

The Substance of *Fables*: Dryden's "Of the Pythagorean Philosophy"

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Dryden's "Of the Pythagorean Philosophy" is commonly seen as the moral and aesthetic center of *Fables*. His translation of about half of Book 15 of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is where critics go to attempt to decipher what Dryden was up to in the intricate arrangement of translations and original pieces that make up this massive collection. Drawing attention to the importance of the piece, Dryden himself calls the digression on the "*Moral and Natural Philosophy of Pythagoras*" the "*most learned and beautiful Parts of the whole Metamorphoses*" (Headnote, 7: 484). Most critics of "Of the Pythagorean Philosophy" focus on the idea of material impermanence in the poem and see that as the central note upon which Dryden is playing. Consequently, they see the arrangement of the multifarious works in *Fables*, the form of the collection, as a symbolic reflection of that content. As Dryden seems to be describing a universe, they say, that is broken up into matter ever in flux, so Dryden's collection is an incoherent series of tales, each of which speaks a truth that is quickly overturned by a new truth in another tale, leaving the collection with no discernable center, no solid meaning, except that it is about that lack of stable meaning. One of the proponents of this type of reading is Cedric Reverand, who claims the work is about the subversion of meaning itself. This is how he sums up his discussion about "Of the Pythagorean Philosophy" and "The Cock and the Fox":

Both tales could be said to "cap" the entire collection; they repeat the pattern of doing and undoing, thereby confirming the basic strategy of *Fables*. But

beyond that, they actually liberate us from irresolution, from unreconciled oppositions, in one case by freeing us into laughter at the whole process, and in the other by providing us with an enlarged understanding, grounded on ancient philosophy as well as on the new science, that perpetual flux, values knitting and unravelling, reforming and dissolving, are all part of a universe whose basic active principle is subversion. (184)¹

This reading of *Fables* fundamentally misunderstands the text’s attitude towards materialism. While this perpetual flux in its ancient and, more importantly, modern guises of materialism is a central preoccupation in *Fables*, it is not so calmly celebrated by Dryden; rather, the flux of materialism, all its “jarring Atomes” (“A Song for St. Cecilia’s Day, 1687” 3: line 4), is a persistent evil, and “heav’nly Harmony” always opposes it (3: 1),² as here in Theseus’s speech from “Palamon and Arcite”:

¹Some other explicit statements claiming *Fables* is about the ambiguity and indeterminacy of meaning that Dryden saw in the universe come from Steven Zwicker in “Dryden and the Dissolution,” especially 327, and in his earlier *Politics and Language in Dryden’s Poetry* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1984) 158-75, especially 173; from Paul Hammond in *John Dryden: A Literary Life* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1991) 142-68, especially 168; from James D. Garrison in “The Universe of Dryden’s *Fables*” (*Studies in English Literature* 21 [1981]: 409-23) especially 420 and 423, and in the section on *Fables* in his *Pietas from Vergil to Dryden* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State UP, 1992) 247-54, especially 250; from Earl Miner in chapter 7, “Thematic Variations and Structure in *Fables*” (*Dryden’s Poetry*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1967) 287-323, especially 303, where he misascribes the real comfort of Pythagoras’s philosophy for Dryden; from Judith Sloman in *Dryden: The Poetics of Translation*, 147-222, especially 191; from Mark Loveridge in *A History of Augustan Fable* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998) 176-88, especially 185; and from Abigail Williams in “The Politics of Providence in Dryden’s *Fables Ancient and Modern*” (*Translation and Literature* 17.1 [Spring 2008]: 1-20) especially 20. In a more extreme fashion, David Bywaters completely dismisses the idea that *Fables* is a unified work in his “The Problem of Dryden’s *Fables*” (*Eighteenth-Century Studies* 26 [Fall 1992]: 29-55).

²A complete reading of the triumph of this force in all of *Fables* is not possible here. This pattern of materialism’s jarring meaninglessness opposed by the meaningfulness of Heaven’s harmony is pursued in extended readings of all of *Fables* in my articles: “Adorn’d with Labour’d Art: The Intricate Unity of Dryden’s *Fables*” (*Modern Philology* 106.1 [2008]: 25-59); “Following the Leaf through Part of Dryden’s *Fables*” (*Studies in English Literature: 1500-1900* 50 [Summer 2010]: 557-81); “Dryden’s ‘Ceyx and Alcyone’: Metamorphosing Ovid” (*Philological Quarterly* 86.1-2 [2007]: 123-41); and “Dryden’s ‘Cymon and Iphigenia’: The ‘Vigour of the Worse’ Prevailing” (*Studies in Philology* 102 [2005]: 210-32).

The Cause and Spring of Motion, from above
 Hung down on Earth the Golden Chain of Love:
 Great was th' Effect, and high was his Intent,
 When Peace among the jarring Seeds he sent.
 Fire, Flood, and Earth, and Air by this were bound,
 And Love, the common Link, the new Creation crown'd.
 The Chain still holds; for though the Forms decay,
 Eternal Matter never wears away [. . .]. (7: 3.1024-31)

The duality here—the divine versus the material, the eternal versus the transient—is pivotal to all of *Fables*, no more so than to “Of the Pythagorean Philosophy.” Yet in privileging the world of the transient, Reverend and those other critics ignore the point of the eternal in this translation of Ovid, that the “Chain still holds.” It is as if they supplant Pythagoras, the figure associated with the religious underlying the material and renowned as the philosophic source for the concept of the soul so pivotal to Christianity, and replace him with an Epicurean or Lucretian version of himself. Pythagoras is not a symbol of science; he is a symbol of religion, more specifically of Catholicism’s values of eternity against the forces of materialism and matter’s evanescence. This stress on Pythagoras’s religious symbolism also has implications for how to read *Fables*. While the form of *Fables* reflects, in miniature, the form of the cosmos described in “Of the Pythagorean Philosophy,” that reflection does not constitute an equivalence between the collection and the decaying mess of matter that Lucretius and other materialists see the universe to be. These tales are only disparate atoms to those who do not see the broader metaphor Dryden is using. As the presence of God in the world and his gift of meaning bind the atoms of matter together in “the Golden Chain of Love,” so Dryden, the little creator, likewise binds these tales together in a chain of meaning.

