

vinton a. dearing, ed., *The Works of John Dryden, Volume xvi, Plays: King Arthur, Cleomenes, Love Triumphant, and the Secular Masque*. Berkley, University of California Press, 1996. Pp. xii, 551. isbn: 0-520-08766-6. \$75.

Vinton Dearing has served as the editor of *The Works of John Dryden* based on the Dryden collection in the William Andrews Clark Library at the University of California at Los Angeles. Twenty volumes in the 'California Edition' have covered or will cover Dryden's enormous output. The sixteenth volume, published in 1996, has four dramatic works, namely *King Arthur*, *Cleomenes*, *Love Triumphant*, and the *Secular Masque*. The fifteenth volume presented *Albion and Albanus*, the prologue to *King Arthur*, with music by Louis Grabu. While all the works of Dryden are worthy of reading and study, only *King Arthur*, because of Henry Purcell's music, remains performed with any regularity. Fittingly, the text, textual notes and commentaries, and an essay on the music occupy nearly half of the volume. Our focus is on *King Arthur*, which has been recorded *in toto* at least four times.

As part of the scholarly apparatus, Dearing has reproduced the title page of the first edition with full comments. Also reproduced is the Act iv, Scene ii, meeting of Emmeline's false image and Arthur, taken from the 1735 *Dramatick Works of John Dryden, Esq.* The essay on Purcell's music includes the original printed broadsides of two set pieces, namely 'Your hay it is mow'd' with its famous second stanza

We've cheated the Parson, we'll cheat him agen
For why shou'd a Blockhead have one in ten?
One in ten, One in ten;
For why shou'd a Blockhead have one in ten?

and the incomparable 'Fairest Isle, all isles excelling.'

Each of the parts is a model of editing and of scholarship. The text is well presented with variants closely noted. Because the first printing omitted the prologue and the epilogue, the notes contain the details of differences among the early editions. It should also be noted that there is not a complete musical score, the preferred edition being that of Margaret Laurie.

Commentary on the text provides, among others, a well-drawn biography of George Savile, Marquis of Halifax, to whom *King Arthur* is dedicated. Also included is a history of publication and performance. This last will hold the attention of many scholars, because it demonstrates that from its initial performance until the middle of the nineteenth century *King Arthur* was frequently on the London stage with few lengthy periods of absence. Granted there were alterations. One of the variants was offered by William Gifford and Henry Gifford in 1735 as *King Arthur*; or *Merlin the British Inchanter*. Shortly afterwards, a pirated version appeared. More recently, David Garrick took a turn at the words and Thomas Arne added music, notably a new overture. The work continued to be performed in one version or another throughout the nineteenth century.

Twentieth-century revivals have been marked by efforts to restore the opera to its 1692 glory. One was the complete production in Atlanta, Georgia, in 1968, the earliest complete and staged performance in the United States. Produced by the renowned

American mezzo-soprano, Blanche Thebom, *King Arthur* was part of the inaugural season of the Atlanta Opera. Any who experienced the performance, which ran for a month, with the scene of Cold Genius rising in a gown of brilliant opalesque beads eventually filling the stage, or the moment when Merlin mounted his winged dragon drawn chariot and flew across the sky, experienced theatrical opulence so grand that the new company went broke and never mounted another production.

While the reception of the staged semi-opera is well-noted, one might quibble over the lack of mention of the St. Louis, Missouri, and the Washington, D.C., productions in the recent past. One important aspect of reception not mentioned is the regular appearance of two of the airs, 'Come if you dare' and 'Fairest isle' in song book collections, particularly those of children. With those minor notes, Vinton Dearing is to be congratulated for a job well done.

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