DRYDEN AS A CRITIC AND ADAPTER OF SHAKESPEARE

IN THE CONTEXT OF

SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY DRAMATIC CRITICISM

by

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ABSTRACT

To evaluate Dryden's criticism of Shakespeare in the context of seventeenth-century dramatic criticism I have examined some of the important tendencies of the Restoration drama. Dryden's criticism shows many influences. In his appreciation of Shakespeare Dryden responds to the theories of Le Bossu among the French and Longinus among the classical critics. The influence of important classical critics — Aristotle, Horace and Longinus — has been worked out in detail; for the influence of the continental critics I have largely relied on the researches of other Dryden-scholars.

A résumé of the seventeenth century criticism of Shakespeare is made to place Dryden's Shakespearean-criticism in the context of his contemporaries. Rymer's Othello is examined in detail because his Shakespearean-criticism is antithetical to Dryden's. The difference between the two critics is discussed; special attention is paid to Rymer's poetic justice because despite Dryden's disagreements with Rymer on his derogatory criticism of the Elizabethan dramatists Dryden subscribed to the principle of didactic function of the drama. His adaptations of Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra and Troilus and Cressida are governed by the principles of morality and decorum.

As has emerged in this study, Dryden's criticism of Shakespeare is governed partly by the influence of the contemporary and classical critics on him; partly by his own career as a playwright and adapter of Shakespeare; and the largest single factor contributing to his appreciation of Shakespeare has been his intuitive recognition of a genius.

In his admiration for Shakespeare Dryden sometimes resists the pressure of his age; equally, sometimes he gives way to it. This thesis attempts to study the extent of this pressure on Dryden; when, how and why it influenced his criticism of Shakespeare; and equally to examine
the factors contributing to his resistance to it. Dryden, the neo-
classical critic of Shakespeare ends up in Dryden the adapter of
Shakespeare; and in the process of adaptations occurs a collapse of the
former; thus, leading to an inevitable departure from criticism by rule
to a total surrender to the force of Shakespeare's dramatic genius.
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ABBREVIATIONS USED

I have used George Watson's edition of John Dryden of Dramatic Poesy and other Critical Essays (2 vols., 'Everyman', 1962:1969) in my text for its illuminating comments and notes, its modernised spelling and for its easy accessibility to every reader of Dryden. Ker's and Scott's editions of Dryden's prose have been referred to for some passages not included by Watson. The California edition of Dryden's prose, vol. XVII, has been consulted but not used in the text since for my purpose it is not sufficiently comprehensive in its selection of Dryden's essays. I found Watson's edition especially useful for the editor's lucid translation of the Latin verses of Horace cited in my text. All my references to the French and Classical sources are second hand, based on the English translations. As most of Dryden's prefaces and dedications recur far too often in my text I have indicated them by abbreviations, followed by their volume and page no. in my footnotes. 'Watson' refers to the comments and observations of the editor in his notes. The list of other abbreviations, used in my text, follows Watson's.

1. Watson:

Dedication to The Rival Ladies
Essay of Dramatic Poesy
Dedication to Annus Mirabilis
Preface to Secret Love
Defence of An Essay of Dramatic Poesy
Preface to The Tempest
Preface to Tyrannic Love
Preface to An Evening's Love
'Of Heroic Plays' prefixed to The Conquest of Granada

RL
EDP
Annus
Secret
'T Essay'
Tempest
Tyrannic
Evening
'Heroic'
Epilogue to the Second Part of The Conquest of Granada
'Defence of the Epilogue'
Dedication to The Assignation
Preface to Aureng-Zebe
The Author's Apology for Heroic Poetry And Poetic Licence, prefixed to The State of Innocence
Letter to Charles, Earl of Dorset
Heads of an Answer to Rymer
Preface to All for Love
Preface to Oedipus
Preface to Troilus and Cressida
The Grounds of Criticism in Tragedy
Preface to Ovid's Epistles, Translated by Several Hands
Dedication to The Spanish Friar
The Life of Plutarch, prefixed to Plutarch's Lives, Translated by Several Hands
To the Earl of Roscommon, on His Essay on Translated Verse, prefixed to Roscommon, An Essay on Translated Verse
Preface to Sylvae: or the Second part of Poetical Miscellanies
Preface to Albion and Albanius
Preface to Don Sebastian
Letter to William Walsh
Dedication to Eleonora
A Discourse Concerning The Original And Progress of Satire: prefixed to The Satires of Decimus Junius Juvenalis. Translated into English Verse by Mr Dryden & Several Other Eminent Hands .
Dedication to Examen Poeticum: Being the Third Part of Miscellany Poems
To Congreve, on his Double-Dealer, prefixed to The Double-Dealer
Letter to William Walsh
Letter to John Dennis
A Parallel of Poetry and Painting, prefixed to De Arte Graphica by C.A. du Fresnoy, translated by Mr Dryden
The Life of Lucian: prefixed to The Works of Lucian Translated from the Greek
Dedication to the Pastorals in The Works of Virgil, Translated
Dedication to the Aeneis in The Works of Virgil Translated into English Verse
Preface to Fables Ancient and Modern, Translated into Verse from Horace, Ovid, Boccace, and Chaucer, with Original Poems

2. The Works of John Dryden

3. Dryden the Dramatic Works

4. All references to Rymer's works, indicated by the following abbreviations, are from
   The Critical Works of Thomas Rymer, ed. Curt A. Zimansky, New Haven, 1956
   Preface to Rapin
   The Tragedies of the Last Age
   A Short View of Tragedy
   Advertisement to Edgar
   Zimansky's introduction and notes (Introduction pp. 1-11; notes pp. 179-269)

6. All references to Act, scene and line in Shakespeare's plays are from William Shakespeare: The Complete Works, ed. Peter Alexander, London, 1951-1953

7. Abbreviations to Journals

- Modern Philology: MP
- Essays and Studies: ES
- Review of English Studies: RES
- Essays in Criticism: EC
- Philological Quarterly: PQ
- Comparative Literature: CL
- Sewanee Review: SR
- Shakespeare Survey: SSY
- Shakespeare Studies: SST
- Shakespeare Quarterly: SQ
- The Shakespeare Association Bulletin: SAB
- Papers on Language and Literature: PLL
- University of California Chronicle: UCC
- Studies in Philology: SP
- Journal of English and Germanic Philology: JEGP
- Modern Language Review: MLR
- Cambridge Journal: CJ
- Notes & Queries: NQ
- Durham University Journal: DUJ
- Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institute: JWC
- The Critical Quarterly: CQ
INTRODUCTION

We pay our homage to a genius by discovering and rediscovering him for ourselves. The discovery of Shakespeare is analogous to the discovery of self, as fascinating and self-rewarding as it is difficult. Every age has tried to discover a Shakespeare of its own, and no age can claim to have the last word on him. This accounts for the multiplicity of Hamlets and Lears through the ages. The Restoration tried for the first time to explore a Shakespeare for the critic and the playwright as well as for the theatre. Elizabethan Shakespeare belonged to the theatre only. Dryden and his contemporaries set the tradition, in however arbitrary and humble a way, of transplanting Shakespeare from the applause of the audience to the scrutiny of scholar and critic, thus providing a base, as it were, upon which the huge pyramid of Shakespeare-criticism was to grow.

This thesis explores the impact of Shakespeare on John Dryden in the context of the seventeenth century dramatic criticism. Dryden is the first important critic of Shakespeare; but in the history of Shakespearean criticism he has not received as much attention as he deserves. It is with a view to filling this gap that this study was undertaken. The seventeenth century had its own standards of dramatic art, quite different from those of Shakespeare's. The new age believed in the literal truth of correctness, decorum and order. However artificial these canons may appear to the modern eye, they were a natural and inevitable growth of seventeenth century consciousness. A Restoration critic felt more at home with the principles of Aristotle
and Horace than with the poetical dramatic art of Shakespeare. A metaphysical vision of Shakespeare was quite alien to his temperament. His criticism of Shakespeare is often formal and pedantic, erring on the side of over-earnestness in condemning or praising in absolute terms. This is because, much to the regret of Dryden, the seventeenth century critic always had another critic, or critics, supposedly erudite, in view. "The common reader" that Virginia Woolf celebrates, calls for a criticism at once casual and relaxed, informal and personal, more conversational than pedagogical. The seventeenth century critic was almost ignorant of the existence of the common reader.

Most of the Restoration critics were poet-critics or dramatist-critics who were interested in justifying their own creative achievements in terms of the excellences of the past; in some rare instances, like those of Rymer and Dryden, they turned to the ancients and the Elizabethans in search of suitable models for their own drama. It is not without significance that no full-fledged analysis of any of Shakespeare's plays was attempted, no commentary on the texts seems even to have been contemplated. One wonders why Rymer, or some learned contemporary of Rymer did not make any attempt at a biographical sketch of Shakespeare; and why a comprehensive critical edition of his plays did not come until Nicholas Rowe offered one in 1709. It is because a study of Shakespeare for his own sake was quite uncommon in the seventeenth century. It is, as C.M. Ingleby describes it, a "pre-critical century". Shakespearean criticism, or criticism at large, comes only as a by-product of the works of the Restoration playwright or poet. It is often written in passing, in the prefaces, prologues and epilogues of the plays, or those of Shakespeare's plays which these playwrights adapted.


To evaluate Dryden's criticism of Shakespeare in the context of the seventeenth century I have tried to examine some of the important dramatic tendencies of the Restoration drama that leave their impact on Dryden's criticism in general which in turn has its bearings on his criticism and adaptations of Shakespeare. Dryden's criticism shows many influences. In his appreciation of Shakespeare Dryden responds to the theories of Le Bossu among the French critics and Longinus among the classical critics. Aristotle and Horace are the other important critics whose principles influence Dryden's dramatic theory at various stages of his career both in his conformity to and departures from them. I have worked out the influence of the three classical critics in detail, although for the influence of the continental critics I have been obliged to rely on the work of other researchers as most of the French critics have not been translated into English in full. I have therefore kept my remarks on them comparatively brief.

A résumé of the seventeenth-century criticism of Shakespeare is made to place Dryden's Shakespearean-criticism in the context of his contemporaries. Of these, Thomas Rymer was an important critic to reckon with and the question of his influence on Dryden, and vice versa, is an important one, both from the point of view of Restoration dramatic criticism and from that of Dryden's criticism of Shakespeare. Rymer was a great champion of poetic justice and this principle gained a special significance in the history of Restoration drama. Dryden differed with Rymer's derogatory criticism of the Elizabethan dramatists; but he subscribed to the principle of poetic justice in theory, at any rate. Dryden's own plays do not always observe poetic justice; but his adaptations of Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra and Troilus and Cressida are governed by the principle of morality and decorum, which, as he thought, Shakespeare had ignored in his treatment of the originals.
Poetic justice has been examined at some length as it had a great hold on Restoration dramatic theory and also because the adaptations of Shakespeare's plays were largely motivated by a desire to make them didactic.

Rymer's disparaging criticism of Shakespeare's Othello posed a challenge to the Restoration appreciation of Shakespeare. Dryden summarily rejected Rymer's denunciation of Shakespeare though he did not offer a rejoinder to Othello as some of the other Restoration-admirers of Shakespeare did; and as indeed the critics and admirers of Shakespeare have continued to do right till our own time. A detailed analysis of Rymer's Othello has been made both because this is the only full-length study of a Shakespearean play in the Restoration and also because Rymer's criticism of Shakespeare is totally antithetical to Dryden's.

Adaptations of Shakespeare's plays by the Restoration playwrights can be interpreted as their criticism of Shakespeare. Dryden's adaptations, at any rate, are his extended criticism of Shakespeare. As has emerged in this study, Dryden's appreciation of Shakespeare is influenced partly by the drama of his age, partly by the impact of the classical and continental critics on him, and partly by his own career as a playwright and adapter of Shakespeare. The largest single factor contributing to his understanding of Shakespeare was his intuitive recognition and admiration for a genius, and in this he stands apart among the Restoration critics of Shakespeare.

According to Donald Davie, Dryden's greatness, in his admiration for Shakespeare, "is in his knowing how far to give way to the pressure of his age, and where to resist it".¹ This thesis is an attempt to study the extent of this "pressure" on Dryden; when, how and why it influenced his criticism of Shakespeare; and equally to examine the

factors responsible for his resistance to it. Dryden the neo-classical critic of Shakespeare, ends up in Dryden the adapter of Shakespeare; and in the process of adaptations occurs a collapse of the former, thus, leading to an inevitable departure from criticism by the rule to a total surrender to the force of Shakespeare's dramatic genius.
John Dryden was a poet by vocation and a playwright by profession, but he was a critic by choice. For nearly forty years he continued to write his critical prefaces for the satisfaction of expressing a point of view, to take an active interest in current literary problems and to establish a gentlemanly mode of critical discussion which was totally unknown in his time. In the seventeenth century there was no money in literary criticism, and no fame either. His detractors ridiculed him for his prefaces, yet he did not give up writing them. This is because the business of criticism was an important one for him and he took it seriously. Those who try to judge him by modern standards, and find him inadequate, must remember that Dryden had no critical tradition to draw on. The truth of Thomas Rymer's picturesque observation "till of late years England was as free from criticks as it is from Wolves", is well borne out by the thinness of the two-volume anthology of the Elizabethan critics edited by Gregory Smith.

1. E.g., the authors of The Rehearsal (1672), who ridiculed his prefaces as an abortive and foolish attempt to explain his unintelligible dramatic plots (The Rehearsal by the Duke of Buckingham, 12th ed. London, 1730, p. 75); Jonathan Swift's jibe that Dryden wrote his prefaces "to raise the volume's price a shilling" ('On Poetry' [1733], cited by G. Watson in The Literary Critics, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1962:64, p. 57).

2. PR (1674), p. 2; cf. 'Discourse' (1693), II, 73-74.
Literary criticism, as it is understood today, had its beginning in the seventeenth century. Sixteenth century criticism was somewhat casual in nature, written mostly to defend the poet and to protect poetry since most of the critics were themselves poets. But now that the office of the critic had shifted from the sympathetic poet to the unsympathetic censor, there was a danger of what Rymer called the waspish critics trying to flood the scene. These "puny" censors and "blundering, half-witted people" were likely to do more harm than good. What sort of person, then, deserved to be a critic? It was as serious an issue as what should be the function of criticism, for the quality of criticism depended on the virtue of the critic. The seventeenth century writers and poets were seriously concerned to lend dignity to the genre of literary criticism, to define the role of a critic and to establish that the discipline of criticism was something more than the ability to praise or condemned. By Rymer's standard, which to a large extent was a representative one, it was to keep a strict vigil on the poet. According to Dryden also "a severe critic is the greatest help to a good wit. He does the office of a friend, while he designs that of an enemy; and his malice keeps a poet within those bounds which the luxuriancy of his fancy would tempt him to overleap."

Before Dryden we find Ben Jonson prescribing that a critic ought to be learned and sincere. He should not, as many physicians did, harm "sound patients with their wrong practise". Above all, "to judge

1. See below, pp. 74-75; cf. Examen (1693), II, 157-158.
3. Secret (1668), I, 109; Sylva (1685), II, 28; cf. 'Walsh' (1693) good critics are very rare, II, 174.
4. "Poets would grow negligent if the critics had not a strict eye over their miscarriage" (PR, p. 1).
5. 'Epilogue' (1672), I, 173.
of Poets is only the faculite of Poets; and not of all Poets, but the
best." Thomas Rymer also demands "extraordinary Talent" for this job,
and every Tom, Dick and Harry, "least acquainted with the game",
should not "bark at every thing" that comes in their way; and to curb them
Rymer recommended the rules of Aristotle as models for criticism, and
these rules were accepted almost universally as a reliable guideline
by the seventeenth century, except for a few isolated protests in the
critical essays of Howard, Butler, Temple and Dryden. Later we find
George Farquhar warning against ignorant judges. At the turn of the
century, a critic like Charles Gildon is found struggling backwards
and forwards with rules, whereas Farquhar totally rejects the authority
of Aristotle and the tyranny of rules; and Joseph Addison, while he
esteems Aristotle, Longinus and Boileau, for being true critics, condemns
their servile followers as "smatterers in criticism" who only knew how
to apply a few general rules like "Mechanical Instruments". In the

1. Discoveries (1640), in Ben Jonson, ed. C.H. Herford and P. Simpson,
II vols., Oxford, 1925-1952 (hereafter referred to as Herford and
Simpson), VIII, 642; cf. Dryden, AL (1678), I, 225.
2. PR (1674), p. 2.
3. Robert Howard, preface to The Duke of Lerma (1668), in Spingarn,
II, 106-107; Samuel Butler, "Upon critics who judge of modern
plays precisely by the rules of the Antients" (1678), Spingarn,
II, 278-280; William Temple, Of Poetry (1692), Spingarn, III,
83-85; Dryden, see below, pp. 97-102.
4. "Discourse upon Comedy" (1702), in Eighteenth Century Critical
Essays, ed. Scott Elledge, 2 vols., Cornell, 1961 (hereafter
referred to as Elledge), I, 80.
5. Charles Gildon, in Miscellaneous Letters and Essays, London, 1694,
feels that a genius cannot be bound by the rules (pp. 87, 91-92,
146, 152), but in the preface to Phaeton, London, 1698, and in
The Complete Art of Poetry 2 vols., London, 1718, he upholds the
rules (P.52; I, 127-128); and again in a letter (1694) to
Mr. Harrington, he stands for the rules. In Critical Essays of
(hereafter referred to as Durham), pp. 16-17; Farquhar, in
Discourse upon Comedy (1702), in Elledge, I, 80-90, Addison,
Spectator No. 592 (1714) in Elledge, I, 77-79, Tatler No. 165
(1710) in Durham, p. 302.
seventeenth century, criticism had yet to find a centre, and the business of experiments, innovations and departures from the past was therefore inevitable.

One of the important departures in the seventeenth century was that the focus of criticism shifted from poetry to drama. The sixteenth century was a period of great drama, but in criticism we have only a Defence of Poesie (1595) or an Arte of English Poesie (1598); and although "poesie" was used in a fairly wide sense, the titles of the major Elizabethan critics reflect a fair reflection of their greater interest. For example, important issues of topical interest like the rhyme/blank-verse controversy of Campion and Daniel, relate to poetry rather than to drama. Dryden and Rymer are the first important critics of drama as such. Before them, Sidney and Jonson had discussed some of the problems of the drama, and occasionally a playwright like Fletcher made a brief but significant contribution to the concept of dramatic genre, but it is not until Dryden that we have the first detailed critical analysis of a play; and Dryden's Essay of Dramatic Poesie, followed by Rymer's Tragedies of the Last Age, are the first major critical treatises devoted exclusively to the drama.

The Essay of Dramatic Poesie (1668) was written when apart from the "pole-star of the Ancients, and the rules of the French stage"

1. Cf. Thomas Lodge, Defence of Poetry (1579); William Webbe, Discourse of English Poetrie (1586); Sir John Harrington, Briefe Apologie of Poetrie (1598).


Dryden had no "other help" or the benefit of any "living master to instruct him". The very use of dialogue was a new departure in English criticism, and whether this early essay was motivated by a wish to reply to the attack of Samuel Sorbiere on the English stage, or it was the manifesto of an ambitious dramatist embarking on his career, it is the first full-length theory of drama in the history of English criticism. As a practising dramatist for nearly thirty years (1663-1694), and even after he left the stage, Dryden was occupied throughout his career with the practical and theoretical problems of dramatic techniques.

Dryden's literary career almost synchronises with the Restoration. The year 1660 restored the monarchy to England, and the monarchy restored the theatre. During the Commonwealth the theatre had been closed officially, though there were instances of surreptitious performances, but now there was suddenly a great demand for plays. One of the ways of meeting this demand was to revive old plays, and Rymer's criticism of the plays of Fletcher, Ben Jonson and Shakespeare is a testimony to the popularity of these revivals. The researches of Gunnar Sorelius have established that there were more performances of

1. Dryden makes this statement in 'Discourse' (1693), II, 73-74; Ben Jonson was the only English critic worth reckoning when Dryden wrote his EDP (1668) and he paid a handsome tribute to Ben Jonson, cf. I, 70.

2. Watson, I, ix.


the old plays than the new until the early seventies. However, most of the old plays were acceptable only after some alteration; but adaptations were not difficult. By the late seventies there was a great decline in the popularity of the old plays, for the public taste was getting more sophisticated. There is evidence in the diaries of Pepys and Evelyn of this change of attitude. Pepys was not happy with many of Shakespeare's plays; Evelyn positively attributed this sophistication to the king's stay abroad. According to Sorelius, however, the decline in the popularity of old plays was not because of any "fundamental changes of taste" or the impact of Rymer's criticism, but because the "King's Men, the guardians of the old drama in general ... were now rapidly approaching old age". Another factor contributing to the demand for new plays was the audience, which comprised more or less the same set of people every day, that is, a few courtiers; for the middle class (with the few exceptions of men like Pepys) by and large still suffered from the impact of commonwealth

1. 'The Giant Race before the Flood': Pre-Restoration Drama on the Stage and in the Criticism of the Restoration, Uppsala, 1966, (referred to hereafter as Sorelius), pp. 73-74 & 74 n.
2. Sorelius, p. 74.
5. Samuel Pepys' response to most of the plays of Shakespeare was unfavourable, with the exception of Macbeth and The Tempest, see below, pp. 30-31; John Evelyn, The Diary of John Evelyn, ed. E.S. de Beer, 6 vols., Oxford, 1955, III (20 November 1661), 304: "I saw Hamlet Pr: of Denmark played; but now the old playe began to disgust this refined age; since his Majestie being so long abroad".
6. Sorelius, pp. 63-64.
puritanism and therefore repetition of the same play was not possible for long.\textsuperscript{1} The demand for plays, thus, exceeded all means of an adequate supply. Dryden must have realised early in his career that of all literary forms the writing of plays was likely to be the most remunerative, and that this was his only hope of surviving as a man of letters, despite the fact that he was unhappy with the contemporary theatre and disliked writing plays.\textsuperscript{2} Those who find it baffling why for twenty-nine years he kept on practising a craft for which he had no liking, might find their answer here.\textsuperscript{3} As a wise man of the world, Dryden had no wish to end up like Wycherley or Otway; the former died of starvation and the latter was imprisoned for debt for seven years.\textsuperscript{4} "The father of English criticism", then, accepted the profession of playwright in order not to starve and into the bargain established the tradition of dramatic criticism. Indeed, English criticism, if not English drama, is the richer for the choice forced upon Dryden.\textsuperscript{5}

Once the choice was made, the question before our playwright was what sort of plays to write; and he tries to face this problem in his first essay. There were before the Restoration playwrights the rich traditions of the Elizabethans - "the giant race before the Flood\textsuperscript{6} - ,


2. See DS (1690), II, 44; 'Discourse' (1693), II, 91; DD (1694), II, 171; 'Parallel' (1695), II, 207.


5. Dryden's dramatic work is important "because it gave him the knowledge and the opportunity for some of his best critical writing": (T.S. Eliot, John Dryden: the Poet, the Dramatist, the Critic, New York, 1932, p. 45).

6. DD (1694), II, 169.
but by contemporary standards the Elizabethans were thought to be too irregular. The patronage of the drama had shifted from the Elizabethan pit to the Restoration court. The king, Charles II, himself took a great interest in the theatre and every dramatist tried to win his favour for economic gain as well as for recognition. After years abroad, the king had picked up new ideas on the continent, especially a taste for French and Spanish dramatic methods. There were also the ancient models of the Greek dramatists. So we find Dryden recommending a new technique of writing plays, selecting what was best and most suitable for the contemporary milieu from the French, Greek and Elizabethan dramatic traditions.

But the Essay of Dramatic Poesy is not the only piece of Dryden's formal dramatic criticism. Throughout his career he keeps on tackling the various issues raised in this essay, though his prefaces cannot qualify as pure criticism. As a practising playwright he had to please the audiences and also the critics. The audiences were rowdy and hard

1. Cf. Secret (1668), I, 104; Beljame, Men of Letters, pp. 79-83; cf. James Sutherland, English Literature, "This was one of the only periods in which the English Court had a genuine influence on literature. Charles II ... gave little practical encouragement to his poets and dramatists; but more important than any financial rewards ... was the fact that they could really please him, that he took an intelligent interest in what they wrote". p. 26.

2. Cf. Orrery's letter to a friend: "I have now finished a Play in the French Manner; because I heard the King declare himself more in favour of their Way of Writing than ours", cited by Beljame, Men of Letters, p. 39.

3. Cf. Watson, I, xii: "For good reasons, perhaps, Of Dramatic Poesy remains Dryden's only attempt at formal criticism. The rest is almost all prefatorial"; cf. The Literary Critics, p. 35.

to please: 1 "their judgment is a mere lottery", 2 but a lottery which had to be won, though Dryden is often contemptuous of the tastes of the audiences, 3 and therefore insists that his real ambition is to be read. 4 But audiences could not be ignored. On them depended his livelihood and "their taste prescribes to him". It was not - as he continually makes out - so much that he wanted "to delight the age" he lived in, as the fact that the delight of the people determined the fate of a playwright. 5 The theatre company did not settle any money for the play. The playwright was offered the takings of the third night - though Dryden was lucky to strike a bargain to write three plays a year for a fixed sum of money - and some plays did not last that long. 6 In addition, there was a growing tribe of malicious critics and Dryden is found answering their charges also.

Dryden had to take account of all these practical problems and they leave their impact on his criticism. His criticism is thus, the by-product of his living contact with the drama of his period. He is as much concerned with a critical theory of drama for his age as with "defending his place in the sun"; 7 and his greatest concern is to establish sound and healthy traditions in English criticism.

2. EDP (1668), I, 86.
5. 'Essay' (1668), I, 120, 116.
7. Watson, I, xiii.
Dryden's concept of a critic

Criticism, as Dryden defines it after Aristotle, is a "standard of judging well; the chiefest part of which is to observe those excellencies which should delight a reasonable reader".\(^1\) The critic should decide in favour of a poet if his composition reflects true genius. Dryden tried to prescribe what was missing in the age, that is, a gentlemanly mode of discussion which would rise above petty prejudices, "not denying even to enemies their just praises".\(^2\) The Restoration critic had yet to learn to admire the graces of a genius; Dryden's example was an isolated one, quite opposed to the literary trends of his age, where hair-splitting arguments over the minor errors of genius were considered a triumph of literary criticism. Happily, Dryden departs from the pedantic dogmas of his contemporaries and tries to disentangle criticism from fault-finding.

Dryden prescribes what he likes best and although he stands for criticism by taste he valued learning as much as Rymer did, despite his statement that he "never read anything but for pleasure".\(^3\) Like Rymer also Dryden was conscious of the poor critical heritage of Restoration criticism but unlike Rymer Dryden's highly allusive poetry shows his awareness of the rich poetic and dramatic heritage of the Restoration.\(^4\) He was therefore concerned about the state of contemporary criticism which failed to subscribe to any positive values. As Dryden describes it, Restoration was a "satirical and censorious\(^5\)."

1. 'Apology' (1677), I, 197.
2. Examen (1693), II, 162.
age", abounding in "ill natured . . . scribblers", and criticism had become "mere hangman's work" in their hands.¹ Much that passed for criticism was no more than hostile commentary. Critical discussion often degenerated into acrimony. Even praise of an author was far from being disinterested; as Dryden points out, the critics would "exalt their author, not so much for his own sake as for their own".²

Dryden is the first English critic to use the word criticism in the sense of literary criticism.³ Right till our own times, abuse of the term has been far too common, and it was particularly so in the seventeenth century. Dryden for the first time tried to understand its proper meaning, and he is found struggling hard to rescue it from the current misuse. He prescribes once for all that fault-finding should not be the same as criticism.⁴ He despises ill-natured critics. Rymer also despises them but in practice he fails to live up to his precepts.⁵ Fault-finding is quite an obsession with a critic of the age; and he "is disgusted less with their [authors'] absurdities than excellence, and you can't displease him more than in leaving him little room for his malice in your correctness and perfection".⁶

3. Watson, I, 196 n5.
4. 'Apology' (1677), I, 196; 'Lucian' (1711), II, 213; cf. Pope, Whoever thinks a faultless Piece to see,
   Thinks what ne'r was, nor is, nor e'er shall be.
   And if the Means be just, the Conduct true,
5. Evening (1671), I, 147; Pr (1674), p. 1; cf. Rymer's later works, TLA (1677), Syl (1693).
For Dryden, such fault-finders are "peevish" critics who try to be "cheaply witty on the poet's cost". He ridicules them as "little critics" and "over-wise censors". "These little critics do not well consider what is the work of a poet and what the graces of a poem". Such "censorious, and detracting people" do not qualify to "set up for critics". They are "wits of the second order" who if asked to write, would do so worse than "the worst of those which they expunge in a true poet"; and "ill writers are usually the sharpest censors". "Thus the corruption of a poet is the generation of a critic", though according to Dryden, "Poets themselves are the most proper . . . critics". As a practising poet and critic, Dryden knew full well that the job of a critic is not an easy one. It is difficult "to understand the purity of English, and critically to discern not only good writers from bad, and a proper style from a corrupt, but also to distinguish that which is pure in a good author from that which is vicious and corrupt in him". In the absence of these accomplishments, "blundering, half-witted people . . . make a great deal of noise about a verbal slip"; and it is malice at its worst "when 'tis forced to lay hold on a word or syllable".

2. Annus (1667), I, 100; Secret (1668), I, 106.
4. 'Apology' (1677), I, 196.
5. Examen (1693), II, 158; cf. Evening (1671), I, 147: "I despise their censures, who I am sure would write worse on the same subject; cf. Pope,
   There are, who judge still worse than they can write.
   Some have at first for Wits, then Poets past,
   Turn'd Criticks next, and prov'd plain Fools at last.
   (Essay on Criticism, Schmitz, 1962, pp. 33-34).
7. AL (1678), I, 225.
and "malice in all critics reigns so high / That for small errors they whole plays decry".\(^1\)

Dryden stands for just criticism;\(^2\) that is, a critic should take "a view of the whole together . . . and where the beauties are more than the faults", a good critic will conclude "for the poet against the little judge";\(^3\) and, "amongst the better sort of critics" certain defects will also "pass for beautiful faults";\(^4\) for a "dull correctness, a piece without any considerable faults, but with few beauties", has little merit;\(^5\) and even poets like Homer and Virgil in the fervour of their writings could not escape little mistakes.\(^6\) A critic should be in sympathy with his author, for only then can he understand him; and a proper understanding of the author is the most conducive to the proper appreciation of him;\(^7\) but "a blind admirer [is] not a critic".\(^8\) A good critic will comment upon his author by illustrating "obscure beauties", by placing "some passages in better light", and by redeeming "others from malicious interpretations";\(^9\) and as very few critics are "genius[es] as universal as Aristotle", who could "penetrate into all arts and sciences without the practice of

1. Tyrannic (1670), I, 143.
4. Eleonora (1692), II, 61.
5. 'Parallel' (1695), II, 207; cf. Dryden's often ridiculed lines in the prologue to Tyrannic Love (1670), I, 143:
   And he who servilely creeps after sense
   Is safe, but ne'er will reach an excellence.
6. 'Apology' (1677), I, 197-198.
7. EDP (1668), I, 31.
8. AL (1678), I, 226.
them".\footnote{1} an average critic should learn the practice of the craft.

The first requisite expected of a critic is to know "the properties and delicacies" of the English language; and to "understand and practise" it, one needs the "help of a liberal education, long reading, and digesting of those few good authors we have amongst us, the knowledge of men and manners, the freedom of habitues and conversation with the best company of both sexes".\footnote{2}

Dryden's practice as a man of letters was a factor which contributed to his spirit of tolerance in criticism. The criticism of the age, as we have seen, was fostered by interminable controversies and wrangles. For reasons which are quite inexplicable, Dryden remained an object of "public mark for many years"; as he himself says: "more libels have been written against me than almost any man now living".\footnote{3} He tries to seek consolation both in the thought that "posterity, perhaps, may be more favourable to me; for interest and passion will lie buried in another age, and partiality and prejudice be forgotten", and in the nobler examples of the past which advocated tolerance in criticism.\footnote{4} He pays a very warm tribute to the Earl of Dorset for his ability to "give allowance to the failings of others, by considering that there is nothing perfect in mankind; and by distinguishing that which comes nearest to excellency, tho' not absolutely free from faults"; and to Lord Radcliffe also because he could

1. AL (1678), I, 225.
4. 'Discourse' (1693), II, 126; cf. Eleonora (1692), II, 63. "For my comfort, they ('the incompetent or corrupt Judges') are but Englishmen, and as such, if they think ill of me today, they are inconsistent enough to think well of me tomorrow".
easily forgive "some trivial faults when they come accompanied with
some countervailing beauties".¹

That Dryden lives up to his precepts is also illustrated by the
many attacks on him and his reactions to them. Hugh Macdonald has
observed: "it is not easy to find any parallel in English literature
to so much violence and ridicule directed against one man of letters in
his life-time". As Macdonald points out, he was a victim of the venom
of his adversaries both when he ventured an opinion and participated
in a controversy, and also when he remained silent.² Moreover, Dryden
did not indulge in any such counter-crusade: "I have seldom answered
any scurrilous lampoon, when it was in my power to have exposed my
enemies ... "³ Dryden did attack in reply to some of his attackers,
for example Howard, Rochester, Settle, Shadwell, Rymer and Jeremy
Collier, but he never took the offensive. Rather he seems to have had
an instinctive distaste for giving provocation, so that when concluding
his attack on Howard in 'Defence of an Essay', where Dryden's reply
was a good deal harsher than the provocation, he remarks: "But as I
was the last who took up arms, I will be the first to lay them down";
and as Watson points out, Dryden not only kept his promise, but even
withdrew the 'Defence' from the later editions of The Indian Emperor.⁴
Again, replying to Rymer's charges, Dryden makes a significant aside:
"I leave the world to judge who gave the provocation".⁵ This restraint
does not arise from any shade of diffidence or evasiveness in his

¹. 'Discourse' (1693), II, 74, Examen (1693), II, 156.
². 'The Attacks on Dryden' ES, XXI, 1935, 72, 69.
³. 'Discourse' (1693), II, 126.
⁴. 'Essay' (1668), I, 130 and n; cf. Summers, I, xxix.
⁵. Examen (1693), II, 160.
character, as has been suggested by Watson;\(^1\) Dryden, as he himself observes, did not care to answer most of his critics because they had "shot at rovers, and therefore missed, or their powder was so weak that [he] might safely stand them at the nearest distance". His professional code of a gentleman-critic militated against mud-slinging: "We have no moral right on the reputation of other men. 'Tis taking from them what we cannot restore to them". However, he makes two exceptions to this principle. First, an attack is necessary when someone becomes a "public nuisance"; and secondly, it becomes justified as a point of personal revenge, when one is "notoriously abused", though here again Dryden recommends Christian forgiveness and explains how he has tried to temper the provocations given him and has "many times avoided the commission of that fault", even when he was "notoriously provoked".\(^2\)

1. \textit{I, v, II, 159 n3.}
2. 'Discourse' (1693), II, 77, 125, 126.
CHAPTER TWO

SEVENTEENTH CENTURY CRITICISM OF SHAKESPEARE

We have almost no authentic record of Shakespeare and his plays during his lifetime. Before Ben Jonson there are brief comments by no more than a dozen contemporaries of Shakespeare. Robert Greene's (1592) disparaging remarks that Shakespeare "is an upstart, Crow, beautified with our feathers... (who) supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blank verse as the best of you" are perhaps typical of a university man of that time. Francis Meres (1598) praises some of the plays; but most contemporary references are to Shakespeare's poems Venus and Adonis and Lucrece. The paucity of Elizabethan criticism is due to the fact that although it was a great age of drama and poetry, there was no impetus for critical appraisal of the drama until the Restoration period.

Much of what is said about Shakespeare in the early seventeenth century is in the form of tributes prefixed to the Folio editions. A tribute cannot qualify for criticism. Thus, Ben Jonson's verses 'To the memory of my beloved, The Author Mr. William Shakespeare' in The First Folio (1623) are pure and unqualified praise. But his association with Shakespeare may go back to 1598 when, by Nicholas Rowe's account,  

Every Man in His Humour was turned down by the Chamberlain's men, and Shakespeare helped to get it accepted.¹ In the prologue to this play Jonson is critical of other dramatists' (perhaps particularly Shakespeare's) failure to observe the unities:

To make a child, now swaddled, to proceede
Man, and then shoote vp, in one beard, and weede,
Past threescore yeeres: or, with three rustie swords,
   And helpe of some few foot-and-half-foote words,
Fight ouer Yorke and Lancasters long jarres:
   And in the tyring-house bring wounds, to scarres.

In the last line of the prologue, addressing the audience, he says "you, that haue so grac'd monsters, may like men" which again seems to refer to Shakespeare's Caliban (the play was produced in 1598, the prologue appeared in the First Folio edition of Jonson's works in 1616, so that by "monsters" Jonson could have had Caliban in mind) literally, or figuratively to a contrast between - as he thought - his well drawn characters and the exaggerated characters of Shakespeare.² In his Conversation with William Drummond (1619), Ben Jonson is supposed to have said, "Shakspear wanted Arte".³ In the Folio-verses (1623) Jonson eulogises Shakespeare as "soule of the Age", pride of "Britaine", to whom the whole of Europe owes homage, who, in spite of "small Latine and lesse Greeke", outshone Lyly, Kyd and Marlowe; and that after him even the classical poets like Terence or Plautus did not please any more. "He was not of an age, but for all time:"⁴ In 1631, in the introduction to Bartholomew Fair, Jonson again ridicules Shakespeare:

2. Every Man in His Humour (1616), Herford and Simpson, III, 303.
3. Herford and Simpson, I, 133.
4. The First Folio of Shakespeare (1623), The Norton Facsimile, pp. 9-10.
If there bee neuer a Servant-monster i' the Fayre; who can help it? he says; nor a nest of Antiques? H ee is loth to make Nature afraid in his Plays, like those that beget Tales, Tempests, and such like Drolleries, to mixe his head with other mens heelees, let the concupiscence of Jinges and Dances, raigne as strong as it will amongst you.

This is obviously a dig at Shakespeare's Tempest and Winter's Tale. Jonson's most sustained criticism comes in his Discoveries, published posthumously in 1640, which is the standard neo-classical criticism of Shakespeare, admiring him for his wit and condemning him for his failure to conform to the rules. His retort that Shakespeare needed to blot so much from his works is perhaps in reply to Heminge and Condell's praise of the poet which they prefixed to The First Folio. Shakespeare, as they observed, "was a happie imitator of Nature, was a most gentle expresser of it. His mind and hand went together: And what he thought, he uttered with that easinesse, that wee haue scarce receiued from him a blot in his papers".

John Milton (1608-1674) is by far the least theatre-minded of all the seventeenth century critics of Shakespeare. His 'Epitaph on the Admirable Dramaticke Poet, W. Shakespeare' is prefixed to The Second Folio (1632):

What neede my Shakespeare for his honour'd bones, The labour of an Age, in piled stones Or that his hallow'd Reliques should be hid Vnder a starre-ypointing Pyramid?

And so Sepulchr'd in such pompe dost lie That Kings for such a Tombe would wish to die.

1. Herford and Simpson, VI, 16.
2. E.g., Jonson's well known remark on Shakespeare "His wit was in his own power would the rule of it had beene so too" (Herford and Simpson, VIII, 583-584).
3. 'To the great variety of Readers', The First Folio, 1623, The Norton Facsimile, p. 7.
4. Prefixed to The Second Folio, 1632, facsimile, Methuen, 1909, sig. A5r.
Although the first four lines suggest that they may have been written as an inscription for a monument, Milton's editor, David Masson, holds the view that "Milton thought for himself that Shakespeare did not need a monument". However, Milton's admiration for Shakespeare's "easie numbers" as opposed to the "shame of slow-endavouring Art" is understandably genuine, since he preferred blank verse to rhyming couplets in his own compositions.

About the same time, in L'Allegro, Milton refers to Jonson's learning and Shakespeare's fancy:

If Jonson's learned sock be on
Or sweetest Shakespeare, Fancy's child
Warble his native wood notes wild.

According to H.W. Garrod, both in L'Allegro (1632) and in the Epitaph Milton celebrates the "Shakespeare of the romantic comedies". In II Penseroso (1632), when Milton talks of tragedy it is Greek and Roman tragedy rather than Shakespearean tragedy that he refers to. Milton's ideal of a tragedy, as indicated in his Samson Agonistes (1671), which is more a dramatic poem than a play, is after the pattern of classical drama rather than in the English dramatic tradition. In the preface he opposes the practice of mixing "comic stuff with tragic sadness and gravity". It is obvious therefore, that he could have had little sympathy for Shakespearean tragedy. Among Milton's notes and plans, preserved among his manuscripts at Trinity College Cambridge, are four outlines for tragedies; that the story of Macbeth is one of them,

suggests that perhaps Milton was not happy with Shakespeare's Macbeth. Nevertheless, Milton was familiar with most of Shakespeare's plays, for as well as the lines from Richard III quoted in Eikonoklastes there are several allusions to Shakespeare's plays in his poems, and Shakespearean echoes are noticeable in Milton's Comus and Lycidas.

William Davenant (1606-1668) was a godson of the poet, but as the story goes, his admiration for Shakespeare went so far that he did not mind being called his natural son. He liked to think that he wrote in the very spirit of Shakespeare. He "was regarded as the repository of a greater and more authentic mass of Shakespeareana than any other living man". In 1637 he published an ode in the memory of the dead poet: 'In Remembrance of Master William Shakespeare'. In his over-enthusiasm, Davenant started the tradition of adapting Shakespeare's plays for the Restoration theatre. As the manager of the Duke's company, he was assigned some of Shakespeare's plays as his particular property by the regulation of 15 November 1660, and these, according to the Lord Chamberlain's records, he proposed "to reform and make fit for the Company of Actors appointed under his direction and command". While the King's company under Killigrew played Shakespeare unaltered, Davenant during the eight years of his association with the Duke's

company adapted Measure for Measure and Much Ado about Nothing by combining them into The Law Against Lovers (1661), Macbeth (1674), and The Tempest (1670), in collaboration with Dryden, who completed the play after the death of the poet in 1668. Dryden tells us that Davenant "first taught me" to admire Shakespeare, a statement to be taken with a grain of salt however; since there are strong echoes of Shakespeare's Hamlet-soliloquy in Dryden's first published poem 'Upon the death of the Lord Hastings' (1649). As a young boy of eighteen, and relatively unknown, Dryden could not have come in contact with Davenant, especially at a time when the senior poet was facing a serious threat to his safety as a result of the execution of Charles I.

Hales of Eton (1584-1656) and Sir John Suckling (1609-1642) were two other great admirers of Shakespeare during the early seventeenth century. The latter, as Dryden informs us, preferred Shakespeare to Ben Jonson even though Jonson's reputation was then at its height. Nicholas Rowe also records Suckling's admiration for Shakespere, and the compilers of Shakespere's Centurie of Prayne (1875) find evidence of plagiarism from Shakespeare in Suckling's works. Hales of Eton is said to have started a debate "to shew all the Poets of Antiquity outdone by SHAKESPEAR, in all the Topics", and the judges, who were men of learning and quality, "unanimously gave the Preference to Shakespear" against the Greek and Roman poets. Nicholas Rowe's version of the Hales' debate is a dramatic and embellished account of his experience. Davenant's adaptation of Shakespeare's plays was widely praised for its fidelity to the original text, and it was considered an important contribution to the English stage.

anecdote is that in a conversation between Sir John Suckling, Davenant, Ben Jonson and Hales, Jonson was "frequently reproaching him with the want of learning, and Ignorance of the Antients", to which Hales retorted

That if Mr Shakespear had not read the Antients, he had likewise not stolen any thing from 'em; (a Fault the other made no conscience of) and that if he would produce any one Topick finely treated by any of them, he would undertake to shew something upon the same Subject at least as well written by Shakespear.

Thomas Fuller mentions Shakespeare in his Worthies of England (1662), and alluding to the literary arguments between Ben Jonson and Shakespeare he concludes that the latter triumphed by virtue of his wit and invention:

William Shakespeare ... in whom three eminent poets may seem in some sort to be compounded. 1. Martial, in the warlike sound of his surname ... 2. Ovid, the most natural and witty of all poets ... 3. Plautus, who was an exact comedian, yet never any scholar ... Add to all these, that though his genius generally was jocular, and inclined him to festivity, yet he could (when so disposed) be solemn and serious, as appears by his tragedies; so that Heraclitus himself ... might afford to smile at his comedies, they were so merry; and Democritus scarce forbear to sigh at his tragedies, they were so mournful.

He was an eminently instance of the truth of that rule ... one is not made but born a poet. Indeed his learning was very little ... Nature itself was all the art which was used upon him.

Many were the wit-combats betwixt him and Ben Jonson ... master Jonson ... was built far higher in learning; solid, but slow, in his performances. Shakespeare ... lesser in bulk, but lighter in sailing, could turn with all tides, tack about, and take advantage of all winds, by the quickness of his wit and invention.

Margaret Cavendish (1625-1673) is one of those critics who stand for the flexibility of rules in the prefaces to their plays, though, like most Restoration critics she upholds the principle of poetic justice. For her time, she shows a rare understanding of Shakespeare's characters.

1. Charles Gildon, 'Some Reflections on Mr Rymer's Short View of Tragedy and an Attempt at a Vindication of SHAKESPEAR ; ... ', in Miscellaneous Letters and Essays, London, 1694, pp. 85-86; Rowe, 'Some Account of ... ', I, xiv; cf. Dryden, who supports this story, EDP (1668), I, 68.

It is worth quoting her comments on Shakespeare at some length since in Restoration criticism this is the only sustained account of Shakespeare's characterisation, other than Dryden's. Speaking in defence of Shakespeare against a remark that his plays "were made up onely with Clowns, Fools, Watchmen, and the like", she writes:

to Express Properly . . . a . . . Fool's Humour . . . is as Witty, Wise . . . and Observing, as to Write . . . of Kings and Princes; and to Express Naturally . . . a Mean Country Wench, as a Great Lady, a Courtesan, as a Chast Woman, a Mad Man, as a Man in his right Reason and Senses, a Drunkard, as a Sober man, a Knave, as an Honest man, and so a Clown, as a Well-bred man, and a Fool, as a Wise man . . . Shakespeare did not want Wit, to Express to the Life all sorts of Persons, of what Quality, Profession, Degree, Breeding, or Birth soever; nor did he want Wit to Express the Divers, and Different Humours, or Natures, or Several Passions in Mankind; and so Well he hath Express'd in his Plays all sorts of Persons, as one would think he had been Transformed into every one of those Persons he hath Described; and as sometimes one would think he was really himself the Clown or Jester he Feigns, so one would think, he was also the King, the Privy Councilor; also as one would think he were Really the Coward he Feigns, so one would think he were the most Valiant, and Experienced Souldier; Who would not think he had been such a man as his Sir John Falstaff? and who would not think he had been Harry the Fith? and certainly Julius Caesar, Augustus Caesar, and Antonius, did never Really Act their parts Better, if so Well, as He hath Described them, and I believe that Antonius and Brutus did not Speak Better to the People, than he hath Feign'd them; nay, one would think that he had been Metamorphosed from a Man to a Woman, for who could Describe Cleopatra Better than he hath done, and many other Females of his own Creating, as Nan Page, Mrs. Page, Mrs. Ford, the Doctors Maid, Bettrice, Mrs. Quickly, Doll Tearsheet, and others, too many to Relate? and in his Tragick Vein, he Presents Passions so Naturally, and Misfortunes so Probably, as he Perizers the Souls of his Readers with such a true Sense and Feeling thereof, that it Forces Tears through their Eyes, and almost Perswades them, they are really Actors, or at least Present at those Tragedies. Who would not Swear he had been a Noble Lover, that could Woo so well? and there is not any person he hath Described in his Book, but his Readers might think they were Well acquainted with them; Indeed Shakespeare had a Clear Judgment, a Quick Wit, a Spreading Fancy, a Subtil Observation, a Deep Apprehension, and a most Eloquent Eloquence; truly he was a Natural Orator, as well as a Natural Poet . . . Shakespeare's Wit and Eloquence was General, for, and upon all Subjects, he rather wanted Subjects for his Wit and Eloquence to Work on, for which he was forced to take some of his Plots out of History, where he only took the Bare Designs, the Wit and Language being all his Own; and so much he had above others, that those, who Writ after him, were Forced to Borrow of him, or rather to Steal from him.

Edward Phillips' (1630-1696) comments on Shakespeare also reflect more a catholicity of taste than a respect for rules and learning. His appreciation of Shakespearean tragedy and his ability to ignore the lack of decorum and economy in his works easily rank him above the average neo-classical critics. In the preface to Theatrum Poetarum (1675), Phillips remarks:

Shakespear, in spite of all his unfiled expressions, his rambling and indigested Fancies, the laughter of the Critical, yet must be confess't a Poet above many that go beyond him in Literature some degrees.

and later in the same book Shakespeare is eulogised as

the Glory of the English Stage; whose nativity at Stratford upon Avon, is the highest honour that Town can boast of: from an Actor of Tragedies and Comedies, he became a Maker; and such a Maker, that though some others may perhaps pretend to a more exact Decorum and oeconomie, especially in Tragedy, never any express't a more lofty and Tragic height; never any represented nature more purely to the life, and where the polishments of Art are most wanting, as probably his Learning was not extraordinary, he pleaseth with a certain wild and native Elegance; and in all his Writings hath an unvulgar style, as well in his Venus and Adonis, his Rape of Lucrece and other various Poems, as in his Dramatics.

Around this time we find stray remarks by some poets and dramatists. For example, Richard Flecknoe in his Short Discourse of the English Stage (1664) observes that "Shakespear was one of the first who inverted the Dramatick Stile from dull History to quick Comedy, upon whom Johnson refin'd". Citing someone's remarks of "Shakespear's writings, that 'twas a fine Garden, but it wanted weeding", Flecknoe adds: "Shakespear excelled in a natural Vein, Fletcher in Wit, and Johnson in Gravity ... Comparing him [Jonson] with Shakespear, you shall see the difference betwixt Nature and Art".  

Thomas Shadwell (1642-1692) was a great admirer of Ben Jonson; yet in his preface to The Sullen Lovers (1668) he finds Falstaff comparable to any of Jonson's humorous characters; in the Dedicatory Epistle to his

2. Spingarn, II, 92, 93-94.
True Widow (1679) he refers to "the true Spirit of a Tragedy . . . wherein Romans are made to speak and do like Romans", and says that only two of Jonson's and one of Shakespeare's come up to this level; in the dedication to his Timon of Athens (1678), an adaptation of Shakespeare's play of the same title, he claims that Shakespeare "never made more Masterly strokes than in this"; in his address to the reader in The Lancashire Witches (1691), he remarks: "For the Magical Part, I had no hopes of equalling Shakespear in fancy, who created his Witchcraft for the most part out of his own imagination (in which faculty no Man ever excelled him)".1

Thomas Otway (1625-1685), in the prologue to The History and Fall of Caius Marius (1680), in which he adapted the Romeo and Juliet situation to the strife between Marius and Sylla, has the following lines in praise of Shakespeare:

Our Shakespear wrote too in an age as blest,
Therefore he wrote with Fancy unconfin'd
And thoughts that were Immortal as his Mind.
And from the Crop of his luxuriant Pen
E'er since succeeding Poets humbly glean
Oh! when will He and Poetry return? 2

Sir William Temple (1620-1699), in his essay, Of Poetry (1690), admires Shakespeare's poetry and tragedies for their excellent virtue of moving the hearts of people to the point of tears, and also commends him for introducing humour on the English stage: "Shakespear was the first that opened this Vein [of Humour] upon our Stage", thereby bringing to the fore the importance of characterisation in the drama, which had earlier depended for its variety upon "different and uncommon

Events", and "I do not wonder . . . that so many should cry, and with
down-right Tears, at some Tragedies of Shake-spear, and so many more
should feel such turns or Curdling of their Blood, upon the reading or
hearing some excellent Pieces of Poetry".¹

Gerard Langbaine (1656-1692) admires Shakespeare for "the
Excellency of his Compositions in all kinds" of dramatic poetry, and
rates Shakespeare above Jonson and Fletcher. He thought that Shakespeare
knew French and Italian well. Defending Shakespeare, he attacks Dryden's
criticism of the poet's language and the plots of his plays in 'Defence
of an Epilogue' (1672), pointing out that Dryden "when the
Enthusiastick Fit was past ... acknowledged him [in his Dramatick Essay]
Equal at least, if not superior, to Mr. Johnson in Poesie". In the
discussion of the sources of Shakespeare's plays, Langbaine shows a
much better knowledge of them than most of his contemporaries.²

John Dennis (1657-1734) is one of those Restoration critics who
looked forwards and backwards in the criticism of Shakespeare. He belied
the hopes of a reply to Rymer's attack on Shakespeare by offering what
was not even an apology for defence. All that he could plead on behalf
of the poet was a trite remark to the effect that Shakespeare may have
had faults but he had beauties too. Later in 1712, he admires
Shakespeare for his just, powerful and well distinguished characters.
Dennis recognises Shakespeare's talent for moving passions, particularly
"terror". His handicaps, like lack of "art" and "learning" Dennis
attributes to the ignorance of the time Shakespeare lived in. As a
staunch advocate of poetic justice Dennis objects that

Shakespeare has been wanting in the exact Distribution of
Poetical justice not only in his Coriolanus, but in most of
his best Tragedies . . . as Duncan and Banquo in Macbeth.

2. An Account of the English Dramatic Poets, Oxford, 1691, Scolar
as likewise Lady Macduffe and her Children; Desdemona in Othello; Cordelia, Kent, and King Lear, in the Tragedy that bears his Name; Brutus and Porcia in Julius Caesar, and young Hamlet in the Tragedy of Hamlet.

Again, he sometimes gives credit to the poet where he finds poetic justice to have been exactly observed, as in "Timon for his Profusion and Intemperance", and "Macbeth for his Ambition and Cruelty".

Charles Gildon (1665-1724) offers a most sustained defence of Shakespeare against Rymer's attack on Othello and its author, which is quite remarkable for a critic of his standing when many of the important critics of the time could not dare to challenge Rymer. In 'Some Reflections on Mr. Rymer's Short View of Tragedy, and an Attempt at a Vindication of SHAKESPEARE in an Essay directed to JOHN DRYDEN Esq' in Miscellaneous Essays and Letters (1694), Gildon argues that Shakespeare "in his Thoughts and Expressions ... discovers himself Master of a very just Observation of things; so that if he had (which I deny) no learning, his natural parts would sufficiently have furnish'd him with better Ethics, than one Hypercritic allows him". Shakespeare's shortcomings, such as mixing comedy in tragedy, perversion of his characters, and language, he attributes to the low taste of the audience he had to cater for. Regarding Shakespeare's failure to write according to the rules, Gildon makes a bold statement: "A nice Observation of Rules, is a Confinement a great Genius cannot bear, which covets liberty". In the observance of poetic justice, Gildon thought that Shakespeare "in most, if not all, of his Plays attain'd the full end of Poetry Delight, and Profit, by moving Terror and Pity for the Changes of Fortune, which Humane Life is subject to, by giving us a lively and just Image of them ... for the Motion of these Passions afford us

1. 'Impartial Critick' (1693) in The Critical Works of John Dennis, ed. E.N. Hooker, 2 vols., Baltimore, 1943 (hereafter referred to as Hooker), I, 41; 'Essay on the Genius and Writings of Shakespear' (1712), Hooker, II, 67; 'That the Stage is useful to the Advancement of Religion' (1698), Hooker, I, 104.
Pleasure and their Purgation Profit". ¹ Contrary to Rymer's recommendation for the Greek and Roman dramatists, Gildon asserts that "we much surpass the Greeks and Latins at least in Dramatick Poetry". ² However, Charles Gildon does not remain consistent in his stand; thus, later, in 1713, he does not retain the same enthusiasm for Shakespeare as he showed in his earlier essay; and now,

Shakespear is great in nothing, but is according to the Rules of Art; and where his ignorance of them is not supply'd by his Genius, Men of Judgment, and Good Sense see such monstrous Absurdities in almost every Part of his Works, that nothing but his uncommon Excellencies in the other, cou'd ever prevail with us to suffer, and what he wou'd never have been guilty of, had his Judgment been but well inform'd by Art. He had a Genius indeed, capable of coming up to the Rules, but not sufficient to find them out himself, tho' it be plain from his own Words, he saw the Absurdities of his own Conduct.

Similarly, his criticism of Rymer's Othello changes from pro-Shakespeare in 1694 to pro-Rymer in his edition of Shakespeare in 1710. ³ Jeremy Collier (1650-1726) finds Shakespeare unbearably immodest; Ben Jonson, as Collier thinks, is praiseworthy for his modesty. Collier objects to the mad songs of Ophelia: drawing a parallel between Ophelia and Phaedra, his comments on the former are: "to keep her alive only to sully after her Reputation, and Discover the Rankness of her Breath was very cruel". However, as compared with the profanity of the contemporary stage, Collier thought that "Shakespear is comparatively sober". He does not condemn Shakespeare for his failure to observe poetic justice, rather he compliments him for not encouraging vice. For example, Falstaff

is thrown out of Favour as being a Rake, and dies like a Rat behind the Hangings. The Pleasure he had given, would not excuse him. The Poet was not so partial, as to let his

Humour compound for his Lewdness. If 'tis objected that this remark is wide of the Point, because Falstaffe is represented in Tragedy, where the Laws of Justice are more strictly observ'd. To this I answer, that you may call Henry the Fourth and Fifth, Tragedies if you please. But for all that, Falstaffe wears no Buskins, his Character is perfectly Comical from end to end.