Oddly, critics more often discuss what Lucretius and Epicureanism mean in regard to *Fables*, and even sometimes directly in regard to “Of the Pythagorean Philosophy,” than discuss what Pythagoras means. Anne Middleton, David Hopkins, Cedric

Reverand, and Paul Hammond³ variously examine Lucretius as a central influence on the thought of Dryden, especially in “Palamon and Arcite.” And in “Of the Pythagorean Philosophy,” Epicurus or Lucretius is often looked upon as a stand-in for Pythagoras. For example, in discussing Dryden’s translations of Lucretius in *Sylvae* (1685), Judith Sloman acknowledges that Dryden objected to what he represented as an Epicurean materialist and that he was a “genuine threat to [Dryden’s] cosmic security” (79). But she then claims that in *Fables* Dryden is a believer in “Christian Epicureanism” (147) and that “Of the Pythagorean Philosophy” is “Dryden’s attempt at an Epicurean poetics” (123). At times, Sloman does look at what Pythagoras means on his own terms, discussing his role in European religious thought and the particular Catholicization of Pythagoras by Dryden (181-85), but she still resists the conclusion that Dryden rejected materialism as an ultimate explanation for the world. She will only go as far as to assert that Dryden was caught in a “double truth” (80) of materialism and Catholicism because she claims that nothing in *Fables* undermines Epicureanism and that the collection in fact highlights “the absence of God” (187). Similarly, David Hopkins sees in “Of the Pythagorean Philosophy” the forces of materialism and those that oppose it caught in an unresolved debate (*John Dryden* 169). Steven Zwicker’s link between Lucretius and *Fables* in general and “Of the Pythagorean Philosophy” in particular likewise indicates a reading of a materialist Dryden (“Dryden and Dissolution” 310), one that sees no discernable order as possible in either his poem or in the world because the only forces that matter are those of the materialist universe with its blind forces of chance (325). The ambiguity that most critics see in *Fables* is an effect of their

³For further reading, see Anne Middleton’s “The Modern Art of Fortifying: *Palamon and Arcite* as Epicurean Epic” (*Chaucer Review* 3 [1968]: 124-43); David Hopkins’s *John Dryden* 199; Cedric Reverand’s *Dryden’s Final Poetic Mode* 60; and Paul Hammond’s “Dryden’s Philosophy of Fortune” (*Modern Language Review* 80 [1985]: 769-85) 783-84.

overrating the value or force of materialism, so often identified with Lucretius, in the poem.

While materialism is a major issue in *Fables*, the more important point is how it is treated. Just the use of Pythagoras should in itself indicate an unambiguous rejection of materialism. Since the times of Ancient Greece, Pythagoras had symbolized looking past the temporal world of matter to the eternal world of the divine and the soul.⁴ For an idea of how the Restoration viewed not only Pythagoras but also Epicurus, Ralph Cudworth's frontispiece to his *The True Intellectual System of the Universe* (1678) serves as a perfect emblem. The frontispiece of this book that is a refutation of atheism shows two separate groups of philosophers arguing over the altar of religion. The group identified as the theists is led by Pythagoras; the group identified as atheists has Epicurus in the middle. Above each group's heads is a laurel. The laurel above the theists is whole and underscored with a blazon saying "victory." The laurel above the atheists is broken and has a blazon saying "confusion." The book itself traces the philosophic attitudes towards the divine among mostly Greek and Roman figures, largely dealing with the atomistic philosophy and how theists and atheists develop that philosophy. Cudworth also clearly sees this division as repeated in his own cultural moment (174-75), with the theists seeing beyond the atomism to a world of the divine (as Dryden's Pythagoras does) and the atheists incapable of that leap: "It is certain that the *Source* of all *Atheism*, is generally a Dull and Earthly Disbelief of the Existence of things beyond the Reach of Sense" (176). This dichotomy, though with not quite the same enthusiastic rejection of Epicurus, is reiterated in William Temple's "An Essay upon Ancient and Modern Learning" (1690). This essay sparked off the "the battle

⁴See S.K. Heninger, Jr.'s *Touches of Sweet Harmony*, in particular Part 2, chapter 5: "Moral Philosophy," 256-84, on Pythagoras's influence for Christians on the idea of the immortality of the soul, and Part 3: "Poetics," 287-397, on his influence on poetics in England.

of the books,” a skirmish in the larger battle between the ancient and moderns that had been going on for at least a century.⁵ This particular episode lasted more than ten years, culminating in Swift’s *The Battle of the Books*. Dryden is not generally seen as directly involved in that debate; however, the title *Fables, Ancient and Modern* echoes Temple’s essay’s title (and Swift does have Dryden figure in his satire of the debate). Temple’s essay uses Pythagoras as the central figure of the superiority of the ancients and clearly places the tradition of Pythagoras, with his moral philosophy and concern for the immortality of the soul, in opposition to the other great tradition of the ancients that centers on materialism and Epicurus (47).

Certainly, critics are right to notice that “Of the Pythagorean Philosophy” is concerned with the decay and fleetingness of matter. After the long proscription against meat eating, Pythagoras turns his attention to time itself: first the day (7: 278-91), next the phases of the moon (7: 292-95), and finally the seasons (7: 296-319). He then looks at the human body’s journey through time to inevitable decay (7: 320-357). Following this passage, time itself is addressed as a carnivore, a metaphor Dryden emphasizes:

Thy Teeth, devouring Time, thine, envious Age,
On Things below still exercise your Rage:
With venom’d Grinders you corrupt your Meat,
And then at lingering Meal, the Morsels eat. (7: 358-61)

Grimly, all matter is meat for time to consume; this is materialism of a very absolute kind. But there is a telling point in the metaphor, one that shows Pythagoras as looking beyond materialism: for Pythagoras, to live within a materialist universe is to live within the world of the carnivore, the great enemy, whom Pythagoras has spent the first part of the poem warning us away

⁵Describing the chronology of the debate, Sir William Temple stated that it started in England “about fifty or sixty years date” (“Some Thoughts” 488). For a discussion of the more general European context about the debate between the Ancients and the Moderns, see Gilbert Highet’s *The Classical Tradition: Greek and Roman Influences on Western Literature* (London: Oxford UP, 1949) 261-88.

from. If the materialist universe is a carnivore, one must seek to reject it, not celebrate it, as Cedric Reverand claims (182). To be consumed by time is the fate of “Things below,” but Dryden, through Pythagoras, holds out great hope for things above.

