

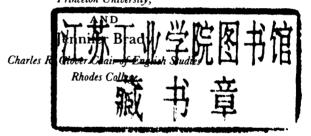
# Literary transmission and authority

#### Dryden and other writers

### JENNIFER BRADY, GREG CLINGHAM, DAVID KRAMER, and EARL MINER

EDITED BY Earl Miner

Townsend Martin, Class of 1917,
Professor of English and Comparative literature,
Princeton University,





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#### Contributing authors

JENNIFER BRADY holds the Charles R. Glover Chair of English Studies at Rhodes College, where she teaches Renaissance and Restoration literature. She is the co-editor, with W. H. Herendeen, of *Ben Jonson's 1616 Folio* (University of Delaware Press, 1991) and has published several essays on Ben Jonson's poetry. She is a graduate of the University of Toronto and received her doctorate from Princeton University.

GREG CLINGHAM has published on Dryden, Boswell, and Johnson in British, American, and French journals. He is the author of James Boswell: "The Life of Johnson" (Cambridge University Press, 1992) and has edited New Light on Boswell: Critical and Historical Essays on the Occasion of the Bicentenary of Boswell's "Life of Johnson" (Cambridge University Press, 1991). He has recently completed a critical study of Johnson's literary biography entitled Writing Memory: The Integrity and Paradox of Johnson's "Lives of the Poets," and he is North American Editor of the new annual, Translation and Literature. Dr. Clingham has taught English at Cambridge, New York, and Fordham Universities, and he is an affiliate of Clare Hall, Cambridge.

DAVID KRAMER, an Assistant Professor at the University of Arkansas, has recently completed a second book on Dryden, "What More I Shall Desire": Eros and Textuality in Dryden's Comic Drama. A previous book, related to his chapter here, is entitled The Imperial Dryden: The Poetics of Appropriation in Seventeenth-Century France and England, and is forthcoming at The University of Georgia Press.

EARL MINER is Townsend Martin, Class of 1917, Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Princeton University. His interests include seventeenth-century English literature, Japanese literature, and comparative poetics.

#### **Preface**

Of all English authors, Dryden has special claims for attention in a study of literary authority and transmission. He is the first English critic to reflect at length on the acts of his own poetic creation; the first to theorize about translation; the first to posit the existence of literary ages or periods; and the first to seek to arrange poets in an order from those originating a literary culture to his own day. He followed Ben Jonson in giving close attention, not only to poets who were his contemporaries, but also to readers, seeking to inform and shape their responses by prefaces and epistles dedicatory to publications of his works. In his lifetime two momentous, related ideas about literature were emerging: that of literary originality (as also borrowing, plagiarism, seizure of rights held by others) and that of literary property. Without the growth of these ideas, the first English copyright act would not have come into being in 1709.

In trying to account for Dryden as authority and transmitter, we undertake a familiar, but by no means resolved, subject. Its outlines are clear: who does not know of Dryden on his predecessors in An Essay of Dramatick Poesie or of his full Virgil of 1697? But the former has raised new questions for recent readers, and the latter is mostly unstudied in important matters. There have been studies of Dryden and Shakespeare, centering on All for Love, or the remarks about Shakespeare, Jonson, and Beaumont and Fletcher in An Essay of Dramatick Poesie. There has not yet been a full study of that relationship that takes in the Roman (or classical) plays of both, the handling of comedy, tragicomedy, and tragedy, or numerous borrowings. If that is true of Dryden vis-à-vis the greatest English writer, it is all the truer of similar subjects involving other writers. On the other hand, as this study shows, there has been a rising interest in particular features of Dryden's relations with other authors, an interest fortified by James A. Winn's excellent biography of Dryden.

Subjects – fashions, some may say – in literary study arise in recognition of features of particular authors and their times. In English studies, the subject of influence revived naturally enough as part of the rehabilitation

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of Romanticism, with its expressive theory as a central principle. The expressivism led to preoccupation with originality as a major problem that was in part solved, if that is the word, by writing movingly about the problem itself. In writing about the difficulty of writing at all, poets often left highly ambitious works that were, at least seemingly, incomplete. Dryden writes often enough about his problems in writing, but these commonly involve financial support or protection. The common became acute late in his life by illness and the problems of his holding steadfastly both to a religion whose believers were penalized in England and to a political, sentimental Jacobitism he shared with that fellow steadfast "Yorkist," Samuel Pepys, and other constitutionalists like the nonjuring divines early in the reign of William and Mary. In their poetry at least, the Romantic writers seem to have been less pressed financially, but they bore more heavily than their seventeenth-century predecessors the burdens of theoretical expressivism and principled originality.

