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Studies in the Heroic Drama

of

John Dryden

Thesis submitted to the

University of Durham

for the degree of Ph.D.

by

Michael Graham Blyth

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Studies in the Heroic Drama of
John Dryden

Abstract

John Dryden's heroic plays present unique problems to the literary critic because they combine the conscious artifice of literary form with the exuberant zest of the native tradition of English drama. While it is undeniable that Dryden used the plays to explore a number of critical problems, viz., the nature of the imagination, the uses of wit, and the portrayal of the passions, it is also essential to realize that he was writing deliberately 'popular' drama. The Restoration heroic play is thus a compromise between the individual tastes of the poet and the fashions of his audience; Dryden's plays therefore contain flashes of self-parody which are manifested in scenes of satiric imbalance and the 'grotesque'.

I have approached the five major heroic plays from the varying points of view suggested by the dramatic conventions of the period; briefly, these are opera, satire, panegyric, wit, 'the grotesque', the 'passions', and the denouement. By examining the application of particular stylistic effects to certain scenes of debate or confrontation, it is possible to locate more precisely the areas of permitted ambivalence in Dryden's plays. In charting the development of Dryden's dramatic technique from The Indian Queen to All for Love, we can see how a 'mixed heroic' style became increasingly important in his manipulation of audience response, and how the heroic play, for all its eccentricities, could be developed as a drama of participation. In evaluating the plays I have made special provision for a discussion of

their effectiveness as theatre, without neglecting the critical questions which often underline their structure. Dryden emerges from this study as perhaps more of an innovator than he is often given credit for; in his heroic drama he practised freedoms of style which he was less able to indulge in formal panegyric or polemical satire. The heroic plays are representative of crucial developments in Dryden's attitude to the heroic in life, and as such they provide a fascinating testimony to the receptivity of Dryden's mind. As social dramas the plays contain an illuminating critique of Restoration morals and philosophy and illustrate Dryden's growing capacity for harmonizing the discrepant. A close study of the texts reveals a surprising diversity of tone, for which we may have to devise subtler and more penetrating critical modes. Balanced between levity and seriousness, Dryden's theatre deserves fuller recognition for its festive reconciliation of the sophisticated and bizarre.

Abbreviations

Abbreviations used throughout:

- CD (California Dryden) : John Dryden, The Works, ed. E.N. Hooker, H.T. Swedenberg Jnr., et al., Vols. I-IV, VIII-X, XV, XVII-XVIII, Berkeley (1956-76).
- SS (Scott-Saintsbury) : John Dryden, The Works, Ed. W. Scott, revised G. Saintsbury, 8 vols., Edinburgh (1882-84).
- W (Watson, George) : John Dryden, Of Dramatic Poesy and Other Critical Essays, ed. G. Watson, 2 vols. (1971).
- L (Link, Frederick M.) : John Dryden, Aureng-Zebe, ed. F.M. Link, (Regents Restoration Drama), (1971).
- V (Veith, David M.) : John Dryden, All for Love, ed. D.M. Veith, (Regents Restoration Drama), (1972).
- King (Bruce) : Bruce King, Dryden's Major Plays, Edinburgh and London (1966).
- Spingarn : J.E. Spingarn (ed.), Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century, 3 vols., (1908).

Abbreviations used in specific chapters:

Chapter 2.

- MM (Marvell-Margoliouth): Andrew Marvell, The Poems and Letters, ed. H.M. Margoliouth, (1952), Vol. I.

Chapter 4.

- EM (Ephesian Matron) : Walter Charleton, The Ephesian Matron, intro. A. Guibbory, Augustan Reprint Society Publication Nos. 172-73, Los Angeles (1975).
- RCP (Repartees of Cat and Puss) : Samuel Butler, Repartees of Cat and Puss in Hudibras Parts I and II and Other Selected Writings, ed. J. Wilders and H. de Quehen, (1973), pp. 223-226.

Critical Introduction

In recent years it has become apparent that the traditionally accepted generic terms 'heroic play', 'heroic tragedy' and 'rhymed heroic play' are singularly inadequate in evoking the richness of texture to be found in Dryden's plays. Now that Dryden's long-neglected drama has received the critical attention it deserves, the need has become even greater to establish a critical terminology equipped to deal with modes of contrast and expression not accounted for by the stricter generic assumptions of Restoration aesthetic theory. Although Dryden argued persuasively that the heroic play was modelled on the laws of an heroic poem, in practice it was clearly much more than that. Rather, it was a curious amalgam of genre and counter-genre, giving rise to a 'mixed style' with a sophisticated awareness of its own antithetical tendencies. It was a drama perhaps more self-conscious and allusive than that of any other period in British theatre.

In an article of seminal importance, Robert S. Newman has called attention to the area in which Dryden's plays still perturb the modern scholar. Most striking, he finds, is the failure of modern critics to "deal adequately with the problem of dubious tone in the heroic plays and with methods for resolving disagreements over tone"¹. Certainly within the last 50 years the work of such eminent critics as D.W. Jefferson, Bruce King, and Arthur C. Kirsch has done much to extend our

¹ R.S. Newman, 'Irony and the Problem of Tone in Dryden's Aureng-Zebe,' SEL, X (1970), 440.

receptivity to the range of styles and tonal harmonies in the plays, particularly since Jefferson first identified the comic element of grotesque which permeates them². But Dryden's text can admit of still closer examination. Such study is bound to be dogged by the specific problems raised by a Dryden text: although it comes down to us with very few corruptions it is evident that much of Dryden's work is hurried and clumsy, and that insipid writing may exist side by side with sparks of intellectual subtlety which constantly reflect the 'literariness' of the dramatist's manner. The chief danger in exploring the intellectual milieu surrounding the plays lies in the temptation to perform a species of literary autopsy rather than offer a constructive critical approach. The crucial challenge in Dryden's drama is to relate its detached literary artifice to a tradition of lively and spontaneous theatre, stretching back to the Elizabethan period, and which the Restoration audience enjoyed no less flamboyantly. On the printed page Dryden's formal and statuesque qualities can appear pressingly obvious, while we tend to forget that his, like any other, is a drama of participation.

The popularity of the heroic play, which Dryden, as chief salesman, marketed with panache, must be seen in the light of his particular gifts for manipulating tone and satiric irony. Dryden's plays establish a mood of intellectual dialogue between actor and spectator; into this rational arena are introduced passions, humours, wit, and all the assembled powers of the imaginative sublime, creating tensions out of which a new art-form is born. The result often appears to be the effect

² D.W. Jefferson, 'The Significance of Dryden's Heroic Plays', Pr. of the Leeds Philos. and Lit. Soc., V(1940), 125-39.

of experiment, the need to engage the potentially subversive creativity of the fictive imagination in a structured synthesis, a medium fluid enough to allow opportunities for the exhibition of these forces under controlled conditions. The levels of response evoked are therefore bound to be correspondingly complex and to reflect greater psychological variety, an idea taken up by Arthur C. Kirsch when he talks of the effect of Dryden's heroic drama upon its audience. He describes it as "a calculated balance between artifice and illusion, between detachment and engagement"³. It is part of the contention of my thesis that the true effect of Dryden's dramatic technique is to aim for a mixed level of audience response, to be comprehended in the term 'satiric engagement'; in this process Dryden encourages his spectators to employ discernment and natural taste while ensuring that they are still able to participate emotionally in the unfolding of dramatic action. It is this precarious balance between extremes which, I feel, underlies much of Dryden's aesthetic theory, and which is worked out at a much more fundamental level in the heroic plays themselves.

The antithetical tendency in Dryden's drama may be briefly summarized. Morally and politically Dryden's tastes were conservative, tolerant rather than reactionary. He felt himself committed to a doctrine of obedience and self-discipline, to the cultivation of a 'private virtue' which although good in itself also upheld the structure of an established moral order. He saw the perfectibility of the private individual as

³ A.C.Kirsch, Dryden's Heroic Drama, Princeton (1965), p.147.

politically and morally consistent only with the existence of firm government and strong, but not absolute monarchy. The shadow of Charles as Christic exemplum never left his imagination from the years of the Restoration panegyric right through the drama (Troilus and Cressida and the Epilogue to Albion and Albanus are two of his strongest royalist apologetics), even to the late Cowleyesque verse-epistles on themes of retirement, especially To my Honor'd Kinsman, John Driden of Chesterton.

