

The Justification of English National Imperialism in John Dryden's Poems

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John Dryden justified imperialism as a means of strengthening the Stuart's monarchy in his poems. In conjunction with the historical legacy of imperialism, he reawakened the imperial origin from the source of Virgil's *Aeneid* and the myth of King Arthur. These initial perceptions of mythical epics substantiated the poetic history of imperialism. Such inclination toward the dominant ideology drove Dryden to contemplate the imperial legitimacy in England from the past time. Since Dryden served as a public poet who celebrated and praised the imperial movement, his poems mostly dealt with political agendas. In a sense, his conservative propagandas for the Stuart Monarchy entailed the national unification in England. Particularly, the heroic King, Charles II, was not only glorified, but also remembered as the most powerful entity in Dryden's poems because of his imperial policies. Dryden's political purpose was to preserve the Stuart monarchy as a central point of the powerful imperialism. Without doubt, the rhetoric of unification was symbolically harmonized for the purpose of

national stability under the Stuart monarchy. Thus, by writing poems, John Dryden acted as the political prophet for the culmination of English imperialism in which the Stuart monarchy reigns.

I. English Imperialism in Terms of Virgil's *Aeneid* and "Songs from King Arthur"

It is indisputable that Dryden traces the beginnings of the imperialism in the light of Virgil's *Aeneid*. The Roman Empire is the age that was founded on the imperialism. For this reason, Dryden's translation of imperial themes in *Aeneid* is clearly related to the historical succession of English imperialism. The legitimate project of the English empire can be shaped by a wide range of discursive practices in connection with the ideal past. To rehabilitate the qualified legacy of Roman Empire, Dryden inevitably employs the ancient arena of the Trojan War in *Aeneid*.

The Seat of awful Empire she designed.
Yet she had heard an ancient Rumour fly,
(Long cited by the People of the Sky;)
That times to come shou'd see the *Trojan Race* (26-29).

In this conventional context, Dryden consciously seeks to imitate Virgil's style because he wants to predict the destined future of English imperialism. Having translated the imperial land of Rome into England of his times, Dryden began to cultivate poetical proposals with his vision of English imperialism:

There fix'd their Arms, and there renew'd their Name,

And there in Quiet rules, and crown'd with Fame.
But we, descended from your sacred Line,
Entitled to your Heav'n, and Rites Divine
(Book I, 337–41).

The seventeenth century England was in need of foregrounding a new national identity. Translating *Aeneid* was the most ideological promise of the mature imperialism. So, such projects within the realm of Roman Empire intensified English imperialism. This is why the imperial rhetoric of nationhood was logically colored by the discourse of the past. Therefore, as a mode of historical justification, England began its national self-construction with the renewal of the Augustan Age in which imperialism prevailed with sublimity.

Furthermore, Rome was more than an ancient city remote in time from Dryden's London in the restoration period. There existed such a fundamental analogue between these two cities in terms of the imperial core of the world. It is obviously Rome that had the most affirmative influence on the imperial representation of England. In other words, Rome functions as a gorgeous precursor of the imperial hegemony in the Western civilization in *Aeneid*:

The people Romans call, the City Rome.
To them, no Bounds of Empire I assign;
Nor term of Years to their immortal Lind
(Book I, 377–9).

Dryden's will was to pronounce the eternal Roman culture embodying the imperial pattern of the prominent domination. Rome was exalted to the extent that its imperial values became ultimate models of England. The poem moves to revive the imperial inspiration and belief in more positive

ways. Therefore, this sort of the imperial cycle enables England to regenerate dynamic energies for the climax of its imperialism.

Not only in *Aeneid*, but also in “Songs from King Arthur,” there are remarkable parallels between the ancient history and the contemporary England in terms of imperialism. What does King Arthur mean for Dryden? Based on the historical lineage of imperialism, Dryden illuminates the heroic epic in this song since he is more than immersed by the mythical retrospection of the Great King. Perhaps, King Arthur is considered as the most suitable figure for a national hero. The divine figure of King Arthur is more than human in that he is an imperial figure. In this sense, Dryden identifies King Arthur with King Charles II. The reminiscence of legendary would be intentional for Dryden to reconstruct the historical legitimacy for English imperialism.

