

# Literature Revitalizes the Past: Historicizing John Dryden's Literary Contributions

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**ABSTRACT:** *Literature revitalizes the past by presenting a blended picture of the real and the imaginative, with Author's unique vision and experience. A literary text is thus an artistic representation of the culture in which it is written implying that a work of art is indispensable from the historical background of its age. In recent days most students and teachers consider it useless to study the writers of the bygone era which poses a severe threat to the perseverance of the tradition of Literary Classics. Hence, the study aims to revitalize the importance of studying literature of past centuries in present times by historicizing the literary contributions of John Dryden, a 17th-century poet. The approach of historicization is used to explain the socio-political environment in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and speculate how this environment has shaped the thematic content and style of Dryden's works.*

**Keywords:** Revitalize, Culture, Historicizing, Literature, John Dryden, Past, Literary Contributions.

## **Introduction:**

“Literature is the foundation of humanity’s cultures, beliefs, and traditions. It serves as a reflection of reality, a product of art, and a window to an ideology. Everything that happens within a society can be written, recorded in, and learned from a piece of literature.” (Lorenzo)

The broad spectrum of life finds its expression through the window of art and literature, literature is thus sometimes becoming a panoramic picture of its times. Chronicles and books of history are filled with typographic details influenced by the vested interests of political regimes. However, literature is free from such constraints while making use of several figurative language and literary devices, literary writers take high flight and full liberty to depict life, man and manners, political and religious turmoil, etc.

From the time of the Anglo-Saxons to the modern period in the 21<sup>st</sup> century literature has been used as a vehicle to present the ideologies, reflect the issues and conflicts, to raise voices against the societal and political injustices. Illustrating the *Canterbury Tales* where Chaucer mainly criticizes the corruption of the clergy and religious institutions. Similarly, the *Faire Queen* by Spencer unveils the hypocrisy of political and religious figures of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Likewise, 18th-century major social problems were marriage, materialism, and showiness which are well depicted in Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* and Oscar Wilde’s *Importance of Being Earnest*. In the same way, the French Revolution can be seen from the eyes of Charles Dickens’ in his *A Tale of two cities*. Nonetheless, the 19th-century dilemma of doubt and faith is mirrored in Tennyson’s *In Memoriam* while materialism is in the *vanity of human wishes* by Makepeace Thackeray. Moreover, 20th-century chaos, anarchy, confusion, boredom, and moral degradation can be well understood from Eliot’s *Hollow Men* and Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*. These are just a few examples out of many, supporting the argument that

literature depicts and nourishes the life and history of that particular era, making each literary piece a unique version of the past.

. “The more you know about the past, the better prepared you are for the future.”

(Theodore Roosevelt)

### **1. Research Question:**

- 1) Does a work of art or literature reflect its period in terms of culture, use of language, socio-political or religious background?

### **2. Research Objective:**

This research aims to revitalize the importance of studying literature of past centuries in present times by historicizing the literary contributions of John Dryden, a 17th-century poet. It aims to reinforce the notion that a literary text is an artistic representation of the culture in which it is written and that a work of art is indispensable from the historical background of its age.

### **3. Research Methodology:**

Historicization is an approach in research that is used to explain the work of an art's social environment in history and speculate how this environment may have shaped the work. It exposes how the social/economic/political background might shape the way an author looks at the issue and in turn, the researcher learns to look differently at his world. “This concept grew out of the feeling that many scholars analyzed texts and art in a vacuum, ignoring the important influences of historical situations. Instead of assuming that Shakespeare's plays are full of universal, timeless themes, these new, historically-oriented scholars would say that Shakespeare was a product of his environment and would match themes in the plays to concerns and developments in Elizabethan England.” (Fullmer)

This paper has deployed the approach of historicization to look at the socio-political background of the seventeenth-century or more precisely John Dryden's age through the lens of Dryden's literary works. However, the current study focuses only on those works of John Dryden which represent any social, political, or religious event of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Historicization provides an insight to look differently at the history of certain period. Regarding Dryden's literary contributions students of history can read Dryden to know about the political conflicts of the time, social phenomena, mindset, and mannerisms, religious controversies and above all the literary and ideological revolutions that took place in that era. Knowing that the student of the 21<sup>st</sup> century can better understand his own society.