But the hyperbolic grandeur of panegyric found a new outlet in the freedom of gesture and histrionic plausibility offered by the heroic drama. The Caroline court drama of the 1630's had ensured the continuance of the old chivalric values of loyalty, piety, duty and honour, to the glorification of an undisguisedly monarchist ideal. This 'panegyrical' tendency did not exist however in splendid isolation; the new drama admitted many more fluid and volatile trains of thought. At odds with what Dryden understood by 'the excellency of the moral' was the irreverence of Restoration wit. Similarly the behaviour of his heroes became iconoclastic, and distorted by exaggeration. Neither the wit nor the heroes were self-limiting constructs, yet both were essential features of the creative expressiveness of the period. The heroic play borrowed from Restoration panegyric the forms and civilities of a typological heroic norm; a Neoclassical attitude to design blended with an exuberance which transformed stasis to a condition of living and lively (i.e. 'well-painted') art. The 'painterliness' of many of Dryden's effects in the heroic drama derives its inspiration from the cumulative assembling of materials common to panegyric, a form rich in aural and visual effect. Instead of being frozen however within a narrative or historical sequence, such effects, when transferred

to the drama lost their factual simplicity, and became instead poetic instruments for the communication and development of emotion, enlivened by the introduction of certain Baroque features. In her study The Sister Arts⁴, Jean H. Hagstrum comments on the "sacrifice of clarity and explicitness to pervasive, disturbing, and disrupting emotions" which characterises Baroque. This indicates part of the progression towards greater psychological realism implied in the transition from panegyric to heroic play.

Dryden's plays, although regarded by one critic as purely 'plays of ideas',⁵ in fact belong to the extrovert and celebratory tendencies of Restoration panegyric. Thus Dryden's mildly sardonic vision of human nature is imbued with a life-force, an almost contradictory 'festivity', which animates the philosophy contained in his drama. The buoyant exoticism, daring verbal assaults, and sensitive depiction of the passions all point towards a drama of consummate gesture and style, a mixed form capable of developing its own idiomatic flavour. Miss Barbeau's humourless interpretation of the plays neglects the constant interception of ideas by the mischievous and profane; her Dryden is a man of severe temperament, intent, like Shaw, on putting over a message. To regard the plays purely as an ideological playground, in which characters are imprisoned in the snare of 'free-will versus necessity', is to deny any dramatic function to the choice of expressive techniques. Both the story and the way it is told contribute to the final synthesis.

⁴ J.H.Hagstrum, The Sister Arts, Chicago (1958), p.101.

⁵ See A.T.Barbeau, The Intellectual Design of John Dryden's Heroic Plays, New Haven and London (1970) .pp.3-23.

Dryden was not an over-cautious writer and was prepared to run risks. His heroes exhibit what Bruce King has interpreted as a "Rochesterian" spirit⁶, whereby subversive passions, uncontrolled desires and blind will mingle dangerously with the more conservative heroic virtues. Hobbesian materialism can be seen to infiltrate even the most altruistic moral endeavour. The partial commitment of Dryden's epic heroes to a life of violent self-aggrandizement - seen as a total commitment by at least one modern critic, Thomas H. Fujimara⁷ - certainly seems out of step with the author's political convictions, which always stress passivity and obedience. However the tension is deliberate, since Dryden delights in juxtaposing rival concepts of order and disorder, concord and dissent, decorum and expressiveness - together with characters which embody them - until they become the very stuff of his creative achievement. It is his particular response to the society in which he moved and worked. He was considerably aided in his pioneering of the mixed style by the analogical modes of thought prevalent in the period; the increasingly popular use throughout the seventeenth-century of scriptural, exegetical techniques to illustrate contemporary events became gradually disseminated throughout the arts. A poem of praise, imbued with a certain 'historicity', no longer looked like fulsome flattery; the poet could manipulate an authoritative resonance derived from a keen sense of the epic past, and of the continuum

⁶. See King, p.204.

⁷. T.H.Fujimara, 'The Appeal of John Dryden's Heroic Plays', PMLA, LXXV (1960), 37-45.

in which typology not only operated, but was still seen to operate. Analogy encouraged an interpenetration of genres which broke down the old classifications; hence Davenant's decision to base the laws of his epic poem Gondibert (1651) on the principles of the dramatic five-act structure. Similarly Dryden's Conquest of Granada (1671) may be read as many things; as a romantic poem reminiscent of Italian epic (a view favoured by Sir Walter Scott)⁸, as a paradigm of the operation of divine providence through history, or as a topical satire on materialism and the failure of society to offer a viable alternative to the 'state of nature'. Dryden's drama blurs distinctions between epic and satire, history and fable. It is both contemporaneous and archaic, while the mixture itself is innovative. It is largely for these reasons that his plays evoke such lukewarm response; amongst critics who are not dismissive, the best defence usually made is that his plays contain praiseworthy things. No critic has yet acclaimed Dryden's drama as a unified, and allusive construct.

Dryden's chief strength lay in his natural ability to intensify techniques of tonal contrast and shift in meaning; his skill in innuendo is borne out not only by his broadly 'comic' (i.e. optimistic) view of humanity, but also by the overall dramatic strategy he adopts. Dryden wilfully juxtaposes the heroic and the preposterous, working on the assumption that a controlled ambiguity heightens rather than disqualifies a true 'imitation' of nature. Thus his plays mingle naturalism with artifice, creating an area which spans

⁸ See Dryden, SS, IV, 1-4.

the grotesque and the mock-heroic⁹. Dryden quickly proves himself a past master at a vein of humane caricature in which heroic conventions are exposed as no longer matching the everyday conduct of men¹⁰. At the same time such conventions are warranted in themselves for their value in setting up behavioural norms upon whose foundations a stable and just democracy can be erected. But the 'heroic affirmation' becomes suspect; its combination of the grandiose and fatuous reveals that at least on one level it is pretentious, an index of intention rather than achievement, words not deeds. Dryden undercuts the sincerity of his chief characters; their skill at ratiocination and their pride in their powers of logic are subtle indications that they are, in fact, dangerously close to the abyss of absurdity and the demonic powers of unreason. This dual standard runs like a sustained innuendo throughout the heroic plays. Dryden's own dramatic persona is easily as unobtrusive as Shakespeare's; yet he nevertheless plays God with all his characters, subjecting them to constant fluctuations of scale. Entirely at the dramatist's whim a character of villainous stature, like Maximin, may be inflated to monstrous proportions by sheer verbosity, or reduced to the status of a puppet by a shaft of analytical wit. Similarly the Old Emperor's view of human kind, as expressed in Aureng-Zebe (1675) might be conveyed in a phrase such as 'gloriously trivial' - the 'little emmets with the human soul'. Most ironic of all is the reflection that none of the characters

⁹. See King, p.7.

¹⁰. For a lucid exposition of this view see R.S.Newman, 'Irony and the Problem of Tone', op.cit., esp.p.447.

who appear to be so busy about their fates can outface the omniscient playwright. Like David at the end of Absolom and Achitophel Dryden pronounces poetic justice like an inspired seer or Jehovic authority. His characters are helpless against the arbitrary imposition of the denouement, in which convention, love, honour and fortitude predictably triumph. The role expected of the audience is surely crucial here; on them alone depends our assessment of Dryden's preoccupation with an epic interpretation of life¹¹. If he expected them to swallow the struttings and assertions of his heroes as gospel truth, then his plays are no more than freakish obsessions. If, on the other hand, he intended his audience to be drawn into the ironic focus of the play, and to call into action their own discrimination and taste, his notion of the heroic hero - the ideal and its antithesis - can be seen as both realistic and witty.

To take the 'mixed style' as an indication of Dryden's artistic preferences is one thing, to interpret it correctly, another. Phillip Parsons gives some useful insights into the difficulties we encounter when trying to elicit precise meaning from Dryden's dramatic texture; he sees the stage action as fulfilling the author's "intention, rather than being its embodiment"¹². This raises the question, long-debated by scholars, as to how far Dryden's theory of the drama complies with, or reflects, his practice of it. Dryden's importance as a critic is unquestionable. His essays and prefaces abound in terse and translucent observations which

¹¹. For further discussion of the role of the audience in the denouement, see below, pp. 487 - 520.

