill in the House of Lords. He was among Dryden's patrons.

*Michal* / *Catherine of Braganza* (11, 750). Michal, Saul's daughter and David's wife, 'had no child unto the day of her death' (2 Samuel 6:23). Catherine, daughter of John IV of Portugal, married Charles II in 1662, but produced no heir. Oates implicated her in the Popish Plot.

*Nadab* / *William, Lord Howard of Esrick* (575-6). Nadab offers 'strange fire' before the Lord and is consumed (Leviticus 10:1-2). Howard (1626-94), a poor baron who for a time during the interregnum became an Anabaptist preacher, was said to have taken communion in an ale-based drink known as lamb's-wool; hence his 'new porridge for the paschal lamb'.

*Origen* ('To the Reader'). Greek church father (c. 185-c. 254).

*Pharaoh* (281-6, 331, 398, 843). See *Egypt*.

*Rehabeite* (617). Member of an ancient Jewish religious order (see Jeremiah 35).

*Sagan of Jerusalem* / *Henry Compton* (866-7). In Israel, a sagan was a deputy high-priest. Compton (1632-1713) became Bishop of London in 1675; he voted against the Exclusion Bill.

*Sanhedrin* / *Parliament* (390, 523, 787, 878, 902, 920, 976).

*Saul* / *Oliver Cromwell* (57, 417, 677). Saul was the first King of Israel, which before was ruled by judges. The prophet Samuel berated and rejected Saul after his failure to kill the captured Amalekite king Agag (see 676-7). Cromwell (1599-1658) ruled as 'Lord protector' in the 1650s; he also appears at line 515 wielding a 'conqueror's sword' at which the London mob 'cower and quake'.

*Shimei* / *Shingby Bethel* (585-629). Shimei throws rocks at David and curses him as 'thou bloody man, and thou man of Belial' as David flees Jerusalem. One of David's companions offers to go 'take off his head' but David prevents him: 'let him alone, and let him curse, for the Lord hath bidden him'. Bethel (1617-97), a leather-seller, was elected sheriff of London in 1680, and helped pack the grand jury that acquitted Whig propagandist Stephen College the following summer. Bethel wrote a pamphlet, *The Interests of Princes and States* (1680), and was notable for refusing to provide the aldermen their traditional dinner.

*Sion* (42). England.

*Solymean row* / *London mob* (513). Solymean means 'of Jerusalem'.

*Stephen* (643). First Christian martyr, accused of blasphemy by suborned witnesses (Acts 6:11-15).

*Triple Bond* (175). See *Egypt*.

*Tyne* / *Holland* (705, 842). England and Holland had engaged in three trade wars during the previous thirty years.



*Western Dome, Him of the* (868-9). John Dolben (1625-86), Dean of Westminster. He has no biblical equivalent.

*Zadock/William Sancroft* (864-5). Zadock, the chief of David's priests, offers to follow him into exile, but David advises him to remain in Jerusalem with the ark (2 Samuel 15:24-9). Sancroft (1617-93) became Archbishop of Canterbury in 1678.

*Zimri/George Villiers, second Duke of Buckingham* (543-68). In Numbers 25:6-14, Zimri was a worshipper of Baal-peor, one of the obscene idols who attracted the attention of the wandering Jews of the Pentateuch. For this, and for openly consorting with a Midianish woman, he was slain with a javelin, on Moses' orders. In 1 Kings 16:9-20, another Zimri kills Elah, a bad King of Israel, and then dies himself for his sins. Buckingham (1628-87), a friend of Charles's youth, served in his ministry from 1667 until 1674, when he was ejected at Parliament's urging; he then joined the opposition. Buckingham was the most prominent member of the group that collaborated in the creation of *The Rehearsal*, a play mocking heroic drama in general and Dryden in particular; it was published in 1672, but had reached the stage in December 1671.

*Epigraph*. 'The closer you stand, the more it captivates you' (Horace, *Mis Poetica* 361-2).

#### To the Reader

11. A *Bromingham* was a false Protestant because of Birmingham's reputation as a scene of counterfeiting; an anti-Bromingham was therefore a Tory.

33. *commonwealthsmen*. Those who would abolish the monarchy and set up a commonwealth, as during the interregnum.

68. Achitophel sets his house in order and then hangs himself (2 Samuel 17:23).

76. An *ense rescindendum* is an amputation; contemporary medical theory held that an opiate was no remedy for a raging fever.

#### *Absalom and Achitophel*

66. A *stare* is a commonwealth or republic, rather than a monarchy.

82. Like the phrase '41 is come again', 'The Good Old Cause' was used in the Exclusion Crisis first to conflate the reforming impulses of the 1640s with the radical republicanism of the 1650s, and then, polemically, to link the violence of mid century with the potential for renewed political violence at the present.

123. A rough estimate of the proportion in England of Protestants to Catholics.

180-91. These lines, and 957-60, were added to the 'second edition, augmented and revised'.

618. 'Shriveal' means 'of or relating to a sheriff'.

957-60. These lines, and 180-91, were added to the 'second edition, augmented and revised'.

#### PROLOGUE AND EPILOGUE TO THE UNHAPPY FAVOURITE (1682)

John Banks's *The Unhappy Favourite, or the Earl of Essex, a Tragedy* was first performed in 1681; Dryden's Prologue was published with the first edition of the play in 1682. The text is from that edition (Macdonald 118a), but incorporates the revisions Dryden made to the Epilogue in *Miscellany Poems* (Macdonald 42a).

#### Epilogue

2. 'Dop,' i.e., 'drop.'

5. The proceeds of public lotteries were consigned to Cavalier army officers after the Restoration, but were not reliably paid them.

14. The Theatre Royal had burned on 25 January 1672; William Lilly was a popular astrologer.

21. *The Hayfield Maid*, a pamphlet of early 1681, relates the supposed vision of a girl in Hatfield, warning the king of possible poisoning and advising him not to move Parliament to Oxford in March.

33. *Herculus Ridens* and *Democritus Ridens* were respectively Tory and Whig papers on the Exclusion Crisis, for which see *Absalom and Achitophel*.

26. Lampoons were short poems on scandalous topics, especially the supposed misdeeds of fashionable women.

#### THE MEDAL (1682)

On 24 November 1681 Anthony Ashley Cooper, first Earl of Shaftesbury, was released from the Tower of London; a grand jury, packed by the sheriffs of London with Whig sympathizers, had refused to indict him on charges of high treason for leading a conspiracy to seize the king and force him to sign the Exclusion Bill. The immediate occasion of Dryden's poem was the issuing of a medal that celebrated Shaftesbury's release, with the earl's head on one side and a view of London on the other; over the city appears the word *Letamur* ('let us rejoice'), and over that the sun emerges from a cloud.