On the pages of Samuel Pepys's diary we have a fairly good index of what Shakespeare meant to the average theatre-goer of the Restoration. Pepys prefers Ben Jonson to Shakespeare, but we have to bear in mind that his reaction to most of Shakespeare on stage is that of Shakespeare altered, whereas Ben Jonson was presented without alteration. Pepys does not seem to have any appreciation of Shakespeare's poetry, imagination or passions. His interest in the theatre was largely in the externals: gorgeous scenes, good acting, pageantry and the women on the stage as well as in the auditorium, and for this the contemporary theatre provided him with ample food. According to the researches of G.C.D. Odell, Pepys attended 350 performances during the ten years which his diary covers, 1660-1669, seeing forty one performances of twelve of Shakespeare's plays. Some of his comments on the plays of Shakespeare and Jonson reflect his preference for Jonson to Shakespeare. For example, Jonson's Bartholomew Fair, The Alchemist and The Silent Woman (II, 51, 58, VIII, 108) are highly acclaimed; but Shakespeare's Twelfth Night is "one of the weakest", a "silly" and uninteresting play (VIII, 206, III, 6, II, 101); Romeo and Juliet is the "worst" play ever seen (II, 197); A Midsummer Night's Dream is "the most insipid ridiculous play" (II, 347); The Taming of the Shrew is a mean and "silly play" (VI, 264, VII, 183); Othello is a "mean thing" as compared to Samuel Fposter's The Adventures of Five Hours (V, 407); Falstaff's

role is neither liked in Henry IV (I, 313) nor in Merry Wives of Windsor (I, 299, II, 108, VIII, 68). The only plays approved by Pepys are the adapted versions of Macbeth and The Tempest for "divertisement" and "variety" (VI, 125, 116, VII, 193); and Hamlet for nice scenes and Betterton's excellent acting (II, 87).

The seventeenth-century Shakespearean scene would be incomplete without a record of the contributions of two great Shakespearean actors, Betterton and Hart. William Betterton (1635-1710) was a friend of Davenant and joined his company in 1661. He is well known for all his Shakespearean roles, and especially for his Hamlet, for which we have Pepys's testimony. According to Downes, Betterton learnt his presentations of Falstaff and Hamlet from Davenant, who in turn had learnt them from Taylor, who had had the privilege of learning them direct from Shakespeare. His insight into Shakespearean scenes and characters was great. Dryden records how the quarrel scene between Troilus and Hector in his Troilus and Cressida was suggested to him by Betterton. Nicholas Rowe acknowledges his debt to Betterton for several passages in his life of Shakespeare and appreciates his masterly understanding of a Shakespearean role. To quote Rowe:

Veneration for the Memory of Shakespeare having engag'd him to make a Journey into Warwickshire, on purpose to gather up what Remains he could of a name for which he had so great a Value ... No man is better acquainted with Shakespeare's manner of Expression, and indeed he has study'd him so well, and is so much a Master of him, that whatever Part of his he performs, he does it as if it had been written on purpose for him, and that the Author had exactly conceiv'd it as he plays it.

3. TC (1679), I, 241.
4. 'Some Account of the Life of Mr William Shakespear', in Rowe's The Works of Mr William Shakespeare, 1709, I, xxxiv.
The other important Shakespearean actor of this period was Charles Hart (d. 1683), who is supposed to have been the illegitimate son of Shakespeare's sister Joan Hart. He played the roles of Othello, Hotspur, and Brutus for the King's company, which produced Shakespeare's plays without alteration. According to Montague Summers, the credit for the success of unaltered Shakespeare goes to the superb acting and interpretation of Shakespearean roles by Charles Hart, rather than to Thomas Killigrew the manager of the company, a point which is proved by the evidence that when Hart was forced to make less frequent appearances because of his illness, "the stage languished and for a while the Theatre played even Shakespeare to empty houses".¹

Seventeenth Century-appreciation of Shakespeare, as has emerged from the above scene, is warm, cautious and vague rather than specific. For example none of the remarks of these critics reflect an intimate acquaintance with Shakespeare's plays, though the adaptations of the period show that the playwrights were familiar with the text of Shakespeare and were unhappy with it to the extent that they thought it needed modification. Again, most of the Restoration critics were not interested in the characters of Shakespeare - Margaret Cavendish, Dryden and Rymer being the only exceptions - nor did they have any knowledge of Elizabethan stage conditions. Dryden's criticism of Shakespeare shares most of these failings of his contemporaries but he differs from others in recognising Shakespeare's genius for tragedy as opposed to comedy. Unlike most of his contemporaries, Dryden places Shakespeare above Jonson (despite his learning), and above Fletcher (despite his stage popularity). In conformity with his age Dryden prescribes and appreciates the efficacy of the neo-classical rules but in the case of a genius like Shakespeare, he thought, these rules held little validity. All these

may seem too obvious to a modern critic but it was not so to a Restoration critic. As we have seen, most of these critics find it difficult to choose between Jonson, a learned poet, and Shakespeare, a natural poet, but ignorant of the rules.

The Restoration playwrights were proud of the refinement of their age, and the purity of their dramatic form and verse. Shakespeare's plays, according to them, suffered from serious lapses - their adaptations of the plays represent their extended criticism of them - since they violated all dramatic decorums of structure, verse, language and poetic justice. The dilemma confronting a Restoration critic and playwright, therefore, was whether to reject Shakespeare in favour of their newly acquired strength - Rymer and his followers vehemently recommended that - or to accept Shakespeare in opposition to their dramatic principles, a very bold step indeed, or to find a means of happy co-existence where Shakespeare and the neo-classical rules could live together. In Dryden's criticism of Shakespeare all three seem to be happening to the same person at different stages of his career. Rymer's criticism of the tragedies of the Elizabethan dramatists in 1677 and of Shakespeare's Othello in 1693 left its impact on Dryden in turning him more pro-Shakespeare than ever before, although Dryden subscribed to some of the dramatic principles expounded by Rymer. In order to understand the extent of this influence on Dryden, it is essential to look at Rymer's account of Shakespeare at some length.
CHAPTER TWO

(II)

THOMAS RYMER'S CRITICISM OF SHAKESPEARE

Thomas Rymer (1641-1713), as opposed to Dryden, is a staunch advocate of Aristotle's principles. In his first essay, the preface to Rapin's Réflexions sur la Poétique (1674), he prescribes the rules of Aristotle. In his next essay, Tragedies of the last Age, however, his stand on the three unities is not very rigid in the beginning. He describes them "the mechanical part of Tragedies", which are "beauties", not "essentials", and "there is no talking of Beauties when there wants Essentials". But soon after he revert's his stand:

If the Poet design any certain sense by his Fable, that sense will bind him to the unity of action; and the unity of action cannot well exceed the rule for time. And these two unities will not permit that the Poet can far transgress in the third. So that all the regularities seem in a manner to be link'd together: but begin with an absurdity, and nothing reasonable can ever follow. 1

Sixteen years later, in A Short View of Tragedy, Rymer recommends the use of a chorus, so that the "Spectators thereby are secured, that their Poet shall not juggle, or put upon them in the matter of Place, and Time, other than is just and reasonable for the representation". And later he lashes out at Shakespeare for his violation of the unity of place in Othello: "For the Second Act, our Poet having dispatcht his affairs at Venice, shews the Action next (I know not how many leagues off) in the

1. TLA (1677), pp. 18, 27.
Island of Cyprus. The audience must be there too: And yet our Bays had it never in his head, to make any provision of Transport Ships for them", though after a little more jibing, he seems willing to condone the poet's lapse here, as compared with his greater outrages: "Well, the absurdities of this kind break no Bones. They may make Fools of us; but do not hurt our Morals."1

Rymer has been described as a consistent critic. J.E. Spingarn, C.A. Zimansky and Irving Ribner all commend Rymer for consistency despite his other failings.2 However, his consistency is directed more towards his single-minded condemnation of Shakespeare and his contemporaries than in expounding the rules; and he is not such a strict and consistent champion of the neo-classical doctrines as is often made out. For one thing, the truth of the neo-classical rules for Rymer is only a means to an end, that is, to realise the greater truth of poetry. The laws of poetry, according to him, are greater than the truth of history or of life. For example, when he recommends probability and decorum in drama, it is the decorum of poetry rather than that of life or of history: "in Poetry no woman is to kill a man . . . nor is a Servant to kill the Master, nor a Private Man, much less a Subject to kill a King, nor on the contrary"; and when he asks "whether in Poetry a King can be an accessory to a crime",3 the decorum demanded is that of poetry and not of history. Similarly when Rymer talks of "poetical justice" in drama, he means distinctly a justice appropriate to drama rather than the justice of history or of divinity. Again, although he subscribes to the view that "the end of all Poetry is to please" and

1. SVT (1693), pp. 84, 142.
that "some sorts of Poetry please without profiting" yet he makes an exception for tragedy. Tragedy, the greatest art of poetry, "cannot please but must also profit". "Comedy (whose Province was humour and ridiculous matters only) was to represent things worse then the truth, History to describe the truth, but Tragedy was to invent things better then the truth".¹

The singular importance of Tragedies of the Last Age is that here Rymer, unlike most of the critics of the seventeenth century, upheld tragedy as the greatest work of art. He admired Homer and Virgil, but his models were Sophocles and Euripides. He had high ideals for tragedy, and according to his severe standards the Elizabethan playwrights could not write great tragedies, though he thought "the English want neither genius nor language for so great a work"; if they had begun with "Tragedy, as Sophocles and Euripides left it; had they either built on the same foundation, or after their model, we might e'er this day have seen Poetry in greater perfection, and boasted such Monuments of wit as Greece or Rome never knew in all their glory".² Shakespeare, as he argues in his Short View of Tragedy (1693), could not write a tragedy; his "genius lay for Comedy and Humour", and in comedy, as he said, "doubtless our English are the best in the World".³ But, even so, he did not care to discuss Shakespeare's comedies, much less point out any of his excellences as a comic writer.

Rymer and "Othello"

Rymer's Othello is the first full-length study of a Shakespearean

1. TLA (1677), pp. 75; 31-32.
2. TLA (1677), p. 21; cf. Milton, "Tragedy, as it was anciently composed, hath been ever held the gravest, morallest, and most profitable of all other poems" (preface to Samson Agonistes (1671), The Poetical Works of John Milton, ed. David Masson, 3 vols., London, 1874, 11, 97), cf. Ben Jonson and Dryden, see below, pp. 95-96 & 96n4.
3. SVT (1693), 169, 175.
play. Indeed there were no detailed studies of any particular play until Dryden's discussion of The Silent Woman in 1668. Rymer can easily claim the distinction of being the pioneer of the Shakespearean studies which gathered momentum with Nicholas Rowe in the eighteenth century. Rymer's criticism of Othello begins with the plot of the play. His definition of the plot for a tragedy is based upon Aristotle: "The first essential, the life and soul, so to speak, of Tragedy is the Plot". And following Aristotle, Rymer defines tragedy: "I have chiefly consider'd the Fable or Plot, which all conclude to be the Soul of a Tragedy; which, with the Ancients, is always found to be a reasonable Soul; but with us, for the most part, a brutish, and often worse than brutish"; and later, again, he says: "the Fable is always accounted the Soul of a Tragedy"; and, also following Aristotle, he accepts plot as synonymous with fable.

Rymer is critical of Shakespeare's departures from Cinthio, his source of the play: "Shakespear alters it from the Original in several particulars, but always, unfortunately, for the worse". Some of these "particulars", according to Rymer, are that Shakespeare bestows on his Moor "a note of pre-eminence" and "styles him the Moor of Venice", whereas Cinthio "calls him simply a Moor". Again, in Cinthio, the Moor's wife is a "simple Citizen", whereas in Shakespeare she is raised to be "a Senator's Daughter". But what great harm is done to the plot by these added distinctions of the Moor and his wife any more than would be caused by the ordinary Moor and his ordinary wife - Rymer does not elucidate. Perhaps there was no valid objection technically, other than his concept of poetic decorum, which did not permit any social or political

3. SVT (1693), pp. 131, 132.
distinction for a Moor or his marriage to a woman of rank. What Rymer, and, later, Coleridge, do not seem to understand is that the black as a character in the literature of England and Europe had travelled a long way from Cinthio to Shakespeare. In the medieval drama of England, a black character on the stage was a symbol of the Devil. In Elizabethan drama black Moors often figured in the masques and pageants for decorative purposes and for a love of the exotic. In _Othello_, Shakespeare was deliberately trying a reversal of the traditional image of a typical Moor by humanising him. He not only reverses the tradition of English drama but there is a double reversal in making the white Iago, with his appearance of a blunt honest soldier, a villain; and the black Othello, with his typical image of a wicked person, an honest character. It is significant that Shakespeare introduced Othello through very hostile characters, thus beginning on the note of the type representation of the black. Iago's portrayal of Othello is that of a stereotyped black, and Roderigo also voices the popular prejudice. This is the most unusual introduction of a tragic hero in Shakespeare. _Hamlet_ and _Macbeth_, for instance, are praised before their appearance. Shakespeare was perhaps trying slowly to work upon his audience the transformation of the myth of the black from a typical bad character to an individual having natural attributes.

Rymer's sarcasm is next directed to the moral of the fable. After a brief summary of "the Fable", he derides Shakespeare for the triviality of the moral:

> What ever rubs or difficulty may stick on the Bark, the Moral, sure, of this Fable is very instructive. First, This may be a caution to all Maidens of Quality how, without their Parents consent, they run away with Blackamoors. Secondly, This may be a warning to all good Wives, that they look well to their Linnen.

Thirdly, this may be a lesson to Husbands, that before their Jealousie be Tragical, the proofs may be Mathematical. However irritating Rymer's banter may seem to the modern reader of Othello, the absence of moral was a serious defect of the play in terms of Restoration theory of drama. The focus of the new tragedy had shifted from Aristotle's theory of catharsis, through pity and fear, to "beget admiration". The basis of this tragedy was moralistic: to arouse admiration for virtue and terror for vice. The seventeenth century, as Baxter Hathaway has pointed out, "demanded a purgation from tragedy in which the spectator is led by means of fear for himself to resist the approaches of passion in his breast, lest the passion overcome his reasoning faculty and lead him into evil ways. Tragedy demonstrates the dangers resulting from action based upon passion". Othello does not demonstrate "the dangers resulting from action based upon passion" because as Shakespeare presents it the hero does not stand condemned, though his passion did overcome his reasoning faculty. By Restoration standards such a person could not be a fit hero for a tragedy. Rymer's sense of shock at the absence of a moral in Othello, then, is in keeping with the Restoration temper. The attempts of later critics, striving hard to seek a moral in defence of Shakespeare which would answer Rymer's burlesque, only establish the validity of Rymer's attack in his own time.

Rymer is next shocked by Desdemona's marriage to Othello. His charges against Desdemona are twofold. First, she brought disgrace to the white race by marrying a black; secondly, the only probable reason for this debasement, according to Rymer, could be womanish appetite, not love:

1. SWT (1693), p. 132.
3. 'John Dryden and the Function of Tragedy', PMLA (1943), LVIII, (665-673), 665.
"This Desdemona is a black swan; or an old Black-amoor is a bewitching Bed-fellow. If this be Nature, it is a lascheté below what the English Language can express".  

Rymer may be accused of a perversion of sensibility, but he did hit upon a point to which the critics of Othello are found paying attention, even when they tend to ignore Rymer. Desdemona's marriage has sparked off several opposing interpretations, not only by characters in the play but also by readers and critics of Othello from Rymer's time to our own. Among the contemporary critics, Charles Gildon argues against Rymer in Miscellaneous Letters and Essays (1694): "After all this, Othello being of Royal Blood, and a Christian, where is the disparity of the match? If either side is advanced 'tis Desdemona. And why must this Prince though a Christian, and of known and experienc'd Virtue, Courage, and Conduct, be made such a Monster that the Venetian Lady can't love him without perverting Nature?". But in his edition of Shakespear (1710: vol. 7) Gildon relapses and contradicts his earlier stand. Now Desdemona's choice of a black negro is so shocking as to take away all pity from her.  

According to Lewis Theobald, Shakespeare presents no moral, unlike Cinthio's novel which is a warning to young ladies against a disproportionate marriage, "but rather, that a Woman may fall in love with the Virtues and shining Qualities of a Man; and therein overlook the Difference of Complexion and Colour".  

1. SVT (1693), p. 161; Shakespeare toyed with the idea of a white girl marrying a blackamoor in The Merchant of Venice. But Portia is no Desdemona and she represents a typical white prejudice when she expresses her relief at the unlucky choice of the Prince of Morocco: A gentle riddance. Draw the curtains, go. Let all of his complexion choose me so. (II, vii, 78-79). But as an individual, Portia seems to have nothing against the Prince. Shakespeare, however, suggests the possibility of a union between white and black in alluding to Launcelot's affair with the moor(III, v).  


nineteenth century, however, Coleridge subscribes to Rymer's view:

No doubt Desdemona saw Othello's visage in his mind; yet, as we are constituted, and most surely as an English audience was disposed in the beginning of the seventeenth century, it would be something monstrous to conceive this beautiful Venetian girl falling in love with a veritable negro. It would argue a disproportionateness, a want of balance, in Desdemona, which Shakespeare does not appear to have in the least contemplated.

So also did Charles Lamb, his objection was based on his reaction to the play in performance: "I appeal to every one that has seen Othello played, whether he did not . . . find something extremely revolting in the courtship and wedded caresses of Othello and Desdemona: and whether the actual sight of the thing did not over-weigh all that beautiful compromise which we make in reading". In our own time, critics like Helen Gardner, John Holloway and John Bayley have argued that Othello is a tragedy of love and sexual jealousy. Helen Gardner, in her illuminating essay, "The Noble Moor", describes Othello as a study in "loss of faith in a form which involves the whole personality at the profound point where body meets spirit". The central point of the tragedy, according to her, is Othello's inability to accept any compromises - anything less than the bliss of the union of pure souls: "He has seen Desdemona as his 'soul's joy'. It is intolerable to be aware in her of only 'what the sense aches at'". But the fact that

4. 'Noble Moor' in Shakespeare Criticism, p. 361; cf. "Othello has garner'd up [his] heart" in Desdemona, "where either I must live or bear no life, / The fountain from the which my current runs, / or else dries up" (Othello, IV, i, 50-61); cf. A.C. Bradley's Desdemona, like Helen Gardner's, is all pure spirit, see Shakespearean Tragedy, London, 1904-1965, pp. 164-165.
after the bliss of the 'soul's joy' Othello comes to misinterpret his wife's love as a longing of the flesh leaves an uncomfortable feeling that Rymer's view of the marriage is not altogether impossible. George Gordon, in his essay, 'Othello, or the Tragedy of the Handkerchief', while refuting Rymer's burlesque of the handkerchief, subscribes to the latter's view of the marriage: 'What is it, after all, that could conceivably attract a delicately nurtured Venetian girl to this coloured bravo; what but one thing? ... Let her be as well-meaning and as seeming-innocent as you please: she is yet a Decadent, in Nature's hands: Mother Nature!' K.W. Evans, in his article, "The Racial Factor in 'Othello'", explains the meaning of the play as being closely related to the opinions popularly held about Moors in Elizabethan times: they were supposed to have great sexual capacity; and this is the basis of Iago's jealousy of the Moor. Nigel Alexander, in his article, "Thomas Rymer and 'Othello'", takes a different view however. According to him, Desdemona's explanation before the senate: "I saw Othello's visage in his mind", (I, iii, 252), should answer all adversaries. However, Nigel Alexander takes only half of Desdemona's speech and that too literally. Her words "I did love the Moor to live with him", and later, imploring the senate to let her stay with her husband: "the rites for why I love him are bereft me", (I, iii, 248, 257), are full and frank declaration of her love in which the physical basis of her love is as important as the attraction of the mind. Desdemona, then, embodies in herself as much of Helen Gardner's spirit as Thomas Rymer's flesh, and the latter is as true and as valid as the former.

2. SST, V, 1969, 124-140.
Rymer's next objection against Othello is the appointment of the Moor to the rank of a Venetian general. Colour prejudice so clouds his vision that he is unable to see in Othello any qualities of a soldier, which even a casual reader of the play cannot fail to admire. Rymer finds it absurd that the Venetian senate should be paying attention to Othello's private affairs when the purpose of its assembling at midnight was to discuss how to avert the national crisis following the Turkish attack. Rymer does not understand Othello's great importance to Venice which largely determined their attitude towards him and his affairs. The white senate of Venice gave an audience to the black Moor because he was for them the man of the hour, and was indispensable by virtue of his sterling qualities - his brave deeds in the past and his great services to the state as a soldier. He is not an ordinary Blackamoor and surely Shakespeare would not have hesitated to provide "such a Husband for an only Daughter of any noble Peer in England". As a matter of fact, the Duke himself takes Shakespeare's untraditional view of the Moor: "If virtue no delighted beauty lack, / your son-in-law is far more fair than black" (I, iii, 289-290) and such a Blackamoor need not undergo any change of skin to look any "House of Lords in the Face". What Rymer fails to see is that the Duke, as the head of the senate, has already answered his objection.

Othello next stands accused by Rymer of being something of a fool. Better critics than Rymer have subscribed to this view, though for quite different reasons. For example, when a sympathetic critic of Othello like A.C. Bradley calls him "simple", "trustful" and "not observant", he

2. SVT (1693), pp. 138-139.
3. SVT (1693), p. 139.
4. SVT (1693), pp. 148-149.
is acknowledging certain shades of Rymer's Othello. E.E. Stoll finds Othello stupid "as he stands in the presence of Iago". F.R. Leavis suggests something to the same effect when he says that Othello responds to Iago's "communications . . . with a promptness that couldn't be improved upon"; and Leavis's Othello, guilty of self-pride, egoism, self-idealisation, self-dramatisation and lack of self-knowledge and self-awareness, is very close to Rymer's Othello.¹

Rymer finds Othello particularly repugnant in the temptation scene. The ready credence given by Othello to Iago's story irritates even the most sympathetic of readers. The Othello that we admire is not the Othello of the third and fourth acts. This Othello bears no resemblance to the one who could lay his "life" upon Desdemona's "faith" (I, iii, 295). Othello's cruelty to Desdemona is appalling; even the pro-Othello critics who elevate the act of murder to "a sacrifice" and a deed done "in Honour",² have no defence to offer for Desdemona's sufferings. And Rymer is perhaps not talking arrant nonsense when, deeply pained, he protests against the brutality inflicted upon her:

Rather may we ask here what unnatural crime Desdemona, or her Parents had committed, to bring this Judgment down upon her; to Wed a Black-amoor, and innocent to be thus cruelly murder'd by him. What instruction can we make out of this Catastrophe? . . . Is not this to envenome and sour our spirits, to make us repine and grumble at Providence; and the government of the World? If this be our end, what boots it to be Vertuous?

Perhaps Rymer's Christian beliefs more than his poetic sense found the spectacle too savage to bear. Even a "pagan Poet but wou'd have found some Machine for her deliverance" and, "has our Christian Poetry no generosity, nor bowels? Ha, Sir Lancelot! ha, St. George! will no Ghost


leave the shades for us in extremity, to save a distressed Damosel?"

He even toys with the idea of saving Desdemona:

Desdemona dropt the Handkerchief, and missed it that very
day after her Marriage; it might have been rumpl'd with
her Wedding sheets: And this Night that she lay in her
Wedding sheets! the Fairey Napkin (whilst Othello was
stiffing her) might have started up to disarm his fury,
and stop his ungracious mouth. Then might she (in a
Traunce for fear) have lain so dead. Then might he,
believing her dead, touch'd with remorse, have honestly
cut his own Throat, by the good leave, and with the
applause of all the Spectators. Who might thereupon have
gone home with a quiet mind.

Shakespeare's treatment leaves Rymer unquiet. Even Samuel Johnson, in
his notes on Othello, echoed Rymer's reaction: "I am glad that I have
ended my revisal of this dreadful scene. It is not to be endured".2

Rymer is the first critic to point out the discrepancy in time-
scheme of Othello;3 and for about a hundred years the objection remained
unchallenged in Shakespearean criticism, until in 1850 John Wilson tried
to justify the two time-schemes theatrically. According to Wilson,
whose view is also discussed by A.C. Bradley, the short time-scheme in
Othello is used to maintain the tension of passion, and the long time-
scheme to lend credibility to the Iago-story.4 N.B. Allen, in his
article, "The Two Parts of 'Othello'", suggests that "Shakespeare wrote
the two parts of Othello at different times - in different frames of mind"
and then joined them together, and that the discrepancy in the two time-
schemes is due to his carelessness in linking the separately written
parts.5 It is however to Rymer's credit to have drawn attention to this
gap in the play.

1. SVT (1693), pp. 161, 159, 162.
5. SSY, XXI, 1968, 17.
To pay attention to all the minor objections of Rymer against Othello is neither possible nor perhaps worthwhile. They are listed only to show the sustained labour our critic was capable of in pouring out his venom:

1. The character of Iago is inconsistent and professionally unnatural because he is dishonest, and soldiers are not dishonest (pp. 134-135).
2. Desdemona is no better than any country chamber maid (p. 134).
3. Desdemona's importuning for Cassio's reinstatement soon after her first night with Othello, is foolish and absurd (p. 135).
4. The thought and the language of the play are gross and vulgar; for example:
   (a) Iago and Roderigo break the news to Brabantio using violent and crude images (pp. 136-137).
   (b) Even the noblemen and the senators do not use language worthy of their dignified status and position (p. 140).
   (c) Othello reviles Desdemona (IV, ii, 34ff) in filthy words (p. 158).
   (d) Othello's speech, mentioning a "huge Eclipse / Of Sun and Moon" (V, ii, 102ff), is a blatant example of Shakespeare's excesses in language, for the sun and moon can never be "so hugely eclipsed, in any heavy hour whatsoever" (p. 161).
5. The senate of Venice show an unbecoming familiarity with Desdemona, as if she were their natural daughter, and at Cyprus everybody is in a rapture at the name of Desdemona (pp. 139, 143).
6. The rhetorical welcome by Cassio to Desdemona when she arrives at Cyprus is not typical of a soldier (p. 144).
7. The witty exchange between Desdemona and Iago (II, ii, 103ff), while they wait for Othello, and Desdemona is tense about her husband's life and the progress of the war, is quite unbecoming to her (p. 144).
8. Soldiers swear in a manner that would qualify them to belong to some affidavit office rather than a war camp (pp. 145-146).

1. All these pages are as in Zimansky's edition.
9. Cyprus does not look like a "town of War" judging by the conduct of its people (p. 147).

10. After the murder of Desdemona, Emilia does not cry out murder until after forty lines of dialogue (V, ii, 130-170) with Othello (p. 162).

Rymer and "Julius Caesar"

Rymer's criticism of Julius Caesar as compared with Othello, is very brief. But as with Othello, nothing at all is good in this play either; and Shakespeare is a greater culprit here than in Othello, for in Julius Caesar "he sins not against Nature and Philosophy only, but against the most known History and the memory of the Noblest Romans, that ought to be sacred to all Posterity". Shakespeare puts his great Romans in "Fools Coats, and make them Jack-puddens in the Shakespear dress" (p. 165). The language which Shakespeare puts in the mouth of Brutus would be suitable for the son of a butcher" (pp. 166-167). Shakespeare's Romans are as gross and as vulgar as his Venetians. The midnight before the murder of Caesar the Roman senators "have no more in their head than to wrangle about which is the East and West". The quarrel scene between Cassius and Brutus is ludicrous, for these two great Roman generals "play the Bullies and Buffoon" (p. 168). Portia is as silly as Desdemona. "Every one must be content to wear a Fools Coat" (p. 169).

Rymer concludes his labours on Shakespeare with a sweeping generalisation:

Shakespears genius lay for Comedy and Humour. In Tragedy he appears quite out of his Element; his Brains are turn'd, he raves and rambles, without any coherence, any spark of reason, or any rule to controul him, or set bounds to his phrenzy. His imagination was still running after his Masters, the Coblers, and Parish Clerks, and Old Testament Stroulers (p. 169).

It is "easy to make fun of Thomas Rymer". In his own time, however, he was a critic to reckon with; he was respected for his learning and his

critical principles influenced the neo-classical theory of drama and criticism. Critics like Dryden and Dennis, even when they admired Shakespeare, did not challenge Rymer's specific criticism of Othello; and even when a man like Samuel Butler openly condemned the "Critics who Judge of Modern Plays Precisely by the Rules of the Antients (1678), did not mention Rymer by name;¹ and Wycherley only casually remarked in a letter to Mulgrave (1677) that Rymer's Tragedies of the Last Age "is duller than his Play of Edgar."² In 1685, a translator of Evremont said about Rymer that "we may justly number him in the first rank of Critics, as having a most accomplish'd Idea of Poetry and the Stage".³ In 1691, Gerard Langbaine, though he admired Shakespeare, paid a handsome tribute to Rymer the critic: he "has an excellent Talent towards Criticism; as appears by his Preface to the Translation of Rapin's Reflections on Aristotle's Treatise of Poetry and his Tragedies of the last Age consider'd".⁴

In 1694, Charles Gildon, answering some of the specific charges of Rymer, upholds Desdemona's marriage and praises Shakespeare for exalting a negro to the high position of a general in Venice: "'Tis granted, a Negro here does seldom rise above a Trumpeter, nor often perhaps higher at Venice. But then that proceeds from the Vice of Mankind, which is the Poets duty as he informs us, to correct, and to represent things as they should be, not as they are".⁵ Later, however, in his edition of Rowe's Shakespeare, Gildon adds an aside, thinking of the audience, who, enveloped in their own prejudice, might not be able to respond to

Shakespeare's presentation of a negro as the chief character:

I have drawn the Fable with as much favour to the Author, as I possibly cou'd, yet I must own that the Faults found in it by Mr Rymer are but too visible for the most part. That of making a Negro of the Hero or chief character of the Play, wou'd shock any one; for it is not the Rationale of the thing and the Deductions, that they may thence be brought to diminish the Opposition betwixt the different Colours of Mankind that wou'd not be sufficient to take away that which is shocking in this Story.

Gildon even tried to defend Rymer against Dryden:

This unaccountable Biggotry of the Town, to the very Errors of Shakespear, was the Occasion of Mr Rymer's Criticisms, and drove him as far into the contrary Extream. I am far from approving his Manner of treating our Poet; tho' Mr Dryden owns, that all, or most of the Faults he has found, are Just; but adds this odd Reflection: And yet, says he, Who minds the Critick, and who admires Shakespear less? That was as much as to say: Mr Rymer has indeed made good his Charge, and yet the Town admir'd his Errors still; which I take to be a greater Proof of the Folly and abandon'd Taste of the Town, than of any Imperfections in the Critic; which in my Opinion, expos'd the Ignorance of the Age he liv'd in.

Richard Blackmore complimented Rymer when he said that, along with St Evremond, Rymer should be put in charge of the nation's wit. He acknowledges his allegiance to Rapin, Dacier and Le Bossu, and to "the Judicious Remarks of our own excellent Critick Mr Rymer, who seems to have better consider'd these matters and to have seen farther into them than any of the English Nation". Jeremy Collier was a great admirer of Rymer. The very title of his work "A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage" (1698) is after Rymer's "A Short View of Tragedy", and the argument and the style of the essay also follow Rymer's methods.

John Dennis, while answering Rymer's attack on Shakespeare, does not deal with his specific criticism of Othello; he dilates on Rymer's

objections to the theme of love in a tragedy, and his suggestion for the introduction of a chorus in the play, opposing both these points vehemently. Shakespeare had his faults but he had his beauties too; this is all he offered in defence of the poet; and on the whole Dennis feels that Rymer's "Censure of Shakespeare in most of the particulars, are very sensible and very just". His assessment of Rymer's criticism is highly complimentary: Rymer, "notwithstanding the Rage of all the Poetasters of the Times, whom he has exasperated by opening the Eyes of the Blind that they may see their Errors, will always pass with impartial Posterity for a most learned, a most judicious, and a most useful Critick".

In the eighteenth century, Rymer's neo-classical criticism is forgotten but some of the editors of Shakespeare pay attention to Rymer's account of Othello. Nicholas Rowe finds no validity in Rymer's pique against Shakespeare and firmly held to the opinion that Rymer's attempt to ruin the reputation of the poet failed totally; but Rowe concedes it to Rymer's credit that "he has certainly pointed out some Faults very judiciously... But I wish he would likewise have observ'd some of the Beauties too... it seems strange that he should allow nothing good in the whole: If the Fable and Incidents are not to his Taste, yet the Thoughts are almost everywhere very Noble, and the Diction manly and proper". According to Lewis Theobald: "Mr Rymer has run riot against the Conduct, Manners, Sentiments, and Diction, of this Play: but in such a Strain, that one is moved rather to laugh at the Freedom and Coarseness of his Raillery, than provok'd to be downright angry at his Censures". After citing a sample of the criticism from A Short View of Tragedy, Theobald observes: "such Reflexions require no serious Answer. This

1. The Impartial Critick (1693), Hooker, I, 11-41; To the Spectator, upon his Paper on Postical Justice (1712), Hooker, II, 19.
Tragedy [Othello] will continue to have lasting Charms, enough to make us blind to such Absurdities, as the Poet thought were not worth his Care.¹

But in spite of this dismissal, Theobald is seen paying attention to some of the problems posed by Rymer, such as the moral of the play, the magical power of the handkerchief, and so on. Alexander Pope compliments Rymer as a critic: "Rymer a learned and strict critic? — Ay, that's exactly his character. He is generally right, though rather too severe in his opinion of the particular plays he speaks of; and is, on the whole, one of the best critics we ever had". But in his remarks that "to judge ... Shakespeare by Aristotle's rules, is like trying a man by the Laws of one Country, who acted under those of another", Pope seems to be digging at Rymer's account of Shakespeare. William Warburton finds Rymer insufferable: "his criticisms on the Poets of the last Age, with only a mixture of trite remarks, transcribed from the French commentators on Aristotle, are one continued heap of ignorance and insolence". However, Warburton finds some merit in Rymer's attack on Iago since he himself subscribes to Rymer's view that a soldier should be "brave, generous, and a man of honour" which Shakespeare's Iago violates.³ Samuel Johnson mentions Rymer along with Dryden: "Dryden's criticism has the majesty of a queen; Rymer's has the ferocity of a tyrant". Johnson agrees that Shakespeare's "disposition, as Rhymer has remarked, led him to comedy"; but otherwise he has little sympathy with the anticulthist school of critics of Shakespeare: "When Shakespeare's plan is understood, most of the criticisms of Rhymer and Voltaire vanish away."⁴

After a total neglect of Rymer in the nineteenth century, interest in him has revived at the turn of this century. Spingarn, in 1907, tried to rehabilitate Rymer and assess his importance in relation to his age:

In the age of classicism, not a man's verdicts but his method and doctrine gave him his position as a critic, not individual dicta or subjective impressions, but principles and learning, and that critical dialectic which was the art with which he wielded these weapons . . . criticism had not yet learnt to concern itself systematically with isolated lines and particular passages, and critics were not finally judged by their attitude toward them. It is one of Rymer's claims to recognition that his work tended in this very direction of the concrete. 1

Writing about the same time, however, George Santley (1900-1904) feels exasperated and endorses Macaulay's verdict of Rymer as "the worst critic". 2

But in 1919, we find T.S. Eliot giving unqualified praise to Rymer's Othello: "I have never, by the way, seen a cogent refutation of Thomas Rymer's objections to Othello"; and, again, in 1924: "Rymer makes out a very good case"; and later, in 1932, Eliot drops another very significant aside: "Thomas Rymer - a critic of whom Dryden speaks highly, and of whom I should be tempted to speak more highly still". 3

In modern criticism of Othello there is a mixed reaction to Rymer's analysis of the play. For example, critics like Robert Bridges, F.R. Leavis, E.E. Stoll subscribe to Rymer's account of Othello's stupidity and K.W. Evans voices Rymer's feelings in his statement: "it is not easy considering what Othello does, to resist Thomas Rymer's estimate of him as a stupidly ferocious barbarian". 4 Clifford Leech argues that Rymer was

1. Spingarn, I, lxx-1xxi.
"philosophically at odds" with the Jacobean. He explains Rymer's criticism of Othello in the context of the changing function of tragedy from the early seventeenth century to the Restoration. Rymer's reaction to Shakespeare's tragedy is the concentrated revolt of the Restoration against Jacobean tragedy. Perhaps a "diluted" and "amended" Shakespeare was the answer for Rymer and his age as Leech suggests; and as indeed the adapters of the period also confirm, though Othello remained unaltered. Nigel Alexander finds Rymer's objections quite baseless. According to him, a "cogent refutation" of Othello has been lacking not because of the weight of Rymer's argument but because of the strength of the design of Shakespeare's play which renders all the objections of Rymer otiose. According to Zimansky, however, Rymer "offers a challenge that cannot be ignored"; the questions, if not the answers, raised by Rymer are significant. His "attack on Othello remains a challenge since the attacks on probability seem valid and the play does raise special problems of moral and decorum". A recent critic of Shakespeare, Leslie A. Fielder, while refuting Rymer's point about the handkerchief, agrees with his verdict that the tragic effect of the play is marred by its hero's tendency to become almost comic. According to Earl Miner, Rymer, "the most anti-literary, the most consistently reductive critic", offers a "cogent refutation" to his own case; "such vulgarity, such reductiveness is never tolerable, and here it spoils a perfectly valid case for Shakespeare's imperfections".

3. pp. iii, li.
5. "Mr Dryden and Mr Rymer" PQ, LIV, No. 1, 1975 (137-151), 148.
We may quarrel with Rymer over his anti-literary criticism, his hasty inferences and his feverish dismissal of every conceivable aspect of Othello. But perhaps it would be worthwhile to investigate his motives for doing so. Rymer, like Dryden, thought that the Restoration must evolve a drama of its own and that the drama of the previous age was neither possible nor desirable; the Elizabethan drama should be treated as a fact of history. Rymer took upon himself the role of an iconoclast, thinking, perhaps, that if the best and the most popular of these plays were demolished hope for a new drama was possible. For this reason his choice fell on Shakespeare's Othello, since this play, as we know, was one of the most popular plays of the period. It has been often held against Rymer, and rightly so, that he failed to point out any of the beauties of Shakespeare; but this lack is not so much a failure of design as a failure of conception. Rymer's plans were to dethrone a powerful adversary. It was therefore his business to condemn Shakespeare and not to praise him. An assessment of Rymer's criticism of Shakespeare should be made in terms of what he set out to do rather than what he did not intend to do.

If Rymer's plans were to ruin the reputation of Shakespeare, he is not the only one to have failed in the attempt. Critics like Voltaire, Tolstoy, Robert Bridges, Bernard Shaw, have all in their own way tried and failed. However, the fact that the Restoration drama directed itself to new ways and that after the publication of The Tragedies of the Last Age the Restoration stage was suddenly flooded with several adaptations of Shakespeare, speaks for the partial success of Rymer's design. This massive alteration of Shakespeare's plays proves that the poet could

retain his hold on the Restoration only after coming to terms with neo-
classical principles, that is by submitting to the canons of poetic justice,
plot reconstruction, decorum, and modification of character and language,
as indeed prescribed by Rymer.
CHAPTER THREE

DRYDEN AND RYMER

How far Rymer influenced Dryden in his critical theory is an intriguing question, and much more intriguing is the fact that the question is never raised the other way round; for Dryden could as well have influenced Rymer as have been influenced by him. Rymer, as we have seen, was a critic of great importance in his own time, and very few of his contemporaries contradicted him. T.S. Eliot's remark about the absence of a cogent refutation of Rymer's Othello has a greater relevance in the context of the seventeenth century than thereafter. Dryden does not so much as mention Othello in his discussions of Shakespeare, much less challenge Rymer's stand on it. But this is not to say that Dryden was in sympathy with Rymer's principles of criticism. There are some points of contact between the two critics. As R.D. Hume has pointed out, both of them worked for the improvement of Restoration drama, and recommended regular construction, decorum and moral utility as virtues desirable in a play. But, in the specific ways of realising these ends, the two critics stand poles apart, and Rymer's principles have a special significance.

1. Cf. F.L. Huntley thinks that Dryden anticipated Rymer in disparaging "the irregular plots of Shakespeare" (The Unity of John Dryden's Dramatic Criticism, Chicago, 1944, p. 194 n); Cf. Earl Miner, according to whom Rymer's historical and progressive ideas ... are plainly owed to Dryden and a more liberal age" (Mr Dryden and Mr Rymer', PQ, LIV, 1975, No. 1, (137-151), 138).

methods, however desirable in themselves, are a complete antithesis to
Dryden's. Hume's contention that Dryden had no vital disagreement with
Rymer's principles, and that the former held the latter in great respect,
seems too simplified an interpretation of Dryden's continual allusions
to Rymer as a "learned critic". Watson finds it odd that Dryden should
be respectful to Rymer; and Zimansky has observed that "at no point does
he [Dryden] quarrel with Rymer's principles".1 Dryden does quarrel,
though, not with Rymer the man, but with his principles of criticism.
For example, in his letter to William Walsh (1693), while opposing Rymer's
stand on the chorus Dryden lays it down specifically that he has nothing
against Rymer the man: "I shall be very proud of your entering into the
lists, though not against Rymer; yet as a champion of our cause, who
defy the chorus of the Ancients".2 As we have seen, Dryden always stood
for politeness of disposition in critical discussion. "I detest
arrogance", he says, and he always reacts to arrogance in criticism.
Even while conceding most of the charges Collier made against his
comedies, Dryden retorts to his ill-mannered criticism: Collier "comes to
battle like a dictator from the plough. I will not say, The zeal of
God's house has eaten him up; but I am sure it has devoured some part of
his good manners and civility". As early as in the dedication to the
Essay of Dramatic Poesy (1668), he refers to "the war of opinions . . .
prosecuted by some like pedants, with violence of words, and managed by
others like gentlemen, with candour and civility".3 It is this
gentlemanly candour and civility which Dryden exercised in his "war of
opinions" with Rymer.

1. Dryden's Criticism, pp. 104-110; Watson, I, 211 headnote, cf. The
Literary Critics, pp. 48-49; Zimansky, p. xxxvi.
2. Letters of John Dryden, ed. Charles E. Ward, Duke University Press,
1942, Letter no. 24, p. 54.
3. Anns (1677), I, 102; Fables (1700), II, 293; EDP (1668), I, 15.
Dryden's first allusion to The Tragedies of the Last Age is in a letter to the Earl of Dorset, and it is anything but complimentary, and that is despite the fact that Rymer had earlier praised Dryden in his preface to Rapin's Reflections. After a diplomatic praise of the book, Dryden has a polite and witty dig at Rymer's fault-finding talents. The first part of the letter is a compliment to Rymer's learning:

Mr Rymer sent me his book, which has been my best entertainment hitherto: 'Tis certainly very learned, and the best piece of criticism in the English tongue: perhaps in any other of the modern. If I am not altogether of his opinion I am so in most of what he says but then follows what is of vital importance and think myself happy that he has not fallen upon me as severely and as witty as he has upon Shakespeare and Fletcher. For he is the only man I know capable of finding out a poet's blind sides: and if he can hold here, without exposing his Edgar to be censured by his enemies, I think there is no man will dare to answer him, or can.

One has only to refer to Dryden's remarks in the preface to An Evening's Love (1671) and in the dedication to Examen Poeticum (1693) on such fault-finding critics as write worse than those they criticise, already quoted (pp. 11-13), to see that Dryden's sarcastic comments on Rymer's excellence as a fault-finder, accompanied by the reminder of his Edgar, are all of a piece. They are certainly not complimentary, and show a gentlemanly disapproval of one critic for another.

Dryden took up his answer to The Tragedies of the Last Age perhaps soon after finishing the book, and the notes scribbled on the "end-papers

1. 'Dorset' (1677), I, 209; cf. Watson: "The letter leaves no doubt that Dryden's admiration for Rymer as a critic was sincere" (I, 208 headnote); F.L. Huntley also feels that Dryden's praise is "sincere" (The Unity of John Dryden's Dramatic Criticism, Chicago, 1944, p. 181).
2. PR (1674), p. 15.
3. Cf. Zimansky, his explanation of the degree of praise in the letter is that Dryden is only being discreet. His "addressee is Dorset, to a member of whose circle Rymer had dedicated the book", p. 194 nn.
4. 'Dorset' (1677), I, 209 (italics added).
of the copy recording his spontaneous reactions to what he later came to qualify - diplomatically - as "the best piece of criticism", are not complimentary. Dryden does not, of course, use Rymer's stick - that of demolishing and smashing with summary judgement - to beat him but he tries to suggest by discussions and arguments the possibility of another point of view. Dryden's disagreement is voiced in such a polite manner that it has been often misinterpreted as a point of agreement with Rymer. For example though G. Watson observes that 'Heads of an Answer', in its defence of English dramatic traditions against both Aristotle and Rymer is Dryden's most revolutionary piece of criticism, F.L. Huntley thinks that Dryden's 'Heads . . . ' subscribes to Rymer's recommendations of pity and fear for the English tragedy after the Greek model, though the latter stresses plot to realise these ends and the former thought that "the English dramatists attain the same end of tragedy through the characters, the thoughts and the words". R. D. Hume has argued that 'Heads . . . ' is very complimentary to Rymer and that Dryden could never be anti-Rymer because he subscribed basically to Rymer's conviction that "modern literature represented a development from the classics". In fact both in the 'Heads of an Answer to Rymer' and in 'The Grounds of Criticism in Tragedy' are the details of Dryden's departure from Rymer's criticism of the English tragedy without indulgence of any bitterness against Rymer. In 'The Grounds of . . . ', Dryden tries to contradict Rymer on Rymer's own premises, that is, by first accepting his neo-classical rules in absolute terms; neither before nor after do we ever find Dryden drawing so heavily on critics like Rapin, Le Bossu and Aristotle as he does here, and as a result critics like M.T. Herrick, John Sherwood, W.E. Bohn, Clifford Leech and George Watson are trapped

into reading 'The Grounds . . .' as a neo-classical treatise written under the influence of Rymer. But what Dryden is trying to do is something quite un-Rymerian in effect. He is trying to argue that even judging by Rymer's strictest critical doctrines "the tragedies of the last age" cannot be condemned, and that Shakespeare and Fletcher are in many ways superior to the Greeks. These are adequate replies to Rymer's attacks on the English dramatists, yet Dryden does not beat the drum in making his points; and if the ability to shout down is to be accepted as a sign of strength, then Dryden must appear as a weak, cautious and timid critic. It is indeed very easy to mistake good-natured tolerance for weakness of will, especially when it comes from an important man of letters and at a time when disagreements were expressed by tearing up the books of opponents in public.²

It is true that Dryden respects Rymer's learning,³ but this is no more than granting him legitimate credit for something which was his due; the giving, as Dryden recommends, of "even to enemies their just praises".⁴ Even so, Dryden's praise is not without qualification: "I

1. John C. Sherwood, 'Dryden and the Rules: The Preface to Troilus and Cressida', CL, II, 1950, 73-83; W.E. Bohn, 'The Development of John Dryden's Literary Criticism', PMLA, XXII, 1907, 114; Clifford Leech, 'Rymer on Othello' in Shakespeare's Tragedies, London, 1950, pp. 92-93; Watson, headnote to CL, I, 238; M.T. Herrick, 'The Poetics of Aristotle in England', New Haven, 1930, p. 67; cf. F.G. Wakcott, who has argued very plausibly that 'Grounds' is Dryden's answer to The Tragedies of the Last Age; ('John Dryden's Answer to Thomas Rymer's "The Tragedies of the Last Age"', PQ, XV, 1936, 194-214); cf. Gunnar Sorelius, who maintains that the preface to Troilus and Cressida, written soon after the publication of The Tragedies of the Last Age "shows a closer dependence on neo-classical theory than usual" though "Dryden's allegiance to the dramatic theory expounded by Rymer was never without reserve" (Sorelius, pp. 180, 187); cf. Samuel Johnson, who initiated the controversy by suggesting that Rymer's book had given occasion to the writing of 'Grounds . . .' (Lives of the English Poets, I, 356).

2. See below, p. 64 n2.

3. 'Heads' (1677), I, 211; AL (1678), I, 230; 'Grounds' (1679), I, 242, 252; DS (1690), II, 478; 'Dennis' (1694), II, 178, Fables (1700), II, 272.

4. Examæn (1693), II, 162.
reverence Mr Rymer's learning, but I detest his ill nature and his arrogance; and as we have seen, Dryden does not over-value learning, but rather maintains: "genius alone is a greater virtue... than all other qualifications put together. You can see what success this learned critic has found in the world, after his blaspheming Shakespeare. Almost all the faults which he has discovered are truly there; yet who will read Mr Rymer or not read Shakespeare?" 1 Discussing this remark, Hume has argued that Dryden "disagrees with both Rymer's prescriptions and his evaluation of Shakespeare, but what Rymer saw as faults Dryden did too". 2 But it is one thing to see faults as faults and quite another to reject a genius for those faults. Dryden rates a genius above his faults, whereas Rymer totally condemns a genius for those faults: Dryden's Shakespeare transcends his faults, whereas Rymer's Shakespeare is not even allowed to survive them.

The difference in the priorities of the two critics is nowhere so well illustrated as in their allegiance to the neo-classical doctrine. The theoretical bases of the neo-classical rules are as important for Dryden as they were for Rymer, if not more so. For that matter, Rymer does not prescribe rules so much as he illustrates their efficacy by demolishing specific works for failing to observe them. On the other hand, Dryden is more concerned about the problems of dramatic form, but unlike Rymer, he does not consider "rules, as if they were a kind of magisterial prescription upon poets"; 3 rather he tries to discuss their serviceability by debating the relative merits of the methods employed by the English, French and Greek dramatists. As a practising playwright, Dryden sometimes prefers to supersede a rule rather than to sacrifice

1. 'Dennis' (1694), II, 178.
2. Dryden's Criticism, p. 130.
3. 'Grounds' (1679), I, 260.
beauties; and as a critic, he does not allow the violation of rules seriously to affect his appreciation of a work of art. He grants freedom for minor departures, especially to a genius, who, as he tried to establish, should not be restrained by these fetters. It is this elasticity towards the neo-classical rules which perhaps misled a critic like Saintsbury to infer that Dryden did not care for rules.\(^1\) That Dryden worked within the framework of rules has been successfully established by critics like Hoyt Trowbridge, John Sherwood, Robert Hume and Edward Pechter.\(^2\)

Those who emphasise the extent of Rymer's influence on Dryden,\(^3\) would do well to see some of Dryden's vital points of disagreements with Rymer. For example, Dryden, in opposition to both Rymer and Milton, disapproved of a chorus on the English stage, and he not only rejected it in theory but even in practice, avoiding its use in his All for Love (1678), written after the "practice of the Ancients",\(^4\) and the following year also in his Oedipus (1679), based on the Oedipus of Sophocles and written in collaboration with Lee. Similarly, despite Rymer's opposition


3. Watson, I, xiii; headnote to TC, I, 238, Dryden's criticism under the influence of Tragedies of The last age, grows "less liberal and less English"; Hume suggests that All for Love and Troilus and Cressida were written under Rymer's influence (Dryden's Criticism, pp. 120-131); according to Sorelius, Oedipus was written under Rymer's influence (Sorelius, p. 123); cf. Walcott, who minimises the extent of Rymer's influence (PO, XV, 1936, 194-214).

to love as a proper theme for tragedy in *A Short View of Tragedy* (1693), Dryden commends himself for his *All for Love* in 1695.\(^1\) Again, Dryden continued to admire Shakespeare's tragedy even after Rymer's debunking of *Othello* and *Julius Caesar*; similarly his admiration for Milton was not in any way affected by Rymer's jeering of the poet in 1677.\(^2\) This is not to say that Dryden was diametrically opposed to whatever Rymer said. On the contrary, he subscribed to some of the important dramatic principles of Rymer. For example, Dryden is in total agreement with Rymer on the theory of poetic decorum, and that is despite the fact that in practice he did not always find it convenient to observe this principle in his plays, and even in theory he preferred a compromise between pleasure and profit rather than have the latter to the exclusion of the former. Rymer's 'poetic justice' had a great impact on seventeenth century dramatic criticism and the Shakespeare-adaptations of the period. Dryden's adaptations of Shakespeare's plays were also motivated by a moral design. It is therefore essential to see Rymer's contribution to poetic justice and its influence on Dryden and other playwrights and critics of the period in detail.

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2. Dryden's admiration for Shakespeare, see below, in ch.6 & 7; for Milton, *Sylva* (1685), II, 32, 'Discourse' (1693), II, 84, 150; cf. Dryden's earlier admiration for Milton, before the publication of *TLA*, 'Apology' (1677), I, 196.
Aristotle and the Neo-classical Critics

Poetic justice is one of the important neo-classical tenets and advocates of poetic justice like Dryden, Rymer and Dennis, have tried to base their support for it on Aristotle. Of the three, Dennis was not only the most vocal in favour of the principle but also the only one to trace its origin to Aristotle: "Aristotle was the first who establish'd this . . . Doctrine of modern Criticism", says Dennis in reply to Addison's enquiry as to who had introduced this doctrine in poetry. However, Dryden and Rymer seem to have read Aristotle more carefully than Dennis, for they do not associate Aristotle so closely with the idea of poetic justice. Dennis's exposition came in the wake of Addison's attack, an attack which so enraged Dennis that he sought to defend it with the support of the greatest authority in classical literature. Why or how his choice fell on Aristotle is intriguing, and even more intriguing is the fact that Addison never challenged him.

1. 'To the Spectator, upon his Paper on Poetical Justice' (1712), Hooker, II, 19.

Dennis could easily have found the support he required in Plato, for Plato and not Aristotle is the first to have tried to establish the principle, and later Horace also emphasises the twin functions of profit and pleasure in poetry. In The Republic, Plato lays it down:

Poets and makers of stories are most wrong when they say that many unjust men are happy, many just men miserable, that injustice is profitable if it be not detected, and justice the good of another, but a man's own loss ... we shall forbid them to make statements of that kind, and shall order them to make songs and stories to the contrary effect.

This is not a statement in isolation; as M.A. Quinlan has pointed out, there are several references to the principle of poetic justice scattered in Plato's Republic and Laws. Plato wanted to banish poets from his ideal commonwealth. The absence of poetic justice, which Plato termed morality in art, was a very strong weapon to use against them. The rationale of Plato's poetic justice was essentially negative; it was a whip to use against the poets and not a positive rule to recommend to them, as the seventeenth century formulated.

Aristotle's stance in the Poetics, as opposed to Plato's, is non-ethical. Unlike Plato, Aristotle does not ascribe any moral function to tragedy. His concept of an ideal tragedy does not include poetic justice, at least not by inference or suggestion. His emphasis on the emotions of pity and terror, a pronounced leaning towards unhappy endings, a genuine admiration for Sophocles - and Sophocles does not always observe poetic justice - do not speak for poetic justice.

The neo-classical critics were perhaps trapped by a superficial

interpretation of some of the statements of the *Poetics*. For example, Aristotle says that "(1) a good man must not be seen passing from happiness to misery, or (2) a bad man from misery to happiness". Now, with a little twist these half-statements could easily be construed as Aristotle's support for poetic justice. To reduce it to the neo-classical doctrine of reward for the good and punishment of the evil was the next step and this is what the seventeenth century critics did. For obvious reasons these critics found it convenient to ignore Aristotle's third recommendation that "an extremely bad man" should not "be seen falling from happiness into misery", for though it is moral it is not moving. A closer reading of the *Poetics* shows that the neo-classical critics read these rules out of context. Aristotle recommends these rules not with poetic justice in view, but, as he explains, because the first is not "fear-inspiring or piteous, but simply odious" and the second, in addition, is also "most untragic". A tragic hero, according to Aristotle, must arouse pity, and "pity is occasioned by undeserved misfortune".\(^1\) Moreover, the "change in the hero's fortune must not be from misery to happiness, but on the contrary from happiness to misery".\(^2\) Now, since a good man's passing from happiness to misery is not conducive to tragic feelings, nor a bad man's passing from misery to happiness, Aristotle's choice of a tragic hero is "the intermediate kind of personage, a man not pre-eminently virtuous and just, whose misfortune ... is brought upon him not by vice and depravity but by some error of judgment".\(^3\)

The function of tragedy, then, according to Aristotle, is to arouse the emotions of pity and terror, and this can be achieved by the following conditions:

1. *Poetics*, ch. 13, p. 35.
(a) The hero should be neither good nor bad but an intermediate kind of person;
(b) He must suffer and his misfortunes should be undeserved;
(c) His suffering had to be the inevitable consequence of some error of judgment and not of any vice or depravity in him.

