

DRYDEN'S DRAMATIC THEORY AND PRACTICE

by

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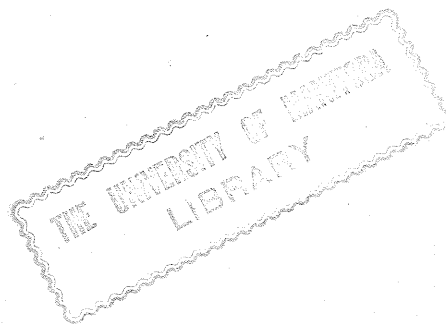


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INTRODUCTION

Any study of Restoration literature almost automatically begins with a study of the works of John Dryden, poet, critic, and dramatist. What Ward says of Restoration drama can be applied with equal truth to both Restoration poetry and Restoration criticism: "The Restoration drama....will be best understood and best appreciated by those who consistently regard Dryden as its central figure."¹ For almost four decades Dryden was the dominant figure of English literature; his position as popular dramatist and respected critic indicates that his works closely reflect the period in which, and for which, he wrote. He is the literary barometer of his age; with keen sensitivity to the tastes of his public he produced plays which pleased his audience, plays which became popular because they appealed to the tastes of the time. To study Dryden's drama, therefore, it is of vital importance to remember the audience for which he wrote. As a professional writer depending upon the sale of plays and poems for his livelihood, Dryden must be considered in relation to his period.

In this thesis, Dryden's dramatic theory and practice will be examined with the purpose of showing how closely he followed the trends of his time, how he sensed the demands of his public, and how he attempted to satisfy them. He wrote for the narrow court circle of witty, intelligent, cultured, critical courtiers, courtiers who were also brutal, licentious rakes. The changing demands of this small section of society were the demands which determined the type of drama which Dryden wrote. His changing

dramatic practice, in turn, influenced his dramatic theory, which was frequently an apology for, or a defence of, a particular play or a particular type of play. In this study of Dryden, as a dramatist and as a critic, I have attempted to show the close relationship between his theory and his practice, a relationship which helps to explain much of his inconsistency as a critic. The changes which occur in his theory and practice, as noted above, depend largely upon the demands of his changing audience.

I have chosen to limit the examination of Dryden's dramatic practice to six plays, selected as being typical of various phases of his dramatic career. These plays provide examples of four dramatic types: heroic drama, new-classical tragedy, tragic-comedy, and comedy. The study of his criticism is also limited to that part which deals with drama; his other critical essays have been ignored as being outside the scope of this paper. The selection of plays and essays, necessary because of the limited space, seems sufficient to prove that Dryden's criticism and Dryden's plays are interdependent and inseparable.

1. A. W. Ward, English Dramatic Literature, (London: MacMillan and Co., 1899), Vol.III, p. 390.

CHAPTER I

DRYDEN'S CRITICAL HERITAGE

Spingarn concludes the introduction to his selection of seventeenth-century criticism with a vivid description of the complexity of the period: "Seventeenth-century criticism is really a very troubled stream; winds from every quarter blow across its surface; currents from many springs and tributaries struggle for mastery within it."¹ He then adds: "In the work of Dryden.... all these currents of thought are utilized, all these forms and moods of criticism are more or less mirrored; in this field he is, after all, the chief representative of his century, and, in more senses than one, the first great modern critic."² This reflection of prevailing ideas in Dryden's criticism makes it essential to know something about the background of English criticism which Dryden inherited. Dryden, with his keen intellectual curiosity, drew many of his critical theories from his lesser known predecessors. While helping to establish ideas more firmly, and while expressing theories with vigorous clarity, Dryden was not an original thinker. As Bredvold says: "He was not a discoverer of new ideas; his whole intellectual biography consists of his ardent and curious examination and testing of those ideas which were current in his age."³

In order to understand Dryden's criticism, therefore, it is necessary to begin with a brief survey of some of the English critical essays of Dryden's predecessors.

According to Saintsbury, Dryden "started with every ad-

vantage, except those of a body of English criticism behind him, and of a thorough knowledge of the whole of English literature."⁴ A study of Dryden's critical writing reveals, however, that he had the "advantage" of an important, if small, group of critical essays ranging from Ascham's Scholemaster to the letters of Davenant and Hobbes. It is almost a paradox that Renaissance criticism from its beginning had strong classical tendencies. Even in the age of Marlowe, Spenser and Shakespeare, critical essays were tinged with classicism, in marked contrast to the general atmosphere of luxuriant freedom. Ascham, with his high opinion of Italian culture and his low opinion of Italian morals, is described by Spingarn as "not only the first English man of letters, but also the first English classicist."⁵ From his emphasis on form and style, and his concern for education in the Latin classics, it is a short step to the second group of Renaissance critics whose chief concern was with metrical studies and classification into types. The classical elements are again evident; Harvey advocated the use of quantitative verse while Campion and Daniel discussed the suitability of rhyme for English poetry.

The first great essay of English criticism is Sidney's Defence of Poesy, described by Spingarn as "a veritable epitome of the literary criticism of the Italian Renaissance;....no other work....can be said to give so complete and so noble a conception of the temper and the principles of Renaissance criticism."⁶ The essay is devoted to an attempt to demonstrate the essential nobility

of poets and poetry; Sidney uses classical examples and authority to defend the poetry he loves as a romantic. In his section on the drama Sidney bases his theory on a rather mutilated Aristotle, approving the use of the unities, and decrying the prevalence of tragi-comedy. The inconsistency of the tone of Sidney's Arcadia with that of his own critical opinions of poetry (which term would include the fiction of the Arcadia) would seem to indicate that the creative spirit of the Elizabethans was under no such restraint as criticism advocated.

Ben Jonson's limited critical works establish him as another of Dryden's critical ancestors. A comprehensive study of Jonson's criticism is impossible here; it will be enough to show that Dryden was influenced by the work of his great predecessor. Wylie's description of Jonson as poet and critic could be applied with almost equal truth to Dryden: "Consciousness of purpose, deference to the past, acceptance of reason as the supreme authority, mark Jonson's poetry and criticism."⁷ It is evident that Dryden was familiar with the works of Jonson when we note that Jonson and Dryden each wrote on the comparison of poetry and painting, on the introduction of new words into the English language, on the identification of the author and his poem. The same quality of "self-conscious art, guided by the rules of criticism,"⁸ can be noted in each critic. Jonson's criticism of Marlowe's "scenicall strutting and furious vociferation,"⁹ and his comments on Shakespeare's need of a curb sound very similar to Dryden's alternation of praise and condemnation. Jonson, like Dryden,

could judge an author according to classical standards, but at the same time he could say about Shakespeare: "I lov'd the man and doe honour his memory, on this side Idolatry."¹⁰ Bronowski, in his study of Dryden's criticism, places great emphasis on the debt owed by Dryden to Jonson: "The principles which ruled Jonson's mind rule Dryden's. To study Dryden is first to study Jonson."¹¹

Between Jonson and Dryden little criticism of real importance appears; however, some of the opinions expressed are interesting historically. A few examples of critics whose opinions are of such interest illustrate the variety of theories. John Webster, in spite of his spectacular and blood~~e~~thirsty plays, recognizes the classical ideals, blaming his audience for his deviation from classical form. Chapman's theory of translation is that the translator is to follow "the material things themselves, and sentences to weigh diligently, and to clothe and adorn them with words....as are most apt for the language into which they are converted."¹² Edmund Bolton cautions writers against the evil of pandering to the tastes of the readers; Henry Peacham is an admirer of the ancients and a staunch supporter of the great power of poetry which "can turne brutishnesse into civilitie, make the lewd honest, turne hatred to love...."¹³ Henry Reynolds considers poetry from the point of view of the metaphysical poets; to him a good poem is one that cannot be too easily understood, the meat must be protected from vulgar and half-educated readers. As Basil Willey says, "He praises the Ancients for the care with which they wrapped up their meanings, thus ensuring that only the discerning should

understand them."¹⁴

Two critics of greater importance as predecessors of Dryden are Davenant and Hobbes, who can be considered together because of their letters containing critical theories. Jonson had realized that the vagueness of critical terms caused confusion in writing and understanding critical essays. Both Davenant and Hobbes defined certain critical terms. Davenant's conception of "wit" is: "the laborious and the lucky resultances of thought....Wit is not only the luck and labour, but also the dexterity of thought.... bringing swiftly home to the memory universal surveys. It is the Soul's Powder."¹⁵ This definition was apparently too vague, too all-inclusive to satisfy Hobbes, who divided the mental processes necessary for the poetic function into judgment and fancy: "Time and Education begets experience; Experience begets memory; Memory begets Judgement and Fancy: Judgement begets the strength and structure, and Fancy begets the ornaments of a Poem."¹⁶ From this division fancy and wit became identified, and by 1650 the need for judgment as well as fancy was recognized. Spingarn emphasizes the transitional state of English criticism represented by Davenant and Hobbes: "The long campaign of good sense against the figures of rhetoric"¹⁷ had not yet excluded the fancy. "The rationalistic temper had not as yet flooded criticism to the exclusion of all imaginative elements."¹⁸ Davenant's theory of epic poetry, elaborated further by Hobbes¹⁹ was one of Dryden's sources for his theories on the heroic drama.²⁰

Although several instances of his debt to his predecessors

in isolated cases have been given, Dryden's heritage in the field of English literary criticism was vague, confused, and uncertain. The relation between creative work and critical theory, except for Jonson, was very slight. Adding to the confusion of contradictory elements was the growing influence of French criticism, particularly that of Corneille, "undoubtedly the Frenchman who, directly and indirectly, most influenced English thought during the early years of the Restoration."²¹ The chief benefit of the earlier English criticism was to raise the problems which Dryden and his age attempted to solve; the solutions took various forms, ranging from the virtuosi school of taste to the school of sense, exemplified by Temple on the one extreme and Rymer on the other. Dryden's peculiar quality of sensitivity to the ideas and tastes of his time appears to have been touched, at various times, by all the diverse trends of seventeenth century criticism. The problems discussed in his first critical work of importance indicate Dryden's breadth of interest, his ability to see all sides of a question and his skill in expressing his opinions on literary problems: "The Essay of Dramatic Poesy....takes us to the very centre of the literary consciousness of the day."²² The subjects under discussion include the contrast of French and English plays, the use of rhyme in tragedy, the question of the unities, and the relative ability of ancients and moderns. Although Wylie states that "Dryden's vital interest was always with the present and future,"²³ it is evident that the forces of the past have also had profound influence on his thoughts. The problems under dis-

cussion are dealt with in terms of the present and the future, but many of Dryden's ideas were borrowed from earlier writers.

The tentative nature of Dryden's early criticism, evident in this famous essay, is an indication of the temper of the time. The Restoration period, in terms of literature as well as of politics and religion, was influenced by the scientific spirit, the growth of rationalism, and the urge to classify and organize. The earlier critical essays of Dryden reflect his sceptical, inquisitive, experimental nature in their comparative freedom from rules. W. E. Bohn describes Dryden as "boldly taking his stand upon his literary instincts.... He is attempting to give theoretic justification to what his feelings recognize as beautiful."²⁴

Dryden's criticism is largely concerned with problems of the drama. This is to be expected when we realize that a large part of his critical work depends upon his interests at each particular period. As Dryden's creative energies were long concentrated upon the drama, it is natural to discover that his criticism echoes the problems to be overcome by the working dramatist. The study of his dramatic theory leads us directly to a consideration of his dramatic practice; only by a study of both drama and dramatic theory can the complete picture be seen. Dryden's dramatic theory and practice provide evidence to prove that he was, both consciously and unconsciously, a true representative of his age, an age of change and uncertainty leading towards a period of serenity, calm, and completeness.

Footnotes.

1. Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century, ed. by J. E. Spingarn, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908), Introduction, p. CVI.
2. Loc. cit.
3. L. T. Bredvold, The Intellectual Milieu of John Dryden, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1934), p.152.
4. G. Saintsbury, A History of English Criticism, (London: Blackwood, 1911), p.111.
5. J.E. Spingarn, A History of Literary Criticism in the Renaissance, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1912), p.255.
6. Spingarn, op. cit., p.268.
7. L. J. Wylie, Evolution of English Criticism, (Boston: Ginn and Co., 1903), p.14.
8. Spingarn, op. cit., p.258.
9. Critical Essays, op. cit., Vol. I, p.23.
10. Ibid., p.19.
11. J. Bronowski, The Poet's Defence, (Cambridge University Press, 1939), p.89.
12. Critical Essays, op. cit., Vol.I, p.72.
13. Ibid., Vol.I, p.118.
14. Basil Willey, The Seventeenth Century Background, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1934), p.209.
15. Critical Essays, op. cit., Vol.II, p.20.
16. Ibid., Vol.II, p.59.
17. Ibid., Vol.I, p.XXXVII.
18. Ibid., Vol.I, p.XXXVI.
19. Bonamy Dobrée, Restoration Tragedy, 1660-1720, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929), p.13.
20. Essays of John Dryden, ed. by W. P. Ker, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926), Vol.I, p.150.

21. Wylie, op. cit., p.19.
22. Wylie, op. cit., p.26.
23. Ibid., p.29.
24. W. E. Bohn, "John Dryden's Literary Criticism", P.M.L.A.,
XV(1907), p.74.

CHAPTER II

DRYDEN'S INCONSISTENCY

Before we begin the study of Dryden's dramatic criticism, a brief examination of the problem raised by his inconsistency as a critic, as a dramatist, and as a man, seems necessary. That he was inconsistent in his criticism, that he did change his religion, and that he wrote poems eulogizing both Cromwell and Charles II, cannot be denied. The very fact that he was guilty of such inconsistencies proves that he was always a man of his age. His changes in opinion usually reflect the changes which took place in a society which was still striving to attain an equilibrium after half a century of social, religious, and political upheaval. Dryden, in his weakness as in his strength, was truly representative of the transitional period in which he lived and worked. The changing tastes of the period are reflected in the development of his drama from heroic to classical tragedy; the changes in his practice are largely responsible for the inconsistencies to be found in his criticism.

Dryden's term of office as unofficial czar of literature extended from shortly after the Restoration until his death in 1700. During this period of almost forty years he wrote, as he said, "to delight the age in which I live."¹ That this was an age of growth and change in ideas of various types becomes evident when we remember that during these forty years England gained religious toleration (although not religious equality),² freedom of the press,³ and independence of the judiciary from the legislative and administrative parts of the government.⁴

During these years can be found such extremes of temper as the mob hysteria prevalent during the Popish Plot,⁵ and the moderate spirit which produced a bloodless revolution in 1688.⁶ For Dryden, to live in such times meant taking an active part in the political and religious controversy of these times; it is, therefore, not surprising to find him inconsistent. Macaulay's description of a typical politician of the period seems to indicate that inconsistency was to be expected: "Fidelity to opinions and to friends seems to him mere dulness and wrongheadedness."⁷

Marlborough, Halifax, the Prince of Denmark, are three names which can be cited to illustrate the fact that loyalties were more elastic during this period than in the reign of Charles I, when all men were willing to shed blood to protect their principles. Marlborough's desertion to William, although singled out by Macaulay for particular condemnation, was not unusual.

Dryden, during his life, almost inevitably underwent changes of opinion. Because of his vigorous presentation of his passing point of view, the contradictions become more glaring than the changes which accompany the development of most writers whose period of productivity is as lengthy as that of Dryden's. Dryden defends and develops each point of view so clearly and with such apparent conviction that when the change does come it is extremely startling. The fluctuating praise or blame of Shakespeare and Jonson is usually a good indication of the type of essay to expect. An essay which condemns Jonson for his lack of wit, and Shakespeare for his over-exuberant use of wit, is likely to be one in which Dryden is very much aware of the impor-

tance of following the rules of the ancients, interpreted to suit his present purpose.

Eliot describes Dryden's essays as "the notes of a practitioner."⁸ As a dramatist, Dryden wrote to please an audience whose taste he sometimes attempted to guide, but which more frequently decided his choice of style and form of his plays. When we consider the difference in tone between The Conquest of Granada and All for Love, we see that Dryden's notes as a practitioner would necessarily be along very different lines. Bredvold attributes Dryden's changeableness partly to "prudential accommodations to changing fashions."⁹ Dr. Johnson ponderously intimates the same idea: "When he has any objection to obviate, or any licence to defend, he is not very scrupulous about what he asserts, nor very cautious, if the present purpose be served, not to entangle himself in his own sophistries."¹⁰ Obviously Dryden's essays taken as a series, as the opinions of one man, as the literary philosophy of the literary dictator of a period, appear hopelessly contradictory and inconstant. As briefly indicated above, however, much of the inconsistency can be attributed to his changing dramatic practice, in turn largely an outcome of the changing tastes of an inconsistent public.

From Dr. Johnson to Bredvold the critics have agreed on one point regarding Dryden: he loved to argue and he argued well. As Dr. Johnson neatly expresses it, "The favourite exercise of his mind was ratiocination."¹¹ Bredvold describes Dryden's intellectual curiosity, his love of discussion, his ability to express his opinions clearly and forcefully. He continues by

asserting that these characteristics are largely responsible for the changeableness of Dryden's criticism: "Dryden's hesitancy is something more positive than indecision; it is less a weakness of will than a richness and suppleness of intellect."¹² Emphasizing Dryden's breadth of interests as being an indication of his sensitiveness to his intellectual milieu, Bredvold asserts: "His apparent indecision is evidence, not of weakness, but of strength, of energy, of a versatile understanding."¹³ Lowell praises Dryden's ability as a debater and, at the same time, indicates the lack of constancy in his beliefs: "The charm of this great advocate is, that, whatever side he was on, he could always find excellent reasons for it, and state them with great force, and abundance of happy illustrations."¹⁴ Saintsbury figuratively describes him: "His strong and powerful mind could grind the corn supplied to it into the finest flour, but the corn must always be supplied."¹⁵ The metaphorical language of Saintsbury might be carried a step farther if we use the English idea of "corn" as including a number of different types of grain. Dryden's corn was of different varieties depending upon the factors already named: the type of play he was defending, the particular period of his long career in which he was writing, the ideas which were of interest to him at the moment. His own opinion of his age must be respected: "We live in an age so sceptical, that as it determines little, so it takes nothing from antiquity on trust."¹⁶ His examination of ideas, in different periods of his life, and from different points of view, inevitably produced inconsistencies.

