SOME ASPECTS OF CHARACTER-WRITING IN THE
PERIOD OF THE RESTORATION

Anna Janney DeArmond*

I. Points of Departure

That the seventeenth century was the great age of character-writ-
ing is one of the minor platitudes of English literary history. Before
that period the character had not fully emerged as a literary type,
while after about 1700 it was permanently absorbed by other forms,
such as the periodical essay or the novel, the biography or the history,
or the long satirical poem.¹ It is further true that the earlier part
of the seventeenth century marks the height of achievement in char-
acter writing, in the narrow but proper sense of the term; whereas
the close of the century—which is the period under consideration in
this paper—reveals the character-sketch in transition, on its way to
becoming no longer a thing in itself, but an element in larger, more
stable, and more significant literary media. That such a development
should have taken place seems inevitable. However interesting the
Theophrastian character-sketch may be, by its very nature it is limited
in scope. There are, after all, a rather small number of recognizably
distinct human types; once these few types have been sketched or
analyzed by half-a-dozen good writers, the possibilities of the character
have been exhausted. It must either cease to be or, as actually hap-
pened, compromise with other, more flexible forms.”

Joseph Hall’s Characters of Virtues and Vices (1608) is the con-
ventional and convenient point for beginning discussion of the char-
acter-sketch in English, since Hall not only consciously followed
Theophrastus but was the first English writer to use the character for
itself alone.² But the emergence of the form is not so much the

*Department of English.

¹ E. N. S. Thompson, in the Preface to his Literary Bypaths of the Renais-
sance (page v), notes that as recently as 1921 he discovered in a current maga-
zine two character-sketches “exactly after the fashion . . . of the seventeenth
century.” In all probability a considerable number of such sketches might be
collected from contemporary writing, but not enough, I believe, to warrant
changing the generalization just made.

²Gwendolen Murphy’s A Bibliography of English Character-Books begins
with Hall. Note also her comment in the Introduction to A Cabinet of Char-
acters, p. xiv.
result of any particular work as the effect of "a number of diverse influences that happened to converge just then on the English mind." 3 There had been, for one thing, a long native tradition of character-writing before Hall, manifested—to mention but a few instances—in Langland's allegorical portraits in _Piers Plowman_, in Chaucer's sketches in the Prologue to the _Canterbury Tales_, in Barclay's pictures of various kinds of fools in his translation of the _Narrenschiff_, and in Skelton's courtiers in _The Bowge of Court_. In the period immediately preceding the appearance of Hall's work, the social pamphleteers—Greene, Nash, Lodge, Dekker, for example—and Johnson, in _Cynthia's Revels, Every Man out of his Humour_, and elsewhere, 4 had made frequent use of the character-sketch. In addition to this strong, if generally undisciplined, English tradition, impetus to character-writing came from two other specific sources: the translation of the _Ethic Characters_ of Theophrastus, in 1592 into Latin, and, before 1610, into English; 5 and the Baconian essay, which offered a model of compact, epigrammatic style perfectly suited to the needs of the character-writer. 6 Moreover, the spirit of the age was conducive to the growth of the new form. Whereas in the Elizabethan period the minds of men had been chiefly moved by large concepts in politics and literature, and had been primarily interested in the great problems of human nature, in the seventeenth century there was a steadily growing concern with minute observation, with detailed study of perhaps less fundamental aspects of life. Since the character, in its original and simplest form, is a concise, objective account of a typical person, descriptive, and generally unencumbered by theory or comment, 7 it was thoroughly suited to the new century. It is more than chance that the character-sketch flourished in a period in which the critical spirit was beginning seriously to rival the creative, in which philosophical and scientific interests came to be an increasing preoccupation of men's minds, in which there was a growing attention to manners and _mores_, to "the dress, the habits of speech, the ways and whims of men." 8 The emergence and popularity of the character is a minor but significant aspect of the age which produced it

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3 Thompson, _op. cit._, p. 24.  
4 For a fuller discussion see E. C. Baldwin, "Ben Jonson's Indebtedness to the Greek Character-Sketch."  
5 Thompson, _op. cit._, p. 8.  
7 See Murphy, _A Cabinet of Characters_, p. viii.  
8 Thompson, _op. cit._, p. 25.
—an age, it is well to remember, that brought forth also such varied but related products as the comedy of manners, the Royal Society, the Cambridge school of Platonists, the satires of Dryden, the Puritan rebellion, the philosophy of Hobbes, and a modern prose style.

It is not necessary in this paper to discuss the early history of the character-sketch in England. The names are familiar. Hall, already mentioned, whose satirical bent gave to his characters a stronger moral tone and a greater tendency to analysis than are to be found in Theophrastus; Overbury, who was nearer the Greek than Hall had been, but who allowed himself a wider, more realistic field of exploration—women as well as men, trades and places as well as people; Earle, who was closer in spirit to Theophrastus than any of his rivals, and produced probably the best characters, in the strict sense, in the English language—these three were the pioneers. Then came Fuller, Mynshul, Lupton, Breton, Cleveland, Saltonstall, and various others, who spread the popularity of the form and expanded its boundaries, thus opening the way to the wider use it came to have in the later years of the century, at the same time that they hastened the process of distortion and disintegration.

An analysis of Gwendolen Murphy’s Bibliography reveals a great deal about the position of the character in the later 1600’s. It is clear, in the first place, that several of the earlier writers remained popular. In 1691, for instance, Nahum Tate adapted ten of Hall’s sketches to the heroic couplet; 9 Overbury’s Characters went into its seventeenth edition in 1664. 10 Earle’s Micro-cosmographie was also reprinted again and again, reaching its ninth edition in 1669, translated (fifty-two characters of it) into French in 1671, imitated and copied by both French and English writers. 11 The Holy State, with its forty-eight characters and thirty-two illustrative “lives,” went into its fourth edition in 1663. 12 Cleveland reappeared in print several times. 13 Even so late a writer as Richard Flecknoe—forever famous by the pen of Dryden—was apparently in demand, for his Enigmatical Characters of 1658 was reprinted and enlarged several times between that date and 1677. 14 On the other hand, no new character-writers

9 Murphy, Bibliography, pp. 14–15.
10 Ibid., p. 25. Both Hall and Overbury were translated into French, Hall as early as 1610—“the first English book of literary interest which is known to have appeared in a French translation” (p. 13); and Overbury, in part, in 1671 (p. 82).
11 Ibid., pp. 42; 82; 44, 45, 46, 70, 75, 148.
12 Ibid., pp. 56 and 58.
13 Ibid., p. 63.
14 Ibid., pp. 64–69.
of the first rank published after the Restoration;\textsuperscript{15} with the exceptions of Samuell Person and Richard Brathwaite,\textsuperscript{16} nearly all the writers were anonymous, and neither of these two men contributed anything really significant to the form.

Miss Murphy also brings to light another interesting aspect of our problem. At the beginning of the century, with Theophrastus’ example relatively close behind them, the character-writers invariably produced a series of portraits which were published together and made a more or less unified impression. Hall, for instance, attempted to set off his “vices,” which he admittedly copied from his Greek master, by “virtues” invented by himself. Nicholas Breton’s Fantastics is held together by its concern with months and seasons and hours of the day. The outbreak of the Civil War, however, had a startling and profound effect on the development of the form. Beginning in 1641 with The True Character of an Untrue Bishop,\textsuperscript{17} a new kind of character emerged—different in purpose and different in form from the earlier type. Miss Murphy calls this variation the “controversial character” and points out in her Preface that it is “mainly of historical and not of literary interest.”\textsuperscript{18} In the Untrue Bishop, for example, the aim is no longer, as in Theophrastus and his English followers, belletristic or broadly satirical; instead, the anonymous writer uses the familiar and popular literary medium as a weapon of attack against a specific social evil. In so doing, he not only abandons the spirit of the character, but also the form; for his essay is no longer a portrait in a series, but an isolated unit, and he allows himself greater length, more illustration, and less objectivity than are customary in the conventional character. During the fifteen or twenty years following 1641, the controversial character flourished mightily. It was nearly always a single unit, published anonymously; it was seldom used constructively, generally attacking the Puritan or the “agitator,”\textsuperscript{19} or such specific undesirables as “an Oxford-Incendiary”;\textsuperscript{20} and it was usually of ephemeral importance.

\textsuperscript{15} Butler, the one great character-writer of the end of the century, did not publish his work in that form. See below.

\textsuperscript{16} Murphy, Bibliography, pp. 74 and 75.

\textsuperscript{17} Phoenix Britannicus, I, pp. 280–285. It is true that there may have been earlier single characters, now lost; and there were, too, the Elizabethan and Jacobean pamphleteers. There can be no doubt, however, that the controversies of the period of the Rebellion were instrumental in broadening the scope of the form in the manner indicated.

\textsuperscript{18} Murphy, Bibliography, p. 5.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., p. 103. Attacks on Puritans (or “non-conformists” or “phantiques”) are too numerous to need listing.

