



Four Augustan Science Poets: Abraham Cowley, James Thomson, Henry Brooke, Erasmus Darwin

By Richard Hillyer

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A study of the opportunities and pitfalls of writing science poetry during the long eighteenth century

“Hillyer focuses on four poetic approaches to the ‘sublime’ discoveries of science in relation to religion: the apologetic, the illicit, the perverse and the atheistic. This tightly-reasoned study sharply differentiates the responses of the Augustan science poets Cowley, Thomson, Brooke and Darwin to the tensions between science, religion and the poetic imagination.” —Martin Priestman, Emeritus Professor of English, University of Roehampton, UK

Focusing on four poets who because of their distinctive profiles illustrate especially well the opportunities and pitfalls of writing science poetry during the long eighteenth century *Four Augustan Science Poets: Abraham Cowley, James Thomson, Henry Brooke, Erasmus Darwin* offers numerous close readings that shed light not only on standard versions of the sublime but also on these idiosyncratic variants: the apologetic (Abraham Cowley), the illicit (James Thomson), the perverse (Henry Brooke) and the atheistic (Erasmus Darwin). Recurrent concerns include the similarities and differences among the languages of poetry, science and religion. Of the poets analyzed all but Thomson wrote extensive notes to accompany their lines, permitting further comparison of languages, in this case between the same authors’ poetry and prose.

Contents

Preface; Acknowledgments; 1. “Scientifick Versification”; 2. “The Sage- Instructed Eye”; 3. “Wondrous Facts”; 4. “The Mind of Man”; Works Cited; Index.

About the Author

Richard Hillyer teaches literature and composition as a tenured professor at the University of South Alabama, USA. He has published books and articles on Thomas Hobbes, Sir Philip Sidney, Ben Jonson, Edmund Waller, W. H. Auden, the Royal Society and the keyword “care.”

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