The final condemnation of Dryden as an inconstant man has

usually been based on the fact that he became a Roman Catholic. Unfortunately for his reputation, this coincided with the Catholic James II's becoming King of England. Dr. Johnson can again be quoted to express one point of view: "That conversion will always be suspected that apparently concurs with interest."¹⁷ Johnson qualifies his statement slightly by the use of "apparently", and later admits: "It is some proof of Dryden's sincerity in his second religion, that he taught it to his sons."¹⁸ There is evidence, however, that would seem to indicate that Dryden's religious philosophy was leaning towards Catholicism before his conversion. The tone of Religio Laici is so similar to that of The Hind and the Panther that it might almost be considered as an introduction to the later poem.¹⁹ The attack on the deists and the dissenters is much more vitriolic than the attack on the Catholics. The fear of civil war and of anarchy, which permeates Absalom and Achitophel, is apparent in his poem defending the Anglican church. With a Catholic King on the throne, Dryden's love of order and his Hobbsian obedience to authority probably tipped the very closely balanced beam in favour of Catholicism. Dryden's monetary situation probably had little effect on his conversion, as his position as laureate would hardly have become untenable if he remained a Protestant. Bredvold asserts that Dryden was affected by scepticism, by the belief that man "is unable to affirm that one (God) is preferable, in any one absolute sense, to another."²⁰ Paradoxically, Dryden, the great reasoner in rhyme, distrusted reason in religion: "It was this distrust of reason, this philosophical scepticism, that drove Dryden toward

conservatism and authority in religion, and ultimately to the Catholic church, just as his distrust of the populace was one reason for his increasing conservatism and Toryism in politics."²¹ Bredvold develops the thesis that Dryden's conversion was the logical conclusion to his religious scepticism: "The Pyrrhonic defense of faith supports the whole logical structure, and inspires the loftiest practical flights, of both of Dryden's poems on religion."²²

Sir Walter Scott in his Life of Dryden reaches the same conclusion: "Dryden seems to have doubted with such a strong wish to believe, as, accompanied with circumstance of extrinsic influence, led him finally into the opposite extreme of credulity."²³ Noyes, in his introduction to Dryden's poems follows the same pattern: "He saw so clearly the difficulties of Scripture authority without an infallible interpreter that he was well prepared to accept the claims of the Catholic Church to be such."²⁴ The consensus of opinion thus appears to be that Dryden's conversion is an indication of his search for order and authority, rather than the "conversion concurring with interest" mentioned by Johnson. The political satires, the religious poems, the tone of his critical essays of the period, seem to provide further proof of Dryden's desire to find security under an infallible authority.

The question of Dryden's inconsistency is complex and disturbing. From a study of the problems which arise no clear-cut, definite philosophical pattern arises. The one unifying force appears to be his attempt to find an authority upon which he can

base his philosophy of literature, of politics, and of religion. During his long and busy life as a writer, the elusive power which he seeks continues to change shape, to bring new rules and new creeds which govern Dryden's ideas for a time. His receptive mind prevented him from ever forming a crystallized doctrine of criticism; the balance was continually disrupted by the absorption of new ideas. The fact that his dramatic criticism was in a continual state of flux makes it extremely difficult to generalize about his theories, which were never quite the same in his different essays. His inconsistency does, however, have the effect of showing more clearly that Dryden was always a man of his age. In his criticism can be found echoes of such opposing views as those of Rymer and Temple or of Collier and Wolseley. For such a man to remain fixed in his theories would be an impossibility: "His mind was so hospitable to new ideas, and so ready to adopt its utterance to the needs of the moment, that at first impression we are apt to think him a mere hypocrite and timeserver. On further acquaintance we find him a kindly gentleman....unconcerned with superficial consistency."²⁵ Dryden's self-judgment is on the side of the majority: "As I am a man, I must be changeable; and sometimes the gravest of us all are so, even upon ridiculous accidents."²⁶

1. Ker, op. cit., Vol.I, p.116.
2. G. M. Trevelyan, England Under the Stuarts, (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1904), p.449.
3. Ibid., p.462.

4. G. M. Trevelyan, The English Revolution, (London: Butterworth, 1938), p.161.
5. Trevelyan, England Under the Stuarts, p.386.
6. Ibid., p.447.
7. Lord Macaulay, The History of England, ed. by C. H. Firth, (London: MacMillan and Co., 1913), Vol.I, p.164.
8. T. S. Eliot, John Dryden, (New York: Terence and Elsa Holliday, 1932), p.49.
9. L. T. Bredvold, The Intellectual Milieu of John Dryden, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1934), p.12.
10. Samuel Johnson, Lives of the English Poets, (London: John Murray, 1854), Vol.I, p.342.
11. Johnson, op. cit., p.379.
12. Bredvold, op.cit., p.13.
13. Ibid., p.14.
14. J. R. Lowell, Among My Books, (London: J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1868), p.28.
15. G. Saintsbury, Dryden, (London: MacMillan and Co., Ltd., 1881), p.136.
16. Ker, op. cit., Vol.I, p.163.
17. Johnson, op. cit., p.310.
18. Ibid., p.325.
19. Bredvold, op. cit., p.121.
20. Ibid., p.19.
21. Ibid., p.71.
22. Ibid., p.122.
23. Sir Walter Scott, The Life of John Dryden, (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1880), p.264.
24. The Poetical Works of John Dryden, ed. by G. R. Noyes, (Chicago: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1909), p.XXXI.

25. Ibid., p.XXXVII.
26. The Mermaid Series, John Dryden, ed. by Geo. Saintsbury,
(London:Univin, 1904), From "Dedication to Aureng-Zebe",
Vol.I, p.342.

CHAPTER III

DRYDEN'S DRAMATIC CRITICISM

In his earliest critical essay, Preface to Rival Ladies, Dryden appears as a "sturdy patriotic Englishman,"¹ praising the genius of Shakespeare and the skill of Waller, Denham and D'Avenant. There is also an almost contradictory praise of the "most polished and civilised nations of Europe."² The apparently contrary opinions, however, are used for a single purpose: to advocate the use of rhyme in plays. Waller and Denham had perfected the ease and dignity of rhyme which had been used in English plays by Shakespeare and, as Dryden mistakenly affirms, by the authors of Gorboduc.³ In his arguments for the use of rhyme, Dryden then turns to the examples of Italy, Spain and France. Rhyme is also useful as an aid to the memory, as an added grace to repartee, and above all "it bounds and circumscribes the fancy."⁴ Dryden here introduces his famous simile comparing the imagination to a "high-ranging spaniel" which "must have clogs tied to it, lest it outrun the judgment."⁵ He accuses blank verse of being too "luxuriant," and in need of "clogs." In fairness to Dryden it should be noted that the blank verse of many of the later Elizabethan dramatists can justly be termed too luxuriant. There was a definite need of some chastening force, a need which Dryden thought rhyme could supply. Dobrée's judgment is at least partially on Dryden's side: "But, if the couplet proved too rigid for dramatic purposes....it did at least stop the rot which had set in in the writing of blank verse."⁶ In his defence of rhyme Dryden is not attempting to browbeat his public into accepting

something entirely strange or entirely new. There were scenes in rhyme included in the Rival Ladies to which the essay was an introduction, and Lord Orrery had already written plays in couplets.⁷ It is more accurate to say that Dryden, with his peculiar receptiveness, had felt the changing taste in his audience and was preparing to give them what they wanted.

Dryden's next essay dealing with dramatic criticism is the most famous of all his critical writing, An Essay on Dramatic Poesy. Written, so Christie tells us,⁸ in 1665 or 1666, it was not published until 1668. By using dialogue form, Dryden is able to present opposing points of view on questions which were perplexing the literary men of the time. Tentative in tone, the essay included an examination of such problems as the relative merits of the ancients and the moderns, and of the French and the English, the use of rhyme in tragedy, tragi-comedy, and the three unities. Dr. Johnson's verdict on the essay needs no qualifications: "It will not be easy to find, in all the opulence of our language, a treatise so artfully variegated with successive representations of opposite probabilities, so enlivened with imagery, so brightened with illustrations."⁹ Although Dryden presents the "opposite probabilities" with almost equal vigour and skill, it is usually evident which point of view is his own. Thus it seems apparent that he is on the side of the moderns and the English, that he defends rhyme and tragi-comedy, and that he advocates a common-sense view of the use of the three unities. The difficulties attached to the writing of such a comprehensive essay so early in the history of English criticism before any critical standards

had been developed, are emphasized by Dryden himself. Writing in 1693 he mentions the exploratory nature of the essay: "Before the use of the loadstone, or use of the compass, I was sailing in a vast ocean, without other help than the pole-star of the Ancients, and the rules of the French stage."¹⁰ In a pioneer work such as this, Dryden is very cautious not to appear dictatorial or magisterial, taking full advantage of the dialogue form to maintain the tentative nature of the essay which he describes in A Defence of an Essay of Dramatic Poesy: "My whole discourse was sceptical."¹¹

Dryden's phrases "the pole-star of the Ancients" and "the rule of the French stage" indicate the fundamental basis for his criticism. However, it soon appears that Aristotle and Corneille have become naturalized Englishmen. Eliot describes Dryden's dramatic theory as "a compromise between Aristotle, as he understood Aristotle through distorting French lenses, and his own practice which is itself a compromise between earlier English practice and French practice."¹² A comparison of Dryden's definition of a play with the Aristotelian idea of tragedy shows both the debt to and the divergence from Aristotle. Dryden's protagonists agree that a play ought to be "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."¹³ Aristotle's definition of tragedy, as translated by Butcher, includes these statements: "Tragedy then, is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude," and "Through pity and fear effecting

the proper purgation of these emotions."¹⁴ Aristotle's "imitation of an action" has become Dryden's "image of human nature;" the "purgation" of fear and pity has been transformed to "delight and instruction."

Students of seventeenth century criticism vary in the interpretation they give to Dryden's idea of "nature." Ker says that although nature has various meanings it is usually "whatever the author thinks best"¹⁵, adding that in general it signified the force which tended "to discourage the invention of conceits."¹⁶ Lovejoy agrees in principle with Ker, enumerating the various uses of the term in seventeenth and eighteenth century criticism.¹⁷ Green, using Lovejoy's article as a basis for his summary, reduces "nature" to "universality, typicalness, uniformity, simplicity and regularity."¹⁸ In spite of the great diversity of meanings "there was a central core of meaning to which those writers clung and to which we, not too precariously, may cling."¹⁹ The central core is, according to Green, "rationality, or order."²⁰ Bronowski says that to Dryden "Nature is an ideal of order; and the acts of man, Wit and Judgment, are acts towards this order."²¹ He claims that Dryden believed in an ideal nature, but that the poet "had to understand his ideal Nature by way of the Nature of Man."²²

The problems which Green sees regarding Dryden's and Aristotle's definitions centre around the theory of imitation and the purgation or catharsis. He delves into the meaning of "nature", although less metaphysically than does Bronowski. However, it seems to me that Dryden's phrase, "image of human nature," is a simple statement which meant exactly the same to Dryden as it does to the modern reader. Dryden thinks of a play as being con-

cerned with men and women; the situations in a play are such as to illustrate the characteristics of these men and women. The problem of "nature" with its manifold connotations does not need to enter the discussion. The qualifying "human" eliminates the majority of definitions given by moderns to Dryden's use of the word "nature" in his definition of a play. Aristotle's "imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude", with his subsequent emphasis on the primary place of action seems to have been replaced by emphasis on character and situation. Dryden's definition includes action as a factor, but the representation of humours and passions occupies a more important place in his thoughts than do the changes of fortune to which human nature is subject. That Dryden was, at this time, beginning to take an interest in heroic drama with its emphasis on character may have had something to do with the framing of his definition in the words he used.

Aristotle's "purgation of fear and pity" has caused controversy among students of criticism for centuries. Two interpretations are given by Green as being most common. One group of critics believes that the purgation takes place through raising the emotions by the action of the play; the other group believes that the purgation takes place through the moral lesson which the play provides. Milton provides one interesting example of the first interpretation in the introduction to Samson Agonistes where he describes the effects of tragedy: "....by raising pity and fear, or terror to purge the mind of those and such-like passions,--that is, to temper and reduce them to just

measure with a kind of delight, stirred up by reading or seeing those passions well imitated."²³ Dryden, judged by his own definition, belongs to the second group, the group that took the ethical view of the function of tragedy, demanding that it should instruct as well as delight.

Dryden is, as usual, in tune with the majority. Richard Flecknoe, later immortalized by Dryden as the dull father of a duller son, writes about the stage that, "Its chiefest end is to render Folly ridiculous, Vice odious, and Vertue and Noblenesse so amiable and lovely, as every one shu'd be delighted and enamoured with it."²⁴ Shadwell, appropriately enough, echoes the thoughts of Flecknoe: "I must take leave to Dissent from those who seem to insinuate that the ultimate end of a Poet is to delight, without correction or instruction."²⁵ Dryden and his contemporary critics were followers of the English tradition in their moral interpretation of the end of poetry. Sidney, probably echoing Horace, defines "poesie" as "an arte of imitation....with this end, to teach and delight."²⁶ In the same essay he uses such phrases as "delightful teaching"²⁷ and "vertue-breeding delightfulness"²⁸ to describe poetry. He attempts to show that poetry is a better teacher than either history or philosophy because of the delight which is coupled with the moral instruction. Jonson calls the poet the "Interpreter and Arbiter of Nature, a Teacher of things divine no lesse than humane, a Master in Manners."²⁹ Davenant describes poetry as the chief aid to "Religion, Armes, Policy, and Law"³⁰ and Hobbes says that the "Designe of the

Poet....is not only to profit, but also to delight."³¹ Dryden, it seems, is following the trend of English criticism when he defines a play as "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."³²

In the debate between Crites and Eugenius regarding the respective merits of ancients and moderns, the balance is tipped slightly, but noticeably, in favour of the moderns. Dryden's own opinions are usually discernible, although they do not appear to be crystallized as yet. Crites, as advocate for the ancients, defends the unities which he traces to Aristotle and Horace. The defence of the ancients is less able than the attack made by Eugenius. This attack is based on the rules, which Dryden apparently respects. The Greeks had no definite number of acts,³³ the unity of time was frequently neglected,³⁴ the instruction did not always lead to virtue,³⁵ and the plays raised horror rather than compassion.³⁶ Oddly enough Dryden's condemnation of the ancients is largely in terms of the most respected qualities of the classical drama. He also sneers at the thinness of the plot,³⁷ the lack of a love theme,³⁸ and the poor quality of the Greek wit.³⁹ In the first encounter it is evident that Dryden has weighed the scales in favour of the moderns, although still respecting the works of the ancients. The conclusion in which Crites admits that the ancients might have written differently if they had lived in the present age indicates Dryden's awareness of historical criticism. The four critics agree that Eugenius and the moderns have had the better of the argument, adding that, "we

are not to conclude anything rashly against those great men, but preserve to them the dignity of masters."⁴⁰ The neo-classical element in Dryden's criticism, although present, is not yet able to control his taste. He is also very much aware of the important part played by the audience in determining what a dramatist can do.

In the next exchange Dryden, as Neander, defends the English dramatists against the French. Lisideius in his case for the French sneers at tragi-comedy: "There is no theatre in the world has anything so absurd as the English tragi-comedy."⁴¹ Neander answers as a patriotic Englishman, proud of his country's contribution to dramatic forms and defends the use of a mixture of the gay and the serious: "A continued gravity keeps the spirit too much bent."⁴² Lisideius praises French drama for its unity of plot, of time, and of place, for its restraint, and for its use of narrations to avoid tumult on the stage. Neander replies that the French plots have unity at the expense of variety, their descriptive passages are "the coldest I have ever read,"⁴³ and there is too little action on the stage.⁴⁴ He continues in praise of English drama in terms of the great dramatists of the past age, Shakespeare and Jonson. The well-known passage on Shakespeare and Jonson indicates Neander's position as a man whose reverence for great literature is stronger than his respect for rules and authority: "If I would compare him (Jonson) with Shakespeare, I must acknowledge him 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: I admire him, but I love Shakespeare."⁴⁵

Again Dryden shows his freedom from restraining authority. His common sense view of the unities as rules which can be so restrictive as to ruin a play,⁴⁶ and his recognition of the importance of the dramatists' audience,⁴⁷ both mark him as a critic whose views are remarkably free from dogmatic restraints. The examination of Jonson's The Silent Woman is made, however, in terms of classical standards. Dryden, in spite of his natural leanings towards freedom, is still a man of his age; as such, it is inevitable that he should be influenced by the neo-classical trends of English criticism. Ker's opinion of Dryden in relation to the contemporary view of criticism emphasizes the unusual amount of freedom which he retains: "Dryden's freedom cannot be rightly estimated except in relation to the potent authorities with which he had to deal."⁴⁸

Neander's defence of rhyme in tragedy follows the ~~same~~ pattern outlined in the Epistle Dedicatory of the Rival Ladies. There is one important addition, however, when Neander describes the type of play in which rhyme is most necessary: "In serious plays where the subject and characters are great, and the plot unmingled with mirth, which might allay or divert these concerns which are produced, rhyme is there as natural and more effectual than blank verse."⁴⁹ This sounds very much like a description of the heroic drama as written by Dryden and his followers. The connection with heroic drama is maintained in Neander's reference to tragedy which, he says, "is wont to image to us the minds and fortunes of noble persons, and to portray

these exactly; heroic verse is nearest Nature, as being the noblest kind of modern verse."⁵⁰ Neander's idea of a serious play is that there is "the representation of Nature, but 'tis Nature wrought up to an higher pitch."⁵¹ A play, he says, "to be like Nature, is to be set above it."⁵² Dryden, through his chief character in the essay, is evidently thinking of the type of drama which he intends to write, the type which appeals to his audience, the type which most clearly reveals the age in which it was popular. His defence of rhyme thus seems to be still another reflection of his age.

In his reply to Howard's condemnation of the use of rhyme in tragedy, Dryden is led by the nature of Howard's attack to contradict much of what he has previously said. Howard's admission that he prefers to read good verses rather than prose or blank verse is eagerly taken by Dryden as the focal point for his reply. The purpose of poetry is not now "for the delight and instruction of mankind." To replace this two-fold end the emphasis has been shifted: "I am satisfied if it cause delight; for 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."⁵³ The purgation of the emotions is not through the usual workings of poetic justice with the representation of virtue triumphant and evil dismayed: "To affect the soul, and excite the passion.....a bare imitation will not serve."⁵⁴ The need to defend rhyme has apparently led to his temporary abandonment of the position he has held regarding the important problem of Catharsis.