Indeed, Dryden’s underlying concern in “Songs from King Arthur” lies in imperial backgrounds for the great honor of his native country. Dryden, a court poet, is obliged to satisfy the ideological need by way of songs. So, the symbolically significant song invokes a historical memory of imperialism in describing the vivid image of glorious battles. In doing so, Dryden tends to accelerate the imperial steps for the absolute triumph of the imperial England:

The fainting Saxons quit their ground;
 Their trumpets languish in the sound;
 “They fly, they fly, they fly, they fly;
 Victory Victory” the bold Britons cry (Song II, 9–12).

Some of the evidences spreading the political hypothesis into people’s mind can be found by a careful analysis of the text. Dryden uses the repetitive style to envision the imperial victory in this musical poem. In consequence, this song ultimately assures a national unity in terms of imperialism.

As a major proof of practicing imperialism, Dryden relies heavily on the propagandistic devices of mythologizing King Arthur because of his integral policy. Due to King Arthur's imperial honors, such as courage and justice, the poetic voice resounds with a benevolent dominion over every living creature to be found on the grounds in England. Possibly, he hopes that at some future date England would conquer the intriguing world:

Retire, and let Britannia rise
In triumph o'er the main.
Serene and calm and void of fear, (Song X, 3–5).

King Arthur is an archetype in Old England that had been an absolute state preoccupied with the national birth. The momentum history is evoked so that English imperialism confirms a successor of Charles II. Through wars over English domination, the legendary is linked to the great moment in which Britain has itself emerged into history. In this manner, the justification of the superior monarchy's rule over his subjects is transcended by the eulogized power of culture over nature. This is the very unifying sense that Dryden defines the Stuart Monarchy as legitimate descendants of King Arthur.

II. Eulogizing Charles II's Legitimacy

Dryden enforces the return of King Charles II to England from Scotland for the complete accomplishment of English imperialism in *Astraea Redux* (1660). According to the sacred lineage of the Stuart Kingship, the dignity of Charles II is glorified in order to restore the royal power. This is why Dryden keeps conceiving Charles II as a justifiable messiah for English

imperialism:

And welcome now (great monarch) to your own;
Behold th' approaching cliffs of Albion;
It is no longer motion cheats your view:
As you meet it, the land approacheth you.
The land returns, and in the white it wears
The marks of penitence and sorrow bears.
But, you, whose goodness your descent doth show,
You heavenly parentage, and earthly too,
By that same mildness which your father's crown
(250-58).

In this scene, Dryden seeks to celebrate the royal virtue depending on the respect of Charles II. Such an emphasis on the Stuart monarchy is believed to fulfill the Golden Age in England. Dryden implicitly emphasizes the noble and unitarian policy of Charles II. From Dryden's viewpoint, the majestic King is supposed to recreate the blessed atmosphere for English imperialism. Of course, these exclusively political interpretations of Charles II are connected to Dryden's position: a public laureate.

In "My Lord Chancellor," the sequence of Dryden's imperial loyalty towards Charles II reappears to support hegemonic power of the Stuart monarchy. Dryden displays his political obligation to defend the potential crisis of the imperial England: the national segregation as well as the divided mind of the State:

At length the Muses stand restor'd again
To that great charge which Nature did ordain;
And their lov'd Druyds seem reviv'd by Fate
While you dispence the Laws and guide the State.
The Nations soul (our Monarch) does dispence

Through you to us his vital influence (23–28).

In brief, Dryden's poem exemplifies the necessity of the perpetual sovereignty of Charles II, of what England should be embedded in. In this way, his poem is a credible response to the proliferation of nationalist and imperial emotions toward the Stuart monarchy. Dryden contends to demonstrate the peaceful England by drawing on numerous references to sublime idiosyncrasies of the Stuart monarchy in this poem.

In a larger sense, Dryden is committed to highlight the inevitable role of Charles II whose ability is to harmonize the world with humanity in "The Epilogue Spoken to the King at the opening the Play–House at Oxford on Saturday last. Being March the Nineteenth 1681." The traditional value of the theater in Oxford is the imperial center of England where the world can be integrated universally. Throughout the British history, it has become a public place in which the Stuart monarch "unites the jarring parts" of England as well as the world for "Concord":

Thus crowded *Oxford* represents Mankind,
And in these Walls *Great Britain* seems Confin'd.
Oxford is not the publick *Theater*;
And you both Audience are, and Actors here.
The gazing World on the New Scene attend,
Admire the turns, and wish a prosp'rous end (5–10).

Dryden creates an intense awareness of the imperial propaganda in delineating the prevalent ideas, namely, the congruous world. The heroic decency of King Charles II is to eternally fortify his imperial regime. In this respect, Dryden's political mind is filled with the invincible power of the Stuart monarchy by signifying complexities of the imperial conceit all over the world.