These conditions do not support poetic justice, unless of course the tragic flaw in the protagonist was misinterpreted by the seventeenth century as his defect to justify his suffering. William K. Wimsatt and Cleanth Brooks have pointed out that "poetic justice was an exaggeration of the Aristotelian punishment of the flaw in the character of the tragic protagonist". But, as Alfred Harbage has explained:

the protagonist's flaw is a technical necessity, not justifying his suffering but indicating how he came to be exposed to suffering. The words of the philosopher have been given a moralistic turn that was never intended... the Aristotelian dictum is distorted to mean that, in any satisfying fable, vice must be shown to be punished and virtue to be rewarded. 2

But perhaps it was not altogether a distortion. Aristotle leaves some room for a moralistic reading in passing. F.L. Lucas has pointed out that tragic error "means simply 'a mistake', though there have always been persistent attempts on the part of moralizing critics to make the hamartia much more definitely a moral weakness, a sin, than it really is". "Aristotle himself seems slightly confused between what is ethically good and what is aesthetically good, or magnificent. That confusion was naturally easier for the Greek, who used the same adjective to describe a 'good' thing and a 'beautiful' one. And we "find the same muddle between ethic and aesthetic goodness, between virtue and splendour of character, appearing again later in Aristotle's demand that the characters of tragedy must be good or fine. 3

2. As they liked it, New York, 1947, p. 120.
Rymer read in Rapin's *Reflections on Aristotle* that Heroick Poesie proposes the example of great Virtues, and great Vices, to excite men to abhor these, and to be in love with the other... tragedy rectifies the use of Passions, by moderating our fear, and our pity, which are obstacles of Virtue; it lets men see that Vice never escapes unpunish'd.

This is a gross distortion of Aristotle's principles; rather than reward virtue and punish vice, Aristotle asserts that "an opposite issue for the good and the bad personages" does not contribute to the ideal construction of plot. "It is ranked as first only through the weakness of the audience... but the pleasure here is not that of Tragedy. It belongs rather to Comedy." But, as F.L. Lucas has pointed out:

Aristotle (XIII.6) prefers an unhappy ending; but seems to contradict himself (XIV.9) by also preferring the type of conclusion where the truth comes to light before the irreparable deed is done (e.g. Iphigenela, about to sacrifice her own brother, finds out who he is, just in time). Perhaps he felt the first to be more deeply moving; the second more satisfying to our humane sympathies.

Lucas also explains that "for the Greeks, tragoidia need not end in disaster. It must include scenes of pain and sorrow, but it need not close with one; though it usually did". The seventeenth century found happy ending more acceptable although Aristotle's ideal tragedy includes human pain and suffering: "though the objects themselves may be painful to see, we delight to view the most realistic representations of them in art".

Another statement in the Poetics contributing to the misconception of the neo-classical critics seems to be that "poetry is something more philosophic and of graver import than history, since its statements are

3. Tragedy: Serious Drama in relation... p. 24 & n.
of the nature rather of universals, whereas those of history are singulars. When Rymer translated Rapin's French rendering of this statement, he wrote:

History proposes not virtue but imperfect, as it is found in the particulars; and Poetry proposes it free from all imperfections, and as it ought to be in general and in the abstract. This made Aristotle confess that Poesie is a better School of Virtue, than Philosophy itself, because it goes more directly to perfection by the verisimilitude, than Philosophy can do with the naked truth.

The twist to Aristotle is quite obvious here. Rymer's thesis of poetic justice, which is largely based on this argument, runs as follows:

These [Sophocles and Euripides] were for teaching by examples, in a graver way, yet extremely pleasant and delightful. And, finding in History, the same end happen to the righteous and to the unjust, virtue often opprest, and wickedness on the Throne: they saw these particular yesterday-truths were imperfect and improper to illustrate the universal and eternal truths by them intended. Finding also that this unequal distribution of rewards and punishments did perplex the wisest, and by the Atheist was made a scandal to the Divine Providence. They concluded, that a Poet must of necessity see justice exactly administered, if he intended to please. For, said they, if the World can scarce be satisfied with God Almighty, whose holy will and purposes are not to be comprehended; a Poet (in these matters) shall never be pardon'd, who (they are sure) is not incomprehensible: whose ways and walks way, without impiety, be penetrated and examined.

That the ancients did not always administer poetic justice, Rymer knew as well as Dryden, but such was the force of Rymer's learning and the awe in which he was held that no one except Dryden dared even to challenge him in the seventeenth century. Rymer, however, thinks that the ancients took care to wash the Viper, to cleanse away the venom, and with such art to prepare the morsel: they made it all Junket to the taste, and all Physick in the operation. . . . They so qualifi'd, so allaid, and cover'd the crime with circumstances, that little could appear on the Stage, but either the causes and provocations before it, or the remorse and penitence, the despair and horrors of conscience which follow'd to make the Criminal every way a fit object for pity.

1. Poetics, ch. 9, p. 27.
2. Rapin's Reflections, p. 75.
3. TLA (1677), pp. 22-23.
4. TLA (1677), p. 28.
Something of the kind happens in Shakespeare's Macbeth, and also in his Othello, but Rymer was not able to appreciate it.

The concept of history and poetry which Rymer expounds, is a modification of what Aristotle seems to suggest through Rapin. Rymer, however, is not the only one to interpret Aristotle like this. Earlier, in the history of English criticism Sidney and Bacon also offer similar arguments in support of poetry's superiority over history. Sidney, in An Apology for Poetry (1595), writes:

Nowe, to that which commonly is attributed to the praise of histories, in respect of the notable learning is gotten by marking the successes, as though therein a man should see virtue exalted and vice punished. Truely that commendation is peculiar to Poetrie, and farre of from History. For indeede Poetrie euer setteth vertue so out in her best cullours, making Fortune her wel-wayting hand-mayd, that one must needs be enamored of her. . . . But the Historian, beeing captiued to the trueth of a foolish world, is many times a terror from well dooing, and an incouragement to vnbrideled wickednes . . . hee [the poet] excelleth Historie, not only in furnishing the minde with knowledge, but in setting it forward to that which deserueth to be called and accounted good: which setting forward, and mooving to well dooing, indeed setteth the lawrell crowne upon the Poet as victorious, not onely of the Historian, but ouer the Phylosther. 1

Bacon, in The Advancement of Learning (1605), recommends that "because true Historie propoundeth the successes and issues of actions not so agreeable to the merits of Vertue and Vice, therefore Poesie faines them more just in Retribution and more according to Revealed Providence". 2 Rymer's "poetical justice" is not only superior to historical justice, but also to divine justice. The truth of the poet is greater and more absolute than the truth of history or philosophy; and this absolute justice is his strict yardstick for the discussion of the three plays which he criticises in The Tragedies of the Last Age. Their greatest failure is a failure to conform to poetical truth by offering

2. Spingarn, 1, 6.
no improvement upon history. Rymer's criticism of Rollo is that

It is indeed a History, and it may well be a History; for never man of common sense could set himself to invent any thing so gross. Poetry requires the ben trovato, something handsomely invented, and leaves the truth to History; but never were the Muses profan'd with a more foul, unpleasant, and unwholesome truth, than this which makes the argument of Rollo. 1

And of A King and no King: "In this Fable appears some proportion, shape, and (at the first sight) an outside fair enough, yet at the bottom we hardly find what is more choice, or more exquisite and more perfect than History." And in The Maid's Tragedy: "But what ever the Poet design'd; nothing in History was ever so unnatural, nothing in Nature was ever so improbable, as we find the whole conduct of this Tragedy, so far are we from any thing accurate, and Philosophical as Poetry requires". 2 Even sixteen years later, in his criticism of Othello, the same theme recurs. Shakespeare's Iago is a very serious outrage to poetic truth.

History may tell us that John an Oaks, John a Stiles or Iago were ungrateful; Poetry is to follow Nature; Philosophy must be his guide: history and fact in particular cases of John an Oaks, or John of Styles, are no warrant or direction for a Poet. Therefore Aristotle is always telling us that Poetry is ... more general and abstracted, is led more by the Philosophy, the reason and nature of things, than History. 3 Rymer's poetical truth demands an even justice, and that the crime should not exceed the punishment; and a full and final award according to deserts must be here and now on the stage. With Rollo, he argues that since the brothers were to be killed, they "ought not to be absolutely innocent ... for ... then no Poetical Justice could have touch'd them: guilty they were to be, in enjoying their Father's crime; but not of committing any

1. TLA (1677), pp. 24-25.
2. TLA, 41.
3. TLA, 61.
4. SVT (1693), p. 163.
new". The committing of new crimes would disturb the even balance of poetic justice because greater punishment was not possible on the stage. His poetic justice . . . would require that the satisfaction be compleat and full, e'er the Malefactor goes off the Stage, and nothing left to God Almighty, and another World. Nor will it suffer that the Spectators trust the Poet for a Hell behind the Scenes; the fire must roar in the conscience of the Criminal, the fiends and furies be conjur'd up to their faces.

Rymer's poetic justice, then, is a secular gesture. "He that sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed". The poet's domain being limited to the stage, he cannot leave things to "the Divine Vengeance".

John Dennis's argument against Addison's contention that "good and evil happen alike to all men on this side the grave" is based on Rymer's thesis that the stage cannot be compared with life and as Dennis elaborates it, in life:

man is a Creature who was created immortal, and a Creature consequently that will find a Compensation in Futurity for any seeming Inequality in his Destiny here. But the Creatures of a poetical Creator are imaginary and transitory; they have no longer Duration than the Representation of their respective Fables; and consequently, if they offend, they must be punish'd during that Representation. And therefore we are very far from pretending that poetical Justice is an equal Representation of the Justice of the Almighty.

But Dennis does not rest here. He tries to exalt the poetic justice of the stage to the divine image of God: "Poetick Justice would be a Jest if it were not an Image of the Divine, and if it did not consequently suppose the Being of a God and Providence. It supposes too the immortality of the Soul, and future Rewards and Punishments". Dennis, in his over-enthusiasm goes to absurd lengths. He also claims that "Mr. Rymer was the first who introduced it [poetic justice] into our native

2. **SVT** (1693), p. 163.
language". Rymer's first, as Spingarn has pointed out, is in the coining of the phrase only: "It is of course the 'distributive justice' of Aristotelian ethics; but I can find no critical term in any continental tongue which is exactly equivalent to it". Rymer uses the term in his Tragedies of the Last Age, and he is the first critic to urge the application of the principle in the contemporary drama.

The doctrine of poetic justice was an Elizabethan creed which the Restoration found particularly acceptable because it was in perfect harmony with the ethos of the age. The new drama revolted against the excesses of the Elizabethan age, its violation of a just and moral order. The pagan world of the ancient drama could not appeal to the Christian bias of the new playwrights. The demand of Restoration critics was for a poetic truth rather than "the historical or accidental truths". A neat and mechanical dispensation of virtue and reward, of vice and punishment, was indispensable to their sense of decorum. Occasionally a playwright relaxed, as for example Otway in The Orphan, Nathaniel Lee in The Massacre of Paris, and Dryden in Amboyna; and Restoration comedy does not always observe the rule of poetic justice. But, by and large, the Restoration playwrights, as Clifford Leech has pointed out, broke the law of poetic justice "only rarely and reluctantly", so much so that the principle has come to be associated exclusively with the Restoration drama.

1. Spectator 40; 'To the Spectator . . . ' (1712), Hooker, II, 20-21, 'That the Stage is useful to the Advancement of Religion' (1698), Hooker, I, 183, 'To the Spectator . . . ' Hooker, II, 19.
2. Spingarn, I, lxxiii.
4. 'Restoration Tragedy: a Reconsideration', p. 147.
Poetic Justice before Rymer

The concept of poetic justice however does not have its origin in the Restoration period. It goes back to the allegories of medieval literature which implied instruction through example. This tradition continued right into Elizabethan literature. Much Elizabethan criticism was produced in reply to the Puritan attack on poetry. Absence of a moral function in poetry was a serious charge against the poets. The critics, who were invariably poets, thought that their best defence lay in the allegorical usefulness of poetry; and poetic justice therefore served them as a good support. Before Sidney's Apology for Poetry, George Whetstone and Thomas Lodge speak of the allegorical utility of poetry. George Whetstone, in the dedication to Promos and Cassandra (1578), writes that his work was intended to show:

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vertue intermyxt with vice, vnlawfull desyres (yf it were possible) queancht with chaste denyals: a needeful actions (I thinke) for publike vewe. For by the rewarde of the good the good are encouraged in wel doinge: and with the scourge of the lewde the lewde are feared from euill attempts: mainetaining this my oppinion with Platoes auctorty. Nawghtinesse commes of the corruption of nature, and not by readings or hearinge the lives of the good or lewde (for such publication is necessarype), but goodnesse (sayth he) is beawtified by either action.
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Thomas Lodge, in his Defence of Poetry (1579), says:

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vnder the persons of beastes many abuses were dissiphered . . . whatsoever ether Virgil did write of his gnatt or Quid of his fley was all courtely to declare abuse . . . vnder the person of Aneas in Virgil the practice of a dilligent capitaine is discribed vnder the shadow of byrds, beastes, and trees the follie of the world were disiphered . . . the creation is signified in the Image of Prometheus, the fall of pryde in the person of Narcissus.
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and also:

1. M.A. Quinlan refers to the parliamentary act of 1543 which permitted only such plays as presented "the punisiment of the wicked and the reward of the good", Poetic Justice in the Drama, p. 66; F.P. Wilson in English Drama 1485-1585, points out how the moral tradition lasted well into the sixteenth century, Oxford, 1969, p. 74.

Poetes were the first raysors of cities, prescribers of good lawes, mayntayners of religion, disturbors of the wicked, aduancers of the wel disposed, inventors of laws. 

With Sidney the defence of poetry ceased to be allegorical. It became didactic. Following Sidney, other critics also took the didactic line of defence. George Puttenham writes in The Arte of English Poesie (1598): Poets "shew the mutabilitie of fortune, and the iust punishment of God in revenge of a vicious and euill life". John Harington, in A Briefe Apologie of Poesie (1591), said: "The ancients Poets ... place the Morall sense profitable for the active life of man, approuing vertuous actions and condemning the contrarie".

Ben Jonson also speaks for poetic justice in his dedicatory epistle to Volpone (1607): "the office of a comic-Poet, [is] to imitate justice and instruct to life"; and his "speciall ayme" in this play was "to put the snaffle in their mouths, that crie out, we never punish vice in our enterludes". In his posthumously published Discoveries (1640), Ben Jonson says that the poet should not only have "meere Elocution; or an excellent faculty in verse; but the exact knowledge of all vertues, and their contraries; with ability to render the one lov'd, the other hated, by his proper embattaling them"; and that the poets should cure the mind by taxing vices just as the physicians cured the body with sharp medicine.

Poetic justice, then, was an integral part of the Elizabethan literary tradition, even though in practice its impact was not so pronounced because of the force of Shakespeare's drama. The Restoration, therefore, inherited the doctrine but did not innovate it as has been

1. Smith, I, 65, 75.
2. Smith, II, 35.
4. Herford and Simpson, V, 20; VIII, 595; 634.
claimed. Rymer did no more than crystallise what was already there in a tentative form; and far from introducing the idea into English criticism, he was anticipated by the playwrights of his own age. For example, Margaret Cavendish, addressing ‘the Readers’ in her Plays (1662), says: “Plays are . . . to persecute Vice; likewise they are to extol Virtue, and honour Merit, and to praise the Graces”.¹ In The Cheats (1662), John Wilson writes in “The Author to the Reader”: “Comedy, either is, or should be, the true Picture of Vertue, or Vice; yet so drawn, as to show a man how to follow the one, and avoid the other”.² Richard Flecknoe, in A Short Discourse of the English Stage (1664), recommends that the “chiefest end” of the stage “is to render Folly ridiculous, Vice odious, and Vertue and Nobleness so amiable and lovely, as every one shu’d be delighted and enamoured with it”³. Thomas Shadwell, in the preface to The Royal Shepherdess (1669), writes that in his play “the Rules of Morality and good Manners are strictly observed . . . (Vertue being exalted, and Vice depressed)”; and in the preface to The Humorists (1671), he reiterates his earlier stand: “Poet ought to . . . please, that so he may instruct: To adorn his Images of Vertue so delightfully to affect people with a secret veneration of it in others, and an emulation to practice it in themselves: And to render their Figures of Vice and Folly so ugly and detestable, to make People hate and despise them”.⁴ That the principle of poetic justice was an accepted critical dogma before Rymer is also proved by Wycherley’s prologue to The Plain Dealer (1677):

For Truth is now a fault, as well as Wit.
And where else, but on Stages, do we see
Truth pleasing, or rewarded Honesty? ⁵

Dryden and Poetic Justice

Dryden's acceptance of poetic justice also preceded the publication of Rymer's Tragedies of the Last Age and his Rapin's Reflections. Dryden accepts the principle almost unobtrusively in his Essay of Dramatic Poesy (1668): Eugenius is unhappy with the ancients because, "instead of punishing vice and rewarding virtue, they have often shown a prosperous wickedness, and an unhappy piety: they have set before us a bloody image of revenge in Medea, and given her dragons to convey her safe from punishment; a Priam and Astyanax murdered, and Cassandra ravished, and the lust and murder ending in the victory of him who acted them"; Lisideius applauds the French for dispensing "with the severity of history, to reward that virtue which has been rendered to us there unfortunate"; and Neander praises Ben Jonson for gaining in Volpone, "the end he aimed at, the punishment of vice, and the reward of virtue". In practice, however, Dryden does not always follow the principle of poetic justice. He falters it constantly in his comedies and sometimes even in his tragedies. His emphasis on pleasure and instruction keeps on varying: sometimes he prefers one to the other; sometimes he feels that pleasure can serve to emphasise instruction. Thus, in his next essay, quite opposed to the first, he speaks for pleasure: "delight is the chief, if not the only end of poesy; instruction can be admitted but in the second place, for poesy only instructs as it delights". Again, in the preface to Tyrannic Love (1670), he speaks for instruction only and goes so far as to suggest that the stage should complement the function of religion: "instructions of morality . . . and examples of piety . . . may be of excellent use to second the precept of our religion"; and, following the

1. EDP (1668), I, 38, 47, 61.
2. 'Essay' (1668), I, 113-114.
Dryden's next statement on poetic justice comes in the wake of an attack by Shadwell who had accused him of debasing "himself to think of nothing but pleasing the Rabble", of encouraging vice "by bringing the Characters of debauch'd People upon the Stage, and making them pass for fine Gentlemen, who openly profess Swearing, Drinking, Whoring, breaking Windows, beating Constables, &c". Dryden's defence, in the preface to *An Evening's Love* (1671), is that "comedy is not so much obliged to the punishment of faults... as tragedy". Drawing a line between the functions of tragedy and comedy, Dryden says: "in tragedy, where the actions and persons are great, and the crimes horrid, the laws of justice are more strictly to be observed; and examples of punishment to be made to deter mankind from the pursuit of vice"; but in comedy, "I know no such law to have been constantly observed... either by the ancient or modern poets". "The first end of comedy is delight, and instruction only the second"; but lest he should be accused of making "libertinism amiable", Dryden offers a qualification. In Comedy, vicious persons are made happy, "but only as Heaven makes sinners so; that is, by reclaiming them first from vice". A comic poet works "a cure on folly... not... by an immediate operation. For it works first on the ill nature of the audience; they are moved to laugh by the representation of deformity and the shame of that laughter teaches us to amend what is ridiculous in our manners".

Next, Dryden alludes to poetic justice in *Heads of an Answer* (1677) after Rymer's famous pronouncement on the principle had been published. Dryden had no quarrel with Rymer on the virtues of the principle, and he

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1. I, 138-139, 140.
subscribed to the view that "the great end of the poem is to instruct, which is performed by making pleasure the vehicle of that instruction". However, Dryden ridicules the strict mathematical scale of Rymer's poetic justice by arguing that a tragedy is much more than the arithmetic of crime balanced against the degree of punishment: Rollo committing many murders, when he is answerable but for one, is too severely arraigned by him [Rymer]; for it adds to our horror and detestation of the criminal; and poetic justice is not neglected neither, for we stab him in our minds for every offence which he commits; and the point which the poet is to gain on the audience is not so much in the death of an offender, as the raising an horror of his crimes.

And rather than show the reward of virtue and the punishment of crime, Dryden offers a refreshing modification to it in suggesting that a tragedy should move "by rendering virtue always amiable, though it be shown unfortunate; and vice detestable, tho' it be shown triumphant". 1 This is more in line with the Shakespearean tragic vision than with Restoration tragedy. Arguing against Rymer, Dryden pointed out that the ancients did not administer "poetical justice (of which Mr Rymer boasts) so well as we". The English way is not "less conducing to move pity and terror, because they often shew virtue oppressed and vice punished". A tragedy must raise the emotion of pity, and "pity is not so easily raised for a criminal (as the ancient tragedy always represents its chief person such) as it is for an innocent man". 2

In 'The Grounds of Criticism in Tragedy' Dryden elaborates the point of pity and terror raised by Rymer in his Tragedies of the Last Age. As Rymer prescribes: "The Poets were to move pitty". But the emotion of pity, as Aristotle recommends, is realised by "undeserved misfortune".

2. 'Heads' (1677), I, 218, 216.
Rymer's "poetical justice" does not permit the suffering of the innocent, yet he is constantly at pains to acquiesce in the propriety of Aristotle. The compromise he offers is not very satisfactory: he suggests that the crime should be softened "by remorse and penitence . . . to make the Criminal every way a fit object for pity"; and the punishment of the hero should not be wholly merited nor should he be entirely innocent. In other words, the emotion of pity could be aroused if the hero suffered more than his faults deserved, but was not entirely innocent, for "then no Poetical Justice could have touch'd" him. This is not Aristotelian pity; nor do pity and terror find a very comfortable dwelling in Rymer's strict scale of "poetical justice", where:

besides the purging of the passions; something must stick by observing that constant order, that harmony and beauty of Providence, that necessary relation and chain, whereby the causes and the effects, the virtues and rewards, the vices and their punishments are proportion'd and link'd together. 1

Dryden's poetic justice was not determined by the chain of cause and effect. It was more aesthetic than mathematical. He could also see that Rymer's thesis of "poetical justice" was at variance with Aristotle's recommendation of pity and terror. Dryden shows for his period a rare insight into the meaning of tragedy as propounded by Aristotle in recognising that a tragedy ending with a prosperous event, or evoking the feeling of joy at "seeing a wicked man punished, or a good man at last fortunate" is of "inferior sort". 2 His concept of the function of tragedy is influenced by Rapin's interpretation of Aristotle, which emphasises instruction rather than catharsis: "Rapin . . . has observed from Aristotle that pride and want of commiseration are the most predominant vices in mankind; therefore, to cure us of these two, the inventors of

1. TLA (1677), 28, 26, 75.
2. 'Heads' (1677), I, 217-218, 'Grounds' (1679), I, 247; cf. "This [Euripides' Cyclops] was the subject of the tragedy, which being one of those that end with a happy event, is therefore by Aristotle judged below the other sort, whose success is unfortunate" ('Discourse' (1693), II, 102).
tragedy have chosen to work upon two other passions, which are fear and pity". However, his recommendation of the means to realise these ends is quite Aristotelian. Fear could be roused by "some terrible example of misfortune, which happened to persons of the highest quality", and pity by the misfortunes of "the most virtuous, as well as the greatest". 1

In accepting the suffering of the virtuous, Dryden strikes out in pronounced opposition to Rymer's stance that "the End of all is to shew virtue in Triumph". 2 However, as regards the punishment of vice, he is in absolute agreement with Rymer. And, in Don Sebastian (1690), he conforms to Rymer's prescription: "Mr Rymer has well observed that in all punishments we are to regulate ourselves by poetical justice", and accordingly Sebastian is not killed for his involuntary crime of incest, but is deprived of his throne and his beloved, and is sent into a desert. 3 Also, in subscribing to the view that "the pity and terror must be principally, if not wholly, founded" on one character, the hero of the tragedy, "for terror and compassion work but weakly when they are divided into many persons", Dryden is supporting Rymer's recommendation. 4 He found this principle so essential for a tragedy that he criticised his own design to divide the sympathy between Octavia and the principal characters in All for Love. 5

Dryden, then, accepts some of the recommendations propounded by Rymer; but Dryden's poetic justice goes neither to the absurd proportions of Dennis's "Divine Image" nor to the rigid academism of Rymer's rule of thumb. He had accepted the principle long before Rymer appeared on the scene, and after the publication of The Tragedies of the Last Age, rather

1. 'Grounds' (1679), I, 245.
2. SVT (1693), p. 111.
3. DS (1690), II, 48.
5. AL (1678), I, 222.
than submit blindly to Rymer's prescriptions, Dryden, as we have seen, tried to grapple with some of the issues raised by Rymer. For example, he accepts Rymer's recommendation of pity and terror in tragedy in 'Heads of ...', but, later, in the 'Grounds of ...' he accepts only one half of Rymer's thesis, that is, the punishment of vice, but opposes the other half by pointing out the incompatibility of the principle of rewarding virtue with the arousing of the emotion of pity.¹

The conflict between pleasure and profit continues even after Dryden had given up the stage. In his 'Discourse concerning Satire', he alludes to "profit and delight, which are the two ends of poetry", and commending Persius for the "profitable doctrine" of his satire, he remarks: "in general, all virtues are everywhere to be praised and recommended to practice; and all vices to be reprehended ... or else there is a fundamental error in the whole design". Later, speaking for pleasure he maintains that though pleasure "is only a means of compassing the only end, which is instruction ... (but) without the means of pleasure, the instruction is but a bare and dry philosophy: a crude preparation of morals, which we may have from Aristotle and Epictetus, with more profit than from any poet".² Next, in his 'Parallel of Poetry and Painting' (1695), Dryden observes that both the painter and the poet would like to please "in preference to instruction".³ Again, in the dedication to the Aeneis (1697), Dryden upholds the virtues of an epic over a tragedy because in the former "pride is humbled, virtue rewarded, and vice punished".⁴ Later, in a 'Letter to Elizabeth Thomas' (1699?) and preface to Fables (1700) Dryden stands for instruction.⁵

1. 'Heads' (1677), I, 213, 217; 'Grounds' (1679), I, 246.
2. 'Discourse' (1693), II, 127, 146, 153.
3. 'Parallel' (1695), II, 186.
4. Aeneis (1697), II, 227-228.
5. II, 267-68; 273-274.
In practice, however, Dryden does not always observe poetic justice. For example, Acacis in *The Indian Queen* (1664), Melesinda in *Aureng-Zebe* (1676), suffer for no fault of theirs; Philocles in *Secret Love* (1668) and Almanzor in *The Conquest of Granada* (1672) fall short of the decorum expected of the chief character of a play; and so does Indamora in *Aureng-Zebe* who is afraid of death. Leonora, the usurping queen in *The Spanish Friar* (1681), for all her treachery and violation of decorum by her marriage to Torrismond - her subject - meets happiness in the end: In *Cleomones* (1690), the king of Sparta, the most virtuous of Dryden's heroes, suffers in the loss of his kingdom and all his dear ones. This provoked the condemnation of James Drake: "in this Play Poetick Justice is altogether neglected, Virtue is every where depressed, and Calamitous, and falls at last unreveg'd . . . Vice revels all along, and triumphs".1 In 1698 comes Jeremy Collier's attack on Dryden, in *A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage*, according to which, "The Business of Plays is to recommend Virtue, and discountenance Vice". He attacks Dryden "for making debauch'd Persons his Protagonists . . . and for making them happy in the Conclusion", as in doing so he goes "against the Law of Comedy, which is to reward Virtue, and punish Vice". Dryden's plea in *An Evening's Love*, "that he knows no such Law constantly observ'd in Comedy by the Antients or Modern Poets" is dismissed by Collier as "a lame Defence". "What then?", he challenges Dryden: "Poets are not always exactly in Rule. It may be a good Law tho' 'tis not constantly observ'd". Attacking Dryden on the authority of the ancient poets, Collier argues that "those Poets had a greater compass of Liberty in their Religion. Debauchery did not lie under those Discouragements of Scandal, and Penalty, with them as it does with us. Unless therefore He can prove Heathenism, and Christianity the same, his

Precedents will do him little service. To Dryden's argument that "delight is the chief end of comedy", Collier's rebuff is the sharpest of all his earlier comments: "Delight! He [Dryden] should have said Debauchery; That's the English of the Word, and the Consequence of the Practice. But the Original Design of Comedy was otherwise: And granting 'twas not so, when then? If the Ends of Things are naught, they must be mended.\(^1\) Collier's was indeed the most formidable attack on Dryden; but rather than retaliate or defend himself, Dryden generously grants Collier's viewpoint, and in his preface to Fables owns that he "has taxed me justly; and I have pleaded guilty to all thoughts and expressions of mine which can be truly argued of obscenity, profaneness or immorality". There is a genuine note of repentance in Dryden now; as he says: "I have endeavoured to choose such fables ... as contain ... some instructive moral ... I wish I could affirm with a safe conscience, that I had taken the same care in all my former writings.\(^2\)" Collier, however, attacked Dryden again, in his Defence of the Short View (1699), which was written in reply to Congreve and Vanbrugh's vindication of their dramatic writings, against Collier's attack. In reply to Collier's second attack, Dryden defended himself in his epilogue to The Pilgrim (1700): it is not much of a defence, for he playfully puts the blame on the court of Charles II, which, as he suggested, was largely responsible for the corruption of the stage.\(^3\)

Poetic Justice after Dryden

Dryden, then began and ended his career supporting the doctrine of poetic justice, and though at times his emphasis on pleasure was more

2. Fables (1700), II, 293, 273-274.
pronounced, he never forgot profit; and except for a few qualifications, he accepted Rymer's thesis of poetic justice. So, for all practical purposes, the doctrine reigned supreme in the seventeenth century and, indeed, Rymer exalted it to a plane in the Restoration drama where it could not easily be challenged. The critics and dramatists who came to write after the publication of The Tragedies of the Last Age had to reckon with the importance of the principle. It became a live issue of discussion and controversy in the contemporary criticism of the drama. For example, Sir William Temple, in his essay 'Of Poetry' (1690), says that the chief end of dramatic poesy "seems to have been Instruction, and under the disguise of Fables or the Pleasure of Story to shew the Beauties and the Rewards of Virtue, the Deformities and Misfortunes or Punishment of Vice; By Examples of both, to Encourage one, and Deter Men from the other". Sir Richard Blackmore, in his preface to Prince Arthur (1695), writes of the poet's "Business being to represent Vice as the most odious, and Virtue as the most desirable thing in the world", and tragedy, comedy and satire should be directed to the "Promotion of Virtue and exposing of Vice".¹

Charles Gildon offered a mild protest against poetic justice. In his preface to Phaeton (1698) he submits to the canon of poetic justice, saying that "a Poet ought never to be guilty of the Crime of Providence", which is "directly opposite to his duty of Rewarding the Innocent, and punishing the Guilty". Then, agreeing with Aristotle, he suggests that "unfortunate Characters shou'd be guilty of some Fraillties at least, to make Providence just in those Evils that fall upon them. And those Fraillties that produce those Misfortunes being what we may all be subject to, must cause our pity for the suffer'ing Object".² By Restoration

¹. Spingarn, III, 89, 228.
². P.b2.
standards Gildon makes a bold departure by his recognition, in the preface to Love's Victim (1701), that "Aristotle (the Father of Critic's) in his Poetics tells us, that the Poet is not confin'd to that which we call Poetic Justice, his chief Aim and Duty being to move Terror, and pity". But he lacked the courage of his convictions and could not break with his contemporaries. In this very play, although knowing full well the support given his case by the authority of Aristotle, he yields to the pressure of his age - "yet to avoid this Censure [the unjustified death of Guinoenda] I have borrow'd a Justification of her Suffering".

The same theme recurs in the death of Julio in his Patriot (1703); and to the objection that "Julio appears too perfect and Virtuous to merit the-Punishment he meets with", Gildon's reply is again that "the Theatre is not a Scaffold for the Execution of Scandalous Criminals, fit only for Tiburn. 'Tis not the Business of the Stage according to Aristotle and Reason to punish profligate Offences, for the Punishment of those has nothing in it productive of Terror, or Compassion", but rather "the Stage goes beyond the Common Course of Political Justice, for it punishes those Crimes the Law does not reach, the involuntary Effects of our passions".

However, so strictly was the rule of poetic justice held in the Restoration that critics like Gildon were not even heard. In order to gain acceptance playwrights had to submit to the principle of poetic justice, and not only were new plays tested by that touchstone but the old plays were also recast to conform to the principle. Otway turned Romeo and Juliet into a tragi-comedy where the lovers are rewarded for their virtue. Dryden altered Troilus and Cressida to present a faithful Cressida in place of Shakespeare's "false Cressida". Edmund Waller altered Beaumont and Fletcher's The Maid's Tragedy by supplying it with

1. Sig. A3r.
a happy ending. Tate softened King Lear by introducing love between Edgar and Cordelia, and giving a happy ending to the play. John Dennis altered Coriolanus so that "the good must never fail to prosper and the Bad must be always punish'd." Invariably, the success of a play was measured by the ability of a dramatist to dispense poetic justice successfully. However, surprisingly enough, Rymer condemns Shakespeare's Othello less on account of the failure of poetic justice, than because of the improbabilities of the plot. He mentions the absence of poetic justice only very casually, and there is an apparent contradiction in the argument itself, for Shakespeare is accused of the outrage against Desdemona, "the poor chicken". Yet Rymer finds Desdemona guilty of violating the norms of white society by marrying a blackamoor. What pained Rymer most should have pleased his sense of poetic justice, but it did not.

The principle of poetic justice remained unchallenged throughout the next century, despite Addison's protest. Very few registered his protest, and none followed it. Even Addison himself did not care to push it to its logical conclusion, and Dennis's defence of the principle, however superficial, and at times absurd, had the last word in the field of drama and criticism; and although the seventeenth century remained the great age of poetic justice the principle was defended well into the nineteenth century.

It has often been suggested that poetic justice took a heavy toll of tragedy in the contemporary drama, and that this principle was now

1. 'Essays on the genius and writings of Shakespeare' (1712), Hooker, II, 6.
2. Joseph Trapp in his 'Lectures on poetry' (1742), recommends profit as the "chief end of poetry, and ... pleasure ... as a handmaid" to it: (Neo-Classical Criticism 1600-1800 ed. Irene Simon, London, 1974, p. 44); Samuel Johnson in 1768, supports Shakespeare's unities and tragi-comedy but condemns him for his failure to observe poetic justice: (Johnson on Shakespeare ed. Walter Raleigh, Oxford, 1908: 1968, pp. 24-29, unities, pp. 15-18, tragi-comedy, pp. 20-21 poetic justice); Tate's Lear held the stage till 1765, and Garrick's Lear, a slight variation of Tate's, was staged for another sixty years: (Shakespeare in the Eighteenth Century, by David Nichol Smith, Oxford, 1926, p. 25).
particulars acceptable because the decadent aristocracy of the
Restoration - the new patrons of the drama - lacked the vigour and
stamina to appreciate a great tragedy. Indeed, tragedy does not find a
comfortable dwelling in the domains of poetic justice, but to say that
the death of tragedy occurred because the drama was considered an escape
from pain and suffering, which poetic justice helped to sustain, is
perhaps a neat and hasty generalisation. The drama of the seventeenth
century was indeed not one of great tragedy; but when, if one may ask,
has great tragedy since been written? Or for that matter, has there
ever been any English tragedy comparable to the greatness of Shakespeare's?
The only departure the seventeenth century made was that it tried to
alter Shakespeare's work to conform with the principle of poetic justice,
as well as with several other neo-classical doctrines. It is not because
the new playwrights or the new audiences were incapable of facing
suffering, but because they had their own concept of the function of
drama: and according to that a play should form a pattern consistent
within itself. And as drama was not life, its pattern had to be different
from life: it had to have greater order, harmony and consistency than
life. The stage, therefore, excluded the accidental exceptions in favour
of the expected pattern of life. That the tragic catastrophe is an
inevitability which results from the tragic flaws of the characters
themselves and not from the accidents which a playwright can create
artificially, was, however, beyond the comprehension of the Restoration
temper. No wonder, then the new playwrights thought that Shakespeare
sacrificed his art to the accidental exceptions, and therefore they tried
to make him "fit" the poetic decorum of the new stage by eliminating
those accidents; so that men like Dryden and Tate altered Troilus and

   pp. 16-17, 22, 31-32.
Cressida and King Lear. The happy ending of Lear was not provided as an antidote to the original tragedy, but was offered up to the realisation of the order and harmony which the new drama had evolved. It is significant that even A.C. Bradley feels that the happy ending of King Lear is more satisfactory dramatically.\(^1\) Nigel Alexander, in a recent lecture, remarked that the play as Shakespeare presents it, finds its happy ending symbolically in the fourth act, with the reunion of Lear and Cordelia.\(^2\) The obsession of the seventeenth century with poetic justice is not altogether misplaced. And if Dryden's age could neither write nor appreciate a great tragedy it could at least save its serious drama from the pitfalls of the total lawlessness of sacrificing characters to an arbitrary, random and even absurd chance.

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1. Cf. "If I read King Lear simply as a drama, I find that my feelings call for this 'happy ending'. I do not mean the human, the philanthropic, feelings, but the dramatic sense" (Shakespearean Tragedy, London, 1904:1965, p. 206).

CHAPTER FOUR

CRITICAL INFLUENCES ON DRYDEN

As a critic Dryden responds to many influences. His modus operandi was eclectic, and he tried to draw on whatever he considered good and beautiful in the classical, continental and Renaissance traditions, as well as on contemporary literary tendencies. A happy outcome of all these influences was that Dryden succeeded not only in enriching his critical insight far more than any of his contemporaries, but at the same time could rise above the dogmatism that can accompany a too rigid adherence to an exclusive theory or principle. Dryden's "grounds and reason of all criticism" received its inspiration from "Aristotle with his interpreters, and Horace, and Longinus"; though Cicero, Quintilian and Plutarch also left their impact on him. Corneille and Tasso were the continental critics who influenced Dryden in his early years; later, Rapin, Boileau, Le Bossu and Dacier were mentioned approvingly. Sidney and Hobbes were the English writers influencing Dryden's critical ideas.

Aristotle

Aristotle was the largest single influence on Dryden - and on the seventeenth century at large - in the crystallization of his dramatic theories. Like most of his contemporaries, Dryden received his Aristotle from the French and Italian commentaries on the Poetics.

1. *TC* (1679), 1, 243.
though there is good evidence to suggest that he had read the text in the original Greek, for several Greek words and phrases taken directly from it occur in the Essay of Dramatic Poesy, and this was published before the commentaries of Rapin, Boileau and Dacier had appeared, although those of Scaliger and Castelvetro had appeared nearly a hundred years before the Essay. But whatever the source of the text, Dryden accepted Aristotle's rules in principle and worked out his own theory of their use, and this was quite independent of Aristotle or any of those who followed him blindly, for to Dryden, unlike most of his contemporaries, Aristotle was no demigod; that he was a great genius Dryden was not niggardly in acknowledging but he was not prepared to submit to the authority of Aristotle obsequiously. For that matter, Dryden was not daunted by any of the geniuses of the past. With all modesty, he was prepared to compare himself with Virgil. His allusions to other writers are always informal, of one man talking of another, whether they be great authorities or otherwise. The lack of adulation is refreshing, especially when we remember that most of the writers of the seventeenth century were prepared to swear by the authority of Aristotle.

Dryden made use of Aristotle's authority, or for that matter the authority of any other celebrity, when he wanted to lend weight to his argument or seek sanction for scoring a point against an adversary, as for example in his controversy with Howard and in his reply to Shadwell's attack on his comedy, but this in no way interfered with his independence. He could accept Aristotle's rules only so far as they

1. *Edg* (1668), I, 27, 33, 34, 63, 72, 73, 74.
2. Scaliger's commentary on Aristotle was published in 1561, Castelvetro's in 1570, Rapin's Reflexions was published in 1674 and Boileau's *Art Poetica* in 1674.
3. 'Discourse' (1693), II, 92; Postscript to the *Aeneis* (1697), II, 258.
4. 'Essay' (1668), I, 121, 124; *Evening* (1671), I, 148, 150-151.
helped to reduce "nature into method" and were "founded upon good sense, and sound reason, rather than on authority; for though Aristotle and Horace are produced, yet no man must argue that what they writ is true because they writ it".¹

Like Rymer, Dryden realised that Aristotle's Poetics was based on empirical rather than on prescriptive grounds;² but unlike Rymer - for whom "Nature is the same, and Man is the same" - Dryden believed that "genius of every age is different", and that what was ideal from the point of view of Aristotle's observations on Sophocles and Euripides might not work out for Restoration drama; and to judge English drama by the ancient rules would amount to pushing the clock back.³ Dryden recognised the adequacy of Aristotle's rules, but at the same time he thought their relevance could be challenged in the context of the changed function of drama. He wanted to stake out for the Restoration drama a tenable middle course between strict rules and absolute freedom, and although in doing so he seems to shift backwards and forwards from one attitude to another, creating an impression of inconsistency, he succeeded all the same in rising above the neo-classical bigotry, and so prepared the way for the eighteenth century criticism which exalted good taste above a strict following of rules.

2. "Poets were his Masters, and what was their practice, he reduced to principles" (Rymer, PR (1674), p. 3); Dryden, EDP (1668), I, 27; 'Apology' (1676), I, 200; 'Heads' (1677), I, 218; 'Parallel' (1695), II, 191; Aeneis (1697), II, 226.
3. Rymer, TLA (1677), p. 19; Dryden, EDP (1668), I, 85, cf. Granada (1672), I, 167, 'Epilogue' (1672), I, 170 & n3, 'Heads' (1677), I, 214, 218, AL (1678), I, 231, 'Grounds' (1679), I, 246, Ovid (1680), I, 270, 'Parallel' (1695), II, 195, Fables (1700), II, 285; cf. Watson, I, xiv: "not many Europeans before the nineteenth century had more than a passing intuition of the assumption we all now share that past ages may have governed their behaviour on principles alien to our own. It is a central neoclassical doctrine, from the sixteenth-century Italians to Samuel Johnson that... 'mankind is the same in all ages'".
Very early in his career, in his 'Epistle to Dr. Charlton' (1663), Dryden talks of Aristotle's as "the longest tyranny that ever swayed".¹ Here the subjection to Aristotle's authority is regretted in the field of scientific thought, where, according to Dryden, the Restoration had made a great advance from the "doting ages from Aristotle".² In poetry also, "antiquity alone is no plea for the excellency of a poem"; rather, one age learning from another "has the advantage of knowing more and better than the former";³ and as "natural causes be more known now than in the time of Aristotle, because more studied, it follows that poesy and other arts may, with the same pains, arrive still nearer to perfection". About drama, Dryden observed that "all the rules . . . were delivered to us from the observations which Aristotle made . . . we have added nothing of our own, except we have the confidence to say our wit is better";⁴ and this superior wit was directed to depart from Aristotle's rules when Dryden found them irrelevant or inadequate. For one thing, Dryden believed that Aristotle himself would have changed his rules if he had seen the plays of the new age.⁵

Dryden approved of Aristotle's division of a play into four parts, namely, 'entrance', 'working up of the plot', 'counterturn' and 'catastrophe';⁶ but Dryden's definition of a play, "a just and lively image of human nature, representing its passions and humours, and the changes of fortune to which it is subject, for the delight and instruction of mankind", makes a rather bold departure from Aristotle.⁷

2. EDP (1668), I, 26; cf. 'Discourse' (1693), II, 88.
3. 'Epilogue' (1672), I, 170.
4. EDP (1668), I, 32, 27; cf. 'Parallel' (1695), where Dryden reiterates his earlier stand "not to make new rules of the drama" (II, 195).
5. 'Heads' (1677), I, 218; cf. EDP (1668), I, 43, 'Epilogue' (1672), I, 170 & n.
6. EDP (1668), I, 33; cf. Poetics, ch. 12, p. 33.
7. EDP (1668), I, 25.
Although Aristotle did not define a play as such - Dryden was the first to do so among the classical and English critics - yet his conception of all kinds of poetry is an imitation of human action. The omission of action by Dryden - quite independent of his departure from Aristotle - leaves a great gap in his concept of a play; and this definition indeed does not bring much credit to Dryden.\(^1\) J. Jenson has however suggested that in the context of the critical vocabulary of the seventeenth century the definition held a different meaning. Pointing out the difference between the modern and the seventeenth century meaning of the terms 'just', 'lively' and 'image', Jenson suggests that whereas the modern interpretation of the definition would be "an accurate and entertaining reproduction of the way human beings think and act", to Dryden it meant "a well-proportioned, appropriately expressed, and probable, lifelike, representation . . . of people" in the play.\(^2\) Dean T. Mace explains the exclusion of action from the definition as having a larger significance because Dryden stood more for an imaginative view of drama than a too literal representation on the stage.\(^3\) Edward Pechter thinks that Dryden's definition conveys a "doubleness" which is at the centre of his criticism as a whole (by doubleness Pechter means Dryden's ability to perceive "literary qualities in terms of complementaries" rather than mutually exclusive values).\(^4\) But more plausibly than these various conflicting interpretations, this rather loose definition seems the attempt of a first discoverer trying to draw


his maps with "some few outlines of somewhat taken at a distance, and which the designer saw not clearly", for when, a decade later, Dryden defined tragedy, he was more sure of his design. Tragedy, he says, is "an imitation of one entire, great, and probable action; not told, but represented; which, by moving in us fear and pity, is conducive to the purging of those two passions in our minds"; and in the commentary which follows, Dryden dilates upon the virtues of action, namely its singleness, entirety, greatness and probability. The emphasis on pity and fear is also more pronounced here than was for example earlier in the Essay of Dramatic Poesy and in the dedication to Annus Mirabilis where Dryden singles out "admiration and concernment" as the objects of a tragedy. The definition now is almost identical with Aristotle's recommendation for tragedy though, in total departure from Aristotle, Dryden does not pay attention to Aristotle's concern for language - his "diction" and "thought".

Dryden, as we have seen above (p. 80 and n. 2), shows some rare moments of insight in understanding Aristotle's concept of tragedy; but in accepting poetic justice - a great Restoration obsession - in fundamentals, he also failed, like his contemporaries, to realise that Aristotle's emphasis on 'pity' and 'terror' in tragedy is incompatible with the principle of poetic justice. Moreover, Dryden did not accept the emotions of 'pity' and 'terror' to the exclusion of the other emotions, for he recommended that "joy, anger, love, fear are to be used as the poet's commonplaces".

1. 'Heroic' (1672), I, 159.
2. 'Grounds' (1679), I, 243.
4. 'Grounds' (1679), I, 245; cf. Poetics, ch. 6-14, pp. 19-41, ch. 6, p. 17: a tragedy is an imitation of action "in language with pleasurable accessories".
5. 'Heads' (1677), I, 213, 217; cf. 'Grounds' (1679), I, 253.
Like Aristotle, Dryden recognised that in tragedy "'tis not necessary that there should be historical truth in it; but always necessary that there should be a likeness of truth, something that is more than barely possible, probable being that which succeeds or happens oftener than it misses".\(^1\) Rymer was a great advocate of Aristotelian probability but he took it as a synonym for decorum.\(^2\) Dryden did not go so far and could see clearly the distinction between the two. Moreover, he was less particular than Rymer about probability, and rather more so about decorum.\(^3\) For Rymer, unlike most of the seventeenth century writers, tragedy was the greatest work of art. Dryden, like Aristotle, preferred tragedy to comedy,\(^4\) but he defied Aristotle's preference for tragedy to epic:

It is one reason of Aristotle's to prove that tragedy is the more noble because it turns in a shorter compass . . . He might prove as well that a mushroom is to be preferred before a peach, because it shoots up in the compass of a night . . . besides, what virtue is there in a tragedy which is not contained in an epic poem?\(^5\)

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2. TLA (1677), "The Characters are all improbable and unproper . . . ", "I question whether in Poetry a King can be an accessory to a crime", pp. 42, 65.
4. Comedy is low and inferior; Secret (1668), I, 105, 'Essay' (1668), I 120, Evening (1671), I, 145, 152, 'Parallel' (1695), II, 185, 189 - 190, 193; cites authority of Aristotle: 'Parallel' (1695), II, 185; epic superior to tragedy: observes his departure from Aristotle, 'Discourse' (1693), II, 95-96; Aeneis (1697), II, 227; cf. Poetics, ch. 5, p. 15, ch. 26, pp. 89-91; cf. Jonson, Discoveries (1640): "The parts of a comedie are the same with a Tragedie, and the end is partly the same. For they both delight and teach"; Herford and Simpson, VIII, 643; cf. Rymer & Milton, see above, p.36 & n2.
5. Aeneis (1697), II, 227; cf. 'Discourse' (1693), II, 96; Poetics, ch. 26, pp. 89-91.
Aristotle's most important recommendation for the drama, plot, proved a great stumbling block for the Restoration playwrights. For Rymer, plot was synonymous with fable, as it had been for Aristotle: "The action is represented in the play by the Fable or Plot".\(^1\) Ben Jonson also thought that "the Fable and Fiction is [as it were] the forme and Soule of any poetical worke", and he constantly used the term fable for plot.\(^2\) It was left to Milton to draw a distinction between the two in his preface to *Samson Agonistes* (1671): "The plot . . . is nothing indeed but such economy or disposition of the fable, as may stand best with verisimilitude and decorum".\(^3\) The neo-classical unities of time, place and action were the prescribed means of realising verisimilitude in the play. Aristotle only mentions unity of action in the *Poetics*, unity of time by implication but unity of place nowhere - a fact recognised by Dryden's Eugenius;\(^4\) the last two unities came to be associated with Aristotle because of the misreading of the *Poetics* by the Italian commentators and practice of the French poets.\(^5\)

Dryden, unlike Rymer and Ben Jonson, distinguished clearly between plot and fable,\(^6\) and also unlike Rymer, plot is of secondary importance for Dryden, more important parts of a play being the beauties of thought, characterisation, manners and expression;\(^7\) and he disagreed with Rymer for prescribing too circumscribed a plot for the English stage. He

1. TLA (1677), p. 18; *Poetics*, ch. 6, p. 19.
2. Discoveries (1640), Herford and Simpson, VIII, 635, 645-649.
4. EDP (1668), I, 36.
5. Cf. *Poetics*, ch. 7, p. 25: "a length which allows of the hero passing by a series of probable or necessary stages from misfortune to happiness, or from happiness to misery; may suffice as a limit for the magnitude of the story", is all the indication of the unity of time in the *Poetics*.
6. 'Heads' (1677), I, 217.
could accept the "mechanic beauties of the plot" so long as they did not sacrifice other more essential beauties of a play.¹ As a playwright he moved backwards and forwards, making departures from the rules to suit his convenience. As a critic, his emphasis is sometimes on regular construction, as in the 'Grounds of Criticism', where he condemns Shakespeare and Fletcher for their defective plots; but in the 'Heads of an Answer' he thinks that the Elizabethans are superior to the ancient playwrights in spite of their irregular plots.² This flexible attitude to rules is best illustrated in Dryden's first critical discussion of the problem, in the Essay of Dramatic Poesy, where Neander recommends flexibility of rules and defends the irregular plays of Shakespeare and Fletcher because they are masculine even though irregular. He also defends English tragi-comedy, which Lisideius had earlier described as absurd. In reply to Lisideius¹ and Critics' admiration of French plays for their regularity, and the former's criticism of Shakespeare's historical plays for their violation of the unity of time, Neander cites the case of Corneille who advocated latitude to rules in his 'Discourse of the Three Unities'. French drama, as Neander argues, sacrificed many beauties in order to observe the unity of place: their beauties are those of a "statue, but not of a man, because not animated with the soul of poesy, which is imitation of humour and passions". Another to support Neander's views is Eugenius, who argues that the ancients committed too many absurdities to confine a play to a limit of twenty-four hours, and to substantiate his argument he cites the example of Terence who neglected the unity of time.³

1. AL (1678), I, 222; 'Grounds' (1679), I, 247.
2. 'Grounds' (1679), I, 246 f, 'Heads' (1677), I, 215.
3. EDP (1668), I, 44-47, 45, 29, 56, 36-38.
In his next essay, however, Dryden supports the unities in answer to Howard's attack on them. As a practising playwright, Dryden sometimes preferred to sacrifice the unities "to gain a greater beauty", and yet again, in conformity with neo-classical practice, he sometimes observed them more strictly than the English stage required. Similarly in the critical prefaces, Dryden is sometimes apologetic for his failure to observe the unities, and sometimes offered instead a justification for doing so.

In his dedication to The Indian Emperor (1667), Dryden apologises for the play being "an irregular piece, if compared with many of Corneille's", and offers in defence that it was "written with more flame than art". In the prologue to his next play, Secret Love (1668), he commends himself for observing the exactest rules of "the unities of action, place and time" though in the preface he expresses his reservations about the virtue of regularity in the absence of "air and spirit (which consists in the writing) to set it off". Again, in the preface to Tyrannic Love (1670), he is proud of the fact that "the scenes are everywhere unbroken, and the unities of place and time [are] more exactly kept than perhaps is requisite in a tragedy", or than had been done in his Conquest of Granada. In his 'Defence of the Epilogue' (1672), when Dryden was most committed to neo-classical values the Elizabethan dramatists are severely criticised for the "lameness of their plots". In 'Heads of an Answer to Rymer' (1677) he upholds the

1. 'Essay' (1668), I, 124-129.
2. id (1690), II, 49; Al (1678), I, 222.
5. Tyrannic (1670), I, 141.
6. 'Epilogue' (1672), I, 172.
English tragedy in spite of the irregular plots and also approves of
double action in a play; though soon after he wrote his tragedy,
All for Love (1678), observing all three unities despite his reservations
about the appropriateness of Greek models for the English theatre in
the preface itself.¹ Again, in the preface to Troilus and Cressida (1679) and
'Grounds of Criticism in Tragedy' Dryden stands for the unities and not
only condemns Shakespeare's historical plays but also his own play,
Marriage A-La-Mode, for its double action.²

After Troilus and Cressida we find a total collapse of Dryden's
neo-classical mood, and now in his prefaces any allusion to his
failure to observe the unities is defensive rather than apologetic.
For example, in his next play, The Spanish Friar (1681), he employed
double action and justified his breach of the rule "for the pleasure of
variety".³ Although in the following essay, The Life of Plutarch (1683),
he praised Aristotle for recommending singleness of action,⁴ in none
of the plays written during this period did he care to observe
(1683), justifying his violation of the unities of time and place, Dryden
remarked: "for this once we were resolved to err with honest
Shakespeare",⁵ and in the preface to Don Sebastian (1690), his tone
was one of open defiance of the rules: "I have not exactly kept to the
three mechanic rules of unity: I knew them . . . but followed them only
at a distance; for the genius of the English cannot bear too regular a
play".⁶ Again, in the preface to Cleomenes (1690), he said: "some of

¹ 'Heads' (1677), I, 215-216; AL (1678), I, 222, 231.
² TC (1679), I, 240-241, 243-244; 'Grounds' (1679), I, 244 ff.
³ Spanish (1681), I, 279.
⁴ Plutarch (1683), II, 7-8.
⁵ Works, VII, 153.
⁶ DS (1690), II, 49.
the mechanic rules of unity are observed, and others are neglected"; and, "it is better to trespass on a rule, than leave out a beauty".  

In his dedication to *Examen Poeticum* (1693) Dryden criticised the French drama for its "thin design, without episodes, and managed by few persons", and observed that the English audiences are pleased with variety of events and under plots, so while the French "follow the Ancients too servilely in the mechanic rules" we keep them "only in view at too great a distance". In the dedication to his last play, *Love Triumphant* (1694), Dryden justified his abandoning the unity of place by declaring that:

I have followed the example of Corneille, and stretched the latitude to a street and palace, not far distant from each other in the same city. They, who will not allow this liberty to a poet, make it a very ridiculous thing for an audience to suppose themselves, sometimes to be in a field, sometimes in a garden, and at other times in a chamber. There are not, indeed, so many absurdities in their supposition, as in ours; but it is an original absurdity for the audience to suppose themselves to be in any other place, than in the very theatre in which they sit; which is neither chamber, nor garden, nor yet a public place of any business, but that of the representation.

In defending his double action he affirmed that "even this is a fault which I should often practise, if I were to write again, because it is agreeable to the English genius".  

The anti-neo-classical mood persisted even after Dryden had given up writing plays, so that the revolt against the rules, unlike Corneille's, was much more than the self-justification of a practising dramatist. Dryden is condescending about the unities in his letter to William Walsh (1693), in the prologue to *The Double Dealer* (1694), and in 'A Parallel of Poetry and Painting' (1695). In the dedication to the

1. Works, VIII, 197, 198.

2. (1693), II, 161.

3. Works, VIII, 341; cf. Samuel Johnson, "the spectators are always in their senses, and know, from the first act to the last, that the stage is only a stage and that the players are only players" (Johnson on Shakespeare, ed. Walter Raleigh, Oxford, 1908, p. 27).