Or did they? One of the central aims of this study is to explore, from differing vantage points, the nature of Dryden's authority in the very act of translating, or otherwise engaging with, other authors "ancient and modern."

In exploring such subjects, we do well to understand that English studies do not color the whole world pink, as maps of the British Empire once seemed to do. Study of interrelations between authors and nations has been a staple of comparative study from the beginning. The model currently most familiar in English studies is the Freudian one in which influence induces anxiety and repression. That model is congenial to portions of bourgeois western society, but it cannot be assumed for earlier western, or non-western, cultures. The central Indian preoccupation is the ceaseless retelling of a few immense works. In east Asia, literary language is, by definition, precedented language, and if there is anxiety it may be more properly termed the anxiety of not being influenced. Of course the English Romantics' compulsion to be original, which intensified whatever anxiety exercised a given poet, does not conceal their common literary inheritances, subjects, and treatments. (How many Romantic poems are there about fallings-off, dead poetic geniuses, and skylarks?) Similarly, for all their veneration of that past which defined them as writers, east Asian poets could not go on saying the same things in the same words. In east Asia, one could innovate by that Protestant urge (or dodge) of going back to the pristine. What was once exceptional might be made a normative precedent in China. A new Confucianism could redefine Korean interests. An innovative Japanese poet could plead the spirit of the first great poetic collection, the Man' yōshū. An innovating

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Islamic poet could find justification in yet another saying by the Prophet in the Qu'rān.

These remarks imply not only that Dryden is a particularly fit subject for study of a complex of related issues, but also that assumptions devised to explain later English literature need not be accepted uncritically. It is also true, however, that the rehabilitation of "influence study" by Claudio Guillén and Harold Bloom has become a presence in the minds of students, of other authors, and even in the minds of those who have not read the works of the two named. The four authors of this book examine quite different portions of, and outlooks on, Dryden's remarkably varied literary career. As a result, we proceed from presumptions that are not at all identical.

In what we have written we do not pretend to exhaust the subject of Dryden and others, much less the theoretical and historical issues. But enough ground has been covered to make it seem desirable to sort out various issues from three perspectives: seventeenth-century English literature, comparative evidence, and the literary and historical principles ("theory") involved. That purpose has prompted my introduction. Those who feel no need to consider such perspectives may proceed to the four main chapters. (It is editorial graciousness to grant what readers will do in any event, from looking for their own names in the index to casual sortes.) In all this, we hope that we have given a four-dimensional Dryden – not a Cubist poet descending the stairs, but a real poet credible as one in his time, a century later, and today.

#### Acknowledgments

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As a close friend of mine is fond of remarking, gratitude may be one of the weaker of human emotions. It gives me particular pleasure, then, to thank Robert Entzminger, Sara van den Berg, Karen Robertson, and C. Anderson Silber for their support, their editorial instincts, and, in Andy's case, his nurturing of my interest in Dryden over many years. Rhodes College has been, as ever, generous with funding. Harmon C. Dunathan enabled the completion of this book through grants and encouraged the project from the outset. Judith Runyan and Gail Stroud helped; so too did Charles C. Wilkinson, who worked assiduously with me in preparing the index.

Jennifer Brady

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## Introduction: borrowed plumage, varied umbrage

#### EARL MINER

One of the rewards of reading Dryden's literary and critical writings – and one of the problems in teaching them – is the rich sense one obtains of his engagement with those who have mattered, and have continued to matter, in western culture. In a rapid survey of the index to George Watson's two-volume Everyman selection of Dryden's critical writings, one discovers about 130 references to English writers, almost a hundred to Graeco-Roman writers, some eighty-five to postclassical European writers, and a couple of dozen to non-literary artists. There is no precedent for such engagement, and who among us can name half the Graeco-Roman writers or half the British writers before Dryden whom he not only names but engages with? The surprising thing about the subject of Dryden's claim as authority and transmitter is that it has not been made, long ago, the explicit object of critical attention, much less a model of how writers conduct themselves in engaging with predecessors and contemporaries.