¹². P. Parsons, 'Restoration Tragedy as Total Theatre', in Restoration Literature: Critical Approaches, ed. H. Love, (1972), p. 33.

bring the practical problems of the drama into the mainstream of literary criticism. But for Dryden theory was not always a natural expression of practice; it represented another type of activity which had a life of its own, a life best illustrated by the fluency of the debate in Of Dramatic Poesy: An Essay (1668) and highlighted by the curious fact that Of Heroic Plays (1672) was written when Dryden had nearly abandoned heroic drama. While it is easy to see at a glance how the experience of composing heroic plays furnished Dryden with enough material to enter into literary controversy (his long feud with Howard in the sixties is sufficient evidence), it is less easy to determine precisely how far his dramatic practice exceeded the scope and design of his theoretical formulations, or indeed to determine whether Dryden was conscious of employing innovative techniques. In general terms the fluidity of his approach to play-writing is rarely to be seen in his criticism; his essays suggest catholicity of taste and scrupulous artistic enquiry, but they do not give a total picture of Dryden the dramatist. A working knowledge of the final acts of such plays as The Indian Emperour and Tyrannick Love, or the first four acts of All For Love, would yield an equally stimulating account of the sorts of compromise Dryden was either drawn to make or which he chose to make for commercial rather than aesthetic reasons. Dryden's text can benefit as much as Shakespeare's from being opened out by modern workshop techniques and improvisation. The danger in relying solely on Dryden's official apologia for his plays is that they can become too much like museum-pieces, attracting the sort of curiosity which fails to detect their life and spirit. Although Dryden's intellect responded deeply

to questions of 'wit, 'humour', and the 'liaison-des-scènes', the forms of mental relaxation which he took are equally worthy of serious study and can be located in the idiosyncratic structure of the plays. In the practice of drama we observe the intuitive exploration of the dramatist at moments in which he is often unconscious of his commitment to stated critical aims. Dryden's theory should not be seen as a strait-jacket into which the exuberance of heroic drama can be squashed; theory and practice should enlighten each other and offer complementary perspectives on the building-up of a new genre.

In fact Dryden can never be said to have 'perfected' the heroic play, simply because his idea of its function was always developing, and although it is easy enough to have a personal favourite within the group, not one of the five heroic plays can be considered as 'archetypal'. For instance The Conquest of Granada, the play which best illustrates the big heroic features, suffers a change of direction by nature of its two-part structure, and although the most romantic of Dryden's 'epic' dramas, is too diffuse to be considered a paradigm. The spontaneity with which Dryden worked is often belied by his critical prefaces, yet amply reflected in a work such as The State of Innocence (1677) a bizarre and enthusiastic excursion into 'rational opera'. It is a unique blend of Cartesian philosophy and Baroque stage-technique which transforms the source-work, Paradise Lost, into a fragmented, mechanistic farce. Dryden's misjudgment here is not really in question (although Marvell, amongst others, thought the adaptation indiscreet)¹³; it is his readiness to catch up the

¹³. For Marvell's opinion in verse concerning The State of Innocence, see J. and H. Kinsley (ed.), Dryden: The Critical Heritage, (1971), pp. 113-14.

preoccupation of the moment, and, like Handel, to use any material available and rework it for his own purposes. Nearly all his heroic plays indicate different preoccupations; The Indian Queen contrasts moral austerity with primitive passion, while The Indian Emperour and Aureng-Zebe comment vividly on decadent heroics. Tyrannick Love explores the extremes created by portraying the tyrant and the saint, and embodies an exciting imaginative journey into the realms of the grotesque. Far from typifying the objection of numerous critics, from Martin Clifford¹⁴ down to the present day, that Dryden's heroic dramas are repetitive and his characters mere replicas of each other, the wealth of innovation and variation to be found could well occupy a study much larger than this. As Phillip Parsons observes,

Even on the printed page these works need close and reflective examination before the kaleidoscopic action settles into the ample, lucid statement of Dryden's design.¹⁵

Dryden's plays, then, need to be seen in the context of the literature surrounding them, especially in the light of the different genres and styles available to the average Restoration writer. To confine Dryden to a slavish obedience to his own stated principles both neglects the originality of his creative powers and the degree of reliance on poetic licence permitted to a discerning and meticulous artist. A certain impoverishment will often take place between the stage-arena and the printed page: the energizing forces which are characteristic of Dryden's drama become harnessed,

¹⁴. For Martin Clifford's Notes upon Mr. Dryden's Poems in Four Letters, ibid., pp.175-86.

¹⁵. P. Parsons, 'Restoration Tragedy as Total Theatre', op.cit., p.33.

disciplined and methodized in his critical formulations; in the process something vital is lost, the spirit of which can best be caught by a comparison with the non-critical writings of his contemporaries. Dryden's literary energy is fed from many sources. In his useful study of Restoration 'methodology', Paul A. Korshin has written,

the study of literary theory only makes sense if we regard a style or intellectual discipline like Restoration poetics as a fluid entity which draws its existence from the separate approaches of various writers.¹⁶

It is largely with this outlook in mind that I hope to establish the diversity of the layers of meaning which obscure the catholicity of approach peculiar to the heroic plays, and from which I hope to suggest how finely Dryden succeeded in capturing what Miss Ruth Nevo has so eloquently called "the social nuance of language".¹⁷

The two critics who have done most to illumine the focus of the heroic plays are D.W. Jefferson and Professor Bruce King. Bruce King, who styles the plays "essentially destructive satires",¹⁸ attributes the force motivating the numerous effects of distortion to the wit, an unique and unusual wit developed and expanded well beyond the Metaphysical conceit and the sublime of Cowley. Jefferson, striving for a more exact analysis, lays more emphasis on comic irony than on

¹⁶. P.A.Korshin, From Concord to Dissent, Menston (1973), p.144.

¹⁷. R.Nevo, The Dial of Virtue, Princeton (1963), p.251.

¹⁸. King, p.80.

Juvenalian satire, and explores more gently the implications of the sudden metamorphosis which galvanizes Dryden's imagery. Jefferson is in agreement with King in finding that it is through the use of wit that the imagery achieves its absurd bias. Jefferson however has a more cultivated sense of the craftsmanship at work in the creation of the total dramatic texture; he writes,

Dryden developed both the grandiose
and the comic aspects of his theme
at the same time, the one being
continually modified by the other.¹⁹

Jefferson understands Drydenian irony predominantly in terms of an attitude, more or less habitual with the dramatist, and which he designates as "comic portentousness"²⁰. He also notes Dryden's "delight in thinking ignobly of the soul"²¹, and the tensions between the gross passions of the flesh and spiritual and moral idealism in the plays. Most commonly Dryden's trick is to parody his own majestic harmonies, debunking the very proficiency of technique whereby he achieves a sublimity in panegyric and historical poetry. Many of Dryden's characters embody an internal antithesis of irreconcilable extremes; Morat, Nourmahal, Lyndaraxa and Zempoalla combine vast aspirations for personal aggrandizement with a painful consciousness of the sheer insignificance of humanity. The inflation towards the 'mock-heroic' implied by the term "comic portentousness" is appropriate, since Dryden's satiric procedure in the drama quite clearly foreshadows that

¹⁹ D.W. Jefferson, 'The Significance of Dryden's Heroic Plays', op.cit., p.129.

²⁰ D.W. Jefferson, 'Aspects of Dryden's Imagery', EIC, IV (1954), 24.

²¹ D.W. Jefferson, ibid., p.33.

of MacFlecknoe (1682), where there is a commensurate and deliberate manufacturing of 'epic' nonsense. Dryden's satire is humane enough to soften malice, while his gift for "portentiousness" is capable of engaging a spectator in the interests of any character so represented, however specious. This capacity to retain the last vestiges of 'high seriousness', despite the operation of satirical techniques, is a distinguishing feature of Dryden's comic vision, and gives rise to the mixed response which procures satiric engagement. Characters like Lyndaraxa and Nourmahal demonstrate this feature most clearly, since neither are characters designed to evoke moral approbation, yet neither of them are permitted to alienate the involvement of the audience with their passions, for all the glorious illogicality of their ideas. Dryden always displays an ironic sympathy throughout his dramatic career for the aberrant, wayward and even moronic susceptibilities of mankind. Robert S. Newman has perhaps done the heroic play the most service of all by suggesting that it is perhaps a mistaken assumption to expect a heroic drama to be uniformly heroic²². Dryden certainly had a clear enough perception that the heroic code, lived in its purest state, demanded a social stability and adaptability that was very far from the actual norm. His satiric intention in the heroic drama is thus largely a matter of degree, a balancing out of ethics and morals against the aesthetic and imaginative demands of genre.

By comparison with the satiric procedure of Cotton, Marvell, Butler or Rochester, Dryden's is markedly restrained;

²² R.S. Newman, 'Irony and the Problem of Tone', op.cit., pp.441-42.

in the plays the satiric mode is not a total inversion of the mode which, for better or worse, Dryden favours most: and that is still the heroic mode. Professor King makes a considerable blunder when he concludes that Dryden had "no belief in heroics, whether heroical emotions or actions"²³, since the schematic structure of the plays, which usually depicts the acclimatization of the heroic individual to the necessary restraints of society, completely denies this. Among recent critics, Earl Miner has demonstrated the strength and even the apparent practicability in commercial terms of the 'heroic idea', which first appears in the patriotic Annus Mirabilis (1667)²⁴. The fact that Dryden makes intelligent use of the most powerful symbols of his day - the king, the hero, the navy, trade, commerce - and envisages them primarily in materialistic colours, has misled some critics into a purely literal interpretation, in which any suggestion of spiritual content is out of place. But, in order to be at all realistic, Dryden's 'heroicized present' - the contemporaneous mythology he creates from his environment - had, of necessity, to contain elements which must seem anti-heroic or even satirical. The attitude to both the English and the Dutch in the Annus Mirabilis for instance, gains even more complexity when the action of the poem is set against Marvell's 'Painter' Satires. Dryden's imagery, sublimely expressive of confident opulence, verges on burlesque from a sense of pique, a barely-concealed exasperation at

²³. King, p.8.