Even in his inconsistency Dryden is still a true representative of his age. The redoubtable Thomas Rymer held much the same view of the problem of delight and instruction: "I am confident whoever writes a Tragedy cannot please but must also profit."⁵⁵ Dryden, by his change of opinion, has changed his allies, but he is not fighting a solitary battle. In whatever controversy he took part, it is safe to say that Dryden was always the leader of a group who believed as he did in at least the main argument. The critical works of the Restoration period seldom discuss problems which have not been already explored by Dryden.

In the same essay Dryden admits that comedy is not suited to his temperament: "I know I am not so fitted by nature to write comedy: I want that gaiety of humour which is required to it. My conversation is slow and dull; my humour saturnine and reserved."⁵⁶ He frankly admits, however, that his work as a poet is aimed "to delight the age in which I live."⁵⁷ In refutation of Howard's opinion that taste should be the standard of judgment instead of "Rules so little demonstrative,"⁵⁸ Dryden answers that, "The humour of the people is now for comedy; therefore, in hope to please them, I write comedies, rather than serious plays; and so far their taste prescribes to me; but it does not follow from that reason, that comedy is to be preferred before tragedy in its own nature; for that which is so in its own nature cannot be otherwise, as a man cannot but be a rational creature."⁵⁹ His argument against Howard's defence of taste as the final standard of judgment has led him to state plainly that his plays were

written to please the audience.

The essay as a whole can be seen to be dictated by the need to refute particular arguments. Dr. Johnson's wise observation, previously quoted in connection with Dryden's inconsistency, seems particularly applicable to the Defence: "When he has any objection to obviate, or any licence to defend, he is not very scrupulous about what he asserts, nor very cautious, if the present purpose be served, not to entangle himself in his own sophistries."⁶⁰ The need to defend rhyme must have been very strongly felt by Dryden at this time, since heroic drama had already become the popular type of serious play.

The preface to The Mock Astrologer is exclusively concerned with comedy. In this essay Dryden defends his own play and the type of comedy which he advocated: "Neither all wit, nor all humour, but the result of both."⁶¹ He confesses that he has "given too much to the people",⁶² with the result that his comedies have too much farce mingled with true comedy. He defends himself against the accusation that his plays have led to instruction towards evil rather than for good. Terence, Plautus, Jonson, have all had debauched persons as chief characters; comedy's aim is not to punish vice but to delight, as instruction "can be but its secondary end."⁶³ He continues his defence, following Aristotle's theory of comedy, by saying that the characters in comedy are of slight stature, are not vicious but frail, and adds that, "we make not vicious persons happy, but only as Heaven makes sinners so; that is by reclaiming them first from vice."⁶⁴ Jeremy Collier in his attack on the immorality of the stage

made great use of Dryden's statement that characters in comedy were not vicious: "There is nothing but a little Whoring, Pimping, Gaming, Profaneness etc., and who would be so hard-hearted to give a man any Trouble for this?"⁶⁵ Dryden's differentiation between vice and folly appears to have followed the example of the court where sex intrigue was an accepted form of amusement unless discovered, when the episode was treated as folly worthy of cynical laughter.

Dryden's criticism during the years in which heroic drama had its ascendancy is coloured by his own dramatic practice. The peculiar nature of the heroic drama, its close relationship to the age in which it flourished, and Dryden's predominant part in the production and encouragement of the heroic drama will be discussed in a later section. However, a brief examination of his criticism related to the heroic drama is necessary. Dryden's definition of an heroic play indicates the direction in which his theory of the drama is leading: "An heroic play ought to be an imitation, in little, of an heroic poem; and, consequently,Love and Valour ought to be the subject of it."⁶⁶ The use of rhyme to raise the play above nature,⁶⁷ the use of machinery,⁶⁸ the presentation of battles on the stage⁶⁹ are all defended because of their presence in heroic poems. The imagination must be raised in order to make the presentation of the play credible: "The poet is then to endeavour an absolute dominion over the minds of the spectators."⁷⁰

In the Epilogue to the Second Part of the Conquest of Granada, Dryden attacks the dramatists of the last age, stating

as his opinion that Jonson wrote "When men were dull, and conversation low."⁷¹ He praises his own age for its wit and gallantry and refinement, and he is very much aware of the close relationship between the dramatist and his audience. Assuming almost contemptuous superiority, he gives the credit for the more brilliant drama of his own age to the age itself:

"If Love and Honour now are higher rais'd,
'Tis not the Poet, but the Age is prais'd.
Wit's now arriv'd to a more high degree;
Our Native Language more refin'd and free;
Our Ladies and our Men now speak more wit
In conversation, than those Poets writ."⁷²

The defence of the form and style of the heroic drama is in the nature of an offensive directed against his dramatic predecessors.

Aware of the danger of an attack on his own plays to which his criticism of others exposed him, Dryden continues his own offensive in the Defence of the Epilogue. Here he flatly states that "The language, wit, and conversation of our age, are improved and refined above the last."⁷³ The advance in learning and culture has been reflected in a more brilliant and more polished form of drama. Jonson, Shakespeare, and Fletcher are all handled rather more roughly than is Dryden's custom. Shakespeare's wit is condemned as careless: "Never did any author precipitate himself from such height of thought to so low expression;"⁷⁴ Fletcher "knows not when to give over;"⁷⁵ Jonson, although able enough in his own form of comedy, lacks "wit in the stricter sense, that is, sharpness of conceit."⁷⁶ Dryden

excuses them by saying that "Had they lived now, they had doubtless written more correctly."⁷⁷ He implies that if they had had the benefits of intercourse with the court of Charles II, and the conversation of Restoration gentlemen, then perhaps they could have written with the "well-placing of words, for the sweetness of pronunciation"⁷⁸ which was unknown in their own time. Dryden concludes by magnanimously allowing the genius of his predecessors but adds: "let us ascribe to the gallantry and civility of our age the advantage which we have above them."⁷⁹ He is a staunch defender of the age which he designed to please, the age which dictated, through its taste, the type of drama which he wrote for its pleasure. Because he was so keenly aware of the temper of his age, Dryden was able to remain a popular playwright for so many years.

In the Prologue to Aureng-Zebe, Dryden indicates the change about to take place in his dramatic practice. He admits that he "grows weary of his long-loved Mistress Rhyme,"⁸⁰ and continues in a strain which shows a marked contrast to the opinions he expressed about Shakespeare in the previous essays:

"But spite of all his pride, a secret shame

Invades his breast at Shakespeare's sacred name."⁸¹

Dryden adds the much-quoted couplet as self-description:

"Let him retire, betwixt two Ages cast,

The first of this, and hindmost of the last."⁸²

At first glance it would appear as if Dryden feels out of touch with his own age. When we remember the age for which he wrote, however, it is not difficult to see that Dryden appreciated that

his was a fickle age. He recognizes the necessity of pleasing his audience and regretfully resolves to appeal to the tastes of his time by abandoning his "long-loved Mistris Rhyme."

Veneration for Shakespeare is further emphasized in Dryden's best play, All for Love, where Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra provides the plot, many of the characters, and a model for many of the speeches. Dryden has not used rhyme because blank verse "is more proper to my present purpose."⁸³ He has a hero who resembles Aristotle's tragic hero; who "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."⁸⁴ The play about which he later said, "I never writ anything for myself but Antony and Cleopatra,"⁸⁵ is classical in construction: "The fabric of the play is regular enough, as to the inferior parts of it; and the Unities of Time, Place and Action, more exactly observed, than perhaps the English theatre requires."⁸⁶ He pays homage to Thomas Rymer as he asserts that he has followed the practice of the ancients who "are and ought to be our masters."⁸⁷ The change in his critical theory parallels the change in the dramatic form he employs; his defence is no longer of heroic drama, but of a more strictly classical type of tragedy. The "school of sense" has triumphed, and the heroic drama is its victim. The Rehearsal, with its witty ridicule of Dryden's extravagant heroic plays, together with Rymer's appeal to the examples of the ancients and to common sense have combined to banish the heroic drama from the stage, although certain of its qualities remain in the classical tragedies of

of the period. Dryden's change in opinion is, therefore, not an isolated case; he is following the trend of Restoration criticism towards common sense, reason and restraint.

In his essay on The Grounds of Criticism in Tragedy, included in the Preface to Troilus and Cressida, Dryden appears as a neo-classic, quoting with approval the opinions of Rymer, Rapin and Bossu. He now disapproves of tragi-comedy, even though the perverted English audiences approve: "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."⁸⁸ He has apparently been re-converted to his opinion that "to instruct delightfully is the general end of all poetry."⁸⁹ The ethical view of catharsis is again his accepted opinion: "To purge the passions by example, is therefore the particular instruction which belongs to Tragedy."⁹⁰ The dramatist needs to "lay down to yourself what that precept of morality shall be, which you would insinuate into the people;"⁹¹ the manners, or that "which incline the persons to such or such actions,"⁹² must be suitable to the persons' age, sex, quality and condition. This is evidently in close agreement with Rymer's theory of decorum, one of the yardsticks he used in his condemnation of Othello and The Maid's Tragedy. Dryden expresses his respect for Shakespeare, who "had an universal mind, which comprehended all characters and passions,"⁹³ but he cannot give unqualified praise, for "the fury of his fancy often transported him beyond the bounds of judgment."⁹⁴ To Dryden, in this essay, the fancy is subordinate to the judgment: "No man should pretend

to write, who cannot temper his fancy with his judgment."⁹⁵ Thus Shakespeare falls under Dryden's disapproval, although the natural love and honour which Dryden feels cannot be suppressed: "I fear....that we, who ape his sounding words, have nothing of his thought, but are all outside."⁹⁶

The tone of the essay is more subservient to authority than any of the previous essays. The influence of Rymer, Bossu and Rapin appears to have been strong, strong enough to bring Dryden, temporarily at least, into the neo-classic camp. There is a more dogmatic air to his assertions; the magisterial tone which Dryden usually avoids can be detected throughout. Dryden's natural love of good poetry is not completely absent, however. The praise of Jonson, Shakespeare and Fletcher, although tempered by his new obeisance to authority, occasionally breaks through the neo-classic surface. Dryden is never able to become the complete neo-classic, nor is he ever able to neglect entirely the authority of the past. He remains a complex figure with two main motivating drives in his critical work: love of literature for its own sake, and respect for the examples and authority of the past.

Dryden's need to please his audience forced him to abandon his too strict interpretation of the rules. In the Dedication of The Spanish Friar he admits that he is using a mixture of tragedy and comedy because the "audience are grown weary of continued melancholy scenes."⁹⁷ He is still an advocate of decorum: "In the heightenings of Poetry, the strength and vehemence of figures should be suited to the occasion, the subject, and the persons."⁹⁸ Dryden's apparent attempt to become independent of

his world has failed, and he accepts his position as a playwright forced to pander to the tastes of his public, even when these tastes are not in accord with his principles. Principles can be more easily changed to suit the audience than the audience to suit the principles.

In the Dedication of Examen Poeticum Dryden frankly admits that the French "follow the Ancients too servilely in the mechanic rules, and we assume too much licence to ourselves in keeping them only in view at too great a distance."⁹⁹ The public is again to blame as "we are bound to please those whom we pretend to entertain; and that at any price, religion and good manners only excepted."¹⁰⁰ The comments on Shakespeare and Jonson contrast greatly with the carping criticism to which Dryden subjected them in the Defence of the Epilogue: "Peace be to the venerable shades of Shakespeare and Ben Jonson!....as they were our predecessors, so they were our masters."¹⁰¹ In the last period of Dryden's criticism, from 1690 until his death, there is little deviation from this praise. Dryden, less interested in dramatic practice, can now afford to allow his instincts free play, can now praise the drama of the past without endangering the popularity of his own.

Although Dryden's critical essays of this period are as sane and as vigorous as his earlier criticism, they are less concerned with the drama. His interests had gradually shifted from the drama to translation, and his criticism followed his practice. The lengthy discourse on Satire deals with poets and poems rather than with drama; consequently there is little which

is relevant to our study of dramatic criticism. In A Parallel of Poetry and Painting Dryden draws heavily on drama for his illustration of the similarity between the two arts. He notes that one difference between poetry and painting is "that the principal end of Painting is to please, and the chief design of Poetry is to instruct."¹⁰² In both arts the subjects "ought to have nothing of immoral, low, or filthy in them."¹⁰³ As this appeared three years before Jeremy Collier's attack on the immorality of the stage, it is probable that the desire for change was in the air. Dryden, with his unerring sense of public opinion, appears to have felt the changing temper of the general reading public. His plays of this period, however, are certainly not free from what he condemns. The answer to this discrepancy can probably be found in the play-goers who were still largely aristocratic and still comparatively free from Puritan influence. It should be noted that Dryden had previously lamented the immorality of the stage in the well-known ode "To the Proud Memory of the Accomplish'd Young Lady, Mrs. Anne Killigrew", written in 1685. In this poem the fourth stanza is devoted to the subject of the immorality of contemporary poetry, particularly of the drama;

O wretched we! why were we hurried down

This lubric and adult'rate age,

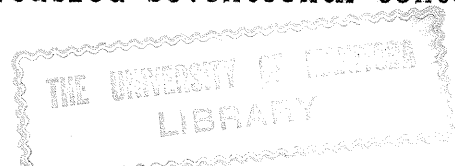
(Nay, added fat Pollutions of our own.)

T'increase the steaming Ordures of the Stage?"¹⁰⁴

In spite of his criticism, Dryden's plays remain as licentious in tone as any of his earlier works; apparently the public was ready to accept reform in theory, but preferred the customary innuendos

in practice.

Dryden's opinion of the rules of the drama remains the same as that expressed in the Grounds of Criticism in Tragedy when he had said that the rules were "made only to reduce nature into method....They are founded upon good sense, and sound reason, rather than on authority."¹⁰⁵ In the Parallel of Poetry and Painting he says, "To inform our judgments, and to reform our tastes, rules were invented, that by them we might discern when Nature was imitated, and how nearly."¹⁰⁶ He adds that "without rules there can be no art, any more than there can be a house without a door to conduct you into it."¹⁰⁷ The same deference to authority, rules and examples is evident in Dryden's emphasis on the need to respect probability¹⁰⁸ and verisimilitude,¹⁰⁹ and the need to keep the decorum of the stage.¹¹⁰ He also attacks tragi-comedy in a tone very different from the praise bestowed upon it thirty years before: "Our English tragi-comedy must be confessed to be wholly Gothic, notwithstanding the success which it has found upon our theatre....Neither can I defend my Spanish Friar, as fond as otherwise I am of it, from this imputation: 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, and are no more to be allowed for decent than a gay widow laughing in a mourning habit."¹¹¹ Dryden, no longer concerned with writing plays, feels more free to criticize deviations from the neo-classical norm than when he was interested in selling a play to an audience which liked the "Gothic" tragi-comedy. It is of interest to remember that the troubled seventeenth century



was about to pass into history while the eighteenth century, the century of English classicism, was about to be born. It is therefore not surprising to see Dryden's criticism turn to a stricter observation of rules.

Dryden was, however, never to become a complete classicist; his instinctive love of great literature saved him from ever falling to the level of his contemporary, Thomas Rymer. With this ever-present leavening of his neo-classical reverence for rules and authority, Dryden's criticism retained throughout his career a tolerance which is never completely obliterated. His respect for the unities is never blind subservience: "Better a mechanic rule were stretched or broken, than a great beauty were omitted."¹¹² In his last critical essay we find Dryden praising Chaucer as "a man of a most wonderful comprehensive nature,"¹¹³ who, in spite of his rudeness as a poet, is preferred to Ovid. The frank, dignified acceptance of Collier's rebuke seems to indicate the mellowing effect of age; "I shall say the less of Mr. Collier because in many things 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, and retract them."¹¹⁴ However, the effect is spoiled when in the same essay we note that he says of Collier, "He is too much given to horse-play in his raillery, and comes to battle like a dictator from the plough."¹¹⁵ He, also, has a very pungent reply to Milbourne's criticism: "I am satisfied, however, that while he and I live together, I shall not be thought the worst poet of the age."¹¹⁶ Dryden's age may have mellowed him in some res-

pects but his controversial spirit has remained as strong as ever.

Dryden's dramatic theory follows no clear-cut pattern; there are fluctuations to be noticed in opinions expressed at almost the same period of his life. The predominant influence on his theory seems to have been the practice of the drama; his criticism was usually written in direct reference to a particular play or a particular type of play. During his vigorous attempt to promote and maintain an interest in heroic drama, his theory was strongly affected by this peculiarly Restoration form of drama. His change in practice towards a neo-classic form brought a corresponding change in his theory. When he was no longer forced to defend his practice he became a more detached critic of the drama, more willing to admit his own errors and, at the same time, more generous in his praise of the earlier English dramatists. He was, at the end of his career, finally free to theorize without keeping one eye on his own dramatic practice.

The study of some of his plays will emphasize this close relationship of theory and practice. For the purpose of this study The Conquest of Granada, Aureng-Zebe, All for Love, Don Sebastian, The Spanish Friar, and Marriage a la Mode have been selected. The first two, as heroic dramas, will serve as illustrations of the type of drama which Dryden must have visualized when he wrote his earlier criticism; the second two, more classical in form and matter, illustrate the changing tastes of the time and the corresponding change in Dryden's ideas of the drama; the last two plays have been chosen, largely because of the comic under-plot in each, to illustrate Dryden's practice

as a writer of comedy. However, before consideration of Dryden's plays can be made, a brief examination of Restoration drama will be necessary.

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1. Bohn, op. cit., p.67.
 2. Ker, op. cit., Vol.I, p.6.
 3. Loc. cit.,
 4. Ibid., p.8.
 5. Loc. cit.
 6. Dobrée, Restoration Tragedy, p.56.
 7. G. H. Nettleton, English Drama of the Restoration and Eighteenth Century, (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1914), p.54.
 8. Dryden, ed. by W. D. Christie, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1871), p.XXI.
 9. Johnson, op. cit., p.340.
 10. Ker, op. cit., Vol.II, p.17.
 11. Ibid., Vol.I, p.124.
 12. Eliot, op. cit., p.58.
 13. Ker, op. cit., Vol.I, p.36.
 14. "Poetics", The Great Critics, ed. by J. H. Smith and E. W. Parks, (New York: Norton and Co., 1932), p.34.
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44. Ibid., p.75.

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46. Ibid., p.77.
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49. Ibid., p.94.
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91. Ibid., p.213.
92. Loc. cit.
93. Ibid., p.228.
94. Ibid., p.224.
95. Ibid., p.222.
96. Ibid., p.227.
97. Ibid., p.249.

98. Ibid., p.247.
99. Ibid., Vol.II, p.7.
100. Loc. cit.
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109. Ibid., p.140.
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111. Ibid., p.147.
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113. Ibid., p.262.
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117.