#### **4. Findings and Discussion:**

##### **4.1. Historicizing John Dryden's Literary Contributions**

John Dryden is considered as the most representative poet of his age therefore to historicize Dryden's literary contributions is to look at his age- seventeenth century with his unique outlook however it is not only Dryden who reflects his age but nearly every author with few exceptions glorified and mirrored his era with his insight on the socio-political scenario of his times. Novak Maximillian, an author of *John Dryden's Politics: The Rabble and Sovereignty* recorded from his observation of the conversation between Thomas Hobbes and William Davenant, the two writers agreed that "it was the duty of the writer to glorify the sovereign by creating images of heroism and greatness that would make him or her appear to belong to a sphere beyond the reach of ordinary mortals...[c]ertainly Dryden followed such a program in his serious plays" (Maximillian 86)

During the period from 1660 to 1688, Charles I ruled as an absolute monarch, effectively consolidating his power over the country. It was during this time that John Dryden was born in Northampton, shire, in 1631.

“Dryden’s life span encompassed what still must be regarded as the most significant watershed in England’s political history – the period of the Civil Wars and the Interregnum. It was an upheaval cataclysmic enough to generate shock waves on through the remainder of the poet’s life” (Fowles xviii)

Given the subject matter, it's not surprising that politics become a prominent theme in his literary work. All centuries are marked by various political upheavals by various religious issues, and much like any other English period, this period too was significant in its way. The moment Charles II came back, there was a literal restoration and renaissance of literature and entertainment. The Restoration was a period of change in both literature and politics. King Charles II was restored to power, and he brought with him an influx of French culture. The theaters opened with new energy and new vigor. However, the issues that had been presented as a basis for reform soon became contentious yet again, with one side favoring monarchical prerogative and the other side advocating for limits on it. (Maurice 163). However, John Dryden emerged as a prominent figure who supported the views of the king and had written a series of poems in praise of Charles II that were published after the restoration, catching the attention of the royal family. He became an important literary figure of that time. Firstly, the significance of John Dryden's background can be seen in the way he reflected in his works. He was born in a Puritan setup. Even though most of his family members were loyal to the Commonwealth – those who supported Oliver Cromwell – he had other ideas. He was, in fact, a strong supporter of the Church of England and even the Royal Family. This is why different parts of his nation saw him as a traitor.

Dryden’s life was marked by various socio-political events that are evident in his works. Looking at his youth and education, one understands that he grew up in a country marked by civil war: the civil war was a constant conflict between Parliamentarians and Royalists. The civil war was significant because it brought about a constant struggle between the monarchy and parliament, two groups often at odds, and it also provided

the foundation for many other developments in English history. The king was executed, Charles II went into exile, and England began to be ruled by the Commonwealth. Oliver Cromwell led a puritanical government until 1660 when he was overthrown by Charles II. Later in 1644, Dryden began his education at Westminster School under the celebrated Richard Busby, an Anglican priest and royalist supporter who headed the school for more than 45 years. This established Dryden's reputation as a writer with royalist leanings. Although it is difficult to determine precisely what Dryden's political and religious attitude was at that time since literature is open to interpretations, it perhaps suggests that one cannot conclude that Dryden was an ardent royalist in 1651 since he had a family who was supporters of the rule of Cromwell and was not faithful royalists, but this may be the point in time when he may have begun to support and have royal sympathies.

#### **4.1.1. Heroic Stanzas**

The "Heroic Stanzas" was the first important work of Dryden written in praise of Cromwell while avoiding criticism of royalty and religion. Dryden always favored peace from civil strife, and when the situation turned chaotic in the wake of Cromwell's death, he welcomed the return of Charles II.