Pythagoras goes on to the long section about geologic time and how the land and rivers always change. But here what looks to be about the transience at the heart of materialism is really pointing to the eternal. The four elements may change “Figure” or “Form” but “nothing is destroy’d” (7: 363; 7: 384; 7: 388):

Those very Elements which we partake,
 Alive, when Dead some other Bodies make:
 Translated grow, have Sense, or can Discourse,
 But Death on deathless Substance has no force. (7: 394-97,
 Dryden’s addition)

This is about eternity and the real center of Pythagoras’s thought, the soul; the eternity of the soul refutes materialism’s grim carnivorous destruction of all. In a Dryden addition, Pythagoras immediately returns to his materialist opponents’ point: “That Forms are chang’d I grant” (7: 398). This is a minor concession that defeats the larger argument about the all-powerful nature of materialism. For Pythagoras (and Dryden) there is a realm of the eternal, where true meaning is found.

Even earlier, this refutation of materialism’s force is stated through an ironic allusion to Lucretius:

Those I would teach; and by right Reason bring
 To think of Death, as but an idle Thing.
 Why thus affrighted at an empty Name,
 A Dream of Darkness, and fictitious Flame;
 Vain Themes of Wit, which but in Poems pass,
 And Fables of a World, that never was?
 What feels the Body when the Soul expires,
 By time corrupted, or consum’d by Fires?
 Nor dies the Spirit, but new Life repeats
 In other Forms, and only changes Seats. (7: 221-30)

As noted in Hammond and Hopkins’s *The Poems of John Dryden*, lines 221 and 222 are allusions to or imitations of Dryden’s own translation of Lucretius, as are lines 218, and 237-38 (*Poems* 531-32). But this passage directly refutes one of the central tenets of Lucretius’s materialism, the mortality of the soul, as it is stated in Dryden’s translation of the poem alluded to: “What has this Bugbear Death to frighten Man, / If Souls can die, as well as Bodies can?” (3: 1-2). In the Ovid translation, Lucretius’s idea that death is absolute because everything is only constituted by matter becomes just “A Dream of Darkness.” Ironically, one of these derided “Poems” or “Fables” is Lucretius’s. As many notice, Lucretius’s thought is in *Fables*. Yet it is here ultimately to be dismissed.

The entire section on vegetarianism (7: 99-207) is a meditation on the consequences of the world of materialism for those who refuse to look beyond it to the eternal truth of “Heav’n’s mysterious Laws” (7: 89), which is that everything is caught in an eternal circle. Dryden generally alters the Ovid to humanize the animal world, which makes the passage less about the choice between vegetarianism or meat eating and more clearly about what it symbolizes: the choice between peace or murder and war. For example, “Parcite, mortales, dapibus temerare nefandis corpora” (15.line 75) [“O mortal, do not pollute your bodies with a food so impious” (Miller, F. 371)] is changed to “O Mortals! from your Fellows blood abstain” (7: 101), or “carne ferae sedant ieiunia” (15.83) [“Flesh is the wild beasts’ wherewith they appease their hunger” (Miller, F. 371)] is changed to “their Maws with their slain Brethren fill” (7: 115). Dryden often adds the word “murder” or its cognates (7: 128, 146, 171, 194), with its more human moralistic connotations. Dryden also emphasizes or adds metaphors of war or political oppression to describe the animal kingdom and meat eating. For example, the carnivores are “stronger Beasts” that “oppress the weak by Might” (7: 123, Dryden’s addition), and he adds “O Tyrant” for the killer of the ox (7: 178). In fact, the connection between war (or at least

murder) and meat eating is made explicit even by Ovid though Dryden adds to the war metaphor (7: 149):

For all was peaceful; and that Peace sincere.
Whoever was that Wretch (and curs'd be He)
That envy'd first our Food's simplicity;
Th' essay of bloody Feasts on Bruits began,
And after forg'd the Sword to murder Man.
Had he the sharpen'd Steel alone employ'd
On Beasts of Prey that other Beasts destroy'd,
Or Man invaded with their Fangs and Paws,
This had been justify'd by Nature's Laws,
And Self-defence: But who did Feasts begin
Of Flesh, he stretch'd Necessity to Sin. (7: 142-52)

Meat eating then is only a symbol for all the forces that have repeatedly been identified throughout *Fables* as all Dryden opposes: war, materialism, tyranny. This complex of associations is also linked to meat eating through war's opposite, love, in an earlier poem in the collection. In "Palamon and Arcite," love is praised precisely because it turns the lion from meat eating towards love: "For thee the Lion loaths the Taste of Blood, / And roaring hunts his Female through the Wood" (7: 3.138-9, Dryden's addition). The chase, perhaps the most recurrent image in *Fables*, is constantly used as a symbol for war, as in "To John Dryden" or "Meleager and Atalanta" (7: 50-70; 7: 209-10, 225, Dryden additions), and sometimes vice versa, as in this addition by Dryden, with its cannibalistic touch, in "The Speeches of Ajax and Ulysses": "[. . .] *Paris* and his lawless Crew / Scarce held their Hands, and lifted Swords: But stood / In Act to quench their impious Thirst of Blood [. . .]" (7: 326-28). Dryden makes Pythagoras's warnings against meat eating a symbol of the blind forces of materialism, which ultimately lead to war when one is unable to see the "Chain of Love" that connects everything.

This misguided world of brutal materialism has an immediate political context, the same one Dryden has in mind throughout *Fables*: William's militaristic England. In the section following the one against meat eating (7: 237-77), Dryden more clearly makes

allusions to the political situation of England, in particular to James’s treatment during and after the Revolution. As Hammond and Hopkins note (532, notes to lines 237-38), materialism is emphasized at first (7: 237-38) by Dryden’s translating Ovid with Lucretian echoes from his own translation of Lucretius’s “Against the Fear of Death” (3: 163-74). Then Dryden adds almost all of these lines:

And here and there th’ unbodied Spirit flies,
By Time, or Force, or Sickness dispossess,
And lodges, where it lights, in Man or Beast;
Or hunts without, till ready Limbs it find,
And actuates those according to their kind;
From Tenement to Tenement is toss’d [. . .]. (7: 240-45)