Aeneis (1697) his opposition to the unities is reinforced: "there is no such absolute necessity that the time of a stage action should so strictly be confined to twenty-four hours as never to exceed them . . . Some longer space on some occasions . . . may be allowed, especially for the English theatre, which requires more variety of incidents than the French . . . and better a mechanic rule were stretched or broken than a great beauty were omitted", and as he argues, one of his reasons for preferring epic to tragedy is that, as opposed to a tragedy, an epic offers adequate time for the development of passions. Later in the same essay he declares: "let the French and Italians value themselves on their regularity; strength and elevation are our standard".¹

As the attached graph shows clearly, Dryden favoured the neo-classical unities until 1679 and after this period he rejects them.

Most of the important critics and playwrights like Shadwell, Rymer, Dennis, Congreve and Charles Gildon, advocated, on the whole, the observance of the unities, with only mild concessions to them occasionally.²


2. Shadwell, in the preface to The Sullen Lovers (1668), claims that he has observed the "three unities", though later, he speaks for "pleasure" rather than "exactness"; M. Summers, ed. The Complete Works of Thomas Shadwell, 5 vols., London, 1927, I, 10, 12); in the preface to The Royal Shepherdess (1669), Shadwell is more for the English practice of action on the stage than the long narrative of the French, although where possible he tries to keep his "Scenes unbroken"; Summers, I, 89; in the prologue to The Libertine (1676), Shadwell defies the unities by offering "the most irregular Play upon the Stage", (Summers, III, 23); Rymer, see above, pp. 34-35; Dennis, in his Advertisement to the Reader from a Plot, and No Plot (1697), refers to the unities of action and time being "exactly observ'd" (Hooker, I, 145), and in his Letter to Walter Moyle (1695), also upholds the unities (Hooker, II, 386); but a concession to the rules is suggested in favour of "Sovereign Beauty" in a Letter to Sir John Edgar (1720) (Hooker, II, 198); and also in the discussion of Dryden's Oedipus in The Impartial Critick (1693), (Hooker, I, 22); in the dedication to The Double-Dealer (1694), Congreve commends his own singleness of plot and the observance of the three unities of the drama "to the utmost severity" (Summers, The Complete Works of William Congreve, 4 vols., London, 1923, II, 10); Charles Gildon, see above, p. 3 and n5.
Figure I: Dryden's attitude to the unities, 1660-1700

1. Dedication, Indian Emperor (1667)  
   attitude wavers
2. Essay of Dramatic Poesy (1668)  
   multiple views
3. 'Defence of an Essay' (1668)  
   for unities
4. Prologue, Secret Love (1668)  
   for unities
5. Preface, Tyrannic Love (1670)  
   for unities
6. 'Defence of an Epilogue' (1672)  
   for unities
7. 'Heads of an Answer' (1677)  
   against unities
8. Preface, All for Love (1678)  
   for unities
9. Preface, Troilus and Cressida (1679)  
   for unities
10. Dedication, Spanish Friar (1681)  
    against unities
11. 'Life of Plutarch' (1683)  
    for unity of action
12. Preface, Don Sebastian (1690)  
    against unities
13. Preface, Cleomenes (1690)  
    against unities
14. Dedication, Examen Poeticum (1693)  
    against unities
15. Vindication of Duke of Guise (1693)  
    against unities
16. Prologue, Double Dealer (1694)  
    against unities
17. Dedication, Love Triumphant (1694)  
    against unities
18. Dedication, Aeneis (1697)  
    against unities

Summary:

1667-1668  ...  attitude fluctuates
1668-1679  ...  for the unities
1681-1683  ...  attitude fluctuates
1690-1697  ...  against the unities
On the other hand, Milton and Jeremy Collier stood wholly for the unités,\(^1\) while others like Margaret Cavendish, Robert Howard, Samuel Butler, William Temple and Farquhar totally opposed the rules.\(^2\)

**Horace**

Influence of Horace on Dryden is at once more profound and personal than any other classical critic. For one thing, Dryden's acquaintance with Horace was direct rather than through any mediator from France or Italy, as in the case of Aristotle and Longinus, for although Ben Jonson's translation of Horace's *Ars Poetica* had been published in 1640, and Roscommon's in 1680,\(^3\) Dryden's source of the *Ars Poetica*, as well as the Epistles and Satires, was the Latin itself. Also, Horace's Epicurean philosophy was somewhat closer to Dryden's disposition than Aristotle's formal precepts nurtured on empirical and scientific knowledge. Dryden's criticism, as such, is full of Horace's quotations, allusions and reminiscences.

1. In his preface to *Samson Agonistes* (1671), Milton is all for "verisimilitude and decorum" (Milton's Poetical Works, ed. David Masson, 3 vols., London, 1874, II, 98); Jeremy Collier also supports the unités wholeheartedly: (A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the Stage, London, 2nd ed., 1698, pp. 228-231).

2. Margaret Cavendish, in her address 'To the Readers', Series I, to her Plays (1662) strongly recommends freedom from the rules, because otherwise plays would be very flat and dull; in the preface to *The Great Favourite* (1668), Robert Howard, arguing against Dryden who had permitted minor latitudes to the unities of time and place, advocates greater concessions (Spingarn, II, 108-110); Samuel Butler wrote a poem, Upon the Critics Who Judge of Modern Plays Precisely by the Rules of the Antients (1778), in which he condemned such critics and their ancient rules (Spingarn, II, 278-280); William Temple, in Of Poetry (1690), says that the rules work against the "spirit and grace" of poetry, and even at best they serve a negative function of helping some people to avoid being bad poets, though they can never make anyone a good poet (Spingarn, III, 83-85); in his Discourse upon Comedy (1702), Farquhar offers the most vehement opposition to the unités of time and place, upholding only the unity of action (Eighteenth Century Critical Essays, ed. Scott Elledge, 2 vols., Cornell, 1961, I, 80-90, 93-99).

3. Ovid (1680), I, 286 & n.
Dryden's assumption that Horace's *Art of Poetry* is an "excellent comment" on Aristotle's *Poetics*, is somewhat intriguing; perhaps he tried to graft Horace on Aristotle after the example of Rapin,¹ for otherwise, in spite of a marked Aristotelian influence, Horace's work is anything but a commentary on Aristotle's. The *Ars Poetica*, unlike the *Poetics*, is not an empirical treatise. The latter is the impersonal observations of a philosopher whereas the former is the personal advice of a poet to his fellow poets - the very occasion of its composition being a private request by his "friends the Pisos".² Horace's treatment lacks Aristotle's comprehensiveness, his force of sustained argument, and even at times coherence. With all these limitations, however, the *Ars Poetica* makes a delightful reading because of its air of casualness and its personal and confidential dialogue with its readers. Dryden, as he said, liked writing "in a loose, epistolary way... after the example of Horace", who "observes no method that [he] can trace";³ and Dryden emulated this informal and casual manner to such an extent that in his serious critical discussions he forgot the names of the critics he was alluding to, and rather than check up he just confided in his readers.⁴

In content the two treatises differ: Aristotle's *Poetics* is concerned largely with dramatic issues - of comedy and tragedy and of tragedy in relation to the epic - whereas Horace is occupied more with the function of poetry, and dramatic poetry, though he thinks it to be superior to other forms, is not his sole concern as a poet. Thus, in

3. Aeneis (1697), II, 232.
4. 'Parallel' (1695), II, 202, Aeneis (1697), II, 233, 239.
his discussion of unity, Aristotle is occupied primarily with the unity of plot in a play, whereas Horace, while he borrows the concept of unity from Aristotle, is more concerned with the unity of poetry. Moreover, Horace emphasises the twin functions of pleasure and instruction in poetry, whereas Aristotle does not mention instruction specifically; and satiric poetry, to which Horace gives some attention in his Ars Poetica, is not mentioned in the Poetics. Horace recommends dividing a play into five acts, while Aristotle advises the division of a tragedy into four parts.\(^1\)

Dryden admired Horace for his "three different talents; as . . . a critic, a satirist, and a writer of odes".\(^2\) As a critic, Dryden thought, Horace, though "the most severe of critics", yet conceded that "when there are many beauties in a poem, it will not be I who will find fault with its few blemishes".\(^3\) For the art of "true criticism", Horace is "most instructive";\(^4\) and, Dryden in his criticism, as we have seen above (pp. 12-13), is highly influenced by Horace's precepts.

Like Horace, Dryden praised his predecessors where praise was due and also drew attention to their defects; his "design", as Horace's, being, "to improve the knowledge of poetry".\(^5\) Like Horace, Dryden thought that poetry can improve not only by the examples of the past but also by a

1. Horace on the Art of Poetry, ed. E.H. Blakeney, London, 1928, pp. 41-42, 54, 50, 48; My discussion of the Ars Poetica is based on the English translation of Blakeney, but for the individual couplets cited in the text I have made use of Watson's English renderings as I have found them more lucid.

2. Sylva (1665), II, 30.

3. EDP (1668), I, 76-77 & n; cf. 'Apology' (1677), I, 197, Sylva (1665), II, 29, Aeneis (1697), II, 236; Ars Poetica, II, pp. 351-352.


5. Assignation (1673), I, 188.
recognition of the excellences of one's own age; and to Horace, Dryden owed the conviction that if the ancients were now alive they would write in conformity with the new age. Accordingly, Dryden not only adapted the creative works of the geniuses of the past but also modified the critical principles of the classical critics to suit the needs of his age.

Dryden admired Horace for the elegance of his words and for the purity and nobility of his diction. Though a great admirer of Virgil's style, Dryden thought he had more spirit in his words than Virgil. Horace's "briskness, his jollity, and his good humour" Dryden tried to copy; "his other excellencies ... are above my imitation"; "few of our noblemen" have been able to "understand critically the delicacies of Horace". Nevertheless, Dryden tried to learn from Horace several of the delicacies to improve the English language. For example, after the innovation of Horace Dryden tried to impart a new force to a well known word by a skilful setting; and after Horace's precept that "new words, and newly coined, will be accepted if they flow from a Greek source with only slight distortion", Dryden coined words from Latin by giving them English terminations. From Horace again, who observed: "many terms

1. EDP (1668), I, 23, 27, 32-33; 'Heads' (1677), I, 211 ff; AL (1678), I, 231; 'Discourse' (1693), II, 81; Examen (1693), I, 161; Horace: "it angers me when anything is blamed, not for being ill written or inelegant, but for being new", and "if poems, like wine, improved with every passing day, I should like to know which year is best for literature" (Epistles, II, 76-77, 34-35), see Watson, I, 23 n.

2. EDP (1668), I, 41, 43 & n, 'Epilogue' (1672), I, 170 & n; cf. 'Heads' (1677), I, 218, 'Discourse' (1693), II, 154-155, Aeneis (1697), I, 247; Horace: "if Fate had deferred his [Lucius'] birth to this age of ours ... he had altered many things ... that he might accommodate himself to the age he lived in" (Satires, I, 10, 68), see Watson, I, 43 n.


4. Sylvae (1685), II, 31; Dedication to Cleomenes (1690), Works, VIII, 193.

fallen out of use shall be reborn, and others now in repute shall fall, if usage wills it so, in whose power lies the judging and the law and the rule of speech", Dryden learnt to adopt the test of usage as the best criterion for reviving and rejecting words.¹

In his theory of translation also Dryden rejected the method of literal translation after the warning of Horace.² Again, Dryden's conviction that a genius can not be produced by rules and learning, shows the impact of Horace's observation: "you will say and do nothing unless Minerva wishes it".³

In the drama, Dryden expounded many of Horace's recommendations. The five-act division was quite an accepted pattern of a play in the Restoration drama.⁴ Dryden accepted Horace's instruction, "let your aim be what it will, so long as it is single and one",⁵ in theory, at any rate, for in practice several of his plays, like Indian Emperor, Secret Love, Spanish Friar, Marriage A-La-Mode, Don Sebastian have inconsistent design and double action. In theory again, Dryden was in agreement with Horace's advice, "do not bring on stage what should be performed off, and keep much from our eyes to be told by the actor's ready tongue.

Medea must not butcher her boys before the audience",⁶ and in some of

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1. ¹EDP (1668), I, 39, Fables (1700), II, 288; Horace: Ars Poetica, II, 70-72, see Watson, I, 39 n; cf. below, p. 133.
2. ²Ovid (1680), I, 268; cf. Aeneis (1697), II, 245; Horace, Ars Poetica II, 133-134.
3. ³Ars Poetica, I, 385, see Watson, II, 195 n, see below, pp. 123-124.
4. ⁴Ars Poetica, I, 189; "let no play be shorter or longer than five acts", see Watson, I, 34 n; who first gave the idea of the five-act division has still not been established, vide, Watson, I, 33 n.
5. ⁵'Discourse' (1693), II, 145; Horace, Ars Poetica, I, 23, see Watson, II, 145 n; cf. Aristotle, see above, pp. 97-100.
his best known plays like Aureng-Zeb, _All for Love_, Cleomenes and Don Sebastian, acts of cruelty are avoided on the stage; though in general he fails to exercise the necessary restraint so that there are many onstage battles and deaths in his heroic plays. Again, Horace's advice, that "tragedy thinks it unworthy to chatter silly verses", Dryden carried to the point of mistaken exaggeration - Horace and Aristotle, in recommending the proper diction for tragedy, surely did not have the heroic rant and bombast in mind. In his theory of manners for a dramatic character, Dryden, as we will see, is highly influenced by Horace's precepts. How much Dryden, as well as the seventeenth century at large, was responsive to Horace's recommendation that a "poet's aim is either to profit or to please, or to blend in one the delightful and the useful", is best shown by the hold of the principle of poetic justice on the drama and criticism of the period. However, with all the personal charm and impact of Horace, Dryden departed from him, as much as he did from Aristotle, when he felt the necessity to do so. Thus, Dryden found Horace's recommendation of the study and example of Greek models to be an impracticable advice for English tragedy, which needed to be built on a large rather than a regular compass.

1. Epilogue to _A_ (1676), I, 193 where Dryden is proud of the fact that his "scenes . . . [are] freed from noise and blood", cf. 'Heroic' (1672), I, 162, where he defends his use of "drums and trumpets".

2. _Ars Poetica_, I, 231, see Watson, I, 87 n; _EDP_ (1668), I, 87, _Spanish_ (1661), I, 277.

3. 'Grounds' (1679), I, 249 & n, _Ars Poetica_, II, 126-127, see below, p. 176 & n.3.


5. "Look to your Greek models by night and day" (Ars Poetica, II, 268, see Watson, I, 231 n); cf. Pope, "Be his [Homer's] great Works your Study and Delight / Read them by Day, and meditate by Night" (Essay on Criticism (1711), reproduced by Robert M. Schmitz, Washington, 1962, p. 47).

6. 'Heads' (1677), I, 219, _AL_ (1678), I, 231; see above, p. 100.
Longinus

While Aristotle and Horace were well known in seventeenth-century criticism, Longinus was almost wholly neglected. This is quite understandable, for the impressionistic and interpretative nature of Longinus' treatise was quite alien to the analytical and technical spirit of the neo-classical critics. Moreover, the function of criticism was considered to be the analysis of faults - of "a work's divergence from accepted norms and canons", and Longinus' emphasis on bold and daring strokes at the cost of regularity and order was totally unacceptable to the age of Rymer. However, Longinus had at no time gained any popularity in English criticism; A.F.B. Clark has pointed out that "none of the Elizabethan or Jacobean critics (even Ben Jonson) mention his name or show any knowledge of him or any trace of his influence". In 1636 Gerard Langbaine the Elder translated Longinus' text into Latin, and this evoked some interest in Longinus but left no impact on the criticism of the period. In 1652 came the first English translation, John Hall's Longinus of the Height of Eloquence rendered out of the original. Boileau's French translation was published in 1674, and in 1680 J. Pulteney published an English translation based on Boileau's version, entitled A Treatise of the Loftiness or Elegancy of Speech.

The word 'sublime' had 'existed in English aesthetic usage since the Renaissance but 'acquired its present connotation after Boileau's translation into French of Longinus' The Traité du Sublime. Before Boileau, "the 'style sublime' . . . was a matter of words, not of thought, and was the very antithesis of 'simplicity' . . . Boileau

1. Spingarn, I, xcvi.
defined the word anew", as a "great thought expressed in the simplest language". In tracing the semantic career of the word in English literature, Samuel Monk has worked out that before Boileau, Chaucer had referred to "heigh style" in his Canterbury Tales, but this was not in the sense of Longinus' meaning, since Chaucer used it to signify a style ornate and rhetorical. Spenser used the word 'sublime' once in the Faerie Queene, but in the sense of 'proud', and he had no conception of the word as used by Longinus. Even Milton, with all his sublime heights in poetry, mentioned Longinus only once, in his essay 'Of Education'.

Among the Restoration critics, even after the publication of Boileau's translation, only Dryden responded to the idea of the sublime. Hobbes praised the "elevation of Fancie", in which "consisteth the Sublimity of a Poet which is that Poetical Fury which the Readers for the most part call for", but this sublimity must be tempered with judgment and used with "Discretion". William Temple alluded to the Longinian concept of the sublime when he said that "true Poetical Fire" would be "fertile in a thousand Productions, ranging over infinite Ground, piercing into every Corner . . . discovering a thousand little Bodies or Images in the World, and Similitudes among them, unseen to common Eyes, and which could not be discovered without the Rays of that Sun". William Wotton is another critic who reflected a Longinian influence in his statement that liberty "inspires Men with Lofty Thoughts, and elevates their Souls to a higher Pitch than Rules of Art can direct. Books of Rhetorick make Man Copious and Methodical; but they alone can never infuse that true Enthusiastick Rage which Liberty breaths into their Souls who enjoy it", but he too thought that its enthusiastic rage must

have the guidance of a "Sedate Judgment".  

Dryden's significance thus lies not in formulating any theory of the sublime - for that he did not; nor did he seize upon the sublime for ambitious and daring concepts in his works - but in the fact that he was almost the first critic to admire Longinus; and to agree with him, for with Longinus he believed that there are effects in literature which can be achieved only through the strokes of genius. Nurtured in the neo-classical environment of rules, Dryden was quite unusual in admiring so warmly the critical theories of Longinus - and the fact that while admiring him, Dryden did not consider it necessary to reject Aristotle and Horace speaks for the catholicity of his mind, where opposites could co-exist. So, while he drew on Aristotle and Horace for deriving the rules for the drama, Dryden was essentially a Longinian in ignoring the rules when the graces of sublimity were in question. In Longinus, Dryden could seek the necessary support for his intuitive response to the criticism where rules could not be a reliable yardstick for discerning the beauties of a work, for a great genius very often ignores the rules but is still to be preferred to "the middling or indifferent one which makes few faults, but seldom or never rises to any excellence".

Dryden got his Longinus from Boileau. A.F. Clark has pointed out that Longinus' influence was totally absent from Dryden's criticism until 1674, and that in the 'Apology for Heroic Poetry' (1677), written after the publication of Boileau's translation, Longinus is mentioned.

1. Hobbes, The Virtues of an Heroic Poem (1675), Spingarn, II, 70; Temple, Of Poetry (1690), Spingarn, III, 81; Reflections upon Ancient and Modern Learning (1694), III, 211-212.  
2. 'Apology' (1677), I, 197; cf. "Longinus, who was undoubtedly, after Aristotle, the greatest critic among the Greeks", I, 197.  
four times. It is indeed true that the word 'sublime' entered Dryden's
critical vocabulary at that time and that the influence of Longinus is
quite marked after 1674, but it is equally interesting to note that
even before his discovery of Longinus, Dryden responded intuitively to
the "graces beyond the reach of art", for as we have seen, Aristotle's
rules never entirely agreed with Dryden's temperament. As early as in
the Essay of Dramatic Poesy, Neander not only condoned some of the
irregularities of Shakespeare but positively admired him. Moreover, in
placing Shakespeare above Jonson, that is above learning, Dryden's
recognition of the transcendent quality of a genius above rules goes
back to a date earlier than his acquaintance with Longinus. Also,
Dryden's theory of the diction proper to tragedy and the heroic play - a
concept which he got from Aristotle and Horace and which is found in his
criticism before 1674 - comes very close to Longinus' concept of a
proper style, though the effect of the two styles is totally different;
in Longinus it is directed to simplicity and in Dryden it is highly
artificial and bombastic.

For Longinus, "art is perfect just when it seems to be nature, and
nature successful when the art underlies it unnoticed"; and Dryden
consistently upheld the concept of "imitation of nature" in drama. Similarly, though Dryden read in Longinus that one road to the sublime
is by imitation and emulation; his own conviction of the virtue of this

2. For the word 'sublime' see I, 196, 197, 207, 259, 277, II, 10,
   25, 61, 121, 243, and for Longinus' influence see I, 197, 198,
   202, 203, 242, 254, 257.
3. EDP (1668), I, 70; see below, pp. 193-200.
   Ch. 22, p. 45; Dryden, according to Mary Thale, was the first
critic to introduce and popularise the concept of "imitation of
nature" in English dramatic criticism, ('Dryden's Critical
precept goes back to a time earlier than 1674. As we have seen, he borrowed from and imitated those he admired without any reservations and made no secret of it - much to the chagrin of some of his detractors; for rather than suppress his sources he openly acknowledges them. It is therefore, obvious that, independently of Longinus also, Dryden had been striving for effects in literature, which, when he read Longinus, he came to recognise as sublime. After the publication of Boileau's translation most of these concepts were crystallised, so that Dryden could now positively recommend criticism by merit rather than by defect. However, this principle had been an integral part of his critical theory, either from the example of Horace or even independently of Horace, because of his instinctive dislike of arrogance and the fault-finding vogue of criticism. After he read Boileau's translation, Dryden drew on some of Longinus' concepts; for example, he found support for his idea of imaging in poetry in Longinus and after him Dryden defines it as "a discourse which, by a kind of enthusiasm, or extraordinary emotion of the soul, makes it seem to us...

1. "We ought not to regard a good imitation as a theft, but as a beautiful idea of him who undertakes to imitate" (Longinus, ch. 13, cited by Dryden in 'Grounds' I, 242) in 1679; Dryden: "the employment of a poet is like that of a curious gunsmith or watchmaker: the iron or silver is not his own" in 1671, Evening, I, 155.

2. Gerard Langbaine, for example, finds Dryden's unconcealed borrowings utterly unforgivable and attributes them to his inability to invent his own plots. Langbaine, however condones Dryden's borrowings from the Greek and Latin poets though he finds it outrageous that Dryden should have borrowed from the Italian, Spanish, French and English "Wits... notwithstanding his contempt for them" (An Account of the English Dramatic Poets, Oxford, 1691, Solar Press Facsimile, 1971, pp. 145-146, 148-149.

3. For the critical acknowledgements, see below, pp. 118-119; for the plays, see Dryden's acknowledgements, such as, he followed, "Jonson's humour with Corneli\'s rhyme", prologue to Secret, I, 108; imitated "the practice of the Ancients" and the style of Shakespeare, AL (1678), I, 230-31; borrowed the quarrel scene of Euripides, IC (1679), I, 241; cf. Evening (1671), where Dryden vindicates his practice once and for all: "where ever I have liked any story in a romance, novel, or foreign play, I have made no difficulty, nor ever shall, to take the foundation of it, to build it up, and to make it proper for the English stage" I, 153; Langbaine's strictures on Dryden, in the light of such a candid confession, have no relevance.
that we behold those things which the poet paints". After Longinus again, Dryden based his concept of passions in a character, and how to employ those passions artfully and make the discourse lofty. To write pathetically is a way to realise this, and for it Dryden is indebted to Longinus; and also for the idea that the use of metaphors helps to raise the passions.

Other Critical Influences

(a) Classical

There remain several critics who together formed part of the cultural milieu in which Dryden lived and wrote, and whose influence on Dryden is much less marked than those of the three major classical critics. Among the classical critics, the Roman rhetoricians, Cicero and Quintilian, are supposed to have influenced Dryden in the art of arguing. Virgil, Homer and Horace left their impact on Dryden's style, and Mary Thale has pointed out how Dryden made use of the non-dramatic qualities of epic poems by Virgil, Homer and Ovid for his dramatic purposes and tried to make the classics "relevant to the modern literary situation" and that he made "reappraisals of modern literature in the light of the classics". Plato's influence on Dryden was scanty but he assimilated many of the Platonic traits through Longinus who with his divine aspirations was a platonist. Plutarch's impact is to be seen in

1. 'Apology' (1677), I, 203; Longinus on the Sublime, ch. 15, pp. 32-37.
2. 'Grounds' (1679), I, 254; Longinus on . . . , ch. 3, 8, pp. 13-14.
3. 'Grounds' (1679), I, 257; Longinus on . . . , ch. 32, pp. 57-60.
Dryden's digressions; his great enthusiasm for Plutarch's diversions, "when . . . [he] strikes a little out of the common road . . . we are sure to be the better for . . . [his] wanderings . . . the great reason of his frequent starts is the variety of his learning; he knew so much of nature, was so vastly furnished with all the treasures of the mind, that he was . . . forced . . . to lay down some at every passage, and to scatter his riches as he went", \(^1\) extends to the point of emulating him since Dryden's own digressions are full of similar beauties and treasures. The general impact of the classical influence has been well summed up by Robert Hume according to whom Dryden tried to strike a "delicate balance" between his English predecessors and "classical foundations" and that his borrowings are largely creative.\(^2\)

(b) French

Dryden held the French critics in great esteem: "impartially speaking, the French are as much better critics than the English, as they are worse poets".\(^3\) For the influence of the French critics on him, A.F. Clark's findings are by far the most valuable for students of the Restoration period. The influence of Boileau,\(^4\)

1. Plutarch (1683), II, 9.
2. Dryden's Criticism, p. ix.
4. For Boileau's influence, see Clark, Boileau and the French Classical Critics in England, pp. 6, 7, 155, 156, 309, who suggests Dryden was influenced more by Boileau the poet and satirist than by Boileau the critic; cf. F.L. Huntley, 'Dryden's Discovery of Boileau', MP, XLV, 1947, 112-117, according to whom Dryden's 'Apology for Heroic Poetry' shows a heavy debt to Boileau's Art Poétique (115-117); cf. John Aden, who minimises the extent of Boileau's influence in that Dryden rejected Boileau's emphasis on reason, his too rigid concept of correctness, and his theory of the unsuitability of the Christian machinery for the epic ('Dryden and Boileau: The Question of Critical Influence', SP, L, 1953, 491-509); cf. 'Discourse' (1693), II, 86 fr.
Le Bossu, and Corneille has been much debated and every Dryden-scholar seems to have his own favourite candidate.

(c) English

Among the Elizabethan critics, Dryden seems to have his own favourite candidate.

1. For Le Bossu, see F.L. Huntley, The Unity of John Dryden's Dramatic Criticism, Illinois, 1944, pp. 196-204, 207, according to whom Dryden applied Le Bossu's recommendation for the epic to dramatic poetry; cf. Clark, who also suggests that Le Bossu's theory of Aristotelian ideals for the epic influenced Dryden immensely, beginning in his preface to Troilus and Cressida and reaching its climax in the dedication to The Annesis (Boileau and the French Classical Critics in England, pp. 251-252); cf. 'Grounds' (1679), I, 246, 252; 'Discourse' (1693), II, 96; 'Parallel' (1695), II, 186; Aeneis (1697), II, 224; cf. Rymer, SVT (1693), p. 83.

2. For Corneille's influence, see W.P. Ker, Essays of John Dryden, I, xix, xxiii, xxx, xxxviii, who suggests that under Corneille's influence Dryden came to take an interest in critical discussions early in his career, that like Corneille, Dryden was passing through a conflict between formal criticism and freedom in art, and that both were trying to strike a balance between the classical and modern critics; cf. George Williamson, 'Dryden as Critic' UCC, XXXII, 1930, 71-76, according to whom Dryden drew on Corneille's 'Exams' for his ideas for the heroic play and rhyme (p. 72); cf. John Aden, 'Dryden, Corneille and the Essay of Dramatic Poesy', RES, VI, 1955, 147-156, who feels that most of the similarities between the two critics are no more than resemblances, because Dryden departed from several of Corneille's theories; cf. Pierre Legouis, 'Corneille and Dryden as Dramatic Critics', in Seventeenth Century Studies, presented to Herbert Grierson, Oxford, 1938, pp. 269-291, who has argued that Dryden's criticism was immensely superior to Corneille's, though the latter was the better dramatist; cf. Clark, Boileau and the French Classical Critics in England, pp. 241-242, who points out the detailed and acknowledged borrowings from Corneille in the Essay of Dramatic Poesy, and adds that like Corneille's, Dryden's other essays are characterised by a judicious balancing between the rules and the artistic needs of individual liberty.

3. Among the less popular critics were Rapin and D'Aubignac, see, Boileau and the French Classical Critics in England: the emphasis of D'Aubignac on the three unities, verisimilitude and decorum was instrumental in shaping the Restoration theory of drama in general, pp. 240-241, while Dryden drew on Rapin for the passions appropriate to a tragedy, and for the relation of good sense, reason and nature to the rules (pp. 279, 285); 'Grounds' (1679), I, 245, 260-261; cf. George Watson, 'Dryden's First Answer to Rymer', RES, n.s. XIV, 18-23, according to whom Dryden preferred Rapin to Aristotle in 'Heads' because of the former's preference for poetry to plot in tragedy (p. 20); 'Heads' (1677), I, 219-220.
owed "the civilised and discursive tone of his own criticism". He praises Ben Jonson's Discoveries for as many "profitable rules for perfecting the stage as any wherewith the French can furnish us"; though Jonson, as Dryden thought, was much influenced by Horace's criticism. However, apart from these two, Dryden did not draw on any of the Elizabethan critics, and even in his controversy with Robert Howard over blank verse and rhyme he did not mention George Puttenham and Samuel Daniel who had earlier so ably defended rhyme in The Arte of English Poesie (1589) and A Defence of Rhyme (1603).

Among contemporary English authors, Hobbes is supposed to have had the greatest influence on Dryden. John Aubrey, in his notes on the life of Hobbes, has observed: "Mr John Dreyden, Poet Laureat, is his [Hobbes'] great admirer, and oftentimes makes use of his doctrine in his plays - from Mr Dreyden himselfe". Louis Bredvold dismisses this influence, arguing that though Dryden makes use of Hobbes' ethical issues of free-will and necessity in his plays, he was himself interested in these issues and enjoyed testing their argumentative strength in verse. According to Van Doren, Dryden owed to Hobbes his deep distrust of human beings in the mass and his intolerance of movements that threatened to disturb the peace. Gunnar Sorelius has pointed out that Dryden's definition of laughter was inspired by Hobbes.

1. RL (1664), I, 7; 'Apology' (1677), I, 206; Sutherland, English Literature of the Late Seventeenth Century, Oxford, 1969, p. 412.
2. EDP (1668), I, 70, 31 & n. 4.
3. RL (1664), I, 4 & n, 8 & n 2, Fables (1700), II, 275.
Dryden has been often accused of suppressing and discounting his critical influences.¹ Such a charge is quite baseless in view of Dryden's generous acknowledgements of his debts where they were due. We have, for example, such candid declarations as, the Essay of Dramatic Poesy is "for the most part borrowed from the observations of others" and that the propositions therein "are not mine . . . but derived from the authority of Aristotle and Horace, and from the rules and examples of Ben Jonson and Corneille"; again, "Aristotle with his interpreters, and Horace, and Longinus, are the authors to whom I owe my lights". Similarly, all the important French critics are gratefully acknowledged from time to time: "Boileau and Rapin; the latter of which is alone sufficient, were all other critics lost, to teach anew the rules of writing", "Bossu, the best of modern critics . . . ", "informations which I have received from the learned Casaubon, Heinsius, Rigaltius, Dacier, and the Dauphine's Juvenal", "by the help of Dacier, I am swimming towards it", "I will take my rise from Bellori", "Fresnoy, whom I follow" for the rules of painting.²

Allusions to other critics are scattered throughout Dryden's criticism; and by a mere chronological perusal of his critical prefaces one can form a fair idea of the new translations and criticisms appearing in the period. However, Dryden's borrowings are more in the nature of impressions of other critics shaping his own ideas than an interpolation of their opinions. He himself best knew the restricted use he made of other critics, which was to crystallise his ideas of the


2. 'Essay' (1668), I, 112, 124; TC (1679), I, 243; 'Apology' (1677), I, 199; 'Grounds', I, 246; 'Discourse' (1693), II, 96-97, 104; 'Parallel' (1699), Essays of John Dryden, ed. W.P. Ker, II, 125, 'Parallel', II, 196; critics who refute the charge of plagiarism in Dryden are John Aden, see above, pp. 115 n 4, 116 n 2; F.L. Huntley, Essay of Dramatic Poesy, Ann Arbor, 1953, p. 3; E. Pechter, Dryden's Classical Theory of Literature, Cambridge, 1975, pp. 92-93.
moment and then formulate his own theory where he found them inadequate:

I am now almost gotten into my depth; at least by the help of Dacier, I am swimming towards it (Roman satire). Not that I will promise always to follow him any more than he follows Casaubon; but to keep him in my eye, as my best and truest guide; and where I think he may possibly mislead me, there to have recourse to my own lights, as I expect that others should do by me.

The fact that Dryden could assert his independence of the best of authorities, like Aristotle, Horace and Rymer, when he found them "misleading" proves that his confidence in his "own lights" was not an empty boast. Moreover, he leaned on others to make a start and then gathered force to sail independently of them.  

Dryden, thus, tried to assimilate in himself the quintessence of the best critical thought then known. But he was an original thinker of some magnitude, for as we have seen, he responded to the good and the beautiful in criticism and literature quite independently of others.  

His level of originality is best shown in the use he makes of his sources; for example, both Rymer and Dryden draw on the classical critics but for the former they provide a handy stick to beat others, while for the latter they serve as a genial influence. The fact that Dryden could admire Chaucer, Shakespeare and Milton at a time when very few did, speaks for his independence of judgment which transcended his age; for even if he borrowed wholesale the principles of criticism, surely there is no way of borrowing the faculty to recognise a genius. By admiring these geniuses, Dryden lived up to his theory of criticism by merit.

1. "Discourse" (1693), II, 104, italics added.

2. E.g., above, pp. 92, 96, 100, asserting his independence of Aristotle and Horace; "Discourse" (1693), II, 96-97, "Informations which I have received . . . to which I shall add some observations of my own".

3. To say with George Williamson that if you add the French critical theories to neo-classical principles along with Ben Jonson's Discoveries "you have Dryden's critical background for the most part", is an over-simplification of the issue (Dryden as Critic' UCC, XXXII, 1930, (71-76), 72).
rather than by defect, and whether or not he arrived at this theory because of Longinus is not easy to establish; since even before Longinus, as early as in the Essay of Dramatic Poesy (1668), and before, Dryden could recognise that Shakespeare was the largest "soul of poesy" of our nation,¹ though he was fully aware of his failings. Again, in 'Defence of an Essay' (1668), while recommending that "if nature be to be imitated, then there is a rule for imitating nature rightly; otherwise there may be an end, and no means conducing to it", yet about Shakespeare Dryden conceded in the Essay of Dramatic Poesy (1668), that "all the images of nature were still present to him, and he drew them not laboriously, but luckily'.²

Dryden is the first critic to apply the general principles of criticism to a specific work. Rymer is another critic in this line, but his methods were far too cerebral and he upheld the purity of rules at the cost of the beauties of the work. Dryden also stoops to this sort of criticism, but he is able to recover himself soon and shift the focus of his criticism from general principles to flexible compromises. In time his methods became empirical and he drew on his personal experience as a writer as much as on the critics he admired. Thus Dryden learnt to see things from every possible angle and this diversity of viewpoint inevitably involved a certain element of change, and even contradictions at times. The multiplicity of influences, however, were largely responsible for his sceptical, disengaged and tentative

2. (1668), I, 122; EDP (1668), I, 67.
approach to literature, to "problematical" and "sceptical" rather than to assertive discourses. Dryden, perhaps realised the futility of asserting any theory as a panacea and enjoyed testing the strength of different theories, as in the several debates in the Essay of Dramatic Poesy. The net result is that Dryden's criticism emerges into something like what he said of Plutarch's style:

being conversant in so great a variety of authors, and collecting from all of them what he thought most excellent, out of the confusion or rather mixture of all their styles he formed his own, which partaking of each was yet none of them, but a compound of them all, like the Corinthian metal, which had in it gold, and brass, and silver, and yet was a species by itself.

1. See Ker, Essays on Dryden, Oxford, 1900, I, xv; L. Bredvold, The Intellectual Milieu of John Dryden, p. 119; cf. Philip Harth, Context of Dryden's Thought, Chicago, 1968, pp. 1-31, who has very ably countered Bredvold's thesis of Dryden's "pyrrhonism" and "antirationalism" by arguing that Dryden's "scepticism is a confident affirmation of the powers of human reason", and therefore "in certain important respects the very opposite" of pyrrhonism and antirationalism (p. 31); cf. H. Trowbridge, "The Place of Rules in Dryden's Criticism", in Swedberg, pp. 112-139, who rejects totally the point of Dryden's scepticism; rather, as he argues, the source of Dryden's method of reasoning is based on Aristotle's rules (p. 130).

2. EDP (1668), I, 13; 'Essay' (1668), I, 123; cf. Sylvae (1685), II, 26.

3. It seems reasonable to accept the Essay of ... as a series of dramatic dialogues articulating different points of view. The undue importance attached to the identification of the four persons has been quite unproductive, and even misleading at times (see below, p. 141 & n 2 ) in Dryden-scholarship since its beginning with Malone in 1800. If Neander's voice qualifies to be Dryden's, then Crites echoes Dryden's tone too, as is confirmed by the tenor of the 'Defence of the Epilogue', nor can Lisideius' concept of the 'imitation of nature' be dissociated from Dryden; equally, Lisideius' stand on tragi-comedy, as opposed to Neander's, is similar to Dryden's as borne out by most of his prefaces (see below, pp. 161-163); cf. F.L. Huntley, On Dryden's Essay of Dramatic Poesy, Ann Arbor, 1961, pp. 8 ff; E. Pechter, Dryden's Classical Theory of Literature, Cambridge, 1975, pp. 36-60, for a somewhat similar stand.

4. Plutarch (1683), II, 10-11.
How far Dryden conformed to the neo-classical standards has been a long drawn out issue. It is as dangerous to follow the extreme of the Saintsbury school of thought which found Dryden's chief merit as a critic in his opposition to the classical rules, as the opposite extreme of those well meaning enthusiasts who upheld Dryden as a champion of rules. A middle-of-the-road view is taken in a recent study of Dryden by Edward Pechter. According to him, Dryden rejects both the extremes of rules and pleasure, and thereby acquires a freedom from tension. Dryden's different attitudes ... [rather than] posit 'paradox' or 'dilemma' or 'antagonism' or 'collision', requiring one exclusive choice or the other ... in fact ... are poised in a tranquil equilibrium ... The positive commitment behind these rejections ... [is] internally consistent, for the rules and pleasure are related as means to ends ... Far from being principles inhibitory of pleasure, the rules help to define the pleasurable in order.

This, Pechter observes, is well supported by the argument of Dryden's preface to Troilus and Cressida and 'A Parallel of Poetry and Painting'.

Robert Hume has argued very forcefully that the critics who wish to see Dryden striking the knell of the neo-classical rules, are giving expression to their own dislike of the rules. However, the problem is not as simple as this. Dryden the critic almost eludes our grasp. He is often found attacking the very premises he draws on; and at such moments he does give the impression of rebelling against the rules.

Moreover, Dryden did not approach the classics like some of his other


contemporaries, as Milton and Rymer did, or as Dennis advocated. On the contrary, Dryden was not prepared to take anything "from antiquity on trust". And although born in an age of rules, he was not willing to subscribe to them without questioning their efficacy. Classical models he considered desirable in order to learn what he could from them, and he also cherished the hope that posterity would look up to them in turn.1

Dryden accepted the rules up to a point - where he found them serviceable in promoting contemporary literature - but beyond that point he felt he had little use of them, though he did not always succeed in defining the border line. Perhaps, as a practising writer and critic, he himself could not see the line as distinctly as we can thereafter; but his dramatic and critical career illustrates that during his later years, particularly after 1679, he leaned more towards the Shakespearean and Longinian graces, showing a distinct preference for genius over art. "Wretched art", he now declared, "cannot arrive to those heights" which come "from a happy, abundant, and native genius". Rules are not altogether rejected at this stage of his thought; rather all art, he observed in 'A Parallel of Poetry and Painting', "must have rules"; they are based on the practice of those who have carefully studied the best way of imitating nature.2 However, he now came to realise more and more the value of "strength" above "skill", and regretted that the Restoration "builders were with want of genius curst".3 No amount of learning can compensate for the want of genius: "A happy genius is the gift of nature . . . how to improve it, many books can teach us: how to obtain it, none; that nothing can be done without it all agree".4

1. 'Epilogue' (1672), I, 169; EDP (1668), I, 43.
2. 'Discourse' (1693), II, 74; 'Parallel', II, 191.
3. DD (1694), 170.
4. 'Parallel' (1695), II, 194-195.
Again, alluding to the art of raillery, Dryden observed: " 'T is not reading, 'tis not imitation of an author, which can produce this fineness; it must be inborn; it must proceed from a genius, and particular way of thinking, which is not to be taught; and therefore not to be imitated by him who has it not from nature". Thus, for example, both in Homer and in Shakespeare "we find all arts and sciences, all moral and natural philosophy, without knowing that they ever studied them". It is "by the force of his own genius" that Shakespeare could "perform so much".¹

For Dryden, then, the rules are desirable ends in themselves; after all they are "founded upon good sense, and sound reason", reducing "nature into method";² and while he is unable to prescribe whether or not a mediocre writer can afford to ignore them, he is at least sure that a genius can; since he is capable of realising excellence without the props of rules. Rather, a genius by his example lays down guidelines, which when formulated systematically become the rules to be followed by those wishing to acquire the same excellence. "The first inventors of any art or science, provided they have brought it to perfection, are, in reason, to give laws to it; and according to their model, all after-undertakers are to build".³ Dryden is indebted to Le Bossu for this idea as it is he who observed: "all excellent arts . . . have been invented and brought to perfection by men of a transcendent genius; and . . . they who practise afterwards the same arts are obliged to tread in their footsteps, and to search in their writings the foundation of them".⁴

Dryden's criticism, then, looks beyond the Restoration standards when he prescribes that the bold strokes of a transcendent genius can

1. 'Discourse' (1693), II, 136, 74; AL (1678), I, 231.
2. 'Grounds' (1679), I, 260.
3. Albion (1685), II, 135.
realise graces beyond the reach of art, but it conforms to the norms of his age when he qualifies it that those who follow the footsteps of a genius should try to achieve excellences within the reach of art.
CHAPTER FIVE

DRYDEN AND THE SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY LANGUAGE OF DRAMA

Dryden held consistently to the belief that English drama is the best in the world, that neither the French with all their regularity of construction, nor the Greeks with their perfect imitation of nature, could rival the English dramatic traditions.¹ This enthusiasm was shared by many contemporary poets and critics. Sir William Temple, although not very appreciative of the moderns as against the ancients, felt that the English dramatists were superior both to the ancients and to their contemporaries in other countries. Charles Gildon also placed the English drama above the Greek and the Latin drama; even Rymer held the English comedy in great esteem.² Both Dryden and Rymer were concerned about the state of English drama: for Rymer, all hope for the future was in going back to the ancient models, but Dryden believed in progress and not in a blind adulation of the past.³ He was proud of the progress made by the seventeenth century in science and philosophy.⁴

1. EDP (1668), I, 1, 23, 27, 32-33, 56-57; 'Heads' (1677), I, 211 ff; AE (1678), I, 224 ff; 'Grounds' (1679), I, 251 ff; Albion (1685), II, 38; 'Discourse' (1693), II, 81; Examen (1693), II, 761.

2. Temple, On Ancient and Modern Learning (1690), Of Poetry (1690), Spingarn, III, 44 ff, 103 ff; Gildon and Rymer, see above, pp. 29, 36.

3. EDP (1668), I, 26; 'Epilogue' (1672), I, 170; 'Heads' (1677), I, 211 ff; 'Discourse' (1693), II, 88.

Like Cowley, Blackmore and Dennis, Dryden believed that the Christian religion gave his countrymen a great advantage over the ancients.\footnote{Cowley, Preface to Poems (1656), Spingarn, II, 69 f.; Blackmore, Preface to Prince Arthur (1693), Spingarn, III, 239-240; Dennis, The Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry (1701), Hooker, I, 210; Dryden, 'Discourse' (1693), II, 85-91.}

With all the progress of science, philosophy and religion, Dryden was concerned that poetry should "not go backward".\footnote{Epilogue' (1672), I, 169; cf. 'Discourse' (1693), II, 152; Examen (1693), II, 166.} How, then, to advance the cause of poetry and drama? It was a great issue for the Restoration, and all efforts were made to raise dramatic standards - by exaltation of the themes, by nobility of manners, by adherence to the neo-classical rules, and above all by using a high serious style as distinct from the common language.

Language

What sort of language was proper for the new dramatic and poetic forms? There was an active awareness of this problem in the literary world of the seventeenth century; Dryden's contributions in this field are by far the greatest. It is about language, indeed, that one can justifiably comment; that Dryden "found it brick and he left it marble",\footnote{Samuel Johnson, Lives of the English Poets, ed. G.B. Hill, 3 vols., New York, 1905:1967, I, 467.} with the result the language of today, as T.S. Eliot puts it, is still the language of Dryden. To quote Eliot: "it is hardly too much to say that Dryden found the English speechless, and he gave them speech"; and as Eliot argues, Dryden proved influential in shaping the English language even more than Shakespeare and Milton because he formed a language possible for the "mediocrity".\footnote{John Dryden: the Poet, the Dramatist, the Critic, New York, 1932, pp. 24, 6, 22; cf. Van Doren, in the preface to his John Dryden: A Study of his Poetry, Bloomington, 1960, calls Dryden's prose the best English prose after Shakespeare, and that Dryden was indeed a master of "the other harmony", p. x.} It is by persistent and dedicated efforts throughout his life that Dryden succeeded in creating...
a critical vocabulary which the English language did not have before him.¹

If the age of Chaucer can be described as the infancy of the English language,² that of Dryden was still struggling to mature to manhood. Latin and Greek, according to Dryden, were the only stable languages.³ "The barbarity of our language is not able to reach it [the height of Horace's Latin]; yet, when I have leisure, I mean to try how near I can raise my English to his Latin", Dryden remarked;⁴ and he often translated his English idiom into Latin to see "what sense the words will bear in a more stable language".⁵ For that matter, according to Dryden, none of the contemporary European languages were comparable in dignity to Latin; even French, with all its purity, the virtue of the "turn of thoughts and words", is not adequate for the composition of an epic.⁶ English, with all its shortcomings, was still the most compendious of the modern European languages, nearest to Latin in majesty and as such suitable for great poetry.⁷ Dryden felt that language flourishes in a climate conducive to its proper development: "they who labour under misfortunes or servitude have little leisure to cultivate their mother tongue".⁸ The Restoration with all the refinements of its

2. Fables (1700), II, 277-278, 281, 286-287.
3. TC (1679), I, 239 and n; cf. Dryden's endorsement of Segrais's verdict: "beauty of sound" in Latin words is lost in any modern language, cited in Aeneis (1697), II, 251.
4. Dedication to Cleomenes (1690), Works, VIII, 193; cf. Ovid (1680), I, 269, Aeneis (1697), II, 298, 251.
5. TC (1679), I, 239 and n 2.
6. Aeneis (1697), II, 251, 238.
8. Plutarch (1683), II, 11.
court and the benefits of learning and conversation, was ripe for the
development of the English language;¹ but sustained effort was needed.
The Greeks had also laboured for many years before they brought their
language to perfection.² Why not the English?

Very early in his career Dryden wished that England, like France,
should have an Academy to regularise linguistic standards.³ English was
in a bad shape: there was no "exact standard of writing and of speaking",
because the basic "foundation of it, a perfect grammar", was wanting.⁴
There was not even a tolerable dictionary, and no prosody for the
benefit of poets.⁵ The English, along with the French and the Italians,
were ignorant of the metre appropriate for heroic poetry. Dryden had
collected over the years "the materials of an English Prosodia
containing all the mechanical rules of versification", but unfortunately
it was never published. It is not difficult to see in which way Dryden's
efforts were directed. They were to raise English to the level of the
ancient languages - a noble and ambitious plan. But as it is not
possible to educate oneself - "who teaches himself; has a fool for his
master" - Dryden accepted the best poets of the past as his models.⁶

We have already seen (above, pp. 105-108), how much he admired Horace;
and as Dryden says: "I have endeavoured to form my style by imitating"
Virgil and Horace; earlier he acknowledges Virgil and Horace as his

2. Aeneis (1697), II, 246; cf. TC (1679), I, 239; 'Discourse' (1693),
   II, 152.
3. RL (1664), I, 5.
4. TC (1679), I, 239.
5. 'Discourse' (1693), II, 152; cf. TC (1679), I, 239 n.
6. Aeneis (1697), II, 236-237, 235; cf. Samuel Johnson: "No nation
   ever produced a writer that enriched his language with such
   variety of models" (Lives of the English Poets, I, 469).
chosen masters, whose beauties he tried to imitate all his life.¹ Ovid's poetic style is praised and imitated for "sweetness, easiness, and smoothness; and . . . a run of verse"; and from Longinus he learnt the art of "imaging", which is "the very height and life of poetry".² In English, Dryden's models were Spenser and Milton.³ In his youth, Dryden admired Cowley among his contemporaries; and Waller and Denham, Dryden thought, did not possess those beauties which could give "the last perfection to their works".⁴

Dryden attached a great importance to words; they are as important in poetry as colours are in painting; "broad obscenities in words ought in good manners to be avoided".⁵ From the ancient models Dryden learned to "employ the magnificence of words, and the force of figures, to adorn the sublimity of thoughts".⁶ Virgil was especially copied for "his choice of words, and his placing them for the sweetness of the sound". Dryden considered Virgil "a succinct and grave majestic writer; one who weighed not only every thought, but every word and syllable", thus acquiring "the propriety of thoughts, and ornaments of words".⁷ However, for all his love for words Dryden did not believe in sacrificing thoughts to the words. Words are the "first beauties", but they are the "clothing of the thought", and in the absence of beauty of thought beautiful words can realise "a beautiful monster at the best".⁸ Wit is

1. Aeneis (1697), II, 242; Sylvae (1685), II, 20.
4. 'Apology' (1677), I, 203, Aeneis (1697), II, 242, 'Discourse' (1693), II, 150.
5. 'Parallel' (1695), II, 203, AL (1678), I, 223.
therefore the "propriety of thoughts and words; or . . . thoughts and words elegantly adapted to the subject". ¹

However, words provide a medium for the interpretation of thoughts; and they acquired a special significance for Dryden when he took to translation, for now more than ever before, he became painfully aware of the paucity of appropriate words in English.² His experience as a translator was an important factor contributing towards his enrichment of his own language. He tried to add to the English vocabulary by coining words, by borrowing from other languages, especially Latin, by giving new status to existing words and by discarding terms and usages which were vulgar or antiquated by the new standards. According to Dryden, "refinement of . . . language" - for which he worked all his life - consisted "either in rejecting such old words or phrases which are ill sounding, or improper, or in admitting new, which are more proper, more sounding, and more significant"; and as he says, in his time many new words were admitted.³ He himself was the innovator of many new words and critical terms; among them, as Watson has pointed out, are: 'balette', 'biography', 'criticism', 'unities' and 'witticism' (the OED records them as Dryden's innovations); Jenson has pointed out a few more, namely, 'protagist', 'protactic person', 'unity', 'chromatic', 'scenary' and 'risibility' (of these the OED records only the first three).⁴

In an illuminating article, Barbara Strang points out that Dryden's innovations were not so original but were largely the result of combining some of the established prefixes of the seventeenth century with existing

1. 'Apology' (1677), I, 207.
3. 'Epilogue' (1672), I, 171; cf. Albion (1685), II, 40; 'Epilogue', I, 176.
words. For example, he devised new combinations with 'by' - a prefix used for 'minor', 'subordinate' and 'subsidiary' - forming words like 'by-concernment', 'by-walk' and so on, as well as formed many other words using various current seventeenth century prefixes. Barbara Strong has also clearly shown that some of the words recorded by the OED, as originating later than Dryden, were in fact brought into use by him, as for example, 'critic', 'belles letters', 'farce', 'conduct', 'discovery', 'design' and so on. Equally, some words are attributed incorrectly to Dryden which had been used before him, for example, words like 'diction', 'hero', 'poetical justice', etc.¹

One way of improving a language is by borrowing from other languages, and Dryden borrowed freely from the Latin. He did not approve of borrowing from French as he did not think highly of that language - he did not think highly of the French drama either,² though he held the French criticism in esteem as we have already seen (pp. 115-116) - and Samuel Johnson’s charge that Dryden is vain about the display of French words seems somewhat ill-founded.³ To the objection that he Latinized too much, Dryden has a very appropriate and adequate answer: "'Tis true that, when I find an English word significant and sounding, I neither borrow from the Latin or any other Language; but when I want at home, I must seek abroad . . . I trade both with the living and the dead, for the enrichment of our native language . . . if we will have things of magnificence and splendour, we must get them by commerce".⁴ The genius

1. 'Dryden's Innovations in Critical Vocabulary' by Barbara M.H. Strong, DUJ, n.s. XX, 1959, 114-123.
of the English lies rather in improving an invention than in inventing themselves. Dryden is proud of the fact that he has enriched the English language by "the choice of words, and harmony of numbers", which were wanting in the most gifted poets, for they either did not care to cultivate their mother tongue or, relying on the beauty of their thoughts, they considered sweetness of language quite unnecessary. As Dryden says, not everyone is fit to innovate because it is difficult to distinguish "between pedantry and poetry", and a poet must be well versed in his own language as well as the language he borrows from. Above all, words should be imported sparingly, so as to assist the native language rather than to invade it.

Dryden supported the revival of antiquated words in moderation; preferably those words should be revived which are "more sounding, or more significant than those in practice". He himself "sprinkled" some "old words" in Don Sebastian, but nonetheless, "words are not like landmarks, so sacred as never to be removed", and they need to be replaced when they have outlived their utility, and should be changed with change of custom; English needs especially to be purged of "old Teuton monosyllables", because encumbered with consonants they are not elegant for poetry.

Another way of improving the language is "by applying received words to a new signification", as Horace prescribed in the Ars Poetica: "You will speak well if a fresh setting restores new force to a familiar

1. Fables (1700), II, 277; Postscript to the Aeneis (1697), II, 258-259; cf. Watson: "Dryden, indeed, is our most successful coiner", II, 259 nn.
2. Aeneis (1697), II, 252.
3. 'Discourse' (1693), II, 84; DS (1690), II, 46; cf. Albion (1685), II, 40.
5. Aeneis (1697), II, 252; cf. Albion (1685), II, 38, 40; 'Letter to William Walsh' (16917), II, 53.
word". Dryden worked towards this ideal and tried to impart a new status and meaning to many existing words, like 'wit', 'conceit', 'imagination', 'fancy', 'idea', 'expression', 'humour', 'manners', etc. It is true, that his emphasis on critical terms varied, outstanding examples being terms like 'wit', 'imagination', 'fancy', 'humour' and 'manners', not to mention 'nature' and 'imitation'. This could be due to the general state of the meanings of critical terms in the seventeenth century which were far from settled. Many literary controversies arose in and revolved round differences in interpretation of the words used by different writers. For example, Shadwell misunderstood Dryden's use of the term 'wit', and so the controversy between the two over Ben Jonson was sparked off; and Howard used the word 'nature' to mean an imitation of the conversation of the characters in a play, whereas Dryden in his reply used 'nature' in the sense of nobility of speech, with the result that the rhyme / blank verse controversy failed to get an identical focal point over this vital issue.

Seventeenth-century writers were conscious of this difficulty, and they are found struggling hard to standardise some of the critical terms. Congreve tried to distinguish between 'wit' and 'humour'; before him,

1. 'Epilogue' (1672), I, 177; Ars Poetica, II, 47-48, see Watson, I, 177 n.
3. 'Epilogue' (1672), I, 178; cf. R.J. Smith's 'Shadwell's Impact upon John Dryden', RES, XX, 1944, 29-44, who argues that the two antagonists had different definitions for wit; for Shadwell it was the invention of remote and pleasant thoughts and for Dryden it was sharpness of conceit; also, for Shadwell wit was the whole process of literary creation and for Dryden it was enlivening of the composition, 34-35.
Davenant also tried to explain the meaning of 'wit'.

1. Rymer coined the term 'poetical justice', and gave new connotations to words like 'nature' and 'common sense'. Almost all the well known writers were trying to settle the status of 'fancy' and 'imagination'. Hobbes had used the word 'imagination' in *Leviathan*, giving it a new connotation; and Watson observes, how, Dryden, attracted by some of Hobbes' conclusions, "was the first to use the word in a sense specialised for the purpose of literary criticism". From the fourteenth century to Dryden, as Watson points out, the words 'fancy' and 'imagination' were used without any special relevance to literary criticism: Dryden introduced them to the critic's vocabulary, and from then until Coleridge's time, 'fancy' remained inferior in status to 'imagination', though not with Coleridge's pronounced emphasis on the difference in their meanings.