²⁴. E. Miner, The Restoration Mode from Milton to Dryden, Princeton (1974), esp. pp. 288-364.

the means he is forced to employ to recommend an ideal of cultural progress. The epic scale is always being diminished by man's frailty and aggression. Restoration man is brute, sensual man, man apprehending the spiritual through the roseate incarnation of the senses. Dryden is forced to sell heroism according to this type of credo: his successful heroes are all suppressed heroes, men encouraged to channel their energy, sexual and military, into the greater service of king, platonic mistress, and state. The result is always a compromise - an imperfect hero, sacrificing his personality; an imperfect state, built on repression.

What then does one make of Dryden's lip-service to stale heroic 'norms' in the plays - concepts like 'honour', 'piety', and 'love', which have little more than a bare word-value? It would seem that Dryden's acknowledgement of spiritual realities amounts to little more than a staid reliance on clichés. However, he felt obliged by his belief in what constituted a just society to include routine allusions to love, honour, duty and piety, which not only recalled the allegorical vagaries of the Caroline masque, but were admitted even by the 'heroic' characters themselves (especially Cortez and Almanzor) as scarcely applicable to the situations of real life. Cortez for instance complains of 'Unlucky Honour that controul'st my will' (CD.IX,67), while Almanzor propositions his mistress with the subversive doctrine, 'And what is honour, but a love well hid?' (SS,IV,192). Aesthetically, on the other hand, the presence of these ritualized, 'precieux' codes of revived courtly love serve a restraining and formalising function, landscaping the ideological terrain of the plays. Hobbesian satire, neoclassical wit, and Epicurean

hedonism are safely contained within the bounds of a society conditioned to expect (if not to achieve) moral reserve. However 'extravagant' Dryden's heroes may become, we never get any profound sense of their capacity to topple the universe; they are the descendants of Marlowe's 'overreachers' but without the dynamic beauty-in-brutality which propels the bloodthirsty Tamburlaine. Dryden's heroes are at the best aspirants, coming new, fresh and innocent (hence politically naïve) to an already established society, and finding themselves unable to reverse a system which will actually tolerate, in modified form, their idiosyncrasies²⁵. The Drydenian hero seeks not so much 'conquest,' as the location and glorification of his own identity - something he may not at first be able to envisage within a community, but which, by confronting other individuals within that community, finds fellow-feeling with them in the shared foibles and irrationalities of human nature. The Baroque hero insensibly finds something of his own 'divinity' reflected in the similar aspirations and frustrations of others. It is significant that Almanzor in The Conquest of Granada eventually accepts the jurisdiction of Ferdinand and Isabella because they happen to correspond most closely to his original conception of his own divinely-inspired (and totally personal) 'majesty'. The fact that Dryden stresses this, rather than the political motive of yielding to Christian conquest, as the

²⁵. For two penetrating studies of heroic aspiration from Shakespeare to Dryden, see E.M. Waith, The Herculean Hero (1962), and Ideas of Greatness (1971). Waith's research into seventeenth-century aspects of heroism is always thorough, but he conducts his enquiries with little reference to the central question of the 'wittiness' of the hero. His unreservedly serious interpretation of Dryden's plays and their affinity with heroic romance and courtesy literature is expanded in 'Dryden and the Tradition of Serious Drama', in E. Miner (ed.), Writers and their Background: John Dryden, (1972) pp. 58-89.

nearest way to gaining Almahide, illustrates that Almanzor retains some of his savage 'innocence'; that he is essentially still a child of nature.

Dryden's protagonists, in Arthur Kirsch's words, "tread a perilous line between magnificence and self-parody"²⁶. The most significant feature of these heroes is their self-absorption and commitment to the ego. Fujimara sees them as representing a Hobbesian 'power' ethic which leaves no room for any spiritual or moral incentive²⁷. As I suggested earlier, such a misconception arises from too literal an interpretation of Restoration materialism. However the restlessness and passionate volatility of Dryden's super-heroes do indicate some of the basic problems bequeathed to Restoration society by the Stuart inheritance - in court-culture, politics, and art. Taking his lead from the Puritans, Dryden took up the challenge of justifying the restoration of the monarchy via scriptural analogy and exegetical commentary. He was faced with the urgent problem of praise. The art of panegyric had been severely compromised in the 1630's by sophistries and hyperbolical rhapsody. To restore the balance the Restoration needed a new sense of identity, a confident facade from which to defend itself against Puritan scorn. Dryden swept in with heroic impetus with a fresh and somewhat feverish mythologising of recent events, and the new Charles Stuart emerged as the new Jove, new Aeneas, and new Davidic King (despite the fact that Cromwell had been poetically enthroned as the latter in

²⁶ A.C.Kirsch, Dryden's Heroic Drama, op.cit., p.151.

²⁷ T.H.Fujimara, 'The Appeal of Dryden's Heroic Plays', op.cit., p.40.

the very recent past). A battery of types was brought to the defence of the monarchy. Dryden, and other public poets of his time, (e.g. Waller and Sprat), encouraged society to take its lead from the king. When it did, it was to do so according to the method suggested to it, viz. typologically. The 'wit', the fop, the libertine, the usurper, the tragedy-queen, the Neoplatonic lover, the jealous husband and the ambitious villainess were some of the most common of established types during the Restoration, first current in society then directly transferred to the stage. Thus the lives of private individuals took on an unusually public aspect, as members of the court circle were alluded to in plays (e.g. Rochester as 'Dorimant'), and more flamboyant modes of conduct were expected from the stereotyped characters of both comedy and tragedy. Figures exhibiting heroic tyranny held a certain fascination, while dramatists vied with one another in copying 'originals' from the town - it was probably because of the close correspondence encouraged between stage and society that Dryden's Mr. Limberham (thought to be a satire on a principal political figure like Shaftesbury) was banned from the stage after only three performances. The stage held 'the mirror up to nature' in a more acute form than it had previously done, scanning its patrons for notable examples of 'humorous' conduct, and all manner of foibles and idiosyncrasies. The theatre became a place in which an ironic awareness became absolutely essential for sheer survival, in an atmosphere in which the 'vizard-masks' sold their reputations. Notable contradictions existed, which on occasion gave considerable piquancy to dramatic experience - Charles II's proverbial laughter at the sight of Nell Gwyn delivering the Prologue to The Conquest of Granada,

Part One, is well known, while Samuel Pepys's sarcastic comments about her miscasting as Cydaria in The Indian Emperour are worthy of more serious attention²⁸. Clearly on such occasions paradox was the chief cause of the delight. The cultivation of the type was by no means new in itself, but there was an increased emphasis on its relation to social conduct, a fastidiousness deriving from the French influence, particularly Corneille and Molière. The type was a mask, a generalised extension of personality, behind which man's natural instincts could shelter in the guise of respectability - the libertine ethic in particular protected such characters as Wildblood, Horner and Dorimant, while also endowing them with stock qualities which their creators could elaborate and 'heroicize' accordingly. The type system was effective, in that it helped to rationalize those passions and instincts which eleven years before the Restoration had led the nation into internecine warfare; it also helped to purge society of its fears concerning man's bestiality. The 'healthy' animality of the Restoration comedy attitude to sex, involved the admission that sexuality was the key to aggression; so by creating a fashionable sexual arena in which a man might take his pleasure uncensored, playwrights secured a more realistic and ultimately hopeful view of the sociability of man. Fear was still a predominant feature of the early

28. For the origin of the anecdote on Charles II, see J. Downes, Roscius Anglicanus, ed. J. Loftis, Augustan Reprint Soc. Publication No. 134, Los Angeles (1969), p. 29. For Pepys's comments on Nell Gwyn, see The Diary of Samuel Pepys, 8 vols., ed. R. Latham and W. Matthews, (1970-74), VIII, 395; '...to the King's playhouse and there saw The Indian Emperour; where I find Nell come again, which I am glad of, but was most infinitely displeased with her being put to act the Emperour's daughter; which is a great and serious part, which she doth most basely'.

years of the Restoration; the popularity of Hudibras and the power of the Scriptural interpretations of the Great Plague and Fire testified to the strength of the impressions left by the Civil War, and the nagging doubt as to whether 'chaos would come again'. The political philosophy of Hobbes had indicated how the intrinsically volitional nature of human personality could predominate, until it produced a nation of Zimris and Achitophels. According to Hobbes, a man need only do what he chooses, and his inclinations are unlikely to coincide with schemes for public good. The heightened uncertainty as to the true 'nature' of man, and as to the real function of a social identity, was partly reflected by the stage, which, in the guise of entertainment either recommended heroic virtue for emulation, or by way of discouragement exposed the evils of illogical thinking and the misapplication of reason. The prevailing cynicism of Restoration comedy created difficulties for the heroic play, which in itself was scarcely a credible recipe for everyday life. However the comedy and serious tragedy of the day were linked by the mixed and characteristically English taste for tragicomedy, and Dryden's heroic plays were valiant efforts to bridge the gap, creating a species of 'ironic tragedy' or 'philosophical comedy'. Many of the techniques employed in the heroic drama - especially heroic repartee and effects of distortion - were intrinsically the province of festive comedy, and Dryden was successful as much through sheer ebullience as by deliberate calculation.