The importance of this development for our period is that it brought about a permanent, though not complete, change in the use of the character. I have already pointed out that the end of the century produced no new writers to rival the pioneers; actually, after Person and Brathwaite, who published their series of characters in 1664 and 1665 respectively, the character-book almost disappeared from lists of new publications. Instead, the single character, as established during the period of the Civil War, became more and more common. It continued to play its part in political controversy, dealing with the "True Presbyterian" and the ever-present Puritan, in the 1678-82 period with the Roman Catholic problem, and towards the end of the century with the growing party distinctions—Whig, Tory, and Trimmer. Moreover, the single character came to discuss increasingly specific and contemporary social types: the quack-astrologer or the quack-doctor, the pettifogging lawyer, the prostitute, the fop, the merchant, and a host of others.

One further relevant fact may be gleaned from Miss Murphy's bibliography, particularly from the Appendix: that from the beginning of the century the character appeared not only as written for its own sake but also as a part of larger works—for instance, by way of serious illustration or example, as in Thomas Adams' sermons, or simply as garnishing, as in Brathwaite's A Strappado for the Divell. This tendency was, it would appear, a compromise, probably unconscious, between the new vogue of the character and the long English tradition of the informal or incidental character-sketch. It is a trend which runs straight through the century, and turns out to be, in the hands of such a man as Dryden, the most significant phase of character-writing in the entire period.

The relation of the character to satire is at once obvious and complex. In the first place, informal satire and informal character-writing both go back to medieval times and frequently appear hand-in-hand, as in the Prologue to the Canterbury Tales. It has already been mentioned that the Elizabethan period, "when the beginnings of all formal and conscious literary modes [including, of course, formal satire] took shape," continued the medieval tradition of character-writing. Whether or not Theophrastus considered his characters to

21 Murphy, Bibliography, p. 106. This character Murphy attributes, following a long tradition, to Sir John Denham. Theodore H. Banks, Jr., in his edition of Denham, rejects it as spurious (p. 325).
22 Ibid., pp. 122-123.
be satirical—which is a point of dispute—certainly Joseph Hall, in his "vices," intended to ridicule. Moreover, in the Viridemiarum, in which he makes his famous claim to be the first English satirist—in the sense, probably, of writing satire in the classical manner—Hall includes several satires of the character type: the "trencher-chaplain" or "my young master," for example. And certainly in the hands of the later writers, especially the controversialists of the Civil War period, the links between the character and the satire were drawn close.

In addition to these pragmatic evidences of relationship, there is an inner, psychological connection between the two forms. Oliphant Smeaton has pointed out that satire has an initial tendency "to be personal in its character." Besides, the character is apt to share with the satire the intention—not invariable, but usual—not only of mocking or lashing, but of reforming as well. Such an intention is clear in two such dissimilar character-writers as Hall, in the "vices," and Samuel Butler; while the didactic intention of the ordinary satirist is attested again and again, by implication and by actual statement, throughout the century. The point is that the character, while it is by no means necessarily satirical or didactic, nevertheless lends itself particularly well to satire or moralizing. In the latter part of the seventeenth century, I believe, that inherent tendency appears in not all, but the greater part of, character-writing.

II. The Inheritors of the Tradition

Of the three new character-writers of any importance in the Restoration period—Flecknoe, Brathwaite, and Butler—the first two deserve little attention. The greater number of Richard Flecknoe's 135 characters were written in the 'fifties, though he rewrote and added to his series in successive editions of his books until 1673.

24 See "The Proem" of "Characterisms of Vices" in Morley, op. cit., p. 130.
25 In his Introduction to English Satires, pp. xiv–xv.
26 For example, in the period under consideration:

Dryden: "'Tis an action of virtue to make examples of vicious men. They may and ought to be upbraided for their crimes and follies." ("A Discourse concerning Satire," Essays)

Gould: "Satire! the best Reformer of the Times..." ("To the Memory of Mr. John Oldham" in The Works of Mr. John Oldham, II, p. 225)

Sheffield: "Of all the ways that wisest men could find
To mend the age, and mortify mankind,
Satire, well-writ, has most successful prov'd,
And cures, because the remedy is lov'd." (An Essay on Poetry)

These are but a few of many possible citations.
He described the characters as "perfectest of all my Works," and it is true that those I have read are agreeable, if undistinguished. They are brief, as the Theophrastian character should be, witty in a mild way, and they set forth their platitudes in reasonably effective phrases. The "Valiant Man," he says, "is only coward in this, that he dares not do an unhandsome action." Of the "Chymrical Poet," he shrewdly remarks, "A long while some admir'd him, because they understood him not; and for the same reason he admir'd himself." In "Of Troublesome Kindness" he gives the essence of the person who is over-solicitous; while he sums up the "Excellent Actor" in the comment, "He puts off himself with his clothes, and never assumes himself agen . . . till the Play be done. . . ." Altogether, Flecknoe is not so dull as Dryden would have us believe; but his characters are too conventional to warrant much discussion.

Brathwaite, like Flecknoe, wrote most of his fifty-odd characters before 1660, and, again like Flecknoe, is merely the follower of a literary fashion, rather than a significant contributor to the form. The eleven pieces of The Captive Captain (1665) show the tendency of the period to use the character for controversial issues. For example, Brathwaite defines "A Phanatick" as "a State-Empyrick, who prescribes sundry Cures but effects no cure," and describes a "Country Commissioner" as stroking his beard and "shaking his shallow nodle." His series on prisons and prisoners resembles the work of such earlier writers as Overbury and Mynshul, with certain autobiographical implications added. In all, Brathwaite is a distinctly minor figure in the annals of character-writing.

Not so Samuel Butler. He is not only the most interesting of later practitioners of the form, but one of the two or three greatest of all English writers of characters. In externals, he is apt to follow the Theophrastian sketch. He begins, that is, with what

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27 Quoted by Murphy, A Cabinet of Characters, p. 260.
28 Morley, op. cit., p. 314.
29 Murphy, A Cabinet of Characters, p. 262.
30 Ibid., p. 263.
31 My observations on Brathwaite are based on Chapter VI of Matthew Wilson Black's Richard Brathwait and on Murphy's Bibliography.
32 His series has had an unusual history. In his own age it never saw print, and even in 1759, when Thyer, Keeper of the Public Library at Manchester, brought out Butler's Genuine Remains, not all the characters were included. It was only in 1908, indeed, that Waller's edition completed the set. According to Thyer, the characters were written between 1667 and 1669—later, that is, than all but a small part, possibly than any, of Hudibras. (For this last point see Dan Gibson, Jr., "Samuel Butler," p. 279, footnote.)
passes for a definition of the type under discussion; frequently he runs together the title and the first line, and he is accustomed to make his definition mocking. For example:

“A Fantastic
“Is one that wears his feather on the inside of his head.”
or:

“A Lawyer
“Is a retailer of justice that uses false lights, false weights, and false measures.”
or:

“A Prodigal
“Is a pocket with a hole in the bottom.”

He supports the definition, as is technically proper, by an accumulation of traits, presented objectively and without comment. He ends either by simply stopping or with a final aphoristic twist. He is nearly always both brief and witty, and he strives to give the impression of being impersonal. His sketches, like those of Theophrastus, are concerned with “vices”—with “virtues” by implication only; and his bent is persistently satirical. In style he is vigorous and clear; of necessity he makes much use of simile and metaphor, but there is a sturdy recurrence of the simple sentence beginning with “he” or “his.” His comparisons are often effective because of their homeliness: for example, “A Degenerate Noble . . . Is like a turnip, there is nothing good of him but that which is underground,” or, in “A Huffing Courtier,” “He puts himself up into a sedan, like a fiddle in a case.” As in his models, he tends to stress one particular trait of the character he is discussing; his Courtier, for instance, is chiefly distinguished by his concern for his appearance, and Butler plays the theme with many variations:

“His occupation is to show his clothes, and if they could but walk themselves they would save him the labour. . . . His tailor is his creator, and makes him of nothing. . . . His carriage of himself is the wearing of his clothes, and, like the cinnamon tree, his bark is better than his body . . . his clothes are the shape he takes to appear and walk in, and when he puts them off he vanishes. . . .”

Butler also achieves the universality which every character-writer seeks. He gains it partly through his shrewd projection of character and partly by the felicity of his style. One recognizes, for instance,

33 This was a conventional device.
34 Murphy (A Cabinet of Characters, p. viii) rightly emphasizes the grammatical rather than logical pattern of the true character. As she puts it, the piling up of traits has the effect of a string of adjectives.
the appropriateness of his description of the Proud Man as "both Damon and Pythias to his own dear self." When he speaks of the Virtuoso as being "like his books, that contain much knowledge, but know nothing themselves," or of the Curious Man (that is, the collector of curiosities) as becoming himself a curiosity by perpetually doting on them, he is representing a type not of an age but of all time. A Cheat he describes succinctly as "a tame highwayman"; he considers that an Obstinate Man "does not hold opinions but they hold him"; the Lawyer, he says, "clogs it [his language] so with words that the sense becomes as thick as a puddle." And who can fail to recognize the candid snapshot of "A Factious Member," who "blows his nose with that discreet and prudent caution that you would think he had buried his talent in a handkerchief, and were now pulling it out to dispose of it to better advantage," or the picture of the gentleman who "when he squires a lady . . . takes her by the handle of her person, the elbow, and steers it with all possible caution, lest his own foot should, upon a tack, . . . unhappily fall foul on the long train she carries at her stern"? Butler is very quotable; he is also clever in his judgments of people, with the knack of describing them vividly in action or summing them up in a witty phrase so that they live even to the reader of the present day.

