tion or reaction, that some periods of his fumbling cosmic search require.

The activists (who are, as much as their philosophical opposites, in no substantial way agreed upon what is justice) berate the law and those who provide and uphold it for its failure always to serve up justice (as if it were a commonly well-known and always available commodity) whereas it is a first step toward justice to realize there is no one magic device or touchstone, be it called law or whatever, by which justice, in whatever guise its face may ultimately be revealed, may be apprehended and made beneficent for all of mankind. Which is the reason that is a questionable expenditure of time to read anything aimed at assaying, now, whether the society that was Massachusetts (and possibly, or possibly not, representative of the whole of our country) forty years ago was either mistaken, misguided or corrupt in application of its law and judicial processes in the trial of Sacco and Vanzetti. That hackneyed issue, almost always mistakenly approached and treated, is not among the most pressing problems of today. On the other hand, the many contemporary perversions of law and legal process are a matter of paramount importance to us today, but further rehashing of the Sacco-Vanzetti case is of little, if any, value in framing and resolving the vital issues involved in them.

There was tragedy in Dedham—and in South Braintree, an essential aspect of the matter too often overlooked—but the basic issue is as to its proper identification and its proper relation to the problems of today. In this, Mr. Russell's book is of no real assistance.

Reviewed by DEAN TERRILL

A Man of his Civilization


JOHN DRYDEN was twenty-nine years old at the Restoration and he greeted it with the hopes of the young and ambitious. His brilliant and sad career thereafter is the subject of Mr. Ward's biography. At first celebrated as England's premier dramatist, Dryden was soon eclipsed by younger men like Wycherly and Etherege. He was the best poet of his day, and the one most subject to literary attack. In his middle life he was always without enough money to avoid begging through praise, and very much at odds with the really satanic politics of his time. Dryden, like Milton, had once wanted to write an epic both "great" and "English": like Milton, he gave up this idea, for he came to understand that the subject—England under the Stuart kings—was too ironically confronted by historical reality to furnish the matter of eulogy. "The times of Virgil please me better" he said in abandoning his plan; it was a statement implying more than a literary judgment. The golden age he foresaw in his youth had become the time of his disillusion. He could not find an Augustus to admire—or to sustain him.

The usefulness of Mr. Ward's book may be measured by its careful depiction of
Dryden's beliefs. He shows that Dryden remained constant to certain ideals, and that his growth from scepticism to religious belief was the indication of his constancy. When he was a Protestant Dryden attacked Calvinism much as he was to attack the "priest become a prince" when he was a Catholic. He saw in the one those tendencies which had led to sectarian anarchy, and in the other those which were to lead to another disastrous crisis in English politics. He could praise Cromwell for the same qualities which led him to praise Charles: among them their genuine desire for justice and toleration. Throughout his life he detested arbitrary power, whether that of king or mob: as Mr. Ward lucidly puts it, he lost no opportunity to express his belief in law tempered by hereditary right. This way of thinking may well have appeared heretical in its variousness in the changing years from 1650 to 1688, but, as we view the dissolution of dogmas from the vantage point of the present, we can see that Dryden was attentive to something beyond transitory political "right." From his early "Heroique Stanzas" on Cromwell to his last dramatic writings Dryden celebrated the ideal of a great and noble culture, secure from foreign enemies and the anarchy of political sects. His greatest political poem praises the "ancient fabrics" of the English civilization, which grew under "divine and human laws." A good historian, he had the whole in view, whether writing of Chaucer in English poetry or Hooker in English philosophy. But his ideal of this civilization under "the mighty years in long procession" was not likely to be fulfilled under Charles II or his unintelligent brother. Nell Gwyn, Mr. Ward dryly notes, gave birth to one of Charles' bastards at a time (May, 1670) when "Mrs. James and Mrs. Davis were away for the same kind of illness." Charles' international and domestic policies were conducted on much the same pluralistic order. He gave mutually impossible agreements to Holland and France, to Catholics and Protestants, to people and Parliaments. His magnificent deviousness was part of the age, for if it was not honorable, it was necessary. One could well be a sceptic in the Restoration, when the balance of power within the state was as shaky as that of Western Europe.