2. Many of Dryden's usages are now obsolete and at times confusing to a modern reader: 'fancy' and 'imagination', for example, were not properly distinguished, so that while 'fancy' was in one instance defined as the second part of imagination, the two words were often used synonymously.

But it is indeed due to Dryden's coining and new usages that "English made a transition, in the century between the death of Elizabeth I and the birth of Samuel Johnson, from a provincial dependence on continental sources to the aesthetic leadership of Europe in the eighteenth century".

4. *Annus* (1667), I, 98; for the synonymous use, see below, pp. 138-139 & n4.
Like most of the Restoration dramatists, Dryden advocates a heightened style for drama, especially in tragedy and the heroic play:
"Sublime subjects ought to be adorned with the sublimest, and... with the most figurative expressions" appropriate to "the occasion... and the persons". But there is a need to distinguish "betwixt fustian, or ostentatious sentences and the true sublime";¹ because "a dwarfish thought, dressed up in gigantic words" would be bombastic, and Dryden even repents of some of his extravagances early in his career, as in *Tyrannic Love* and *The Conquest of Granada*.² Bombast was one of the main causes of the decline of the heroic play, though as Dennis observes, the force of the rhyme helped to neutralise its effect.³

Fancy and Judgement

Rhymed plays, as opposed to the earlier blank verse plays, were a natural corollary to the growth of the heroic play. According to C.V. Deane the popularity of rhymed verse in drama was due to the French influence, a view shared by contemporary dramatists, chiefly by Robert Howard; though Dryden pointed out that the Italian, Spanish and German tragedies were also written in rhyme.⁴ He denies the influence of the French drama in the *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, though later, in the prologue to the *Secret Love* he acknowledges it. But apart from the

continental influences, the state of the drama in England was also conducive to this new development. The older poetic style was suitable for the free rein of imagination and fancy; but in the seventeenth century, reason more than emotion and judgement more than fancy were the touchstones of excellence in dramatic art. Rymer is contemptuous of the argument that poetry is "the child of Fancy . . . never to be school'd and disciplin'd by Reason . . . is blind inspiration, is pure enthusiasm, is rapture and rage all over". He recommends that "reason must consent and ratify what-ever by fancy is attempted"; and especially in the contrivance of a play, "reason is always principally to be consulted. Those who object against reason are the Fanatics in Poetry". Thomas Shadwell's views on this issue anticipate Rymer: "fancy rough-draws but judgment smooths and finishes. . . In fancy madmen equal, if not excel all others", though Shadwell tries to temper the severity of his remark with the qualification that some fanciful plays can be as good as Ben Jonson's "correct, and well-govern'd Comedies". Still earlier Hobbes tried to settle the distinct functions of the two: fancy supplies the "ornaments of a Poem", and judgement its "strength and structure".

Dryden's views on judgement and fancy are not as radical as those of Rymer, although they conform to the Restoration theory of drama. Very early in his career Dryden prescribed that imagination should not "outrun the judgement". A regulated fancy and well employed judgement will "bring forth the richest and clearest thoughts". Though profound

1. EDP (1668), I, 78, Secret (1668), I, 104.
2. See George Williamson, "The Restoration Revolt against Enthusiasm", SP, XXX, 1933, 571-603.
4. RL (1664), I, 8, 9.
and infallible judgement is very rare, it is "the master-workman in a play"; people with weak judgements are "not fit to write at all". Moreover, judgement needs other props to support it; history, geography and moral philosophy are a great help to it. Fancy helps in moulding the thought, but it must be subjected to judgement:¹ "No man should pretend to write who cannot temper his fancy with his judgement", for fancy alone can lead to "ridiculous mistakes and gross absurdities".² Dryden did not imitate Ben Jonson because he felt that unlike Jonson, he lacked judgement "to make men appear pleasantly ridiculous on the stage". Fancy is conducive to wit but judgement is required for humour. Farce inspires scorn because it works on fancy only.³ "A true just play, which is to bear the test of ages" cannot be produced "by the force of fancy, without the maturity of judgment".⁴ Dryden's most severe condemnation of fancy comes in the wake of attacks upon Settle and Shakespeare. "Men that are given over to fancy only, are little better than madmen", he remarked on Settle; and later, on Shakespeare: "the fury of his fancy often transported him beyond the bounds of judgement". According to Dryden, Lucan and Statius were "men of an unbounded imagination, but who often wanted the poise of judgement".⁵ However, Dryden praises Davenant for his "quick and piercing imagination";⁶ and fancy is also upheld in his 'Defence of an Essay': to "enjoy the pleasures of the fiction" better, reason should "contribute willingly

1. EDP (1668), I, 91, Annus (1667), I, 98.
2. 'Grounds' (1679), I, 255, 261; cf. EDP (1668), I, 91.
6. Tempest (1670), I, 134-135; cf. 'Heroic' (1672), I, 159.
its assent" to imagination. In the preface to An Evening's Love he remarks: "judgment, indeed, is necessary in him [the poet] but 'tis fancy that gives the life-touches, and the secret graces to it; especially in the serious plays"; and he also defends his fanciful creations in the preface to Tyrannic Love.\(^1\) Dryden thus vacillates between fancy and judgement, and though he did not apply the strict standards of Rymer in preferring judgement to fancy, he failed to strike a balance between the two, as for example one of his contemporaries, Sir William Temple, did. According to Temple, "without the Forces of Wit all Poetry is flat and languishing; without the succors of Judgment 'tis wild and extravagant. The true wonder of Poesy is, That such contraries must meet to compose it".\(^2\) Later, Charles Gildon also echoes Temple in affirming "Fancy and Judgment must join in every great Poet . . . Fancy is what we generally call Nature, or a Genius; Judgment is what we mean by Art, the union of which in one Man makes a complete Poet".\(^3\)

In Dryden, however, such contraries do not meet, though in the years of his maturity a vehement support of judgement is not so pronounced. Early in his career he is found advocating the cause of judgement almost to the total exclusion of fancy. One of the important reasons for his preferring rhyme to blank verse is that rhyme "bounds and circumscribes the fancy", and "imagination in a poet is a faculty so wild and lawless that like an high-ranging spaniel it must have clogs tied to it, lest it outrun the judgment".\(^4\)

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1. 'Essay' (1668), I, 126; Evening (1671), I, 155; Tyrannic (1670), I, 142.

2. Of Poetry (1690), Spingarn, III, 81; the word 'wit' had become a synonym for 'fancy' in the seventeenth century, cf. Spingarn, I, xxix.


4. RL (1664), I, 8; 'imagination' and 'fancy' are sometimes used interchangeably by Dryden, and yet he also tries to draw a line between the two; cf. Annus (1667), I, 98.
Dryden and Rhyme

Rhyme assumed a special significance for Dryden early in his dramatic career for other reasons too. As he points out in his dedication to *The Rival Ladies*, he prefers rhyme to blank verse because it is an aid to memory, it is graceful in repartee, it helps poets to exercise brevity and pertinence, and it has all the advantages of prose in addition to its own special advantages. But rhyme cannot be employed effectively by those poets who lack felicity of diction. Shakespeare, as Dryden remarks, adopted blank verse "to shun the pains of continual rhyming".

In the *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* we have, as with most of the dramatic issues that Dryden takes up there, a mutually inclusive stand, where rhyme and blank verse are upheld by two different exponents. Crites argues in favour of blank verse while Neander in reply condemns it. Crites' criticism of rhyme, according to Neander, lacks the force of argument, because it is based largely upon the defects of rhyme rather than upon rhyme as such. A similar criticism can be made against the ill-use of blank verse, or for that matter against any kind of verse. The advantages of rhyme, as enumerated in the dedication to *The Rival Ladies*, are repeated: rhyme alone, Neander reiterates, is the proper medium for tragedy. Comedy may not be written in rhyme, but for serious plays, "where nature is wrought up to an higher pitch... heroic rhyme is nearest nature, as being the noblest kind of modern verse".  

To Crites' objection that rhyme sounds unnatural on the stage, Neander argues that verse itself is unnatural for drama; and about Aristotle's recommendation that a play should be written in the kind of verse that is nearest prose, Neander suggests that rhymed verse can be rendered as near prose as blank verse. To the criticism that repartee...
in rhyme appears contrived rather than natural, Neander argues that it should be no more displeasing than the pattern of a dance which is well contrived. In common household conversation rhyme is out of place, but a poet should be able to clothe ordinary things decently. The Elizabethans failed to write in rhymed verse because this mode of versification had not been evolved in that age. The Restoration had greater excellences in language - a theme which Dryden develops at great length in his 'Defence of the Epilogue' - and rhyme was one of their many refinements. As rhyme is something new, the multitude, whose judgment is never reliable, will take time to accept it even though the nobility is already favourably inclined towards it.¹

It is not easy to conclude, as most critics tend to do, that Neander had the last word in the Essay of Dramatic Poesy, that his point of view is Dryden's point of view, and that Dryden's verdict is here for rhyme against blank verse;² for soon after, in the preface to Annus Mirabilis (1667), Dryden refers to rhyme as being a necessary evil for the English language. "The learned languages have certainly a great advantage of us, in not being tied to the slavery of any rhyme". In the prologue to the Secret Love (1668), Dryden is again enthusiastic about the efficacy of "Cornell's rhyme" for the English drama.³

The cause of rhyme is next taken up by Dryden in the wake of a serious attack upon it by Robert Howard in his preface to The Duke of Lerma (1668). Howard attacked Dryden for using the word "natural in a wrong Application", and argued that it is not natural that a play,

1. EDP (1668), I, 89-91.
3. I, 95, I, 108; Annus Mirabilis, published in 1667, was written after the Essay of Dramatic Poesy, though the latter did not get published until 1668, Watson, I, 93 headnote.
which is "supposed to be a Composition of several Persons speaking
ex tempore", should be in good rhymed verses.¹ To this, Dryden replied
in 'Defence of an Essay' that rhyme is natural in a serious play because
it is most effective for a heightened language, for although "'tis true
that to imitate well is a poet's work", imitation alone is not enough.
To create illusion in the drama the language "must be heightened with
all the arts and ornaments of poesy", and as Dryden argues, even "the
lowest kind of comedy" needs a "degree of heightening" to set off the
subject; and that a play is not "supposed to be a composition of several
persons speaking ex tempore", as Howard had argued, but "the work of the
poet, imitating or representing the conversation of several persons".
To Howard's objection that rhyme is not "nearest the nature of what it
represents", Dryden counters that verse itself is not "nearest to
ordinary conversation":² and as this does not warrant the abandonment
of verse plays, why then should rhyme be rejected? Prose "is by common
consent deposed as too weak for the government of serious plays", and
blank verse, which is "nearer in blood" to prose, suffers from the same
weakness. Therefore rhyme is the right choice. It is for the sake of
delight that "the Ancients . . . wrote all their tragedies in verse,
though they knew it most remote from conversation". Rhyme has succeeded
blank verse "in all modern languages", and there must be something in it
to deserve this success.³

By the time of 'Of Heroic Plays' (1672), rhyme was well established
in the contemporary drama. Dryden, therefore declared triumphantly that
time has tested and proved the efficacy of rhyme, and those who thought
that rhyme was incapable of describing great passions because of the

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¹ Spingarn, II, 107.
² 'Essay' (1668), 113-114.
³ 'Essay' (1668), I, 115-116.
examples of Shakespeare and Fletcher who presented excellent passions without rhyme, have proved wrong. The success of the heroic plays has proved the strength of rhyme: "serious plays ought not to imitate conversation too nearly. If nothing were to be raised above that level, the foundation of poetry would be destroyed".¹

But all this heat and fire in the cause of rhyme occurred during the hey-day of the heroic play. Dryden could not perhaps have contemplated writing a different kind of play then, say a tragedy on the Shakespearean model. By the time he came to write Aureng-Zebe (1676), the feeling of disgust is obvious in the dedication to the play, where he complains of being "condemned to rhyme", and is also reflected in the prologue, when he says that he has "now another taste of wit" which finds its home in All for Love (1678) composed in blank verse: "in my style I have professed to imitate the divine Shakespeare; which that I might perform more freely, I have disencumbered myself from rhyme". Dryden's tone is somewhat defensive though, for he needs the excuse of imitating Shakespeare's style to justify his adoption of blank verse, and insists that where rhyme is concerned he does not condemn his "former way, but this is more proper to my present purpose".² This was a transitional phase and he was experimenting with a new form. He was on the whole pleased with the experiment: in "imitating him [Shakespeare] I have excelled myself throughout the play" which is reaffirmed even several years later in 1695.³

A condemnation of his "former ways" does take place. After a passing uncomplimentary reference to "the slavery of rhyme" in his preface to Ovid's Epistles (1680), he rejects it totally in 1684, in his

1. 'Heroic' (1672), I, 157.
2. Dedication to AZ (1676), I, 190; Prologue to AZ, I, 192; AL (1678), I, 231.
3. AL (1678), I, 231; 'Parallel' (1695), II, 207, see above, p. 63 & n 1.
panegyric to the Earl of Roscommon, regretting that —

Barb'rous nations, and more barb'rous times
Debased the majesty of verse to rhymes;

and after describing the growth and evolution of rhyme in Italy where it was perfected as "an art" by poets like Dante and Petrarch, Dryden concludes that rhyme, even at its best, is no more than a "pleasing sound" —

What rhyme improv'd in all its height can be:
At best a pleasing sound, and fair barbarity. 1

There is a steady and constant rejection of rhyme from this time onwards. Blank verse is an "advantage", he remarks in connection with Hannibal Caro's translation of Virgil's Aeneid; and "the quick returns of rhyme" can debase the dignity of the style, for when "the rhyme comes too thick upon us, it straightens the expression: we are thinking of the close, when we should be employed in adorning the thought. It makes a poet giddy with turning in a space too narrow for his imagination. He loses many beauties without gaining one advantage". Double rhyme "is not so proper for manly satire; for it turns earnest too much to jest, and gives us a boyish kind of pleasure. It tickles awkwardly with a kind of pain . . . we are pleased ungratefully and . . . against our liking". Again, talking of "the shackles of modern rhyme" in his dedication to Aeneis, Dryden reiterates that "he who can write well in rhyme may write better in blank verse. Rhyme is certainly a constraint even to the best poets", though he is also keen to impress upon us that he has as "little reason to complain of that hardship as any man"; but "what it [rhyme] adds to sweetness, it takes away from sense; and he who loses the least by it may be called a gainer. It often makes us swerve from an author's meaning". 2

1. Ovid (1680), I, 269; 'Roscommon' (1684), II, 15.
2. Sylvae (1685), II, 22; 'Discourse' (1693), II, 147-148; Aeneis (1697), II, 240.
As the attached graph shows, Dryden's views changed from a preference for rhyme from 1664 to 1672, to a preference for blank verse from 1672 to 1697. The change, however, is not sudden. It is a slow and steady curve of growing into blank verse presaged by some of his remarks during the period he stood up for rhyme. There is only one break in the continuity of Dryden's curve, in his condemnation of Milton, which again is more a criticism of his want of talent in writing rhymed verse than of blank verse itself. The first years of this second period (1676-1680) were marked by a rapidly increasing use of blank verse and a concomitant decline in the use of rhyme in Dryden's plays.

Rhyme was therefore the desired medium for the drama during the active period of Dryden's heroic plays, and there is a degree of agreement among Restoration dramatists and critics, and even among critics hostile to rhyme, that for the heightened effects of the heroic plays rhyme was more suitable than blank verse. In his early battle for rhyme, then, Dryden's great mistake was over-enthusiasm for the cause for which he stood, and for pushing the argument in favour of rhyme a little too far. In the heat of passion he tried to recommend rhyme not only for heroic plays but for all drama.

C.V. Deane has aptly pointed out that "had Dryden, in his Rival Ladies preface contented himself with pleading for rhyme on behalf of the heroic play only, the

1. E.g., in EDP (1668), Neander excludes "all comedy" from rhyme, following it up by an ambiguous remark "I deny not but blank verse may be also used" not specifying however for what sort of drama it should be used; again in Annus (1677), Dryden complains of "the slavery of rhyme" in the English language (see above, p. 141), and in 'Heroic' (1672), where he grants that Shakespeare and Fletcher "excellently described passion without rhyme", I, 81, 95, 157.
2. 'Discourse' (1693), II, 84-85.
3. According to Ker, however, "it was the rhyme itself to which he felt himself drawn, rather than the heroic play", (Essays of John Dryden, I, 11); cf. T.S. Eliot: Dryden "defended the rhymed couplet because it was the form of verse which came most natural to him", John Dryden: the Poet, the Dramatist, the Critic, p. 37).
Figure II: Dryden's attitude to rhyme and blank verse, 1660-1700

1. Dedication, Rival Ladies (1664)
2. Dedication, Annus mirabilis (1667)
3. Essay of Dramatic Poesy (1668)
4. Preface, Secret Love (1668)
5. 'Defence of an Essay' (1668)
6. 'Of Heroic Plays' (1672)
7. Dedication, Aureng-Zebe (1676)
8. Preface, All for Love (1678)
9. Preface, Ovid's Epistles (1680)
10. 'To the Earl of Roscommon' (1684)
11. Preface, Sylvae (1685)
12. 'Discourse concerning Satire' (1693)
13. Dedication, Aeneis (1697)
question of which medium was nearer to nature would have been quite irrelevant. Unlike Dryden, Rymer gave qualified approval to rhyme:

"Rhyme is the more proper for this sort of Tragedy, which ends happily" but it "is rather sweet, then grave; unless temper'd with so much Thought, and with such Pomp of words, as suits not with that Sorrow and Lamentation which Tragedy ordinarily requires". Rymer later rejected rhyme totally; objecting to the French plays in rhyme, he says that "our Ear should not be hankering after the Rhyme, when the business should wholly take us up, and fill our Head. The words must be free, independent, and disengag'd, no entanglement of Rhyme to be in our way".2

Rymer came to reject rhyme when it was fast losing its popularity in the Restoration drama. Robert Howard was the first important critic to launch a regular crusade against rhyme, in his preface to Four New Plays in 1665. But Howard was anticipated by Richard Flecknoe, who remarked in the preface to his play, Love's Kingdom, that rhyme is "more excusable in Pastorels, than in other Plays; and where I leave the Rhyme or numbers, I imagin'd that . . . a good Play was like a good Song; where 'tis not necessary all notes shu'd be of an equal length". Flecknoe recommended simple language as opposed to the bombast and extravagance of the contemporary playwrights.3 Thomas Shadwell attacked the excesses in language of the heroic play in his prefaces to The Sullen Lovers (1668) and The Humorists (1671); and at last in 1688, in the preface to The Squire of Alsatia, he expressed a sense of joy and relief that "time, which all things tries, had laid Rhyme dead".4

3. Love's Kingdom, London, 1664: "To the Noble 'Readers".
The opposition to rhyme is voiced by some of the less well known playwrights and critics also. Edward Howard, in the Epistle to his play, *The Usurper* (written in blank verse), attacked the "trappings of Rhime"; in the preface to *The Women's Conquest*, Howard argued that rhyme is not "natural or proper" for a play because it is "sententious" and therefore unsuitable for "freedom of dialogue, and converse (which Plays should resemble)". Howard, however, qualified his opposition to rhyme by restricting it to drama: "rhyme is far more allowable" in epic, and even desirable for the end of scenes and acts where the audience can take a "weighty and sententious close"; and as he observed, Davenant introduced "rhyme on the Stage for vocal Representations, and *Operas* . . . rather than for Plays". Edward Ravenscroft, in the prologue to his comedy, *The Citizen turn'd Gentleman* made a contemptuous reference to rhyme: "the great Heroes now / In Playes of Rhyme and Noyse with wond'rous flow"; and later, in the prologue to his play, *King Edgar and Alfreda*, he criticised the "Disease" of verse, and pleaded for "Sense . . . that is not shodd with Ryme", and for a natural language devoid of "Rant . . . Rapture . . . and high flight".

Among the critics, Edward Phillips advocated that "the use of Measure alone without any Rime at all, would give far more ample scope and Liberty, both to Style and fancy than can possibly be observed in Rime", and to support his argument he cited the example of Milton's *Paradise Lost*. For tragedy, Phillips observed, "the continued *Rhapsodie of Riming Couplet* . . . is too stiff, and of too much constraint for the liberty of conversation, and the interlocution of several Persons".

Phillips could have been influenced by the example of his uncle, John Milton, who in a note prefixed to the second edition of his Paradise Lost, called rhyme "the invention of a barbarous age, to set off wretched matter and lame metre".1 According to John Dennis, part of the excellence of Milton's poem is due to the use of blank verse rather than rhyme: "for Mr Dryden had handled the very same Subject in Rime, but has faileth so infinitely short of the Sublimity, the Majesty, the Vehemence, and the other great Qualities of Milton". Dennis made the most vehement attack upon rhyme: it "impairst the Beauty and the natural Force of the Expression, and the Power of true Harmony; it has something effeminate in its jingling Nature, and emasculates our English Verse, and consequently is utterly unfit for the greater Poetry". Like Milton, Dennis also finds rhyme "low and comical . . . very often a Jest"; and therefore inappropriate for tragedy: "the Soul of a Tragick Poet, who has giv'n himself up to Rime, has seldom been capable of Terror or Majesty, or the Instruction of the noblest Philosophy, or any thing that is truly great".2 It is significant that Dryden rejected rhyme when he came to write his tragedy, All for Love, since he realised that the medium that was suitable for heroic plays was not appropriate for a tragedy.

Dryden was a playwright and a critic, and although he could not make his mark as a playwright his dramatic career is important insofar as it offered him an opportunity to give serious thought to the dramatic techniques of his time, and in the context, discuss the dramatic achievements of Elizabethan dramatists. A chronological study of his prefaces and prologues shows that his attitude towards Shakespeare changes gradually from a half-hearted admiration of the poet in the beginning to a full and absolute recognition of his genius around 1679, after his adaptation of Shakespeare's Troilus and Cressida.

As a critic of Shakespeare, Dryden can claim a distinction over other critics of Shakespeare by virtue of his historical position. He is, as he alone could be, free from both blind envy and adulation. The Elizabethan critics were much too close to Shakespeare to have a detached view of him; and the critics who followed Dryden tended to be conditioned and obscured by the burden of their predecessor's scholarship. Thus, the story of the eighteenth century critic, as is well known, was one of building on the foundations of those before him concentrating particularly on textual emendation. Dryden, however, had only the incorrect folio and quarto editions to draw on, and he had in turn to be an editor (as an adapter?), a critic and an admirer of Shakespeare all in one. It was not an easy task, and in trying to assess Dryden's
merits and demerits as the first Shakespearean critic, one must bear in mind his own misgivings about first explorers and discoverers, who have to find their way without any guide and light.¹

As the first explorer of a virgin field, Dryden suffered from the limitations and disadvantages of a lack of any tradition in Shakespearean criticism. Thus, he could not appreciate Shakespeare against the background of the Elizabethan age, though by his historical proximity to it he was well equipped to do so - and how tempting is the thought that someone more reliable than Aubrey might have recorded such of the Shakespearean lore as would still have been known in the seventeenth century through the link with the surviving Elizabethan actors and writers.² The only allusion to the Shakespearean tradition in Dryden's writings is that Shakespeare himself said that he was forced to kill Mercutio "in the third act, to prevent being killed by him"; and his only reference to the Elizabethan beliefs and practices in magic is that Shakespeare "then writ as people then believed";³ and though (as already discussed on p. 92 and n3, above), sporadically, Dryden gives evidence of an historical perspective in his criticism, he does not try to place Shakespeare's plays in a historical context; the only isolated remark in this connection is that Shakespeare's plots were weak because of the ignorance of his age.⁴ Also, Dryden does not understand the Elizabethan theatrical conventions or the traditions which Shakespeare

1. 'Heroic' (1672), I, 158, 159; 'Discourse' (1693), II, 139, Fables (1700), II, 281.
2. The fact that in acting tradition Betterton could have had the benefit of Shakespeare's experience through someone who had known someone who had been instructed by Shakespeare himself, makes the gap in the dramatic tradition all the more regrettable; see above, p. 31.
and his contemporaries drew on, and the improvements Shakespeare made on them.\(^1\) Dryden's criticism of Troilus and Cressida, that "it is not divided into acts", shows his ignorance of Elizabethan practices, when most plays were printed without any rigid divisions of acts and scenes. Similarly, his remark that most of Shakespeare's plots were from "Hecatomithi or Hundred Novels of Cinthio", reveals his ignorance of the sources of Shakespeare's plays;\(^2\) and his observation that Troilus and Cressida "was, in all probability, one of his [Shakespeare's] first endeavours on the stage" and Pericles was written at the beginning of his career, shows that Dryden's knowledge of the chronology of Shakespeare's plays was quite inadequate.\(^3\) However, none of the seventeenth century critics had any idea of the order in which Shakespeare wrote his plays, and this did not become established with even relative certainty until Malone's researches in 1778-1790.\(^4\)

1. Cf. Rymer, SVT (1693), p. 130, who shows an awareness of the impoverishment of the traditions which Shakespeare had to draw on, cf. "Corboduck is a fable, doubtless, better turn'd for Tragedy, than any on this side the Alps in his time; and might have been a better direction to Shakespear and Ben Johnson than any guide they had the luck to follow".

2. TC (1679), I, 240; Evening (1671), I, 154; cf. Gerard Langbaine, A Fove, p. 27 & n2, who shows a better knowledge of Shakespeare's sources.

3. TC (1679), I, 240; prologue to Circe, Works, X, 335; Walter Scott suggests that this opinion seems to be solely founded on the inferiority of 'Pericles' to the other plays of Shakespeare" Works, X, 335 n, which, in keeping with Dryden's theory of evolution of a culture and an artist (see above, pp. 93, 126-129), also shows that, however unsuccessfully, Dryden tried to ascertain the chronological order of Shakespeare's plays.

4. See An Attempt to Ascertain the Order in which the Plays attributed to Shakespeare were Written, London, 1778; Malone followed this up in 1780 and 1790 in his ten-volume edition of Shakespeare.
Dryden's failure to appreciate Shakespeare's language is largely due to the difference in sensibilities of the Restoration and the Elizabethans. With all his passion for language, Dryden failed to see - except in rare flashes - the beauty of Shakespeare's poetry. His chosen models for poetry, as we have seen above (on pp. 129-130), were Homer, Virgil and Spenser. Shakespeare was exalted to this status only once, when Dryden came to write All for Love; and most of the time he felt unhappy with what he thought to be Shakespeare's linguistic extravagance. Dryden's neo-classical bias did not allow him to understand the subtlety of Shakespeare's dramatic idiom which combined poetic imagery with the language of everyday life. The decorum of the Restoration did not permit anything commonplace or familiar to appear in their tragedy and, correspondingly, their poetic diction was directed to realise a heightened effect. Again, in keeping with the complexity of his characters, Shakespeare's dramatic style is suggestive, with a casual stroke of phrasing releasing a cosmic force. The Restoration playwrights were more responsive to the obvious and the explicit than to the imaginative. A Restoration playwright therefore aimed at clarity and precision, just as his characters were simple and flat. As a result of these different demands upon language, Dryden found the verbal grandeur of Shakespeare quite irrelevant, and even defective at times. Early in his career, Dryden remarked that Shakespeare invented blank verse to avoid the pains of continual rhyming, a comment which is a two-fold literary howler because Shakespeare did not invent blank verse, nor did his choice fall on blank verse to escape the difficulties of rhyming. However, by 1676 Dryden himself had come under the spell of Shakespeare's poetry, and talking of his own "verse" and "long-loved mistress, Rhyme", 1. Al (1678), 1, 231.
Dryden now confesses that "a secret shame / Invades his breast at Shakespeare's sacred name", and that "in a just despair" he is now prepared to yield "foremost honours" "to an age less polished, more unskill'd". Some inkling of this "just despair" is foreshadowed as early as in 1667, in the preface to Annus Mirabilis and in 1672—at a time when Dryden was fighting the battle of rhyme actively—when he remarked in passing that Shakespeare and Fletcher "excellently described passion without rhyme".

This reverential mood lasted for two years, until 1678. In the 'Heads of an Answer to Rymer' for the first time Dryden compliments Shakespeare's language: "the raising of Shakespeare's passions are more from the excellency of the words and thoughts"; and "by the genius of poetry", Shakespeare succeeded in describing even incoherent situations. To justify the appreciation of Shakespeare's poetry, Rapin more than Aristotle is a reliable guide for Dryden, since according to Rapin "'Tis not the admirable intrigue, the surprising events, the extraordinary incidents that make the beauty of a tragedy; 'tis the discourses when they are natural and passionate'. So are Shakespeare's'.

In All for Love, Dryden's idolatory of Shakespeare's language extends to the point of imitating him—"the greatest possible tribute—and his preface contains the great praise Dryden bestowed upon Shakespeare's language: "'tis almost a miracle that much of his language remains so pure" that "he has left no praise for any who come after him". These are words of rare praise and the only ones of their kind, for otherwise Dryden, like most of his contemporaries, thought that the

1. IR L (1664), I, 6; AZ (1676), I, 192.
2. Annus, I, 95, 'Heroic' (1672), I, 157; see above, p. 143.
3. 'Heads' (1677), I, 216, 217, 220.
4. AL (1678), I, 231.
Restoration language "in general is so much refined since Shakespeare's time", that even a lesser man of this age had advantages unknown to a genius among the Elizabethans. We do not ordinarily fall into the linguistic errors of which even the most correct and learned, Ben Jonson, is guilty. But then the times were ignorant in which they lived. Poetry was then, if not in its infancy among us, at least not arrived to its vigour and maturity. Moreover, the Elizabethan dramatists had only limited opportunities: "besides the want of education and learning . . . they wanted the benefit of converse". This is because they were not "conversant in courts . . . greatness was then not so easy of access, nor conversation so free . . . they were unlucky to have been bred in an unpolished age, and more unlucky to live to a refined one". This implication is nowhere more manifest than in Dryden's attempt to improve Shakespeare's Troilus and Cressida by refining its language.

It is because of the obsolete language that Shakespeare's plays were not as popular on the Restoration stage as those of Beaumont and Fletcher: "The English language in them arrived to its highest perfection: what words have since been taken in, are rather superfluous than necessary"; though later, by 1671, Dryden does not hold quite the same view, for he talks of his intention of dealing with "the improvement of our language since Fletcher's and Jonson's days". By 1672 he feels unhappy with the language of all the Elizabethans: "none of them, no, not Jonson in his height, / Could pass without allowing grains for weight"; and he

1. T C (1679), I, 239; cf. 'Epilogue' (1672), I, 170: "the language, wit and conversation of our age are improved and refined above the last;" cf. Granada (1672), I, 167: "our native language more refin'd and free;" cf. EDP (1668) "neither was verse then refined so much to be an help to that age as it is to ours" I, 92; cf. RL (1664), I, 7.

2. 'Epilogue' (1672), I, 176, 172, 181.

3. T C (1679), I, 241; cf. EDP (1668), I, 69.

4. EDP (1668), I, 68-69; Evening (1671), I, 145; Granada (1672), I, 167.
finds, on reading "diligently the works of Shakespeare and Fletcher
... in every page either some solecism of speech, or some notorious
flaw in sense". After a hair-splitting examination of Jonson's
stylistic and grammatical howlers, Dryden despairs of finding any
correctness in Shakespeare and Fletcher, who were men lacking Jonson's
learning: "That their wit is great, and many times their expressions
noble, envy itself cannot deny"; without doubt, if these poets had lived
in our age they would have "written more correctly". Shakespeare has
many times "written better than any poet in any language", but he is
not consistent in writing wit, and often writes "below the dullest
writer of ours, or of any precedent age"; nor does he express "wit
according to the dignity of the subject ... Never did any author
precipitate himself from such heights of thought to so low expressions
as he often does. He is the very Janus of poets; he wears almost
everywhere two faces; and you have scarce begun to admire the one ere
you despise the other".¹ Dryden failed to appreciate the versatility
of Shakespeare's dramatic verse, which modulated from high to low in
keeping with dramatic character and situation.

Dryden accused Shakespeare of a failure to distinguish "the blown
puffy style from true sublimity";² since "the fury of his fancy often
transported him beyond the bounds of judgment, either in coining of new
words and phrases, or racking words which were in use into the violence
of catachresis".³ He is unable to appreciate Shakespeare's plenitude

1. 'Epilogue' (1672), I, 171; 173-176; 171, 176, 178.
2. 'Grounds' (1679), I, 257; cf. E. Pechter, who suggest that Dryden
is here more interested in "defining the boundaries of the true
sublime than in simply debunking Shakespeare for exceeding them"
3. 'Grounds' (1679), I, 257; see above, "fancy" and "judgment", pp.
137-139; cf. Samuel Johnson: "A quibble was to him [Shakespeare]
the fatal Cleopatra for which he lost the world, and was content to
lose it" (Johnson on Shakespeare, ed. Walter Raleigh, Oxford,
1908:1968, p. 27).
of metaphor, even though Longinus, whom Dryden admired so much, had
recommended the employment of metaphor for raising the passions: "but
to use 'em at every word, to say nothing without a metaphor, a simile,
an image, or description, is I doubt to smell a little too strongly of
the buskin"; and to illustrate his point, Dryden quotes from Hamlet:
"Out, out thou strumpet Fortune! all you gods . . . " (Act III, ii,
486-512). His criticism of the passage - along with the misquotation
of the first two lines from the Hecuba-speech, "The mobbled queen ran
up and down, / Threatening the flame with bisson rheum; a clout about
that head", which makes them sound much sillier as he remembers them,-
does little justice to Shakespeare. To quote Dryden's remarks:

What a pudder is here kept in raising the expression of
trifling thoughts! Would not a man have thought that the
poet had been bound prentice to a wheelwright, for his
first rant? and had followed a ragman for the clout and
blanket, in the second? Fortune is painted on a wheel,
and therefore the writer, in a rage, will have poetical
justice done upon every member of that engine: after this
execution, he bowls the nave down hill, from Heaven to
the fiends (an unreasonable long mark, a man would think);
'tis well there are no solid orbs to stop it in the way,
or no element of fire to consume it: but when it came to
the earth, it must be monstrous heavy, to break ground as
low as to the centre. His making milk the burning eyes
of Heaven was a pretty tolerable flight too: and I think
no man ever drew milk out of eyes before him: yet, to make
the wonder greater, these eyes were burning. Such a sight
indeed were enough to have raised passion in the gods; but
to excuse the effects of it, he tells you, perhaps they
did not see it. Wise men would be glad to find a little
sense couched under all these pompous words; for bombast
is commonly the delight of that audience which loves
poetry, but understands it not: and as commonly has been
the practice of those writers who, not being able to infuse
a natural passion into the mind, and have made it their
business to ply the ears and to stun their judges by the
noise.

The rhetoric of the speech is quite natural in a play-within-a-play,
where an actor, acting as actor, recites a speech to make an impact upon

1. 'Grounds' (1679), I, 257-258.
2. 'Grounds' (1679), I, 258.
prince Hamlet. Dryden's criticism of the passage, however, betrays his failure to understand the dramatic appropriateness of the rant, and that is despite the fact that in attributing these lines to some other author (a point which he does not substantiate and which remains unsupported by Hamlet-scholarship),¹ Dryden is able to recognise their difference in style from the general run of verse in the play. Dryden's objection, here, is not only to the excess of metaphors but to the kind of metaphors used by Shakespeare. For example, fortune as a wheel, "the burning eyes of Heaven" are clichés that Restoration writers might have used. Dryden's too close and literal analysis of the Hecuba-speech is more in line with Rymer's manner of hair-splitting cavillings. Like Rymer again, Dryden's style is slangy and he poses silly questions only to ridicule them. The adverse comments of the passage are more in the nature of a burlesque than criticism.

Dryden's criticism of the language of his predecessor reached its height in 1672-73; a brief spell of admiration of Shakespeare's poetry followed in 1676-78; but in 1679 he was again severe in his criticism. After 1679, however, there is a marked restraint in any cavillings at the language of the Elizabethans, although, as we have seen (on pp. 131-136) Dryden was now occupied more seriously with the improvement of the English language, especially during the period of his translations. He, of course, does not praise Elizabethan language at this stage, nor does he draw on it for models, but he does not condemn it now; and even in a letter to William Walsh, when Dryden again indulges in a minute analysis of the English syntax, he does not allude to the failings of his predecessors, as he had done earlier in 'Defence of the Epilogue'.²

1. 'Grounds' (1679), I, 257.
2. 'Letter to Walsh' (1691?), II, 53.
Dryden evaluates the linguistic achievements of the Elizabethans by the standards of the Restoration. He is therefore able to see in them the merits of the contemporary norms and needs. Thus, even at the height of his disgust with the language of the Elizabethans, in 'Defence of an Epilogue', he does not fail to compliment Shakespeare, Fletcher and Ben Jonson for having enriched English by giving new significance to received words.\(^1\) Dryden's criticism of Shakespeare's language has often invited indignation from the admirers of the poet but according to T.S. Eliot Dryden's criticism was justified as he was struggling to modernise the English language. To quote Eliot: "take his [Dryden's] comments upon Shakespeare one by one, and you will find... that most of them are just... Dryden's praise of Shakespeare is as high as our own, and... if we stop to apprehend the values which are rightly important for Dryden in his time, his occasional censure of Shakespeare is usually right".\(^2\)

The Unities (or plot)

Dryden's animated criticism of Shakespeare's plots belongs to the period between 1668 and 1679. In the *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, Lisideius is highly critical of Shakespeare's historical plays for their failure to observe the unity of time:

they are rather so many chronicles of kings, or the business many times of thirty or forty years, cramped into a representation of two hours and an half, which is not to imitate... nature, but rather to draw her in miniature... to look upon her through the wrong end of a perspective, and receive her images not only much less, but infinitely more imperfect than the life: this, instead of making a play delightful, renders it ridiculous.

Neander, however, defends Shakespeare against the attacks of both Ben Jonson and Lisideius, arguing that it is more difficult to write the

1. See above, pp. 133-134.
2. *John Dryden the Poet, the Dramatist, the Critic*, New York, 1932, p. 57.
irregular plays of Shakespeare and Fletcher. These plays offer so much more variety and greatness of character than the regular plays of the French, which "by their servile observations of the unities of time and place, and integrity of scenes . . . have brought on themselves . . . dearth of plot, and narrowness of imagination"; and in most of them "there is a more masculine fancy and greater spirit in the writing than there is in any of the French"; but Neander is still anxious to make the point that Shakespeare also wrote a regular play, *Merry Wives of Windsor*, before Ben Jonson.¹

From the Essay of Dramatic Poesy and until after 1679, Dryden is steady in favouring the unities. Shakespeare's plays, especially the earlier ones, come under severe censure in 'Defence of the Epilogue' (1672) for "the lameness of their plots" (for Dryden thought that Shakespeare and Fletcher also improved their plots with experience); for, *Pericles* and the historical plays "were made up of some ridiculous, incoherent story, which in one play many times took up the business of an age". Besides, plays like *Winter's Tale, Love's Labour Lost, Measure for Measure . . . were either grounded on impossibilities, or at least so meanly written that the comedy neither caused your mirth, nor the serious part your concernment".²

Dryden next alludes to the plots of the Elizabethan dramatists in 'Heads of an Answer' (1677), when he defends English tragedy in the wake of Rymer's scathing attack in The Tragedies of the Last Age. As he argues, English tragedy is written more beautifully than if not so correctly as Greek tragedy. He supports the double action of English drama arguing that the multiplicity of episodes sustain the suspense of the audience better than a single action where the whole design is

1. EDP (1668), I, 47, 63-66; Jonson, prologue to Every Man in His Humour, (1616), Herford and Simpson, III, 303.
2. 'Epilogue' (1672), I, 172.
clear all at once.¹ Dryden himself could not have been really convinced by his own argument, for in his tragedy, All for Love (1678), written soon after 'Heads of an Answer', he strives for Greek correctness rather than English variety or suspense. That the stance adopted in 'Heads of an Answer' was no more than a passing phase, is more than substantiated by his criticism of the plots of Shakespeare and Fletcher later in 1679, in the 'Grounds of Criticism in Tragedy', as well as in his attempt to improve upon the defective plot of Shakespeare’s Troilus and Cressida.² However, after 1679 Dryden’s stand on the unities (as seen above, pp. 100-102 and figure 1) changes and now onwards the irregularities of Shakespeare do not matter. His genius transcends his defects. Dryden comes to realise now that the unities of "time, place, and action may with pains be wrought, / But genius must be born; and never can be taught".³

Tragi-Comedy

Dryden’s neo-classical bias nowhere stands in his way so much as in his inability to have a clear insight into Shakespeare’s tragi-comedy. Tragi-comedy had come to acquire a new dignity in the English drama after the successful example and formulation of it by John Fletcher, according to whom "a tragie-comedie is not so called in respect of mirth and killing but in respect it wants deaths, which is enouogh to make it no tragédie, yet brings some neere it, which is enouogh to make it no comedie".⁴ But heroic tragedy, where a serious theme is brought to a happy ending, was now in effect fulfilling the same basic function as

1. 'Heads' (1677), I, 215-216.
3. DD (1694), II, 71; cf. 'Dennis' (1694), II, 178.
4. Faithfull Shepheardesse, London, 1609, 'Address to the Reader'.
Shakespeare attempted in his last plays. To most of the Restoration dramatists, then, tragi-comedy meant no more than the artificial mingling of tears and laughter which Sidney had earlier condemned and which Fletcher also positively rejects. The consensus of Restoration opinion finds its voice in Lisideius, who describes English tragi-comedy as one of the most "absurd" forms of drama of all the world, and this is because

many scenes of our tragi-comedies carry on a design that is nothing of kin to the main plot; and that we see two distinct webs in a play, like those in ill wrought stuffs; and two actions, that is, two plays, carried on together, to the confounding of the audience... here a course of mirth, there another of sadness and passion, a third of honour, and fourth a duel: thus in two hours and a half we run through all the fits of Bedlam.

Neander defends the English practice of "mirth mixed with tragedy" because "continued gravity keeps the spirit too much bent; we must refresh it sometimes".

Dryden's concept of tragi-comedy is not that of Fletcher, nor does his tragi-comedy achieve the dignity and serenity of Shakespeare's Tempest. In Dryden it is something to be contrived artificially, so that his practice of introducing comic scenes into his serious plays is always laboured - more a concession to the English audience than a part of his dramatic conviction. Dryden's next statement on this theme occurs in the preface to Secret Love (1668) where, speaking up for his play, he concedes that the argument of his Indian Emperor "was much more noble, not having the alloy of comedy to depress it". In the preface to

2. EDP (1668), I, 45, 58.
An Evening's Love (1671), Dryden approves of "the mixed way of comedy", but does not elucidate his point. In the preface to Oedipus (1679) he says: "variety, as 'tis managed, is too often subject to breed distraction: and while we would please too many ways, for want of art in the conduct, we please in none". In the preface to his Troilus and Cressida (1679), Dryden condemns the double action of Shakespeare's plays, as well as his own Marriage A-La-Mode, on the grounds that "two different independent actions distract the attention and concernment of the audience, and consequently destroy the intention of the poet: if his business be to move terror and pity, and one of his actions be comical, the other tragical, the former will divert the people, and utterly make void his greater purpose"; and in his 'Grounds of Criticism in Tragedy', he reiterates this point: "he who treats of joy and grief together is in a fair way of causing neither of those effects".

Dryden's next play, The Spanish Friar (1681), shows, that to him tragi-comedy meant no more than tacking "two plays together", and that he introduced the comic plot only because "the audience are grown weary of continued melancholy scenes". In Don Sebastian (1690) also, Dryden supplied the comic sub-plot of Antonio and Morayma because "the English will not bear a thorough tragedy; but are pleased that it should be lightened with under-parts of mirth"; but to say (as Dryden does) that his under-plot was an integral part of the main plot "depending on the serious part of the design", shows that his perspectives are awry. The plot of Antonio and Morayma is only superficially related to the main plot, and neither the characters nor the theme of the interlude contribute anything to it. In his next play, Cleomenes (1692), Dryden not only works for one main design "unmixed with comedy", but commends

1. Secret, I, 105; Evening, I, 148-149; Oedipus, I, 243; TC, 243-244; 'Grounds', I, 256.
himself in his preface for doing so. In his 'Discourse concerning
Satire' (1693), Dryden prescribes that the comic plot of a tragi-comedy
has to be "subservient to the chief fable... so that the drama may
not seem a monster, with two heads". Again, in his letter to William
Walsh (1693), Dryden observes that he does not approve of the practice
of tragi-comedy as it "distracts the hearers [but] for the sake of
variety; and for the particular taste which they [the audiences] have
to low comedy", he has often given in. His last play, Love Triumphant
(1694), bears this out where Dryden concedes that tragi-comedy is a
fault, which, however, he would like to practise for the sake of his
audience.¹

Dryden's last statement on tragi-comedy, in 'A Parallel of Poetry
and Painting' (1695), sums up his lifelong ambivalence in regard to
this dramatic genre. He now describes it as "wholly Gothic,
notwithstanding the success which it has found upon our theatre". He
does not even defend his own Spanish Friar, "for though the comical
parts are diverting, and the serious moving, yet they are of an
unnatural mingle: for mirth and gravity destroy each other".² In
practice as in theory, then, Dryden is unable to maintain an artistic
equilibrium of Shakespeare. However, it is significant that nowhere in
his discussions does Dryden condemn Shakespearean tragi-comedy, except
in that first debate in the Essay of Dramatic Poesy where one speaker
criticises the English tragi-comedy and the other redresses the balance
by supporting it. The absence of a direct attack on Shakespeare's use
of a dramatic form about which Dryden always felt ill at ease, suggests
at least by inference - that Dryden, unlike Rymer, did not find
Shakespearean tragi-comedy unbearable.³ For an open defiance of the

1. Spanish, I, 279; DS, II, 51; Works, VIII, 197; Discourse, II, 145;
2. 'Parallel' (1695), II, 202.
Restoration prejudice against Shakespeare's tragi-comedy Shakespearean criticism had yet to wait another hundred years, for the voice of Samuel Johnson.

**Comedy**

Dryden, as seen above (p. 96 and n 4), considered comedy as an inferior form of art. In an apparently self-deprecatory remark: "I know I am not so fitted by nature to write comedy: I want that gaiety of humour which is required to it", he is in fact paying a backhanded compliment to himself as a serious artist fit only for the loftier endeavours. Unlike Rymer, Dryden held Shakespearean tragedy in great esteem but about comedy, he is in agreement with Rymer that modern comedy is superior to Shakespeare's.

Shakespeare's romantic comedies had little appeal for the artificial culture of the court. Many of these comedies "were never seen in the Restoration". In Pepys' opinion, as we have seen above (p. 30), most of Shakespeare's comedies were dull and insipid. In 1673, Richard Ward, a preacher of the gospel in Hertfordshire chose ten lines from The Merchant of Venice as an example of "unprofitable and ineffectual Words"; and in a prologue to a revival of James Shirley's Love Tricks (1677) we are told: "That which the World call'd Wit in Shakespear's age, / Is laught at, as improper for our Stage".

1. Cf. Johnson on Shakespeare, ed. Walter Raleigh, Oxford, 1908:1968, p. 10: "That this [tragi-comedy] is a practice contrary to the rules of criticism will be readily allowed; but there is always an appeal open from criticism to nature".
2. 'Essay' (1668), I, 116.
According to Dryden, Shakespeare "did not perfectly observe the laws of comedy"; and the plots of his comedies, with the exception of *Merry Wives of Windsor*, fall short of neo-classical decorum of theunities which held a special importance for Dryden before 1679 when most of his criticism of Shakespeare's comedies occurs.¹ A comedy, more than a tragedy, as Dryden observes, should observe the prescribed limit of time: "the plot, accidents, and persons of comedy are small, and may be naturally turned in a little compass". He therefore admires Ben Jonson for allowing only twenty four hours to his comedies, and his "*Silent Woman* before all other plays", is preferred for this reason.²

Ben Jonson is admired by Dryden as a "perfect pattern of imitation... in his humour". Dryden's definition of humour: "the ridiculous extravagance of conversation wherein one man differs from all others" is also influenced by Jonson's theory of humour.³ Shakespeare's comic characters appeared to Dryden as not "well chosen"; they are not "kept distinct from interfering with each other".⁴ Falstaff is

the best of comical characters... (because) he is not properly one humour, but a miscellany of humours or images, drawn from so many several men: that wherein he is singular in his wit, or those things he says... unexpected by the audience; his quick evasions when you imagine him surprised, which, as they are extremely diverting of themselves, so receive a great addition from his person; for the very sight of such an unwieldy, old, debauched fellow is a comedy alone.

Dryden's admiration of Falstaff for his complexity, here, is inconsistent with his later remarks in 'the Grounds of Criticism' where Falstaff is

2. 'Essay' (1668), I, 128-129.
3. 'Epilogue' (1672), I, 182; EDP (1668), I, 71-73; Ben Jonson: Every Man Out of His Humour (1600), Herford and Simpson, Ill, 431-433.
praised for consistency of manners. The contradiction is also apparent in Dryden's appreciation of Jonson's characters for exemplifying one humour at a time and yet admiring Falstaff for a "miscellany of humours".¹

However, even Ben Jonson, from Dryden's point of view, falls short of the sophistication of the new comedy.² The Restoration comedy, under the influence of the court, was geared to mirror the gallantries and manners of men and women of the aristocratic class. Dryden subscribes to Aristotle's view of a comedy in his remarks that the "persons in comedy are of a lower quality", of "common rank", and of "lower and more familiar nature".³ However, this was not in agreement with Restoration norms, so Aristotle was interpreted to conform to the requirements of the new comedy. William Congreve, in his reply to Jeremy Collier's criticism of the current practice of ridiculing the nobility in comedy, argued that Aristotle did not "mean the worse sort of People in respect to their Quality, but in respect to their Manners".⁴ Aristotle's definition, that comedy is "an imitation of men worse than the average", worse in the sense of "one particular kind, the Ridiculous, which is a species of the Ugly",⁵ obviously does not refer to a social hierarchy.

Dryden stands for the comedy of gentlemen: "gentlemen will now be entertained with the follies of each other: and though they allow Cob and Tib to speak properly, yet they are not much pleased with their tankard or with their rags: and surely their conversation can be no jest

1. EDP (1668), I, 71-72; 'Grounds' (1679), I, 250.
2. Evening (1671), I, 147, 'Epilogue' (1672), I, 182.
to them on the theatre, when they would avoid it on the street”.¹

Jonson’s “mechanic humour”, according to Dryden, was confined to the
"low characters of vice and folly".² Shakespeare and Ben Jonson could
not describe gentlemen. Jonson’s Truewit could pass for “a fine
gentleman in an university”, and “Shakespeare showed the best of his skill
in his Mercutio”, but their wit in general "was not that of gentlemen;
there was ever somewhat that was ill-bred and clownish in it".³

Beaumont and Fletcher "understood and imitated the conversation of
gentlemen much better; whose wild debaucheries and quickness of wit in
repartees, no poet can ever paint", and therefore their plays are twice
as popular as those of Shakespeare and Ben Jonson. Repartee, which is
"one of the chiefest graces" of comedy, was a special feature of
Fletcher’s plays. Shakespeare’s comic wit often degenerates into
"clenches".⁴

According to Dryden, "by the knowledge and pattern of their wit
who writ before us, and by the advantage of our own conversation, the
discourse and raillery of our comedies excel what has been written by
them"; even our ordinary level of communication is superior to what these
poets could write, for "Our ladies and our men now speak more wit / In
conversation than those poets writ". Of the three dramatists,
Shakespeare’s comedies were the least popular, Beaumont and Fletcher’s
the most.⁵ Shakespeare’s comedy, with its variety and richness of
character, wild woodland settings, innocent romantic love, the absence

1. 'Epilogue' (1672), I, 182.
2. EDP (1668), I, 74, 'Epilogue' (1672), I, 178; cf. Granada (1672),
   I, 167.
3. 'Epilogue' (1672), I, 180, EDP (1668), I, 74.
4. EDP (1668), I, 68-69, 60-61, 67.
5. 'Epilogue' (1672), I, 181; Granada (1672), I, 167; EDP (1668), I,
   69, see Watson, I, 54 n.
of dramatic unities and indifference to poetic justice meant very little to the Restoration playwrights and audiences. Heavy alteration - some of these comedies were transformed into operas - seemed an ideal way of reviving them. By this means, the Restoration adapters thought, they were refining the crude comedies of Shakespeare. In a prologue written by Bevill Higgons to Granville's The Jew of Venice (1701), an adaptation of The Merchant of Venice, Shakespeare's ghost is made to voice a representative opinion of the Restoration theatre world:

These Scenes in their rough Native Dress were mine;
But now improv'd with nobler Lustre shine;
The first rude Sketches Shakespear's Pencil drew,
But all the shining Master-strokes are new.  

Tragedy

Tragedy, Dryden thought, was a great work of art; and only a true critic, not just a blind admirer, can claim to be an adequate judge of it. Seventeenth-century-tragedy had nothing in common with Shakespearean tragedy. The rules of modern tragedy are derived by "the Italian and French critics, by studying the precepts of Aristotle and Horace" and the examples of the Greek poets. Dryden's consistent admiration for Shakespeare's tragedies cannot be explained in terms of the Restoration theory of tragedy, rather it exists in spite of it.

During the early years of the Restoration, the heroic tragedy, as propounded by Hobbes and practised by Davenant, aimed to be the

2. Cf. "Tragedy surpasses every other kind of writing in gravity" EDP (1668), 1, 41 & n 2; cf. 'Parallel' (1695), II, 184.
3. AL (1678), 1, 226.
4. 'Parallel' (1695), II, 191.
counterpart of epic;¹ and Dryden subscribed to their view.² The hero of this tragedy had to be the embodiment of virtue, and in order to realise this, "admiration" more than Aristotle's "pity" and "terror" had to be the central emotion.³ We have already seen the Restoration concern with decorum of plot, poetic justice and an exalted diction for tragedy, to which Dryden largely subscribed. Yet he responds to Shakespeare's tragedy and exalts it above the Greek tragedy;⁴ and thought that only at its best can the ancient tragedy bear comparison to Shakespearean tragedy.⁵ Two factors seem to have contributed to his unqualified admiration of Elizabethan tragedy. One was Rymer's outright denunciation of it, and the other the influence of Longinus. Dryden had to defend the English tragedy against Rymer's attack, and fortunately in Longinus he found an adequate support in antiquity itself to justify the excellences of an irregular genius. It has often been suggested that Dryden was somewhat awed by the power of Rymer's learning in The Tragedies of the Last Age; but there seems little plausibility in such an interpretation, especially in view of the advantage Dryden gained over Rymer by his timely discovery of Longinus. In his 'Heads of an Answer to Rymer', Dryden's defence is essentially on Longinian principles, and in his 'Grounds of Criticism in Tragedy' he brings all the ancients - Aristotle, Horace and Longinus - together, along with a string of

2. 'Heroic' (1672), I, 158; cf. EDP (1668), I, 86, Tyraffic (1670), I, 142.
5. Cf. "the master-piece of Seneca ... [is] that scene in Troades where ... you see the tenderness of a mother ... in Andromache ... [which] raises compassion to a high degree ... and bears the nearest resemblance of any thing in their tragedies to the excellent scenes of passion in Shakespeare" EDP (1668), I, 41.
contemporary French critics, to justify his admiration of Elizabethan tragedy.

Dryden's "Heads of an Answer to Rymer" repudiates the very basis of Rymer's argument by affirming that "fable is not the greatest masterpiece of a tragedy." Aristotle placed it first, not because of its dignity but for its priority. A fable without other suitable dramatic aids, namely, characters, manners, thoughts and words, cannot contrive pity and terror so movingly; and in all these features, English tragedy is not inferior to Sophocles' and Euripides'.

Dryden makes a bold departure from the precepts of Aristotle and Rapin by exalting English tragedy above the Greek. Aristotle, perhaps, could not determine "all the excellences of tragedy" because his experience was limited to Sophocles and Euripides alone. English tragedy is richer than the Greek in variety of plot and character. In opposition to Rapin's recommendation, Dryden applauds the English practice of introducing love into a tragedy. To arouse pity, love is the ideal subject because "we are not touched with the sufferings of any sort of men so much as of lovers; and this was almost unknown to the Ancients."

Tragedy should extend further than the emotions of pity and terror. It should encourage the love of virtue and the hatred of vice, and to realise these pity and terror are inadequate, many other passions, such as joy, anger, love and fear, being needed also. In the "concernment for the

1. 'Heads' (1677), I, 211-212; cf. 'Grounds' (1679), I, 247-248.
2. 'Heads', I, 212, 218. 
3. 'Heads', I, 212, 216; cf. EDP (1668), I, 65, where Dryden applauds "the variety and greatness of characters" of Shakespeare and Fletcher as against the narrow and flat designs of the French.
4. 'Heads', I, 212, 218; cf. EDP (1668), I, 41-42, where the English tragedy is exalted above the ancients for the soft passion of love. Obviously Dryden did not change his stand even after reading in Rapin that love degrades tragedy "from that majesty which is proper to it" (Reflections on Aristotle's Treatise of Poesie, trans. Rymer, London, 1674, p. 112), cf. Rymer, SIV (1693), p. 117.
good, and . . . detestation for the bad . . . the English have . . . answered this end of tragedy as well as the Ancients, or perhaps better". English tragedy has thus answered the test of Aristotle's pity and terror, as well as added many more passions. In addition to all this, English tragedy has administered poetic justice better than did the ancients. Finally, on the authority of Rapin himself, Dryden claims that the beauty of a tragedy lies more in natural and passionate discourses than in a skilful contrivance of plot, and that Shakespeare by the genius of his poetry has succeeded in raising excellent passions. On the whole, it is more to the credit of the English that in spite of defective plots they have been able to write such beautiful tragedies which in all other respects excel those of the Greeks. The essence of the argument is that Shakespeare and Fletcher could write successful tragedies because they wrote in conformity with the genius of the age and nation they lived rather than imitate the Greeks.