Charles recalled Parliament to ask for money, as a solution to the failure of his religious policy in Scotland, which had sparked tensions between Scotland and England which erupted into a war. The members of the Long Parliament, who came to be known as "the Long Parliament," were in a state of dejection when they first convened. They displayed no interest in reform but rather wanted to start a revolution against the monarchy (Maurice 73) As a result, the privileges of the king were threatened (Ibid 77). Charles had to decide whether he wanted to fight for his liberties or relinquish them to maintain peace. He chose to protect his liberties, which resulted in the Civil War.

Dryden political stance at the time favored Charles I when he "refused to plead his case", as he asserted that "[t]he King cannot be tried by any superior jurisdiction on earth" (Ibid 87)

Nevertheless, this didn't prevent him from being executed in 1649. During the next decade, England remained a republic, commonly remembered as the Commonwealth. Dryden also worked for Commonwealth "in Cromwell's bureaucracy" (Lewalski 344)

During the Interregnum, when Charles I was held captive by Parliament, Cromwell held the office of Lord Protector of England. This period was controversial and fueled tension between royalists and republicans alike. He was criticized by both parties for his quasi-regal authority. "He was condemned as a tyrant, mocked as a false king and ridiculed for his appearance: Cromwell's nose was one of the most common features of satirical verse in the 1650s." (Santos Brigida 150)

It is a period characterized by "a practical humanism" brought about by its specific "political, economic, and intellectual conditions" (Humphreys 20) These conditions were the outcome of the "dynamic and explosive conceptions of religion and politics" (Ibid 19-20) during the Civil War and later period which "provoked a desire for harmony" (Ibid 20) Dryden helped create this period with his support for the restoration of a monarchy.

In his poem "Heroic Stanza" on Oliver Cromwell's death (1659), Dryden avoids naming or describing any specific battles in the English Civil War and instead presents it in medical language. (Winn) The poem became popular for its brevity its psychological insight and literary style. Dryden contrasts Cromwell with his predecessors, the generals who served before he took over. The former generals had become incompetent physicians, while Cromwell was a gentle and helpful surgeon:

*Warre our consumption was their gainful trade,*

*We inward bled whilst they prolong our pain:*

*He fought to end our fighting and said*

*To stanch the blood by breathing the vein.* (Lines 45-8)

It was not only Dryden but a diverse group of writers, artists, and philosophers in seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century England (Restoration writers) who commonly drew analogies between the arts and the body, between the commonwealth and an ordered universe, and between the artist and the statesman due to their desire for stability and fear of violent upheaval. (Shelton)

However, "Heroic Stanza" is characterized by a lack of clear characterization and ambiguity in its presentation, which makes it difficult to discern any coherent republican ideology from the text. His style reflected the time, and his literary innovations were important in representing the complicated cultural and political changes.

#### **4.1.2. Astraea Redux**

Dryden's first piece of Restoration literature was a poem titled *Astraea Redux*, which he wrote to celebrate the return to England of Charles II in 1660. As scholars and historians claim, John Dryden wrote *Astraea Redux* as a literary tribute to the newly restored monarchy in England. However, the poem does not hold an absolute view of the Restoration. Although Dryden did join the Restoration party and become the first British Laureate, he did so for pragmatic reasons that are revealed in the tone. Dryden's poem, which satirized the monarchy, was not anti-monarchical in spirit, but worldly in nature. (Napoleon799)

In other words, Dryden's skepticism combined with his acute perceptions created the satiric nature of his poem. Dryden's view about the impact of conspiracies in England is rooted in his knowledge and experience of the tragic events of history. He aims to remind everyone how terrible these calamitous actions were. The poem describes past events and ends with a reference to the Restoration, a time of great political change.