Dryden's heroes represent a compromise between the naturalistic and primitive appetites of contemporary man ('matter in motion'), and the integrated, socially-responsible

ideal suggested by classical precedent (Aeneas). As John A. Winterbottom has indicated, some movement away from the notion of hero as iconoclast towards the hero as the embodiment of a social ideal was both necessary and desirable for Restoration culture. In his view the plays explore 'the conflict between the hero and the community, a conflict which is eventually explored in favor of the community'²⁹. He also suggests that Dryden's great virtue lies in perceiving 'both the potential value and the positive threat' of the heroic character³⁰. Certainly the hero in Dryden's plays almost axiomatically conducts himself so as to be at complete moral variance with the direction of the plot - he 'moves eccentric, like a wandering star'. (SS, IV, 105). Coincidence and fate eventually achieve for him the integration he cannot, and often will not, achieve for himself. Dryden was undoubtedly more attracted to the extremes of heroic personality than he liked to admit; his plays include scenes of violence and mutilation which may be seen as visual counterparts to the poetic heightening needed to compass an epic sublime. The exaggeration of much of the violence however (the last acts of The Indian Emperour and Tyrannick Love are more reminiscent of the Kyddian revenge-play than Fletcherian romance) indicates the satiric intention; Dryden never over-protected his heroes from ridicule. He created puppets and monsters who act as symbolic correlatives to the problems he kept encountering with the creative imagination. His heroes

²⁹. J.A. Winterbottom, 'Stoicism in Dryden's Tragedies', JEGP, LXI (1962), 876.

³⁰. J.A. Winterbottom, 'The Development of the Hero in Dryden's Tragedies', JEGP, LII (1953), 169.

also make concessions to public taste and to the prestige attached to virtuoso performance. The basic problem is simply that of quite how seriously Dryden intended anybody to take them. The heroic hero arrived at a time when society needed the release of its pent-up energies in organised but flamboyant histrionics. As Ruth Nevo has pointed out, the very exuberance and grandiloquent posturing of the Baroque hero is almost enough to justify his existence³¹. He is a creature who expresses his heroic assertiveness per se without seeking to corroborate rhetorical gesture with physical evidence of his prowess. The inactivity of Baroque heroes on the Restoration stage has attracted much comment³². In one sense they are true men of leisure - men who possess the birthright, or the time, to indulge in fanciful wish-fulfilment which is never realised even within the scope of the play. They attempt to exist as conscious self-projections of themselves, externalizing their inward impulses, until they become spectators of their own 'gloire'³³. This self-regarding quality is part of the apparatus of the mock-heroic, and Dryden uses it with devastating effect in MacFlecknoe. However what really prevents the 'huffing' hero from being unequivocally heroic is his lurking susceptibility to charm and decorum. In the heroic plays the male libido is mercilessly subordinated to feminine codes of decency, which makes

³¹. See R. Nevo, The Dial of Virtue, op.cit., p.137.

³². Notably by such critics as Nevo, ibid., esp. pp.155-56; E. Rothstein, Restoration Tragedy, Wisconsin (1967), pp.56-7; and P. Parsons, 'Restoration Tragedy as Total Theatre', op.cit., p.31.

³³. Both Rothstein in Restoration Tragedy, op.cit., and Kirsch in Dryden's Heroic Drama, op.cit., take this view, although the position is best summed up in A.C. Kirsch's article, 'Dryden, Corneille, and the Heroic Play', MP, LIX (1962), 248-64, (esp. p.262).

the hero's bold assertiveness look more like a final protest before capitulation than a trustworthy account of his capacity for heroic self-realization. Dryden's interest in the heroic temperament is predominantly psychological; he assesses what makes thought, impulse and will 'heroical', and shows by witty analysis the influence which such ideas exert over the behavioural characteristics of primitive or feudal societies.

The defence of any artificial or 'conceited' form such as the heroic play must rest securely on the language, design and way of proceeding most appropriate to it. The feature of the heroic plays which calls for most excuse and interpretation is the wit. It occupies a central position in Dryden's development of the mixed style, and Professor King comments,

...it is the wit which shapes
the satire, creating a humorous,
ironic focus towards the sentiments
of the characters.³⁴

This again is part of the larger antithetical movement of the plays, although Professor King's refusal to trust Dryden's belief in the heroic obscures the existence of an inverse process, i.e. a contradiction of the satire by the sentiment reshaping or reflecting back upon the wit. The exact nature of Drydenian wit requires careful discrimination, and a ready eye for the occasions upon which Dryden exploits heroic pretensions for witty effect. Equally challenging is Dryden's tendency to invoke the heroic mode as a corrective to the flights of fancy engendered by wit, a process which can sometimes radically alter the balance of a comedy -

³⁴. King, p.73.

The Assignation (1673) is perhaps the most startling example of this volte-face. Dryden balanced a fondness for Metaphysical conceit with an Augustan emphasis on clarity and distinctness, so that his dramatic wit, brilliantly set off by his characterisation, is never placed far away from sentiment. Although certain speeches openly condone rhetorical excess, pathos, sentiment and wit are the interdependent features of heroic repartee, creating a pattern of verbal volleying not unlike a game of tennis; to extend the metaphor it is the lurking presence of sentiment - often in the generalized form of the moral 'sententia' - which prevents the ball going out of court. Thus the wit does not dominate the action, although it gives it its zest and excitement. Bruce King's view of the plays as purely "destructive satires"³⁵ reveals how easy it is to overestimate the power of Baroque wit over mood. Admittedly it introduces the grotesque and ambiguous at once into the idea of the speaker, but often its sheer vehemence and unexpectedness serves as a warning. It is virtuosic, and short-lived.

Dryden achieves the integration of so many discrepant elements in his drama not by any conscious endeavour to unify or coerce his scenes or debates, but by employing an essentially digressive, or allusive technique. As through a prism, he constantly reflects different shades of light through the texture of his scenes or argumentation; the wit he uses in such circumstances is both a means of heightening character and of suggesting intellectual piquancy, usually

³⁵. King, p.80.

through the sheer incongruity of simile or metaphor. It is not the fully developed shaft of the mature satirist, as Professor King's view would suggest. Dryden was anxious that dramatic wit should be above all things stylish, conversational, and humorous. The mercurial touch of self-conscious artistry is present throughout all the witty distortions of the heroic drama; it is on the whole much less destructive than the effects of parody and mock-heroic used in 'straight' satire. It is meant to furnish the 'delight' of the play, to fulfil a partially ornamental function in the dramatic poem. Therefore the style of wit employed is of necessity hybrid, and exclusive to the plays themselves. I hope in the course of this study to reveal some of its more intimate qualities.