CHAPTER IV

"HEROIC DRAMA" AND "RESTORATION COMEDY"

Of these two distinctly Restoration types of drama, Dryden is more closely identified with heroic drama than he is with the comedy of manners. Historically, the growth of the heroic play can be traced to two main sources, the Elizabethan "tragedy of blood" and the French classical drama. Saintsbury brings in Italian influence for "a lyrical admixture" and Spanish influence for bombastic language.¹ Nettleton says that Restoration drama "is the resultant of English and Continental forces"² with the major continental force being French. James Tupper compares the romantic plays of Beaumont and Fletcher to the heroic plays of Dryden to illustrate the many points in common:³ the remote scene with a romantic background, the contrast of pure and sensual love, the emphasis on a spectacular denouement, the resemblance of the heroes of both types, the introduction of a love-lorn maiden, an evil woman and a wicked rival. Kathleen Lynch, while not denying the French influence, traces the growth of the heroic drama to another type of little known English drama, the Platonic plays popular in the court of Charles I.⁴ She compares the lovers of the Platonic drama to the lovers of the heroic drama; in each type, the lovers "always love by destiny. Love assails them at first sight and without warning."⁵ The lovers of the heroic drama are forced to undergo tests before they receive the rewards of their constancy and love; they are torn by an emotional conflict between the sensual and the Platonic, until

the final obstacle to honorable love is removed. It would thus appear that Restoration heroic drama is of a predominantly English origin, with a smaller debt to French heroic tragedies and heroic romances than would first appear to be the case. Nettleton expresses his belief in the continuity of English drama in spite of the Interregnum: "The roots of Restoration drama lie in Elizabethan soil."⁶ In connection with foreign influences he says: "Not even the multiple proofs of Gallic graftings on the stock of Restoration drama can obscure the contention that its roots lie in English soil."⁷

The heroic drama was first produced in England by Davenant in The Siege of Rhodes where most of the prevailing characteristics can be discerned: "In its theme of love and honor, and their personification in martial hero and angelic heroine, in its choice of foreign setting and of semi-historical atmosphere, in its preference for exalted characters and stirring scenes, and in its victory of virtue over the vicissitudes of war, The Seige of Rhodes largely fixed the formula for heroic drama."⁸ Dryden, after adapting the rhymed couplet to this "formula," became the most successful author and the most loyal defender of the heroic drama. In Saintsbury's opinion, Dryden's heroic plays "are almost the only heroic plays worth reading."⁹

Dryden, writing to please his audience, chose the heroic drama, with all its fantastic extravagance, rather than the sterner tragedy of the Elizabethans. As he was the surest barometer of the literary taste of the period, his support seems to prove that heroic drama appealed to the Restoration audience

of wits and rakes and dandies. Bonamy Dobrée's explanation of the popularity of heroic drama supports this contention. In his opinion, the English people were "hungry for heroism,"¹⁰ and were looking to art to provide them with what they could not find in life; they turned to the heroic drama to find characters of "heroic constancy and faultlessly noble sentiments,"¹¹ qualities sadly lacking in the court circles from which the audience was drawn. Bacon's theory of the use of poetry, "to give some shadowe of satisfaction to the minde of man in those points wherein the nature of things doth denie it,"¹² has been carried into practice. The weary, disillusioned sceptics of the Restoration looked for a form of drama which would show man meeting and overcoming all obstacles, rather than for a tragedy which brought ~~them~~ ~~man~~ face to face with man's struggle against an overwhelming fate. Even the term "heroic tragedy" is, as Nettleton observes,¹³ misleading, since the hero and heroine almost invariably emerge in triumph. Dryden, the practical dramatist, apparently knew that his audience was not ready for tragedy, so with unfailing sensitivity he gave them heroic drama.

Added to this main reason for the appeal of heroic drama to the jaded, disillusioned patrons of the Restoration theatre, was the important change which had taken place in the physical aspect of the stage. Davenant again is credited with being the first English dramatist to make use of elaborate stage settings and scenic backgrounds. By Dryden's time the stage was vastly different from the comparatively bare stage used by the Elizabethans. Nettleton attributes to these changes one cause

of the frequency of plays which emphasized spectacle, in Aristotle's opinion the least artistic part of tragedy: "The very success of these devices in opera reacted upon the regular drama, so that tragedy shows a new and increasing reliance upon spectacular effects."¹⁴ The introduction of women actresses must have had further effects upon the drama; it would no longer seem absurd for a dramatist to present love-scenes on the stage.

Dryden's first venture in the heroic drama was in collaboration with his brother-in-law, Sir Robert Howard. The resultant play, The Indian Queen, was followed in 1665 by The Indian Emperor, Dryden's first independent play of this type. Nettleton describes the two productions in terms of Davenant's operas: "In these plays the heroic features of Davenant's dramatic operas are heightened by increased intricacy of plot and violence of action, and by exaggeration of characters and bombastic speech."¹⁵ The culmination of the heroic drama was reached when Dryden produced the Conquest of Granada in 1670. In two parts, each of five acts, Dryden's play has some resemblance to Marlowe's Tamburlaine. Each has a hero of superhuman qualities, a bombastic, fantastic, incredible character who rants his way through ten acts of blood and violence. There is, however, in Dryden's play a kind of unity of tone, which will be considered when examining the play in detail. The final heroic play in couplets, with typical bombast, with the conflict of love and honour, and with triumphant ending is Aureng-Zebe, in which indications of a more subdued tone can be clearly seen: "Plot and dialogue are handled with greater restraint, with in-

creased respect for the dictates and decorum of the French theatre."¹⁶ Although never completely free of the influence of the heroic "tone", Dryden's succeeding plays cannot be classified as typical heroic dramas. All for Love and Don Sebastian are attempts at classical drama, although in the latter play Dryden has added an underplot of comedy in order to please his English audience.

Although Dryden dominated the heroic productions of the time, he was, of course, not the only dramatist who wrote in the heroic manner. Otway and Lee, later to rival Dryden as writers of neo-classical tragedies, both began their dramatic careers as heroic dramatists; the characters created by Dryden's rival, Elkanah Settle, out-ranted Almanzor, and "Starch Johnny" Crowne tried his heavy hand at the same type. The devastating satire of The Rehearsal, although Dryden was the main target, attacked so many of the other dramatists of the period that Scott concludes that Mr. Bayes "may be considered as in some degree a knight of the shire, representing all the authors of the day, and uniting in his person their several absurd peculiarities."¹⁷

A consideration of Dryden's dramatic writings in relation to his criticism centres around the heroic drama, which appears to be a unique type of drama compounded from romantic and classical elements. The essential lack of correspondence between matter and form in heroic plays is described by Dobrée,¹⁸ who finds Dryden attempting to write upon romantic themes while using a form of expression which was neo-classical in its origin. The exuberant passions and bombastic utterances of the heroic characters, who express the romantic idea of an individual ready

and able to defy the universe, are presented in a dramatic form which is restricted by rules based on neo-classical doctrines. Nettleton says that Restoration tragedy "is channelled in 'heroic drama' between artificial banks difficult to surmount."¹⁹ The fate of the heroic drama was thus foredoomed to a short life: "The reason is that the dramatists of that day were trying to express romantic ideas in a form specially evolved from the classical....It never occurred to the critics that content and form were interdependent."²⁰ Dryden's critical essays of the period in which heroic drama remained popular are interesting specimens of the occasional nature of his criticism. As a producer of heroic dramas, in deference to the tastes of the time, Dryden felt obliged to defend them from the criticism of the followers of common sense. His defence, paradoxically based on neo-classical doctrines, supports a type of play "such as would have put to the blush any French classicist or any good-sense author of eighteenth century England."²¹ The struggle to reconcile the contradictory conceptions of neo-classical authority and romantic freedom is very evident in this period. He was probably secretly relieved when his changing dramatic practice allowed him to write plays, such as All for Love and Cleomenes, more easily reconciled to neo-classical standards.

Although Restoration heroic tragedy avoided reality, Restoration comedy, in spite of Lamb's defence of its immorality because of its artificial nature,²² can be termed realistic comedy. Writing for and about a court and an aristocracy in which newly regained liberty had been transformed to license,

the comic dramatists of the period appear to represent a realistic picture of this limited section of English life. The Puritan restraint of the Commonwealth had attempted to build a nation of saints. Upon the return of Charles II and his court, with its tone of moral laxity, the restraints were removed. Macaulay, biased as he is against the Stuarts, nevertheless appears to have estimated the results accurately: "On the very first day on which the restraint of fear is taken away, and on which men can venture to say what they think, a frightful peal of blasphemy and ribaldry proclaim that the short-sighted policy which aimed at making a nation of saints had made a nation of scoffers."²³ With such an audience, the dramatists were free to write in thinly veiled terms about the subject of most vital social interest, the relations of men and women. Macaulay can again be quoted to explain the growth of Restoration comedy: "The character of the drama became conformed to the character of its patrons. The comic poet was the mouthpiece of the most deeply corrupted part of a corrupted society. And in the plays before us we find, distilled and condensed, the essential spirit of the fashionable world during the Anti-puritan reaction."²⁴ The same picture of Restoration court life is given in good-natured detail in the Memoirs of the Comte de Gramont, a contemporary picture of the Court of Charles II.²⁵

Comedy is usually closely connected with the social and ethical life of the audience for which it is written; the characters are of less heroic stature than those of tragedy but closer to man as he is. Tragedy may reflect the mental health

of a period more closely than comedy, but comedy is a surer reflection of the physical environment of the author. The theme of tragedy is man's struggle against overwhelming odds; natural and supernatural forces combine to present an obstacle to man's attainment of happiness. To be effective, the struggle must represent a man of great strength of character who does not compromise to escape his fate. In comedy the theme is closely connected with man as a social animal and with his attempt to conform to the fashions and principles of his physical and social environment. Those who fail to meet the standards of their social group, whether because of folly, excess or exaggeration, provide suitable material for comedy. Dryden, describes the difference between tragedy—heroic drama to him—and comedy: "Admiration would be the delight of one, and satire of the other."²⁶ The comedy of manners has a strong flavour of satire of different intensity with different authors, but present in all the comedies of the period.

The satire of Restoration comedy is directed against those unable to conform to the social standards of the court. As the audience was composed largely of members of the aristocracy who did conform, the sympathy of this audience was with the men and women who accepted their social environment; this usually implied that the audience looked with approval upon characters who were quite immoral according to the standards of any other age. The husband, jealous of an unfaithful wife, is considered a suitable target for satire; on the other hand, the frankly lascivious adulterer might be accepted as a suitable hero. The morals of

the hero are of less importance than his manners, which would include his dress, his speech, his wit and his skill in amorous intrigue. Excessive affectation of dress, of speech, of wit, or of knowledge is a popular subject for the dramatist's satire; again, lack of social conformity is the basis of the attack.

In the evolution of English comedy from Ralph Roister Doister to The Way of the World, we note that the tone and the characters in general remain predominantly English, in spite of all foreign influences. The most famous characters of comedy, in spite of their supposed nationality, are English in their attitude; the imported types come to life only after an infusion of English blood. Even the one-sided figures of Jonson's comedies of "humour" express English qualities and represent certain characteristics easily recognized by his English audience. It is significant that in the revised version of Every Man in his Humour, Jonson changed the scene from Florence to London. What Dobrée says about the transformation of French plots and characters into typically English plays and typical Englishmen would seem to hold good for most foreign importations. The borrowed, or stolen, French comedies became English because the French atmosphere "would not suffer the sea voyage."²⁷ The debt to France and Spain for situation, story and characters has been dealt with in great detail by Mr. Harvey-Jellie.²⁸ However, the final product emerged as an English play, portraying English characters in an English setting. "Even when French authority seems most dominant it never fully imposed its yoke upon the English theatre."²⁹

In the growth of the "comedy of manners", typical of Restoration comedy, the growth of the neo-classical point of view is apparent. Restoration Comedy is interested in external conformity rather than in the psychological, moral or mental abnormalities of man. The criticism of the period, typified by that of Dryden, emphasizes that, "As for comedy, repartee is one of the chiefest graces; the greatest pleasure of the audience is a Chace of wit, kept up on both sides, and swiftly managed."³⁰ The conception of "wit" as more important than "humour" leads to a form of drama in which "the intellectual faculties are exalted above the emotional."³¹ Nettleton believes that the comedy of manners is the natural outgrowth of the critical outlook of the period: "In an age that exalted wit rather than humour, and external form rather than innate genius, it was natural for drama to turn to the comedy of manners."³² The manners were, of course, those of the court and the fashionable society of London aristocracy, the manners of the men described by Dobrée: "These reviled rakes, then, were men of taste and cultivated refinement."³³

To the Restoration dramatists the question was one, not of morals which concerned mankind in general, but of social standards which were related to a limited part of society. The problem which arises in practically all Restoration comedy is the problem of sex; the treatment of the subject is as free from moral restraint as was the life of Charles II. Dobrée believes that the experimental nature of the age is reflected in the interest taken by society—as represented by the court—in

attempting to reconcile sexual promiscuity with the social structure of a Christian country: "Men and women were experimenting in social things; they were trying to rationalize human relationships.....Affection and sexual desire were quite separate."³⁴ The acceptance of the right of either sex to satisfy sexual appetites rather indiscriminately is illustrated in the comedies; the identification of reputation and honour brings out the emphasis on external appearance and conformity to the norm.

Restoration comedy gives us an insight into the age which produced it. The dramatists consciously wrote to delight an audience which was representative of the most morally corrupt part of society, an audience which recognized members of its own group upon the stage. Dryden, as usual, followed the crowd. He did not originate the comedy of manners and, as a study of his criticism shows, he was not proud of his skill as a writer of comedies. As Dryden was "thoroughly susceptible to the spirit and influence of his time,"³⁵ his comedies, like his serious plays, bear the mark of his period. Although his ability as a writer of comedy was less than that of his great successor, Congreve, some of his characters are the ancestors of Mirabell and Mrs. Millamant. In spite of his confession that his nature was not suitable for comedy, he has managed to build vivid scenes and create vigorous characters. His characteristic energy and skill carry him safely through what appears to have been an unpleasant task.

Footnotes.

1. Saintsbury, Dryden, p.20.
2. G. H. Nettleton, English Drama of the Restoration and Eighteenth Century, (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1914), p.35.
3. J. W. Tupper, "The Relation of the Heroic Play to the Romances of Beaumont and Fletcher," P.M.L.A., XIII (1905), pp.584-621.
4. Kathleen Lynch, "Conventions of Platonic Drama in the Heroic Plays of Orrery and Dryden," P.M.L.A., XLIV (1929), pp.456-471.
5. Ibid., p.461.
6. Nettleton, op. cit., p.35.
7. Ibid., p.48.
8. British Dramatists from Dryden to Sheridan, ed. by G. H. Nettleton and A. E. Case, (Chicago: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1939), pp.3-4.
9. The Mermaid Series, John Dryden, op. cit., p.9.
10. Dobrée, Restoration Tragedy, p.16.
11. Ibid., p.20.
12. "Advancement of Learning," Critical Essays, Vol.I, p.9.
13. British Dramatists from Dryden to Sheridan, op. cit., p.4.
14. Nettleton, op. cit., p.41.
15. British Dramatists from Dryden to Sheridan, p.4.
16. Ibid., pp.5-6.
17. Scott, op. cit., p.117.
18. Dobrée, Restoration Tragedy, p.26.
19. Nettleton, op. cit., pp.4-5.
20. Dobrée, op. cit., p.26.
21. Bohn, op. cit., p.99.

22. Charles Lamb, "On the Artificial Comedy of the Last Century", The Essays of Elia, (London: Collins), pp.227-237.
23. Lord Macaulay, Literary and Historical Essays, (London: Oxford University Press, 1923), p.508.
24. Ibid., p.511.
25. Anthony Hamilton, Memoirs of the Comte de Gramont, trans. by P. Quennell, (London: Routledge and Sons, 1930).
26. Ker, op. cit., Vol.I, p.120.
27. Bonamy Dobrée, Restoration Comedy, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924), p.49.
28. W. Harvey-Jellie, Le Théâtre Classique en Angleterre, dans l'âge de John Dryden, (Montreal: Librairie Beauchemin Limitée, 1932).
29. Nettleton, op. cit., p.48.
30. Ker, op. cit., Vol.I, p.72.
31. Nettleton, op. cit., p.5.
32. Ibid., p.72.
33. Dobrée, Restoration Comedy, p.18.
34. Ibid., p.20.
35. Saintsbury, Dryden, p.103.

CHAPTER V

THE CONQUEST OF GRANADA

To modern readers the heroic drama is almost completely incredible. The exploits of the invincible Almanzor, the sudden fits of intense and unreasonable jealousy that beset Boabdalin and Almanzor, the completely perfect Almahide, the absolutely heartless and wicked Lyndaraxa, the complete surrender of Abdelmelech and Abdalla to the love of a woman whose evil they recognize, the nobility and purity of Ozmyn and Benzayda, are all too absolute to be credited. Noyes compares the modern opera and the heroic drama: "The spectators, like those at an opera in our own day, were expected to leave their common sense at home."¹ He continues in his comparison: "The heroic plays offend our twentieth century taste by their bombast and artificiality; in their own time they pleased audiences French enough to relish artificial gallantry, English enough to love sound and fury."² Dryden, writing to make a living, knew what his audience wanted and proceeded to give them "sound and fury" mingled with "artificial gallantry."

The Conquest of Granada, despite the implications of the title, is only incidentally concerned with the capture of the last Moorish stronghold in Spain. Dryden is not interested in the struggle of two races for ascendancy; he is primarily interested in two characters, Almanzor and Almahide, whose love is the foundation upon which the main plot is built.³ The familiar ingredients of heroic drama invariably include at least one pair of such lovers; this play has a second pair, Ozmyn

and Benzayda, whose love for each other provides the material for a second plot. A third group, Abdelmelech, Abdalla and Lyndaraxa, provides another plot closely connected with the main plot through all three characters. Abdelmelech as Boabdelin's most faithful follower, Abdalla as his rebellious brother, and Lyndaraxa as the evil woman whose wiles and ambitions keep the action moving, are all important characters in the main plot. The characters in The Conquest of Granada are typical of the characters in most heroic plays. The hero, Almanzor, superhuman in valour and in skill in arms, is hopelessly entangled in a struggle between his love for Almahide and his honour. The heroine, Almahide, is virtue incarnate; her love for Almanzor is unlawful and dishonourable, therefore it must be suppressed. In the virtuous heroines of heroic drama there is never a struggle between love and honour; honour is always victorious. The wicked woman, another stock character, is represented, as we have seen, by the figure of the beautiful, ambitious, scheming Lyndaraxa whose beauty conquers all—except Almanzor. The king, Boabdelin, represents the third part of the triangle, the disagreeable, obstructive force which stands between the pair of lovers. One unusual thing about Boabdelin is that he is Almahide's husband and so a force which can only be overcome by death—honour would not permit any breach of the marriage vows.