Quite within the conventional limits of the character, then, Butler seems unusually fresh and ingenious. Not all his characters, by any means, rise above the commonplace, but often he succeeds in making the hackneyed tricks—the abrupt beginning and end, the heaping up of traits, the witty metaphor—seem new; even the familiar characters—the Country Squire, the Melancholy Man (one is bound to recall *Il Penseroso*), the Miser, for instance—take on vitality. But the peculiar worth of Butler's sketches is that he, like Earle, while he remained true to the spirit of the character as the controversialist usually did not, makes it the medium of ideas and of his own personality. In his 187 sketches Butler has covered nearly all the society of his time—from duke to rabble, from playwright to politician, from top to raunter. He felt, like many of his contemporaries, "Never for Satyr was there better times," 35 and he turned the force of his sceptical mind and sharp wit against the failings of his age. His attitude is worldly and disillusioned, though not misanthropic; and his ideal, as in *Hudibras*, is avoidance of extremes. He puts it quite explicitly: "Those that use excess in any thing never understand the

35 Quoted on pp. 279–280 of Gibson, *op. cit.*
truth of it, which always lies in the mean.” 36 Since everywhere around him he saw the unbalance he deplored—in the intolerance and fanaticism of the religious reformers, 37 in the libertinism of the court, in the scribbling of the “mob of gentlemen,” in the graft among politicians and professional men, in the pretensions of the philosophers—his Characters castigates the age, and indicates, in so doing, his own attitude toward manners and morals, state and church, science and poetry.

One of Butler’s most striking characteristics of mind is his distrust of democracy, which he reveals especially in the sketches of the Rabble and the Philosopher; the people, he says, “see things done, and every man according to his capacity guesses at the reasons of them, but . . . they seldom or never are in the right.” A Republican to him is a dreamer, who “builds governments in the air, and shapes them with his fancy.” His attitude toward politics, and religion as well, is essentially conservative: “All innovations in church and state are like new built houses, unwholesome to live in, untill they are made healthful, and agreeable by time.” 38 Like Swift, Butler was inclined to belittle the pursuits of contemporary science, but only because he was doubtful of the value of abstract speculation, because, as he said, “general assertions ought to be sparingly used,” 39 and because, paradoxically, he was by nature cautious and sceptical. 40 The manners of the times, he is constantly ridiculing or attacking in the persons of the newsmonger, the coffee-man, the modern critic, the statesman, the alderman, the tennis-player, the undeserving favorite, and various others. In such sketches he frequently anticipates the social criticism of Addison and Steele, 41 in method as well as in subject-matter. The most fundamental of Butler’s attitudes, however, is his hatred of hypocrisy. Always, throughout the Characters, he wars against this major human vice. His preoccupation with it is a chief

36 Quoted by Gibson, op. cit., p. 283. See also in the character of the Overdoer: “He believes the mean to be but a mean thing, and therefore always runs into extremities as the more excellent, great, and transcendent.”
37 In the character of the Zealot he actually quotes from Hudibras.
38 Quoted by Gibson, op. cit., p. 303.
39 Ibid., p. 320.
40 Gibson asserts (ibid., p. 318) that Butler was much interested in the scientific investigations of his time, but that he was so completely the empiricist (again one recalls Swift) that he tended to condemn all studies which seemed to him to have no practical value.
41 For example, note the resemblance between Tom Folio and Butler’s Virtuoso, Ned Softly and the Small Poet, Will Honeycomb and the Amorist. Obviously, Addison and Steele did not take lessons of Butler, since his Characters was unpublished.
reason for his dislike of religious fanatics, even for his attack on the libertine, who, he says, “endeavours to make himself appear worse than he is.” 42 It is not necessary here, I believe, to indicate further the extent or the nature of Butler’s commentary. 43 The point is that Butler’s characters, in spite of their general strictness of form, leave a strong and unified impression. Butler is not, like Flecknoe or Brathwaite, a mere artificer; he gives the reader not so much a gallery of portraits as a stock of ideas. He is, in fact, the one writer in the Restoration period whose characters present a reasonably complete philosophy.

There is one other interesting departure from tradition in the Characters: the freedom with which Butler allows himself to mention specific people when it pleases him to do so. He mocks William Prynne in “An Haranguer” and again in “A Small Poet”; he comments on Oliver Cromwell as a speaker; he remarks favorably upon Thomas Hobbes. 44 In “A Small Poet,” which develops into an informal essay on the sins and errors of the poetaster, he frankly takes Edward Benlowes 45 for his model; and, though I can find no actual evidence in support of my suspicion, I should not be surprised to discover the equally long and essay-like “A Modern Politician” to be also a portrait. Finally, there is the undisguised picture of “A Duke of Bucks”—Dryden’s Zimri—“inconstant as the moon which he lives under.” 46 The importance of this deviation from convention should not be overestimated; the character naturally tended, as we have seen, to free itself from formal restrictions. 47 But it is true, none the less, that we have in Butler an anticipation of the satiric portrait of the poets. 48

42 See “A Ribald.”
43 Gibson’s excellent essay gives ample evidence in support of the points I have touched on hastily, and bears out the observations anyone may make from reading the Characters and Hudibras.
44 These allusions to Cromwell and Hobbes I find mentioned in Thompson (op. cit., p. 21) without indication of their source; I have not been able to locate them in the Characters. Gibson (op. cit., p. 290) believes that “A Modern Politician” (see below) represents Hobbes.
45 According to Mark Van Doren (The Poetry of John Dryden, pp. 3–4), Benlowes was “almost the worst poet England has produced”!
46 Fickleness must have been the dominating characteristic of the man. All the sketches of him by his contemporaries stress it.
47 Murphy, in A Cabinet of Characters (p. xxix), says that the tendency to refer to specific people in character-sketches goes back to the time of the Civil Wars.
48 Again I do not mean to imply that Dryden and the others knew Butler’s Characters.
If I have praised Butler highly, it is because he seems to me particularly significant in the history of character-writing. His characters—not all of them, but a goodly number—are interesting in themselves, more interesting, I should say, than those of any other writer except Earle. Most of them are good examples of character-writing, following the pattern with reasonable closeness, yet enlivening it by freshness of style and thought. Moreover, he is, so far as I know, the last important writer of the character-book; and his Characters marks, therefore, the end of a chapter. As a matter of fact, the character had been declining for twenty-five or thirty years before Butler wrote (possibly since 1628 and the Micro-cosmographie); he took a dying form, poured into it his own personality, and gave the new-old device a brief respite from oblivion.

III. The Descendants of the Controversial Character

The single character printed as a broadside or as a thin pamphlet, or the collection of two or three, or half-a-dozen, or ten characters in a little book, was common enough in the Restoration period. Some few of these more or less isolated characters dealt with the old Theophrastian types; more of them reflected the political and religious janglings of the time; while an ever-increasing number turned to the rich field of the society of the day. Most of them still concerned people, sometimes thinly disguised individuals; a considerable number dealt with places. Most continued still to be written conventionally in prose; a growing number were written in verse, usually doggerel; and a few were written to be sung to a familiar tune. 49 From my own not very extensive reading of them, I should say that many, perhaps most, are too dull to be of concern to anyone but the antiquarian. A few, however, are lively and interesting, and occasionally you may turn up one that is really well written.

The group that deals with politics and religion is generally, to my taste, on the side of dullness. The Character of a Fanatick, for instance, written by "A Person of Quality" in 1675 50 is a re-statement of all the familiar accusations, with interlardings of Latin and Greek,

49 See, for instance, The Modern Fanatical Reformer: Or, the Religious State-Tinker ... To the Tune of Liggan Water (1693). (Murphy, Bibliography, p. 153)

50 Harl. Misc., VIII, pp. 79–82. It was reprinted in 1681. (See Murphy, Bibliography, p. 110.) The most interesting thing about it is that the writer, like Swift in A Tale of a Tub and The Mechanical Operation of the Spirit, accuses the fanatic of taking "the maggots of his own brain, for divine inspiration." (See C. M. Webster, "The Satiric Background of the Attack on the Puritans in Swift's A Tale of a Tub.")
with plentiful references to the Bible, and without distinction either of style or argument. Unfortunately, there are a good many others equally lifeless. On the other hand, The Character of a Prince. Written between the Years 80 and 90 \(^{51}\) is a moderate and well-written account of "the Prince who England wants." It does not follow the old character, though it is brief; for after an introduction in which the writer mentions the "four Virtues properly called Regal" and their attendant vices, he discusses, a paragraph at a time, Piety, Prudence, Valour, and Justice, and ends with an effective summary. As an essay it is an excellent piece of work, but it is an indication of how much the original conception of the character had been stretched by the end of the century. A rather interesting group of semipolitical characters deals with the ideal Englishman—for example, Character of a True English-Man, The Loyal Non-conformist, and The Honest Briton’s Character of Himself.\(^{52}\) All these, as it happens, are in verse: the first in the pentameter couplet, the second in quatrains, the third in vigorous anapaestic couplets. Each of them, as the title indicates, is a defence of the sanity and judgment of the average British citizen, and the first, it is interesting to note, is supposed to have been addressed to the Pope, to persuade him of the impossibility of converting the English. Obviously, such verses indicate again a breaking-down of the old idea of the character, but it is pleasant to see the familiar form used, for once, not to chastise and denounce, but to state the cause of moderation. Though in his opening lines the "Honest Briton" seems almost to be writing a character to end all characters, his viewpoint is agreeable to contemplate after the ranting of the controversialists:

"I’m nor High-Church, nor Low-Church, nor Tory, nor Whig;  
Nor flattering Young Coxcomb, nor formal Old Prig:  
Not eternally Talking, nor silently Queint;  
No profligate Sinner, nor pragmatical Saint. . . ."