If not explicit or the basis of a model, the subject has necessarily arisen for nearly every critic of Dryden in some more or less tacit or practical fashion. The interfusion of literature, religion, politics, social organization, and economics in the century made proper authority a revolutionary issue of the state of letters as well as politics. Transmission was not play, but engagement with predecessors and contemporaries inevitable to any serious writer. In one mood, Donne could make "one little room an everywhere," but even for his awakening lovers the interest lay in finding the macrocosm in the human microcosm, the world in the bed – if not tossed in Robert Burton's blanket.

Wars and rumors of them preceded and accompanied Dryden's career. The sanguinary struggles that stained England's green and pleasant land

more often sounded in words from diverse sources like Samuel Butler's drum ecclesiastic, the pulpit. The parliamentary and Protectorate causes sought to restore England to a blest state supposed to exist before "the Norman yoke" was imposed. In that, and other, respects, major groups in the English Protestant Church Militant were deeply concerned with recovering the pristine truth of the Bible (altar, church discipline, windows not idolatrous) before it had been corrupted by that bugaboo, the Whore of Babylon, papacy. In reaching back to the ancient to remove what was untrue, the Puritans (that undefinable but conceptually indispensable group) discovered something of prime importance for a Dryden born into a Puritan family: one's own age is as historical as King David's or Augustus Caesar's. And if the good of the past can be recovered while ridding it of the evil, human progress is possible. As this example germane to Dryden shows, the engagement of one's present needs with rivals and with the past may produce unexpected results, unintended results often ultimately more important than what was sought to begin with.

The aim of the following chapters is to address what it means for a Dryden to engage with predecessors and contemporaries, and for a later critic - Samuel Johnson - to engage with a Dryden. This is a subject susceptible to definitions various in breadth and in nature. On a gradation of solely literary encounter (and let it be said again that the subject is by no means solely literary), there is at one extreme dark ignorance. It would have meant something if Butler, Milton, and Dryden had known the Indian or Middle High German epics. But of course they did not. At a lesser extreme there are those works that are known, but that simply do not seem to matter - examples include Ausonius' Mosella and Frascatorius' Syphilis. From there we might consider the opposite extreme, downright plagiarism.<sup>2</sup> Between the extremes there exist complex congeries of practices, attitudes, and issues, only a few of which claim critical fashion at a given time. To the extent that we are unacquainted with fashions at other times and in other cultures, we think our own the sole natural ones and, what is worse, think temporarily reigning concerns the inevitable ones. Yet what is perhaps still worse is the ignoring of the historical and cultural developments that make the presence of a given constellation of issues understandable. And what is probably worst of all is the assumption of a single explanation. Neither this introduction nor the ensuing chapters will cover all the grounds that ought, in conscience, to be traversed: none of us has systematically or theoretically concentrated on religion, economics, politics, gender, and certain other matters crucial to seventeenth-century English experience. But what we do provide will underscore the belief of four people in the importance of the general topic of literary relations and in the necessity for differing approaches.

That general topic is extensive enough. It involves the ways writers use other writers, the ways critics use writers and other critics, and the ways in which readers use writers and critics. In fact, those "literary relations" constitute but a part of the topic. There are also the state and commercial producers; there are those who may be designated the police. There are also the often unspoken rules of the game, the silent as well as noisy ideologies – the systems of values often contradictory but far more often mutually reinforcing. And there are differences, if not conflicts, between various social groups, as well as national efforts to exert power or prestige, and consequently efforts by other nations to wield or to resist dominance. In short, there is too much even to enumerate at decent length in an introduction to a single book.

It is necessary, therefore, to clarify a few issues that affected Dryden, before moving on to more theoretical concerns with authorial interrelationships. Since it is to Dryden that England owes its very concept of a literary period and of literary succession, it will not be amiss to begin with a series of symbolic historical moments relating to the general subject of this study.<sup>3</sup> After that brief review, we can inquire into the general issues of what relations between, or among, authors imply. We may close with application of these matters to Dryden.