Here Dryden describes two potential or theoretical narratives for a soul as it leaves the body at death, which he puts in language that is reminiscent of his and his readers’ immediate political context. The two kinds of spirit journeys have applications to either James or William. Some of the diction here is applicable to James’s experience of the Revolution. The term “flies” recalls James’s flight from England, and by “Force” “dispossess” is an accurate description of what William did to him. Then the idea of the hunter is introduced, an odd image to connect to a Pythagorean soul after the long vilification of hunters as, most often, mere carnal figures of materialism. This image seems more readily to apply to William, who like a beast of prey pounces upon England, the “ready Limbs.” And it should be remembered that the image of William as a beast of prey attacking England is used earlier in the collection in “To John Driden” (7: 54-57) and in “The Cock and the Fox” (7: 480-506). Even the unusual term “Tenement” may allude to England or the throne because “tenement” can mean “any various forms of incorporeal property treated like land that is held by one person from another.” So James is the spirit that “flies” while William is the ruthless hunter figure of aggression and deceit. Further, the term “actuates”—which may be stretching things, but it is an odd use—recalls the “acts” of

Parliament that were the “legal” means that secured the accession of the throne for William and Mary, which Jacobites would consider a thin disguise for the force William used to grab the throne, and the “acts” reference will be clearly picked up a bit later in the passage. In this presentation of the image of the possible journeys of a soul, Dryden has reminded the reader of *Fables* of his preoccupation with these figures of the Revolution and will develop his critique more insistently in the ensuing lines. Playing upon Ovid’s metaphor of the soul as wax, Dryden continues to criticize William in this passage on the progress of the soul by alluding to the alteration of the Great Seal that occurred after the Revolution, when William’s image supplanted James’s, as Hopkins notes (“Translation, Metempsychosis” 149-50): William’s “Face assumes” (7: 247), with the connotations of pride, and William’s image “deface[s]” (7: 251) the Seal, not only changing it but ruining it. And again James is the “Soul” that “flies” “To seek [his] Fortune in some other Place” (7: 252-53). There is also the possible snide remark implied about William’s famously ugly looks “defac[ing]” the Seal.

Dryden portrays James as the victim of the forces of materialism, of minds that cannot see into the eternal world of the soul for which Pythagoras is arguing. This is particularly clear, as Rachel Miller notes (179), in the passage that condemns Mary especially:

Then let not Piety be put to flight,
To please the tast of Glutton-Appetite;
But suffer inmate Souls secure to dwell,
Lest from their Seats your Parents you expel;
With rabid Hunger feed upon your kind,
Or from a Beast dislodge a Brother’s Mind. (7: 254-59,
Dryden’s expansion⁶)

As well, being James’s “son”-in-law sort of makes William Mary’s brother—and they were already first cousins—so by extension

⁶Throughout the essay, I use the word “addition” when the words and idea are Dryden’s only and the word “expansion” when Dryden expands on an idea that is already present in the text.

the “Beast” here is William. The forces that govern William and Mary’s actions are those of materialism, mere “Glutton-Appetite,” that destroy the filial bonds that should guarantee peace. The forces they support are put in direct opposition to “Piety,” or love, the pervasive positive force throughout *Fables*.⁷ The passage then claims that all caught in “Nature” and “Times” does not last (7: 262; 7: 266). This leads to Dryden’s last allusion in this passage to the Revolution and its outcome. He connects the whole enterprise of the Revolution to the destructive and self-consuming forces of materialism and time:

Thus in successive Course the Minutes run,
And urge their Predecessor Minutes on,
Still moving, ever new: For former Things
Are set aside, like abdicated Kings:
And every moment alters what is done,
And innovates some Act till then unknown. (7: 272-77,
Dryden’s expansion)

The obvious “abdicated Kings” reference has led many critics to comment on this passage, but few notice the contempt and irony that is leveled at William and Mary and how immoral and foolish their actions are made to appear. For example, Reverand misunderstands the role of the temporal in this passage as he does in the rest of Pythagoras’s philosophy or, more precisely, Dryden’s version of it. Reverand says Pythagoras in this passage “not only tolerates but also celebrates” the flux of time (183). But Dryden’s Pythagoras is mocking the force of “innovation” here just as he did (as Reverand himself notes [183]) when, in “Absalom and Achitophel,” he wrote “Innovation is the Blow of Fate” (2:800); death, then as now, is the ultimate effect of “Innovation.” These innovative acts of Parliament only attempt to legitimize what is for Dryden illegal and immoral. And Dryden

⁷As noted in the commentary to *Fables* for “Meleager and Atalanta” (Dryden 7:683, note for lines 287-88), “piety” was a synonym for “love” in the seventeenth century. Also, James D. Garrison discusses the significance of the idea of piety in *Fables* in *Pietas from Vergil to Dryden* (note 1 above) 247-54.

further ridicules William's "Glutton-Appetite" (7: 255) for power, which pushed James, his "Predecessor," out, and satirizes the new regal couple and Parliament's complicity as they "alter[] what is done" to make it appear otherwise. For Dryden the Revolution has not been the providential act of God that William's supporters described it as⁸; it is the antithesis of a religious triumph because it celebrates everything that betrays the forces of the divine. This depiction of William's world is mirrored in "The Flower and the Leaf," where the followers of the flower are "nurs'd in Idleness, and train'd in Courts" (7: 565). They symbolize all that is transient and perishable; caught up in time, they "enjoy the present hour" but will be hunted down, as if by one of Pythagoras's carnivores: "Death behind came stalking on, unseen, / And wither'd (like the Storm) the freshness of their Green" (7: 567-68).

Dryden, however, not only paints a grim picture of the ruthless world of materialism and its proponents in England; he also articulates its opposite to show an escape from this hopeless and empty world of beings caught in time and the flux of matter. At one level this is simply the point of the original Ovid. But on a second, more symbolic, level Dryden makes this poem about how Catholicism is that answer by using Pythagoras's preoccupation with the eternal as a symbol for Catholicism's own similar preoccupation. In his discussion following the summation of the seemingly all-encompassing effects of carnivore time, Pythagoras, or more pointedly Dryden in his revisions, turns his mind to that which is beyond flux. As I discussed briefly before, materialism's power is presented in lines 362 to 397 ultimately to be refuted. Pythagoras has turned his thoughts to the "deathless Substance" (7: 397) beyond the reach of time. In this passage Pythagoras expresses a feeling of being above it all, no longer

⁸For a discussion of Whig attitudes to the revolution and providence, see Abigail Williams's "The Politics of Providence in Dryden's *Fables Ancient and Modern*" (note 1 above) or Craig Rose's *England in the 1690's: Revolution, Religion, and War* (Oxford: U of Oxford P, 1999) 19-25, which Williams cites.

crushed by the depressing facts of the decay of the material world. Time, still despised, is now only a kind of foolish game of vanity:

Thus are their Figures never at a stand,
But chang’d by Nature’s innovating Hand;
All Things are alter’d, nothing is destroy’d,
The shifted Scene, for some new Show employ’d. (7: 386-9,
389 Dryden’s addition)

“Nature’s innovating Hand” is merely creating a “new Show,” not chewing us up in its “venom’d Grinders” (7: 360). Innovation, less threateningly than earlier in the poem and than in “Absalom and Achitophel,” is a delusory escape that only distracts the trivial or the foolish.