The great political character of the period is, of course, Halifax’s Trimmer.\(^{53}\) Since it is hardly more a character in the strict sense than Milton’s Character of the Long Parliament, it is, once more, evidence of the widening use of the term. So much has been said of it

\(^{51}\) Phoenix Britannicus, I, pp. 278–280. Murphy (Bibliography, p. 152) dates it 1689.

\(^{52}\) All in Phoenix Britannicus, I, pp. 80, 552, 94 respectively. The last is undated, but seems likely to fall within the period under discussion. The others are 1680 and 1670 respectively.

\(^{53}\) The reprint in Coffin and Witherspoon’s Seventeenth-Century Prose is from the first collected edition of 1700.
that one cannot hope to add anything new. It is the best political essay of the age, and, by implication, it succeeds in giving a picture of the man: tolerant of political differences, and insistent that "there can be no true religion without charity," but with "a passion for liberty"; clear-sighted enough to recognize the essential importance of law and government, yet to see also their faults; scornful—it would seem from his style—of embellishments and the vanities of authorship; witty, observant, independent. Like Butler, Halifax seeks after the mean, but he does it with more grace; like Butler, he "adoreth the goddess Truth," but he is more certain of her ultimate triumph and therefore less cynical. And he has genuine humour as well as wit, as his concluding proof of the trimmer-ness of all good things reveals. *The Character of a Trimmer*, coming as it does at the very end of the century, is a far worthier finale than the controversial character deserved. Different from the others, it is not likely to die.

The characters of social types make up a large and sprawling group. Representative of one kind are *The Character of a Town-Gallant* \(^{54}\) and *The Character of a Town-Misse*, \(^{55}\) both put out in 1675 by the same printer, \(^{56}\) and intended, I imagine, as complementary to each other. The first gives us a picture of a man whose "three Cardinal Virtues" are "Swearing, Wenching, and Drinking"; it emphasizes his licentiousness, his coarse language, his cowardice, his duping of his creditors and his landlady, his "French Apish Tricks." It tells how he spends his day: from bed to dressing table to ordinary to playhouse to bawdy-house to bed again. It is a vigorous, plain-speaking attack on what was apparently a common Restoration figure. *The Town-Misse*, equally unvarnished, tells the life-history of a whore. It is precisely the sort of tale that serves as a digression in, for instance, *The English Rogue* or, a century later, *Roderick Random*: country-girl-seduced-by-squire and so on—the story is too familiar to need recounting; but, like the *Gallant*, it is told from a point-of-view unsympathetic and satirical. William Winstanley's *Four for a Penny* \(^{57}\) gives pictures of "a parcel of beasts of prey" which must have been familiar to many in 1678, as in other times as well: the "unconscionable pawnbroker" (Winstanley is impartial, or didactic, enough to mention that "there are conscionable dealers in that way, that are a relief and comfort to the poor"), the equally unconscionable tally-man, and the bum-bailey and his setting-cur.

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\(^{54}\) Hindley, *The Old Book Collector's Miscellany*, II.

\(^{55}\) *Ibid.*, III.

\(^{56}\) Murphy, *Bibliography*, pp. 84-85.

The same writer's *Character of a Scold* 58 is not only in its universality but in its organization closer to Theophrastus than is *Four for a Penny*; but its most striking characteristic is its tendency to imitate the type it satirizes: like the scold, it does nothing but rail. There are, of course, fops a-plenty; he was a stock piece for the character-writer. Miss Murphy, in *A Cabinet of Characters*, 59 quotes from *The Character of the Beaux* (1696) a particularly complete study of a young man who belongs in company with Butler's "Fantastic" or Sir Foppling Flutter or Addison's beau. "From ten to twelve he receives visits in bed; then he spends three hours in dressing; at dinner he avoids such food as beef or mutton because it is too coarse for his delicate constitution; at the "Choclate-House" he interrupts serious conversation with what he calls wit, and tries to make himself a "Cronie" of the poets; at the play he turns his back on the stage and attempts to attract attention to himself; he ends his day by playing ombre at a lady's lodgings till the small hours." 60 On the other side of the ledger may be put such pieces as *The Character and Qualifications of an Honest Loyal Merchant* (1686) and *The Character of an Honest Lawyer* (1676), 61 both of which are idealized pictures. The lawyer offers an interesting contrast to Butler's lawyer; 62 but the swelling, imperialistic note of the other sketch makes it especially memorable. The merchant, we are told, "by the honest Magick of Industry, removes the Mines of Peru, and the Golden Sands of Guinea... WITHOUT him the World would still be a kind of Wilderness... his pains unites divided Empires, ... joins peoples ... unto one common Society," spreads comforts and conveniences, health, and the incalculable benefits of Christianity over all the world. One can almost hear in the distance—two centuries of distance—"Take up the white man's burden"; and one can't help being glad that we have the more realistic and attractive picture of Sir Andrew Freeport.

Two characters I have read seem to deal, probably, with specific people, and in so doing to indicate the new direction the character was beginning to take. One is John Oldham's *Character Of a certain Ugly Old P—*, 63 which according to tradition is a portrait of

58 Hindley, *op. cit.*, II.
60 Addison's Clarinda is a perfect feminine counterpart of this late Restoration youth.
61 Murphy, *A Cabinet of Characters*, p. 326 and p. 332 respectively.
62 See above.
the writer's father. It is both fantastically exaggerated and exceedingly coarse. The parson, or priest, is described as filthy and stinking, with a nose big enough for an ordinary man to find shelter under, ears which he binds around his head instead of using quilted night-caps, a voice so booming that he has preached half the parish deaf. His name is used to scare country children, and if he goes to hell (as the author believes he certainly must), he will probably frighten the devils also. The character is the most outrageous, as well as the most offensive, that I have read, a far cry from the work of even such a confirmed sceptic as Butler. Whether or not it is a portrait of Oldham's father, it seems to be a caricature of some particular cleric. *The Character of a Disbanded Courtier* (1681) I imagine, without external evidence, to be also a portrait of a real person, possibly—my eye is on the date as well as the contents—of Shaftesbury. In manner it is temperate; in style, clear; and it seems not so much to draw a picture as to tell a story—a story which seems to deal with an actual situation. It may very well be a portrait easily recognizable to its own age, but now obscure—as, after all, the satirical portraits of Dryden would be to us without the aid of the history books.

The characters of places are quite numerous, though far less so than those of people. Marvell and Butler, for example, each wrote a character of Holland in verse, neither one memorable except for Butler's deft description of the country as "A land that rides at anchor." Scotland likewise underwent the process of characterization, and a "Countrey-Poet" wrote an interesting, if not very poetic, *Character of London-Village*, which begins:

"A Village! Monstrous! 'Tis a mighty Beast, Behemoth, or Leviathan at least; Or like some Wilderness, or vast Meander, Where to find Friends one long enough may wander. The Towing Chimneys like a Forrest Show, At whose low Branches do Balconies grow. . . ."

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64 See Bell's introduction to his edition of Oldham, p. 7, footnote.
66 Marvell's *The Character of Holland* (*Harl. Misc.*, VII, pp. 321-323); Butler's *Description of Holland* (Chalmers, VIII, p. 227). The date of Marvell's poem seems very uncertain: the *Harleian Miscellany* reprints it from a 1665 folio; Elton dates it from 1653; Gosse, from 1672; Previté-Orton says it was written during the Dutch War of '53. All of Butler's short poems, according to Gibson, were probably written after the Restoration (p. 279, footnote).
Among the most interesting place-characters, however, are those that deal with the coffee-houses, and two of these are especially entertaining: the prose *Character of a Coffee-House* (1673) ⁶⁹ and *The Coffee-House or News-Mongers Hall* (1672) ⁷⁰ in verse. The first begins with a shrewd and amusing definition: “A Coffee-house is a lay-conventicle, good-fellowship turned puritan, ill-husbandry in masquerade, whither people come, after toping all day, to purchase, at the expense of their last penny, the repute of sober companions. . . .” The writer speaks of the smell of tobacco, the sootiness of the coffee-pots, and the garbling of news; of “Capt. All-man-sir, the man of mouth”; of the town wit (whom, by the way, he characterizes fully); and of the incognito poet—in short, of sights and sounds and smells and people. *The News-Mongers Hall* puts very much the same picture into verse, as quotation will show:

“You that delight in Wit and Mirth,  
And long to hear such News,  
As comes from all Parts of the Earth,  
Dutch, Danes, & Turks, and Jews,  
I’l send yee to a Rendezvous,  
Where it is smoking new;  
Go hear it at a Coffee-house,  
It cannot but be true.