Describing The Conquest of Granada, Nettleton says that "the plot is a maze through which Almanzor advances with assured tread."⁴ During the first five acts of the play Almanzor changes sides twice, fights numerous battles (in all of which he is

victorious), rants against love, falls in love, and is finally banished from his Almahide. Although there is no unity of plot, the figure of Almanzor provides a unifying force to the great variety of action; in spite of the confusion of events the superior vigour, strength and nobility of the hero keep the situations from being isolated events. The sub-plots are similarly held together by the characters, who remain constant and unchanged. Lyndaraxa, clever and evil, is always present whenever Abdalla or Abdelmelech are involved in the plot; Ozmyn and Benzayda, the perfect lovers, tread their perilous way through a series of otherwise unconnected events. Dobrée says that "the test of truth in a tragedy is to be applied not to the facts, but to the feelings."⁵ The facts of The Conquest of Granada are difficult to follow, are a confused mass of battles, deceptions, intrigues and counter-intrigues; the "feelings" are never obscured, since Almanzor or Almahide or Ozmyn or Lyndaraxa are ever willing to express their emotions, usually in extravagant language but frequently in beautiful poetry.

Mr. Tupper, in an article in P.M.L.A., says that heroic plays are held together by their variety of action: "The Conquest of Granada has no character interest, no plot interest; but it has this interest that something is happening in nearly every scene of the play."⁶ It must be admitted that Almanzor is a type common to all heroic drama, a type which provides no psychological interest. However, in spite of his superficial, unbelievable character, it is Almanzor who provides the cohesive force which binds the play together. It is not enough to have

variety of action unless this unifying force is present. As Saintsbury says, in the heroic drama the "hero or heroine takes the place of the action and supplies a more flexible unity of life-interest."⁷ Thus Dryden has succeeded in binding the ten acts of Granada into a cohesive whole because of the interest Almanzor, Almahide and the lesser characters arouse in the audience. Nettleton, while admitting the important part played by the variety of action, also implies that Almanzor is the unifying force: "Nevertheless, despite bombast and grotesqueness, a certain masterful vigour sweeps the action onward. Spirited couplets help to sustain the dialogue, and the vitality of the central character is abundant enough to impel him triumphantly through double the ordinary number of acts of heroic drama."⁸

As he is the central figure in the play, great things must be expected of Almanzor, and Dryden introduces him in such a way as to show the audience immediately that the hero is no ordinary man. The part he played in the bull fight emphasizes his skill, his valour and his nobility of appearance. His entrance coincides with the first brawl between the two Moorish factions; Almanzor enters, appraises the situation at a glance, and then speaks:

"I cannot stay to ask which cause is best;

But this is so to me, because opprest."⁹

After disobeying King Boabdelin and being disarmed, Almanzor speaks again:

"Whence has thou the right to give me death?

Obeded as sovereign by thy subject be,

But know, that I alone am king of me."¹⁰

He continues in his grand manner, telling the king that he has
"not leisure yet to die."¹¹

Almanzor's character is briefly summarized by Prince
Abdalla, who has invited him to Granada to aid the Moors:

Vast is his courage, boundless is his mind,

Rough as a storm, and humorous as wind:

Honour's the only idol of his eyes;

The charms of beauty like a pest he flies."¹²

The king pardons him, "entreats" his subjects to cease their
fighting, and is rebuked by Almanzor:

A beggar speaks too softly to be heard:

Lay down your arms! 'tis I command you now."¹³

Naturally, the Moors obey the unknown hero whose nobility and
valour command immediate respect and obedience. Almanzor an-
swers the Spanish envoy's threats with magnificent self-

assurance: "The Moors have heaven, and me, to assist their cause."¹⁴

After a successful skirmish against the Spanish vanguard he in-
dulges in a little characteristic rant:

It pleases me your army is so great;

For now I know there's more to conquer yet.

By heaven! I'll see what troops you have behind;

I'll face this storm, that thickens in the wind;

And, with bent forehead, full against it go,

Till I have found the last and utmost foe."¹⁵

The first meeting of Almanzor and Almahide introduces the
complicating power of love. Almanzor, in spite of himself, finds

himself hopelessly in love with Almahide, whose vows of marriage have just been given to Boabdelin. In keeping with his character, Almanzor's love is noble, passionate, overwhelming. His first indication of love is when he discovers that:

Honour burns in me not so fiercely bright,
But pale as fires when mastered by the light:

.....

I fear it is the lethargy of love!¹⁶

Honour with Almanzor goes hand in hand with "Arms, and the dusty field."¹⁷ When he realizes the effects of love, he rants unreasonably:

"I wonnot love you; give me back my heart;
But give it, as you had it, fierce and brave.

It was not made to be a woman's slave."¹⁸

The characteristic conflict of heroic drama between love and honour begins as soon as Almanzor and Almahide meet. His first action is an honorable one; spurred on by his "exalted passion", he pleads for Almahide's release and her safe return to Boabdelin. When his request is refused because Abdalla needs the support of Zulema's ten thousand men, whom their leader will draw off unless Almahide is promised to him, Almanzor replies in his usual manner:

What are ten thousand subjects such as they?

If I am scorned—I'll take myself away.¹⁹

Abdalla, however, believes ten thousand to be more valuable than even such a hero as Almanzor, and the hero immediately restores his allegiance to Boabdelin. Almanzor seems to fluctuate

between the two extremes which Scott sees in Dryden's lovers:
"Of a mere moral and sentimental passion he seems to have had little idea, since he frequently substitutes in its place the absurd, unnatural, and fictitious refinements of romance. In short, his love is always in indecorous nakedness, or sheathed in the stiff panoply of chivalry."²⁰

The second meeting of the two lovers shows that love to Almanzor is not always spiritual and Platonic; like most of Dryden's characters he looks upon love as something more tangible than sighs and vows and praises. The conflict of love and honour in this scene is personified by the lovers: Almahide represents unassailable honour, while Almanzor represents irresistible love. Almanzor asks,

"My love is languishing, and starved to death.

And would you give me charity—in breath?"²¹

His attack proves partially successful when Almahide admits that she loves him, but regrets that her previous vows stand in the way of honorable love. As Almanzor realizes that this is the only kind of love which would win such a paragon of virtue, he asks and receives leave to win her from the forces in opposition:

"Since I no longer have to combat you,

That did the greatest difficulty bring;

The rest are small, a father and a king!"²²

The father and king combine to discomfit the confident Almanzor, who is disarmed and led away to be executed. Only through the pleading of Almahide can he be saved, and then at the high price of her marriage to Boabdelin:

"But at no other price would I rate your life,
Than my consent and oath to be his wife."²³

The next two speeches illustrate the powerful force typical of heroic love.

Almanzor: Would you, to save my life, my love betray?
Here; take me; bind me; carry me away;
Kill me! I'll kill you if you disobey.

Almahide: That absolute command your love does give,
I take, and charge you by that power to live,²⁴

As Dobrée says, "It was almost shameful not to betray your country if love demanded it of you."²⁵ Almahide's offer of a sister's love is scornfully rejected; such is not Almanzor's idea of love:

A sister's love! that is so palled a thing,
What pleasure can it to a lover bring?

'Tis like thin food to men in fevers spent;
Just keeps alive, but gives no nourishment.²⁶

After a sorrowful and stormy farewell, the ill-fated lovers are separated to close the first part of the play on a note which is only saved from sentimentality by the rude entrance of Boabdelin who gloats over his defeated rival, talks of future wars, and as the curtain drops goes his way to love and Almahide.

Such is the love of Almanzor and Almahide and such is the love of Ozmyn and Benzayda. With neither pair of lovers is there ever any internal obstacle to be overcome. Although Almanzor does believe the evidence which seems to prove Almahide's adulterous actions with Abdelmelech, he still loves. Scott says that

love in heroic drama "required a sacrifice of every wish, hope, and feeling, unconnected with itself, and was expressed in the language of prayer and of adoration. It was that love which was neither to be chilled by absence, nor wasted by time, nor quenched by infidelity. No caprice in the object beloved entitled her slave to emancipate himself from her fetters; no command, however unreasonable, was to be disobeyed; if required by the fair mistress of his affections, the hero was not only to sacrifice his interest, but his friend, his honour, his word, his country."²⁷ Love is the motivating force throughout the entire play. Abdalla becomes a rebel because of his love for Lyndaraxa, obeying her commands even when he recognizes them as evil. Boabdelin is less a villain than a jealous husband and lover, but as an obstacle to the love of Almanzor and Almahide his death is inevitable. Zulema loves Almahide and loses his life in an attempt to gain his love. Ozmyn and Benzayda finally reconcile the warring factions through their deep and undeviating love for each other in spite of seemingly insurmountable obstacles. Tupper compares Marlowe's heroes with those of Dryden "in their contempt of the impossible and their overwhelming desire to attain their ends", but adds that there is a difference in the desired ends, as "the hero of the heroic play is first and always a lover, and his heroism, is directed invariably toward the attainment of his love."²⁸ Queen Isabella is probably expressing Dryden's idea of the place of love in heroic drama:

"Love's an heroic passion, which can find

No room in any base degenerate mind:

It kindles all the soul with honour's fire
To make the lover worthy his desire."²⁹

Tupper also compares the heroic drama and the romantic plays of Beaumont and Fletcher, showing the similarity of material but emphasizing the difference in the manner of treating these materials: "The romantic play is concerned with love and its concomitant passions of jealousy, hate, revenge, all exhibited in full fruition; the heroic play deals with love and a kind of exaggerated valor, with only sporadic exhibitions of jealousy, generosity, and revenge. The conflict of emotions is much greater in the romantic than in the heroic play....It is the obvious that occasions the situations of the heroic play....The problem in the romantic play involves the heart to heart relations of the lovers; in the heroic play it is merely the removal of an obstructive force in the way of marriage. Consequently there is in the heroic play a constant background of war."³⁰ In The Conquest of Granada the background of war is constantly being brought into the action of the play. Almanzor's qualities of valour and skill and nobility, Boabdelin's courage but indecisiveness, Abdalla's treachery because of love, Ozmyn's loyalty to his father in conflict with his love for Benzayda, Abdelmelech's unwavering loyalty to his honour, are all illustrated by the confusion of sieges, attacks and counter-attacks. By means of a battle Dryden can eliminate all obstacles to the marriage of his lovers. Boabdelin can die as a king should die, nobly and in battle. The treacherous Lyndaraxa can be given her just reward by allowing her to gain her crown only long enough to

realize fully how terrible is death. Ozmyn can reconcile love and honour by using his shield to protect the father of Benzayda while keeping his sword in his scabbard rather than use it against his father's friends. Almanzor can be recalled from his banishment because of Boabdelin's need of his help, even when the king realizes that a dangerous rival in love will once more threaten his happiness. Love and honour in their perpetual struggle for supremacy can be depicted most easily through the use of the background of war.

The use of the martial background does not appear to have been chosen solely because of the needs of the plot. In the heroic play there is a great deal of action on the stage; there are single combats, battle scenes, besieged castles, scenes of unfortunate prisoners. Such spectacles appeal to the eye, and the heroic drama in general appears to have been designed to entertain the eye and the ear rather than the intellect. The demands of the audience were blamed for the presentation of so much action; Dryden, pleading his case, says that battles have been presented on English stages by Shakespeare and Jonson and adds that they are necessary "to produce the effects of an heroic play."³¹ Whatever the cause may be, Dryden is not satisfied to leave war and bloodshed in the background; it must be presented on the stage rather than presented through narration.

The changes in the theatre itself, as previously noted, must have had a decided influence on the presentation of spectacular action. The introduction of elaborate settings, the reduction in the size of the proscenium, the use of curtains,

and the introduction of actresses for the female parts, all affected the type of drama.³² Nettleton credits Davenant with being the first to make consistent use of these innovations and adds: "In thus deliberately attempting not merely a more elaborate pictorial background, but a more faithful and consistent setting for drama, Davenant set in play forces whose ultimate results he could not have foreseen."³³ The choice of setting was partly dictated by the desire to have an exotic background; the choice for heroic drama was usually some scene distant in time and place. The acoustics of the new theatres, according to Ham in his biography of Otway and Lee, left much to be desired; the result was a style of acting with exaggerated movements and an artificial chant. "After the Restoration, the conventions of acting seem to have commenced to harden into elaborate formulas, with the development of heroic tragedy tending to accelerate the process."³⁴ He describes the acting with a vivid phrase: "magnificent sweep of gesture and operatic use of voice."³⁵ Such conditions were ideal for such ranting heroes as Almanzor and such noble heroines as Almahide.

The Conquest of Granada, typical of heroic drama in its emphasis on love and on honour, in its background of war and its presentation of vigorous action on the stage, is also typical in other ways. It is written in the accepted form for heroic drama, the heroic couplet; it is wholly serious, there being no mixture of tragedy and comedy in heroic drama proper; and it ends happily, unlike the tragedies of the Elizabethans. Although Boabdelin, Abdalla, Abdelmelech, Lyndaraxa, Zulema, Hamet and

Gomel, are all killed during the course of the action, the two pairs of lovers are united at the close of the play. These numerous deaths are all more or less necessary to bring the required result, and little sympathy is felt for any of the victims.

The introduction of machinery here, in the form of the ghost of Almanzor's mother, is still another convention commonly used by heroic dramatists. In order to maintain the atmosphere of the heroic poem, Dryden introduces the ghost; he explains that the poet cannot omit "these gods and spirits, and these enthusiastic parts of poetry"³⁶ without losing the epic flavour which he believes to be an important part of the heroic play. Upon the ghost's first appearance even Almanzor is affected momentarily:

"Well mayst thou make thy boast whate'er thou art!

Thou art the first e'er made Almanzor start.

My legs

Shall bear me to thee in their own despite:

I'll rush into the covert of thy night,

And pull thee backward, by thy shroud, to light."³⁷

The ghost serves as further evidence of the superhuman valour of Almanzor, who can act with courage even though he admits:

"My blood, like icicles, hangs in my veins,

And does not drop."³⁸

The ghost's warning message is disregarded, as Almanzor's love proves stronger than honour and fear of damnation combined. Dryden has used the first appearance of the ghost to reveal the character of Almanzor with his bold courage and passionate love.

The second appearance is merely narrated and allows the Spaniards to defeat Almanzor and the Moors without loss of prestige to the great hero. The wounded Almanzor with uplifted sword is saved from parricide by the shrill voice of his long-dead mother who pleads:

"Spare, spare his life...who gave thee breath."³⁹
Almanzor, already acquainted with this supernatural relative, obeys, and the war is over. The play ends happily; all those are rewarded who deserve reward, and all who deserve punishment are punished by death.

1. The Poetical Works of John Dryden, p.XX.
2. Loc. cit.
3. Cf. Tupper, op. cit., p.590: "It is the love affair of Almanzor and Almahide, and not the fate of Boabdelin's kingdom that furnishes the interest."
4. Nettleton, op. cit., p.62.
5. Dobrée, Restoration Tragedy, p.13.
6. Tupper, op. cit., p.593.
7. The Mermaid Series, John Dryden, op. cit., p.4.
8. Nettleton, op. cit., p.63.
9. "The Conquest of Granada", The Mermaid Series, John Dryden, Act I, Sc. i, p.45.
10. Ibid., p.47.
11. Ibid., p.48.
12. Ibid., p.49.
13. Ibid., p.50.
14. Ibid., Act I, Sc.i, p.52.
15. Ibid., Act II, Sc.i, p.54.

16. Ibid., Act III, Sc.i, p.73.
17. Loc. cit.
18. Ibid., Act III, Sc.i, p.74.
19. Ibid., Act III, Sc.i, p.78.
20. Scott, op. cit., p.409.
21. Ibid., Act IV, Sc.ii, p.95.
22. Ibid., Act IV, Sc.ii, p.97.
23. Ibid., Act V, Sc.ii, p.112.
24. Loc. cit.
25. Dobrée, Restoration Tragedy, p.21.
26. The Conquest of Granada, Act V, Sc.ii, p.113.
27. Scott, op. cit., p.102.
28. Tupper, op. cit., p.585.
29. The Conquest of Granada, Pt.II, Act I, Sc.i, p.125.
30. Tupper, op. cit., pp.586-7.
31. Ker, op. cit., Vol.I, p.154.
32. A. Nicoll, The English Theatre, (London: Nelson and Sons, Ltd., 1936), pp.78-108.
33. Nettleton, op. cit., p.29.
34. R. G. Ham, Otway and Lee, Biography from a Baroque Age, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1931), p.34.
35. Loc. cit.
36. Ker, op. cit., Vol.I, p.152.
37. The Conquest of Granada, Pt.II, Act IV, Sc.iii, p.179.
38. Ibid., p.180.
39. Ibid., Pt.II, Act V, Sc.ii, p.205.

CHAPTER VI

AURENG-ZEBE

The Conquest of Granada exemplifies Dryden's heroic drama at its most extravagant, while Aureng-Zebe, the last and most restrained of his heroic plays, is of special importance as a contrast to the earlier heroic drama. The evolution towards All for Love becomes apparent after a brief comparison of the two heroic plays in relation to some of the conventional characteristics of this type of drama. Nettleton's comment can be taken as a concentrated introduction: "Plot and dialogue are handled with greater restraint, with increased respect for the dictates and decorum of the French theatre."¹

In this, the last of his rhymed heroic plays Dryden again uses the conventional theme of love and honour in conflict; he creates an irresistible beauty, Indamora, whose eyes charm all the important male characters in the play. In spite of her constant, irreproachable love for Aureng-Zebe, she is besieged by the Emperor, by the aged Arimant, and by the young Morat. The motivation for the action of the play springs almost exclusively from the love aroused in the hearts of her panting admirers. The emperor deserts his ambitious, jealous wife, disowns his loyal, honorable son Aureng-Zebe, and gives his empire to the ranting, ambitious, power-loving Morat. His reason is completely out of control; honour and conscience make vain and feeble attempts to rebel against the all-embracing power of dishonorable love. The struggle between love and honour is never very exciting with the Emperor; love is too completely in the ascendant.