The first symbolic moment is that of Plato and his student Aristotle in the Greek Academy. Plato conceived of three rivals for intellectual allegiance: philosophy, poetry, and rhetoric (Republic, 10; Phaedrus). Aristotle conceived of a far wider range of subjects, including not only those mentioned but ethics, various sciences, and metaphysics. Aristotle's Poetics, although apparently incomplete as we have it, makes clear that he also thought in terms of intellectual rivalry: poets are, he said, superior to historians. (He probably also thought them superior to rhetoricians, but definitely not to philosophers.) Together, Plato and Aristotle show that one necessary condition for literary study had been reached: the positing of literature as an autonomous branch of human knowledge. 4 A second symbolic moment is reached with Alexandrian scholarship and writing. The scholarship involved collections of earlier writers, so that the plays of Euripides were brought together in intelligible fashion and, it is even sometimes hesitatingly suggested, the Homeric poems were first divided into 24 units based on the letters of the Greek alphabet. The first great library in the west was founded. Literature had not only been separated, but institutionalized.

Horace benefitted from the Alexandrian achievement and its imitations

and, like numerous other Romans, studied in Greece. His achievement was a dual one. For one thing, his concept of *imitatio* redefined imitation from the Aristotelian technical sense of the cognitive literary act to emulation of the Greeks. Along with that, out of his own writing of lyrics and satires he posited literary affect as a differentia and "end" of literature that had not been feasible in the Greek Academy.<sup>5</sup> The two achievements are at one in his lyrics, where affect and adaptation of Greek prosodic measures are indistinguishable.

The sense of literature as a separable human activity weakened in the earlier Middle Ages, as the anonymity of poets (with other evidence) testifies. By the later Middle Ages, however, authorship is again known because again assumed to be important. Around 1200 we observe the potentiality for literary rivalry among the Minnesinger, and the fact itself between two highly gifted narrative poets, Wolfram von Eschenbach and Gottfried von Strassburg. Gottfried went so far as to distinguish the important narrative and lyric poets in German.<sup>6</sup>

The Renaissance is hardly a moment, and is too close to Dryden (presuming he was not part of it) to specify with confidence or describe with clarity features that he and we would recognize with equal force. But a few may be hazarded. One is the new institutionalizing of literature, with the French Academy as the dominant model.<sup>7</sup> As an "original member" (who apparently did not pay his dues) of the Royal Academy chartered by Charles II, and as a participant in the unfulfilled attempts by Roscommon to establish a committee-academy on the English language, Dryden was clearly interested in literary institutionalizing.<sup>8</sup> He also benefitted from appointments as poet laureate and historiographer royal (benefitted in prestige at least, and sometimes he was paid his promised money). The ever uncertain combination of monies from such sources, along with others from plays, from prologues and epilogues to plays by others, from translations, and from patronage made Dryden the first of that institution we can, with some show of truth, term the professional poet, the "independent" man of letters. (Aphra Behn followed shortly as the first woman of letters and the second person in England.) He was also familiar with that Renaissance innovation, the literary quarrel. Although the Italians produced a number of lively versions of it, the ones over Guarini's Pastor Fido and over Corneille's Cid were particularly hard fought. Dryden was well aware of French quarrels. Even if he had not been, his sense of literary history and of period would necessarily have led him to consider his relation to poets of the distant past, the more recent past, and the present. He was perpetually discovering that his soul was like whatever poet of old he was engaged with. And, like other writers, he

heats up the closer he gets to his own time, being much more complexly involved with the poets of "the last age" or century, meaning roughly to 1625, than with earlier writers. And, as "Mac Flecknoe" and the poem to Congreve suggest, working out relations with his contemporaries required great care and on occasion major adjustment.

By the eighteenth century, the developing sense that writers should be entitled to the works they had written had become a fully fledged (if not yet fully soaring) conception of literary property. Moreover, the ideal of literature in something like its restricted modern sense of belles-lettres had been formed. The burden of originality was developing more or less in course with that of authorial property, and both became crucial with the Romantics. It would be possible to follow these developments further, but the rest is more or less our modern possession, even if we are barely aware, for example, of how very recent is the institutionalizing of study of vernacular literature.