There Battles & Sea-Fights are Fought,  
And bloody Plots display’d;  
They know more Things than ere was thought,  
Or ever were betray’d: . . .

The Drinking there of Chocalat  
Can make a Fool a Sophie:  
’Tis thought the Turkish Mahomet  
Was first Inspir’d with Coffe, . . .  
Then let us to, the Coffe-house go,  
’Tis Cheaper far then Wine. . . .” ⁷¹

The descendants of the controversial character are many and I have no more than indicated something of the range of subject-matter

⁷⁰ Murphy, *A Cabinet of Characters*, pp. 311-315. Compare with these coffee-house pieces, *The Character of a Tavern* (1675), part of which is reprinted in V. de Sola Pinto’s *Sir Charles Sedley*, pp. 57-58, footnote.
⁷¹ That the coffee-house had its defenders as well as its attackers is indicated by the publication of such pamphlets as: *Coffee-Houses Vindicated*. In *Answer to the late published Character of a Coffee-House. Asserting from Reason, Experience, and Good Authors, the excellent Use, and physical Vertues of that Liquor. With the grand Conveniency of such civil Places of Resort and ingenious Conversation* (1675). See Harl. Misc., VIII, pp. 75-79.
and variety of form which it assumed in the Restoration period. Though its literary value is often negligible, its social significance may be fairly great. Moreover, as I have suggested previously, it reveals an important step in the decline of the form; its perpetual compromise with non-literary aims was both cause and effect of the breakdown of the character.

IV. The Historical Character

The rise of the historical character, as it happens, came about in the period of the decline of the Theophrastian character; that is, its great age was the Restoration: "it was after 1660 that the art of the character [i.e., the historical character] attained its fullest excellence." 72 Though it had an origin and early development distinct from that of the type of character we have been discussing, it was too significant a form in its own day to be neglected. Moreover, though such relationships are difficult to calculate, it must surely have affected and been affected by the English-Theophrastian tradition; 73 and it seems entirely likely that the next century absorbed the two forms into biography, fiction, history, and verse without drawing any particular distinctions between them. D. Nichol Smith sees three main influences, other than the Theophrastian, converging on the historical character at the time of its coming into prominence. 74 The first was that of the classical historians, all of whom, by the middle of the seventeenth century, could be read in English. The second was that of the modern continental historians, for example, Davila, Strada, and Grotius. The third was that of the French portrait, which appeared in the mémoire and the romance as well as independently. Flecknoe, among English character-writers, was at pains to make clear the difference between the portrait and the character; 75 and indeed the distinction is fundamental. 76 The portrait, unlike the character, "consists in a description of the physiognomy, complexion, figure, appearance, and mannerisms of an individual designated under

72 David Nichol Smith, introduction to Characters from the Histories and Memoirs of the Seventeenth Century, p. xxxvii.
73 Perhaps the most obvious difference between the true character and the historical character is that the former was nearly always satirical whereas the latter aimed at accuracy and impartiality in portraiture.
74 Ibid., pp. xxix ff.
75 See Murphy, A Cabinet of Characters, p. vii.
76 Fundamental, but not necessarily permanent. In Butler’s “Duke of Bucks,” for instance, and in all the great satirical characters in verse the line between the two forms is indistinct.
a pseudonym." 77 It had a natural place in the mémoire; in the romance—for example, in Le Grand Cyrus or Clélie—it was part of the general attempt to picture contemporary France under Greek and Roman names; as an independent form it was the result of a sort of parlor-game in the salon of Mademoiselle de Montpensier, where the brilliant company amused itself by writing portraits of themselves and of others whom they knew. 78

Among the early English writers who helped to establish the form of the historical character and pave the way for the great who came later were Arthur Wilson, Sir Anthony Weldon, Ben Jonson, Thomas Fuller, and James Howell. 79 In the period of the Restoration there were such writers as Lucy Hutchinson, who in her memoirs penned the famous description of her husband; Sir Philip Warwick, overshadowed by Clarendon, but significant because his Memoires was "the first book to appear with notable characters of the men of the Civil Wars and the Protectorate"; 80 and Lord Shaftesbury, who in his "Fragment of Autobiography" wrote a splendid portrait of Henry Hastings, an elderly country gentleman of the old school. The great names, however, are three: Clarendon, Burnet, and Halifax.

Most of Clarendon's characters belong to that part of the History which was written from 1668 to 1670, 81 and since the book was actually put together in 1671, it is just, I think, to consider it substantially a Restoration work and to discuss his characters without attention to the precise time at which they were written. Clarendon's chief trait as a portraitist is his detachment; part of that impartiality was temperamental, part the natural result of writing, as in most cases he did, at a considerable distance in time from his subject. Take, for instance, the sketch of Charles I, written twenty years after the king's execution. 82 The first paragraph shows that Clarendon's feelings were still strongly sympathetic to Charles, whose behavior he describes as "Saintlike" and whom he calls a "blessed Martyr." But his judgment is balanced and his attitude objective: he praises Charles's qualities as a man, points out his shortcomings as a king.

78 Smith, op. cit., p. xxvii.
79 For comments on these men as writers of the historical character and for pertinent selections from their work, see D. Nichol Smith, op. cit.
80 Ibid., p. xlix. Warwick's Memoires was published in 1701; Clarendon's History in 1702.
81 Ibid., p. xxxvii.
82 This character and the succeeding ones discussed in Section IV may be found in Smith by referring to the table of contents.
Or consider the portrait of the Protector. Clarendon's dislike of the man is obvious; his disapproval of nearly all that Cromwell represented was intense. Nevertheless, he commends Cromwell's courage, industry, and judgment; he comments on the remarkable understanding of human nature which the man must have had in order to "raise himself to such a height" without high birth, friends, or wealth. He was wicked, says Clarendon, but he was not bloody and not a follower of "Machiavells methode." His praise, in short, seems the higher because it is joined with an honestly admitted dislike; and the value of the portrait is enhanced by the fact that the artist is, at once, unsympathetic and discerning. The same balancing of the score is apparent in his sketches of others: Hobbes, Hampden, Waller—in fact, of most of those whom he undertook to draw.

The other chief trait of Clarendon's character-writing is the inwardness of his conception of character. He never stresses externals of appearance and seldom mentions specific actions.\(^83\) Of Hampden, for example, he says that he was naturally cheerful and vivacious, that he was affable and temperate in debate; he explains that Hampden's moderation during the early years of the dispute was due to prudence, that he was "supreme governour over all his passyons." He tells us nothing to make us see the man; but he tells us much to make us understand him. What we have is not what Dr. Johnson called a Flemish picture, but an analysis of personality.

In style Clarendon differs markedly from the Theophrastian writer, with his piling up of simple sentences, his crispness and brevity. Part of that divergence may be accounted for by Clarendon's different comprehension of character; most of it, I think, is to be attributed to the fact that he wrote rather to please himself than to please the public. His style is loose and flowing, often with long, elaborate sentences, sometimes as formless as the one which opens the description of Cromwell.\(^84\) The end of the portrait of Waller, with its careful antitheses,\(^85\) is far less characteristic than the involutions of, say, the four sentences in which Selden is described. But though Clarendon's style bears conventional analysis less well than, for instance, Butler's, it seems perfectly fitted to what it has to express. The portraits he draws, despite their lack of pictorial quality,

\(^{83}\) Note how basically different this approach is from that of the Theophrastian writer.

\(^{84}\) A sentence of thirty-nine lines, beginning, "Crumwell (though the greatest Dissembler livinge) . . . ."

\(^{85}\) "... His company was acceptable, wher his spirit was odious, and he was at least pittyed, wher he was most detested."
SOME ASPECTS OF CHARACTER-Writing 75

despite the frequent complexity of his manner, are sharp and precise. We have always a clear understanding of Clarendon’s conception.

Burnet is a very different character-writer from Clarendon. It is said that when the History of the Rebellion appeared, Burnet turned back to the History he had long been preparing and rewrote some of his characters. If he was trying to achieve the particular kind of success which Clarendon had achieved, the result is disappointing; for Burnet is, consciously or not, less the biographer and more the character-writer. If one looks for a minute at, for example, the sketch of Shaftesbury, one is at once struck by the similarity to the Theophrastian technique: “He began to make a considerable figure very early. . . . He had a wonderful faculty in speaking to a popular assembly. . . . He had a particular talent to make others trust to his judgment. . . . He was as to religion a Deist. . . .” There is the same piling-up of details in what Miss Murphy calls grammatical rather than logical sequence; the same fundamental dependence on the swift, simple sentence; and, basically, the same lack of analysis. It is interesting to contrast Clarendon’s treatment of the first Duke of Buckingham with Burnet’s of the second. Clarendon is interested in getting at the reasons for Villiers’ early popularity and later un-popularity; though he does not apologize for him, he seeks to understand the motives that dictated his conduct. Burnet’s approach to the second Duke has none of these characteristics. He states facts; he weighs nothing: “He had a great liveliness of wit. . . . He had no sort of literature . . . he . . . set himself to corrupt the King. . . .” There is no explanation, no probing below the surface. One feels that Burnet knows a great deal about Buckingham, has observed a great deal; but he gives no impression of having understood the man’s character, or even of having thought about it. He throws on Buckingham a strong, clear light, less disturbing than that of Butler or Dryden, but scarcely more revealing. Of all the writers of the historical character, Burnet seems closest to the Theophrastian tradition; but the similarity, I suspect, was the result of temperament rather than of intention.