Through the religious overtones of the translation here (7: 362-97), Dryden, more than Pythagoras, communicates a consolation that places him above the material world. This passage is filled with religious and particularly Catholic allusions. It starts off with the word “Elements,” which Hammond and Hopkins note is a reference not just to Lucretian terminology (540, note to line 362) but also to that used for the Catholic mystery of the Eucharist (541, note to lines 394-97). The allusion to the Eucharist is even more emphatic in the closing paragraph of this section:

. . . what we call to Die, is not t’ appear,
Or be the Thing that formerly we were.
Those very Elements which we partake,
Alive, when Dead some other Bodies make:
Translated grow, have Sense, or can Discourse,
But Death on deathless Substance has no force. (7: 392-97)

This refutation of the world of flux is merged with diction linked to the Eucharist: “Elements we partake,” “Substance,” “Translated” (Hammond and Hopkins 541, note to lines 394-97). Most critics read this as about *Fables* itself and how Dryden saw his translation as a form of “transubstantiation” of other writers,⁹ and such a

⁹For further reading on this idea, see Jayne Elizabeth Lewis’s *The English Fable*. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996) 125; Charles Tomlinson’s “Why Dryden’s Translations

reading is convincing. But this reading is only a subset of what the terminology of the Eucharist, the “real presence,” is doing here and in *Fables* generally (such as in “Baucis and Philemon”). One of the derisive caricatures of the Catholic communion was that it was cannibalism because of the Catholic insistence on the “literal” real presence in the host. But Dryden turns the tables on his opponents. As the cannibalism that Pythagoras has been warning against in meat eating—“O spare to make a *Thyestean* Meal” (7: 680)—is a symbol of all that is temporal and material, a form of false meaning, so the real presence of the Eucharist is a fundamental metaphor for real meaning because it is eternal, “deathless.” Only those who live in the world of the literal—the ruthless, time-bound carnivores—see the real presence as just more meat. For Dryden, the Eucharist is the sign of all true meaning, not just literary meaning, and Dryden is claiming a small piece of this meaning for *Fables*. Catholicism has the secret to whatever is beyond decay, so it is the opposite of cannibalism’s hopeless materialism. This juxtaposition between cannibalism and the Eucharist is reminiscent of how Dante uses the Count Ugolino episode in *Inferno*, Canto 33, with the cannibalism in Ugolino’s corner of hell and the allusion to cannibalism in his own sons’ deaths when one offers himself for his father to eat. There, as in Dryden’s poem, cannibalism is the Satanic materialist parody of the divine mystery of the Eucharist. And as Judith Sloman notes (184-85; 222), many of the villains in *Fables* are depicted as cannibals.

Having articulated the Catholic alternative to the despair of materialism, Dryden’s Pythagoras “grant[s]” that “Forms” decay (7: 398) and gives a long list of how time has changed geography and cities and peoples, but this list of overwhelming flux also ends in another figure that contradicts the universality of transience, the phoenix (7: 578-611). This symbol of the eternal

Matter” (*Translation and Literature* 10:1 [2001]: 3-20) 17-18; and David Hopkins’s “Translation, Metempsychosis” 150-51.

is subtly altered from the Ovid to be a clearly Christian one. St. Clement was the first to use the phoenix as a symbol for the Christian resurrection of the body (25). But Dryden’s rewriting of Ovid here more clearly alludes to Tertullian. Pythagoras claims the phoenix comes eternally from its own form; it is “another and the same” (7: 581, Dryden’s addition), its own translated or transubstantiated being. This phrase imitates Tertullian’s description of the Phoenix in his *Concerning the Resurrection of the Flesh*:

I mean that bird, special to the east, famous from its solitary character, miraculous in its after-history, which gladly puts itself to death and renews itself, passing away and appearing again by a death which is a birth, a second time a phoenix where now there is none, a second time the very creature that no longer exists, another and yet the same. (30-31)

In line with this Christianizing of the passage, Dryden emphasizes the non-material origin of the bird: it does not live on “Corn or Herbs” (7: 582) but on the “Essence of *Amomun*” and only “watches” the “rich Gums of *Arabia*” in order to live (7: 584). He also adds to the Ovid terms that make the bird sound like an artist or writer as it makes its nest: “first he draws / The Plan,” and its claws are “Nature’s Artificers” (7: 588-89; 7: 590). Furthermore, the theme of the eternal is communicated in an addition that is only apparent when read in conjunction with other tales in the collection, most specifically “The Flower and the Leaf.” The phoenix makes his nest on “Oaken Boughs” (7: 587). Ovid only has “in ramis tremulaeque cacumine palmae” (15.396) [“in the topmost branches of a waving palm tree” (Miller, F. 393)]. Dryden also includes the palm, but the oak is his addition and a symbol for the followers of the leaf in the pseudo-Chaucerian tale (“Flower and the Leaf” 7: 230, 253, 279, 284, and 503), which is an allegory of the choice between the eternal (the followers of the leaf) or the fleeting world of time (the followers of the flower). The oak is used again in a Dryden addition in “The Wife of Bath Her Tale” to signal the same choice that must be made by the knight; there it is a withered oak leaf (7: 226), symbolizing the knight’s betrayal of

