

**ORCHESTRA, OR A
POEME OF
DAUNCING**

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Orchestra, or a poeme of dauncing by John Davies

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JOHN DAVIES

**ORCHESTRA, OR A
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DAUNCING**

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

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OR
A POEME OF DAUNCING,
by
SIR JOHN DAVIES.

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(Signed)

Richard Stanton Lambert

INTRODUCTION.

Sir John Davies presents us with the unusual figure of the politician-poet marking out for himself a brilliant career in both capacities. The adventurous variety of his experiences, the daring ambition which prompted him to shine in literature, law, and politics alike, dates him as a child of Elizabeth's age. He was a Wiltshireman, born at Chisgrove in 1559, and educated at Winchester and Queen's College, Oxford, where he matriculated at the age of sixteen. He took his degree in 1590, but before this had already entered the Middle Temple to read for the Bar. It must have been in the course of his legal studies that he first began to write poetry; for though 'Orchestra', his 'lusum adolescentiæ', was not actually published till 1596, the year after he was called to the Bar, it was already entered on the Stationers' Register in 1594, and was probably composed some time in 1593.

Davies must have been a wild and high-spirited youth, even for his day. The boy who could throw off the thousand odd lines of 'Orchestra' in fifteen days, as he tells us he did in his dedication of the

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poem to Richard Martin, and then, not so long a while later, burst in upon the Barristers' Table in Middle Temple at dinner-time, and thrash this same Martin with a cudgel for jeering at him, had evidently a considerable fund of nervous energy to draw upon. This latter escapade occurred in the winter of 1597-8, and naturally led to the apparent early termination of his legal career: in February, 1598, Davies was formally disbarred. Nothing daunted, however, he retired to Oxford, and gave himself over to the serious pursuit of literary fame. His 'annus mirabilis' was 1599, when first the collection of 'Hymns to Astrœa' in honour of Elizabeth, and later the strange didactic poem on the immortality of the soul called 'Nosce Teipsum', were published. By 1601 Davies was at the height of his literary fame, and fresh editions of his poems were being called for. But in the same year he pertinaciously returned to woo again his former love, the Law. A formal apology made in public to Martin procured his readmission to the Middle Temple, and started him afresh upon his professional career.

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Having conquered the field of poetry, he now had before him the more treacherous field of politics. In 1601 Elizabeth was calling together her last Parliament; Davies got himself elected as member for Corfe Castle (Dorset), and quickly made his way to the front. Soon he was placed upon the grand committee appointed by the Commons to thank the Queen for acceding to their wishes in withdrawing certain patents which had been abused by those to whom she had granted them. The next year saw the second edition of 'Nosce Teipsum'. Evidently its fame was spreading fast, for on Elizabeth's death in 1603 Davies paid a diplomatic visit of welcome to James in Scotland, and was received with open arms as the author of a serious metaphysical work. The result of this was quickly seen: Ireland was thought to be a suitable field for the poet's labours. He was appointed Solicitor-General for Ireland, and was knighted on his arrival in Dublin in December, 1603.

In Ireland he experienced both good and evil fortune. In 1608-9 he married Eleanor Touchet, daughter of Lord Audley, who brought him con-

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siderable trouble through her religious mania. She gave herself up to writing (and publishing) crazy prophetic discourses, and annoyed her husband by prognosticating his death three days before it occurred, and going into premature mourning; she may be said to have hurried him to his grave by suggestion. Meantime his interest in Irish affairs led him into a remarkable correspondence with Robert Cecil, in which he described most vividly the lawless and depressed condition of the country. In 1612 he summed up his conclusions on the Irish Question by publishing his 'Discoverie of the True Causes why Ireland was never entirely subdued, untill the Beginning of his Maiesties happie Raigne'. Davies' view of Irish history is original and penetrating; the native Irish had always been ready to receive the blessings of English civilisation, but had been prevented by the nobility, which had stood between them and the English Government, oppressing them by extortion and grinding them down into barbarism. This was the view of the lawyer who had served under Mountjoy and Chichester, and taken an active part in

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organising the plantation of Ulster.

In 1606 Davies had been promoted to the Irish Attorney-Generalship and made an Irish Sergeant-at-law, and elected to the Irish House of Commons to represent Fermanagh County. In the next year, when Parliament met, he became once more the central figure in a scene of violence. A bitter struggle between the Catholic and Protestant factions raged over the election of a new speaker. Davies was the Protestant candidate, but Sir John Everard, the Catholic nominee, forestalled his opponent by getting into the speaker's chair, and clinging physically to his office before the election had been decided. Whereupon Oliver St. John and Ridgeway 'took Sir John Davys by the arms, lifted him from the ground, and placed him in the chair in Sir John Everard's lap, requiring him to come forth out of the chair'. The poet in his later life was corpulent and heavy; his rival must have been exceedingly uncomfortable. Anyhow, Davies obtained the speakership.

But he was now gradually becoming tired of Irish politics, and his ambitions turned again towards

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England. In 1614 he was elected to the English House of Commons to sit for Newcastle-under-Lyme, and in 1619 he finally relinquished his Irish offices. During these years Davies became more and more interested in the study of historical records, and assisted Sir Robert Cotton to found the Society of Antiquaries. In 1615 he took part in the investigation of the horrible Overbury murder case, and in 1620 he was made a Judge of Assize, on the North-Western circuit. Besides publishing his poems in a collected edition in 1622, Davies worked his way further into the King's favour by vigorously supporting the use of the royal prerogative in matters of taxation. Not only did he approve of the forced loan, but he even wrote a treatise concerning 'Impositions, Tunnage, Poudage, Prísage, etc., fully stated and argued from Reason Law and Policy', which was not published till 1656. At last the goal of his political career came in sight. In 1626 he was about to be appointed Lord Chief Justice in the room of Crew, who had been removed from office for his failure to support the royal prerogative. On December 7th

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