Similarly, in “Prologue and Epilogue to the Unhappy Favourite,” Dryden devotes himself to address the biblical juxtaposition of “the Royal Dove” and English King to confirm imperialistic ideals. From the opening part of the poem, the undisturbed role of Noah seems to represent the British King looking for the nonviolent control of the world:

When Tops of Hills the Longing Patriark saw,
And the new Scene of Earth began to draw;
The Dove was sent to View the Waves Decrease,
And first brought back to Man the Pledge of Peace
(3-6).

Such position of King presumably serves to cleanse a chaotic world to rescue mankind from regression: the enormous flood in the Genesis. In Dryden’s poetic treatment of the Bible and the British history, the royal King acts to revitalize the stable unification of the precarious world through the powerful voyage of the sea:

All that our Monarch would for us Ordain,
Is but t’ Injoy the Blessings of his Reign.
Our Land’s and Eden, and the Main’s our Fence,
While we Preserve our State of Innocence;
That lost, then Beasts their Brutal Force employ,
And first their Lord, and then themselves destroy
(25-30).

In accordance with the underlying worth of the new Land as *Eden*, Dryden enunciates the political belief that the Stuart monarchy should conquer it against the brutal force of enemy. This kind of reading construes a core of a political propaganda in relation to imperialism.

The imperial strategy to advocate Charles II is profoundly enacted in

Dryden's "Prologue to His Royal Highness, upon His first appearance at the Duke's Theatre since his Return from Scotland." This prologue encompasses the imperial paradigm that stands for the heavenly power of the Stuart monarchy in England:

O Welcome to this much offending Land
The Prince that brings forgiveness in his hand!
Thus Angels on glad Messages appear:
Their first Salute commands us not to fear:
Thus Heav'n, that cou'd constrain us to obey (36–40).

From this scene, Dryden prevents people in England from resisting the divine vigor of Charles II. According to Dryden's faith, Charles II is inherently endowed as an imperial King by God in the heaven. Based on the religious viewpoint, the ultimate goal Dryden asserts contains the inseparable relationship between the imperialism and the Stuart monarchy. Using the religious metaphor, Dryden espouses the imperial regeneration of King Charles II beyond the human power in this poem.

After strengthening the imperial image of King, Dryden turns into an unrelenting ethos inherent in England. The masculine analogy between Charles II and the Great Nation is made explicit in "Prologue and Epilogue to Amboyna." The masculine strength of the nationhood is in fact incomparable to Holland in terms of martial battles. On the whole, Dryden attempts to reclaim infinite powers of English imperialism with such war-oriented principles. Based on the historical war against the rival neighborhood, the predominance of the imperial project is to pursue an ideological demarcation between the two incompatible nations. This inevitably occurs to conquer the island Amboyna as a way of proving the national force. By identifying Holland with savage, Dryden justifies the imperial power of England which aims at defeating and struggling against

the enemy country:

No Map shews Holland truer then our Play:
Their Pictures and Incriptions well we know;
We may be bold one Medal sure to show.
View then their Falshood, Rapine, Cruelty (prologue,
26-29).

In fact, both nations are extremely interested in occupying the native island of Amboyna because they want to construct their supreme identities through the military encountering. To some extent, from English imperial perspective, the suspicious behavior of Holland is hard to believe because of “ill Nature and ill Manners” It might be pointed out that such descriptions are to denigrate unequivocal traits of the Dutch, which enhances the alleged hierarchy between England and Holland in the name of imperialism. Dryden’s mind is filled with more allusions for the superior gravestone of England in the sea.

Unfortunately, there are frequent tensions not only between countries, but also between monarchy and parliament. This domestic situation remains a potential obstacle as opposed to the perfect imperialism in England. For this reason, Dryden is willing to denounce the unfaithfulness of the State throughout this poem:

And you, I take it, have not much of that.
Well Monarchys may own Religions name,
But States are Atheists in their very frame.
They share a sin, and such proportions fall
That like a stink, ‘tis nothing to’em all.
How they love England, you shall see this day
(prologue, 20-25).