The actions of Morat are also dictated by the love which burns so suddenly and so fiercely after his first encounter with the captive queen. Until he falls under the powerful influence of Indamora's virtue, honour and beauty, Morat is little better than Aureng-Zebe's description of him:

"When thou wert formed, Heaven did a man begin;

But the brute soul, by chance, was shuffled in."²

However, he dies a reformed man because of the chastening effect of his love for Indamora; he is even able to make a last conscience-stricken farewell to his faithful wife, Melesinda. As Morat is an obstacle to the fulfilment of the love of Aureng-Zebe and Indamora, his death is as inevitable as Boabdelin's in The Conquest of Granada. The manner of Morat's death, the change in his attitude to his brother and to his wife, all emphasize the powerful effects of a strong, purifying, heroic love.

Old Arimant, senilely in love with Indamora, becomes a most useful slave to the young queen, who uses her beauty to exact loyalty from the man who is fit for a friend but not for a lover. Rather heartlessly, Indamora (controlling him through smiles and frowns), sends Arimant with letters to Aureng-Zebe, and uses him as a messenger. Whatever Arimant does is dictated by his love for Indamora or his loyalty to the Emperor; if any conflict arises, love is invariably the stronger force.

Aureng-Zebe is built on a grander scale than the other characters, and has more soul-searching conflicts, but his actions are also governed by love and honour. His honorable love for

Indamora seldom contradicts his honour; with Aureng-Zebe, love and honour combine to give him the strength to withstand dishonorable actions. He is able to refuse the throne, offered in exchange for his surrender of Indamora to his amorous old father, because such an action would be a disavowal of both the virtues which are the strongest motivating forces in his character, love and honour. The struggle in Aureng-Zebe is between dishonorable self-interest on the one side and honorable love for Indamora, reinforced by loyalty to his emperor and father, on the other. The initial problem of reconciling obedience to his father and constant love for Indamora brought a brief conflict in which love and honour are opposing forces. As the play proceeds, however, they become allies, which provide strength and power to withstand all temptations.

The usual background of war is utilized by Dryden; the confusion of battles and betrayals and changing fortunes is relatively as great as in The Conquest of Granada. There is less action presented directly to the audience, the armies remaining off the stage, but the importance of war as a deus ex machina to remove obstacles is maintained. Morat, whose reformation might have proved embarrassing, is killed in an honorable fight; Nourmahal, the wicked lady, is eliminated by suicide after her defeat in an attempt to win control of India for herself; Arimant, the hopeless lover, dies gloriously for the side of virtue; the Emperor is finally restored to the rule of honour after witnessing the unswerving loyalty of the wronged Aureng-Zebe; Aureng-Zebe is shown as a brilliant and valorous leader of men, as a skilful

and courageous soldier, and as a man whose exploits attract the devotion and loyalty of all his followers.

The setting is as usual in a distant, exotic land, giving the stage manager an opportunity to provide elaborate and colourful scenery. The time of the action is 1660—an unusual choice for heroic dramatists, who preferred the distant in time as well as in place. Dryden probably felt quite free to take liberties with his characters because of the distance between Restoration England and Aureng-Zebe's India. There is a marked absence of songs or dances, the only music being provided by Nourmahal to transform Aureng-Zebe's despair into the softer passion of love, and the only meretricious ceremony being Morat's funeral procession, followed by the mourning Melesinda.

The points which mark Aureng-Zebe as being transitional in Dryden's dramatic productions are not noticeable in the characteristics of the play so far discussed. There are many qualities which rank this play as heroic; the emphasis on love and honour, the setting and the military background, the character types, the use of couplets, the happy ending and the exclusion of all comic relief. However, besides differences in the treatment of these familiar ingredients, there are other variations. There is no secondary hero and no secondary pair of lovers; there is no use made of the supernatural (unless Melesinda's gloomy predictions are accepted as such); and there is comparatively little rant of the Almanzor type. Another important change is expressed by Dryden in the Epilogue where he says that Aureng-Zebe is a play with,

"The action great, yet circumscribed by time."³

The rules have apparently taken a stronger hold of Dryden's theory than they had when The Conquest of Granada was written; in practice, however, only the lesser unities of time and place have been observed, the cohesive force of this play, like that of Granada, being the characters rather than the action. Further differences in the two plays can be discovered by a comparison of Dryden's treatment of the materials in the two plays.

Dryden takes great liberties with the usually rigid heroic couplet. Saintsbury says, "It is remarkable that the structure of the verse itself would have led to the conclusions that Dryden was about to abandon rhyme."⁴ In his earlier heroic plays Dryden appears to have been happy in the restraint and firmness of his chosen form of verse; in Aureng-Zebe he appears rebellious against the confining couplet, resorting to half-lines, and particularly to enjambement. It seems superfluous to point to passages in the play itself when we have Dryden's own word for his readiness to abandon rhyme. In the Prologue to the play he admits that he

"Grows weary of his long-loved mistress, Rhyme."⁵

This weariness is responsible for a much more varied form of verse, a form much less rigidly confined to correctly polished couplets.

Perhaps the most pronounced difference in the two plays, however, is to be found in the characterization of the two heroes. Aureng-Zebe is a more modest, a more restrained, a more loyal Almanzor. Whereas Almanzor rants about his valour and his skill

as a soldier, Aureng-Zebe lets others describe his; whereas Almanzor is a law unto himself, Aureng-Zebe is almost too honorably loyal to the authority of his father; whereas Almanzor is wholly governed by his emotions of love, pride and jealousy, Aureng-Zebe is controlled by his reason, at least occasionally. It is difficult to conceive of Almanzor giving the following justly famous speech, while it is perfectly in character for the more rational Aureng-Zebe:

When I consider life, 'tis all a cheat;
Yet, fooled with hope, men favour the deceit;
Trust on, and think to-morrow will repay:
To-morrow's falser than the former day;
Lies worse, and, while it says, we shall be blest
With some new joys, cuts off what we possess.
Strange cozenage! None would live past years
again,
Yet all hope pleasure in what yet remain;
And, from the dregs of life, think to receive,
What the first sprightly running could not give.⁶

Almanzor can meditate upon life and fate and death, but he almost invariably concludes his speech in a tone of characteristic bombast. After the meeting with the ghost, Almanzor tries for eight lines to solve the mysteries of life and then reverts to character:

Let fate be fate; the lover and the brave
Are ranked, at least, above the vulgar slave.
Love makes me willing to my death to run:

And courage scorns the death it cannot shun.⁷

In one important respect the two heroes are very similar: both are hopelessly in love, and both are given to violent and unreasonable fits of jealousy. In each case it appears to be conventional to believe first appearances and disbelieve the apparently unfaithful mistress.

These two heroic plays of Dryden's, are interesting not only as plays, but as indications of his changing tastes in drama. The next play to be examined, All for Love, marks the peak of Dryden's respect for rules and authority, and, at the same time, is an indication of his ever-present admiration of Shakespeare. All for Love, with its careful following of neo-classical rules, is Dryden's only play of this type, the demands of his audience forcing him to return to the use of tragi-comedy. The study of the classical All for Love, together with an examination of the tragi-comedy, Don Sebastian, further illustrates Dryden's changing dramatic practice, changes which are echoes of the changes in his audience, and which are themselves productive of changes in his theory.

1. British Dramatists from Dryden to Sheridan, op. cit., pp.5-6.
2. "Aureng-Zebe", The Mermaid Series, John Dryden, Act III, Sc.i, p.388.
3. Ibid., p.438.
4. Saintsbury, Dryden, p.57.
5. Aureng-Zebe, p.344.
6. Ibid., Act IV, Sc.i, p.398.
7. The Conquest of Granada, Pt.II, Act IV, Sc.iii, p.182.

CHAPTER VII

ALL FOR LOVE

It seems inevitable that Dryden's play, All for Love, should be compared with Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra. Such a comparison usually results in the condemnation of Dryden's play as a second-rate rendition of a familiar story. However, in justice to Dryden it should be remembered that his treatment of the material is entirely different from Shakespeare's. Dryden is writing in the period which produced the criticism of Thomas Rymer and his disciples of the "School of Sense". He is not free to deal in such universals as did Shakespeare, being restricted by the theories and the practice of his time. Nettleton, while emphasizing the need to judge All for Love by Restoration standards, briefly discusses the differences to be noted in this play and its Shakespearian model: "The Restoration mind neither could nor would recapture the careless Elizabethan rapture. Even Dryden, whose instinctive love of Shakespeare often rose superior to the critical compunction of his age, was never free from its form and pressure."¹ He notes that the unities, decorum, and poetic justice, were all part of the "form and pressure" of the age which resulted in a play which "gained simplicity at the cost of comprehensive vision."²

Saintsbury believes that Dryden chose the form of his play largely because he realized the "limitations of his own great powers....to emulate the splendour and the poignancy of the passion between 'Egypt' and Antony."³ However, he adds that,

although the "result is no longer quite divine poetry"⁴; he has succeeded in writing a play in "a new form almost as suitable to the subject....as any form could possibly be."⁵ Dobrée's verdict on the two plays is an almost regretful admission that Shakespeare had written a more magnificent, more universal, more beautifully poetic play than has Dryden: "It is Shakespeare's poetic genius in the use of metaphor, his incomparable capacity for marrying ideas, his irresistible mind working ever on the word and making it flesh, which makes his play more universal than Dryden's."⁶

Although All for Love does not qualify for the high praise which Dobrée gives to Antony and Cleopatra, it is nevertheless a good play. The temptation to compare the two plays, however, will be resisted as much as possible, since this study will be made with reference to Dryden's other dramatic productions, especially The Conquest of Granada and Aureng-Zebe. As already indicated, the classical trends noted in Aureng-Zebe reach their climax in All for Love. A comparison of the heroes of the three plays serves to illustrate this completion of the metamorphosis; the weakness of Antony emphasizes Dryden's rejection of the heroic play with its invincible, victorious heroes. Scott condemns Antony's character as being historically false: "There is too much of the love-lorn knight-errant, and too little of the Roman warrior, in Dryden's hero."⁷ Garnett's condemnation includes both of the main characters: "Some weakness may be forgiven in a hero, but the heroism of the real Antony is swallowed up in weakness....Dryden's Cleopatra wants this character of univer-

sality."⁸ While it must be admitted that Antony is too prone to bewail his ill fortune and too ready to accept the defeat which might have been averted, the fact remains that Dryden's previous heroes have been men without any weaknesses. The invincible, incredible Almanzor sweeps all before him, rules his own fate, emerges happy and victorious; the loyal, honorable, noble Aureng-Zebe suffers temporary misfortunes which are swept aside by his magnificent, overwhelming skill and courage. Antony, however, is not one of the supermen; he is all too human, with too much human weakness to overcome his difficulties. The invincible, unconquerable, all-powerful hero of the heroic drama has been replaced by a hero who "ought not to be a character of perfect virtue....nor yet altogether wicked."⁹

Because his hero and heroine have these human weaknesses, the play cannot follow the heroic pattern. The happy ending, characteristic of Dryden's heroic plays, is impracticable when his hero and heroine are faced by obstacles which are too large to be removed by ordinary humans, as Antony and Cleopatra appear to be in Dryden's play. Almanzor and Aureng-Zebe proceed in a comparatively direct line towards their objective. Almanzor loves Almahide, so he fights and rants until the obstacles are removed; Aureng-Zebe finally overcomes all external opposition and is rewarded by the hand of the lovely Indamora. Antony's position is more complicated, since he is already married to Octavia, and he has already won the love of Cleopatra. The moral standards of the heroic drama could not allow such a situation to develop, since the heroine must always be above reproach. The introduction

of the disturbing figure of Octavia serves to emphasize the weakness of hero and heroine, especially in comparison with the honorable lovers of heroic drama. Dryden, dealing with historical figures, is forced to accept certain well-known facts as his raw material. As a result, his main characters cannot be truly heroic, and the play, without a superhuman hero and a faultless heroine, of necessity follows a different pattern from the heroic drama.

Antony is still governed largely by the heroic qualities of love and honour, but these are not the only motivating forces at work. He is a Roman general, a general whose exploits have rivalled those of Caesar and Pompey, and as a Roman he is influenced by tradition, by pride of race, and by patriotic loyalty. He is a husband and father; the entrance of the loyal Octavia with their young children momentarily obliterates the fascinating figure of Cleopatra. He has a great capacity for friendship; Ventidius and Dolabella, although almost completely opposite in character, are both deeply loved by Antony. Unlike Almanzor or Aureng-Zebe, Antony is a complex human individual with many complicating motives. The inner conflicts experienced by the heroic heroes are invariably prompted by the struggle between love and honour. With Antony the inner struggle is more complex, less easily classified, and less easily resolved. The stern Roman general, the faithful friend of Ventidius and Dolabella, the conscience-stricken husband and father, are all opposed by the love-lorn slave to Cleopatra's charms. Although the conflict is predominantly between love and honour, all the complexities of Antony's character almost automatically insure a

departure from the formula of heroic drama. The clinging arms of Cleopatra and the brawny figure of Ventidius represent the conflict of love and honour. In a heroic drama the hero could have fought his battles, defeated his enemies, and reconciled these two opposing forces. Antony, however, was faced with the insurmountable problem of being married to the noble Octavia, while still loving his Egyptian queen. In The Conquest of Granada Dryden had been able to dispose of Boabdelin in honorable battle in order to leave Almanzor and Almahide free to love honorably. Octavia cannot be so easily removed; she has all the legal and moral rights to Antony, and poetic justice would not permit Dryden to kill a woman whose only fault was her marriage to Antony. The only solution to the knotty problem was Antony's death; thus the classical form of tragedy replaces the heroic drama with its happy and triumphant hero.

The heroines of heroic drama, exemplified by Almahide and Indamora, were all of spotless honour. The eager hero, occasionally overcome by love, could propose dishonorable love, but the heroine was always honour personified. There could be no doubts in her mind; death was preferable to dishonor. Although Dryden's Cleopatra is not painted as a wicked woman, she is certainly not spotless. Dryden's introduction of Octavia emphasizes the dubious position occupied by Cleopatra; the meeting of the two women does not increase our respect for either, but it does have the effect of showing Cleopatra as "the other woman." Dryden, restrained by the contemporary critical doctrines of poetic justice and decorum, could not follow the heroic pattern of

triumphant hero and heroine; the death of Cleopatra was as inevitable as that of Antony, if justice was to triumph. That Antony and Cleopatra were historical characters had a great influence on the final scenes of the play, but the fact remains that Dryden chose their story as suitable for the tragedy which he "writ" for himself. The ready-made plot with its background of all-powerful love was adapted by Dryden to suit his aim: the production of a tragedy following the classical form.

Dryden is, of course, aware of the change in his characters. In the Prologue he almost defiantly describes his hero, with implied comparisons with the ranting heroes of his previous plays:

His hero, whom you wits his bully call,
Bates of his mettle, and scarce rants at all:
He's somewhat lewd; but a well-meaning mind;
Weeps much; fights little; but is wond'rous kind.¹⁰

He continues in his discourse describing Octavia and Cleopatra:

"I could name more: a wife, and mistress too;
Both (to be plain) too good for most of you:
The wife well-natured, and the mistress true."¹¹

The contrast between the characters presented to the Restoration audience in All for Love with those characters previously presented by Dryden, Otway, Lee, and other heroic dramatists, must have immediately announced to the intelligent audience that heroic drama was being abandoned.

Dryden's announcement in the Prologue that "he fights this day unarmed,—without his rhyme", must have been taken as a sign of the approaching death of heroic drama. As previously

noted, the tight, hard couplets of The Conquest of Granada were loosened in Aureng-Zebe, so that the change to blank verse must have been expected. The quality of Dryden's verse in All for Love is generally accepted as being unusually high. T. S. Eliot says, "It is really the norm of blank verse for later blank verse playwrights."¹² Dobree says that in this play "he tightened up blank verse, which had run to seed in Shakespeare's successors."¹³ Saintsbury agrees with this view-point, emphasizing the excellence of Dryden's blank verse as a model for succeeding dramatists.¹⁴ The choice of an example can be made from almost any section of the play; however, the following speech of Antony's has been chosen as a sample of blank verse, since it also illustrates the restrained speech of Antony in comparison with the rant of Almanzor. Antony, speaking of his great love for Cleopatra, is carried away by his exalted passion, but the blank verse seems to act as a restraining influence. The tone of this passage is subdued but impressive; Antony, deeply moved as he is, still expresses himself in passionate but simple poetry:

How I loved.

Witness, ye days and nights, and all ye hours,
That danced away with down upon your feet,
As all your business were to count my passion!
One day passed by, and nothing saw but love:
Another came, and still 'twas only love:
The suns were wearied out with looking on,
And I untired with loving.
I saw you every day, and all the day;

And every day was still but as the first,

So eager was I still to see you more.¹⁵

Bronowski has high praise for All for Love as a good play which is also good poetry: "He could not keep his judgment of the play free of the standards of poetry, nor his judgment of poetry free of the standards of the play. Once or twice he did prove that the two can be made one: that the poetry need not master the play as it had done for the Elizabethans, and that the play need not master all else as it has done for us. All for Love is such a proof."¹⁶

As a play, All for Love must be considered in relation to the plays of its own period. The restraint of the main characters, the tragic ending, the switch to blank verse, have all been discussed. Another striking quality of the play is its strict observance of the neo-classical unities. In the Preface, Dryden describes his play in terms of its technical perfection: "The fabric of the play is regular enough, as to the inferior parts of it; and the Unities of Time, Place, and Action, more exactly observed, than perhaps the English theatre requires."¹⁷ The compression of the action of the play into twenty-four hours seems to have been unfortunate, especially when the great Shakespearian play looms as a magnificent, sprawling model. The unities of place and of action also tend to eliminate the cosmic background by which Shakespeare emphasized the greatness of Antony's loss. Nettleton believes, however, that Dryden, in All for Love, "touched perhaps the height of poetic tragedy of his age."¹⁸ He emphasizes the classical restraint, the compression

of time and action, and the simplicity of characters,¹⁹ by all of which this play is sharply differentiated from its Shakespearian model. In his opinion, Dryden "could not hope to rival the imperial sweep and infinite variety of Shakespeare's world tragedy, but the classical limitations brought a gain in unity and concentration of action."²⁰

The difference between Dryden's classical masterpiece and his heroic plays becomes more apparent when the qualities emphasized by Nettleton are considered. The classical restraint has been discussed in relation to the characters and the verse form; there is an almost complete absence of rant and bombast, which are so characteristic of the heroic drama. The compression of time and action, carefully observed in All for Love, is neglected in The Conquest of Granada and only partially followed in Aureng-Zebe. The action of All for Love takes place in a single day, and all actions lead directly to the conclusion which appears to be inevitable. Dobrée says that in a play, "only those events are action which are the outcome of the emotions and needs of the protagonists, and are necessary to the tragic climax."²¹ According to this definition, many events in The Conquest of Granada cannot be considered to be action, whereas in All for Love the events chosen by Dryden are all necessary to bring the play to its logical conclusion, or to illustrate the emotions of the characters. The action which leads Antony and Cleopatra to their doom is the only action that Dryden introduces; there is no sub-plot, no humour, no unnecessary character. The Conquest of Granada, although wholly serious, none/theless

has minor plots which are only loosely connected to the main story of Almanzor; Aureng-Zebe is more closely knit, with all the characters having a share in the main action, but many of the events have little in common with Dobrée's definition of what constitutes action in a play. In the heroic dramas, even in the transitional Aureng-Zebe, Dryden is dealing with stock characters and stock situations which lead to spectacle, rant and violence, often entirely without significance as far as the furtherance of the plot is concerned. In All for Love, Dryden uses the classical way of writing,²² preserving a unity of tone with no peaks of passion intruded for the sake of spectacular effect. He makes no minor excursions, avoids all but the essential action, and brings his characters to their inevitable doom.