Halifax deserves a place of importance in this group of writers because of A Character of King Charles the Second, an elaborate analysis in seven parts of the relation of the king to his ministers and his mistresses, to religion and politics, and to himself. As in the Trimmer, Halifax is here a long way from the original conception of the character. Even more than Clarendon he is bent on making us
understand a personality, and he is inclined, in addition, to generalize on human nature in the course of exposing the motives behind Charles's actions. He says, for example, that to have no power of dissimulation lays a man open to contempt, while to have too much exposes him to suspicion; it is a necessary but a dangerous quality to possess. "I am of an Opinion [he tells us] . . . that Gratitude is one of those things that cannot be bought." Or he remarks, "Age stealeth so insensibly upon us, that we do not think of suiting our way of Reasoning to the several Stages of Life. . . ." Such comments, couched in Halifax's beautifully simple style, lead us to understand the writer as well as the subject. His analysis of Charles gives the impression of being almost completely unbiased, and his comments are shrewd: Charles's wit, he says, was "better suited to his Condition before he was restored than afterwards"; Charles was "so good at finding out other Mens weak Sides, that it made him less intent to cure his own"; "His Chain of Memory was longer than his Chain of Thought." Though Halifax is not sympathetic to Charles, he has a detachment which makes his conclusions seem valid even when most unfavorable.

Like Butler, these three important historians have a place in the annals of character-writing only in retrospect. In the Restoration period, since their work was not published till after the beginning of the new century, their influence, at best, must have been slight—even granting the possibilities of conversation and the circulation of manuscripts among friends. They are, however, both interesting in themselves and significant of the general interest in character and character-writing in the closing years of the century. The Theophrastian and the historical character alike reveal something of the temper of the age. Moreover, the historical character, in that it is non-satirical, may well have contributed much to the development of realistic character-writing in the period to come.

V. The Satirical Character of the Poets

The satirical character in verse has already been represented in this paper by various pieces mentioned in discussion of the offspring of the controversial character. These works, however—often produced by anonymous writers, and usually of no literary merit—obviously belong rather with the casual output of the pamphleteer than with the work of professed poets. Even Butler's Description

86 Halifax's Character did not appear until 1750.
of Holland is better discussed in that group than here, for it makes no more pretension to significance than, say, The News-mongers Hall. Moreover, the satirical character of the recognized poets is generally not a unit in itself like The Honest Briton or London-Village, but a part of a larger satirical scheme, to which it contributes and from which it gains support.

The use of the character by Sheffield or Gould or Dryden may differ in two important ways from most of the uses we have considered so far. One of these differences I have just mentioned: the tendency to reduce the character to a subordinate position. These men thought of themselves as satirists, not as character-writers; they took up the familiar device of the character very much as they took up the heroic couplet, because it suited their needs. In all probability they were far less conscious of the character tradition and of their place in it than we are. And if Dryden wrote half-a-dozen sketches more memorable in the history of the character than did any of his contemporaries, that achievement is incidental to his having written the greatest satires of the age. The second chief difference is that in the verse satire of the major poets an individual rather than a type is likely to be attacked. That is, of course, entirely contrary to the basic conception of the Theophrastian character, but the tendency towards individualizing we have seen growing stronger throughout the century and appearing without disguise in such a study as Butler's "Duke of Bucks." It is probable, also, that the portrait and the early examples of the historical character and of biographical writing encouraged this natural bent away from the typical.

To discuss the satirical verse character within reasonable limits, one must disregard completeness and concentrate attention on a few representative poets. It is not difficult to pass over hastily the large group of minor writers of which Richard Duke may serve as a good example. Duke, one of the many imitators of Dryden, followed up the appearance of Absalom and Achitophel with a piece entitled The Review, in which he penned characters of Charles, of Clarendon, of Shaftesbury, of James, and of Buckingham, under the thin disguise of pseudonyms. Though the poem is Duke's most important work, it is not very well written, and it has none of the good sense, moderation, and essential justice one finds in Dryden—and none of Dryden's wit. We are aided in eliminating material not only by the insignificance of such men as Duke, but by the fact that in much satirical

87 This was, of course, true of the historian as well.
88 Anderson, British Poets, VI, pp. 627-629.
writing where one might expect to find characters they do not appear. Take, for example, Oldham: in the whole vigorous length of the *Satire upon the Jesuits* there is no true character. By implication, of course, Loyola is characterized, and the Order as a unit; but there is nowhere a character in the sense that Zimri is a character. And in such other pieces of Oldham's as *The Careless Good Fellow* or the splendidly exaggerated *A Drunkard's Speech in a Mask*, though a character is implicit, no specific group of lines makes up the portrait, and no particular individual can be shown to have been Oldham's model.\textsuperscript{89} Butler is largely outside our discussion because the notable portraits in *Hudibras*—those of Hudibras himself and Ralpho, even that of Shaftesbury—were written before the Restoration.\textsuperscript{90} In his later work, as in the Oldham poems just discussed, he is sometimes close to the character form—for instance, in his attacks on Edward Howard for *The British Princes*;\textsuperscript{91} but generally he skirts it. In the *Satire upon the Imperfection and Abuse of Human Learning*, however, he writes two characters, one on orators and another on pedants,\textsuperscript{92} which are in the Theophrastian tradition, and excellently done, as a few lines will show:

"The pedants are a mongrel breed, that sojourn
Among the ancient writers and the modern;
And, while their studies are between the one
And th'other spent, have nothing of their own;
Like spunges, are both plants and animals,
And equally to both their natures false: . . .
Their poring upon black and white too subtly
Has turn'd the insides of their brains to motley;
Or squandering of their wits and time upon
Too many things, has made them fit for none; . . .
But never bring the world and books together,
And therefore never rightly judge of either. . . ."

\textsuperscript{89} Bell (*op. cit.*, p. 50, footnote) says of the second of these two poems: "Etherege, Rochester, or Sedley might have sat for the portrait, and were probably the actual originals from whom it was drawn."

\textsuperscript{90} For dates of writing of *Hudibras* see Hardin Craig, quoted by Gibson, *op. cit.*, p. 279, footnote. The portrait of Shaftesbury occurs in the Third Part, Canto II, ll. 351–420.

\textsuperscript{91} Dorset's closest approach to the character seems to have been inspired also by Howard, whom he addressed in two poems (Chalmers, VIII, p. 341), one of which begins:

"Thou damn'd Antipodes to common sense,
Thou foil to Flecknoe, pr'ythee tell from whence
Does all this mighty stock of dulness spring?"

Howard seems to have been the butt of nearly every poet of the age, not only on account of *The British Princes* but also because of his plays. Sheffield in his *Essay on Satire* comments on Dorset's lines on Howard.

Four poets of the period seem both representative and interesting in their use of the character: Gould, Rochester, Sheffield, and, of course, Dryden. Gould is certainly the least important of the group, but his satire called *The Play-House*, a long poem in couplets, is a curious combination of satire of place and satire of specific people. The piece as a whole is in effect a character in very much the manner of the coffee-house verses; and in the course of the poem Gould likewise characterizes particular parts of the theatre—the “Middle Gal- le'ry,” the boxes, the pit—and various types of people who frequent it: ordinary “punks” and “Punks of Quality,” the sot, the set of critics.

Gould also introduces into his poem names of specific people, those of certain notorious ladies, and those of nearly all the playwrights of the day. And finally come the characters of real people: Mrs. Barry, who is attacked with extraordinary coarseness and violence; Betterton, who is treated with much greater moderation; James Nokes, the comedian; and Thomas Jevon, the first English Harlequin. Gould’s poem is more important as social history than as literature; he gives a convincing satirical picture of the Restoration theatre. The portraits, while they convey some impression of the persons described, have little either witty or poetical about them. Here is, for instance, the kit-cat of Jevon:

“... a punning, drolling, bant’ring Ass,  
Cocks up, and fain wou’d for an Author pass,  
His Face for Farce Nature at first design’d,  
And match it, too, with as Burlesque a Mind:  
Made him, as vilely born, so careless bred,  
And gave Him Heels of Cork, but Brains of Lead.”