Dryden's preference for the English tragedy over the Greek is, in no way a denunciation of the Greek tragedy. On the contrary, like Rymer, Dryden was a great admirer of the Greek tragedy, especially of Sophocles', whose Oedipus he held in great esteem. Like Rymer again, Dryden recommended that Sophocles and Euripides should be our guides in tragedy; but unlike Rymer, Dryden was a great champion of the English

1. 'Heads', I, 212-213, 217.
4. 'Heads', I, 215, cf. "If the plays of the Ancients are more correctly plotted, ours are more beautifully written; and if we can raise passions as high on worse foundations, it shows our genius in tragedy is greater".
5. 'Heads', I, 214.
7. 'Parallel' (1695), II, 195; Rymer, above, p. 36.
tragedy and rated it above the Greek tragedy.

The defence of the English tragedy is next taken by Dryden in his preface to Troilus and Cressida. As the opening paragraph of the preface explains, Dryden wanted to justify his admiration for Shakespeare after the example of Longinus' praise of Aeschylus. Accordingly, though Dryden is not blind to the defects of Shakespeare, namely his plot, language, failure to render poetic justice, yet he stands for "the admirable genius of the author". Dryden formulates his criticism of tragedy on a synthesis of the principles of Aristotle, Horace and Longinus. Thus, Aristotle's definition of a tragedy is accepted in toto, and unity of action, probability, pity and terror are accepted as desirable. Judged, then, by Rymer's standards, which were based largely on Aristotle's, the plots of Shakespeare and Fletcher are defective; but there is something more to a tragedy than the beauty of plot, and Dryden offers his own critical formula for assessing a tragedy. Arguing against Rymer's criticism of A King and No King, Dryden qualifies it that though "the faults of the plot are so evidently proved that they can no longer be denied", yet he finds the play moving when it is read... the beauties of it must therefore lie either in the lively touches of the passion: or... that even in imperfect plots there are less degrees of nature, by which some faint emotions of pity and terror are raised in us... nothing can move our nature, but by some natural reason, which works upon passions. And since we acknowledge the effect, there must be something in the cause.

Here Dryden is drawing on Longinus - to judge by effect rather than by defect.

After answering Rymer's criticism of Fletcher on the Longinian rather than Aristotelian principles, Dryden dwells at length on Longinus'
prescription of passions in tragedy. Shakespeare had a gift for it: 1

"Passions in his scene between Brutus and Cassius are extremely natural,
the thoughts are such as arise from the matter, the expression of 'em
not viciously figurative". 2 Before Shakespeare, Euripides and then
Fletcher had exploited "the quarrel of two virtuous men, raised by
natural degrees to the extremity of passion", but, Dryden goes on:

the particular groundwork which Shakespeare has taken is
incomparably the best; because he has not only chosen two
of the greatest heroes of their age, but has likewise
interested the liberty of Rome, and their own honours who
were the redeemers of it, in this debate. And if he has
made Brutus, who was naturally a patient man, to fly into
excess at first, let it be remembered in his defence that,
just before, he has received the news of Portia's death;
whom the poet, on purpose neglecting a little chronology,
supposes to have died before Brutus, only to give him an
occasion of being more easily exasperated. Add to this
that the injury he had received from Cassius had long been
brooding in his mind; and that a melancholy man, upon
consideration of an affront, especially from a friend,
would be more eager in his passion than he who had given
it, though naturally more choleric. 3

Rymer, as already seen (on p. 47), is highly critical of this scene.

Dryden, on the other hand, singles it out as the best example of its kind
in the history of drama. After Shakespeare's example - the Brutus/Cassius
friendship surviving despite a bitter quarrel - this becomes a
favourite theme with Dryden. We find him using it in All for Love,
Troilus and Cressida and in Don Sebastian. As in Shakespeare, in each of
these plays the friends in question are great heroes and their personal
anger and pride are linked with their country's honour, and one of the
friends recovers himself by recognising the qualities of nobility and
virtue in the other. Dryden, as we know, was a great admirer of
Shakespeare's dramatisation of passions and Brutus's fit of passion in

1. 'Heads' (1677), I, 220, 'Grounds' (1679), I, 257; cf. EDP (1668),
I, 41.

2. 'Grounds' (1679), I, 259.

this scene understandably inspires his special praise since in working up Brutus's anger artfully and naturally Shakespeare comes close to the Longinian precepts of passion which Dryden takes to be a special gift of a genius.

The question which Dryden raised before beginning his 'Grounds of Criticism in Tragedy': "how far we ought to imitate our own poets, Shakespeare and Fletcher, in their tragedies" is answered at length. We ought to imitate the beauty of Shakespeare's thought and characterisation. We ought not to imitate his "sounding words" since we have "nothing of his thought, but are all outside; there is not so much as a dwarf within our giant's clothes". "If Shakespeare were stripped of all the bombast in his passions, and dressed in the most vulgar words, we should find the beauties of his thoughts remaining; if his embroideries were burnt down, there would still be silver at the bottom of the melting-pot ... the excellency of the poet was ... in the more manly passions". After the prescription of Le Bossu, Dryden's advice is we ought to follow Shakespeare and Fletcher "so far only as they have copied the excellencies of those who invented and brought to perfection dramatic poetry".

Dryden next alludes to Shakespeare's tragedy after Rymer's scathing attack on Othello. His almost total silence on Rymer's Othello is somewhat intriguing, the only comment in passing being that Shakespeare's tragedy, for his genius, will continue to be read despite Rymer's criticism.

1. 'Grounds' (1679), I, 243, 260, 259-260, 246.
Characterisation

The neo-classical critics and dramatists paid comparatively little attention to Shakespeare's characters. Other than Dryden, Margaret Cavendish is the only seventeenth century critic who gives serious attention to Shakespeare's characters. Jonson, for example, merely alludes to some of the characters of Henry IV, I, II, and very casually at that. Leonard Digges speaks of the powerful effect Shakespeare's characters had on the audience, specially Caesar, Brutus, Cassius, Othello, Iago, Falstaff, Hal, Poins, Beatrice, Benedick, Malvolio; and as already seen, on pp. 254, Shadwell and William Temple refer to Shakespeare's characterisation only in passing. Some of the actors of the period contributed more to the interpretation of Shakespearean character than most of these critics. Betterton, for example, devoted himself to the study of Hamlet; Hart's Othello had a great impact on the audiences.

This neglect of character-analysis is quite understandable since a neo-classical critic was more concerned with plot and correctness of form than an appreciation of character. But for Dryden, plot, although the "ground work" strikes not the eye so much as the beauties or imperfections of the manners, the thoughts, and the expressions.

And while Dryden found Shakespeare often wanting in the "ground work", for the art of characterisation he thought Shakespeare was "worth our imitation".


3. 'Grounds' (1679), I, 247-248; 253.
Dryden indeed does not dwell on the psychological subtleties of Shakespearean character (except for an isolated—and very elementary—analysis of the Brutus/Cassius scene of passion) — this is to expect something much ahead of his time — nor does he give a full length study of any of Shakespeare's characters (Rymer's derogatory account of the protagonist of Othello is the only example of its kind in Restoration criticism), but in his ability to admire the versatility and greatness of Shakespeare's characters he was a precursor of Shakespearean criticism than a representative of his age. However, of the many Shakespearean characters, Dryden mentions only a few (apart from those in the plays he adapted), namely, Falstaff, Mercutio, Brutus, Cassius, Henry IV, Richard II, Desdemona and Juliet.

Dryden's theory of characterisation is based on the "lights" of Aristotle, Horace and Longinus. Of the three, Dryden acknowledges his debt to Horace, who is himself indebted to Aristotle. Dryden's theory of manners or characterisation — which is somewhat confusing to a modern reader, since he does not quite mean what we understand by characterisation — runs parallel to Aristotle's recommendations of characters. According to Aristotle, "manners" constitute the "characters"; and for Dryden "from the manners, the characters of persons

3. Ars Poetica, II, 156, 119, 126-127: 'you must remark the manners of each age'; 'either follow tradition, or create your own convention'; 'let each character be maintained as it began, and remain consistent with itself', (Watson, I, 249, n 2), cf. above, p. 108.
are derived".\(^1\) Again, Aristotle elaborates: "manners, or characters, belong...to any speech or action that manifests a certain disposition; and they are bad or good as the disposition manifested is bad or good"; and Dryden's definition of manners runs: "the manners in a poem are...those inclinations, whether natural or acquired, which move and carry us to actions, good, bad or indifferent, in a play".\(^2\) Dryden's first recommendation is that manners "must be apparent; that is, in every character of the play some inclinations of the person must appear; and these are shown in the actions and discourse".\(^3\)

The second requisite of manners, according to Aristotle, is "propriety"; in Dryden's words, "the manners must be suitable, or agreeing to the persons; that is, to the age, sex, dignity, and the other general heads of manners".\(^4\) Aristotle's third prescription is "resemblance";

and, as Dryden elaborates this point: "this is founded upon the

2. Poetics, ch. 15, p. 29; 'Grounds' (1679), I, 248; cf. 'Heads' (1677), I, 216; later, when Dryden retreats from Aristotle, manners come to stand for "passions and, in a larger sense, the descriptions of persons, and their very habits" (Fables (1700), II, 278); association of manners with action in the first definition is clearly after the example of Aristotle; cf. Rapin, "the manners are the cause of the action, for it is from these that a man begins to act" (Reflections on Aristotle's Treatise on Poetics, trans. Rymer, p. 35).
3. 'Grounds' (1679), I, 249; cf. 'Parallel' (1695), II, 186.
4. Poetics, ch. 15, p. 29; 'Grounds' (1679), I, 249.
particular characters of men, as we have them delivered to us by relation
or history". The fourth requirement, according to Aristotle, is that
manners should show "uniformity"; and Dryden takes this to mean "that
they be constant and equal, that is, maintained the same through the
whole design".¹

Under the first heading, clarity of manners, Dryden finds
Shakespeare worthy of commendation: "'Tis one of the excellencies of
Shakespeare that the manners of his persons are generally apparent, and
you see their bent and inclinations".² Clarity of manners demands a
degree of consistency in the characters: "one virtue, vice, and passion
ought to be shown in every man, as predominant over all the rest; as
... love of his country in Brutus". And since it is not possible to
have "one particular virtue, or vice, or passion only", there should be
"a composition of qualities which are not contrary to one another in the
same person ... (and) in a comical character or humour (which is an
inclination to this or that particular folly)". Falstaff best illustrates
this consistency of manners. He "is a liar, and a coward, a glutton,
and a buffoon because all these qualities may agree in the same man".
So far as Falstaff is concerned, Dryden's enthusiasm goes back to the
Essay of Dramatic Poesy, where Falstaff is described as the best of
comical characters, for his complexity.³ Falstaff, incidentally, is the
most admired character of Shakespeare in the Seventeenth century.
According to G.E. Bentley, among the characters of Shakespeare and Jonson,
Falstaff is mentioned most frequently in the seventeenth century.
Shadwell, a great admirer of Jonson against Shakespeare, however considers
"Falstaffe ... comparable to any of Johnson's considerable humours".

1. Poetics, ch. 15, p. 30; 'Grounds' (1679), I, 249.
2. 'Grounds' (1679), I, 251.
3. 'Grounds' (1679), I, 250; cf. above, pp. 165-166.
Even Jeremy Collier praises Shakespeare's treatment of Falstaff.¹

However, about Shakespeare's comic characters in general, Dryden had his reservations; they are not well chosen, are not distinguished.² They do not conform to the current norms of a comedy demanding gentlemen. Mercutio is the only Shakespearean character who could come up to the expectation of a Restoration gentleman and Dryden admires Shakespeare's skill for portraying such a fine man; though even Mercutio, according to Dryden, is not witty by Restoration standards that Shakespeare should have killed him in the third act to keep him from running away with the play: "I see nothing in him but what was so exceedingly harmless that he might have lived to the end of the play, and died in his bed, without offence to any man".³

Dryden finds Shakespeare particularly satisfying on the second quality of manners, that is propriety. Sophocles and Euripides among the Greeks and Terence among the Romans are the best examples in classical drama for this quality. Contemporary French drama is especially wanting in this as the French poets generally portray the manners of their heroes to be entirely French, no matter what the time or place of the scenes they represent.⁴ "Shakespeare, having ascribed to Henry the Fourth the character of a king and of a father gives him the perfect manners of each relation, when either he transacts with his son or with his subjects".

No other dramatist "ever drew so many characters, or generally

2. Evening (1671), I, 149.
3. 'Epilogue' (1672), I, 180.
distinguished ‘em better from one another, excepting only Jonson’. In Caliban Shakespeare displays a highly fertile imagination: "he seems there to have created a person which was not in nature, a boldness which at first sight would appear intolerable; for he makes him a species of himself, begotten by an incubus or a witch". But this, as Dryden qualifies, "is not wholly beyond the bounds of credibility", because the people then believed in magic and spirits. And whether or not Shakespeare's generation can be defended, Dryden would like to leave the issue to the examination of philosophy; but he is certain that Shakespeare

has most judiciously furnished him with a person, a language, and a character, which will suit him, both by father's and mother's side: he has all the discontents and malice of a witch, and of a devil, besides a convenient proportion of the deadly sins; gluttony, sloth, and lust are manifest; the dejectedness of a slave is likewise given him, the ignorance of one bred up in a desert island. His person is monstrous, as he is the product of unnatural lust; and his language is as hobgoblin as his person; in all things he is distinguished from other mortals.

Caliban is Dryden's most detailed and perceptive analysis of a Shakespearean character. That of all the characters of Shakespeare Dryden's choice should fall on Caliban is not surprising; for apart from the fact that he came to admire Shakespeare's portrayal intimately through his own experience as an adapter of The Tempest, Dryden thought that Shakespeare had a special gift for creating supernatural characters. In Caliban, Shakespeare takes a very bold step in developing from ordinary "fairies" and "pigmies" of A Midsummer Nights Dream to a full-fledged supernatural character. This unique creature, who is a species

1. 'Grounds' (1679), I, 251, 252; cf. Dryden's praise of Chaucer for drawing distinguished characters (Fables (1700), II, 284).
2. 'Grounds' (1679), I, 252-253; cf. above, p. 150.
3. 'Grounds' (1679), I, 253.
4. Prologue, Tempest (1670), "which works by magic supernatural things" (I, 136), cf. 'Apology' (1677), I, 204.
5. 'Apology' (1677), I, 204.
by himself, conforms to all the characteristics consistent within the framework of his inheritance - from his mother's side (a witch) and father's side (a devil). The measure of Shakespeare's success in making this incredible creature a plausible and distinguished character in every manner - by bestowing upon him appropriate traits, suitable appearance and proper language - according to Dryden, is an amazing feat of Shakespeare's genius for characterisation. Dryden's pronouncements on Henry IV and Caliban, in fulfilment of the canon of propriety of manners, come very close to Rymer's demands for decorum in a poetic character, and understandably so, for Dryden was influenced by Rymer's principles of characterisation.¹

Passions are an integral part of manners because they play an important role in distinguishing one character from another. Emotions of pity and terror, according to Dryden, are to be moved by the plot, but those of "anger, hatred, love, ambition, jealousy, revenge, etc" are to be raised through the various characters in a play.² Here Dryden parts company with Aristotle and Horace, and turns to Longinus. Drawing on the latter, Dryden observes that to describe the passions naturally and to move them artfully is the greatest virtue in a poet. He "must be born with this quality". Nothing is "more ridiculous than a great passion out of season", that is, ignorance of its nature and how and when to move it.³ Characters cannot be well distinguished from one another if they are all "ranting, swaggering, and exclaiming with the same excess".⁴

1. Cf. Dryden's total agreement with Rymer on the latter's criticism of Fletcher's King in Maid's Tragedy, 'Grounds' (1679), I, 252; his support for Rymer's poetic justice and his attempts to incorporate this principle in some of his dramatic characters, see above, pp. 78-82.
2. 'Grounds' (1679), I, 253.
3. 'Grounds' (1679), I, 254; Longinus on The Sublime, ch. 18, pp. 13-14.
4. 'Grounds' (1679), I, 255; cf. 'Parallel' (1695), II, 198.
"Confused passions make undistinguishable characters". Shakespeare having succeeded in drawing distinct characters, it can "be inferred that he understood the nature of the passions". Shakespeare's failure is not in the passions but in the obscurity of his expressions. His language is at times too "puffy" and too "figurative" to present the passions effectively. But Shakespeare does not often fail in this way: for example, the passions in his scene between Brutus and Cassius are highly commendable, and so are those in Richard II when the king is deposed. The beauty of Shakespeare's thoughts outshines the extravagance of his language, and Dryden consistently admired Shakespeare's scenes of passions.

Dryden does not discuss the last two properties, that is, resemblance and uniformity of manners, so none of the Shakespearean characters is brought forward to stand the test of these Horatio-Aristotelian maxims. It is a significant point of Dryden's criticism that while by its neo-classical yardstick Shakespeare is found to be imperfect in various dramatic arts, such as defective plots, inappropriate language, undesirable comedies and an undignified mixture of comedy and tragedy, no fault is found in any of Shakespeare's characters. By Rymer's account, none of Shakespeare's characters deserved any praise; Dryden's criticism, on the other hand, is remarkable for the total absence of censure of any of Shakespeare's characters.

1. 'Grounds' (1679), I, 257; cf. Dryden's strictures on two contemporary playwrights who drew all their characters after their own selves ('Parallel' (1695), II, 198).

2. 'Grounds' (1679), I, 257; cf. Shakespeare's "excellent scenes of passions" (EDP (1668), I, 41); Shakespeare's discourses are natural and passionate ('Heads' (1677), I, 220); see above, pp. 173-174.

3. TC (1679), I, 241-242; 'Grounds' (1679), I, 258-259.

In practice, however, Dryden failed to achieve the plenitude of Shakespeare's characterisation, since most of his own dramatic personages are types, wanting in the vigour of passion which he admires so much in Shakespeare. Following Shakespeare, Dryden recommended imperfect heroes in the drama - men rather than the demigods of the heroic play or of the French drama.\(^1\) Characters should be a perfect imitation of nature and not an anaemic imitation of it as in Greek comedy.\(^2\) Tragic characters should be "the highest from amongst mankind",\(^3\) and although Dryden does not dwell on any of Shakespeare's tragic characters except Brutus, Cassius and Richard II, one of his reasons for admiring Shakespearean tragedy is the beauty and greatness of the characters.

**Shakespeare, Fletcher and Ben Jonson**

Dryden is one of the few critics of the Restoration who place Shakespeare above Ben Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher. The theatre popularity of these playwrights can be worked out by a study of Allardyce Nicoll's lists of plays written and performed during the period 1660-1700.\(^4\) The Restoration theatre was certainly limited in quantity: except for the first year or two of the period "two theatres, and for over twelve years, one theatre, supplied the wants of the London play-going public of the time".\(^5\) Only in the first year or so was there any theatre of the people, the so-called "Old Actors" of the Red Bull, which had been established in 1605 and

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2. EWP (IN #), I, 35.
3. 'Parallel' (1695), II, 184, cf. EDP (1668), I, 87.
5. Nicoll, pp. 5-6.
had managed to give occasional surreptitious performances even during
the Commonwealth.¹

The interests of two sorts of playgoers, courtiers and general
populace, were different. The repertoire of the King's company over the
years 1660-1665 was:

- Beaumont and Fletcher .................................... 21 titles
- Shakespeare ............................................... 4
- Ben Jonson .................................................. 4
- Other - old plays ........................................... 29
  - new plays ........................................... "several" 2

while the repertoire at the Red Bull in 1659/60 was -

- Beaumont and Fletcher .................................... 9 titles
- Shakespeare ............................................... 3
- Ben Jonson .................................................. 1
- Other - new plays ........................................... 7 3

This clearly shows that while Beaumont and Fletcher were more popular
than Shakespeare and Ben Jonson with both types of audience, Shakespeare
was more popular than Ben Jonson with the people (3:1 actual; about 2:1
when adjusted for the greater number of plays written by Shakespeare).
With courtier audiences, however, Ben Jonson was more popular than
Shakespeare (4:4 actual; 2:1 adjusted).

Jonson's popularity of the early years of the Restoration is not
maintained later. As the century wore on, he fell out of favour in the
theatre, while Shakespeare continued to be performed throughout the
period, though more and more in the form of adaptations. From the
record of the plays performed before royalty, listed in the warrants for
payment, we get a picture of the theatre popularity of the two
playwrights:

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A second line of evidence of the relative popularity of the old playwrights is provided by Pepys. In the period 1660-1669, Pepys saw seventy two performances of twenty eight plays by Beaumont and Fletcher, eighteen of five plays by Ben Jonson, and forty one of twelve (?14) plays by Shakespeare. The prompter Downes records performances of four other plays by Shakespeare and four others by Ben Jonson during this period.²

From these records Odell concludes that Ben Jonson "fared better, proportionately to the number of his works, than did his greater contemporary". Unfortunately, Odell does not make any mention of Ben Jonson after 1669; so we have to depend largely on our figures abstracted from the lists of royal command performances to determine the relative interest in Ben Jonson and Shakespeare during the Restoration.

Yet another approach to the problem of their relative popularity is through literary sources. Bentley has made a count of allusions to the works of the two playwrights by seventeenth century authors, and has concluded that "Jonson's reputation was greater in the seventeenth century taken as whole, than Shakespeare's". However, literary allusions may not be a very reliable guide for evaluating the real impact of the two playwrights. David Frost suggests that the evidence from publishing is more reliable, and sets out his findings as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Single editions 1594-1700</th>
<th>Plays</th>
<th>Total editions</th>
<th>Average per play</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shakespeare</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>3.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben Jonson</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1.69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Collected editions 1594-1700</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shakespeare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben Jonson</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Printed alterations and adaptations 1600-1700</th>
<th>Adaptations</th>
<th>Editions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shakespeare</td>
<td>24 plays</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben Jonson</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Odell, I, 23; cf. Montague Summers who holds the view that Shakespeare was as popular in the seventeenth century as he was in the nineteenth century and that the other Elizabethan dramatists shared this popularity with him equally. (Shakespeare Adaptations, London, 1922, pp. xvii-xviii).


4. Frost, SQ, XVI, 82-83: the data on masques omitted as irrelevant.
These data show that Shakespeare was the more popular. However, with the single editions it would be as well to make some allowance for the relative output of the two playwrights, so reducing the apparently much greater popularity of Shakespeare. But Frost's data refer to the whole of the seventeenth century and not just to the Restoration. Thus, Frost's "collected editions" are evidently those of the four folios of 1623, 1632, 1663 and 1685 with Shakespeare, and the collected works of 1616, 1640 and 1692 with Ben Jonson. Counts made of the separate plays show:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1594-1659</th>
<th>1660-1700</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shakespeare</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben Jonson</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both these sets of figures show clearly that there was a continuing interest in reading Shakespeare, while with Ben Jonson it was largely a pre-Restoration interest. Six plays of Shakespeare were published separately during the Restoration, two of them in more than one edition. *Hamlet* (5) and *Othello* (3); but only one play of Ben Jonson was published separately, *Catiline*.

Perhaps the most satisfactory literary approach to the problem of relative popularity, is to take adaptation as the crucial factor, the absence of it showing which playwright was acceptable on his own merits. Here, the balance would be very much in favour of Ben Jonson. The tradition of adapting plays no doubt began with a view to paying homage to Shakespeare, by one of his great devotees, William Davenant; but as the century progressed and the tastes of the audiences changed, if Pepys and Evelyn can serve as a fair barometer of this, Shakespeare in his original form was not acceptable in the Restoration theatre. Ben Jonson, on the other hand, with his urbanity, verbal wit with overtones of satire,

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simplified characters presenting one strong trait, and the correctness of his dramatic structure, had a greater appeal. Even Dryden concedes that in Ben Jonson's works "you find little to retrench or alter".  

Shakespeare and Beaumont and Fletcher

As a comparativist, Dryden is at his best. Some of his most illuminating observations are made while comparing one thing with another, be it one genre with the other, as tragedy and epic; different critical terms and forms, as fancy and judgement, rhyme and blank verse; the drama of one country with that of another, as French and English, ancient and modern; or one author with another, as Ovid and Virgil, Horace, Juvenal and Persius, Homer and Virgil, Shakespeare and Ben Jonson, and Shakespeare and Beaumont and Fletcher. Dryden's later comparisons between classical poets, in dedication to Examen Poeticum (1693), 'Discourse concerning Satire' (1693), and dedication to the Aeneis (1697), convey a sense of almost academic detachment, and his evaluations are fair and impartial. For example, despite all his personal admiration for Horace, Dryden concedes that as a satirist Juvenal was superior to Horace.  

However, the same is not true of his comparisons of Shakespeare with Jonson, or with Beaumont and Fletcher. Here there is a distinct preference for loving the one and admiring the other. Moreover, whereas in his Jonson/Shakespeare comparisons Dryden tries to maintain a facade of equality between the two contemporary dramatists, he does not see the necessity of such a restraint in the case of Shakespeare and Fletcher. The latter, as Dryden does not hesitate to say, "comes far short of him . . . almost in every thing", and Fletcher was but "a limb of

1. EDP (1668), I, 69.
2. 'Discourse' (1693), II, 131-133, 135, 138.
3. EDP (1668), I, 70.
Shakespeare"s who borrowed and learnt his dramatic art from his superior.¹ He is therefore not a good model for imitation, because "to imitate Fletcher is but to copy after him who was a copier".²

Another striking difference between Dryden's comparisons between classical poets and those between English playwrights is that whereas the former are pieces of sustained literary criticism, the latter occur sporadically during the active period of his dramatic involvement. This is because the study of the poets is a continuing private concern to Dryden, in relation to his own translations of epics and satires, but the playwrights are analysed and compared against a background of current controversy and attack on them, especially by Rymer. Dryden's approach to them, therefore, is defensive and their comparative study remains essentially subservient to the larger design - to prove the efficacy and fitness of the Elizabethan drama for the new drama. Despite the current popularity of Beaumont and Fletcher - popularity ill-deserved according to Dryden, since he thought that the best of Fletcher's plays are "much below the applause which is now given them"³ - Dryden recommends Shakespeare over Fletcher. By Dryden's own account too, Beaumont and Fletcher were twice as popular as Shakespeare in the early Restoration.⁴

1. 'Grounds' (1769), I, 251, 260; see, for example, such remarks of Dryden as, nearly all the characters of Fletcher are borrowed from Shakespeare, 'Grounds' (1679), I, 253; 'Shakespeare taught Fletcher to write love and wit', 'Grounds', I, 260.

2. 'Grounds' (1679), I, 253; cf. Tempest (1670), prologue, I, 136; Fletcher's Sea Voyage is a copy of Shakespeare's Tempest, the "innocence and beauty which did smile in Fletcher" came from Shakespeare's "Enchanted Isle" (Tempest, I, 134); both Jonson and Fletcher copied Shakespeare and "with the drops which fell from Shakespeare's pen" that they have been able to "outwit all other men" (Tempest, I, 136).

3. 'Epilogue' (1672), I, 172.

4. EDP (1668), I, 69; cf. "In the sixty-eight performances by the King's Company cited in the records of Sir Henry Herbert, Master of the Revels, for the years 1660-1662, Jonson and Shakespeare break even with three performances each, while Beaumont and Fletcher piled up twenty-seven to their credit!", Shakespeare from Betterton to Irving, I, 23; cf. Watson, I, 54 n.1.
As to the reasons for the popularity of Beaumont and Fletcher, Dryden holds that "there is a certain gaiety in their comedies, and pathos in their more serious plays, which suits generally with all men's humours. Shakespeare's language is a little obsolete, and Ben Jonson's wit comes short of theirs"; they "had, with the advantage of Shakespeare's wit . . . great natural gifts improved by study; Beaumont especially being so accurate a judge of plays that Ben Jonson . . . submitted all his writing to his censure . . . Their plots were generally more regular than Shakespeare's especially those . . . made before Beaumont's death"; their insight into the gentlemen-character was better than any other poet and "they represented all the passions", especially love, "very lively", and "English language in them arrived to its highest perfection".¹

This early enthusiasm for Beaumont and Fletcher is not reflected in Dryden's later writings; for example, Fletcher's King and No King, highly admired in the Essay of Dramatic Poesy, does not get the same verdict in 'Grounds of Criticism in Tragedy' despite the fact that Dryden found the play "moving". However, after the recommendation of Aristotle, Dryden criticises the play as of "that inferior sort of tragedies which end with a prosperous event".² And he agrees with Rymer that the plots of Shakespeare and Fletcher are defective. His earlier allusion to the defective plots of the Elizabethan playwrights in Essay of Dramatic Poesy is defensive. This is because he then wanted to establish the superiority of the English drama, despite its irregularity, over the correct French drama; hence his argument that "there is a more masculine fancy and greater spirit in the writing [of Shakespeare and Fletcher]

1. EDP (1668), I, 68-69.
2. EDP (1668), I, 54, 'Grounds' (1679), I, 247.
than there is in any of the French".¹ In masculine fancy, as Dryden elaborates later, Shakespeare excels Fletcher. The difference between their "plotting" is

that Shakespeare generally moves more terror, and Fletcher more compassion. For the first had a more masculine, a bolder and more fiery genius; the second, a more soft and womanish. In the mechanic beauties of the plot, which are the observation of the three unities, time, place, and action, they are both deficient; but Shakespeare most.

In the Defence of the Epilogue (1672), however, Dryden is more critical of Fletcher's plots than of Shakespeare's; that is, judging even by his best plays it could be demonstrated that "Fletcher, who writ after him (Shakespeare), neither understood correct plotting, nor . . . the decorum of the stage".² As to "how far we ought to imitate Shakespeare and Fletcher in their plots", Dryden's advice is that the errors of their plots should be avoided as they would be "more unpardonable in us, because we want their beauties to countervail our faults".³

On the plane of characterisation also, though Dryden bracketed Shakespeare and Fletcher in his earlier discussion,⁴ later he rates Fletcher much below Shakespeare. Thus, Fletcher, unlike Shakespeare, is not able to draw distinguished characters; his comic characters suffer from obscurity of manners because his comedies are more concerned with events and adventures than characterisation. Similarly, in the best of Fletcher's tragedies the characters are not allowed to develop for their own sake; but are catered and tailored to the requirements of the scenes they appear in. Shakespeare could ascribe perfect manners in conformity with the age, quality, country and dignity of his characters: Fletcher

¹ EDP (1668), I, 65-66.
² 'Grounds' (1679), I, 247; 'Epilogue' (1672), I, 172.
³ 'Grounds' (1679), I, 246-247.
⁴ EDP (1668), I, 65: "we endeavour . . . to follow the variety and greatness of characters which are derived to us from Shakespeare and Fletcher".
could not. For example, the king in The Maid's Tragedy, according to Dryden, has none of the virtues of a king; and in The Faithful Shepherdess both Philaster and Perigot act "contrary to the character of manhood. Nor is Valenti nian managed much better" as an Emperor. Fletcher, unlike Shakespeare, is not a good model for imitation in characterisation:
"the characters of Fletcher are poor and narrow, in comparison of Shakespeare's; I remember not one which is not borrowed from him; unless you will accept that strange mixture of a man in the King and No King".

Another significant difference between the two playwrights lies in the description of passions. Both Shakespeare and Fletcher are applauded "for the excellent scenes of passion", especially for the love scenes, in the Essay of Dramatic Poesy. Later, again, Fletcher is commended for "the lively touches of the passion" in his King and No King. The success of the play, as Dryden argues, cannot be wholly ascribed to "the excellency of the action; for I find it moving when it is read". However, when it comes to a larger and more comprehensive range of passions, Fletcher could not compare with Shakespeare:

Shakespeare writ better betwixt man and man; Fletcher, betwixt man and woman: consequently, the one described friendship better; the other love: yet Shakespeare taught Fletcher to write love: and Juliet, and Desdemona, are originals. 'Tis true, the scholar had the softer soul; but the master had the kinder. . . . Fletcher . . . treated love in perfection, yet honour, ambition, revenge, and generally all the stronger passions, he either touched not, or not masterly.

Dryden's observations on the two dramatists reflect his distinct preference for Shakespeare to Fletcher, and that the former, despite some

1. 'Grounds' (1679), I, 250-251, 252-253.
2. EDP (1668), I, 41.
3. 'Grounds' (1679), I, 247; the word 'action' is used here in the sense of acting or actors, and not in its modern sense: cf. OED; cf. Jenson, p. 19; Dryden has Rymer's comment about the role of Mr Hart in mind; cf. TLA (1677), p. 19; see 'Heads' (1677), I, 213.
4. 'Grounds' (1679), I, 260.
shortcomings, is an ideal model for the art of characterisation, beauty of thought and masterly wit. Both Shakespeare and Fletcher are guilty of superfluity and waste of wit. 1 "The carelessness of Shakespeare" and "luxuriance of Fletcher" are equally grave lapses; 2 "let us imitate . . . the quickness and easiness of Fletcher, without proposing him as a pattern to us, either in the redundancy of his matter, or the incorrectness of his language". 3

Shakespeare and Ben Jonson

Dryden's attitude towards the two Elizabethan dramatists is consistently one of admiration for Jonson's learning and love of Shakespeare's greatness. In the Essay of Dramatic Poesy, Eugenius prefers Ben Jonson "above all other poets", and recommends that "all writers, both French and English, ought to give place to him"; Crites has "a great veneration for him", and considers him "the greatest man of the last age"; Lisideius thinks him to be "the best received of our English poets". In Neander's opinion, Shakespeare is "at least his equal, perhaps his superior"; comparing the two poets, he acknowledges Ben Jonson as "the more correct poet, but Shakespeare the greater wit. Shakespeare was the Homer, or father of our dramatic poets; Jonson was the Virgil, the pattern of elaborate writing". 4 Jonson "was a careful and learned observer of the dramatic laws" and "decorum of the stage". 5

1. 'Epilogue' (1672), I, 178, 182, Evening (1671), I, 149.
2. 'Epilogue' (1672), I, 178.
3. 'Epilogue' (1672), I, 182.
4. EDP (1668), I, 31, 67, 53, 67, 70; for a special significance of Shakespeare/Jonson comparison, see A Björk's "The 'Inconsistencies of Dryden's criticism of Shakespeare', Anglia, XCI, 1973, (219-240), 237-238, and Samuel H. Monk, "Dryden and the beginnings of Shakespeare Criticism in the Augustan Age" in The Persistence of Shakespeare Idolatory: Essays in honor of Robert W. Hабcock, ed. Herbert M. Schellert, Detroit, 1964 (pp. 49-75); according to Monk it is "the most influential passage written about Shakespeare before Coleridge", p. 61
5. EDP (1668), I, 66, 63; cf. 'Epilogue' (1672), I, 182.
Shakespeare and Fletcher, Jonson "designed his plots himself", and in his comedies corrected those errors of plot that Shakespeare and Fletcher committed in theirs.1 "Few Englishmen, except Ben Jonson, have ever made a plot with variety of design in it included in twenty-four hours which was altogether natural".2 Shakespeare made a frequent use of "drums and trumpets" on stage, while Jonson, after the example of the ancients, "shows no battle in his Cataline"; "the sounding of trumpets, and the shouts of fighting armies" are heard behind the scenes.3

Ben Jonson was "deeply conversant in the Ancients, both Greek and Latin, and he borrowed boldly from them"; "he was not only a professed imitator of Horace, but a learned plagiary of all the others", for example of Lucan, Petronius Arbiter, Seneca, and Juvenal. His Sejanus and Cataline are heavily indebted to Roman authors but, according to Dryden, Jonson "has done his robberies so openly . . . [that] what would be theft in other poets is only victory in him"; so that he is able to represent the Roman "rites, ceremonies and customs" better than original authors.4

Ben Jonson's wit is not only inferior to Shakespeare but also to Beaumont and Fletcher.5 Unlike the latter, Jonson, therefore, was not guilty of luxuriant fancy or of the waste of wit.6 "One cannot say he wanted wit, but rather that he was frugal of it".7 Jonson's talent was

1. Evening (1671), I, 154; 'Grounds' (1679), I, 247; see above, p. 165.
2. 'Essay' (1668), I, 128-129; cf. Dryden's high praise of the plot of The Silent Woman, EDP (1668), I, 71-75.
3. EDP (1668), I, 53, 62; 'Heroic' (1672), I, 162.
5. EDP (1668), I, 68-69.
6. EDP (1668), I, 92, Evening (1671), I, 149.
7. EDP (1668), I, 69.
"to make men appear pleasantly ridiculous on the stage . . . and
in this he needed not the acumen of wit, but that of judgment . . .
Ben Jonson's plays were pleasant . . . but . . . pleasantness was not
properly wit, or the sharpness of conceit, but the natural imitation of
folly". Dryden does not agree with those who think "it is easier to write
wit than humour" and proves this by comparing Jonson's felicity in humour
with his one character of wit, Truewit, in The Silent Woman, who seemed to
have given the author more trouble "than all his images of humour in the
play". Whenever he "aimed at wit in the stricter sense, that is,
sharpness of conceit, [he] was forced either to borrow from the Ancients
. . . or when he trusted himself alone, often fell into meanness of
expression . . . the lowest and most grovelling kind of wit which we call
clenches".

Again, unlike Shakespeare and Fletcher, Ben Jonson was not good at
moving passions. "You seldom find him moving love in any of his scenes,
or endeavouring to move the passions; his genius was too sullen and
saturnine to do it gracefully, especially when he knew he came after
those who had performed both to such an height". Even in comedies, where
he excels others in humour, "love, which is the foundation of all
comedies in other languages, is scarcely mentioned in any of his plays".

Ben Jonson could not equal Shakespeare and Fletcher in wit and
passion, and in humour "he delighted most to represent mechanic people";
the description of . . . humours, drawn from the knowledge and

1. Evening (1671), I, 148-150; Dryden's criticism of Ben Jonson's
wit provoked a strong reaction from the latter's admirers,
especially from Shadwell who thought Jonson the best of dramatic
poets "for his Excellency in Dramatick Poetry", preface to The
Sullen Lovers (1668), in The Complete Works of Thomas Shadwell, ed.
M. Summers, 1927, 5 vols., I, 11; cf. R.J. Smith, 'Shadwell's
Impact upon John Dryden', RES, XX, 1944, 29-44.
2. 'Epilogue' (1672), I, 178-179; cf. EDP (1668), I, 67,
Shakespeare's "comic wit degenerating into clenches".
3. EDP (1668), I, 69; cf. Evening (1671), I, 149; 'Epilogue' (1672),
I, 182.
observation of particular persons, was the peculiar genius and talent of Ben Jonson. Representation of folly "is a lower exercise of fancy, though perhaps as difficult as the other [wit], for 'tis a kind of looking downward in the poet, and representing that part of mankind which is below him. In these low characters of vice and folly lay the excellency of that inimitable writer." While Shakespeare is an ideal model for imitation in tragedy, Jonson is "a perfect pattern of imitation" for his humour. In his "humour and contrivance of comedy" he excels the contemporary drama. Ben Jonson's comedy is therefore more acceptable than Shakespeare's, in spite of the change of taste in comedy from the last age. For the "pattern of a perfect play" in the Elizabethan drama, it is neither Shakespeare nor Fletcher but Ben Jonson who could offer the Restoration critics a play to match the French. However, in a fit of extravagant idolatory of Shakespeare, Dryden goes to the extreme of suggesting that it was by imitation of Shakespeare that Ben Jonson learnt his "art" and humour.

In the art of characterisation, Dryden observes that Ben Jonson is the only dramatist who can equal Shakespeare's greatness. He "always writ properly, and as the characters required". In "his choice of characters, and maintaining what he had chosen to the end", Jonson can be credited for "the height and accuracy of judgment". In The Silent Woman Dryden finds "many persons of various characters and humours, and all delightful". The humour of Morose is so natural as to make him suspect "Jonson was actually acquainted with such a man"; and "besides Morose, there are at least nine or ten different characters and humours in The Silent Woman, all of which persons have several concernments of their own,

1. EDP (1668), I, 69, 73; cf. Evening (1670), I, 148; 'Epilogue' (1672), I, 178.
2. 'Epilogue' (1672), I, 182; Evening (1670), I, 144; EDP (1668), I, 66; 'Essay' (1668), I, 129; Tempest (1670), prologue, I, 136.
3. 'Epilogue' (1672), I, 178, 182.
yet all are used by the poet to the conducting of the main design to perfection". As to the clarity of manners in characterisation, Dryden thinks Fletcher falls short of Shakespeare; "but of all poets, this commendation is to be given to Ben Jonson, that the manners even of the most inconsiderable persons in his plays are everywhere apparent". Other than Shakespeare "no man ever drew so many characters, or generally distinguished 'em better from one another, excepting only Jonson".

Jonson, in his borrowings from the ancients, "beautified our language". However, Dryden feels that "he weaved it [language] too closely and laboriously in his serious plays: perhaps, too, he did a little too much romanize our tongue, leaving the words which he translated almost Latin as he found them: wherein, though he learnedly followed the idiom of their language, he did not enough comply with ours".

Dryden seems to anticipate the view, later put forward by Malone, that Ben Jonson was somewhat prejudiced against Shakespeare. Early in the Essay of Dramatic Poesy (1668), he pronounced that Jonson "had used extreme severity in his judgment on the incomparable Shakespeare" for his failure to observe the dramatic unities. Crying vengeance, as it were, Dryden tries to find fault with one of Jonson's plays, Cataline, for its minor lapse in the unity of time, though he knew full well that Ben Jonson's failing was seldom in that direction. In the same essay he refers to Ben Jonson's attack on Shakespeare's lack of learning and retaliates that the latter, unlike the former, did not need "the spectacles of books to read nature, he looked inwards and found her there". Later, in 1693, Dryden voices his reservations on "Jonson's verses to the memory of

1. EDP (1668), I, 71, 73-74.
2. 'Grounds' (1679), I, 251-252.
3. Evening (1671), I, 154; EDP (1668), I, 70.
Shakespeare*, which he thought were praise of Shakespeare the man but censure of Shakespeare the poet. Then again, he refers to a derogatory remark of Ben Jonson on some unintelligible speeches of Macbeth (not cited by Dryden), and whether or not Dryden agreed with this apocryphal verdict on Shakespeare, he retaliates by pointing out some lines of "bombast" and "horror" from Cataline.²

To argue, however, as R.J. Smith has done, that Dryden's appreciation of Ben Jonson was influenced adversely by Shadwell's denunciation of his criticism of Ben Jonson, is not substantiated by a study of his later writings. We find unqualified praise of Ben Jonson in the Essay of Dramatic Poesy:

> I think him the most learned and judicious writer which any theatre ever had. He was a most severe judge of himself as well as others... Wit, and language, and humour also in some measure, we had before him; but something of art was wanting in the drama till he came. He managed his strength to more advantage than any who preceded him. ³

Shadwell's attack on Dryden appeared in his preface to The Sullen Lovers in 1668. Dryden takes up his reply in the preface to An Evening's Love (1671), and while he upholds his earlier stand on Ben Jonson's wit, he grants that "Ben Jonson is to be admired for many excellencies; and can be taxed with fewer failings than any English poet". However, Dryden is not prepared to "admire him blindly", though he admires him enough to confess that he lacked "judgment to imitate him".⁴ Later again, referring to Ben Jonson's "excellencies" which the Restoration cannot equal, Dryden offers him the high praise that no age can ever equal them.

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1. Cf. Dryden's citation of a line from Rochester, "The best good man, with the worst-natur'd Muse", which, as he says, bears a resemblance to Ben Jonson's elegy on Shakespeare ('Discourse' (1693), II, 75 & n. 3).

2. 'Epilogue' (1672), I, 173 and n. 4.


He finds him the "most judicious poet" for characterisation and ranks him equal to Shakespeare in this art. And in his later exaltation of the Elizabethan dramatists over the Restoration, Ben Jonson, along with Shakespeare, is always mentioned as a venerable figure. Fletcher ranks next to Jonson and Shakespeare, though as Dryden observes, Ben Jonson, with all his vigour, cannot equal Fletcher's ease.

Dryden, then, pays due respect to Ben Jonson's learning, accuracy of plot, his humour and his consistency of character. When making comparisons with the contemporary drama, Dryden invariably brackets the two great Elizabethans together. However, in spite of all his admiration for Jonson, Dryden's preference for Shakespeare is more than obvious. Most of the other Restoration critics were more inclined towards Jonson; for example, according to Shadwell, "Ben Johnson, whom I think all Dramatick Poets ought to imitate, though none are likely to come near, he being the onely person, that appears to have made perfect Representations of Humane Life". The balance between learning and genius was very delicate for a Restoration critic, but according to Dryden: "Has not great Jonson's learning often fail'd? But Shakespeare's greater genius still prevail'd". Again, comparing the two poets, Dryden sums up his opinion:

Shakespeare made faults; but then did more excel,
Heaven made his [Jonson's] men; but Shakespear made his own.
Wise Jonson's talent in observing lay,
But others' follies still made up his play.

1. 'Epilogue' (1672), I, 180, 178.
3. 'Epilogue' (1672), I, 182.
5. Prologue to Joseph Harris's Mistakes (1690), Works, X, 411.
He drew the life in each elaborate line,
But Shakespeare like a Master did design.

Dryden the Neo-classical Critic of Shakespeare

A recent critic has described Dryden's tributes to Shakespeare as the "loci classici of criticism." Unlike Rymer, Dryden's criticism of Shakespeare drew no response from his contemporaries, unless Langbaine's attack on him in 1691 can qualify as criticism. Samuel Johnson is the first to pay attention to Dryden's criticism of Shakespeare, and he has a word of praise for it: Dryden's "account of Shakespeare may stand as a perpetual model of encomiastic criticism: exact without minuteness, and lofty without exaggeration." With Johnson's remark, unfortunately, evaluation of Dryden as a Shakespearean critic almost begins and ends. He figures only in general histories of criticism, where he is acclaimed for his slightly wider understanding and appreciation of Shakespeare than his contemporaries. As we have seen, Dryden's criticism of Shakespeare surpasses that of any other seventeenth century critic, both in quality and quantity, though he never attempted to write a formal treatise on Shakespeare, as some of the other critics, notably Rymer, Gildon and Dennis, did. And although Shakespeare remains an integral part of Dryden's dramatic heritage, his allusions to the poet are rather informal and casual - always incidental - in terms of something else that he is discussing at the moment. He drops Shakespeare's name both because of the genuine and instinctive love that he had for him (with Chaucer and Milton close behind), and also because he is trying to find in him an

3. See above, p. 27.
appropriate model for the contemporary drama. Dryden's was a typical seventeenth-century approach, the critical evaluations being made not in terms of the intrinsic merit of the work criticised but as a means of seeking precepts for their own works. *The Silent Woman*, for example, was not examined from the viewpoint of an ideal work of art but as a "perfect pattern of a play" for the contemporary drama. Rymer analysed the Elizabethan dramatists to demonstrate their unworthiness as models to imitate. Against this, Dryden again and again raises the question how far we should imitate Shakespeare and his contemporaries.

Like a neo-classical critic, Dryden tries to balance the beauties and faults of Shakespeare so as to determine judiciously which side of the balance is heavier. On the one hand Shakespeare is judged against the excellences of the classical dramatists, and on the other he must stand the test of the contemporary dramatic milieu. Perhaps the former became necessary because of Rymer's recommendation of the classical drama against Shakespeare; and the latter because Dryden was anxious to prove the relevance of Shakespeare for the Restoration. As a result, Shakespeare is adjudged from two angles, and that angle which is absolutely necessary for the proper understanding of an author, the background and traditions of his own age, never occurred to Dryden. As against the classical drama, Dryden's verdict, as we have seen, goes entirely in favour of Shakespearean drama. However, in dealing with Shakespeare's merits as a model for the contemporary drama, Dryden chooses to be cautious, rather than enthusiastic. The irregularities of Shakespearean drama - double plot, mixture of tragedy with comedy, incoherence of events, multiplicity of characters - which were termed "variety" to score a point against classical and French drama, could not be ignored in the new climate of rule and decorum. To copy them would be a disaster, especially when Shakespeare's beauties, which are anyway not easy to duplicate, are missing. Dryden's tone is that of warning against the potential danger:
"Let us therefore admire the beauties and heights of Shakespeare, without falling after him into a carelessness and ... a lethargy of thought, for whole scenes together"; again, "Let not Shakespeare suffer for our sakes; 'tis our fault, who succeed him in an age which is more refined, if we imitate him so ill that we copy his failings only, and make a virtue of that in our writings which in his was an imperfection".¹

In his praise as well as in his censure of Shakespeare, Dryden is a true Restoration critic. He compliments Shakespeare "as the man who of all modern, and perhaps ancient poets, had the largest and most comprehensive soul"; and there are several eulogies of this kind scattered in Dryden's works.² Like most Restoration commendations of Shakespeare, Dryden's praise of Shakespeare is vague rather than specific. For example, as a great admirer of Shakespeare's tragedy, Dryden exalts it "far beyond any thing of the Ancients";³ but when we come to look for concrete examples of the greatness of Shakespearean tragedy, we find the only attributes that Dryden specifies are the excellences of Shakespeare's passions and greatness of his characters and thoughts; even here one looks in vain for the details that seem implied in the generalisation but are never elaborated. How one wishes that a statement like "Shakespeare had an universal mind, which comprehended all characters and passions", had not abruptly concluded where it began. The story is not any better when Dryden is offering a similar tribute to Horace or to Chaucer. "The divine wit of Horace left nothing untouched; that he entered into the inmost recesses of nature; found out the imperfections even of the most wise and grave, as well as of the common people"; similarly, Chaucer "has taken into the compass of his Canterbury Tales the various manners and

1. 'Epilogue' (1672), I, 182, 'Grounds' (1679), I, 260.
2. EDP (1668), I, 67; cf. PL (1664), I, 6, 'Grounds' (1679), I, 260.
3. 'Dennis' (1694), II, 178; cf. 'Discourse' (1693), II, 81.
humours . . . of the whole English nation in his age. Not a single
color character has escaped him. All his pilgrims are severally distinguished
from each other". And so also with Ben Jonson, "the manners even of the
most inconsiderable persons in his plays are every where apparent".1
Perhaps the comments on any one of these poets could serve for the other;
and it would be natural to infer from these generalised eulogies that
Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Horace, and Chaucer drew characters of equal
nature and greatness. Nothing could be more misleading and farther from
the truth, as conceived by the critic himself. However, this mode of
generalised criticism was the only one known in the seventeenth century.
They had yet to learn how to specify the area of their criticism with
reference to the concrete and particular.2 Rymer is the only critic who
makes an attempt in this direction, but unfortunately his use of this
exemplary method was distorted by his misdirected conviction that the
function of criticism is only to condemn a person and his work. In
sheer desperation, then, one turns to the vague but animated criticism
of Shakespeare by the other seventeenth century critics. Dryden's
criticism, in this respect, is only an extended and improved version of
other voices of the century for whom Shakespeare is "divine",
"inimitable", "soul of an age", and so on.

Again, while Dryden's praise of Shakespeare is vague and
generalised, his censures are much more precise. We are not left in any
doubt just how defective Shakespeare's plots are, or what we are supposed
to think of Shakespeare's comedy, his verse, his language, his
superfluity or waste of wit in terms of Restoration standards. Dryden
subscribes to the neo-classical norms when he pronounces "Cressida is
false, and is not punished"; and he is a typical neo-classical critic

1. 'Grounds' (1679), I, 260, 'Discourse' (1693), II, 129, Fables (1700),
II, 284, 'Grounds', I, 251.
3. TC (1679), I, 240.
when he thinks, as others did, that Shakespeare could be best preserved by adaptation. As a product of his age, Dryden could not understand the poetic-dramatic unity of Shakespeare's plays, so that the artificial unity of plot, which was perhaps a practical necessity in the new theatre of scenery, seemed the only important thing to have. Shakespeare's poetry was another major stumbling block in the way of a Restoration critic for a proper appreciation of his plays, and though Dryden shows some rare flashes of appreciation of Shakespeare's poetry, by and large he finds it obscene and licentious.

However, with all these qualifications, Dryden's instinctive and intuitive recognition of a great genius transcends the neo-classical criticism and to an extent it was exceptional for his time. This can be more justly claimed for his precocious recognition of the geniuses of Chaucer and Milton. Dryden is indeed "the true founder of Milton's literary reputation," and he can be credited with resurrecting Chaucer's name from obscurity in the seventeenth century. For Shakespeare, perhaps, the claim cannot go so far, because Shakespeare was being increasingly recognised and admired by Dryden's contemporaries. Dryden departs from others in the allowances he makes for Shakespeare's faults in recognition of his beauties; that these were no faults at all was to be the judgment of the critics to come after him. Dryden's singular contribution, which is also his departure from other Restoration critics, is that he did not let these faults outweigh his appreciation and recognition of Shakespeare's genius. That he had to turn to the authority

1. It is significant, however, that Dryden could appreciate only the early poetry of Shakespeare, as for example Richard II, most of his other laudatory remarks on Shakespeare's language are no more than vague generalisations.

of Longinus to justify it, seems more of an accident than expediency.

Dennis, for example, was so fully soaked in Longinus that "he was nicknamed by his contemporaries Sir Longinus"; but when it comes to an appreciation of Shakespeare we find that it is Rymer more than Longinus who is the source of his inspiration. Dryden could have received his impetus from Longinus, for he was indeed capable of using all influences to his advantage, but his conviction that the inspiration of a genius has to serve as the rules for others and not vice versa, is quite independent of any external influence, classical or contemporary. It is because of this realisation that in his later criticisms he is more responsive to Shakespeare's beauties and less concerned about his defects.

Dryden the Playwright and the Critic of Shakespeare

Another factor that seems to have contributed to Dryden's admiration of Shakespeare's genius is his own career as a playwright. Dryden's dramatic achievements do not equal his achievements as a poet, and though he is not found admiring himself for the latter, a note of disgust for the former is continually expressed in his writings. The only play for which he compliments himself is All for Love. He may put the blame for his failures on the audiences, or he may put it on the contemporary state of the drama, but the bitter fact did not escape

1. Cf. "The poet Aeschylus was held in the same veneration by the Athenians of after ages as Shakespeare is by us; and Longinus has judged, in favour of him . . . our reverence for Shakespeare [is] much more just, than that of the Grecians for Aeschylus" (TC (1679), I, 230-239).


3. Cf. 'Dennis' (1694), II, 178; see above, p. 61.

4. 'Parallel' (1695), II, 207.

5. See above, p. 9 and n. 3, below, 209.
him that he could not make his mark as a dramatist, and finally, wholly despairing, he gives up writing plays and turns to translation. Perhaps one of the reasons for Dryden's failure was his sense of awareness that he was fighting a losing battle in the drama. Right from the beginning he was conscious of the fact that the Restoration drama had to make a beginning against the background of a very rich dramatic heritage which could not be equalled, much less excelled. From the days of the *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* he acknowledges that the Restoration playwrights could not meet their predecessors on their own grounds:

> it is to raise envy to the living, to compare them with the dead. They are honoured, and almost adored by us, as they deserve; neither do I know any so presumptuous of themselves as to contend with them... not only we shall never equal them, but they could never equal themselves, were they to rise and write again. We acknowledge them our fathers in wit; but they have ruined their estates themselves before they came to their children's hands. There is scarce an humour, a character, or any kind of plot, which they have not blown upon: all comes sullied and wasted to us: and were they to entertain this age, they could not make so plentuous treatments out of such decayed fortunes.

Twenty five years later, after he had bid farewell to his hopeless pursuit of the drama, the story is much the same:

> peace be to the venerable shades of Shakespeare and Ben Jonson! None of the living will presume to have any competition with them: as they were our predecessors, so they were our masters. We trail our plays under them; but... our ensigns are furled or dragged upon the ground, in honour to the dead; so we may lawfully advance our own afterwards, to show that we succeed, if less in dignity. 1

For Dryden, the main thing was to keep the game going, though he fully realised that the quality of the new drama was bound to be "less in dignity". In a spirit of bravado he might seek consolation in the "refinement" of the new age and their excellence in the heroic play, 2 but his prologues and epilogues, which are pieces of literary criticism

1. EDP (1668), I, 85, Examen (1694), II, 160.
2. 'Epilogue' (1672), I, 171.
in their own right and are often frank confessions of his own failures and successes, betray his sense of frustration. This feeling of inadequacy is more pronounced after 1679, after his adaptation of Shakespeare's 'Troilus and Cressida', though it is presaged in his earlier writings. In the preface to 'An Evening's Love' (1671), while comparing the Restoration drama with the Elizabethan drama, he acknowledges that Ben Jonson's humour and comedy could not be excelled. Next, in the Epilogue to the Second Part of 'Granada' (1672), when he asserts the superiority of his own age over the Elizabethan, the point of self-awareness does not altogether escape him, for he concludes the epilogue with:

Yet, though you judge (as sure the critics will),
That some before him writ with greater skill,
In this one praise he has their fame surpast,
To please an age more gallant than the last.