Parsons in his article, The English Heroic Play, says that the English heroic dramatists and the French neo-classical dramatists "were following different ideals of dramatic unity."²³ The two different ideals can be found in Dryden's plays. The Conquest of Granada "is not the study of a tragic conflict, but a representation of a triumphant career and it receives epic unity from the character of the hero."²⁴ In All for Love, on the other hand, Dryden is consciously striving to follow the doctrines of Rymer, Rapin, and Bossu. Instead of building a plot around an invincible hero, Dryden has adopted the typical neo-classical idea of the importance of plot itself. He is now apparently in agreement with Aristotle's definition of tragedy, with its emphasis on the fable. The dramatic unity of All for Love thus depends upon action, rather than upon character. The

increased simplicity of the plot of Aureng-Zebe when compared with The Conquest of Granada, prepares us for the final change to be found in All for Love, the only one of Dryden's plays which can be said to have real unity of action. Dobree, comparing Dryden's plays with those of his Elizabethan predecessors, has high praise for All for Love: "Yet in its result, All for Love is more decisively a tragedy than of those above referred to except Shakespeare's best....Dryden's play has a coherence, a direction to one end, in a word, a unity, which we may wrest from the others, but which they do not, like his, compel."²⁵

Another fundamental difference between the heroic plays and All for Love is to be found in the nature of the dramatic conflict. The heroic plays deal primarily with a pair of lovers whose happiness is obstructed by some external obstacle: a husband, a father's jealousy, a wicked woman or a scheming villain. A tragedy, such as All for Love, deals with characters whose happiness is obstructed by a force which cannot be overcome. As tragic lovers, Antony and Cleopatra are caught in a web from which they can neither withdraw nor advance without disaster. The heroic play deals out death to all who oppose the triumphant couple; tragedy results in the death of the protagonists themselves. Dryden's change from heroic drama to neo-classical tragedy is nowhere made more obvious than in the change from triumphant lovers to the defeated, dying Antony and Cleopatra. All for Love, however, was Dryden's only tragedy written in strict accordance with his principles, as he apparently felt the English taste for more action on the stage, and for tragi-comedy, was

too strong to be denied. The one play which is occasionally mentioned as rivalling All for Love in quality, Don Sebastian, while retaining some of the characteristics of the neo-classical drama, is in reality a mixture of comedy and tragedy. As usual, Dryden obeyed the dictates of his audience in opposition to his own principles, which by 1679 were neo-classical in tone, as can be seen in his preface to Troilus and Cressida. The experiment in classical tragedy was reluctantly abandoned, but not before Dryden had left us the one play he wrote for himself. In Cleomenes, he approaches neo-classical tragedy, with certain allowances made for popular support. In the Preface to this play he writes: "After all, it was a bold attempt of mine, to write upon a single Plot, unmix'd with Comedy; which tho it be the natural and true Way, yet it is not to the Genius of the Nation. Yet to gratify the barbarous Party of my Audience, I gave them a short Rabble-scene!"²⁶ He also extends the time of his play in order to include the famine scene, but adds: "In such a Case, 'tis better to trespass on a Rule, than leave out a Beauty."²⁷

In All for Love, Dryden's classical criticism finds its most satisfying outlet in his practice. The rules and the examples of the French classicists, always dear to Dryden with his love of order and his respect for authority, have been allowed to control the practical application of his theory. There is no need for Dryden to juggle and distort Aristotle, or Rapin, or Rymer, as long as he is able to write for himself without allowing the clamorous dictates of his audience to influence his work.

He gives his audience a play which he is pleased to present, pleased because, for once his principles have not been thrown overboard for the sake of popular appeal. Forced by his financial difficulties to return to a less austere classicism, Dryden was again compelled to pander to the perverted tastes of his English audience. The change in his practice, however, is not accompanied by a corresponding attempt to justify his change through any new theory; he is henceforth content to expound his neo-classical theory and blame the shortcomings of his plays on the need to satisfy his audience. A study of Don Sebastian as a play wherein he consciously neglects his neo-classical theory in order to win popularity illustrates his acceptance of the authority of the play-going public.

1. British Dramatists from Dryden to Sheridan, op. cit., p.70.
2. Loc. cit.
3. The Mermaid Series, John Dryden, Introduction, p.12.
4. The Mermaid Series, John Dryden, op. cit., p.12.
5. Loc. cit.
6. Dobrée, Restoration Tragedy, p.89.
7. Scott, op. cit., p.86.
8. R. Garnett, The Age of Dryden, (London: Bell and Sons, 1895), p.94.
9. Ker, op. cit., Vol.I, p.191.
10. The Mermaid Series, John Dryden, op. cit., p.18.
11. Loc. cit.
12. Eliot, op. cit., p.35.

13. Dobrée, Restoration Tragedy, p.82.
14. Saintsbury, Dryden, p.59.
15. "All for Love", The Mermaid Series, Act III, Sc.i, p.46.
16. Bronowski, op. cit., p.99.
17. Ker, op. cit., Vol.I, p.192.
18. Nettleton, op. cit., p.91.
19. Ibid., p.90.
20. Ibid., p.91.
21. Dobrée, Restoration Tragedy, p.69.
22. Ibid., p.78.
23. A. E. Parsons, "The English Heroic Play", Modern Language Review, XXXIII, (1938), p.10.
24. Ibid., p.12.
25. Dobrée, Restoration Tragedy, p.90.
26. "Preface to Cleomenes", The Dramatick Works of John Dryden, (London: Jacob Tonson, 1725), Vol.VI, p.241.
27. Loc. cit.

CHAPTER VIII

DON SEBASTIAN

Don Sebastian, written in 1690, is designated as a tragedy by Dryden himself, although there is a comic under-plot to which Nettleton slightly refers in his phrase: "length and poverty of comic parts."¹ Dryden, never very happy about his skill as a writer of comedy, admits that he might have given his audience "a better course of comedy....than that of Antonio and Morayma", but proudly defends the mixture of comic and serious plots: "For what could be more uniform than to draw from out the members of a captive court the subject of a comical entertainment."² He is careful to point out that "the English will not bear a thorough tragedy; but are pleased that it should be lightened with underparts of mirth."³ The unity of action which characterized All for Love has been sacrificed to the tastes of his English audience.

The apology implicit in Dryden's discussion of his use of comedy in a play which is primarily a tragedy seems to indicate his position as a reluctant fugitive from neo-classical practice. His defence of the play in other respects bears out this assumption. When he discusses the fate of Don Sebastian and Almeyda, he cites Mr. Rymer's theories of poetic justice. Dryden feels justified in saving the lives of his tragic hero and heroine because their faults were not great enough to warrant punishment by death: "The learned Mr. Rymer has well observed, that in all punishments we are to regulate ourselves by poetical justice; and according to those measures, an involuntary sin deserves not

death."⁴ The English audience is also blamed by Dryden for his failure to follow "the three mechanic rules of unity."⁵ He continues in the accents of a confessed transgressor: "I knew them, and had them in my eye, but followed them only at a distance; for the genius of the English cannot bear too regular a play: we are given to variety, even to a debauchery of pleasure."⁶ The concluding sentence of the paragraph defends the extension of time to two days—from a common-sense point of view, which is typical of Dryden: "To gain a greater beauty, it is lawful for a poet to supersede a less."⁷ Unlike Rymer, Dryden was a doctrinaire only so far as his practical experience as a successful dramatist would allow; he knew almost instinctively that rules and doctrines, although useful and desirable, could not be followed blindly.

In his preface Dryden uses still another of Rymer's theories as a defence of his play. Pointing out some of the more desirable qualities of Don Sebastian, Dryden says: "And there may be also some secret beauties in the decorum of parts, and uniformity of design, which my puny judges will not easily find out: let them consider in the last scene of the fourth act, whether I havenot preserved the rule of decency, in giving all the advantage to the royal character, and in making Dorax first submit."⁸ Dryden apparently agrees with Rymer's doctrine of decorum: "I question whether in Poetry a King can be an accessory to a crime."⁹ In the justly famous scene between Dorax and Don Sebastian, Dryden's careful observance of decorum somehow seems to create an air of falsity. The sympathy of the reader has been

with the gloomy, noble, loyal Dorax; when he begs for forgiveness, therefore, a feeling of resentment is aroused. Restoration standards, however, must be remembered, as Dryden was writing for an audience steeped in the ideas of Rymer, an audience whose critical senses would have been offended if Don Sebastian had been the first to confess his faults.

In tracing Dryden's progress from the heroic plays to All for Love, we note that his theory is usually twisted to conform to his practice. A study of Don Sebastian reveals that he is now more ready to admit that the play is not in agreement with the principles he advocates. He points out where the play deviates from the ideal, and at the same time he proudly indicates many ways in which it follows the desired pattern. Whereas he formerly praised tragi-comedy as an English invention which was a symbol of English vigour, Dryden now admits that a mixture of comedy and tragedy is permissible only because "the English will not bear a thorough tragedy."¹⁰ Noyes describes the change in Dryden's attitude with reference to The Spanish Friar: "This departure from his critical tenets, however, he excuses as a concession to English taste, instead of defending it on abstract grounds as he would have done in his earlier years."¹¹ The same deviation between his theory and his practice in relation to Don Sebastian is evident in his attitude to the unities, which are defended in theory but neglected in practice.

This play, then, written for the people, is less regular in form and less classical in tone than is All for Love. There

appears to be a slight reversion to heroic drama with respect to the characters and the general background of the plot. Don Sebastian is a subdued Almanzor; he rants about his royal blood and his past history, about his love for Almeyda, and about the unkind fate which caused him to fall in love with his sister.

He loves as fiercely, as suddenly, and as completely as did Almanzor; his conflict is primarily the heroic conflict between love and honour. There are also other characters in the play who resemble the stock characters of heroic drama. The flawless heroine, Almeyda, although a more vigorous character than Almahide or Indamora, is nevertheless closely related to Dryden's heroines of the heroic drama. Her over~~e~~powering love for Sebastian is rivalled by her beauty and purity; as Dryden is careful to point out, the sin of which she is guilty is an involuntary one. Muley-Moluch, Emperor of Barbary, has much in common with Boabdelin and the old Emperor in Aureng-Zebe; as the representative of a royal house he is shown to have a nobility of character which shines through all his vices. Restoration dramatic conventions would not allow Dryden to present even a pagan king as the villain of a play. Muley-Moluch is the obstacle which stands between Sebastian and Almeyda, and as such he must be removed, even though he is not painted as being entirely devoid of kingly dignity. Just as he removed Boabdelin to make way for the lovers, so Dryden is forced to bring about the death of the Emperor. To do so he introduces a character whose villainy rivals that of Iago. This villain, Benducar, although he bears some resemblance to both

Iago and ~~Edmond~~, is also in the heroic tradition. The scheming Zulema in The Conquest of Granada, the pre-reformation Morat in Aureng-Zebe, the villainous Ruy-Gomez in Otway's Don Carlos, are all typical villains of heroic drama. They all try to prevent the lovers from attaining happiness, and Dryden's villains both hope to win the heroine for themselves, as does Benducar in this play.

The atmosphere of the tragic parts of Don Sebastian resembles the heroic: the setting is in the glamorous court of Barbary; there is a background of war; and love and honour are the two dominant motivating drives. The heroic elements, however, are subdued and subordinated to the main theme of tragedy. Sebastian, in spite of his arrogance, is unable to overcome the gruesome obstacle of incest; the apparent triumph of the lovers is turned to inevitable disaster once the truth of their relationship is established. Although Dryden saves the lives of Sebastian and Almeyda, the play ends on a very different note from the triumphant finale of the heroic plays. The removal of all human opposition raises the play to the pitch of exultant victory, a victory turned to absolute defeat after Don Alvarez gives his fatal news. Dryden's defence of his skill in saving the lives of his main characters also emphasizes the difference between this play and Shakespearian tragedy where the death of the hero is inevitable.

The mixture of comedy and tragedy is equally foreign to heroic drama and to classical tragedy. The three plays previously

considered have

considered have this much in common: they are all wholly serious, and all are defended in theory for being so. The heroic play, with its rhyming rant, remains at a pitch of passion which imitates the epic poem in sustained seriousness; the neo-classical tragedy proceeds at a steady, rather monotonous, pace to its final scene without the disturbing intrusion of comedy. Don Sebastian, with elements of heroic passion mingling with neo-classical restraint, differs from both types by the addition of a large proportion of comic scenes. In this respect Dryden appears to be returning to his earlier practice as exemplified by Marriage a la Mode and The Spanish Friar. Both of these plays, however, are better known for the comic than for the serious portions of the plot, whereas Don Sebastian is usually considered as a tragedy with a comic under-plot. All three plays follow the same pattern in the use of blank verse for the serious part and the use of prose for the comedy, rhyme being used by Dryden only in plays which are wholly serious "where the subject and characters are great, and the plot unmixed with mirth."¹² The heroic plays and also neo-classical tragedy maintain a unity of tone which is lacking in Don Sebastian, with its excursions into an entirely different sphere of life from that of the main action. Aldous Huxley says that "tragedy is chemically pure. Hence its power to act quickly and intensely on our feelings."¹³ While Don Sebastian is not in the category of what Huxley calls "Wholly-Truthful literature"¹⁴ the effects of this play are similar to those he ascribes to truthful literature: "Being chemically impure, Wholly-Truthful

literature cannot move us as quickly and intensely as tragedy or any other kind of chemically pure art."¹⁵

1. Nettleton, op. cit., p.93.
2. The Mermaid Series, John Dryden, Vol.II, p.284.
3. Loc. cit.
4. Ibid., p.281.
5. Ibid., p.282.
6. Ibid., p.282.
7. Ibid., p.282.
8. Ibid., p.284.
9. "Tragedies of the Last Age", Critical Essays, Vol.II, p.195.
10. Mermaid Series, op. cit., p.284.
11. Dryden's Poetical Works, Introduction, p.XXV.
12. Ker, op. cit., Vol.I, p.94.
13. A. Huxley, Music at Night, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1931), p.13.
14. Ibid., p.14.
15. Ibid., p.15.

CHAPTER IX

DRYDEN'S COMEDY

Because Dryden was less interested in comedy than in tragedy, the relationship between his theory and his practice is less evident in his comedies than in his serious plays. That he wrote comedies, even when he was aware of his lack of native comic ability, is, however, further proof of the close connection between his dramatic practice and the age for which he wrote. The Restoration audience, hungry for comedy, made demands which Dryden, as a professional writer, could not ignore. This analysis of his comedy, therefore, will emphasize the dependence of his practice upon his age; in order to do this an analysis of Dryden's comedy in comparison with ~~that of~~ his contemporaries seems necessary.

Dryden's complacent acceptance of his pre-eminent position in the field of serious drama contrasts strongly with his lack of confidence as a writer of comedy. The critics of Dryden have generally been ready to accept his own opinion of his skill as a writer of comedy: "I know I am not so fitted by nature to write comedy: I want that gaiety of humour which is required to it. My conversation is slow and dull; my humour saturnine and reserved."¹ Scott, besides condemning Dryden's plays because of their immorality, says that his comedies have "a certain heaviness of character. There are many flashes of wit; but the author has beaten his flint hard ere he struck them out"² Saintsbury says that he was not well enough acquainted with polite society to

write comedy of the manners type, and as for repartee, "His guns were rather too heavy for that."³ Eliot implies the same heaviness, the same lack of grace and charm: "His most polished figures of comedy, are, compared to the finest Restoration comedy almost bumpkins."⁴

Dobree, while admitting Dryden's weaknesses, praises his comedies: "His immense critical skill, in default of high creative capacity, enabled him to forge work of very pure metal."⁵ He compares Dryden with two of his famous contemporaries: "He has not the free joyousness of Etherege nor the power of Wycherley, but he shows a talent equal to theirs, if he has no special comic flavour to impart to his use of it."⁶ Dobree's qualified praise seems to be the fairest judgment; Dryden's comedies may not have been as spontaneous and light-hearted as were many of the contemporary plays, but they were, nonetheless, good enough to satisfy the tastes of the audience which Nicoll describes: "The spectators might be thoughtless and depraved, but they were cultured, and the grace and the wit and the elegance which they brought into life and the playhouse was something quite new."⁷

The most popular form of comedy with this Restoration audience was the comedy of manners. In many respects Dryden's comedy bears a strong resemblance to the plays of Etherege, Wycherley, Congreve and Farquhar, although there are also some marked differences. Dryden himself apparently thought of his comedy as being a compound; "neither all wit, nor all humour,

but the result of both."⁸

He admits that ~~the~~ the Jonsonian comedy of humour is not within his power, since "I want judgment to imitate him."⁹ He is, moreover, always a staunch supporter of wit as the soul of comedy, wit in this case apparently being synonymous with repartee: "As for repartie, in particular; as it is the very soul of conversation, so it is the greatest grace of comedy, where it is proper to the characters."¹⁰ Inspired by such a doctrine, Dryden naturally uses witty characters in his plays, characters such as Doralice and Melantha in Marriage a la Mode. Aware of his shortcomings,¹¹ he is less apt to create a "humour" character than one who would be at home in Etherege's Man of Mode, or Congreve's The Way of the World. Palamede and Rhodophil in Marriage a la Mode would have been welcome additions to Dorimant's circle of rakes and wits. Lorenzo's intrigue with the young wife of old Gomez seems to be the pattern for Bellmour's affair with old Fondlewife's young wife in Congreve's The Old Batchelor.