The world of Whig and Tory was a disturbing one, and Dryden, like Halifax and other men of an honorable and conservative mind, stood outside the vicious politics of the Popish Plot and the Rye House Plot. The response of Dryden to his milieu was to live with it as he could: this meant eulogizing certain affluent noblemen, turning out with deplorable consistency dramas for which he had contracted by bulk, begging the Treasury for funds years past due, allowing, in some sense, the public taste to become his own. But it meant something else as well: the writing, or more properly manifestation, of "Absalom and Achitophel," "Religio Laici," and "The Hind and the Panther." It meant the defense of his beliefs by every conceivable form of address, and by a difficult and public conversion to a despised faith. And it meant the essays of his later years which, as T. S. Eliot has noted, are very great defenders of sanity. The intellectual life of Dryden was largely the affirmation of certain old ideas in a new and magnificent rhetoric. What some of these ideas were is explained by Mr. Schilling in Dryden and the Conservative Myth, which limits itself to a discussion of "Absalom and Achitophel." Few who have had the resolution to read through this book will have the strength to deny that Dryden was in fact a conservative. Whether they will be satisfied by the explanation of his beliefs seems dubious, for, while the book is impossibly long, it does not cover a great deal that is important. The reader is advised to turn to Mr. Ward's
book for a synthesis of Dryden’s philosophical ideas, from earliest to latest works. And he must be referred to Professor Bredvold’s *The Intellectual Milieu of John Dryden* for a more coherent exposition of Dryden’s thought in relation to its setting. The present book does have virtues, but not on the order of the two above.

I suggest that Dryden’s poem is rooted not in day-to-day political events, but in old and tenaciously held philosophies. In politics as in poetry Dryden followed Ben Jonson, especially as Jonson’s political vision is expressed in “To Penshurst.” It is in this remarkable poem that “Absalom and Achitophel” has its ideological roots: in “To Penshurst” we see expressed the love for a native English social tradition which is “ancient” and “reverenced”; the sense of a nearly mystical organic union in the range of creation from its orchards, fish, birds and kine through the “farmer,” to the “great lord” and king; the intense respect for “the mysteries of manners, arms, and arts” which, in the later poem, are threatened by commerce, revolution, and unsanctified wealth. If “To Penshurst” describes a world which is linked by Christian unity, a kind of miniature cosmos secure from the flow of history, Dryden’s great work differs profoundly in its sense of the uneasy equipoise in the poet’s culture. The cosmological principles of politics have by now been subjected to enormous strains by the Restoration no less than the Revolution. It is not only the surge of party interest which concerns Dryden; he is far more obsessed with the powerful attacks of human nature itself on the polity. “Natural instinct” is something of which Dryden is contemptuous in politics as in poetry. His work is a defense of natural law and of tradition, and his tor-yism is only a vehicle for this defense. He defends the idea of kingship while he maintains a properly equivocal attitude toward Charles. The “vigorous warmth” of the king is praised only ironically; it is connected to the “warm excesses” of the royal bastard, to the “raging fevers” of the mob, and to the “fiery” turbulence of Achitophel. All are of a piece, and point to Dryden’s angry and tragic sense of the passionate individual will destroying the polity.

Whether in this poem about the 1670’s or in the great range of his works Dryden’s sense of history was impressive. His works are a great review of the seventeenth century, a criticism of far more than literary scope. And they are an affirmation as well of the central tradition of Humanism. He brought to his time not only the rhetoric of classicism but an overriding sense of proportion. He demonstrated that art served a moral and intellectual purpose. When he wrote in the last weeks of his life “We hope much better of the coming age,” he could look back on a career which had largely prepared for the peace of the Augustans. Eliot’s opinion is surely borne out: Dryden was a man of his age and better, of his civilization.

Reviewed by R. S. Berman

**Nineteenth Century Unrealism**


At a coffee table in a faculty lounge, a young mathematician recently described to me the professional activity of physicists: “Scientific theories are not about the real nature of the world, they are explanations of the movements of needles.” Morse Peckham’s book surveys nineteenth century art