Wit is not the only feature determining Dryden's choice of dramatic techniques. A growing interest in the passions is clearly visible in the heroic drama. Thomas H. Fujimara has recognised in the passions the primary source of Dryden's dramatic power³⁶. He interprets Dryden's use of the passions as a direct reflection of Hobbes, which would give the passions a satirical function almost equivalent to the wit. But Dryden is sufficiently removed from any formulation of a 'ruling passion' like Pope's to give the lie to Fujimara's contention that the plays, in extolling the primacy of passion, embody the glorification of sex and power in particular. Dryden's attitude to the passions is dependent upon a stylised conception of individual passions, which, like the 'humours' of comedy, may have particular applicability to a character of Extravagant temperament. His plays present

³⁶ T.H.Fujimara, 'The Appeal of Dryden's Heroic Plays', op.cit., p.40.

a more rational, Cartesian, approach to the passions than do, for instance, the plays of Shakespeare. It is for this reason that so many critics have expressed dissatisfaction with Dryden's treatment of 'real life' in the plays, and held him incapable of depicting the passion of love. Again, as in the wit, what we are witnessing in the plays is the development in embryo of techniques that come to fruition in MacFlecknoe; what Dryden is doing with the passions is to explore them primarily as self-contained artefacts, abstractions recalling the allegorical virtues and vices of the Elizabethan interludes and moralities, but grafted upon modern personalities which epitomise the prevailing trends in contemporary society. Sometimes an individual or 'compound' passion can then be seen as the natural expression of personality - as e.g. ambition for Lyndaraxa, love-revenge for Zempoalla, 'sudden dejection of mind' for Melesinda. Often several passions mingle in proportion to the number of moral alternatives facing a character, e.g. the interaction of shame, pride, remorse, love and jealousy in the Antony of All for Love. Just as dullness is allowed to permeate the whole atmosphere which envelops the witless Shadwell in MacFlecknoe, the passions become the native element of the heroic plays. The poet's vividness of description, or enargeia, is severely put to the test, in this most painterly activity of illustrating the passions which labour in human breasts³⁷. Dryden utilizes the passions as an opportunity for lyricism,

³⁷. See J.H.Hagstrum, The Sister Arts, op.cit., p.177.

bombast, and even whimsy. Yet Dryden's characters love to boast of their immunity to passion; passions are regarded as a misfortune, a test of virtue, or as punishment for presumption. There is a corresponding emphasis throughout the plays on the curing of passion, and on medical inventories of symptoms. The passions are visitations which both reveal and set in motion the latent potential for good and evil within personality, and which constitute an essential part of the writer's 'verisimilitude', or 'drawing to the life'. Slavery to passion is one of Dryden's favourite ironic norms; although his characters remain isolated within their own specific passions, they exhibit their shared common humanity by falling prone to heightened emotion. Dryden evinces a curious detachment here; although he is concerned to make the passions convincing, he avoids complete empathy with his characters. It is as if he treats the simple engagement of the emotions as a mechanism, a technique of dramatic effect, and so does not feel constrained to build up organically-conceived and 'integrated' personalities after the manner of Shakesperian tragedy. Passions pass through the stage actors and are communicated to the audience to be appreciated, judged and excused. It thus becomes a part of social decorum to express an analytical interest in the passions, after the manner of Corneille and Racine, and apply reasoned experience to the forces of unreason.

Emotion in Dryden is always sudden, unpredictable and infectious; a chain of passions, linked by familial resemblances (e.g. Love and Hate, Hope and Fear) fetters the characters and gives the actors an opportunity to show off their histrionic ability. It is as if emotion in the

Restoration theatre provides the revelatory experience (i.e. one in which one recognizes some fundamental truth about the nature of humanity) which madness had provided on the Elizabethan stage³⁸. Although there is a strong temptation to consider Dryden's affective techniques unrealistic or inadequate, it is as well to remind ourselves of the almost superstitious fear which came to be associated throughout the seventeenth century with imagination and any form of violent emotion. Dryden uses the passions because they are theatrically colourful, and because they exactly suit the volatile natures of his villains and villainesses. But although he needs passion, Dryden is anxious to control and methodize it, and to show that order is implicit even in chaos. His famous re-definition of wit as 'a propriety of thoughts and words' in The Author's Apology for Heroic Poetry and Poetic Licence (W, I, 207) bears the imprint of his study of the passions and suggests that the formal virtues of 'judgment' and 'discretion' - the ordering criteria in art - should also extend to the regulation of human behaviour. Dryden's mature formulation of 'wit' implies these conservative values of correctness, decorum and balance. For Dryden true wit was something which must benefit from the conquest or moderation of the passions. Before Dryden really allows himself to explore the physical or spiritual consequences of emotion he likes to be secure in the knowledge that passion can be restrained by the forces of the intellect, and that wit and 'right reason' have the power to purge the mind of delusion.

³⁸. See below, pp. 437 - 86.

It is particularly important that we should not see the mixed style - the modulation between high seriousness and mockery induced by the interaction of wit and the passions - as something which Dryden miraculously abandoned when he turned to blank verse. Dryden's penchant for the ironic and grotesque does not cease to manifest itself after 1675, the date of his last rhymed play. Characters like Alexas in All for Love and Muley Moloch in Don Sebastian testify to the persistence of types from the early plays, while tonal ambivalence is never entirely missing; indeed it remains a marked and even distressing feature of All for Love, a play whose total effect ought to be uniformly tragic. After 1675 the general trend of Dryden's work for the stage is towards the greater participation of the audience in 'pathetic' (i.e. sensibility-inducing) emotion; the antithetical bias of rampant heroic wit is thus discarded as unsuitable. However Dryden's blank-verse tragedy lacks brilliance precisely because it is denied the enriching plurality of epic and satiric voices found in the heroic plays; the sonorities of All for Love and Don Sebastian are more sparsely-textured and austere. The lucid neo-Shakespearian verse is too meditative, too painstakingly transparent, to offer the deep imaginative stimulus of image and metaphor. Dryden's blank verse disappoints because it is not redolent with a poetic suggestivity which radiates outwards from surface meaning. The loss of the bizarre wit of the heroic play, with its ability to invoke the gratuitous emotionalism of the Baroque, fatally restricts Dryden's range of timbres, and the phasing-out of satiric interplay excludes the allusive and the piquant from his style. We are left with the

impression of great formal discipline and of august presence in the later tragedies; Dryden is making studied efforts to become a 'great' dramatist. The autumnal harmonies of Aureng-Zebe foreshadow these changes; its strengths lie in its concision (the plotting is clear and the heroic 'norm' restrained), and its assimilation of the dramatic function and use of the passions. The play is more contemplative than its forbears, moving further away from the festivity of Dryden's youthful excursions into theatre.

The concept of 'festivity' is one which will be of central importance throughout my succeeding discussions of Dryden's stage techniques. I use the term to denote the roundedness of Dryden's approach to language and style, and to describe his readiness to risk imbalance and indecorum for the sake of experiment. In his book Shakespeare's Festive Comedy, C.L. Barber links festivity with a specific saturnalian tradition of 'holiday' in Elizabethan England. He argues that holiday symbolised temporary licence, 'a "misrule" which implied rule',³⁹. Although Dryden's plays are unlike Shakespearian comedy in that they do not invite obvious analogies between social rituals and dramatic forms, or promote a heightened awareness of the mirthful associations between man and nature, they do exhibit perverse excursions into the fanciful and grotesque which partake of an aggressive and often satirical 'festivity'. Barber explains that

A saturnalian attitude, assumed
by a clear-cut gesture toward
liberty, brings mirth, an
accession of wanton liberty.⁴⁰

³⁹ C.L. Barber, Shakespeare's Festive Comedy, Cleveland, Ohio and New York, (1963), p.10.

⁴⁰ ibid., p.7.

Dryden's 'festivity' is too dark to be seen as an extension of Shakespearian 'revel', apart from the fact that it is fed from quite other sources. However 'festivity' of an ironic sort is a recurrent feature of Dryden's style, especially visible in his habitual use of mock-heroic. Villainous or exaggeratedly 'heroic' characters flout the conventions of social order and thereby assert their independence as 'lords of misrule'. For Dryden the use of the grotesque provides a useful outlet for the hedonistic impulses of 'saturnalia', enabling him to integrate the powers of the 'fancy' into the contrapuntal design of the heroic plays. Dryden's festivity is characteristically most in evidence when subverting the formal restrictions called for by the denouement; 'festivity' here becomes a tacit admission of protest. A mischievous habit of sprinkling the elevated rhetoric of heroic tragedy with casual throwaway remarks which invite ill-timed laughter brings serious tone dangerously close to annihilation. For instance, Zempoalla in The Indian Queen, dispensing with her royal prisoners, abruptly tells her guards, 'Here, lead these Offerings to their deaths', (CD,VIII,223), and Maximin, momentarily diverted by the moral fervour of his wife in Tyrannick Love, exclaims:

How much she is to piety inclin'd!
 Behead her while she's in so good a mind. (CD,X,182).

Through banality and the intrusion of the prosaic, Dryden demonstrates with unnerving assurance how narrow is the isthmus which separates the godlike and sublime from the monstrous and unnatural. What may appear to be stylistic 'blunders' are in fact moral pointers; the festive over-confidence of Zempoalla and Maximin helps to outline the true nature of their 'tragic' or ironic flaw - a degeneracy

of the will which, to the rational Dryden, is perhaps the most horrifying symbol of man's helplessly sinning condition.