The phrase, "authorial interrelations," may not be especially canorous, and is but one among many important issues. The problem lies in finding a sufficiently neutral term. It becomes acute when the authorial is taken from the standpoint of but one of the human agencies involved, for instance the "transmitter" or, alternatively, the "appropriator," terms that feature some, and ignore others, of the crucial issues.<sup>9</sup> Transmittal inescapably implies a deliberate sending agency, and appropriation a seizing one. Neither is a necessary presumption. Homer had no idea of his transmitting anything to a Joyce for Ulysses, and few members of the Tribe of Ben were likely to lay rude hands on Father Ben's goods. If for "transmittal" we substitute "imposition" or "making available," we obviously have two possibilities differing more from each other even than from the concept of transmission. Similarly, if for "appropriation" we substitute "reflection" or "colonized," we imply quite different processes. Although, as we say, we often give voice to words thoughtlessly, we mean without due thought, carelessly. For there are no indeterminate terms (that would be a contradiction), and there are none innocent of bearing some past and present freight. None the less, we require not only names but specifiable meanings if we are to achieve clarity in our own minds and offer that clarity to others. A corollary holds that we depend on the clarity of those who attend to us, and that certainly is true of what follows.

Clarity is needed by one who seeks to reorder some thoughts about authorial relations by redefining three familiar terms: rivalry, influence, and reception. When the question arose of what title to give my first little book, it was clearly necessary to avoid at all costs the then disreputable, even pedantic word, "influence." Rehabilitation of that term came first

with Claudio Guillén's revival of it in the first two chapters of his "Essays Toward the Theory of Literary History." Since then Harold Bloom has made a massive subject of it with a series of studies featuring chiefly Milton, Romantic, and selected modern poets. It is clear that critics such as Guillén and Bloom have enjoyed close attention, and have altered ideas about authorial interrelations. It is not clear that their models are valid for all periods, genres, and literary cultures.

For that matter, although the etymological meaning of "influence" is as innocent a word as could be hoped for, basic presumptions of influence – especially the idea of transmittal – have not been acceptable to all. In his own series of studies, Dionýz Ďurišin has argued that what is called influence is better considered reception, since no matter what a given literature has to offer others, in practice what is important depends on the receivers' choices and, it may be added, commonly on their misunderstandings. Although for some reason (the rather wooden English translations?), Ďurišin's work has been unjustly neglected, it has been unwittingly confirmed and enlarged upon by reception theory, whether as Rezeptionsästhetik, as affective stylistics, or under other labels.

The major differences between those who stress the transmitter and those the receiver are clear enough, as are the differences between critics who look on authorial interrelations as benign or neutral, and others, Bloom in particular, who conceive of the relation in agonistic terms. One unavoidable difficulty posed by puissant Bloom to a comparatist is that he works on the evidence of a single language and focuses on a relatively restricted period of poetic history. "Modernist" and "postmodernist" writers use their predecessors in ways differently from those described by Bloom. 14 It is certainly true that Bloom's Freudianism is the product of late nineteenth-century bourgeois European culture and, as such, has little, if any, applicability to other times and places. Catherine Belsey amusingly makes this point in regard to the Davenant-Dryden revision of The Tempest. Of the doubling of Miranda with another sister and the description of both as women who have never seen a man, Belsey comments on what a pre-Freudian era it is when a father does not constitute a man. 15 In other cultures such as the east Asian, the centuries of Confucianism (not to mention other acculturations of human sexuality) led to such veneration of precursors as to make Freud irrelevant. To Chinese, Korean, and Japanese poets, there was a language of poetry, and that language was defined as precedented language. Their burden was not to be original, but to be faithful. There is another problem with Bloom's model. He seems to imply that his "Theory of Poetry" applies to all kinds of writing, but his subtitle and his evidence weigh in a scale of verse. If his

account had validity, it would apply as much to novelists, dramatists, essayists and, for that matter, writers not considered literary in usual categories.

Bloom's and other recent conceptions of authorial interrelations in English literature might be explored for further utility. But the conceptions have been too readily presumed universal in applicability, when in fact they are limited chronologically, culturally, and in terms of their range of pertinence. The last especially concerns me. By restricting ourselves to poetry or even to literature, we have excluded much else that is important. Literature does not exist in the historical or cultural vacuum to which too many of our studies seem to have consigned it. The point is obvious, before our noses, which has not assisted its being taken in, anymore than has the contradicting evidence from other literary cultures.

