

Ingenious Dr. King': the life and works of
Dr William King (1663-1712), with
particular reference to the tradition of
Menippean satire.

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Abstract

The thesis represents the most extensive study yet made of the life and works of one of the most neglected authors of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. In its introduction it provides a review of King's critical reception up to the present day, beginning with the comments of some of the Scriblerians and his eighteenth-century editors and biographers. The thesis proper is divided into two sections, the first of which is concerned

with King's life and opinions, and is in turn separated into two chapters. Chapter One is a biography, and not only establishes the facts of King's life, but seeks to place him firmly in his historical and ideological context. The conclusion drawn from this is that King remained committed to the high Anglican/Tory ideology of rank and authority throughout his life, and that these values had a major bearing on everything he did and wrote. The second chapter looks in more detail at King's cultural milieu and the relationship between his ideological standpoint and his views on learning, particularly in terms of the ideal of the 'gentleman scholar'. The second half of the chapter is devoted to a reconsideration of the relationship between science and Humanism and the high Anglican attitude towards Baconianism, which is aimed at dispelling the common notion that King's thee-political conservatism necessarily led him to oppose science per se. A close study of his serious, non-ironic writings, most notably the *Heathen Gods* and the *Adversaria* (a loose collection of observations which to date have been neglected) confirms that King was both a disciple of late Renaissance Christian Humanism and an advocate of the 'high' Baconianism associated with the Anglican Church. The second part deals with King's work as a Menippean satirist, and begins with a definition and review of the chief classical and Renaissance exponents of this ancient genre (sometimes known as 'the tradition of learned wit'), before turning to the analysis of a number of King's prosimetric and poetic parodies, travesties and mock-heroics. Chapter Four looks at King's controversial writings and political pamphlets, concentrating on his use of irony and burlesque as weapons against a number of thee-political enemies. The last three chapters are devoted respectively to King's finest works - his satires on Richard Bentley, Martin Lister, and Hans Sloane - and again consider these pieces in terms of the adaptation of the Menippean genre for the purposes of elaborate parody and occasional satire. At the same time, the meaning of King's parodies is shown to extend beyond merely personal attack to a serio-comic defence of traditional values in respect of scholarship, literature and more broadly social issues. By their exceptionally witty ridicule of abuses of philological and scientific learning, they implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) endorse the intellectual and cultural ideals of late Renaissance Humanism and high Baconianism. The final contention is that while his burlesques are seriously limited by their topicality, they are sufficiently sophisticated and amusing to entitle him to an important place in the tradition of Menippean satire. The thesis also contains four appendices dealing with King's involvement in *The Examiner*, the question of his authorship of *A Vindication of the Reverend Dr Henry Sacheverell*, some unpublished manuscripts attributed to him, and a manuscript of a nineteenth-century essay on his life and works.

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