In the same year, in 'Defence of the Epilogue', when again the language of the Elizabethans and the laxity of Shakespeare's plots come under severe attack, there is another aside of self-awareness: "let us render to our predecessors what is their due, without confining ourselves to a servile imitation of all they writ: and, without assuming to ourselves the title of better poets". In 1676, in the dedication to 'Aureng-Zebe', the sense of frustration is more pronounced: "I never thought myself very fit for an employment where many of my predecessors have excelled me in all kinds"; and the prologue is a tale of total defeat. The audience can be pleased but the playwright's own mortification at being dwarfed by the Elizabethan giant is hard to swallow. Yet, "what verse can do" he has done, and the play, as he says, is better than his other plays, but

a secret shame
Invades his breast at Shakespeare's sacred name:
Awed when he hears his godlike Romans rage,
He, in a just despair, would quit the stage,
And to an age less polished, more unskill'd,
Does with disdain the foremost honours yield.
As with the greater dead he dares not strive, 
He would not match his verse with those who live.
Let him retire, betwixt two ages cast,
The first of this, and hindmost of the last.
A losing gambler, let him sneak away . . .

The feeling of being sandwiched between the great drama of Shakespeare and his own polished but less creative age, disturbs him from this time onwards and though he does not "sneak away" from the stage in "just despair", his next dramatic venture is to imitate the great poet of the last age. He feels altogether pleased with his achievements in All for Love (1678): "since I must not be over-confident in my own performance after him, yet . . . by imitating him I have excelled myself throughout the play". The best way to improve one's art is to imitate genius, so goes Dryden's theory; and the theory could be put into practice for the sake of his own self-fulfilment at least once in his own dramatic career. However, the demands of the age could not be ignored, so the next best step was to constrict the genius of the past within the bounds of the new dramatic milieu; and since Shakespeare in altered clothes was proving quite successful, Dryden also tried his hand at adaptation. Troilus and Cressida was a success; but the prologue of the play is an unqualified and loud admission of the feebleness of the new "Age" against the "manly", "bold" "master-strokes" of Shakespeare in a "barbarous age"; and the ghost of Shakespeare is made to say:

I found not, but created first the Stage.
And, if I drain'd no Greek or Latin store, 
'Twas, that my own abundance gave me more.
On foreign trade I needed not rely,
Like fruitfull Britain, rich without supply.
In this my rough-drawn Play, you shall behold 
Some Master-strokes, so manly and so bold,
That he, who meant to alter, found 'em such,
He shook; and thought it Sacrilege to touch.
Now, where are the Successours to my name? 

The problem of succession was of serious concern to Dryden both in politics and in poetry; and whereas in politics he could only voice his protest passively by ridiculing his opponents, as an active participant in the drama he had a greater responsibility than could be achieved simply by satirising the culprits. To his lament, "where are the Successours to my name?", Dryden found no answer. It was, however, to Dryden's credit to have realised it in his time, when, as the first critic of Shakespeare, he was "sailing in a vast ocean" without the help of the "loadstone, or knowledge of the compass". The feeling of failure is expressed not only in his dramatic works but earlier, in MacFlecknoe (1678), there are echoes of contempt for the triviality and pretentiousness of the contemporary drama; later, this was confirmed in his Epistle the Fourteenth (1698), to Peter Motteux, a fellow-dramatist:

'Tis hard, my friend, to write in such an age,
As damns not only poets, but the stage.  

T.S. Eliot once remarked:

Shakespeare made a great poetic drama impossible... Anyone who tries to write poetic drama, even to-day, should know that half of his energy must be exhausted in the effort to escape from the constricting toils of Shakespeare... For a long time after an epic poet like Milton, or a dramatic poet like Shakespeare, nothing can be done. Yet the effort must be repeatedly made; for we can never know in advance when the moment is approaching at which a new epic, or a new drama will be possible.

Dryden, as an immediate successor to this great drama, had to face the full glare of the Shakespearean dazzle; but Eliot's suggestion in this century had been anticipated by Dryden in the seventeenth century, that is, "the effort must be repeatedly made", even if only to realise that the transcendent achievements of Shakespearean drama cannot be equalled:

1. 'Discourse' (1693), II, 73.
"in the drama we have not arrived to the pitch of Shakespeare and Ben Jonson", and to Shakespeare also goes the credit of creating the English stage.\(^1\) Again, in 1694, in his *Epistle to Sir Godfrey Kneller*, Dryden feels a sense of pride in belonging to Shakespeare's "godlike race". Like Teucer, who fought under Ajax, Dryden takes shelter under Shakespeare's name; and acknowledges with all humility his littleness against Shakespeare's greatness:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Due Honours to those mighty Names we grant,} \\
\text{But Shrubs may live beneath the lofty Plant;} \\
\text{Sons may succeed their greater Parents gone;} \\
\text{Such is thy Lott; and such I wish my own.} \\
\end{align*}
\]

Under this phase of reverence, Dryden now turns to Shakespeare for blessings and inspiration and takes shelter even in his irregularities. For example, in the *Epistle to Sir Godfrey Kneller*, Dryden talks of the "awe", "blessings" and inspiration his soul derives from Shakespeare; in *Vindication of the Duke of Guise*, he defends his failure to observe theunities after the example of Shakespeare. Some anticipation of this attitude is presaged during his pro-neo-classical period also; for example, in the *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* (1668), Crites cites Shakespeare's example of "many scenes of rhyme together"; in 'Of Heroic Plays' (1672), Dryden justifies his "use of drums and trumpets" after Shakespeare, and in the preface to *Troilus and Cressida* (1679), Dryden is proud of the fact that he could copy Shakespeare.\(^2\)

After 1679, Dryden not only stopped alluding to Shakespeare's defects, but he realised the total futility of measuring Shakespeare's achievements by neo-classical standards. In the prologue to his last


play, *Love Triumphant* (1699), he reminds the critics like Rymer, actively engaged in denouncing Shakespeare:

To Shakespeare's Critique, he bequeaths the Curse,
To Find his Faults, and yet himself make worse.
A precious Reader in Poétique schools,
Who by his own Examples dams his Rules. 1

**Dryden the Adapter and the Critic of Shakespeare**

Lastly, the factor that seems to have influenced Dryden's development as a critic of Shakespeare is his role as an adapter of Shakespeare; and the converse that his criticism determines the line of his adaptations is equally true. An intimate contact with Shakespeare, as his adapter, left a deep impact on his understanding and criticism of Shakespeare. The Dryden that emerges after his labours on a Shakespearean play is not the same man who entered into it. Every encounter with a play of Shakespeare leaves him aghast, as it were, with a growing realisation of the greatness of the original writer and the hopelessness of his efforts to imitate him, much less equal him. Shakespeare's magic cannot be copied, he exclaims in despair after his tailoring of *The Tempest* (1670), in collaboration with Davenant; his "power is sacred as a King's", and "monarch like" he makes dramatic laws for all his contemporaries, and for posterity too. This hyperbolic tone is understandable, the sense of awe and reverence on the close study of a genius acts as a reminder to a realistic craftsman of his own humility, and the futility of following the same trade with his inadequate tools. After *All for Love* (1678), it is the same story told with greater force: Shakespeare leaves no praise "for any who come after him". 2 It is Eliot's voice at a distance of three hundred years: "yet the effort must be made". Another and last attempt is made, this time

not to imitate a great play of the poet but to remodel what Dryden thought one of Shakespeare's first attempts and therefore, perhaps, a less inspired work of a genius. But the Dryden who embarks on this attempt to improve upon what he thought to be his predecessor's defects, ends up totally dumbfounded, concluding that there could be no successors to Shakespeare. It was a moment of truth, and as with great truths it was at once painful and exhilarating. Dryden realises now that Shakespeare's genius is greater than all criticism. Dryden the neo-classical critic now makes a total retreat from Aristotle and his interpreters and, not only that, he also comes to the conclusion that the best way to relax with Shakespeare is to abandon the race altogether, to give up writing plays. His career as a playwright concludes here both emotionally and spiritually. His next project is the translation of Ovid's Epistles (1680), and although he continued to write plays sporadically until 1694, they were more the result of expediency than of his free choice. Whatever other factors contributed to his farewell to the theatre, not the least tempting speculation is the one which Eliot makes for us: "Shakespeare made a great poetic drama impossible". He did, for Dryden.

Dryden's progress from criticism of Shakespeare by the rules to an unqualified admiration of the poet, has often posed the serious problem of where to place him among the neo-classical critics. Watson, for example, observes that Dryden in his praise of both the regularity and for the irregularity of the Elizabethan drama, is trying to eat his cake and have it. Earlier, Irving Ribner alluded to the "paradox" of Dryden's praise of Shakespeare and his position as the champion and greatest exponent of neo-classicism. The view of Shakespeare held by Dryden and his followers, according to Ribner, was "confused and uncertain, and in..."
the last analysis meaningless". According to Saintsbury, Dryden did not care for the rules, and therefore, admiration of Shakespeare came naturally to him. Samuel Monk compliments Dryden's "liberalism"; preserved "Shakespeare, relatively unmutilated by critical pettiness; and in so doing he helped preserve English neo-classical criticism and literature from arid pedantry".

The basic assumption behind these pronouncements seems to be that Dryden's criticism of Shakespeare must form a pattern in conformity or otherwise to the neo-classical principles of his time. A recent critic has suggested a departure from this stock-approach by viewing the inconsistencies of Dryden's attitudes to Shakespeare in terms of the argumentative and polemic nature of his prefaces. As has emerged in our study of Dryden, his assessment of Shakespeare, in the context of his career as a playwright, critic and adapter, takes a dramatic turn upwards. And as in a play, the conflict between the opposing forces of the rules and Shakespeare, dominating in his earlier criticism, is resolved after his intimate contact with the genius of his predecessor. In Dryden's own words, example of a genius serves as a "torch . . . to lighten our passage; and often elevate our thoughts as high as the conception we have of our author's genius".

Every study of the Restoration adaptations of Shakespeare, and there are quite a number, tends to lapse into either a downright denunciation of the adapted plays as compared with the originals, or at best offer a kind of apologia for the adapters. John Bailey, for example, in a comparative study of Antony and Cleopatra and All for Love, while granting that in the "matter of art and handling it is Dryden and not Shakespeare who has shown the sounder judgment", has however a grim warning for any attempt at re-doing Shakespeare: "the eternal epitaph of those who do not know their place would be the inevitable verdict on the fool who should try to retouch the unique incommunicable things of Shakespeare". Such a pronouncement may carry some weight today with our three hundred years of scholarship, criticism and stage experience of the poet, but it had little validity for an age which approached Shakespeare fresh, as it were, from the inadequate quarto and folio editions then available. It is to the credit of the Restoration that it was growing increasingly aware of Shakespeare's greatness, and that both the critics and the playwrights at large were more enthusiastic about

1. The list of the disparaging group is much the longer, notable among them being critics like T.R. Lounsbury, Allardyce Nicoll, Hazleton Spencer, G.C.D. Odell; whereas in the second group are isolated voices like those of Montague Summers and Gunnar Sorelius.

2. 'Dryden and Shakespeare', in Poets and Poetry, Oxford, 1911 (pp. 72-79), pp. 78, 75.
his drama than their sixteenth century counterparts. However, the process of adaptation was an inevitable corollary of this appreciation. A modern producer of Shakespeare, in offering a new interpretation of a play, means no insult to the poet; in one or two cases this might be debatable. Marc Witz's adaptations and productions, for example, are sometimes inspired by positive dislike of what he thinks Shakespeare is doing. But, by and large, despite all our love and admiration for Shakespeare, we produce his plays amenable to twentieth century stage conditions with a few isolated instances of the productions of Granville Barker (1877-1946), following the innovations of Samuel Phelps (1804-1878) and William Poel (1852-1934). The Restoration also had to present a Shakespeare in conformity with the conditions of the theatre of their time.

The Elizabethan was a great age of drama, whereas the Restoration was an age of theatre. If Pepys's taste is an index of the taste of the audiences of those times, they were more responsive to a spectacle of visual splendour than to poetic imagination. With a view to catering for such audiences Davenant introduced scenery in the theatre. So the wide sweep of Shakespearean fancy, to which the Restoration could not respond anyway, was rendered otiose. The dramatic effect that Shakespeare evoked with words could now be realised with the help of stage machinery. Shakespeare's poetry had little appeal for a Restoration critic and playgoer. The altered versions of Shakespeare's plays consistently aim at simplifying the language by rewriting some of the verse lines as prose or simpler poetry, removing some rich poetic metaphor, and substituting simpler words, more appropriate, as they thought, for the refinement of their age.

1. Cf. Hazelton Spencer, who is very critical of Davenant's innovation and has suggested that this elaborate scenery was largely responsible for his violent treatment of Shakespearean revivals, because the lust for spectacle lessened the importance of the play and affected dramatic composition adversely (Shakespeare Improved, Harvard, 1927, pp. 46, 54 ff).
On 8 December 1660 appeared the first actress on the Restoration stage, Mrs Margaret Hughes (who played Desdemona for the Duke's company), to be followed by many others. By the testimony of Downes, we know that boys were quite successful in female parts during the early Restoration. However, judging by the comments of Shakespeare's Cleopatra, it seems that they were not necessarily so in the Elizabethan theatre. Shakespeare's treatment of women, especially in his tragedies and histories where women characters are very few and are allowed the minimal stay on the stage, suggests that Shakespeare himself, like his Cleopatra, shuddered to see "some squeaking... boy" mar the tragic grandeur of his female protagonist. Why there are no female counterparts to Lear or Hamlet is not difficult to understand. On the Restoration stage there was no such threat to a woman's role; and, to please both the audiences and the new actresses their roles needed amplification. To think with Dryden that Shakespeare himself would perhaps have done what the Restoration playwrights were doing, would not be too wide of the mark. The addition of two women characters in The Tempest, a detailed attention to Lady Macduff and an increase in the number of scenes between Macbeth-couple and Macduff-couple, which have been an eyesore for modern critics, would perhaps have passed uncensured by the original playwright himself.

In the new pattern of the drama, the dramatic unities had come to acquire a great importance. Shakespeare himself was not ignorant of the dramatic rules. He knew that a play should have the "scene indivisible"

2. Cf. Downes's comments on Kyneston who acted so well that he wondered "whether any Woman that succeeded him so Sensibly touch'd the Audience as he" (Roscius Anglicanus, p. 19).
3. Cf. Dryden's theory that "genius of every age is different", see above, p. 92, cf. 106 & n 2, above.
The chorus in Henry V refers to the liberties taken in the unities of place and time (Act II, v); and the chorus in The Winter's Tale implores:

> Impute it not a crime
> To me or my swift passage that I slide
> O'er sixteen years, and leave the growth untried
> Of that wide gap, since it is in my pow'r
> To o'erthrow law, and in one self-born hour
> To plant and o'erwhelm custom. (Act IV, i, 4-9).

But what was easily achieved with poetic make-believe was no longer possible with Restoration scenic make-believe. Shakespeare, in fact, makes this point in the prologue to Henry V:

> 'Tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings,
> Carry them here and there, jumping o'er times. (28-29, italics added)

Since the aid of thoughts was no longer conceivable in the new dramatic milieu, Shakespeare himself perhaps would have made attempts to conform his plays to the external order of unity and so it should be adjudged as no crime in the adapters.

Poetic justice was another important neo-classical tenet, and, as we have seen, the force with which Rymer enunciated this principle made it imperative for playwrights to observe it. Shakespeare, whose artistic decorum was not quite comprehensible to this age, was considered a wayward child who needed to be restrained. Since drama for these playwrights was more a matter of coherence of the chain of events than a development of character, they thought Shakespeare's plays needed only minor modifications of plot to acquire the respectability missing from them. Shakespeare does not reward virtue and punish evil, though by showing their contrasted effects, he implies a praise for the former and condemnation of the latter. Shakespeare was too much of an artist to take upon himself the role of a judge; and perhaps he seems to suggest, even for a judge the exact dispensation of virtue and vice is not always possible. Virtue may be all too superficial - the virtue of action
rather than of intention, and who can ever see what lies beyond words and deeds? Or virtue may be no more than self-righteousness. In drama, as in life, there is no foolproof way to discern the truth of each individual act of virtue. As to the even-handed punishment of evil, Shakespeare posed the question through Hamlet: "use every man after his desert, and who shall escape whipping?" (II, ii, 524). In fact, Hamlet tries to treat his mother according to her deserts (III, iv) and what follows is not only appalling but futile. And does not Brutus's act of punishing Caesar according to what he thought to be his deserts, prove self-defeating and self-destructive? Who is the right recipient and who the right rewarder? These are larger and difficult questions, and the Restoration drama was not concerned with them; it attempted a different kind of drama. Shakespeare's plays did not conform to their new pattern and therefore needed alteration.

These heavy alterations led to a simplification of character and reduction of cast (the large cast of Shakespeare's plays was reduced for reasons of economy also, especially when the introduction of scenery and elaborate costumes was taking a heavy financial toll). Complexity of character is not a forte of the Restoration drama. Dryden, as we have seen, insists on distinguished and consistent characters where a few outstanding traits predominate. This is closer to Ben Jonson's characterisation than Shakespeare's. However, just as we do not seek a consistency of structure in Shakespeare's plays, so we should not be looking for subtlety of character in the Restoration drama. The point is not whether they simplified Shakespeare's characters, but whether their own characters are developed any better. Character study was on the whole subservient to the other dramatic principles both in drama and in criticism, and as far as the history of Shakespearean criticism goes it is not until the late eighteenth century that serious attention was offered to one of his characters by Maurice Morgann.
When all is said, one last point must be made, that the adapters were rewriting Shakespeare's plays out of the great love and admiration for him and not just to pander to popular taste.¹ Popular demand was well met by the plays of Beaumont and Fletcher, Ben Jonson and new plays.² Shakespeare's popularity was at its lowest ebb during the first years of the Restoration, and in fact the adapters did a great service to the poet by preserving him on the stage and eventually securing his popularity over that of his contemporaries. Modern critics would do well to remember that as working dramatists the adapters rewrote these plays for the stage - happily for them the audiences did not compare these versions with their originals. The modern reverence for a Shakespearean text goes back to the nineteenth century when critics preferred to read these plays rather than to see them. In the Restoration, Shakespeare was meant for the stage and tampering with his text seemed no blasphemy to the adapters so long as it helped to keep Shakespeare alive and enjoyable on the stage.

The Tempest

The Tempest of Dryden-Davenant was written in 1667, at a time when Dryden, not too sure of his dramatic talents, was actively engaged in writing tragi-comedy in rhyme. In criticism, as reflected in his Essay of Dramatic Poesy (1668), he was trying to find a workable formula for the Restoration drama. His attitude towards Shakespeare, during this

¹ Cf. Allardyce Nicoll, Dryden as an Adapter of Shakespeare, Oxford, 1922, pp. 10, 12; Hazelton Spencer, Shakespeare Improved, pp. 137, 201, who hold the opposite view.

² According to Nicoll's handlist of Restoration plays, the number of new plays performed was as follows:

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<th>Year Range</th>
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<tr>
<td>1660-1664</td>
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See Restoration Drama, I, Appendix C, 386-446.
period, was that of sincere admiration for his genius and censure for his faults. The Tempest, written largely under the guidance of Davenant, aims at correcting some of the supposed failings of Shakespeare's play and making it amenable to the Restoration taste. A decade later, the purpose of writing All for Love was quite different; it was to imitate the style of the poet. In the last adaptation, Troilus and Cressida, Dryden's plan was to improve Shakespeare's play.

Of all Restoration adaptations Dryden-Davenant's Tempest has suffered most at the hands of modern critics. Charles Gildon, however, anticipated the modern scholars. He is highly critical of the characterisation of the adapters; Davenant's counterpart of Shakespeare's plot spoiled "the natural innocence and character of Miranda", and caused great damage to the plot by the broken scenes and "embarrassed conduct". The "alterations are monstrous" especially in the Manner and Sentiments. In 1892, H.H. Furness reprinted what he thought was Dryden's Tempest in his New Variorum Shakespeare, and remarked: "no imagination, derived from a mere description, can adequately depict its monstrosity, - to be fully hated it must be fully seen". However, Furness's remarks refer to Shadwell's Tempest, for until the recent researches of W.J. Lawrence, endorsed by G.C.D. Odell, Allardyce Nicoll and Montague Summers, it was not realised that only the quarto of 1670 represents the Dryden-Davenant version, while the quarto of 1674 contained Dryden's preface but was composed by Shadwell. As a matter of fact, Dryden's play was never reprinted after the 1701 folio edition of his works until Montague Summers included it in his Restoration Adaptations in 1922. It follows that T.R. Lounsbury's disparaging

remarks about Dryden's Tempest refer to Shadwell's play. However, his objection to the plot of the play is equally valid for the Dryden-Davenant version since Shadwell retained most of the plot of the first play, with only minor deletions or additions of a few lines here and there. Shadwell's Tempest is more strictly an opera than Dryden-Davenant's and for operatic potentiality he elaborates the Masque of the Furies in Act II and the role of Milcha (Ariel's lady love), as well the concluding masque is altered and expanded.

With Allardyce Nicoll, we come to a criticism of Dryden-Davenant's Tempest which is equally damaging: the "scenes of suggestive innocence are . . . the result of the immoral, degenerate qualities of the age". According to Odell, "this alteration is the worst perversion of Shakespeare in the two-century history of such atrocities". Hazelton Spencer subscribes to the same view: it "may fairly be called the worst, as it was the most successful of the Restoration alterations". More recently the editors of California edition have offered a very sensitive and sympathetic criticism of the play. And as we know, the play proved to be one of the most popular on the Restoration stage.

The Tempest or the Enchanted Island is not the product of Dryden's own inspiration and invention. This is not said with a view to absolving Dryden from his share of the collaboration, but to mark the difference between this early attempt of Dryden and his later adaptations of Shakespeare. Judging by Dryden's own account in The

4. Montague Summers, perhaps because of his partisan attitude towards Dryden, suggests that the greater part of the authorship was Davenant's, Restoration Adaptations, p. xli, cf. Allardyce Nicoll, who opposes this view, Dryden as an Adapter of Shakespeare, p. 16, cf. Hazelton Spencer, who gives a short list of German scholars who have argued that Dryden's share in the authorship was greater than Davenant's Shakespeare Improved, p. 202.
preface to the play, he was largely responsible for the composition of
the play while Davenant designed the plot.\(^1\) It was Davenant's practice
to add to the existing plot of the original play. In Macbeth, for
example, the role of the witches is elaborated, and several additional
scenes are given to Macduff and his wife and to Macbeth and Lady Macbeth;
in The Law against Lovers he used the Benedick/Beatrice story from
Much Ado About Nothing for his sub-plot, and in the main story Juliet
(Claudio's betrothed) receives more attention than in Shakespeare's play.
Similarly, in his Tempest he introduced a series of changes, among which
was the emphasis placed on Miranda's innocence by introducing a male
counterpart to her, Hippolito, who had never seen a woman. This sort of
character had a special fascination for Dryden, who was always drawn by
the exotic, as the settings of his Indian Queen, Indian Emperor, Aureng-
Zebe and Don Sebastian show. A dweller in a cave on a desert island
was the right sort of theme for Dryden. Earlier, in The Indian Queen
(1663), he had already exploited the theme of natural man in Montezuma;
later, Almanzor in The Conquest of Granada (1672) claims to be a free
and "natural" man. Naturally, therefore, "the counterpart to
Shakespeare's plot . . . so pleased me that I never writ anything with
more delight".\(^2\) Other changes in the new play were the comic parts of
the sailors, largely written by Davenant.\(^3\) Alonzo is the Duke of Savoy
and the usurping Duke of Mantua and not the King of Naples as in
Shakespeare, so that suffering he meets on the island has a greater moral
force than in the original story. To drive home the moral point, the

2. *Tempest* (1670), I, 135; the theme of the innocent man, however,
is considered to be the greatest absurdity by the critics of The
Tempest from Charles Gildon onwards, cf. Allardyce Nicoll,
Dryden as an Adapter of Shakespeare, pp. 15-16, Hazelton Spencer,
*Shakespeare Improved*, pp. 201-202.
culprits are shown to be penitent right from the beginning, unlike Shakespeare's play where Antonio is an unmitigated villain. The plot of the conspiracy against Alonzo is deleted, so the character of Sebastian is dropped. Caliban's conspiracy against Prospero's life is also dropped, though Caliban is anxious to get rid of Prospero and, as in Shakespeare, takes the drunkard Trincalo for a god and is prepared to "kneel to him" and "kiss...[his] foot" (Act II, p. 176).¹

Trincalo, like a typical Restoration rake, marries Sycorax, Caliban's monster sister who has neither beauty nor virtue, "only to get possession of the Island" (Act IV, p. 211). The vulgar advances of Sycorax, her open flirtatiousness, her incestuous leanings, and her brother acting as a pimp (Acts III and IV, pp. 190, 209, 211), may come as a shock to the civilised morality of Trincalo and his tribe, but Dryden is anxious to emphasise the point - implicit in Shakespeare's play also - that the monstrosity of the civilised world is a great deal more depraving than the innate wickedness of the uncivilised monsters.

The scenes of intrigue and rivalry between Stephano, Mustacho and Trincalo lusting for power and ambition, are perhaps presented to contrast the conventional wickedness of the town with the innocent wickedness of the island. Under this influence, Caliban takes on some facets of a Restoration court intriguer instead of the down-to-earth monster of Shakespeare's play. Ariel, with a gift for reading the thoughts and motives of all creatures on earth, knows that

The Monsters Sycorax and Caliban [are]
More monstrous grown by passions learn'd from man.
(Act IV, p. 219).

Most of the early scenes between Prospero and Caliban in Shakespeare's play are retained, but this Caliban is not as poetic as Shakespeare's,

1. All references to the text of the play are from Montague Summers' edition, their location is designated by the page numbers in vol. II of that book.
and all his thoughts are expressed in prose rather than verse. Shadwell's Caliban, for that matter, is more poetic than Dryden-Davenant's.

Ariel does not undergo much change, but he indulges in a lot more singing and is also given an additional dance with his lady-love towards the end of the play. Prospero is just one of the characters in the play rather than the all-pervading spirit of Shakespeare's play, and quite opposed to the genial dispenser of the fate of other characters he is here reduced "to execute Heaven's laws" (Act IV, p. 216). The "potent art" of Shakespeare's Prospero, at whose command "graves . . . have waked their sleepers, op'd, and let 'em forth" (Act V, i, 48-50), becomes here "feeble Art . . . [endeavouring] to resist the will of Heaven" (Act IV, p. 213). Dryden's Prospero is not even sure if his "Art it self is false" and, like a typical Drydennian character, he is found oscillating between free will and destiny:

If Fate be not, then what can we foresee,
   Or how can we avoid it, if it be?
   If by free-will in our own paths we move
   How are we bounded by Decrees above?  (Act III, p. 198).

The attention of the adapters is not focussed on Prospero but on the young lovers. For Dryden, love has been one of the most important passions of the drama. In the Essay of Dramatic Poesy, he refers to the gentleness of love "which is the most frequent of all the passions, and which, being the private concernment of every person, is soothed by viewing its own image in a public entertainment". Love dominates most of the plays he wrote during this time, for example, Secret Love (1670), Tyrannic Love (1670), An Evening's Love (1671), The Indian Queen (1663), The Indian Emperor (1665). In Shakespeare's Tempest there was only one pair of lovers, but in the new play there are four pairs. Prospero, as Nicoll remarks, is the only important character not to be favoured with

1. EDP (1668), I, 42; see above, p. 170 and n 4.
This plenitude of lovers catered to the Restoration playwright's favourite design of expanding the female cast; and instead of the one woman of the Shakespearean play we have three women in the new play, so that the greater part of it is occupied with their agonies, jealousies and ecstasies.

The spontaneity of innocence that comes naturally in the case of Shakespeare's Miranda had to be realised by the contrived strategy of Prospero, since the two innocent sisters who had never seen a man except Prospero, and the young man Hippolito who had never seen a woman, were supposed to have spent their lives on the same island without ever seeing each other. The reaction of the uncivilised man Hippolito to the opposite sex corresponds to that of the female monster Sycorax. She finds it natural to inform the first man in her life, who is her husband now, that she will be as kind to all the other men as she has been to her lord (Act IV, p. 209). Hippolito informs his first woman, Dorinda, that he will have all the other women in the world along with her. In fact, he goes a step further than Sycorax; he asks his beloved to woo her own sister for him (Act IV, p. 205). He has to have the educative influence of the civilised world through Ferdinand and to experience pain and near-death to cure himself of his lust and settle down to one woman. All four lovers suffer the pangs of jealousy because of easily aroused suspicions of one another, but in the end they realise their mistakes and settle down happily. The world of the lovers in the Enchanted Island is not that of Shakespeare's romantic comedy but that of the Restoration. It would be more fruitful to compare this play with the licentious comedies of the Restoration than with Shakespeare’s Tempest. For example, the broad jesting and the intrigues of the two couples (Rodolph and Doralice, and Palamede and Melantha), in Marriage A-La-Mode, who while

anxious to possess their own spouses also flirt outside marriage, run close to the intrigues and jealousies of the lovers in *The Tempest*. It is significant that Dryden, who called his *All for Love* an imitation of Shakespeare and his *Troilus and Cressida* an improvement on Shakespeare, makes no claim of this kind for *The Tempest*. It is, as he observes long after the publication of the play, "a tragedy mixed with opera, or a drama written in blank verse, adorned with scenes, machines, songs, and dances, so that the fable of it is all spoken and acted by the best of the comedians . . . it cannot properly be called a play, because the action of it is supposed to be conducted sometimes by supernatural means, or magic; nor an opera, because the story of it is not sung". Opera, as Dryden defines it, "requires a more masculine beauty of expression and sound . . . its principal intention being to please the hearing rather than to gratify the understanding". It was a new form of entertainment on the Restoration stage which was proving very successful with the audiences for its appeal to ear and eye. Modern critics trying to compare *The Tempest* of Dryden-Davenant with the play of Shakespeare are inevitably twice disappointed, because it does not qualify to be pure drama even by Restoration standards, much less by Shakespearean.

The language of Shakespeare's original is altered radically. For example, in Act I, ii, the contents of the vocabulary of the dialogue between Prospero and Caliban remain unchanged but Shakespeare's blank verse is rendered into prose. Some of Caliban's curses to Prospero are toned down. For example, Shakespeare's

```plaintext
The red plague rid you
For learning me your language
```

is changed to

```plaintext
the red botch rid you for learning me your language
```

(Act I, ii, 364-365)

(Act I, ii, p. 167)

1. Albion (1685), II, 41, 35.
Other changes noticeable in the adapted version are simplification of Shakespeare's language and correction of his grammar. For example, Miranda's line in Act I, ii

More to know Did never meddle with my thoughts (21-22)

is simplified into

I ne're indeavour'd to know more than you were pleas'd to tell me. (Act I, ii, p. 161)

and

To cry to th' sea that roar'd to us (Act I, ii, 149)

is altered, for the reason of grammatical correction,

To cry to th' seas which roar'd to us (Act I, ii, p. 162)

The greatest loss of Shakespeare's poetry has been in the deletion of the lines like "We are such stuff as dreams are made on" (Act V, i, 156-157).

All for Love

By the time of All for Love Dryden had come to admire Shakespeare's poetry. Quite opposed to his earlier stand in 'Defence of the Epilogue' (1672), Dryden now observes that Shakespeare "excels... all modern poets" in "the excellency of the words and thoughts". "Steeped in divine Shakespeare", Dryden, at this point of his career, was in a proper frame to imitate the style of the poet. However, in keeping with his own theory, propounded at length in 'Grounds of Criticism in Tragedy', Dryden copies only what he takes to be the excellences of his model. As a result, in all matters of detail and execution, All for Love is a new play. Imitation, as Dryden defines it later in connection with translation, is "an endeavour of a later poet to write like one who has written before him on the same subject; that is, not to translate his words, or to be confined to his sense, but only to set him as a pattern, and to write, as he supposes that author would have done, had he lived in

1. 'Heads' (1677), I, 217, 216; Summers, IV, 167.
our age, and in our country". The need to conform the genius of the past to the demands of the present, as we have seen (above, pp. 92, 106 and n 2), is a favourite theme of Dryden; and All for Love is another experiment in that direction.

All for Love has been a popular play from the Restoration to our own times. It replaced Shakespeare's play on the stage until the eighteenth century, when Antony and Cleopatra was revived by Garrick only once. On the Restoration stage the play was a success. Robert Gould, in his satire, The Play House (1685), wrote that Dryden's "All for love, and most correct of all, / Of just and vast applause can never fail". In 1699, Charles Gildon called it a "Masterpiece" despite "the false Moral". John Dennis admires the first act of the play but condemns the tragedy for violating the decorum of a tragedy since the hero rejects his virtuous wife for a "prostitute". Samuel Johnson grants that there are very few improprieties of style or character in All for Love, yet deplores the "romantic omnipotence of love" in the play. In the twentieth century, despite the disadvantages Dryden suffers from the inevitable comparison with Shakespeare, All for Love has been accepted almost unanimously as "the finest of the Restoration . . . tragedies".

1. Ovid (1680), I, 270; cf. above, p. 106 and n 2.
3. Summers, IV, 167 ff; cf. Downes, "the Principal in their Stock [Killigrew Company] and most taking of the plays, Roscius Anglicanus (1708), p. 15; about a performance of 1704, Downes tells us that the Court was "very well pleas'd", p. 47.
5. The Lives and Characters of the English Dramatick Poets . . . First begun by Mr Langbain, improv'd and continued down to this time, by a Careful Hand, London, 1699, preface, sig. A 5 v.
and even in comparison with Shakespeare it fares rather well. Bonamy Dobree, for example, finds it "more tragic" than Antony and Cleopatra, and he prefers the classical method of Dryden's play to the panoramic span of Shakespeare's.\(^1\) John Bailey also admires Dryden's method of handling the structure more than Shakespeare's.\(^2\) According to Norman Suckling, it is "perhaps the only great classical tragedy in English".\(^3\) Morris Freedman attributes the success of the classical method to the influence on Dryden of Milton's Samson Agonistes. As he argues, Dryden's Antony and Cleopatra are closer to Milton's Samson and Dalila than to Shakespeare's characters. Ventidius serves the function of Milton's chorus, echoing many of the images of the latter. Dryden, according to Freedman, was indebted to Milton's theory of drama as expounded in his preface to Samson Agonistes for the neat observance of the neo-classicalunities, the absence of a mixture of tragedy and comedy, and the elimination of the vulgar and trivial in All for Love.\(^4\) Montague Summers and Kenneth Muir have established that Dryden was indebted to Samuel Daniel's Tragedy of Cleopatra (1594), and that the last 150 lines of All for Love follow the last act of Daniel's play closely.\(^5\) Dryden does not acknowledge any of these influences specifically, though he alludes to the "greatest wits of our nation after Shakespeare" who had handled the subject of the death of Antony and Cleopatra, and that their various examples gave him the confidence to try this theme. Rymer's influence

4. "'All for Love' and 'Samson Agonistes'", NO, CCI, 1956, 514-517.
is more directly acknowledged, especially in his claim that he chose the play for the "excellency of the moral". It is in keeping with Rymer's requirements for a tragedy in The Tragedies of the Last Age that Dryden emphasises that in All for Love "the chief persons represented were famous patterns of unlawful love; and their end accordingly was unfortunate...the crimes of love which they both committed were not occasioned by any necessity, or fatal ignorance, but were wholly voluntary, since our passions are, or ought to be within our power".\(^1\)

Why Dryden's choice fell on Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra as a model for his best tragedy he does not elucidate. Unlawful love and its tragic consequences are, as he specifies in the preface, his reasons for the choice and these are in keeping with the Restoration ethos.\(^2\) Dryden was attracted towards the Roman plays of Shakespeare; he is "awed when he hears his [Shakespeare's] godlike Romans rage".\(^3\) The heroic traits of Shakespeare's Roman heroes, Brutus, Antony and Coriolanus, come very close to Dryden's own concept of a hero; and of all Roman plays of Shakespeare, Antony and Cleopatra was most satisfactory from Restoration point of view as neither Julius Caesar nor Coriolanus offered a romantic part for a woman. Also, Antony and Cleopatra best lent itself to a didactic purpose. Dryden's predisposition towards a moralistic theme, an admiration for Shakespeare's poetry and a desire to experiment on his "godlike Romans", seem to have been factors contributing to his selection of Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra as a model for imitation.

Some of the themes of All for Love are anticipated in Dryden's Aureng-Zebe. Melisinda, like Octavia, is a rejected wife. Morat, like Antony, prefers love to honour. Pity and sentimentality, dominating in

1. \footnote{AL (1678), I, 221-222.}
2. \footnote{See Baxter Hathaway, 'John Dryden and the Function of Tragedy' PMLA, LVIII, 1943, 665-673.}
3. \footnote{AZ (1676), I, 192.}
All for Love, are for the first time presaged in Aureng-Zebe. Dryden's Aureng-Zebe is a turning point in his dramatic career in more ways than one. Here for the first time Dryden's weariness with the heroic play is in evidence. The rejection of rhyme in the prologue is more serious than it appears. It is the rejection of a form unsuitable for the new type of tragedy which Dryden now contemplated - he continued to use rhyme in his poetry even after this date. It is in the dedication to Aureng-Zebe that Dryden first expresses his wish to write an epic. Obviously, he had come to realise now that the difference between an epic and a drama is much more than just a matter of form. It is a different genre demanding a different discipline, the heroic play fulfilling the function of neither an epic nor a drama; and he happily turns away from this mode of writing. Conflict between love and honour, which he later described as "the mistaken topics of tragedy", also finds its partial rejection in Aureng-Zebe, and almost total rejection in All for Love, where love replaces honour.

Dryden builds his play on a neat and regular structure. None of the concessions that he normally allows in his plays are permitted here. There are no scenes of battles and trumpets on the stage, and no variety of sub-plot to please the audience: "the action is so much one that it is the only of the kind without episode, or under-plot; every scene in the tragedy conducing to the main design, and every act concluding with a turn of it". In his unity of plot and economy of design Dryden seems to be following the example of Racine who observes a great restraint in his style and the execution of plot. Equally, Dryden found the extravagance of Shakespeare's play too indecorous for the Restoration stage and in cutting it down to size he seems to be offering a criticism.

2. AZ (1676), I, 191.
3. DS (1690), II, 45.
of Shakespeare's plot. The epic proportion of *Antony and Cleopatra* is trimmed into a neat and concise dramatic length. The vast panorama of history - ten years in Shakespeare - is compressed into a single day. The unchartered globe-trotting of Rome, Syria and Athens is not permissible in this setting since the action takes place at one point of Alexandria. The characters are reduced from thirty-four to twelve and the scenes are cut down from forty-two to five.

"The unities of time, place and action [are] more exactly observed than, perhaps, the English theatre requires". This had its restricting effect on the play. As compared to Shakespeare's play, Dryden's play is a closed stage where vast forces of energy are accumulated and released at a flash point and allowed to explode for a period of three hours. The total action occurs on the plane of words. Events are recounted, not acted. The characters are compelled to be artificially self-reminiscent. Whereas in Shakespeare we actually participate in Antony's glory and then witness his downward curve, Dryden's Antony must recapitulate his past glory:

> Why was I rais'd the Meteor of the World,
> Hung in the Skies, and blazing as I travel'd,
> Till all my fires were spent; and then cast downward,
> To be trod out by Caesar?  (Act I, p. 196)

The action moves forward punctuated with retrospective flashes. In Shakespeare, the thunder and the grandeur of Antony's soldiery are enacted; in Dryden, the action of the two soldiers has to be squeezed into a few lines of the hero:

> We two have kept its homage in suspense,
> And bent the Globe, on whose each side we trod,
> Till it dinted inwards:    (Act V, p. 254)

The dramatic tension lies in details rather than in action. What

1. *All (1678)*, I, 222.

2. All references to the text of the play are from Montague Summers' edition; their location is designated by the page numbers in Vol. IV of the book.
Shakespeare dramatises in action in the course of three acts - Antony's infatuation, his departure from Egypt, the whole affair of the patched-up brawl ending in the expediency of a political marriage, Cleopatra's daily messengers to Rome and her rage and temper at the news of the marriage, Antony's return to Egypt and then the ignominious defeat at Actium - Dryden must narrate briefly, find a cold and dull expediency for Antony to dwell on, to the total loss of the immediacy of dramatic participation:

Fulvia dy'd;
(Pardon you gods, with my unkindness dy'd)
To set the World at Peace, I took Octavia,
This Cesar's Sister; in her pride of youth
And flow'r of Beauty did I wed that Lady,
Whom blushing I must praise, because I left her.
You call'd; my Love obey'd the fatal summons:
This role'd the Roman arms; the Cause was yours.
You hindered it: yet, when I fought at Sea,
Forsook me fighting; and (Oh stain to Honor!
Oh lasting shame!) I know not that I fled,
But fled to follow you. (Act II, p. 212)

The unity of place is achieved with the help of artificial coincidences. All the characters of the play must necessarily flock to the "Temple of Isis" - be they the priests of Isis who legitimately belong there or Dolabella, Octavia and her children who do not have the remotest connection with the place. Shakespeare's play is over-populated, but we meet his people where they are expected to be; and sometimes even no where - since often the location of the scenes is not clear. Dryden's characters have a rather incongruous way of appearing promptly on the scene when they are needed, however artificial their entries and exits appear in the dramatic context.

The impact of the unities is marked on the characterisation also. Like Racine's Andromache, all the characters in All for Love are interlinked and any move by one of the characters affects the fate of the others. As compared with Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra the
characters are radically simplified; none of the complexities of Shakespeare's characterisation are permissible or advisable in All For Love. As action is restricted to a single day, only the relevant emotions could be included. In the process of eliminating the faults of his predecessor Dryden lost much that was charming in the characters. The colossal size of Shakespeare's Antony is reduced to a "shadow of an Emperor" (Act I, p. 197). The plot expediency gives him a start when his decline had already set in. The empire is lost; the manifold shades of his personality - soldier and administrator, his jovial mood at the feast of Pompey, his ambivalence towards Cleopatra, haughtiness with Caesar, magnanimity towards Enobarbus - are lost to us. Dryden presents his Antony to be of open and transparent nature:

Why was I fram'd with this plain honest heart,
Which knows not to disguise its griefs and weakness,
But bears its workings outward to the World? (Act IV, p. 242)

which is in keeping with the requirements of the plot that permitted development of a few outstanding streaks of his personality. He is warm in friendship as emerges from his contacts with Ventidius and Dolabella, a good soldier - in narration rather than in action - and a conscientious husband and father, who is torn between the conflict of his duty and a great passion for Cleopatra. Love subordinates all other loyalties including military glory. After the news of the death of Cleopatra he has "no more work for War".

I was but great for her, my Pow'r, my Empire,
Were but my Merchandise to buy her love;
And conquer'd Kings, my Factors. Now she's dead,
Let Caesar take the World, ------ (Act V, p. 254)

Dryden's focus is on the hero's conflict between the rival duties of mistress/wife, honour and love; and all the characters - minor and major - are developed with this central theme in view; so that not only do all lines and scenes of the play but also all the characters unerringly contribute to his main design.
Dryden's Cleopatra is a plain and simple Restoration heroine and not a mysterious, complex Egyptian queen of Shakespeare. In total departure from history and from Shakespeare, she is a picture of absolute chastity and constancy, with no frailties of human nature. If Dryden could, he would perhaps erase the existence of her former lovers. Caesar alone is mentioned to the total exclusion of Pompey; and even about Caesar, Dryden's Cleopatra, unlike Shakespeare's Cleopatra - who is proud of her past conquests - is put to the blush about her past:

I grieve for that, my Lord, much more than you;
For, had I first been yours, it would have sav'd
My second choice. (Act II, p. 213)

She almost disowns her past in saying that she only "endur'd" Caesar, and gave herself to him as "to a Tyrant" and that even when "Caesar lov'd" her she "lov'd Antony" (Act II, p. 214). Her loyalty to Antony is so great that for his sake she refuses the written offer of Octavius for Syria and Egypt. Kingdoms are "a Trifle"; she is prepared to "part with life; with any thing" for Antony's sake (Act II, p. 215).

As opposed to Shakespeare's Cleopatra Dryden's Cleopatra is totally incapable of coquetry. Even as a matter of stratagem she cannot feign love to Dolabella and betrays herself in the process of doing it. In the words of Dolabella she is "fenc'd round from humane reach, / Transparent as a Rock of solid Crystal"; (Act IV, p. 255). To take away the blemish of lying about her death to Antony, Dryden puts the onus of this episode on Alexas. Cleopatra is so virtuous that Antony will not "believe her tainted" even "Though Heav'n and Earth / Should witness it" (Act IV, p. 239). Alexas compares her innocence with "Lucrece" (Act V, p. 253), and Charmion calls her "virtue" (Act V, p. 247).

Dryden's Cleopatra, like his Antony, has lost all the world for love: and though a queen, she is in spirit a typical Restoration woman who feels insecure and unprotected without her lover. She is entirely,
sometimes pathetically, at the mercy of his love. If the wife stands
deserted in this play the mistress too suffers from the threat of
banishment from her lover:

must I wander
The wide World o'er, a helpless, banish'd Woman,
Banish'd for love of you; banish'd from you? (Act IV, p. 245)

In her encounter with Octavia, Cleopatra emerges a weak, helpless woman
who has suffered more than the wife:

If you have suffer'd, I have suffer'd more.
You bear the specious Title of a Wife,
To build your Cause, and draw the pitying World
To favour it: the World contemns poor me;
For I have lost my Honour, lost my Fame,
And stain'd the glory of my Royal House,
And all to bear the branded Name of Mistress. (Act III, p. 229)

On the departure of her rival Cleopatra feels weak and defeated. Her
"spirits" sink and she is so weighted with grief that two women are
needed to support her. "In spirit, if not in name, she is indeed a
suffering wife". 1

In order to illustrate the conflict between love and duty in the
hero Dryden polarises his characters into two groups; Ventidius,
Octavia and her children representing the cause of the wife, and
Cleopatra and Alexas pleading for the mistress. Ventidius' sympathies
are with Octavia. He hates Cleopatra for bringing "ruin" on Antony.
She, according to Ventidius, is an embodiment of deceit, cunningness
and falsehood. For Antony, Ventidius epitomises Rome, duty and the
military side of his life. His cool, rational and virtuous disposition
is presented as a foil to Antony's "crimes of love". In the first act
of the play he acts as the chorus of a Greek play in his comments on
Antony's present fallen state contrasted with his past glory. He is
a great friend to Antony and tries to draw him to the world of law,
reason and propriety, acting as Antony's "deliverer" (Act II, p. 208).

In Alexas' words, Ventidius

ne'er was of his [Antony's] pleasures; but presides
O're all his cooler hours and morning counsels:
In short, the plainness, fierceness, rugged virtue
Of an old true-stampd Roman lives in him. (Act I, p. 194)

Octavia in Dryden is a better-developed character than her counterpart in Shakespeare. Her function in this play is more vital than in Shakespeare's play. She epitomises Antony's domestic life and duty - a wife, a mother of his children. Unlike Shakespeare's Octavia Dryden's Octavia cannot be just married and forgotten by her husband. She asserts all the legal rights of a wife to protect her marriage and recover her husband from the other woman. In the process she acts self-righteous: "Am I a Cleopatra?" (Act IV, p. 241). She invariably uses abusive language for her rival: "bad Woman" (Act III, p. 226); "shame of our Sex" (Act III, p. 229); "Faithless Prostitute" (Act IV, p. 241). In her encounter with Cleopatra she is so cruel and haughty that the sympathies of the audience go to the wronged mistress rather than the wronged wife. Shakespeare's Octavia is "ever known to patience" (Act III, vi, 98), but Dryden's Octavia is a violent woman, who, driven from her husband's house, "solicits her revenge" (Act I, p. 192). She is a nagging and possessive wife who leaves her husband in despair since she cannot have him "whole, and scorn to take you half" (Act IV, p. 242).

In Dryden's efforts to retain audience's sympathy for the chief characters, his portrayal of his Octavia is much less attractive than the Octavia of Plutarch and Shakespeare.

Dolabella's friendship for Antony is a total departure from Shakespeare. His infatuation for Cleopatra is introduced to contrast the love of a young man with the love of a middle-aged Antony. Dolabella's "was an age when love might be excus'd, / When kindly warmth, and when . . . springly youth / Made it a debt to Nature"; but in Antony's "declining age . . . 'tis plain dotage". Moreover, unlike Antony, he
had "no Legions . . . no World to lose, no peoples love" (Act III, p. 222). Yet for the sake of the friendship of Antony, Dolabella "stifled" (Act III, p. 219) that love. His revival of this love later is justified as he thought he was doing no "injury" to Antony "to wear the Robe which he throws by" (Act IV, p. 232). Dryden introduces a new scene between Dolabella and Cleopatra to bring out the faithful and 'loyal' side of Cleopatra. Dolabella's extended role in Dryden's play is therefore more for the reasons of his serviceability in the lives and love of the main characters than for himself.

The expansion of Alexas' role, from a mere eunuch in Shakespeare, to a fully developed character in Dryden, is also functional. Like the nurse in Racine's Phèdre he acts as the confidant of the heroine and also like the nurse he takes upon himself the responsibility of the intrigue and lies about Cleopatra's death which in Shakespeare's play is executed by the heroine herself. This again is in keeping with Dryden's intention of presenting an unblemished Cleopatra. Alexas's scheme of arousing Antony's jealousy by persuading Cleopatra to feign love to Dolabella, also meets Dryden's design to present a true and constant mistress in Cleopatra. Unlike the other main characters of the play who are always ready to die, Alexas, unknown to the joys of life, clings to life until too late towards the end of the play he realises the futility of all his schemes to preserve his life at all costs: "much better thus to die, / Than live to make a Holy-day in Rome" (Act V, p. 261).

How far Dryden carried out his moralistic purpose is debatable. As argued by Emerson, Davis and Johnson there is a gap between Dryden's intention (as indicated in his preface) and execution. The destruction of "Antony and Cleopatra is not occasioned by their love alone. Instead, the motivation for their deaths . . . is the result of the blundering lies and machinations of the well-meaning Alexas": and he "being the least sympathetic character in the play . . . is, as such, a poor
instrument of justice".¹ A.D. Hope has pointed out that Dryden "does not succeed in showing the effects of vice".² Bruce King has argued that "All for Love does not picture criminal love deservedly punished for its sins; rather it illustrates a transcendent love for which the world is well lost". Dryden's emphasis on a moral in the play, as King observes, is only to delude the critics of the Rymer school.³ King seems to suggest that Dryden was in effect opposed to Rymer's theory of poetic justice. This, of course, is to understand that Dryden did not support the neo-classical didactic theory of drama, but, as we have seen (above, pp. 78-82), Dryden largely subscribes to Rymer's views on poetic justice, though in practice he may not always observe it.

Dryden's emphasis on a moral is neither subservience to the critics like Rymer nor an attempt to claim something that he did not intend to present. He designed the play on the neo-classical moralistic pattern and it was his sincere conviction that his treatment of the story illustrated that moral. In the seventeenth century, as we have seen (above, p. 88), tragic catastrophe was more a matter of accident artificially contrived than an inevitability to which the tragic protagonists are led. Dryden did not realise that by taking away the initiative from his protagonists and making Alexas responsible for their death, he was reducing the morally responsible tragic characters to pathetic victims of fate. The lovers certainly do not die because of their "crimes of love"; the factors responsible for their death could as well have been operative if they were lawfully married.

1. 'Intention and Achievement in All for Love', by Everett Emerson, Harold Davis and Ira Johnson, in Twentieth Century Interpretations, ed. Bruce King, (pp. 55-60), pp. 59, 60.
2. 'All for Love, or Comedy as Tragedy', in The Cave and the Spring, by A.D. Hope, Adelaide, 1965, (pp. 144-163) p. 148.
That Dryden was drawn by the moral of the legend is borne out by the action of the play. The course of events in *All for Love* is dictated by the moral intention rather than by the historical incidents as in *Antony and Cleopatra*. The roles of Ventidius, Octavia, and Dolabella are developed to drive home the sinfulness of their love. In contrast to the background of the Roman world of politics in conflict with the Egyptian world of the pleasures of love in Shakespeare's play, Dryden's play introduces us to a "ruined" Antony who "hopes by absence / to cure his mind of Love" (Act I, p. 192). As with Milton's Samson, the woman Antony loves is the cause of his ruin. Ventidius asserts that Cleopatra "has deck'd his ruin with her love" (Act I, p. 195). Antony's comment on their love is that they "have lov'd each other / Into our mutual ruin". He accuses Cleopatra: "I derive my ruin / From you alone" (Act II, p. 211). Cleopatra in return also harps on the theme of ruin: "'twill please my Lord / To ruine me" (Act II, p. 213). This unlawful love, as Ventidius enumerates, generates multiple ruin: Cleopatra has "ruin'd" Antony and Antony has "ruin'd" Octavia (Act II, p. 226); Octavia maintains that Cleopatra's "inevitable charms" have "ruin'd my dear lord" (Act III, p. 229); Dolabella also "blam'd the love of ruin'd Antony" (Act III, p. 231); and even Cleopatra knows that in Rome some friend of Antony "mutters a secret curse on her who ruin'd him" (Act V, pp. 258-259). So, while Alexas's "design brought all this ruine on" (Act V, p. 250) the lovers, their love is seated in ruin right through the play.

To present the sinfulness of this love, the conflict between love/honour, wife/mistress is emphasised. Antony laments that he has

Lost my Reason, have disgrac'd
The name of Soldier, with inglorious ease.
In the full Vintage of my flowing honors
Sat still, and saw it prest by other hands. (Act I, p. 199)

Ventidius urges Antony to action for "honor's sake" (Act I, p. 200), and reminds him that "ere Love misled your wandering eyes" he was "the chief
and best of Human Race" (Act I, p. 202). The "wrong'd" wife (Act II, p. 209) confronts the wronging mistress, "shame of our Sex", who should "blush, to own those black endearments / That make sin pleasing"; and even Cleopatra prefers to "bear the specious Title of a Wife" to "the branded Name of Mistress" by which she has "lost my Honour, lost my Fame, / And stain'd the glory of my Royal House" (Act III, p. 229).

However, despite all these effects the love of Antony and Cleopatra fails to be the deadly sin that Dryden intended it to be. His concern for arousing pity for his hero and heroine defeats his moral purpose. In the preface to the play Dryden is seen to be anxious that the introduction of Octavia may not destroy the audience's compassion for Antony and Cleopatra, "whose mutual love, being founded upon vice, must lessen the favour of the audience to them when virtue and innocence were oppressed by it". Again, in 'A Parallel of Poetry and Painting', he asserts that "their passions were their own, and such as were given them by history; only the deformities of them were cast into shadows, that they might be objects of compassion; whereas if I had chosen a noon-day light for them, somewhat must have been discovered which would have rather moved our hatred than our pity".1 Dryden failed to realise that the emotion of pity is incompatible with the didactic function of drama, and that his excessive indulgence in compassion for his tragic personages proved fatal to the poetic justice of the play.

Dryden's moralistic plan is also defeated by the intensity of the lovers' passion which makes the moral judgment by which they stand condemned rather irrelevant. The ethical codes of the conventional world could not lay down laws for judging "the lovers [who] sit in State together, / As they were giving Laws to half Mankind" (Act V, p. 261). The warning on behalf of honour and sexual morality could not justifiably

1. _Al_ (1678), I, 222, 'Parallel' (1695), II, 202.
apply to this "blest Pair" whose death inspired the elegy: "No Lovers liv'd so great, or dy'd so well" (Act V, p. 261). By Dryden's simplistic vision of tragedy, the unhappy ending artificially brought about by the physical death of the lovers adequately delivers poetic justice; that the final self-assertion of the couple

so dying,
While hand in hand we walk in Groves below,
While Troops of Lovers Ghosts shall flock about us,
And all the Train be ours (Act V, p. 258)
defies the punishment implied in their death totally eludes Dryden. In Racine's Phèdre, for example, the guilt of illicit and incestuous love is entirely responsible for the tragedy. The suffering of the heroine is as much in her death as in the moral torment Phèdre suffers preceding her death. Dryden's protagonists suffer no such moral agony before their death.

How far All for Love conforms to the pattern of a heroic play is another controversial issue. Some critics have gone to the extreme of calling it a pure heroic play. Hazelton Spencer, for example, remarks that "the influence of the heroic drama is powerful in this play". Eugene M. Waith has argued that All for Love is closely linked with the earlier heroic plays, The Conquest of Granada and Aureng-Zebbe. Dryden's Antony is closer to Almanzor and Morat than he is to Shakespeare's Antony, and his Cleopatra is more closely related to his other heroines than to Shakespeare's Cleopatra. However, according to Morris Freedman and Montague Summers "All for Love bears little relation to any heroic drama of the time". It represents that definite detachment from the heroic play which Dryden was at some pains... to emphasize.1

Dryden could not have chosen the theme of the death of Antony and Cleopatra as a subject for an heroic play because the historical fact of the story did not permit a happy ending. In his very choice of the

legend, then, Dryden rejects one of the essentials of the heroic play.