Rochester, a far more gifted man and writer than Gould, if he had not wasted his life in trivialities and excesses, might rank very close to Dryden himself. Like Oldham, Rochester shows the influence of the character rather than an inclination to use it. In *A Trial of the Poets for the Bays*, for instance, where the chief writers of the age are brought up, turn by turn, there are many suggestions

93 See Montague Summers, *The Restoration Theatre* for a complete reprint and notes.
94 Summers, *op. cit.*, pp. 311 ff.
95 Gould’s critical opinions, by the way, are surprisingly sound and independent.
96 For two spirited defences of Rochester, man and poet, see Kenneth B. Murdock in *The Sun at Noon* and V. de Sola Pinto’s essay “The Poetry of ... Rochester.”
97 All the poems referred to in this discussion, except *Timon*, may be found in Chalmers, VIII, pp. 237–252. *Timon* is discussed in Pinto’s essay, pp. 122–123.
for characters, but none of them is developed. In *An Epistolary Essay... to Lord Mulgrave* Rochester throws much light on his own personality, and his attitude toward his work, but he avoids a complete sketch of himself. And in *Timon*, in which he pretends to meet at a dinner party Kickum, Dingboy, Halfwit, and Hufte, character remains implicit. On the other hand, *A Letter from Artemisa in the Town, to Chloe in the Country* is not only an admirable social satire, but contains several sketches that are substantially characters: the "silly sex," the "kind, easy fool," Corinna (who is Rochester's version of the Town-Miss), and the "heir and hopes of a great family." None of these portraits has the epigrammatic quality of the strict character but they clearly belong to the school. The most conventional character-sketch by Rochester is the poem entitled *Sir Car Scrope*. Scrope, like Shadwell, had made the mistake of answering a far greater poet than he was, and his reward is Rochester's unflattering portrait. It is not Rochester at his best, and it lacks the brilliance and polish of Dryden's characters; but the conclusion is effectively written, and more than reasonably demolishing:

> "Half witty, and half mad, and scarce half brave,  
> Half honest (which is very much a knave)  
> Made up on all these halves, thou canst not pass  
> For any thing entirely, but an ass."

The two major poems of John Sheffield, Duke of Buckinghamshire, are *An Essay on Poetry*, from which Pope quoted, and made famous, the lines:

> "Of all those arts in which the wise excel,  
> Nature's chief master-piece is writing well. . . ."

and the "Rose-Alley Satire," or, more formally, *An Essay upon Satire*. In the second occur all of Sheffield's important character-sketches. The poem as a whole is a slashing and sometimes witty attack upon the court of Charles II, his mistresses, his statesmen, and the poets who adorned the court; and it makes better use of the satirical character than any of the poems previously discussed. Some of the people are ridiculed without benefit of pseudonym; others are concealed—or Sheffield pretends to conceal them—in the more usual fashion.

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98 Rochester seems to have been a particularly self-conscious poetaster. Here, and in other poems as well, his attitude resembles that of Byron at the beginning of the third canto of *Childe Harold*.  
99 *An Essay upon Satire* may be found in Chalmers among the works of Dryden, VIII, pp. 519-521.
The first real portrait is of Buckingham,100 who is described less well than by Dryden, but still comes to life for us:

"First, let's behold the merriest man alive,
Against his careless genius vainly strive;
Quit his dear ease, some deep design to lay,
'Gainst a set time, and then forget the day. . . .
Let him at business ne'er so earnest sit,
Show him but mirth, and bait that mirth with wit,
That shadow of a jest shall be enjoy'd,
Though he left all mankind to be destroy'd. . . ."

The second picture is of Shaftesbury, "our little Machiavel . . . that nimblest creature of the busy kind." The emphasis in the sketch is on Shaftesbury's physical disabilities; Sheffield speaks of the Earl's "hard mind," which

"No pity of its poor companion takes . . .
That whilst he creeps his vigorous thoughts can soar. . . ." 101

While the portrait is a good one, it again lacks Dryden's power, and entirely his sense of justice. Halifax is described as

". . . the new earl, with parts deserving praise,
And wit enough to laugh at his own ways,"

but as one, also, who

". . . to get a statesman's name,
Forfeits his friends, his freedom, and his fame."

Apparently Sheffield understood Halifax's politics less well than he did his sense of humour.

The four poets 102 whom Sheffield characterizes are Dorset, himself, Sedley, and Rochester, all of whom are mentioned quite openly. Dorset is ridiculed chiefly for having let himself sink into drink and

100 For this and other unnamed characters in the poem, see Maurice Irvine's article "Identification of Characters in Mulgrave's 'Essay upon Satyr.'" In the course of his discussion (p. 543) Irvine makes a good general comment on the satirical character: "According to the fashion of the time the character is outlined with a few swift touches of such justice that no contemporary could fail to recognize the original. The success of such a satire lies not only in its wit but in the nicety with which those flaws were drawn that mark the one particular man, and no other. The success of personal satire was almost entirely the pleasure of recognition coupled with the semblance, but the semblance only, of inductive reasoning involved in the identification. Personal satire was the detective story of the seventeenth century."

101 Dryden, in both The Medal and Absalom and Achitophel, pictures Shaftesbury as driving his sickly body by force of will.

102 I omit the fourth statesman, Tropos, as less important than the other three. He is identified by Irvine as Finch, by Van Doren as Scroggs.
dullness. Of himself Mulgrave says—w th truth, if one can believe Dr. Johnson: 108

"Him no soft thoughts, no gratitude could move;
To gold he fled from beauty and from love . . .
'Tis not his fault, if too much wealth and power
Break not his boasted quiet every hour." 104

"Little Sid's" picture is particularly offensive, with its summarizing "No nastiness offends his skilful nose." The attack on Rochester, however, is the best portrait in the poem, distorted, as the satirical character always is, but with the fundamental nearness to truth which is necessary to real success. Sheffield attacks Rochester's cowardice—Rochester had avoided a duel with Mulgrave—his affectation, his meanness, lewdness, and mischief-making (mild word!); and the "nasty rubbish" of his writing. If the assertion that Rochester lacked wit is scarcely true, most of the rest is justified; and if Rochester was the instigator of the Rose-Alley ambuscade, the inference is that Sheffield had struck home.105 All in all, the Essay upon Satire used the satirical character with new directness and skill.

Dryden is incomparably the greatest writer of this group; moreover, he shows all the various levels of character-writing which are apparent in the writers previously discussed. The Medal is a long sketch of Shaftesbury, but one cannot lift a single group of lines from the satire which can be called a character, any more than one can from Oldham's Satire upon the Jesuits. At the beginning of The Hind and the Panther there are the sort of thumb-nail satires we noted in Rochester; Dryden briefly sums up the various sects: "the bloody Bear, an independent beast, Unlicked to form"; "the quaking Hare" who "Professed neutrality, but would not swear"; the "bristled Baptist Boar . . . whitened with the foam of sanctity." And there are such other brief sketches as the famous one of the English in Absalom and Achitophel:

"The Jews, a headstrong, moody, murm'ring race,
As ever tried th' extent and stretch of grace;
God's pamper'd people, whom, debauch'd with ease,
No king could govern, nor no God could please. . . ."

104 In the conclusion, also, Sheffield at least pretends to see through himself. He says:

"I, who so wise and humble seem to be,
Now my own vanity and pride can't see."

105 J. Harold Wilson, in an article entitled "Rochester, Dryden, and the Rose-Street Affair," states his belief that Rochester was not responsible for the attack on Dryden.
Again in *The Hind and the Panther* there are long characters which are close to the Theophrastian tradition: the Wolf (representing the Presbyterians), the Panther (representing the Church of England), or the "sort of Doves" (representing the Anglican clergy). Finally, there are the full-length satirical portraits of Shadwell, Burnet, Bethel, Shaftesbury, and the rest.

Dryden's overwhelming superiority in the creation of the character is, I think, to be attributed to two factors. The first is simply his mastery of his form; no one else in his day had at his command so effective a medium as Dryden made the couplet. Without sacrificing any of the robustness of Oldham, Dryden gained regularity and swiftness. More than any other writer of his time he knew the value of balance and antithesis. And he had an excellent sense of timing and a good ear. His verse moves with an apparently careless ease, interrupted by an occasional phrase as vigorous and decisive as a blow. He combines the lucidity of good prose with a fiery poetic energy. In the second place, Dryden had superb satirical ability. He possessed the same sort of shrewd and rather cynical understanding of men that Butler had, and the same ability to pick out the particular flaws of character that would best bear emphasis.\(^{106}\) Moreover, his work has, more than that of any other major satirist in English, an air of detachment: he never rants; all his greatest portraits give the impression of objectivity, of an aloof and half-humorous exposure of the petty or the ridiculous. Dryden, indeed, consciously employed such a technique, as some lines from *A Discourse concerning... Satire* show:

"How easy is it to call rogue and villain, and that Wittily! But how hard to make a man appear a fool, a blockhead, or a knave, without using any of those opprobrious terms!... The character of Zimri in my *Absalom* is, in my opinion, worth the whole poem: it is not bloody but it is ridiculous enough.... If I had railed, I might have suffered for it justly; but I managed my own work more happily, perhaps more dexterously. I avoided the mention of great crimes, and applied myself to the representing of blindsides, and little extravagancies.... And thus, my Lord, you see I have preferred the manner of Horace,.... to that of Juvenal...."

In addition, as Saintsbury points out,\(^{107}\) Dryden seldom sacrificed—as, for instance, Shadwell did in *The Medal*, as Sheffield did in his *Essay on Satire*, as Pope did in *The Dunciad*—the type to the individual: "Zimri is at once Buckingham and the idle grand seigneur who plays at politics and at learning, Achitophel is at once Shaftes-

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\(^{106}\) Dryden's early work in the drama must have aided him in this.