The focal point of this poem is the conflict between a land without a king and government but with religious turmoil. The opening lines introduce this conflict, as well as the loss of faith in fellow man. This loss of faith Dryden exemplifies from "*a sullen interval of war: / Thus when black clouds draw down the laboring skies, / Ere yet abroad the winged thunder*



*flies, / An horrid stillness first invades the ear, / And in that silence we the tempest fear” (Lines 4-8).*

England was on the verge of igniting turmoil again. Dryden makes it clear that he is worried about another civil war developing and causing havoc for England's people. Dryden's argument states that this war would be pointless and ultimately worsen the economy of England.

*“Church and State did groan; / Madness the pulpit, faction seized the throne” (21-22)*

Dryden's tone has two aspects: he criticizes the government on behalf of the people although he does not mention the consequences of Oliver Cromwell's ruling. From his historical perspective, Dryden saw Cromwell's reforms as progressive and necessary. He believed that Cromwell kept England under order. Suppressing Irish and Scottish insurgencies is one of the instances that prove Cromwell's progressive reforms. Cromwell defeated the Scots at the Battle of Dunbar in 1650, Dryden chooses to purposefully isolate the victory of Cromwell over Scotland along with many other victories. The two possible explanations for why he did this may be: He was concerned to omit details that would trivialize his serious complaint and included only points that would make his story more powerful or though he was skeptical of the monarchy and Parliament, Dryden was not skeptical of Cromwell's effectiveness in ruling—nor did he want to alienate the king by mentioning him. After Oliver Cromwell lost power and John Milton was “arrested as a defender of the Commonwealth, fined, and soon released”, English poet John Dryden reacted with a witty and sarcastic critique. (Napoleon799)

It is important to note that, Dryden was writing in a time that involved the classical epideictic tradition of praise and blame thus, understanding this critical concept is essential to fully understand Dryden's work.

#### **4.1.3. Annus Mirabilis**

The year of publication of *Annus Mirabilis* (1669) was the turning point in Dryden's career. Charles II, who knew that Dryden was more valuable to his cause as a writer than as a commander, appointed him Poet Laureate a year after the publication of this poem. It was no coincidence that the book published in 1669 was so successful at this time; *Annus Mirabilis* was a response to a national crisis, and its rhetoric shows that it fits into Restoration England's social order. For a sectarian critic like Ambrose Bigge, eager for the return to power of Cromwell's Saints, the "expensive war," the "consuming Pestilence," and the "more consuming Fire" were wondrous signs of divine judgment heralding the demise of Stuart sovereignty. (Stillman) London's radical press churned out dozens of pamphlets making similar claims about the Stuart monarchy. However, Dryden defended the Stuart monarchy against such attacks by adopting and transforming the revolutionary rhetoric of his opposition. Rather than seeing all of it as God's judgment on London, Dryden sees it as a trial through which Charles II empowered by knowledge and providence, triumphs wonderfully. God, science, and Charles stand as the poem's trinity of heroes who empower each other in their quest for knowledge about nature. In this way, Dryden paints a visionary portrait of the sovereign as philosopher king—piously turning knowledge about nature into knowledge about government. Samuel Johnson wrote that poet John Dryden used the phrase "*Annus mirabilis*" to suggest that things had improved from past years because they could have been worse. (Cronin)

Zwicker argues that Dryden's "stanzas associate empire, abundance, and solicitude with the king; they heighten valor as a princely motive and argue commercial gain as the national will". Dryden's poem was written to "create a national ethos and offered a vision of an ascendant England ruling the oceans." (Zwicker 102)

Edward N. Hooker (1946) explains this purpose in "The Purpose of Dryden's *Annus Mirabilis*." He writes that rather than judgments, these disasters are trials that will bind the king and people together when the English people set aside their factiousness and accept the wise and providential leadership of Charles II. (51)

The First Dutch War, which lasted from 1652 to 1654 and pitted the United Provinces against Spain and its allies, demonstrated Charles II's capability as a military commander. When war was inevitable, Charles II prepared his navy in advance and selected capable leaders such as the Duke of York, who led the English to victory at Lowestoft on June 2-3, 1665. The poem likens England to a careful and powerful husband whose absence is mourned by a chaste wife and children (Shelton) Dryden also compared Charles II to Aeneas, a prudent leader who accepts the will of heaven while also recognizing that a strong navy ensures commercial might. He further demonstrates his wisdom by personally seeing the repairs of England's ships after battle since this enables commercial strength.