Nicoll, after agreeing that Dryden's comedies lead towards comedy of manners because of his gay, witty, amoral lovers, points out one of the greatest differences between the comedy of manners and the comedy of Dryden: "Dryden....is yet divided from Etherege by the presence in him of a certain passion and enthusiasm."¹² The distinguishing marks of the Restoration comedy of the "manners" type are, according to Nicoll: lovers who are gay, graceful, emancipated, amoral, cynical and witty, a subservience of plot to wit, and a complete lack of emotion.¹³ As previously noted, Dryden's comedy qualifies in all respects except lack

of emotion. Whereas Dorimant's intrigues in The Man of Mode are coldly arranged and heartlessly carried through, Dryden's characters, Lorenzo, Rhodophil, Palamede, Antonio, are all enthusiastic and apparently ruled by passion. Nicoll, in trying to appraise Dryden's similarity to, and difference from, the comedy of his period, emphasizes the intellectual nature of Restoration comedy in contrast with the emotional, sympathetic nature of Dryden's comedy: "He had a heart and he showed it, and, although he could be more vulgar and more indecent than the worst of them, he sets our sympathies a-trembling for his lovers, wicked, frivolous, stupid creatures though they be. In their best plays neither Etherege nor Congreve ever touches our hearts. Herein lies the secret of their art."¹⁴ To Nicoll, the complete lack of emotion characterizing Etherege's plays, together with the emphasis on wit rather than plot, make the immorality less obvious. His theory is, "as soon as deliberate morality and emotion are introduced into the plays of the age, they become at once vulgar and disgusting."¹⁵ Thus, according to Nicoll's contention, the plays of Dryden are more strikingly vulgar and immoral than those of more cold-blooded dramatists. However, the heartless, unemotional figure of Dorimant, and the calculating, intrigue-loving Horner, appear to be far more disgusting than the more human characters created by Dryden. The introduction of passion and emotion, instead of accentuating the vulgarity, seems partially to justify the amorality of Dryden's characters. The witty, passionless, intellectual characters of The Man of Mode, seem more debased

than the witty, passionate, emotional characters of the comic part of Marriage a la Mode.

The vulgarity and immorality of Restoration comedy are not confined to the comedy of manners, but appear in practically all the comedies of the period. As Nettleton says, this is a reflection of the age, just as are the wit and gaiety which permeate comedy: "Whether comedy laughs with the sins of the Restoration, or weeps with the sentimentality of the eighteenth century, it bears the form and pressure of the age."¹⁶ Dryden's comedies, according to Scott, are "stained with the license of the age (a license which he seems to use as much from necessity as choice)."¹⁷ The power exerted by the audience, acknowledged by Scott, was always recognized by Dryden; he was fully aware that he was writing in a corrupt age for an immoral audience. In the Epilogue to Vanbrugh's Pilgrim, Dryden contradicts Collier's attack on drama as the corrupting influence of the age:

Perhaps the Parson stretch'd a point too far,
When with our Theatres he wag'd a War.
He tells you, that this very Moral Age
Receiv'd the first Infection from the Stage;
But sure, a banish't court, with lewdness fraught,
The Seeds of open Vice returning brought.¹⁸

Writing for an audience such as the one he describes, Dryden's plays should not be judged as harshly as ~~he is~~ ^{they are} by Saintsbury: "The coarseness of Dryden's plays is unpardonable."¹⁹ As previously noted, the demands of the audience almost invariably

decided the kind of drama which Dryden wrote; his comedies, in order to please, of necessity followed the tastes of the court.

The court circle, however, in addition to being brazenly immoral, was witty, gay, and intelligent. Thus Dryden and his contemporaries attempted to mingle wit and licence, gaiety and coarseness, brilliance and animation. Dryden's great respect for wit in comedy has already been mentioned; in this, he is typical of his period. What Nettleton says about Congreve can be applied to the majority of Restoration comedies: "Congreve's wit is his supreme strength and perhaps his greatest weakness. It led him to sacrifice not merely naturalness in character and dialogue, but effectiveness in plot. In his comedies the action usually halts while the train of wit passes gaily by."²⁰ Dryden, it must be admitted, is not Congreve's equal in wit, but he is guilty of the same weakness which Nettleton ascribes to Congreve; he is too ready to forget his plot in an attempt to hammer out "repartie" which, as previously noted, he calls "the greatest grace of comedy."²¹ Perhaps it is because his characters are less witty, less brilliant, and less sophisticated, than those of Etherege and Congreve, that they retain a freshness and vigour which is lacking in the characters which appear and reappear in the comedy of manners. The enthusiastic, changeable, socially ambitious, Melantha is more lovable and more life-like than the poised, self-assured Harriet in The Man of Mode or than any of Congreve's heroines except the matchless Mrs. Millamant in The Way of the World. Dryden's "saturnine and reserved" humour may

have kept him from equalling the sparkling wit of some of his contemporaries, but apparently it was not incompatible with the creation of convincing characters.

Dryden's comedy, as we have seen, has many of the characteristics of the comedy of manners. It has the witty lovers, the immoral situations, and the emphasis on sexual irregularities as the main theme. His chief deviation from Congreve's type of comedy appears to be Dryden's sympathy for his characters, and his infusion of passion into their veins. Another important difference from the comedy of manners is seen in Dryden's choice of setting. Whereas the scene of the manners type of comedy is almost invariably laid in London, Dryden's comedies, like his serious plays, have foreign settings. The characters which appear in the plays of Etherege, Wycherley, Congreve, Shadwell, and Vanbrugh, are so closely related to the aristocratic London play-goers that occasionally a controversy arose as to the original from which the dramatist had created his stage character. Dryden's characters are Sicilians or Thebans or Spaniards, but they have the qualities of the English aristocrat of his period. The distant setting has the effect, however, of making his "English" foreigners definitely characters of fiction. There is no question aroused as to whether Dryden had Rochester or Sedley or Buckingham in mind as an original; his characters live or die solely on their own merits, not because of their significance as a possible portrait of one of the courtiers.

The characteristics of Dryden's comedy which have been

discussed above are evident in the two comedies chosen as typical of Dryden's comic powers, The Spanish Friar and Marriage a la Mode. In each the setting is in a foreign country, in each the theme is sexual intrigue, in each the comic characters are well supplied with wit, and in each there is warmth and passion which make the characters less sophisticated, but more human, than the characters of Etherege or Congreve. As frankly licentious in tone as any of the contemporary plays, these two comedies have speed and gaiety, good-nature and vigour, which make the intrigues not only acceptable, but highly amusing. Dobree describes Dryden's comedies in terms of their effect on audience and readers: "To read them is to laugh aloud, to see them acted is to make the sides ache. Collier may have found them licentious, but in Dryden there is always so direct, so virile a quality, that the word 'filth' cannot be applied. There is health and sanity in every phrase."²² Evidently Dryden's purpose, to please his audience, has been achieved, both of these comedies being, as Dobree says, extremely funny.

A brief examination of some of the action proves the truth of this contention. The double intrigue in Marriage a la Mode leads to amusing complications when the bored husband and wife find themselves involved with Palamede and his future bride. Disguises and mistaken identity as further complicating forces are employed so neatly, and with such good humour on Dryden's part, that the audience finds such ancient conventions easy to accept. The growth of Rhodophil's jealousy, and his re-assessment

of Doralice's charms, seem natural developments of the plot; by the revival of their love, Dryden is able to end his comedy with everybody happy, a change from the practice of most of the Restoration writers of comedy who often have at least one unhappy character, usually the waste product of a successful sexual intrigue. In Dryden's play, however, the only cause for mild regret is that neither of the pairs was able to find the time and the place necessary for successful completion of the intrigue. In the Epilogue, Dryden jeers at the audience who "were all for driving on the plot,"²³ while he claims to have more consideration for the proprieties:

"He would not quite the women's frailty bare,

But stript them to the waist, and left them there."²⁴

In Dobrée's words, "Dryden laughs morality back into its rightful place, as the scheme which ultimately makes life most comfortable."²⁵

The characters are as immoral as most Restoration characters even though no immoral acts are committed. To their immorality, however, they add wit, gaiety, charm, and good nature. Of the four main characters, Melantha, with her affected speech, her love of the court, her social ambition, and her energetic enthusiasm, is the most interesting. She tumbles into difficulties and rebuffs, she assiduously works at becoming a lady, she accepts Rhodophil as a lover, all with a child-like desire to be in the mode. Her love of life is infectious, and her enthusiasm, contagious. Compared to her, the witty Doralice is mature, cold, and calculating. The male characters are conventional

wits and rakes, without the charming individuality of Melantha. This belittling of Doralice, Rhodophil, and Palamede, is relative; only because of Melantha's life and charm, do they appear at a disadvantage.

In The Spanish Friar, the Falstaffian figure of Dominic is the central character of the comedy. Whereas Lorenzo is a typical rake, Elvira a typical young wife of an old man, and Gomez a typical old husband in fear of sprouting horns, Dominic is an individual. Written in 1681, while the Popish Plot was still simmering, the play is described by Dryden as "a Protestant play."²⁶ As usual, Dryden's play was written to please his public, a public at this time strongly anti-Papist. However, Dominic is probably less a symbol of Dryden's anti-catholicism than a symbol of his anti-clericalism; the Mufti in Don Sebastian is similarly ridiculed. Whatever his reasons, Dryden paints Dominic as a covetous, lying, cowardly, selfish old man. The incongruity of his speeches and his actions, his protestations of pious fasting and his huge belly, make for hilarious, if farcical, comedy. The astuteness of Gomez, the brazen impudence of Elvira, the scheming of Lorenzo, are all subordinate to the fat old friar's part in the comedy. To Dryden's Protestant audience, the ludicrous figure of Dominic should have been extremely entertaining. Dryden's acute sense of what would please is nowhere better illustrated.

Dryden's theory of comedy, while not entirely consistent, usually agrees in general with his remark that "the chief end of

it is divertisement and delight."²⁷ With such a belief it is natural for Dryden to write the comedy he does, comedy designed to delight and divert the aristocratic, luxury-loving, licentious wits of the court of Charles. This brief survey of his comedy serves to prove that, in his attempt to please, Dryden follows the accepted pattern of his contemporaries. He creates superficial, brilliant, immoral, witty, and delightful creatures, who move in a world far distant from London, but a world whose moral values resemble the values of Dryden's audience. Although he is not as witty as Congreve, nor as carefree as Etherege, his comedies are successful because of his sanity, his vigour, and his dramatic skill.

1. "A Defence of an Essay of Dramatic Poesy", Ker, op. cit., Vol. I, p.116.
2. Scott, op. cit., p.413.
3. Mermaid Series, John Dryden, Introduction, p.8.
4. Eliot, op. cit., p.42.
5. Dobrée, Restoration Comedy, p.106.
6. Ibid., p.108.
7. A. Nicoll, A History of Restoration Drama 1660-1700, (Cambridge: University Press, 1928), p.25.
8. "Preface to An Evening's Love", Ker, op. cit., Vol.I, p.139.
9. Ibid., p.138.
10. Ibid., p.139.
11. Ibid., p.138.
12. op. cit., p.185.

13. Ibid., pp.184-5.
14. Ibid., p.214.
15. Ibid., p.188.
16. Nettleton, op. cit., p.12.
17. Scott, op. cit., p.413.
18. John Dryden, Poems, ed. by E. Rhys, (London: J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1934), p.88.
19. Saintsbury, Dryden, p.119.
20. Nettleton, op. cit., p.131.
21. Ker, op. cit., p.139.
22. Dobrée, Restoration Comedy, p.111.
23. Mermaid Series, John Dryden, op. cit., Vol.I, p.331.
24. Ibid., p.331.
25. Dobrée, Restoration Comedy, p.113.
26. Mermaid Series, op. cit., Vol.II, p.117.
27. Ker, op. cit., p.143.

CONCLUSION

Dryden's dramatic theory and his dramatic practice are mutually dependent, each representing one aspect of his literary point of view. Neither the drama nor the criticism can be successfully examined as independent of each other. A study of Dryden's criticism, made without reference to his dramatic productions, leaves the impression of hopeless inconsistency; studied in relation to his dramatic practice, the reasons for many of these inconsistencies are evident. In one respect, Dryden's dramatic theory is consistent: in its close relationship to his dramatic practice at the time. His theory and practice at any particular point in his long career thus remain closely allied. Although contradictions of his previous criticism may be in evidence, there is little inconsistency between the play he has written and the theory of the drama which he develops in defence of his practice. It is true that Dryden frequently writes a play which contradicts his theory, but he recognizes the contradiction and explains it as a necessary evil which he is forced to give to a demanding English audience. Even in this apparent inconsistency, however, the necessity to study theory and practice together is evident.

Throughout his career as a dramatist Dryden was frequently forced to pander to the tastes of his audience. The changing tastes of his public are reflected in the different types of drama which Dryden wrote; the change in his practice is in turn

reflected in his criticism. To understand Dryden's drama it is, therefore, necessary to remember the audience for which it was written and to which his criticism was directed. In this thesis, frequent mention has been made of the audience, the Restoration audience of wits and rakes, libertines and cultured critics. The demands of this audience had to be met if a professional dramatist, such as Dryden, was to be successful. The sensitivity of Dryden to these demands partially explains his continuing success as a popular playwright; his bid for popularity with his plays inevitably brought criticism which supported his practical endeavours. Thus, as we have seen, Dryden's theory and practice of the drama are closely related to the age for which he wrote.

Dryden's early criticism is tentative in nature; he is apparently feeling his way cautiously, being careful not to commit himself too definitely. The dialogue form of his famous Essay of Dramatic Poesy illustrates this tendency to leave the door slightly a-jar, in case of a possible need to retreat. There are, however, definite signs of his future course in drama; his definition of a play, his support of rhyme, his conception of catharsis, have all been mentioned above as indications of the effect his writing of heroic drama had upon his theory of the drama. In this period, his own dramatic practice was, like the theory he expressed, still of a tentative nature; drama had not yet almost completely ousted poetry from Dryden's work, as it was to do in the period from 1667-1680.

During this period Dryden's criticism is even more closely

related to his drama. The Defence of the Essay with its vigorous defence of rhyme and its emphasis on raising the passions, is clearly a defence of heroic drama. Bohn says that Dryden uses the "logical methods of the rationalist to defend a sort of play as irrational as can be imagined."¹ In the Preface to The Mock Astrologer, Dryden admits his lack of comic ability, but defends his own comedies as being written to please his audience, which likes a mixture of wit and humour, and which prefers diversion to instruction in comedy. His rather weak defence of the immorality of the comedy of the period is further evidence of the dependence of his theory upon his practice.

The criticism which accompanied Dryden's Conquest of Granada is naturally coloured by this most heroic of all Dryden's heroic plays. In his defence of the heroic play, Dryden resorts to an attack on the drama of his predecessors as being lacking in wit and in polish. The defence of his play, like the play itself, reflects the age for which it was written. As Bohn says, "The present is to Dryden a golden age: The heroic play, the polished versification, the gay and courtly manners mark for him the height of culture and of art."² Writing, as he was, for an age which could not accept tragedy, Dryden gave his audience the kind of play they wanted, and then defended himself and his play by praising the wit, the culture, and the polish, of the public for which he wrote. The changed tone of the criticism of this "heroic" period can be traced through the heroic drama to the audience which applauded The Conquest of Granada so whole-

heartedly.

Dryden's last heroic play, Aureng-Zebe, is more restrained, more dignified, and more reserved than any of the preceding rhymed heroic plays. As can be expected, the dramatic theory which Dryden expressed at this time is in the same general tone; he has praise rather than blame for Shakespeare, and he is forced to admit that the great dramatists of the past have written in a manner above his own reach. Apparently Aureng-Zebe is a transitional play; a play which also marks a turning point in Dryden's criticism. From this time on, Dryden's dramatic theory is derived from the classical idea of tragedy; his deviations from his theory are made only because his audience demands it.

The study of Dryden's dramatic practice made in this paper has emphasized that Dryden was, as Saintsbury says, "emphatically of his time."³ As this was a time in which "literary excitement rose higher about stage writing than about any other kind,"⁴ it was natural for Dryden to turn to the writing of plays, plays designed to please. As a man keenly aware of the demands of his audience, his plays were ensured of popularity. Nicoll expresses the reason for the extravagance in Dryden's heroic plays: "Dryden was no man to write dramas that would bore an audience. He was writing for money, and his heroic tragedies.....are at once more stirring, more impossible, more bombastic, and more popular in tone than any which had gone before."⁵ And so once again we can conclude that the dependence of Dryden upon the public explains much of the changing, exper-

imental nature of his dramatic practice, since "he was always ready, quite reasonably, to give the public what it wanted."⁶

Thus we find Dryden's dramatic practice following the change in his audience from the court circle of King Charles II, with their cynical, disillusioned, attitude towards life, to the more assured and more outwardly respectable audience of forty years later. To satisfy his early audience drawn from the courtiers of an England which "was then passing through a period of disillusionment after a cycle of events which ought to have been glorious enough, but which the event proved disappointing,"⁷ Dryden wrote heroic plays to "provide what was lacking in everyday existence."⁸ In his later plays, heroic drama was abandoned to satisfy the desires of an audience educated by The Rehearsal, and by Thomas Rymer, an audience becoming strongly aware of neo-classical rules and dogma. They were, however, only half-educated; they still did not approve of plays which followed the rules too closely. Dryden's All for Love and Don Sebastian illustrate the truth of Dobrée's statement: "Dryden was to.... write according to the rules, reluctantly to change back again because the public would have none of them."⁹

The dependence of Dryden's practice upon his public is echoed in the dependence of his theory upon his practice. Thus, as previously shown, any study of Dryden's criticism must take into consideration the period in which it was written, and the play, or type of play, popular at the time. Bredvold, although more interested in Dryden's philosophical background

than in his dramatic career, describes Dryden's position in his "intellectual milieu" with words easily applied to his dramatic theory and practice; "It is evident that the ideas of John Dryden were not his peculiar property. They were representative ideas of the age, growing out of the dominant temper of the age, which happened also to be the temper of Dryden himself."¹⁰

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1. Bohn, op. cit., p.87.
 2. Ibid., p.91.
 3. Saintsbury, Dryden, p.8.
 4. Dobrée, Restoration Tragedy, p.25.
 5. Nicoll, A History of Restoration Drama, p.100.
 6. Dobrée, op. cit., p.38.
 7. Ibid., p.14.
 8. Ibid., p.16.
 9. Ibid., p.38.
 10. Bredvold, op. cit., p.98.

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