Dryden's saturnalian tendencies are nearly always defined by the scope of his dramatic wit. In the heroic plays and tragedies of Nathaniel Lee they are expressed in the orgiastic release by rhetoric of inflated passions. Because Lee's norm of passion remains consistently high, we receive the impression that his 'saturnalia' are more serious-minded than Dryden's. Lee's high-powered declamation receives little variation in tone while Dryden's couplets are always fluently modulated to achieve a variety of ironic effect. C.L. Barber's notion of saturnalian comedy is particularly applicable to Dryden's method in the heroic plays. Barber says that saturnalian comedy

is satiric only incidentally;
its clarification comes with
movement between poles of
restraint and release in
everybody's experience.⁴¹

Dryden moves frequently back and forwards between the poles of fancy and judgment, the wit being seemingly incidental but really being instrumental to the process. It ought to be emphasised here that what Barber means by 'clarification' does not take place in Dryden or Lee to quite the same extent or in quite the same manner as it does in Shakespeare.

'Clarification' expresses the concept of the centrality of the dramatist's relationship with his audience and his assumed readiness to make them participators in his imaginative design; it is a quest for a sense of integration.

⁴¹. ibid., p.8.

This is rarely completely realized in Dryden or Lee. Lee's nervous energy sweeps his dramas along with the impetus of a tornado, but passion has neither purgation nor moral direction; his plays eventually 'tire themselves out'. Dryden, on the other hand, makes a more deliberate attempt to contrast formal design with festive wit and the disordering passions, but the actual process of integration takes its stimulus from the interpenetration of these separate elements, and is not formally acknowledged (Dryden's denouements often promote a 'harmony' which is totally out of keeping with the foregoing spirit of the play, so cannot be considered as definitive statements or 'solutions'). Dryden's darker 'festivity' is in part a reflection of the ironic needs of his audience - their need to be 'cushioned' by wit from too spontaneous an engagement in heroic emotion - and is also in part a reflection of his own imaginative needs as a poet - for example in his attraction towards incongruity and disproportion. For Dryden 'festivity' is something essentially separate from judgment, discretion, and all the principles which constitute the just ordering of a work of art. Although Dryden never conceived of an overall principle which would express his most individual contribution to dramatic art, his 'festivity' is not unlike what some critics have interpreted as his 'settled habits of mind' - something which incorporates his wry philosophy with the neat and sometimes too-neat providence of his plays⁴². Shakespeare's 'festivity'

⁴². See in particular D.W. Jefferson, 'The Significance of Dryden's Heroic Plays', op.cit., p.127, 'Aspects of Dryden's Imagery', op.cit., pp.32-3, and "All, all of a piece throughout": Thoughts on Dryden's Dramatic Poetry' in Restoration Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon Studies 6, ed. J.R. Brown and B. Harris (1965), p.159.

partakes of an altogether different humour, a mood of 'holiday' intended for another society. Shakespeare is able to express his quest for integration in the unity of tone, conception and feeling he is able to achieve in linking his romantic settings or 'green worlds' with the contemplative music of the Elizabethan lyric. Dryden's plays too have songs, some of them memorable ones; but they do not express the same fullness of experience. Dryden's dramatic preoccupations are inspired by the critical ferment of the world outside the play, Shakespeare's by an imaginative journey into the world of the play, and by questions arising within it.

To make such comparisons is not to decry Dryden. His aims were very different indeed from Shakespeare's. The heroic plays represent a fascinating compromise between the imaginative demands of theatre and the social need for realism ('nature' and 'verisimilitude' are Dryden's major glosses), a compromise which is expressive of the cultural milieu of the Restoration. What Dryden does is to put forward a 'heroic' idea which, under certain circumstances, may be admitted as 'un-heroic'; the 'heroic' will always incorporate a loophole for a-social and disruptive behaviour. Conversely, everything - even the sublimest illogic - can appear 'heroic' to those who put their faith in words. Thus the 'heroic' as utilized by Dryden is not a barren absolute or even a principle of conduct which can be accurately or adequately defined; it becomes a 'medium' or mode of perceiving in which the spectator is alerted simultaneously to the possibilities of transcendence or transmogrification. Grotesque metamorphosis dogs Dryden's heroic imagery, waiting to reduce it to a condition of uncertainty; thus Dryden's

grandiose imagery uneasily apes Hobbesian 'matter in motion', and is frequently found in a state of transition. Thus the 'heroic' becomes a sort of literary 'carte-blanche' which may glorify or denigrate, perhaps do both, according to context. The 'heroic' in fact becomes an instrument of power and manipulation.

Dryden's skills are predominantly technical; we admire his ratiocinative energy and the suavity with which he convinces his audience of their instrumentality in creating a heroic, affirmative present equal to the challenge of an epic past. Dryden plays on his own awareness of mediocrity and on the reluctance of his spectators to abandon tacitly agreed social norms. Dryden thus hoodwinks his patrons into believing that those very moral virtues which define them as social, co-operative beings (e.g. 'love', 'honour', 'piety', 'obedience') are in reality heroic attributes, attributes of the divine or godlike life which can establish a continuum between the Restoration gentleman and the 'pious' Aeneas ('court wits' such as Buckingham, Sedley, Mulgrave and Rochester could lay claim to be considered as modern 'heroes' of a more sceptical mould, while Dryden frequently treated his dedicatees in heroic fashion, e.g. Monmouth, Dorset)⁴³. However it is the existence of a dual standard, the recognition of what is perennially implausible beneath the ideal heroic exterior which becomes the starting-point for

⁴³. For a comprehensive survey of the relationship between Restoration heroic ideals and the lives of Restoration aristocrats, see J.H.Wilson, The Court Wits of the Restoration, Princeton (1948).

Dryden's dramatic satire. The ambiguity of his plays reflects the image of a society alienated from a confident belief in its own identity, and a society which looks increasingly to the comforts of the classical Golden Age for a sense of its own progress and stability. The notorious opulence and splendid rhetoric of the heroic plays are largely compensative virtues, intended to bolster a confidence which quickly waned after the Dutch Wars. It is therefore not surprising that Dryden's plays approach the problem of public confidence in terms which are easily accessible to those who had already sought salvation in Hobbesian materialism. Dryden analyses such topics as land, money, property, belief, philosophy, dress, conformity, sexual etiquette and political power in plays whose atmosphere is deliberately remote; heightened by the intensity of the surrounding exoticism, the notion of heroism is carefully abstracted from an immediate political context, although later plays (e.g. Oedipus, The Duke of Guise, The Spanish Fryar), do this less successfully and run the risk of censorship. The plays however are not mere political allegories; although much of their vigour is expressed in dialectic Dryden did not design them as purely didactic artefacts. Essentially Dryden was exploring the new potential available to Restoration man in a manner which would reveal to him the fulness of a life based on genuine commitment, judgment and discretion. The interaction of satire and fable proved that such a prospect could be genuinely delightful. It was through the development of a 'festive' breadth of response that Dryden's audience could

accustom itself to the continuous questioning and reassessment which the heroic play demands. Just as Dryden's wit is never uniformly facetious, so his morals are never uniformly austere; he 'reforms the nation',

Not with dull morals, gravely writ, like those
Which men of easy phlegm with care compose,
.....
But by examples drawn, I dare to say,
From most of you who hear and see the play.
(SS, IV, 364)

In our own day we need perhaps to make more concerted efforts to appreciate the assimilative strengths of such theatre. We need most of all to learn how to look beyond the generic limitations of familiar terms such as 'wit', 'humour', the 'mock-heroic', 'fancy', and 'imagination', and trust more to the mood of the individual heroic plays and to the spirit which moves and enlightens their practice. In the ensuing chapters each of the major heroic plays will be treated in some degree as an unique response to an expressive problem. It will be the purpose of this thesis to promote an approach to the heroic plays which will explain why Dryden relied so frequently on style and tone to achieve greater 'heroic' ends, and why the technicalities of his drama require so much special pleading. In any encounter with the heroic play, one thing is certain; it will invite inevitable comparisons with other related genres. I therefore make no apology for drawing freely upon the traditions of panegyric, burlesque, opera and melodrama in providing analogies which seem to me to offer a creative insight into the workings of Dryden's heroic drama.

Chapter 1

The Operatic Principle and the Heroic Play

Introduction

Edward Gordon Craig, in his manifesto, The Art of the Theatre, published in 1905, wrote:

When the theatre has become a masterpiece of mechanism, when it has invented a technique, it will without any effort develop a creative art of its own.¹

Craig's voice is unique in its insistence that the achievement of such a creative art is not merely inspirational but also the effect of study and conscious labour; it is to be the end product of any dramatic experience and, he maintained, only from the moment of performance does the living design of the play reveal itself and give birth to new ideas, new experience, new design. Craig's words point towards the kind of critical shortcomings which still beset the proper appreciation of Restoration drama and suggest ways in which these shortcomings may be met. For example, how many modern critics have made any real attempt to discover the potential creative power implicit in the heroic play, or striven to understand the techniques which Dryden and other writers of the genre built into the composition of these lofty, baffling dramas?

