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A Source for the Image of the Loadstones in Dryden's *The Hind and the Panther*

In *The Hind and the Panther* (1687) Dryden has the following lines which are spoken by the Panther, representing the Church of England:

‘Tis true,’ she said, ‘I think it somewhat strange  
 So few should follow profitable change:  
 For present joys are more to flesh and blood  
 Than a dull prospect of a distant good.  
 ’Twas well alluded by a son of mine  
 (I hope to quote him is not to purloin)  
 Two magnets, heaven and earth, allure to bliss,  
 The larger loadstone that, the nearer this:  
 The weak attraction of the greater fails,  
 We nod awhile, but neighbourhood prevails:  
 But when the greater proves the nearer too,  
 I wonder more your converts come so slow.  
 Methinks in those who firm with me remain,  
 It shows a nobler principle than gain.’<sup>1</sup>

Dryden's editors have not identified the source of the image of the two loadstones or magnets which the Panther says she has taken from the work of one of her sons, that is,

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<sup>1</sup> *The Hind and the Panther*, iii 362-75, in *The Poems of John Dryden*, edited by Paul Hammond and David Hopkins, Longman Annotated English Poets, 5 vols (Harlow, 1995-2005), iii

from an Anglican writer.<sup>2</sup> Here, however, is a passage which the Panther might have had in mind:

Were not this Chief Good perfectly *One*, were there any other equal to it; man's Soul would hang *in æquilibrio*, equally poised, equally desiring the enjoyment of both, but moving to neither; like a piece of Iron between two Loadstones of equal virtue. But when Religion enters into the Soul, it charms all its restless rage and violent appetite, by discovering to it the Universal Fountain-fulness of One Supreme Almighty Goodness.

The quotation comes from John Smith's *Select Discourses* (London, 1660), p. 415. It might be stretching the point a little for the Panther to describe Smith, one of the Cambridge Platonists, as her son, for when he took up his fellowship at Queens' College, Cambridge, in 1644 he was one of a group of incomers who replaced fellows ejected as a result of the Earl of Manchester's purge of those who refused to take the covenant, and he took up his post only after satisfying the Westminster Assembly of his fitness.<sup>3</sup> But he would certainly have declared his allegiance to the Church of England when he matriculated at Emmanuel College in 1636; his funeral sermon was preached by Simon Patrick, the future Bishop of Ely; and his *Select Discourses* was assembled by the Anglican clergyman John Worthington. The collection was reprinted in 1676, so was current when Dryden was composing his poem. Smith had been a neighbour of the Drydens in Northamptonshire, being born in

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<sup>2</sup> In our Longman edition Professor Hopkins and I noted that Henry Vaughan describes heaven's attraction for the soul in terms of a magnet in 'The Starre' and 'The Queer' (*Silex Scintillans* II (1655), in *The Works of Henry Vaughan*, edited by L. C. Martin, second edition (Oxford, 1957) pp. 491-2 and 539), but neither poem uses the word 'loadstone' or speaks of the competing attraction of two magnets.

<sup>3</sup> *ODNB*.

1618 at Achurch, just a couple of miles from the Dryden family homes at Aldwinckle and Titchmarsh. It may be fanciful to hear a private allusion to this connection in the phrase ‘neighbourhood prevails’, but there is a stronger link, for Dryden composed a *Carmen Lapidarium* on the death of John Smith in 1652 when he was an undergraduate at Trinity College, Cambridge.<sup>4</sup> It is not unlikely that while exploring Anglican theological writings in his preparation for *The Hind and the Panther*<sup>5</sup> Dryden may have taken up this posthumous collection of Smith’s writings, turned to this discourse ‘Of the Excellency and Nobleness of True Religion’ (which would actually have been an appropriate subtitle for Dryden’s poem) and noted this image of the two loadstones, which, like the Panther’s metaphor, occurs in the context of an argument about man being attracted by two powerful but incompatible forms of the good.

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<sup>4</sup> *Poems*, i 11-12.

<sup>5</sup> Discussion of Dryden’s preparatory reading for *The Hind and the Panther* has mostly focussed on his knowledge of the controversial exchanges between Protestant and Catholic theologians: see especially Victor M. Hamm, ‘Dryden’s *The Hind and the Panther* and Roman Catholic Apologetics’, *PMLA*, 83 (1968) 400-415, and see also *Poems*, iii 34-5. That he was reading widely in theology, or at least preparing to do so, is suggested by his purchases of theological books in 1680 and 1682: see T. A. Birrell, ‘John Dryden’s Purchases at Two Book Auctions, 1680 and 1682’, *English Studies*, 42 (1961) 193-217.