the values of the eternal. Oak is even used once more in "Of the Pythagorean Philosophy," in a Dryden addition, to symbolize "Godlike" Hercules's link with the world of the eternal (7: 19, Dryden's addition); he is given a "Club of Oak" (7: 28). So as a "maker" or artist, the bird is constructing a nest that is a reflection of the values of the eternal just as Dryden is attempting to do in *Fables*, his own construction. The nest's and, by extension, the bird's link with the timeless is that the myrrh used for the nest is described as "corruptless" (7: 595, Dryden's addition). Its fiery death and rebirth also links the phoenix to that which is beyond the world of flux. Fire is the purest element, which "to Heaven ascend[s]" (7: 366), as Pythagoras states earlier in the poem: "Fire first with Wings expanded mounts on high, / Pure, void of weight, and dwells in upper Sky" (7: 388-89, Dryden's expansion). Similarly, fire is defined in "The Wife of Bath Her Tale," like the phoenix, as perfect and self-contained: "But Fire, th' enlivener of the general Frame / Is one, its Operation still the same. / Its Principle is in itself [. . .]" (7: 427-29, Dryden's expansion). To emphasize the baby phoenix's link to the eternal, Dryden adds to the description of its continuity with its parent: "His Father's Heir, and from his tender Wings / Shakes off his parents Dust, his Method he pursues" (7: 601-02, Dryden's addition). Two metaphors are at work here. Picking up from the image of the bird as an artist or poet, Dryden points out that both father and child create by the same "Method" and "on the same Terms" (7: 603, Dryden's addition). And the "Dust," or ashes, of his father echoes the epigraph to all of *Fables*: "But now we stand by the ashes and bones of my father himself, not, I think, without the purpose and holy guidance of the gods" (Hammond and Hopkins 33; originally from *The Aeneid* 5. 55-57). Great literature is a kind of transmigration of the soul between authors, as Dryden says of Chaucer's spirit in the preface: "I found I had an Soul congenial to [Chaucer's]" (7: 40, line 582) and that it could not be wholly chance that he was translating Chaucer but would say no more

“for fear of being tax’d with Superstition” (7: 42, line 666).¹⁰ A living author is possessed by a great predecessor’s spirit in order to write eternal works; as the phoenix is reborn to carry on the work of its father (and as the eternal spirit guarantees a continuity beyond the fleetingness of matter or “Dust”), so Dryden carries on the work of his literary father. And fittingly, as in Ovid, his great work of eternal production, the nest, is laid at the door of the temple of the eternal, the Church (7: 610), signifying the real center of worship for Dryden and the center of inspiration for *Fables*.

But there is a second aspect of the metaphor. The image of the phoenix unites the idea of change and eternity in the same being, “another and the same” (7: 581), the perfect metaphor not only for poets but also for kings. So the second aspect of the metaphor is a political one that reflects badly on William, who is not “His Father’s Heir” (7: 601). For Dryden the political world, like the literary, should imitate the eternal cycles of the phoenix. Dryden goes on to add the royal imagery to the following passage: the bird’s life is a “reign” (7: 604) and the father’s sepulcher is “Royal” (7: 607). In contrast to the phoenix’s performance of his filial duty, William and Mary’s usurpation of the throne was certainly not done “decently” (7: 611).

Although the next verse paragraph is only slightly altered by Dryden, it does have an appropriate echo coming after this claim to a scrupulous obedience to the dictates of the values of eternity, political and artistic. After the Revolution and the “usurpation” he felt he had endured as the former poet laureate, the artistic sellouts to the political world were one of Dryden’s favorite sources of resentment, most clearly expounded upon in his “To Sir Godfrey Kneller.” In this passage, those who change are by definition incapable of phoenix-like constancy: the hyena is “of a double-kind” (7: 613, Dryden’s addition), connoting hypocrisy

¹⁰James A. Winn discusses the eternal cycles Dryden is recapturing in the present moment of his art, with reference as well to the epigraph and the phoenix specifically, in “Past and Present in Dryden’s *Fables*” (*Huntington Library Quarterly* 63.1 [2000]: 157-74).

and timeserving; and the description of the chameleon's action is changed from "adsimulat, tetigit quoscumque colores" (15.410) ["takes the colour of whatever thing it rests upon" (Miller, F. 395)] to "receives / The colour of the Thing to which he cleaves" (7: 16-17). There is something more servile and desperate in Dryden's rendering that expresses contempt for its changeability, to which the phoenix and Dryden stand opposed.

The most important image of the eternal in the phoenix passage is one that is central not only to the resolution of the poem, with its prophecy of Rome, but also to *Fables* as a whole, an image that can be found throughout the collection: the circle. The phoenix's nest, in a Dryden addition, is described as a bed, "Fun'ral and Bridal both" (7: 594). This is a perfect circle of life, where the beginning cannot be distinguished from the ending. And with the perfect recreation of the father, nothing is altered or lost. This is what Hercules calls "Times revolving Race" and which the narrator reiterates as "Revolving Time" in a witty antimetabole imitating the circle of time (7: 23; 7: 25). The circle image shows up elsewhere in *Fables*. In "Palamon and Arcite," the death of Palamon gives rise to the marriage of Arcite and Emily, the resolution of the tale. The marriage is described through an implied image of a circle that accommodates itself to the divine "Golden Chain of Love":

Ordain we then two Sorrows to combine,
And in one Point th' Extremes of Grief to join;
That thence resulting Joy may be renew'd,
As jarring Notes in Harmony conclude. (7: 3.1115-18).

This is like the "Fun'ral and the Bridal both" from the phoenix, not only in the image of the circle but also in the connection between death and marriage. "To John Driden" more explicitly has the image of the circle in the center of the poem when describing the hare as the

Emblem of Humane Life, who runs the Round;
And after all his wandering ways are done,

His circle fills, and ends where he begun
Just as the Setting meets the Rising Sun. (7: 63-66)

Douglas Canfield describes this version of the circle as “a cycle of ineluctable futility” because the hare is involved in the pointless circles of violence or meaningless action, and, as Canfield also points out, in this poem, so are the fox, doctors, the war with France, and William’s grasp on the throne (170). These contradict the kind of circle that the phoenix represents; they are the actions of the futile materialists who will be eaten up by the cycles of violence. In the example of the circle of the hare, which symbolizes the same kind of futility we are shown in the world of endless decay in the Pythagorean philosophy, “Victors are by Victories undone” (“To John Driden” 7: 164). They are undone because they do not look beyond materialism and its pointlessness. Canfield goes on, however, to show that in “To John Driden” the circle is also an image of eternity, the kind associated with the phoenix: “The image of the circle suggests not only the problem but the answer as well: the circle of perfection of the soul, into which man must retire to find peace” (170). This better circle, Canfield says, symbolizes an escape from unceasing change “by standing fixed on the firm center on one’s own soul throughout life—and ultimately into death” (169).