However, due to the elaborate praise of Charles II throughout the poem, critics classify it as a panegyric written to celebrate the King and his rule. To achieve his goal, Dryden focused on historical events, reinterpreted them, and made them resound in glory.

*“It was written . . . in the wake of disasters that stirred fears and resentments and prompted cries of divine judgment against the court and its quality and conduct, and the poem spends considerable effort at interpreting and reinterpreting these facts of national life”* (Dryden 526)

Moreover, in his poem Dryden's tried to bring readers back to the past, reminding them that England's problems were not new and could be solved by examining countries adversaries and human nature in general. This is significant when addressing certain members of society who blame the war on divine retribution.

Some people believed that God was the author of history and that natural disasters. For instance, it was perceived that God was discontent with the restoration of King Charles II to the throne, as evidenced by many fires in London. In Stanza 16, Dryden combines the idea of portents with an

easy victory over the Dutch to suggest that God was happy about England's policy against Dutch. Dryden through the use of figurative language compared the events of 1664 when two comets were observed to candles sent by Angels to guide England:

*To see this fleet upon the oceans move  
Angels drew wide the curtains of the skies,  
And Heav'n, as if there wanted lights above,  
For tapers made two glaring comets rise.*

Stanza 192 describes Dryden's intention to enlighten the readers and them that both parties in a conflict can seek guidance from God. In these lines, the poet can be seen contemplating Dutch notions:

*Their battered admiral too soon withdrew,  
Unthank'd by ours for his unfinished fight,  
But he the minds of his Dutch Masters knew,  
Who called that Providence which we called flight.*

Despite England's horrifying experiences and natural catastrophes, Dryden remained positive and inculcated hope in people. He imagined a new city rising from the ashes 'with silver paved, and all divine with gold' which will last until 'the death of time.' (Line 121)

*Me-thinks already, from this Chymick flame,  
I see a City of more precious mold:  
Rich as the Town which gives the Indies name,  
With Silver paved, and all divine with Gold. (Lines 1169–72)*

In *Annus Mirabilis*, Dryden took a Providentialist (a term which means "God-directed") approach to the London fire contrary to

the common opinion in his day that it was Catholic arsonists who set the city ablaze. Dryden's Olympian outlook enabled him to remain less exposed to partisan passions when he wrote about historical topics and perhaps this is why his fellow writers admired him so much.

#### **4.1.4. Absalom and Achitophel**

Dryden wrote *Absalom and Achitophel* in 1681, during a great political turmoil in England. The poem was suggested by King Charles II himself. By the late 1680s, there was widespread concern about who would succeed King Charles II upon his death. Both James, Duke of York, and his brother Charles were contenders for the throne. The poem was published in November 1681 under the title *Absalom and Achitophel*, meaning "Protection" and "Disobedience." The poem was also titled as a political satire of several characters. Still, the author's intentions are unclear—whether he intended to base his work on pure satire or some other type of literature, such as epic poetry.

It is generally believed that *Absalom and Achitophel* is a short heroic poem with satirical elements but contrary to this belief Sir Walter Scott in his preface calls it "indisputably the best and most nervous political satire that ever was written." (Scott 197) It is important to note that *Absalom and Achitophel* was written at a time when religion was an open issue and Dryden's criticism of the Church is pointed and sharp, mocking not only Protestantism but also transubstantiation and the priesthood.

Between 1678 and 1681, anti-Catholic hysteria was at a fever pitch. People were looking for answers, and they found them in a scandal known as the Popish Plot. Titus Oates created the hoax about a Catholic conspiracy to assassinate the king; it was so convincing that even the king was temporarily taken in. The Popish Plot was a hoax, and no evidence has ever been found to support it, but this incident led directly to the execution of 22 innocent people and set in motion the Exclusion Crisis.