As Dryden defines it, "an heroic play ought to be an imitation, in little, of an heroic poem ... Love and Valour ought to be the subject of it". Dryden was influenced by Hobbes and Davenant, who had affirmed that the heroic play should be the dramatic counterpart of the epic.

In the Essay of Dramatic Poesy (1668), Dryden observes that there is a great affinity between tragedy and epic:

> the genus of them is the same, a just and lively image of human nature ... the characters and persons are still the same, viz. the greatest of both sorts; only the manner of acquainting us with those actions, passions, and fortunes, is different. Tragedy performs it viva voce, or by action, in dialogue; wherein it excels the epic poem, which does it chiefly by narration.

Like the epic, the function of this tragedy is "admiration", showing the heroic virtues of a perfect man. The hero of All for Love is modelled on Aristotle's recommendation. As Dryden says in the preface:

> the hero of the poem ought not to be a character of perfect virtue, for then he could not, without injustice, be made unhappy; nor yet altogether wicked because he could not then be pitied. I have therefore steered the middle course; and have drawn the character of Antony as favourably as Plutarch, Appian and Dion Cassius would give me leave, the like I have observed in Cleopatra.

Now Antony may oscillate like Almanzor, but he is certainly not a blameless hero like Aureng-Zeb. As Ventidius remarks: "His Virtues lye ... mingled with his Crimes" (Act III, p. 218). Far from being an object of admiration, Dryden's Antony arouses our pity to an excess.

In contrast to the ranting of the heroic heroes of the heroic play, the

1. 'Heroic' (1672), I, 158; Hobbes: 'Answer to Davenant' (1650), Spingarn, II, 55; Davenant: 'Heroic', I, 157-158.
3. EDP (1668), I, 41, 46; Annus (1667), I, 101; 'Essay' (1668), I, 114; cf. Aeneis (1697), where Dryden prescribes the same virtues for an epic hero: "the shining quality of an epic hero, his magnanimity, his constancy, his patience, his piety ... raises first our admiration" (II, 228).
4. AL (1678), I, 222.
hero of this tragedy weeps several times, and so do some of the other male characters in the play. In fact, Dryden remarks in the prologue to the play that his hero "scarce rants at all... Weeps much; fights little, but is wonderous kind" (Preface, p. 188). And not only the hero arouses pity, but the heroine too, and Cleopatra no less than Octavia. In its accent on pity and sentimentality, All for Love anticipates the sentimental drama of the eighteenth century and departs from the heroic play of his own time.

All these are positive efforts to find a new departure from the heroic mode of writing a tragedy. The conflict of love and honour may have a seeming resemblance to an heroic play, though in fact the love/honour conflict is subservient to the love/duty conflict here. Honour stands rejected in the subtitle of the play, where Dryden positively declares The World Well Lost for such a love. Honour, as understood in Renaissance, "consisted in the possession of virtue", requiring good actions rather than bad. Shakespeare, by and large, accepts this concept of honour, though some of his tragic protagonists like Brutus and Othello are deluded in their vision of the honourable deed; and when heroes like Macbeth, Antony and Coriolanus have the right concept of honour it is in conflict with some other claims on them. Shakespeare's Antony has a high sense of honour which is identified with the Roman values and his honour clashes with his love for Cleopatra. Dryden's


Antony is too much of a lover to care for honour.\(^1\) His Cleopatra "deserves more world's than I can lose" (Act I, p. 201). Throughout the play love is presented in conflict with the world, and Antony prefers the madness of the former to the glory of the latter.\(^2\) "He defies the world, and bids it pass". To Octavius he is prepared to give all since "the world's not worth my care" (Act I, p. 194). He will "not be pleas'd with less than Cleopatra", and would not exchange her for "this Rattle of a Globe" with Caesar (Act II, p. 216). When he is dying, one kiss of Cleopatra is "more worth / Than all I leave to Caesar" (Act V, p. 258). Unlike Almanzor and Aureng-Zebe, Antony needs an external spur, Ventidius, to urge him to act for "Honor's sake" (Act I, p. 200; II, p. 209). Ventidius is the embodiment of the Roman empire and honour in the first act of the play, but in the third act he takes upon himself the role of pleading for Octavia, the deserted wife, so as to heighten the effect of Antony's conflicting loyalties between wife and mistress.

Despite all these radical changes All for Love does not altogether escape some of the earlier influences of the heroic play. The love of Antony and Cleopatra, for example, is elevated to an heroic passion. In Shakespeare's play though Antony is a great soldier and Cleopatra a great queen, in their love for each other they are ordinary human beings. Dryden's Cleopatra is an unblemished woman - in total contrast to the complex Cleopatra of Shakespeare - and she loves Antony with "transcendent passion . . . [that] soard, at first, quite out of Reason's view" (Act II, p. 204). An inconstant heroine was unthinkable in an

1. See A.D. Hope, 'All for Love, or Comedy as Tragedy' in The Cave and the Spring, p. 147.

2. The imagery of madness recurs with love: Antony has lost his "Reason" in love; he calls himself "Mad-man" and "Fool" (Act I, p. 199); Cleopatra's "Love's a noble madness" and "out of Reason's view" (Act II, p. 204); according to Alexas, love has deluded Cleopatra's sight (Act III, p. 206); and according to Dolabella, Cleopatra loves Antony to "madness" (Act IV, p. 243).
heroic tragedy, and Dryden distorts even the historical facts in order to present a "Mistress true" (Prologue, p. 188).¹ Julius Caesar, her former lover, only "possess'd my Person", not love, and while "Caesar lov'd me; but I loved Antony" (Act II, p. 213); "'twas but gratitude / I paid his love" (Act III, p. 228). She cannot even feign love for Dolabella (Act IV, p. 235), so complete is her love for one man only. Antony raises her to the status of a goddess:

receive me, goddess:
Let Caesar spread his subtile Nets, like Vulcan;
In thy embraces I would be beheld
By Heav'n and Earth at once,
And make their envy what they meant their sport.
Let those who took us blush; I would love on
With awful State, regardless of their frowns,
As their superior god.
There's no satiety of Love, in thee;
Enjoy'd, thou still art new; perpetual Spring
Is in thy arms; the ripen'd fruit but falls,
And blossoms rise to fill its empty place;
And I grow rich by giving. (Act III, p. 217)

Despite a felicitous echo of Shakespeare's "Age cannot wither her . . . where most she satisfies" (Antony and Cleopatra, II, ii, 239-41) the language here has a ring of the earlier excess of the heroic play.

Antony's love for Cleopatra, as already seen, is high, noble and heroic. According to one of Dryden's characters, Queen Isabella in The Conquest of Granada II, Act I:

Love's a Heroique Passion which can find
No room in any base degenerate mind:
It kindles all the Soul with Honours Fire,
To make the Lover worthy his desire. (Summers, III, 96)

Dryden's exaltation of his hero and heroine, is to celebrate an heroic love, and he elevates their characters to make them worthy of it.

As in an heroic play again, the characters of All for Love are always in readiness to die. Ventidius would prefer to be killed rather than be accused of being a traitor by his friend (act I, p. 202); and

¹. This is in violation of his own theory in the 'Grounds' that historical characters in drama should have a strict resemblance to their characters as given in history, I, 249.
he would rather die than ask forgiveness of Cleopatra (Act II, p. 216). Cleopatra is prepared to die at the slightest provocation. Harsh words from Antony are nothing short of "death" to her (Act II, p. 205). Dying for Antony's sake is but a trifle for her, and she would rather die than cause trouble to her lover; her only request to her lover is to let her die with him (Act II, p. 215). Again, when confronted by Octavia, Cleopatra declares that she can die for the man she loves. She lives for him alone, and when he seems lost to her, "her sight grows dim, and every object dances / And swims before me, in the maze of death" (Act III, p. 229). She will confine herself to a "solitary Chamber" and "till death will his unkindness weep" (Act III, p. 230). On receiving Dolabella's message of Antony's farewell with cruel words she collapses; and, on recovering, finds it loathsome to live in this false world of "violated Vows, / And injur'd Love", preferring the quiet of "the sleeping soul . . . in my Tomb" (Act IV, p. 235). On Antony's banishment she pulls out her dagger to kill herself rather than "bear it" (Act IV, p. 247); and she will "die pleas'd to think you once were mine" (Act IV, p. 246). In the last act, the only way to "prove" her innocence to Antony is to assure him that she will "die with him (Act V, p. 257).

While All for Love is an independent play in its theme, structure and characterisation, in the style, as Dryden himself says, he is imitating his predecessor, and the play is indeed the richer for this. Dryden's style, in his earlier plays, is often rhetorical, bombastic and at times flat. In All for Love these excesses are avoided. The language of the play is sober, reserved and in keeping with the restraint with which he treats his story, plot and characters. To come closer to the spirit of his predecessor's style, Dryden abandons rhyming couplets in favour of Shakespeare's blank verse; and Shakespearean cadence and tones are immersed in Dryden's verse throughout the play. Dryden, as we
have seen, is not enthusiastic about Shakespeare's language consistently, as for example he is about Shakespearean tragedy and characterisation. Yet the influence of Shakespeare's poetry goes back to Dryden's first published poem as we have already seen in an earlier chapter (p. 22). And even in drama, other than All for Love, many of his plays echo Shakespeare's lines and thoughts. For example, the soothsayer scene (Act III, i) in The Indian Queen (1663) is based on the scene of the witches in Macbeth (Act IV, i). In The Kind Keeper (1677-1678) there is an open allusion to Shakespeare's Macbeth: "I am like Macbeth after the death of good King Duncan; methinks a voice says to me; Sleep no more; Tricky has murder'd Sleep" (Act IV, Sc. ii, Summers, IV, 323). In Don Sebastian (1690) Dorax's exhortation in the last scene of the play when Sebastian wants to put an end to his life:

\begin{quote}
Be not Injurious in your foolish zeal,
But leave him free; or by my sword I swear,
To hew that Arm away, that stops the passage
To his Eternal rest
\end{quote}

is reminiscent of Kent's line in King Lear:

\begin{quote}
Vex not his ghost. O, let him pass! he hates him
That would upon the rock of this tough world
Stretch him out longer
\end{quote}

In All for Love, there are impressions and reminiscences of Antony and Cleopatra as well as several other plays of Shakespeare. Dryden was particularly appreciative of Shakespeare's handling of friendship at this stage of his career. As he wrote a year later, in 'The Grounds of Criticism', Shakespeare described friendship better than love: "friendship is both a virtue and a passion essentially; love is a passion only in its nature, and is not a virtue but by accident: good nature makes friendship; but effeminacy love". After the example of Brutus/Cassius quarrel in Julius Caesar Dryden models the scene between Antony and Ventidius in the first act of the play and he prefers this
scene to "anything which I have written in this kind". The friendship of Antony with Ventidius and Dolabella is in total departure from Antony and Cleopatra. Dryden is here drawing on other examples of friendship in Shakespeare. Friendship between Antony and Ventidius, though based on Antony's relationship with Enobarbus and Eros in Shakespeare's play, also draws on Cassius/Brutus in Julius Caesar and Hamlet/Horatio in Hamlet. As in Hamlet, when Horatio wants to follow Hamlet in death and the latter urges him not to do it, so in Dryden Antony requests Ventidius to survive his death.

Hamlet:

0 good Horatio, what a wounded name, 
Things standing unknown, shall live behind me!
If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart, 
Absent thee from felicity a while, 
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain, 
To tell my story. (Act V, i, 336-340)

All for Love:

Will thou not live, to speak good of me? 
To Stand by my Fair Fame, and guard th' approaches From the ill Tongues of Men? (Act V, p. 229) 

Not only the first episode between Antony and Ventidius is based on Shakespeare's quarrel scene in Julius Caesar but Dryden is also drawing on some of the imagery of Shakespeare in this scene. For example, Ventidius:

but now

My Mother comes afresh into my eyes; 
I cannot help her softness (Act I, p. 198)

is reminiscent of Cassius' lines in Julius Caesar

Have you not love enough to bear with me, 
When that rash humour, which my mother gave me 
Makes me forgetful? (Act IV, iiii, 118-119)

and of Sebastian to Antonio in Twelfth Night: "I am yet so near the manners of my mother that, upon the least occasion more, mine eyes will tell tales of me" (Act II, i, 36-38).

1. 'Grounds' (1679), I, 260; AL (1678), I, 231.
Again in Act II, Cleopatra's speech

That you would pry, with narrow searching eyes
Into my faults, severe to my destruction.
And watching all advantages with care,
That serve to make me wretched? (p. 213)

echoes Cassius' lines in the quarrel scene:

For Cassius is aweary of the world;
Hated by one he loves; brav'd by his brother;
Checked like a bondman; all his faults observ'd
Set in a notebook, learn'd and conn'd by rote,
To cast into my teeth. (Act IV, iii, 94-98)

Images directly based on Antony and Cleopatra abound. The Cydnus speech of Enobarbus (Act II, ii, 195-208) is recast in a speech from Antony to Dolabella (Act III, p. 221). Yet another speech of Enobarbus:

Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale
Her infinite variety; other women cloy
The appetites they feed; but she makes hungry
Where most she satisfies: for vilest things
Become themselves in her; that the holy priests
Bless her when she is riggish (Act II, ii, 239-244)

is partly echoed in Antony's speech to Cleopatra in Act III and Ventidius' speech to Octavia in Act IV:

There's no satiety of love in thee;
Enjoy'd, thou art still new; (Act III, p. 217)

The holy Priests gaze on her when she smiles;
And with heav'd hands forgetting gravity,
They bless her wanton eyes. (Act IV, p. 237)

The last act of All for Love is heavily indebted to Shakespeare's Antony
and Cleopatra. Cleopatra of Dryden is very close to Shakespeare's
Cleopatra of the last act, who in the beginning of that play is more
coquetish than in love with Antony but after the death of Antony she
too like Dryden's Cleopatra is "from head to foot / . . . marble-constant"
(Act V, ii, 238). Both Cleopatras must die after the death of their
lover and, equally, both think that in the act of their death they earn
the status of Antony's wife. Shakespeare's Cleopatra exclaims:
"Husband, I come. / Now to that name my courage prove my Title!" (Act V, ii, 285-286); and Dryden's Cleopatra speaks in a similar vein: "his
Wife, my Charmion; / For 'tis to that high Title I aspire" (Act V, 258).
Kenneth Muir has observed that Dryden's images do not spring naturally from his theme, as the leaves from a tree; they are improvised; and though they may illuminate separate ideas, feelings, and even characters and scenes, they serve to destroy rather than to create the unity of the whole. All for Love is a fine tragedy decorated with poetry. It is not a poetic tragedy in the truest meaning of the term.

F.R. Leavis, comparing the Cydnus speech of Enobarbus (Act II, ii, 195-208) with Antony's speech in All for Love (Act III, p. 221), concludes that "about Dryden's rendering there is nothing to say except that it has none of the poetic - and that is, we have seen, the dramatic - life of the original. It is accomplished verse, and verse that lends itself to stage delivery, but it is hardly poetry". This is to judge Dryden by standards to which he did not subscribe. Apart from the inevitable difference between the genius of the two poets, the conceptions and aims of the two plays were different. Shakespeare's play, with its vast panorama of human pageantry - including people from all strata of society, from queen to clown, triumvirs to common soldiers, kings, generals, courtiers, citizens, eunuchs, servants, messengers, councillors, soothsayers, politicians, friends, lovers, husbands, wives - with its variety of events, with action moving on a global scale, almost reaches epic proportions. Dryden, on the other hand, in his choice and presentation of characters, the story and the structure of the play, is much restrained by the limitations of the drama. This difference in design has an inevitable bearing on the verse of the two plays. For example, the two speeches compared by F.R. Leavis have a totally different function to perform despite the apparent similarity of their description. The character of the two speakers is different and so is the specific context of their narration. Enobarbus is trying to impress

upon his fellow soldiers the glories of an exotic land in contrast to life in Rome. The vigour and richness of his speech are consistent with his situation, just as the calm and subdued description of Antony's speech is in keeping with his mood of private despair over the loss of Cleopatra. Dryden's style is less exuberant and less inspired, just as the presentation of his story is subdued and controlled. The verse of All for Love has none of the verbal splendour of Shakespeare's poetry but it is adequate for the play as conceived by Dryden. It is, as Van Doren has rightly described, "virtually impeccable; it has made the play. It is richly and closely woven, but it is absolutely clear; and it bears no trace of complacency in composition".¹

The style of the play is closely linked with Dryden's criticism of Shakespeare's language. As we have seen, Dryden is highly critical of Shakespeare's metaphors, his puns and his highly figurative language. In his imitation of his predecessor's style, Dryden has therefore tried to copy what he considered the virtues of the poet. He was specially drawn by the pathos of Shakespeare's description of Richard II's entry into London (V, ii, 23-26). In All for Love the element of pity predominates and after the example of Richard II there is a great deal of weeping in Dryden's play. And apart from Richard II, there are resemblances and verbal echoes from many other Shakespearean plays, for example, Much Ado About Nothing, Twelfth Night, As You Like It, The Merchant of Venice, Henry IV, Julius Caesar, Othello, Hamlet and Macbeth. Langbaine was the first critic to point out that Ventidius' speech "your Cleopatra / Dolabella's Cleopatra / Every Man's Cleopatra" (Act IV, p. 238) is taken directly from Much Ado About Nothing: "Leonato's Hero, your Hero, every man's Hero" (Act III, ii, 96).² W. Strunk has listed

². An Account of the English Dramatic Poets, 1691, p. 152.
twenty seven borrowings from *Antony and Cleopatra*, and ten from other plays of Shakespeare.¹ T.P. Harrison has observed a few echoes from *Othello*, and D.T. Starnes from other plays of Shakespeare.² S. Kilma has estimated that there are approximately thirty borrowings from *Antony and Cleopatra*; and thirty borrowings from other plays of Shakespeare, pointed out by different critics, and to these he adds another fifteen.³ Charles Forker has observed that the Cydnus speech is not only based on *Antony and Cleopatra*, but is indebted directly to *Romeo and Juliet* (Act II, ii, 23).⁴ Kenneth Muir has shown a number of resemblances between *Antony and Cleopatra* and *All for Love*, and Montague Summers has pointed out several borrowings from *Antony and Cleopatra* and other plays of Shakespeare.⁵

These extensive borrowings from and imitations of so many of Shakespeare's plays are much more than sincere flattery. They are an attempt to enter into the spirit of Shakespeare's genius and write what perhaps he himself would have written in the new age.

**Troilus and Cressida**

*Dryden's Troilus and Cressida* is an adaptation of Shakespeare's play. It is therefore derivative, whereas *All for Love* is creative. Dryden makes it clear in the preface to his play that he undertook the

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³ 'Some Unrecorded Borrowings from Shakespeare in Dryden's *All for Love*', *NQ*, CCVIII, 1963, 416-418.

⁴ "*Romeo and Juliet*" and the "*Cydnus*" speech in Dryden's "*All for Love*", *NQ*, CCVII, 1962, 382-383.

⁵ Muir, in Twentieth Century Interpretations, pp. 37-38; Summers, IV, 507-530.
writing of this play with a view to improving it. His reasons for choosing Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* seem to be twofold. First, its subject, love against a background of war, was a favourite preoccupation of Dryden in his heroic plays. Secondly, he wrongly assumed that this tragedy was one of Shakespeare's first attempts on the stage and hence was particularly likely to need correction of form and meaning. As Dryden claims in the preface to the play:

> I new modelled the plot; threw out many unnecessary persons; improved those characters which were begun and left unfinished, as Hector, Troilus, Pandarus, and Thersites; and added that of Andromache. After this I made, with no small trouble, an order and connection of all the scenes; removing them from the places where they were inartificially set; and though it was impossible to keep 'em all unbroken, because the scene must be sometimes in the city and sometimes in the camp, yet I have ordered them that there is a coherence of 'em with one another, and a dependence on the main design; no leaping from Troy to the Grecian tents, and thence back again in the same act.

According to Dryden, then, Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* needed improvement in four important directions, namely, language, plot, the divisions of acts and scenes, and poetic justice. Of these the last seems to have been the most crucial factor in influencing his adaptation. According to the Restoration ethos, Shakespeare's play grossly violated the moral decorum of a tragedy: "the chief persons, who give name to the tragedy, are left alive; Cressida is false, and is not punished". The didactic function of drama had come to acquire a special significance in the Restoration drama after the publication of Rymer's *Tragedies of the Last Age*. Dryden specifies it in the preface that "to instruct delightfully is the general end of all poetry". Shakespeare's Cressida could not perform the function of instructing by example, and therefore

1. Cf. Odell, who thinks that "on the whole, the play, as does *All for Love*, deserves to rank rather as a new work than as an adaptation" Shakespeare from Betterton to Irving, I, 51).
was not a proper heroine for a tragedy. The chief persons of a tragedy "ought to have virtuous inclinations, and degrees of moral goodness in them". To make Cressida a fitting character for his tragedy, Dryden removes all the blemishes from his predecessor's heroine; and he does this in total departure from the traditional Cressida; for Dryden's Cressida is more untrue to the legend than Shakespeare's Cressida is to Troilus. However, to justify his version, Dryden denies the authenticity of the legend itself: "I find nothing of it among the Ancients; not so much as the name Cressida once mentioned". Dryden was therefore free to make all the changes he considered necessary. Cressida, who had been a byword for faithlessness becomes in Dryden's hands the "purest, whitest innocence" (Act V, p. 103). Unlike Shakespeare's Cressida who is a slur on "womanhood" (V, ii, 127), whose "mind is . . . turn'd whore" (V, ii, 112), Dryden's Cressida is "as chaste as . . . Andromache" (Act III, ii, p. 72). Unlike Shakespeare's Cressida, she is neither coquettish nor false. On the advice of her father she feigns love to Diomede to keep open an avenue of escape to Troy for herself and her father. She therefore appears to be false to Troilus, who was watching this scene of dissembled love. However, Dryden does not end here. His Cressida must appear true to her lover; so when Diomede lies about possessing her, she kills herself to prove her fidelity to Troilus. The suspicion of her lover is unbearable: the pain of death is preferable to his curses:

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Enough my lord; you've said enough:
This, faithless, perjur'd, hated Cressida,
Shall be no more, the subject of your Curses:
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1. 'Grounds' (1679), I, 245, 246.
2. TC (1679), I, 240.
3. All references to the text of Dryden's play are from Montague Summers edition (Vol. V); their location is designated by the page number of that book.
Some few hours hence, and grief hath done your work;
But then your eyes had miss'd the Satisfaction
Which thus I give you - thus - (she stabs her self).

Convinced that her lover believes in her love, she dies "happy that he
thinks me true" (Act V, ii, p. 103).

It is not only towards the end of the love episode that Dryden
redeems his heroine by suicide, but throughout the play he takes pains to
present a decorous Cressida befitting the norms of a Restoration tragedy.

Shakespeare's Cressida is a frivolous woman who at times indulges in
obscenities, for example, in her repartee with her uncle:

Pandalus: You are such a woman! A man knows not at what
ward you lie.

Cressida: Upon my back, to defend my belly; upon my wit,
to defend my wiles; upon my secrecy, to defend
mine honesty; my mask, to defend my beauty;
and you, to defend all these; and at all these
wards I lie at, at a thousand watches.
(Act I, ii, 251-256)

Dryden omits all such indecorous passages from his play. Again,

Shakespeare's Cressida is an accomplice in Pandarus's wooing her for
Troilus. Her hesitation is more a matter of strategy than feminine
coyness:

Women are angels, wooing:
Things won are done; joy's soul lies in the doing.
That she belov'd knows naught that knows not this:
Men prize the thing ungain'd more than it is.
That she never yet that ever knew
Love got so sweet as when desire did sue;
Therefore this maxim out of love I teach:
Achievement is command; ungain'd, beseech.
Then though my heart's content from love doth bear,
Nothing of that shall from mine eyes appear. (Act I, ii, 278-287)

The denial of her love by Dryden's Cressida to her uncle is a childish
self-deception:

A strange dissembling Sex we Women are,
Well may we men, when we our selves deceive.
Long has my secret Soul lov'd Troilus.
I drunk his praises from my Uncles mouth,
As if my ears cou'd ne're be satisfi'd;
Why then, why said I not, I love this Prince?
How cou'd my tongue conspire against my heart,
To say I lov'd him not, O childish love!
'Tis like an Infant froward in his play,
And what he most desires, he throws away. (Act I, i, p. 42)
For Shakespeare's Cressida love is a matter of conquest and possession; for Dryden's it is surrender and sacrifice. The first is physically attracted towards Troylus, and her love changes when her eyes spot a better object; the other loves with her "soul", her love is an ideal love and she dies a martyr to it.

To remove further blemishes from Shakespeare's heroine, Dryden shows us a Cressida who will not accept an illicit affair with Troylus. She must have the assurance that a priest will sanction their union:

Cressida: And will you promise that the holy Priest Shall make us one for ever?

Pandarus: Priests! marry hang 'em! they make you one! go in, go in, and make your selves one without a priest: I'le have no priests work in my house.

Cressida: I'le not consent unless you swear. (Act III, ii, p. 64)

In Hector's eyes, Cressida is "no common creature"; she is worthy of the love of a person like Troylus, and although Hector had come to persuade Troylus to give up Cressida for the sake of his country, he feels so overwhelmed by Troylus's loss of such a love that he is prepared to be his "champion" to secure her for him (Act III, ii, p. 74).

To preserve her snow-white image, Dryden relates rather than enacts the scene of Cressida's arrival at the Grecian camp; so that while in Shakespeare's play the audience actually witnesses her "wanton spirits" finding expression in the exchange of kisses and raillery with the Greek wits, in Dryden's version this indecorous scene is removed from the view of the audience. By putting it into the mouth of lascivious Pandarus (Act IV, ii, p. 88), who could be embellishing the whole scene to enrage Troylus, Dryden leaves some room for doubt as to the authenticity of his narration.

However, all these alterations simplify the character of Shakespeare's Cressida, and unlike Shakespeare's heroine who is a protagonist, Dryden's Cressida is a helpless victim of fate. She is a
tool in the hands of her elders rather than a woman of independent disposition. Unlike Shakespeare's Cressida, Dryden's Cressida, as Hazelton Spencer puts it, has, like his Cleopatra, "lost variety; she is neither a lazar kite nor a natural coquette, but simply Woman in Love".¹

Though the major revision made by Dryden is in the character of Cressida, his Troilus also dies for love. Shakespeare's Troilus, disillusioned with love and shocked by the death of Hector, takes upon himself the responsibility for the Trojan cause, but Dryden's Troilus is so consumed with his private grief that he can only think of dying after his loss. The cause of his country and his involvement in the war lose all significance for him in the face of his personal tragedy:

She's gone for ever, and she blest me dying;
Cou'd she have curs'd me worse! she dy'd for me;
And like a woman, I lament for her.
Distraction pulls me several ways at once,
Here pity calls me to weep out my eyes;
Despair then turns me back upon myself,
And bids me seek no more, but finish here. (Act V, ii, 103-104)

He defers his death only to avenge himself on Diomede. He kills Diomede and then is killed by Achilles and dies on the body of Diomede. The lover in him always had the better of the patriot. Earlier, in the speeches of the Trojan council, though this Troilus, like Shakespeare's Troilus, defends honour as opposed to the expediency of Hector (Act II, i, pp. 42-44), towards the end of the scene he is shown to be anxious to go to Cressida and leave the business of the state. Hector does not fail to see this weakness in Troilus:

A woman on my Life: ev'n so it happens,
Religion, state affairs, whater' es the theme
It ends in women still. (Act II, i, p. 44)

In emphasising the love episode of the story, which redeems the character of Cressida, Dryden sacrifices much of the heroism and nobility of Troilus. In Shakespeare, he is "a true knight", "speaking in deeds and deedless in his tongue", "manly as Hector, but more dangerous", and Troy can

¹. Shakespeare Improved, p. 232.
justly erect on him "a second hope as fairly built as Hector" (Act IV, v, 96-109). In Dryden, the intimate identification of Troilus with Troy is missing. He lives and dies for love. In Shakespeare's play, Cressida's falseness is the cause of the tragedy; but Dryden's Troilus is credulous and it is his credulity that brings the tragic end to their love. Dryden provides additional reasons for the plausibility of Troilus's credulity with Pandarus's description of Cressida's flirtatious exchanges in the Grecian camp (Act V, ii, p. 88) and Diomede's villainy (Act V, ii, p. 102), but essentially it is a tragic flaw in Troilus that he lends himself more easily to the appearance of things than to their truth. However, with all these weaknesses, Dryden's Troilus shines magnanimous in friendship. To bring forth this virtue of Troilus' character, Dryden created a new scene between Troilus and Hector in the third act (scene two) which had precedents in dramatic literature handled in masterly fashion by Euripides, Shakespeare and Fletcher in Iphigenia in Aulis, Julius Caesar and The Maid's Tragedy respectively. Dryden notes that "the quarrel of two virtuous men, raised by natural degrees to the extremity of passion, is conducted in all three to the declination of the same passion, and concludes with a warm renewing of the friendship". The decision to exchange Cressida for Anthenor is brought to Troilus, not by Aeneas, as in Shakespeare's play, but by Hector, who is Troilus's brother and friend. Hector tries to break the bad news to his brother "by degrees and glimpses" (p. 69). Troilus refuses to comply with the "unjust" order of his father; and on learning that his brother's hand had also "seal'd this exchange", he flares up and accuses Hector of being a "traitor" to one who was his

1. For the view that Shakespeare's Troilus inspires revulsion and derision because of his infatuation; and that the play is meant to be a satire, see Comical Satyre and Shakespeare's Troilus and Cressida, by O.J. Campbell, California, 1938, pp. 217-218, 223-234.

2. TC (1679), I, 241.
brother and, even more, his friend. "Friend's a Sacred name" (p. 71), which Hector does not deserve to bear. Hector is enraged by this charge and accuses Troilus of loving a woman "as common as the tainted shambles", "the Daughter of a fugitive / A Traytor to his country". Troilus retaliates that Cressida is "as chaste as . . . Andromache" (p. 72). Hector is provoked to the point of wanting to kill his brother, but he composes himself and decides to leave him, discarding him as a friend. Troilus, who 'a joy beyond' love and, therefore, cannot bear to be a "friend no more", offers to kill himself since he has lost his friend's love and friendship. This moves Hector and he forgives his brother (p. 73). This scene shows the characters of both the brothers to advantage, especially Troilus' in whom heroic triumphs over his personal happiness. Critics like Langbaine and Johnson have a special word of praise for it. According to Langbaine "the last scene in the third Act is a Masterpiece, and whether it be copied from Shakespear, Fletcher, or Euripides, or all of them, I think it justly deserves Commendation". Hazelton Spencer prefers the scene to Shakespeare's. However, G.C.D. Odell "finds the episode . . . wholly artificial and unconvincing".

Dryden's play gives greater attention to Hector than Shakespeare's. Hector rather than Troilus is the central figure in the Trojan war. Troilus' sacrifice of his love for his country's cause, is an act of supreme nobility, but during the war scenes it is Hector who steals the show. The play ends on the downfall of Hector; and Troilus, wrapped up in a personal tragedy, dies for his private cause rather than the public cause. In dividing sympathy between two important characters, Dryden seems to have forgotten his own "rule which is extremely necessary, and

which none of the critics that I know have fully discovered to us" that "terror and compassion work but weakly when they are divided into many persons".¹ Dryden's Troilus, therefore, as compared with Shakespeare's Troilus, is less noble and less tragic. Other changes in characterisation made by Dryden are of minor importance. The comedy parts of Pandarus and Thersites are intensified: the former is more lecherous than his counterpart in Shakespeare, and the latter is made to play an active role as Ulysses's tool in moving him to fight. Dryden also "threw out many unnecessary persons".² Shakespeare's Paris, Helenus, Deiphobus, Margareton, Cassandra and Helen are dropped without any loss to the play. Similarly, the function of characters like Priam, Aeneas and Ulysses is reduced; but the reduction of Ulysses's role is somewhat unfortunate, especially his scene with Achilles in Act III, iii, which in Shakespeare brings out the wisdom of Ulysses and the wrath of Achilles, and as such was both instructive and delightful - a favourite Restoration theme. But because Dryden's focus was on the Trojan side of the war and his sympathies were with the young lovers of Troy, the omission is understandable. None of the characters in Dryden's play is redundant. Only such characters as contribute in bringing the story to "a point of sight in which all the lines terminate"³ are retained, and the others are dropped. Sometimes one minor character performs the function of several characters of Shakespeare's: for example, Andromache, in a scene reminiscent of the one between Calpurnia and Caesar in Shakespeare's Julius Caesar, combines the roles of Cassandra, Priam and Andromache in Shakespeare (Act V, iii).

1. 'Grounds' (1679), I, 240; Dryden's claim to originality is ill founded; it is Rymer who first formulated this rule, see above, pp. 71-72, 80, 81 and n 4.

2. TC (1679), I, 240.

3. 'Grounds' (1679), I, 244.
These reductions and omissions are part of Dryden's design to make the play coherent. The scissors are employed even more drastically and effectively on the plot of Shakespeare's play. In addition to tightening the loose structure of his predecessor's play, Dryden added some new scenes necessitated by the changes in the story. Scene ii in act III is entirely new in Dryden's play; and so is scene ii in act IV between Calchas and Cressida, the former advising Cressida to beguile Diomede so that with his help they can escape from the Greek camp. Equally, a new scene, the second scene of act II, is Andromache's entry into the council of the Trojans and her statement that her son desired to be knighted so that he could fight the brave Greeks. Hector, the father, feels shamed by the spirit of bravery shown by his son, and his challenge to the Greek to fight in a single combat therefore sounds more plausible than in Shakespeare's version. The first scene of act V, where Andromache attempts to keep her husband out of the battle, is greatly altered. In the last scene of act V, Cressida's suicide to prove her fidelity in love, Diomede's villainy and the fight in which Diomede is killed, are new in Dryden; and so is Troilus' death at the hands of Achilles. Hector's death happens off stage. The conclusion of the war comes with the victory of the Greeks. However, the unities of time, place and action are not observed in Dryden's play.

Economy of scenes is accomplished to the same degree of effectiveness as the economy of characters. Thus, the second scene of act III serves the function of four scenes of Shakespeare; and Dryden's presentation of the episode of the exchange of Cressida is dramatically more effective because of the touching scene between Hector and Troilus. Similarly, the long council speeches of the Greek and Trojan warriors are cut, restricting them to their functional level. The two actions of the play are linked together and brought to a neat resolution. Troy's war with the Greeks contributes to the tragedy of the main action,
the death of the lovers. In Shakespeare's play, as Dryden says, "the later part of the tragedy is nothing but a confusion of drums and trumpets, excursions and alarms".\(^1\) In Dryden's play this confusion is avoided: the inconclusiveness of Shakespeare is replaced by a tragic finality. In the death of the lovers the moral of true love is affirmed, and in the victory of the "factious" Greeks the political moral is illustrated: "union preserves a commonwealth, and discord destroys it".\(^2\)

Dryden's Cressida dies an heroic death, and in dying blesses her lover. She is happy in the thought that he thinks her true (Act V, ii, p. 103). The principal action of the play is thus resolved in the tragic end of the lovers. In the secondary action, Ulysses celebrates the victory of the Greeks:

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Hayle! Agamemnon: truly Victor now!
While secret envy, and while open pride,
Among thy factious Nobles discord threw;
While publique good was urged for private ends,
And those thought Patriots, who disturb'd it most,
Then like the headstrong horses of the Sun,
That light which shou'd have cheer'd the World, consum'd it:
Now peacefull order has resum'd the reynes,
Old time looks young, and Nature seems renew'd:
Then, since from homebred Factions ruine springs,
Let Subjects learn obedience to their Kings. (Act IX, ii, pp. 104-105)
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The topicality of the moral would have been obvious to Restoration audiences at a time when Shaftesbury's faction wanted to exploit the Popish plot to weaken the power of the king.

After his praise of Shakespeare's language to the point of emulation in All for Love, Dryden relapses into his favourite theme in the preface to Troilus and Cressida that the language of the Restoration is "so much refined since Shakespeare's time that many of his words, and more of his phrases, are scarce intelligible. And of those which we understand, some are ungrammatical, others coarse, and

1. TC (1679), I, 240.
2. 'Grounds' (1679), I, 248.
his whole style is so pestered with figurative expressions, that it is as affected as it is obscure". The language of Shakespeare's Troilus and Cressida is therefore edited and altered on a massive scale. Many of the speeches are rewritten with a view to correcting the grammar, simplifying the metaphor, substituting simpler and decorous words for Shakespeare's supposedly unrefined words and many of the figurative speeches are expressed literally. The most significant of Dryden's changes are the condensation of Shakespeare's elaborate scenes and abridgment of his long speeches. According to Neander, in the Essay of Dramatic Poesy, "generally... short speeches and replies are more apt to move the passions and beget concernment in us than the other: for it is unnatural for any one in a gust of passion to speak long together, or for another in the same condition to suffer him without interruption". Dryden, therefore, cuts down the long speeches in the Greek and Trojan councils. He deletes the extended metaphors of most of Shakespeare's speeches and retains the central functional portion. Thus, thirty lines of Agamemnon's speech in the Shakespearean play is reduced to ten lines in Dryden's play:

Princes,
What grief hath set these jaundies o'er your cheeks?
The ample proposition that hope makes
In all designs begun on earth below
Fails in the promis'd largeness; checks and disasters
Grow in the veins of actions highest rear'd,
As knots, by the conflux of meeting sap,
Infest the sound pine, and diverts his grain
Tortive and errant from his course of growth.
Nor, princes, is it matter new to us
That we come short of our suppose so far
That after seven years' siege yet Troy walls stand;
Sith every action that hath gone before,
Whereof we have record, trial did draw
Blas and thwart, not answering the aim,
And that unbodied figure of the thought
That gave't surmised shape. Why then, you princes,
Do you with cheeks abash'd behold our works;
And call them shames, which are, indeed, nought else

1. TC (1679), I, 239, cf. 'Epilogue' (1672), I, 170 ff; see above, pp. 152-158.
2. EDP (1668), I, 60.
But the protractive trials of great Jove
To find persitve constancy in men;
The fineness of which metal is not found
In fortune's love? For then the bold and coward,
The wise and fool, the artist and unread,
The hard and soft, seem all affin'd and kin,
But in the wind and tempest of her frown
Distinction, with a broad and powerful fan,
Puffing at all, winnows the light away;
And what hath mass or matter by itself
Lies rich in virtue and unmingle.  (Act I, iii, 1-30)

Dryden's ten-line speech says the same thing more economically:

Princes, it seems not strange to us nor new,
That after Nine years Siege Troy makes defence,
Since every Action of Recorded Fame
Has with long difficulties been involv'd,
Not Answering that Idea of the thought
Which gave it Birth, why then you Grecian Chiefs,
With sickly Eyes do you behold our labours,
And think 'em our dishonour, which indeed
Are the protractive Tryals of the Gods,
To prove heroique Constancy in Men?  (Act I, ii, p. 33)

Similarly, the long speeches of Shakespeare's Ulysses are pruned and the whole scene of 392 lines in Shakespeare is reduced to 109 lines in Dryden. The Greek and Trojan councils receive the same degree of abridgment; and despite the fact that the latter is more important in the context of Dryden's treatment of the story, 213 lines of Shakespeare's version of the Trojan council (Act II, ii) is conveyed in 75 lines (Act II, i) in Dryden's version. The love episode, which is of primary importance in Dryden's tragedy, is also pruned with a view to stripping "all bombast in his [Shakespeare's] passions". Troilus' exuberant claims of love in Shakespeare (Act III, ii, 74-95) are deleted in Dryden's version; and those speeches of the earlier play which Dryden retains are subdued, so that Shakespeare's "embroideries were burnt down", leaving the residue of "silver at the bottom of the melting-pot". 1 Thus, to Troilus' question, "Why was my Cressid then so hard to win?" (Act III, ii, 113), Shakespeare's Cressida replied:

1. 'Grounds' (1679), I, 259-60.
Hard to seem won; but I was won, my lord,
With the first glance that ever - pardon me.
If I confess much, you will play the tyrant.
I love you now; but till now not so much
But I might master it. In faith, I lie;
My thoughts were like unbridled children, grown
Too headstrong for their mother. See, we fools!
Why have I blabb'd! Who shall be true to us,
When we are so unsecret to ourselves?
But, though I lov'd you well, I woo'd you not;
And yet, good faith, I wish'd myself a man,
Or that we women had men's privilege
Of speaking first. Sweet, bid me hold my tongue,
For in this rapture I shall surely speak
The thing I shall repent. See, see, your silence,
Cunning in dumbness, from my weakness draws
My very soul of counsel. Stop my mouth. (Act III, ii, 115-129)

In Dryden, however, the same reply is summed up in six lines:

Hard to seem won; but I was won my Lord.
What have I blabb'd, who will be true to us.
Sure I shall speak what I shou'd soon repent.
But stop my mouth. (Act III, ii, p. 63)

Similarly, the vows of the lovers are toned down to a dramatic decorum.

Thus, in Shakespeare:

**Troilus:**

> O virtuous fight,
> When right with right wars who shall be most right!
> True swains in love shall in the world to come
> Approve their truth by Troilus, when their rhymes,
> Full of protest, of oath, and big compare,
> Want similes, truth tir'd with iteration -
> As true as steel, as plantation to the moon,
> As sun to day, as turtle to her mate,
> As iron to adamant, as earth to th' centre -
> Yet, after all comparisons of truth,
> As truth's authentic author to be cited,
> 'As true as Troilus' shall crown up the verse
> And sanctify the numbers.

**Cressida:**

Prophet may you be!

If I be false, or swerve a hair from truth,
When time is old and hath forgot itself,
When waterdrops have worn the stones of Troy,
And blind oblivion swallow'd cities up,
And mighty states characterless are grated
To dusty nothing - yet let memory
From false to false, among false maids in love,
Upraid my falsehood when th' have said 'As false
As air, as water, wind, or sandy earth,
As fox to lamb, or wolf to heifer's calf,
Pard to the hind, or stepdame to her son' -
Yea, let them say, to stick the heart of falsehood,
'As false as Cressid'. (Act III, ii, 168-191)
And in Dryden:

**Troilus:**
All constant Lovers shall, in future Ages,
Approve their truth by Troilus: when their verse
 Wants similes, as turtles to their mates:
Or true as flowing tides are to the Moon;
Earth to the Center: Iron to Adament:
At last when truth is tir'd with repetition;
As true as Troilus shall crown up the verse,
And sanctify the Numbers.

**Cressida:**
Prophet may you be!
If I am false, or swerve from truth of love,
When time is old, and has forgot it self,
In all things else, let it remember me;
And after all comparisons of falsehood
To stabb the heart of perjury in Maids;
Let it be said as false as Cressida. (Act III, ii, p. 64)

The verbal exchanges of the lovers' vows which run to 170 lines in Shakespeare's play are abridged to about 80 lines in Dryden.

Simplification of Shakespeare's diction is one of the main reasons for Dryden's alteration, his objection to the poet being that "the fury of his fancy often transported him beyond the bounds of judgment", so that he would say "nothing without a metaphor, a simile, an image or description". Dryden therefore literalises Shakespeare's figurative expressions. In the Agamemnon speech, for example, along with the condensation, Shakespeare's metaphor is also simplified. Shakespeare's "jaundice o'er your cheeks" is changed to "sickly Eyes"; "yet Troy walls stand" is simplified to "Troy makes defence"; "unbodied figure of the thought / That gave's surmised shape" to "that Idea of the thought / Which gave it Birth". Similarly, the Ulysses speech in Shakespeare: "The great Achilles, whom opinion crowns / The sinaw and the forehand of our host" (Act I, iii, 141-142), is simplified to "The great Achilles whom opinion crowns / The chief of all our Host" (Act I, i, p. 34).

Changes like "sword" to "knife", and "gash" to "wound" in Shakespeare's "Thou lay'st in every gash that love hath given me / The

1. 'Grounds' (1679), I, 257.
knife that made it" (Act I, i, 61-62), are part of the Restoration refinement. Words like "knife" and "gash" were considered too indecorous for a Restoration tragedy. Some changes, for example, the substitution of "Roastmeat" for Shakespeare's "cake" (and its subsequent corollary) in Act I, ii, seem to be just for the sake of novelty. The style of Troilus and Cressida, unlike All for Love, is not creative. An adapter tends to be limited by the language of his source play, and he needs more ingenuity in editing than a creative writer; and he has to conform to the demands of his time as well as represent faithfully the original author. The result is a cross between two styles. As Dryden himself says: "I need not say that I have refined his language, which was before obsolete; but I am willing to acknowledge that as I have drawn his English nearer to our times, so I have sometimes conformed my own to his, and consequently, the language is not altogether so pure as it is significant". In the preface to the play, Dryden seeks a justification for his adaptation of Shakespeare in the example of the Athenians altering Aeschylus' plays. Dryden's difficulties are the greater because the English language lacks the perfection of the Greek, but "our reverence for Shakespeare [is] much more just, than that of the Grecians for Aeschylus".\(^1\) Dryden's adaptation of Troilus and Cressida has been praised, both in the seventeenth century and in ours. Yet Dryden himself was not happy with his achievements as the prologue to the play indicates.\(^2\) However, the singular importance of Dryden's alteration is not the adapted version of the play but his realisation that Shakespeare's genius was inimitable.

Dryden differs from the other adapters of his time by virtue of his superior handling of verse. Shakespeare's blank verse, in the hands

1. TC (1679), I, 241, 239.
2. Langbaine and Samuel Johnson, see above, p. 260 and n.1; modern critics exalting Dryden's play to Shakespeare's are: Summers, I, viii, Odell, I, 50; Spencer, pp. 231, 236, 237; Dryden, above, p. 208 and n. 2.
of adapters like Davenant and Tate, at times lapses into bad prose. Dryden, as he is a superior poet, handles Shakespeare's poetry with care both in All for Love and in Troilus and Cressida; and the former, being a creative composition, is richer than Troilus and Cressida, which is derivative. Another important difference between Dryden and the other Restoration adapters of Shakespeare is that the adapters like Shadwell and Davenant tend to literalise Shakespeare wholesale. Dryden was against literal rendering in his translations; and this principle applies to his adaptations also.

Dryden differs from the other adapters of Shakespeare of his time in that his adaptations are his extended criticism of Shakespeare's plays. Adapters like Davenant, Shadwell, and Nahum Tate, did not leave any criticism of Shakespeare; their adaptations were motivated by the need to make the old plays amenable to the Restoration audience. Dryden's adaptations are part of his criticism of Shakespeare; and as we have seen, the two adaptations, one following the other, occur during the time of Dryden's active involvement with the drama of the Elizabethan age following Rymer's attack on it. Both adaptations bear out Dryden's precept, expounded in his 'Grounds . . . ', which is to copy the excellences of his genius, leaving his defects. Dryden's versions retain as many of the dramatic virtues of Shakespeare's originals as were possible within his dramatic vision and in some specific instances they even excel the first plays. His motives for the two adaptations are different; in All for Love imitation of Shakespeare's style is the chief motive, and in the treatment of the moral, story, plot and characterisation Dryden's play departs from Shakespeare. In Troilus and Cressida, as Dryden explicitly says in the preface, his purpose was to improve the defects of Shakespeare's play.

Dryden's adaptations of Shakespeare are part of his life-time's conviction that a genius of the past should be re-interpreted to conform to the needs of the present. His translations of the satires and epic of the classical poets and adaptation of Chaucer's *Canterbury's Tales* are all part of the same creed. Dryden's study and adaptations of Shakespeare indeed carried him "into a much larger world than any in which he had earlier lived".¹

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION

Dryden's prefaces to his plays, with the exception of that to Troilus and Cressida, are not exclusively devoted to dramatic criticism. Some of his prefaces, as for example that to The State of Innocence, do not discuss any of the dramatic issues, while the preface to All for Love is only partially concerned with dramatic techniques. On the other hand, the prefaces to some of the non-dramatic works, like the dedication to Examen Poeticum, 'A Discourse concerning Satire' and 'A Parallel of Poetry and Painting', abound in dramatic allusions, and at some most unexpected places. The bulk of Dryden's dramatic criticism thus lies scattered in a maze of utterances spread over his long career.

Dryden's extensive criticism, stretching to three decades, often poses problems. He is indeed "not easy to pigeonhole".¹ The "rambling" nature of his prefaces, "never wholly out of the way, nor in it", obscures more than it reveals.² Moreover, invariably, spurred on by the demand of the moment, Dryden digresses to profundities. His criticism, thus, certainly looks above and beyond the immediate. Some of his very important statements lie scattered in his digressions and asides, and as a result his essays become very lively and interesting.

2. Fables (1700), 11, 278.
Dryden lived in an age of great political, intellectual and religious upheaval; and as a man of great sensitivity he not only responded to what happened around him but actively participated in it. To think of Dryden as a critic in isolation would be a totally frustrating experience. He was not a man who could say to himself in the cool detached spirit of an academic don, 'today I will contemplate a satisfactory technique of writing plays', or, 'tomorrow I must work out the principles for the study of Shakespeare, Fletcher and Jonson'. Rather, the picture that Dryden conjures up in our imagination is that of a lively and sprightly figure in Will's coffee house (as Congreve describes him), who at various stages in his life held the offices of Poet Laureate, Historiographer Royal and member of the Royal Society; who ran in and out of quarrels with the important men of his time; who was the object of serious professional and personal attacks; who was a favourite of the court sometimes, and out of it at others; who was perhaps not very happy in his personal life, though he had married a woman of rank with some income of her own; who was the most important poet of his time and a fairly successful playwright too, but whose ambition was to write an epic, which he could not or did not write; who wrote the lives of Plutarch, Polybius and Lucian, and very narrowly missed being a pioneer in this field; who translated Virgil, Lucretius,

1. Cf. Donald Davie, whose objection to the Essay of Dramatic Poesy is that in the absence of specific questions which Dryden as a playwright should have asked or implied such as whether to observe the unities or follow Shakespeare or Corneille, he feels the discussions in the essay remain "nebulous", 'Dramatic Poetry: Dryden's Conversation Piece' CQ, V, 1962 (553-61), 553.


4. Dryden's wife, Elizabeth Howard, was granted £3,000/- by her father, the Earl of Berkshire, in 1662, Charles E. Ward, The Life of Dryden, London, 1961, p. 35; Dryden's marriage was not happy - Lady Elizabeth was "almost wholly illiterate . . . had no sympathy with her husband's pursuits . . . (was) a woman of a morose and irritable temper . . . (and) subsequently became insane", J. Churton Collins, Essays and Studies, London, 1895, p. 21.

5. Watson, I, xv.
Theocritus, Homer, Fresnoy, Boccacio, Juvenal, Persius and Ovid into English; who adapted some of the works of Shakespeare, Milton and Chaucer; and who was all these and a critic too; and who receives the endorsement for the title of "father of English criticism" even from those critics who are not very sympathetic towards him.\(^1\)

Such critics are perhaps not sympathetic towards Dryden because they try to look for something which they could not and should not have expected to find in him. Why, for example, ask for bold theories of criticism from a man living in an age which was just learning to grapple with the theory of criticism for the first time?\(^2\) Why expect the last word on dramatic techniques from a practising playwright who was himself searching for a workable formula and who in all modesty offers one thing as an experiment but shows equal willingness to try something new if the first failed to fill the bill? Why, again, condemn a man for inconsistencies and contradictions when he never claimed to have the last word on the critical issue under discussion? He rather confesses: "as I am a man, I must be changeable; and sometimes the gravest of us all are so, even upon ridiculous accidents".\(^3\) Moreover, according to Dryden, second thoughts are "usually the best, as receiving the maturest digestion from judgment"; also, "stiffness of opinion is the effect of pride, and not of philosophy".\(^4\)

1. Cf. Watson, I, vi, "his claim to the paternity of English criticism we may concede at once", cf. The Literary Critics, 1964, p. 35.

2. Watson finds it a serious charge against Dryden I, xiii, The Literary Critics, pp. 42, 48, 60; much the same point is made by Arthur Krisch who in pinpointing Dryden's critical failure, attributes it partially to his tendency to seek compromises, partially to the "infantile state of contemporary criticism but mainly to the fact that Dryden "did not have any considerable ability to formulate theory" Literary Criticism of John Dryden, ed. Arthur C. Krisch, University of Nebraska Press, 1966, pp. xii-xiii.

3. Dedication to Aureng-Zebe (1676), Works, V, 186.

4. EDP (1668), I, 92, Dedication to Don Sebastian (1690), Works, VII, 287.
As a critic, Dryden is often on the defensive. The very titles of some of his essays are apologetic - 'Defence of an Essay', 'Defence of the Epilogue', 'Apology for Heroic Poetry', The Vindication of the Duke of Guise. Perhaps he took recourse to this mode of criticism to justify himself as a playwright and critic in the wake of the abusive criticism of his adversaries,\(^1\) for temperamentally he was not aggressive. In a letter cited by Churton Collins, we have a comment by one of his contemporaries: "posterity", says this writer, "is absolutely mistaken as to that great man; though forced to be a satirist, he was the mildest creature breathing...\(^2\) We have his own account also: "I detest arrogance, but there is some difference betwixt that and a just defence".\(^3\) However, the defence may not always be a just one, as for example his reply to Robert Howard in favour of the dramatic unities and rhyme, and his reply to Shadwell in defence of his comedies. At times his arguments are even hair-splitting, as in the 'Defence of the Epilogue'; and sometimes he is not above stooping to the expediency of an easy exit, when he puts the blame on his audience for the bombast and rant of his heroic plays, or when he seeks the shelter of the classical writers, and even the king, for the gross excesses and failings of his plays.\(^4\) But one thing is certain: Dryden could always hold his own in a confrontation. He had a remarkable ability to argue his point, for he would apply all kinds of strategies - one value against another, acceptance and rejection of the same principle, making antiquity take precedence over modernity and the other way round too.

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1. According to Watson, however, all his prefaces are "mainly concerned with defending his place in the sun" (I, xiii); if so, Dryden certainly overshot the mark by securing a place as the "father of English criticism" into the bargain.


3. Annus (1667), I, 102; see above, p. 57.

4. Spanish (1691), I, 276: "I knew they were bad enough to please, even when I write them"; Evening (1671), I, 150, 152; Secret (1668), I, 105, 107.
This facility in argument often gives rise to an impression that Dryden's criticism abounds in contradictions, but as we have seen, his changes are more superficial than fundamental, because where the larger interest of poetry is concerned Dryden is uniformly consistent; and most of his changes are in support of the cause of the advancement of poetry. He says as much: "I think it no shame to retract my errors, and am well pleased to suffer in the cause, if the art may be improved at my expense". He has indeed suffered posthumously from the myth of critical inconsistency, and this has come to stay as a cliché in Dryden-criticism. His contemporaries, however, only accused him of political and religious vacillation. The bogey of critical contradiction gained momentum in the nineteenth century, though Samuel Johnson had partly anticipated it; but later critics like Beljame, Percy Houston, George Williamson, L. Bredvold, Margaret Sherwood and Watson have kept the myth going very successfully. Their charges have been ably countered by critics like William Bohn,

1. 'Grounds' (1679), I, 243.
2. E. Pechter has rightly pointed out that the fundamental weakness behind the inconsistency theory is the erroneous notion that rules and taste are necessarily antithetical, Dryden's Classical Theory of Literature, Cambridge, 1975, pp. 17-78.
3. Cf. The Laureat: "Had Dick still kept the regal diadem / Thou hadst been poet laureat still to him", in Works, ed. Scott-Saintsbury, X, 105.
M. Trowbridge and, lately, by Robert Hume and Edward Pechter. Some modern critics have found merit in Dryden's criticism regardless of the charges, and this is more to the point; for the undulating, encircling movement of Dryden's criticism speaks of his vast synthetic mind embedded with a rich synthetic experience. And rather than perpetuate the debate one way or the other, it would be worthwhile to examine the strength of the charge itself. Is critical inconsistency really a crime as has been made out in Dryden's case? Isn't the ability to doubt and revise one's own judgments a sign of wisdom and maturity of the highest order? And what about Whitman singing in self-glorification:

Do I contradict myself?
Very well then I contradict myself
(I am large, I contain multitudes).


2. Cf. George Saintsbury: it is "in criticism that Dryden best shows that original faculty which has been denied him elsewhere", A History of Criticism and Literary Taste in Europe, 3 vols., London, 1900-1904, II, 372; T.S. Eliot: Dryden's is "the first serious literary criticism in English by an English poet", John Dryden, the Poet, the Dramatist, the Critic, New York, 1932, p. 35; Summers: Dryden "is the most discerning and constructive of English critics", I, xviii; Phillip Harth: "Dryden's faith in freedom of inquiry served him well in criticism", Contexts of Dryden's Thoughts, Chicago, 1968, p. 32.

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