The lesson of “Palamon and Arcite,” “To John Driden,” “Of the Pythagorean Philosophy,” and of all of *Fables* is not to be one of those who “chasing, sigh to think themselves are chas’d” (“To John Driden” 7: 70) but to move beyond the pointless cycles of materialism. And the passage on Rome picks up on the image of the perfect circle of eternity, prophesies how the Catholic Church leads out of that trap of time-bound meaninglessness. Just before discussing Rome directly, Pythagoras turns his attention to the rise and fall of empires. This is exactly the philosophical terrain where “Victors are by Victories undone,” seen so frequently in *Fables*, at least when those victors are representative of the world of violence, such as a Palamon, Tancred, Meleager, or others. The pursuit of empire is circular and pointless, part

of the seemingly inescapable world of material change, which is seen not as “balanced” against some other values or ambiguous in the significance of its outcomes, but as decidedly negative:

Nations and Empires flourish and decay,
By turns command, and in their turn obey;
Time softens hardy People, Time again
Hardens to War a soft, unwarlike Train.
Thus *Troy* for ten long Years her Foes withstood,
And daily bleeding bore th’ expence of Blood:
Now for thick Streets it shows an empty space,
Or only fill’d with Tombs of her own perish’d Race,
Her self becomes the Sepulcher of what she was. (7: 626-34,
Dryden’s expansion)

Dryden emphasizes the death and emptiness in this passage (with its allusion to England’s own, William-led ten-years war). There is no mention of the returning hope: ultimately, all is a desolation of pointless wars. No celebration of this cycle is possible. To choose this route is to choose death.

As he moves on to discuss Rome, we anticipate the same fate for yet another empire. But his description is entirely different. Rome’s fate he associates with the skies, where the two purer elements of fire and air reside (7:366): “*Rome* [. . .] in time shall mate the Skies” (7:637-38, Dryden’s addition). He is indicating a unity between this empire and the forces of heaven; the empire will “mate,” that is, “match or equal,” the eternal forces of the heavens. Just the tone of the description of change for this empire is totally different:

Widening her Bounds, and working on her way;
Ev’n now she meditates Imperial Sway:
Yet this is change, but she by changing thrives,
Like Moons new-born, and in her Cradle strives
To fill her Infant-Horns; an Hour shall come
When the round World shall be contain’d in *Rome*. (7: 639-44,
Dryden’s expansion)

The qualification of this being a different kind of change is not in the Ovidian original. This change does not tend toward

decay; under it, Rome “thrives.” Images of death and war are not here; instead Pythagoras compares Rome’s empire to the moon, a simile not in Ovid. The image is again of a circle, not yet complete, but this empire will grow until the “round World” is merely a part of Rome. Rome will not be foolishly within the circle but will controllingly encompass it. This description is much like that of God in Theseus’s speech in “Palamon and Arcite”:

Parts of the Whole are we; but God the Whole;
Who gives us Life, and animating Soul.
For Nature cannot from a Part derive
That Being, which the Whole can only give:
He perfect, stable; but imperfect We,
Subject to Change, and diff’rent in Degree [. . .]. (7: 3.1042-47)

The image of the circle is also used in *The Hind and the Panther* to describe the Catholic Church’s eternal reign: “Let them remember that she cannot dye / Till rolling time is lost in round eternity” (3: 3.18-19). Rome, Pythagoras’s ideal empire, aligns itself away from the temporal and material world of death and towards the eternal. Dryden adds to its divine associations. The prophecy of Helenus to Aeneas (7: 649-62) points out the link between the Goddess of love and Troy through Aeneas, Venus’s son, who in turn will transplant Troy to Rome. Further, showing the divine’s influence in Rome’s empire, Dryden adds, “Heav’n yet owes the World a Race deriv’d from Thee” and refers to Julius Caesar as the one “Heav’n will lend Mankind on Earth to reign” (7: 655; 7:660). Rome is the proxy empire for the divine. How this empire operates will be exactly opposite to the methods of all the figures of materialism and violence in *Fables*, those “Victors” who “are by Victories undone.” Paradoxically, and incomprehensibly to those who operate within the logic of the world of violence, Troy’s defeat is the secret of its success: Pythagoras rejoices

[. . .] to view
[His] Country Walls rebuilt, and *Troy* reviv’d anew,
Rais’d by the fall: Decreed by Loss to Gain;

Enslav'd but to be free, and conquer'd but to reign. (7: 664-67,
Dryden's expansion)

This echoes the Christian "fortune of the Fall" (and Christ's own victory through death) and also reiterates the pattern of the real heroes of *Fables*, not Ajax nor Palamon nor Alexander, but John Driden or Arcite or the hag from "The Wife of Bath Her Tale." Rome will prove triumphant, as does Arcite, who "Obtain[ed] the Conquest, though he lost the Fight" (7: 3.1142). In "The Wife of Bath Her Tale," the duality of the violent fools of transient materialism versus the forces of the eternal is also the theme in the hag's encounter with the rapist knight, whose "Mind is Worldly bent" (7: 493). There, as well, the peaceful figure that argues for the values of eternity defeats the knight in a "battle" that ends in marriage, not death:

Then thus in Peace, quoth she, concludes the Strife,
Since I am turn'd the Husband, you the Wife:
The Matrimonial Victory is mine,
Which having fairly gain'd, I will resign [. . .]. (7: 519-22)

The battle metaphor is entirely Dryden's. The knight learns lasting victory only comes after defeat, as in the example of Rome.

The Catholicization of Rome's empire and the whole Catholic message are anticipated early in the poem. When Pythagoras is introduced, Dryden alludes to the language of his other more explicitly Catholic poem, *The Hind and the Panther*. In that poem Dryden describes God's seat in the heavens as "Thy throne is darkness in th' abyss of light, / A blaze of glory that forbids the sight" (3: 1.66-67). This comes at a moment in the poem when Dryden praises God for having supplied the unerring guide of the Church to see beyond "private reason" (3: 1.63). This context echoes Pythagoras's role, and Dryden makes the connection clear with repeated phrasing and the language of paradox. Much like the earlier poem's voice of the Church, Pythagoras,

[. . .] tho' from Heav'n remote, to Heav'n cou'd move,
With Strength of Mind, and tread th' Abyss above;

And penetrate with his interiour Light
Those upper Depths, which Nature hid from Sight [. . .].
(7: 81-84)

Pythagoras is that unerring guide, “the Man divine” (7: 77), who “discours’d of Heav’ns mysterious Laws” (7: 89). And the Catholic world is also there in the last lines of the poem: the warlike William and his political machinations are implicitly contrasted against the Catholic world of Rome, where the “Godlike *Numa*” has a “willing People and an offer’d Throne” and is a monarch “sent by Heav’n to bless / A Salvage Nation with soft Arts of Peace” (7: 712; 7: 714; 7:715-16).