Before examining Dryden's response to the Popish plot, two points of significance are worth noting. The problems for the political class in England were twofold: First, Charles had not been able to produce an heir

with Catherine of Braganza. This meant that, by right of succession, if Charles died without an heir, then his brother James would inherit the throne. Second, James was a Catholic and hence he was unacceptable as King of England. James' conversion to Catholicism in 1668-9 was initially a secret, but when he publicly refused to attend religious ceremonies at the chapel royal in 1672, it became public knowledge. (Keay 160,162) This led to an increase in anti-Catholic feelings among members of Parliament, especially when James remarried in 1673 to an Italian Catholic princess (Ibid 164)

The family of Charles I produced two daughters, Anne and Mary. However, both died without issue. Without any direct heirs, the Stuarts were to face several political problems after the king's execution in 1649. These problems further lead to the Glorious Revolution of 1688 when England would switch from a monarchy to a constitutional monarchy. The Glorious Revolution initiated a process by which the power of the crown would gradually be reduced, and parliament would effectively become the sole sovereign in the realm.

This poem uses the disguise of a Biblical story to satirize the political situation of the times in which it was written. The poem describes an existing crisis and the political issues of contemporary society (Yu 6)

Achitophel convinced Absalom to revolt against King David, who represents James Scott. Absalom is a representation of James Scott and Achitophel represents the Earl of Shaftesbury. Dryden satirizes both characters using Biblical allegory. The satire continues from leader to adherents—the Whigs.

Throughout the poem, the poet attempts to inform King Charles that James Scott was not to be blamed and accused because the Earl of Shaftesbury was the one who aroused the rebellion against him. The poem also ridiculed and satirized King Charles but in a gentle tone. He points out the King liked to keep multiple wives and numerous slaves. (Dryden 93)

In addition, it depicts a metaphor for contemporary political circumstances and a false heroic story. Dryden refers to it as a poem without being ironic, which means that it possesses components that are different from those found in mere ironic ones. (Hopkins) In the poem's opening, Dryden affirms that the proper finish of satire lies in amending and correcting the vices. He also points out that in this poem he tried his best not to make the satire very severe and acute, as he understands that such harshness might not be fitting for those who are less corrupted. (Stapleton)

Moreover, Dryden affirms that he hoped to treat all factions fairly, yet he also understands that "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." He stated he would take comfort in knowing that the opposition would surely publicize "manifest prejudice to my cause", because of which their judgment would be rendered less authoritative against me.

Besides the trenchant portrayal of the king's opposition, Dryden puts before his readers the political issue that inspired his poem, whether or not parliament has the authority to deny the king's brother a right of succession.

*Did ever men forsake their present ease, in midst of health Imagine a disease; Take pains Contingent mischiefs to foresee, Make Heirs for Monarchs, and for God decree?* (Lines 755-58)

His opposition to Exclusion, according to Schilling, is for "poetic reasons" or a conservative myth that offers a "fully developed rational argument" for "the right political system." (Schilling and Dryden 239)

Dryden chose the well-known Biblical story of Absalom revolting against his father David at the wicked instigation of Achitophel to satirize the contemporary political situation. The choice of a Biblical allegory is not original on Dryden's part, but his treatment of the subject is beyond

comparison, as Courthope states. However, he also makes sure that the political satire is not lost in confusion due to intricate Biblical parallelism.

One advantage of setting the story in pre-Christian times (as Dryden did) is obvious: Dryden could praise the King and satirize his opponents at once. To discredit these opponents, he had to emphasize Monmouth's illegitimacy; however, at the same time avoid implying that Charles's morals were so loose that they should be criticized openly.