Another important matter requires attention. Any account of the relations between one writer and others – say, Dryden and Shakespeare, Jonson, or Racine – requires assurance that the writers involved have been sufficiently defined and understood, if an account of their relations is to carry conviction. There must be historical and logical bases for connection or comparison to be valid.

The tenor of my preceding remarks is sufficiently clear – but negative. What follows therefore turns to positive argument that will involve Dryden among other examples. Because Harold Bloom has figured as an actual and heuristic presence in the preceding pages, we may begin with rivalry. And, having rejected his central view of the matter, we must seek an alternative. Rivalry such as Bloom posits under the title of influence should be considered chiefly, although not solely, to involve writers who are contemporaries. Anyone personally acquainted with writers – whether poets or novelists, historians, or philosophers – knows that, although a writer may have a quarrel with Vida or Vico, the vital concern is with living Jacks and Janes. As it happens, there is plain testimony to the fact from the very field – English Romantic poetry – that Bloom has chosen as his agonistic arena. William Hazlitt says it well in his essay, "On the Living Poets."

I cannot say that I ever learnt much about Shakespeare or Milton, Spenser or Chaucer, from these professed guides [i.e., "the most popular poets of the day"]; for I never heard them say much about them. They were always talking of themselves and one another. Nor am I certain that this sort of personal intercourse with living authors, while it takes away all relish or freedom of opinion with regard to their contemporaries, really enhances our respect for themselves.<sup>17</sup>

Hazlitt's remarks have confirmation from other periods, cultures, and kinds of writing. They apply not only to the English Romantic poets, but to Pindar

and his competitors in writing odes, to Chinese poets vying for office by the implications of their poems, and to modern mouth-watering over Nobel prizes. The subject is susceptible to comparative treatment. Hazlitt's remarks could be extensively examined by comparative study, for example by an examination of resemblances and differences between Athenian competitions in the writing of plays and Japanese competitions in poetry matches.

Examples nearer Dryden will better serve our immediate interests, however. For the second edition of *Paradise Lost*, Milton included a notice, "The Verse," at the bookseller's urging. The bookseller introduced the matter of Milton's prosody by saying that the lack of rhyme had "stumbled" many readers. Let us hear Milton out.

The Measure is English Heroic Verse without Rime, as that of Homer in Greek, and of Virgil in Latin; Rime being no necessary Adjunct or true Ornament of Poem or good Verse, in longer Works especially, but the Invention of a barbarous Age, to set off wretched matter and lame Meeter; grac't indeed since by the use of some famous modern Poets, carried away by Custom, but much to thir own vexation, hindrance, and constraint to express many things otherwise, and for the most part worse than else they would have exprest them. Not without cause therefore some both Italian and Spanish Poets of prime note have rejected Rime both in longer and shorter Works, as have also long since our best English Tragedies, as a thing of it self, to all judicious ears, triveal and of no true musical delight; which consists onely in apt Numbers, fit quantity of Syllables, and the sense variously drawn out from one Verse into another, not in the jingling sounds of like endings, a fault avoyded by the learned Ancients both in Poetry and all good Oratory. This neglect then of Rime so little is to be taken for a defect, though it may seem so perhaps to vulgar Readers, that it rather is to be esteem'd an example set, the first in English, of ancient liberty recover'd to Heroic Poem from the troublesom and modern bondage of Rimeing. 18

This is sometimes thought to be aimed at Dryden. If so, it has to do more with plays than with heroic poems. (And "vulgar Readers" seems a strange designation for a single contemporary.) For, as Milton comes to admit, *Paradise Lost* is "the first" epic written in English (since the Old English poetry he did not know of) that does not rhyme. More recently, in rhymed verse of varying kind, there had been Cowley's *Davideis*, Davenant's *Gondibert*, Chamberlayne's *Pharonnida*, Butler's *Hudibras*, and Dryden's *Annus Mirabilis*. Spenser and the Italian poets (who are the Spanish non-rimers he has in mind?) "of prime note" wrote in rhymed verse. Milton's complaint applies to contemporaries and all but a few lesser epic or similar poets he could have known of in vernacular languages. He professes to have thrown off not only "the Norman yoke," but also the