How to read *Fables* is implied in this reading of “Of the Pythagorean Philosophy” because this elaborately rendered poem from Ovid is essentially about meaning, about the meaningful and the meaningless. Pythagoras’s ultimate lesson is that everything is connected, and only the foolish carnivores trapped in time refuse to see the connections and thus leave the world to fall into meaninglessness, just as the critics I’m arguing against do to the collection that this poem is part of. For both these critics and myself, as is the world, so is the book. These critics who extol the ambiguity of meaning say the collection seems to be a series of unconnected tales like the “jarring Atomes” of the Epicurean universe. In their Epicurean reading, the meaning of the collection disappears the same way the world of matter does. But this reduction of the world of meaning to the world of materialism is the same error all the villains of *Fables* make. The structure of meaning that Dryden is metaphorically imitating is not theirs. The center of meaning in *Fables* is the center of meaning in the universe for all Catholics: love. As Dryden says in the Poeta loquitur to “Cymon and Iphigenia,” love “still inspires [his] Wit” (7: 3). Of course, this is not the profane love of mere sex; it is the love that is synonymous with divine order, as Dante called it, “the love that moves the Sun and the other Stars” (33.145). In a defiant act, Dryden asserts a particularly Catholic aesthetic by performing this metamorphosis of the

material “ashes and bones” (Hammond and Hopkins 33) of other authors’ works and effects his own act of transubstantiation, that is, moves beyond the trivial “accidents,” to use the Aristotelian term, of matter and reanimates them into a divine living presence on a lesser scale from that of the great creator’s presence of meaning in the cosmos.¹¹

In *Touches of Sweet Harmony*, his book about the Pythagorean aesthetic that prevailed in the poetics of the Renaissance, S. K. Heninger admits he exaggerates the speed and the sharpness of the division between the patterns of reading of the Renaissance and those of the later seventeenth century, especially those influenced by the scientific revolution (14-15). Conversely, in a detailed historical study of the Restoration, Richard Kroll examines the opposite pattern of reading that replaced the Pythagorean, the new Epicurean reading, though with almost no direct reference to Pythagoras—the book has only two brief references. In Dryden, we have the perfect example of a figure right in the midst of this shift in hermeneutics. In *Fables*, he meets the new scientific mode of reading the atomistic universe on its own terrain, with its “contingent” and “probabilistic” grasp on meaning,¹² by creating a text that apparently shares in all the wild chaos of that universe. But Dryden then defeats that reading of the universe by showing that within it resides the old-fashioned Pythagorean/Catholic one, with all its metaphoric assumptions. This is also, however, the reason for the great misunderstanding of Dryden’s masterpiece: when materialism and all the forces that are allied with it are presented in *Fables*, the critics most often do not read them as misunderstandings of the universe, because we are the heirs of that scientific revolution, of that

¹¹Heninger describes how the Pythagorean philosophy dictates this role for the artist in his chapter “Poet as Maker,” 287-324, and he gives a very concise description of the role of the “Pythagorean” poet (364). Also, Hopkins discusses the idea of translation as a version of transubstantiation (“Translation, Metempsychosis” 151).

¹²These two ideas are the center of Kroll’s argument. He establishes his use of them in his introduction (1-27).

new way of reading the universe. More precisely and recently, post-modernism has created ways of “contingent” reading that privilege atomistic interpretations that militate against strong unities. Even as Reverand claims to be avoiding this trap of ahistorical reading (203), he creates a Dryden who is very much the pleasing post-modern figure of openness and undecidability, one who is “caught between conflicting principles, unable to resolve issues in the synthetic, visionary manner he had so often employed” (218). As historians of the art of this period notice, multiplicity—frequently present—is ultimately undercut by an authoritarian drive for unity. This description of Baroque art by Umberto Eco is strikingly similar to Reverand’s description of *Fables* and “Of the Pythagorean Philosophy” in particular:

Baroque form is dynamic; it tends to an indeterminacy of effects (in its play of solid and void, light and darkness [. . .] its broken surfaces, its widely diversified angles of inclination) [. . .]. Its search for kinetic excitement and illusory effect [. . .] never allows a privileged frontal view; rather it induces the spectator to shift his position continuously in order to see the work in constantly new aspects, as if it were in a state of perpetual transformation [. . . Here] for the first time man opts out of the canon of authorized responses and finds that he is faced [. . .] by a world in fluid state which requires corresponding creativity on his part. The poetic treatises concerning “*maraviglia*,” “wit,” “*augudezas*,” and so on, really [. . .] seek to establish the new man’s inventive role. (52)

But Eco immediately warns the student of post-modern literary theory—and it should be a warning for the student of Dryden—that “it would be rash to interpret the Baroque poetics as a conscious theory of the ‘open work’” (52). Another critic of the Baroque, José Antonio Maravall, makes the same point, which is also reminiscent of the question around multiplicity and unity in Dryden’s Pythagoras:

Wolfflin was very much on the right path when he came to notice, perhaps deriving from his profound knowledge of so much material, that beneath its apparent freedom and lack of norms the baroque was subject to a strong principle of unity and subordination. In imposing itself upon a great variety of singular elements, this predominance of the total unity of the composition

corresponded, with its molding and limiting action, to a unity of domination inspiring the entire organization of baroque culture. (140)

In Baroque art, apparent “freedom” or “undecidability” is subordinated to the demands of unity. To a post-modern reader, there is something unpleasing in this tyrannical approach to a text, but there is something historically appropriate as well. Kroll does examine the opponents of the new atomistic-contingent reading as well, and chief among them are Catholics. The term he uses most often for their hermeneutic is “infallibilism” (50).¹³ As a reader activating the message of a—as Dryden saw it—heroically Catholic figure producing art in opposition to the corrupt world around him, I leave myself open to charge of being such an “infallibilist,” a kind of seventeenth-century absolutist monarch of the text, dogmatically ignoring the complexity of the little universe that is *Fables*. But I hope my marshalling of the evidence here shows this mode of reading is called for by the text, not just by me. To not read Dryden’s demand for unity can lead to serious misreading. For example, Reverand’s inability to see beyond the multiplicity to the overall drive for unity in *Fables* leads to such a very ahistorical misunderstanding, as when he says that, for Dryden, King William is “the right monarch for a stable England” (218). But to Dryden, William and all his symbolic stand-ins in *Fables* are representative of the modern world’s privileging of the chaos and insubstantiality of meaning.

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¹³Kroll’s chapter 7 (239-75) is a more extensive discussion of Anglican probabilism versus Catholic infallibilism in Biblical exegesis.

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