He deftly lays the poem;

*In pious times priestcraft did begin*

*Before polygamy was made a sin.*

*When a man on multiplied his kind,*

*Ere one to one was cursedly confined....*

Dryden's use of irony is intentional, as he is laughing at Charles himself, who, as a witty patron, could have appreciated the joke. Dryden's poetry from the early 1680s presents a strong argument in favor of the Stuart monarchs.

#### **4.1.5. The Medal**

The Medal is a political cum personal satire that came in continuation of Absalom and Achitophel, only in terms of an attack on Shaftesbury who is ruthlessly though indirectly criticized by John Dryden. The Medal contextualizes the historical event of 1681 when Shaftesbury was charged with treason but released from the jury and the victory was publicly celebrated by Whigs. Dryden was outraged on this dismissal of charges against Shaftesbury as well as the jurors. As Fowles points out, *The Medal* is a work in which Dryden “opts less for subtlety than outright condemnation” (Fowles 105) and “confronts the Earl” i.e. Shaftesbury – “in fully frontal attack” (Ibid 104).



In the given lines Dryden expounds on the dangers of mob rule and defended hereditary succession and the 'inherent right' of monarchs. (Elloway 12)

"Almighty crowd, thou shortest all disputes.

Power is thy Essence, Wit thy Attribute!

Nor Faith nor Reason make thee at a stay,

Thou least o'er all Eternal truths in thy *Pindarique* way! (Hopkins 65)

#### **4.1.6. Religio Laici and The Hind and the Panther.**

Religious havoc and political mayhem were running parallel in the times of John Dryden when the most difficult answer was perhaps to declare your support for either Catholics or Protestants. The question of religion was intertwined with the political one as it mainly depends on who the ruling monarch is. Hume believes that Puritans were associated with a certain attitude. Puritans were against the influence of Kings and wanted to limit their power. (David 259) Religious zealotry intensified the conflict between the two sides, which led to the political dialogue being poisoned by religious bias. John Dryden being the most representative poet of his times penned down the religio-political dilemma of his age in his most controversial satires *Religio Laici* and *The Hind and the Panther*.

*Religio Laici* or a layman's faith was undoubtedly a plea for the Anglican Church and a staunch critique of the influence of the Catholic Church in state affairs. With the ascension of James II to the English throne Dryden took a U-turn and shifted his religious loyalty alongside the political favors which is also the result of moral degradation of his age. The conversion to Catholicism and Dryden's support for it is mirrored in his second satire, *The Hind, and the Panther*. It is the sharp contradiction to the previous stance Dryden took in *Religio Laici*. The two satires combined reflected the true temperament of the age. As mentioned earlier, the question of religious favor was the

overarching phenomenon of seventeenth century hence Dryden reflected this dilemma by writing these two satires. Written after three years *The Hind and The Panther* was the religious allegory and the representative of Dryden's new conviction. The 17<sup>th</sup> century was marked by the emergence of new churches and belief systems to which though Parliament was hostile yet the English kings were steadily becoming a part of this new religious fervor. So much so that Charles II was also inclined towards Catholic Church though secretly. However, James II was an open catholic, promoting Catholicism and supporting Catholics by giving them high offices and political favors.

## **5. Conclusion**

Life would have been no expression if there was no literature. For it depicts life as a transcript of the author's unique understanding and vision than a photographic reality. Literature and life are so intertwined with each other that the existence of one is not possible without the other so is the relationship of an author with his age. Therefore, to study the use of language by a particular nation in a specific period, the life, men, and mannerisms of that culture, and the socio-political and economic conditions of the era— a literary text of that era must be read.

This study concludes that John Dryden is truly regarded as the most representative poet of his age for his marvelous capacity to capture the spirit of the age and represents the socio-political, literary, and religious trends and conflicts of 17<sup>th</sup>-century England. Dryden's literary contributions cannot be appreciated truly if the reader is not aware of the 17<sup>th</sup>-century historical background. In the contemporary world, his works can be read as an artistic history of the 17<sup>th</sup> century which perform a great deal in reviving the language and culture of his times. Thereby emphasizing the notion that Literature revitalizes the past.

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