To alleviate the incongruent conflict as well as reconstruct the imperial Kingdom, Dryden upholds the masculine decision of Charles II whose policy is engaged with France. Indeed, the parliament discomforts the influence of catholic religion in France. However, the foreign principle of Charles II should not be seen as a kind of chauvinism. Rather, Dryden claims the truth that English military coalition with France is the patriotic defiance to fulfill its triumphant imperialism in opposition to Holland:

Yet is their Empire no true Growth but Humour,
And onely two Kings Touch can cure the Tumor.
As Cato did his Affricque *Fruits display:*
So we before your Eies their Indies lay:
All Loyal English will like him conclude,
Let Caesar Live, and Carthage be subdu'd
(Epilogue, 17–22).

From this epilogue, Dryden venerates the critical Charles II by placing of him and Caesar in tandem because of his palpable impact on English fate. The assertion of Caesar is deliberately retained by Dryden's ambition for the discourse of masculine heroism. In this sense, Dryden loyally substantiates the imperial propaganda for the optimistic future of England with the national strength in this poem.

III. The Poems in Terms of Imperial Propaganda

The imperial request to defeat Holland martially is also presented in Dryden's "Annus–Mirabilis." Especially, the river Thames is described to reflect the imperial heart in which England expends its sphere into the sea by combating the naval war against Holland. At the beginning of "Annus

Mirabilis,” the imagery of British ocean and martial ships are blend of the symbolic power of England under imperialism:

Thus mighty in her ships stood Carthage long
And swept the riches of the world from far,
Yet stoop'd to Rome, less wealthy, but more strong:
And this may prove our second Punic War (17-20).

As Mckeen claims, Dryden intends to prophesy “British dominion of the seas (155-64) or recalls English aid to the new republic” (100). Indeed, through the navigation in the sea that is originated from the Thames, Dryden explicitly stresses the consecutive naval battles against the enemy, Dutch to celebrate the imperial sovereignty of England. The general Albemarle and the Prince Rupert are the bravest representatives to protect the river as well as the sea in the naval wars against the Dutch.

With equal pow'r he does two chiefs create,
Two such as each seem'd worthiest when alone,
Each able to sustain a nation's fate,
Since both had found a greater in their own (184-187).

In order to “sustain a nation's [imperial] fate,” King Charles II sends the two audacious figures to the sea in order to defend the British Empire. The resolution of Charles II is certainly figured out to obstruct the Dutch's interference in the sea. Dryden thinks that England itself has to be released from the unnecessary anxiety and fear due to the opponent. In a sense, the English nation should be preserved from the onset of the Thames for the purpose of its imperial mission. Thus, the axiomatic starting point for the English imperialism is to remove the national evil, Holland, from which the entire world would suffer.

The thematic pattern of imperial voices is similarly orchestrated by mythical characters who praise the martial chorus in "The Secular Masque." To promote the consecutive fighting against Holland, Dryden formulates heroic figures in Greek myth to multiply imperial agendas in this poem:

Janus. Chronos, Chronos, mend thy pace;
An hundred times the rolling sun
Around the radiant belt has run
In his revolving race
Behold, behold, the goal is sight;
Spread thy fans, and wing thy flight (1-6).

It may be applicable that the poetry which Dryden has strived to create throughout his life is chiefly political. The political engagement within Dryden's national mind is undeniably oriented with the transcendental sense of war. With the association of the national plan, Mars, the god of war, trumpets this imperial project through ensuing dynamics of martial power:

Mars. Inspire the vocal brass, inspire;
The world is past its infant age:
Arms and honor,
Arms and honor,
Set the martial mind on fire,
And kindle manly rage
Mars has looked the sky to red;
And Peace, the lazy good, is fled (45-52).

From this scene, Mars advocates the embattled landscapes for the honor of English imperialism. The assumption of Mars is that his complacent

attitude towards the national battle becomes parts of the generic vitality for England. Even if the imperial war agitates “manly rage” of other external nations, Dryden rationalizes the imperial project of England in the name of admirable balance.

In the line of the imperialism, Dryden’s argument is also concerned to the English colonization. In his “Prologue of Aureng-Zebe,” Dryden indicates the tragic doom of the African nation where its culture should be subjugated by the imperial civilization of England. Without doubt, Dryden’s imperial desire is straightforward in delineating the imperial design for the colonization. Dryden’s poem shows the sustaining concern of the African authority whose wit is not eligible to exercise adequate politics:

Aw’d when he hears his Godlike *Romans* rage,
 He, in a just despair, would quit the Stage;
 And to an Age less polish’d, more unskill’d,
 Does, with disdain the foremost Honours yield.
 As with the greater Dead he dares not strive,
 He wou’d not match his Verse with those who live:
 Let him retire, betwixt two Ages cast (13–21).