\(^{107}\) George Saintsbury, *Dryden*, p. 77.
bury and the abstract intriguer. . . .” Even, I might add, in the portrait of Shadwell in MacFlecknoe, Dryden avoids specific charges or accusations; he simply says, over and over, and always cleverly, that Shadwell is dull, makes him, indeed, the very model of dullness.

Of particular characters, the most famous, probably, are the Buzzard in the Third Part of The Hind and the Panther, Shadwell in MacFlecknoe, Doeg and Og in that section of Part Two of Absalom and Achitophel which Dryden wrote, and Achitophel and Zimri in Absalom and Achitophel. If Dryden’s portrait of the Buzzard did less than justice to Burnet, Burnet also did less than justice to Dryden; and the sketch, though less sustained and less brilliant than some of the others, is a telling one:

“More learned than honest, more a wit than learned . . .
His praise of foes is venomously nice;
So touched, it turns a virtue to a vice . . .
Prompt to assail, and careless of defence,
Invulnerable in his impudence,
He dares the world; and eager of a name,
He thrusts about, and justles into fame.”

The Shadwell portrait in MacFlecknoe is too well known to need quoting; it is exactly the right reply to Shadwell’s scurrilous and violent attack in The Medal of John Bayes. Dryden answers nothing, denies nothing; instead, he reduces his adversary to absolute insignificance. The character “for sheer cumulative destructiveness has no equal in satire.” The Doeg and Og sketches—Settle and Shadwell respectively—are the liveliest, the most humorous of the great characters. The initial picture of Settle, who, pen in hand,

“Spurr’d boldly on, and dash’d thro’ thick and thin,
Thro’ sense and nonsense, never out nor in;
Free from all meaning, whether good or bad,
And, in one word, heroically mad. . . .”

or of Shadwell’s bulky frame

“. . . from a treason-tavern rolling home.
Round as a globe, and liquor’d ev’ry chink. . . .”

108 I omit “The Character of a Good Parson” because it is not original (though most of it is Dryden rather than Chaucer) and because it is nonsatirical and uncharacteristic.
109 Cf. Pope’s famous comment on Addison.
110 Van Doren, op. cit., p. 207. The justice of Dryden’s accusation of dullness is borne out by the fact that Shadwell complained that Dryden had made him an Irishman “though Dryden knew perfectly well that he had only once been in Ireland”! (Saintsbury, op. cit., p. 9)
are very nearly rollicking. Throughout both sketches Dryden’s gusto is almost greater than his contempt.

The two great portraits of Absalom and Achitophel are surrounded by lesser ones that in any writer but Dryden would themselves be of first importance. All were “drawn at full length, with a precision never approached by any of the popular ‘character’-makers of the preceding half-century.” 111 There is the picture (non-satirical, of course) of James II. 112 There is the stinging and nearly matchless attack on Shimei (Bethel) who “never broke the Sabbath, but for gain” and “lov’d his wicked neighbour as himself.” There is the confident and scornful rescue of Corah (Titus Oates) from oblivion. The sketches of Shaftesbury and Buckingham, however, are properly most famous. The character of Achitophel remains the best known of all portraits of Shaftesbury, and it is remarkable for the balance and essential justice of Dryden’s assertions. Shaftesbury, as Dryden freely admits, was bold and courageous, an admirable judge, a tireless worker in spite of a crippled body, above thought of private profit; but he loved power and enjoyed the excitement and danger of state-craft, and he cultivated and used personal popularity to gratify his wishes and gain his ends. It is, accordingly, the demagogue in Shaftesbury that Dryden attacks, in lines that for poetic effectiveness and completeness of portraiture are unsurpassed. 113 The Zimri portrait is more cutting and more witty than that of Achitophel; it is, as Dryden knew, judged simply as a satirical character, the finer piece of work, more compact, more unified, and more mocking. Moreover, what Dryden says of Buckingham seems to be substantially correct. 114 Still, it seems to me, the Achitophel is a greater accomplishment. Van Doren says of Dryden: “Often he seemed to be saying the last word about a man when actually he was saying almost nothing; he seemed to weave a close garment about his subject when in truth he only latticed him over with antitheses.” 115 That is generally a sound statement; it is eminently true of the MacFlecknoe sketch of Shad-

112 Cf. the longer one in *The Hind and the Panther*, Part III.
113 Both Achitophel and Zimri are too well known to need the extensive quotation which is the only way to do them justice.
114 Compare Sheffield, Butler, and Burnet. The last wrote: “He had no principles of religion, virtue, or friendship. Pleasure, frolick, or extravagant diversion was all that he laid to heart. He was true to nothing, for he was not true to himself. He had no steadiness nor conduct: He could keep no secret, nor execute any design without spoiling it. He could never fix his thoughts, nor govern his estate. . . .” (Smith, op. cit., p. 235) For Butler and Sheffield, see above in this paper.
well; it is basically true of the sketch of Zimri, brilliant though it may be. But the Achitophel portrait is more than a series of phrases, more than "almost nothing" superbly stated; for nowhere else in the poetry of the period is the technique of the satirical character so perfectly combined with poetic power and with the realization of a personality. Indeed, if one had to choose one character-sketch from the whole period of the Restoration to illustrate and summarize the achievement in the form, surely Dryden's Achitophel most deserves such an honour.

VI. Conclusion

Though the previous pages have discussed the most striking permutations of character-writing in the Restoration period, I have by no means covered all the uses of the form. The character, for instance, joining hands with the Jonsonian humour, is implicit in most of the plays of the period, especially the comedies, with their fops and Puritans and scolds and witty mistresses and swashbucksers—all of them sound English-Theophrastian types; while Sir Fopling Flutter, for example, gives us specifically "the character of a complete gentleman." Moreover, the drama was often used for the purpose of satirizing particular people, for example, Dryden in *The Rehearsal*, Shaftesbury in *Venice Preserved*; and Rochester and his circle in *The Man of Mode*. The character appeared, too, in prose fiction: in the romances it followed, naturally, the tradition of the French portrait; in more realistic writing it was closer to the Theophrastian form. *The English Rogue*, for example, in its lengthy course describes a "cunning whore," "a hector," "a host," "a libertine zealot," a canting rogue, a tailor (in which, incidentally, Sir Thomas Overbury is mentioned by name), and "a bottle of canary." The influence of the character is reflected even in diaries, as in Evelyn's description of his daughter Mary. In short, one can expect to find the character almost anywhere in the literature of the age.

The Restoration, it seems to me, is probably the most interesting period for study of the character-form. In such writers as Flecknoe and Brathwaite and, in his less original moments, Butler, we can ob-

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117 Otway attacks Shaftesbury both as Antonio and as Renault. (See John R. Moore, "Contemporary Satire in Otway's *Venice Preserved*.")
118 See Pinto, *Sir Charles Sedley*, p. 70.
119 Probably others as well. Those mentioned may be found at pp. 54, 70, 316, 424, 345, 330, and 60, respectively. Most of the sketches are commonplace, but the bottle of canary is really clever.
120 Under date of March 10, 1685.
serve established usage. We can follow in pamphlets and broadsides the tendency to turn the character to political and social account, often with serious detriment to its literary merit. And we can anticipate the death of the form in its absorption by dramatist, historian, and satirical poet. The whole history lies before us in little. In the age which followed the opening of the new century, the character, as an entity, practically ceased to exist. Such a work as Ned Ward's *The London Terraefilius: or, The Satyrical Reformer, &c.*,\(^{121}\) with its fifty-six assorted sketches, is not only exceptional but unimportant. The great characters of the period belong to Steele and Addison,\(^{122}\) and to Pope: the members of the Trumpet Club, Tom Courtly, Ned Softly, Will Honeycomb; and Sporus and Atticus. These sketches, whether in periodical essay or satirical verse, are clearly not characters-for-characters'-sake. Even in the later occasional brief revisions to the independence of the old form, in such pieces as Gray's "Sketch of His Own Character" or Wordsworth's "Happy Warrior" or some of Lamb's essays, the thread of continuity has been broken and the tradition lost.

In the long story of character-writing in English from Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* to Mr. Thompson's copy of *Life*, the seventeenth century was, therefore, the one period in which the character took on the name and aspect of a literary type. It flourished; but at its best in prose—in Earle or Butler—it was false to its own essential trait of impersonality; at its best in verse—in Dryden—to its independence. Even more than most human things, the character was "subject to decay," and in a real sense the Restoration period saw the end of the form.

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(This list omits such obvious and easily obtainable items as Dryden's *Essays*, the *Cambridge History of English Literature*, etc. Otherwise, it includes all books and articles referred to in the course of the paper.)

**I. Primary Material**


\(^{121}\) See vol. 4 of Ward's works.

\(^{122}\) Between the seventeenth-century character and Steele and Addison the influence of La Bruyère made itself strongly felt in England. *The Characters, or the Manners of the Age* was translated into English and published in 1699. La Bruyère influenced Addison and Steele considerably; Murphy says that he "gave sufficient fresh vitality to the English character to carry it through what still seems to be the last stage of its development in the periodical essay." (*A Cabinet of Characters*, p. 351)


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