In this section, Dryden takes for granted the resignation of the African leader because of his dullness. By eliciting the glorious fortune of his nation, Dryden endorses England’s taking over the African land throughout this poem. In this sense, it consistently conveys the imperial message referring to the control of the Stuart monarchy in Africa:

We and our Neighbours, to speak proudly, are
 Like Monarchs, ruin’d with expensive War.
 While, like wise English, unconcern’d, you sit,
 And see us play the Tragedy of Wit (37–40).

Nonetheless, the imperial enthusiasm for a New Land causes Dryden to create the poem whereby colonizing a remote land is envisioned as series of English benign determination. For this reason, this prologue infinitely means the political issue to demonstrate the justification of how England operates its colonial policies. It implicitly illustrates the sense of colonial process for the imperial prosperity in England.

In "Songs from The Indian Emperor," Dryden proceeds to articulate the colonial intention of England for the absolute imperialism. It is Dryden that encourages the national consciousness for the colonization by writing many poems. The colonial passion is reasonably comprehensive for the purpose of public affairs: the mercantile expansion and global unification. The Indian Emperor should be transformed by English power. This poem reveals the antithetical destinies of two nations after the colonization. While the Indian land mourns lost of its subjective mirth, England rejoices the successful conquer of the new land:

Ah, fading joy, how quickly art thou past!
Yet we thy ruin haste.
As if the cares of human life were few,
We seek out new:
And follow fate, which would too fast pursue (1-5).

Perhaps, Dryden's motives for suppressing the Indian world are concentrated on the thriving future of England for the national strength and wealth. Of course, this imperial mode and discourse correspond to the English aspiration for geographical benefits. The remote lands in India are fundamental parts of the imperial scheme for the colonization. In this manner, the imperial idea is relentlessly insidious throughout the poem.

IV. Conclusion

Dryden's poems equivalently share uniformed structures of panegyric based on the historical legitimacy. The intentional discourse and process of panegyric enable his poems to revive and incorporate the imperial paradigm. Besides, in terms of a dialectical process, this kind of unitarian rhetoric is politically intended to ensure a blessed future in England. The poetic voice for celebrating patriotic imperialism induces echoes to convert the magnificent empire of Rome into the English Empire. "Stuart Panegyrics" appear to recollect the imperial images of a "prosperous destiny under their leader" and lineage (Rogers 188). The way how Dryden paints their poems would be pleasure to memorize the imperial equilibrium of England. It is likely that Dryden's public poems reinstate the imperial landscape through their poems; the Stuart monarchy comes into vision of the conventional orthodox to dominate both England and a globe world. This poetically declared imperial allegiance would have intensified unified structure of eulogy in Dryden's poems. Therefore, it is explicable that the appropriate forms of encomium inspire potential growth and promise of English Empire.

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Abstract

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John Dryden justifies imperialism as means of strengthening the Stuart's monarchy in his poems. Since Dryden serves as a public poet who celebrates and praises the imperial movement, his poems mostly deal with political agendas. In particular, John Dryden acts as the political prophet for the culmination of English imperialism in which the Stuart monarchy reigns. It is through the analogue between the Roman Empire and Dryden's London that he wants to predict the destined future of English imperialism. Furthermore, Dryden identifies King Arthur with King Charles II. Dryden defines the Stuart Monarchy as legitimate descendants of King Arthur. Such an emphasis on the Stuart monarchy is believed to fulfill the Golden Age in England. Dryden also venerates the critical Charles II by placing of him and Caesar in tandem because of his palpable impact on English fate. In addition, using the religious metaphor, Dryden espouses the imperial regeneration of King Charles II beyond the human power in his poem.

By identifying Holland with savage, Dryden justifies the imperial power of England which aims at defeating and struggling against the enemy country. The axiomatic starting point for the English imperialism is to remove the national evil, Holland, from which the entire world would suffer. The English nation should be preserved from the onset of the Thames for the purpose of its imperial mission. Moreover, Dryden's imperial desire is straightforward in delineating the imperial design for the

colonization. The imperial enthusiasm for a New Land causes Dryden to create the poem whereby colonizing a remote land is envisioned as series of English benign determination. In a word, Dryden's poems equivalently share uniformed structures of panegyric based on the historical legitimacy and his poems serve as the means to revive and incorporate the imperial paradigm.

Key Words: Imperialism, colonization, political agenda, Charles II, King Arthur

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