Craig's views on theatrical artifice can help us here for he was both courageous and eccentric enough to put technique before originality and creative genius in his aesthetic hierarchy. He argued that without a concept of theatre as total theatre,

¹. E.G. Craig, On the Art of the Theatre, (1957), p.176.

comprising the sum of every craftsman's labours, no 'living' design, no inspirational force, would ever be possible from the drama². He understood theatre primarily in terms of its life-giving appeal to the senses and, through them, to fundamental and unchanging spiritual values. This was a technique not unfamiliar to Restoration playwrights. Craig redefined the five 'senses' of theatre, deliberately stressing their collaborative function in the formation of total design; they are 'action, words, line, colour and rhythm'. These brought together the disparate elements of symbolism, dance, ritual and realism.

Craig's emphasis on the overall design, and his scrupulous attention to those individual components which are forged by the poetic process into a corporate unity, may be seen as the modern counterpart of Dryden's painstaking attempts to create a critical forum for his plays in the society for which he wrote them. The importance Craig attached to the figure of the stage-director - the man who interprets and brings to life the poet's text - is equally suggestive of the way in which modern criticism

². Phillip Parsons in 'Restoration Tragedy as Total Theatre', (in Restoration Literature: Critical Approaches, ed. H. Love, (1972), pp. 27-68), argues that Dryden had less imaginative grasp of 'pure theatre' than Lee, Otway, or Congreve. Parsons' main objection is that Dryden's plays read too much like heroic poems to 'enact' well on the stage, and he views dialectic as a severe hindrance to the progress of dramatic action. Edward Gordon Craig's concept of theatre, however, is prepared to take account of the verbal as well as the physical element; words are the essential medium for a 'living' design. While Parsons finds Dryden's dramatic technique 'earthbound' by comparison with that of other dramatists, it should be noted that Dryden clearly fulfils the majority of Craig's stipulations for an aesthetically balanced and pleasure-giving drama.

has failed to respond to the flexibility of Dryden's plays by largely ignoring the vital transition from the study to the stage. As a production like the Prospect Theatre Company's 1977 revival of All for Love shows, Dryden's drama is one of deliberately calculated expertise, a conscious straining after a facility of style and execution brought about only by continuous polishing and improving. Dryden's art is at home in the formal discipline exacted by the unities. It is tempting enough when we witness the ease of the total design of a play like All for Love to assume that the theatrical in Dryden has been, and always will be, a faintly exuberant, superficial quality, typical of the light-heartedness which colours the traditional view of the Restoration. However, Craig's ideas should make us look again more closely at the effects of line, tone, rhythm, plot and structure which give Dryden's plays their deceptively facile appearance.

The idea that any dramatist might perfect a style which would enable his theatre to become a 'masterpiece of mechanism' would probably not earn many adherents today, yet to a Restoration writer, living off the meagre proceeds of his productions, it would be sound enough advice. Craig makes an astute distinction between the life of the dramatist and the life of the theatre, firmly believing that they are separate in nature. Certainly we encounter in Dryden a curious element of detachment from the stage itself. He was not always a willing dramatist, he rarely fulfilled the terms of his commissions, and Don Sebastian was the almost accidental result of a reluctant

return to writing for the stage as a result of financial pressures³. As regards the casting of his plays, Dryden seems to have had little say in the matter, otherwise Samuel Pepys might not have complained of Nell Gwyn's 'ill acting' of Cydaria in The Indian Emperour⁴. At a glance Dryden's shadowy, somewhat wry personality aligns itself much more readily with the critics, booksellers, translators and men of letters, the 'middle-men' on the fringes of the court wits, than with the actors, stage-managers and prompters who still seem to haunt the pages of Shakespeare as very real people. However, Dryden's aloofness is sometimes misleading. True, his interest in the theatre was primarily commercial, but this did not prevent him from exercising the capacity to shock with sudden spiritual revelation and create

³ Dryden's reasons for his late return to writing for the stage are set out in his Preface to Don Sebastian (W, II, 44-51). The image which sums up most succinctly Dryden's attitude to theatre at this time is that of 'digging in exhausted mines'. Whereas Dryden's invention did not fail him in his translations or Chaucer adaptations, he was probably aware that his later plays were conceived largely in imitation of his earlier successes.

⁴ See The Diaries of Samuel Pepys, 8 vols., ed. R.C. Latham and W. Matthews, (1970-74), pp. 395 and 525. On the two occasions in 1667 when Pepys saw the play, Nell Gwyn's unsuitability for tragedy roused his indignation (perhaps especially because her comic role of Florimel in Secret Love was such a delight). In spite of this, however, Mrs. Gwyn continued to take leading serious roles in Dryden plays, as Valeria in Tyrannick Love (where she dies out of her calling, 'in a tragedy' - see the Epilogue), and the complex and emotional Almahide in The Conquest of Granada. Although her strengths lay in comedy, it may have been refreshing to watch Mrs. Gwyn bring a certain coquettishness to morally 'elevating' roles, and her performances could well have pointed up the amusing Baroque wit of the serious plays, and served Dryden's interests extremely well.

an aura of moral panic - aspects of his plays which have usually been much neglected and overlooked. And yet, just as for Edward Gordon Craig the principle of design represented the very essence of theatre and the source of its truth, magic and eccentricity, for Dryden convention and design were the mainstays of his imaginative response to the tastes of his public. Though separated by more than two hundred years Dryden and Craig share something of the same perverse mixture of iconoclasm and veneration, experiment and caution, in their use of the currently received tenets of dramatic theory and practice.

Dryden's active contribution to the art of the theatre has never been properly evaluated, partly because his stature as a poet has tended to dwarf his dramatic aptitude, partly because his more lasting monuments of satirical and translated verse have overshadowed the wit of the plays. But to seek out Dryden the 'practical man of the theatre' is not to decry his immense achievement in other fields or to negate the instinctively literary nature of his response to life and society. Although he was never intimately involved with the running of a production, we glimpse from the **p**refaces, prologues and epilogues the kind of practical questions he faced when dealing with the reception of his plays. In his complaints about the actors and the audiences of his day there are hints of the potential stage-manager expressing dissatisfaction with the tools of his trade. His concern for the reputation of the English stage, for its prestige compared with that of Italy or France, its literary standards and its capacity to delight, demonstrate again and again in his critical works his belief in the importance of establishing just techniques for the perfection of his art⁵.

⁵ Dryden's major statements on the national prestige of British drama are to be found in An Essay of Dramatic Poesy, (W, I, esp. p. 76)

In freeing Dryden from his often rather ponderous image as Poet Laureate we shall need the assistance of a theatrical analogue which will enable us to arrive at a new vision of the aims and merits of his dramaturgy. It is the aim of the present chapter to demonstrate how technique, when viewed through the optics of a sympathetic and related genre - that of the opera - emerges as the enlivening principle behind the heroic plays; and to illustrate how astutely Dryden made use of every means at his disposal, intellectual, moral and theatrical, to create an art which was collaborative in the best sense. It would be reliant upon poet, painter, musician, listener and reader in equal proportion, each exercising their separate functions and identities, each receiving their individual impressions and transmuting them into their own imaginative engagement in the play. Theatre, Craig reminds us, means participation:

The Art of the Theatre is neither acting nor the play, it is not scene nor dance, but it consists of all the elements of which these things are composed: action, which is the very spirit of acting; words, which are the body of the heart; line and colour, which are the very heart of the scene; rhythm, which is the very essence of dance.⁶

Craig's allegory of theatre as an organism comprising body and 'heart' (i.e. soul) stresses the interdependence of the senses and spiritual values. A more recent critic, Robert Etheridge Moore, lays a comparable emphasis upon the physical attributes of Restoration theatre when discussing the underlying meaning of a drama of aggregates: he writes;

⁶ E.G. Craig, On the Art of the Theatre, op.cit., p.138.

It is the synthesis of the elements of music, poetry and décor that stimulated the imagination of the audience, a synthesis that cannot be recaptured merely by looking at the printed page. We need the theatre in our heads, the living impression of scenery, production, words and melody.⁷

In Dryden's case such a process of synthesis demands that we take into account even what he himself considered to be the 'false beauties of the stage' - 'the lights, the scenes, the habits, and, above all, the grace of action', which all 'impose upon the judgement'. Dryden knew well enough that the actor was vital to the life of the play and that 'false beauties' were instrumental in maintaining that life:

when the actor ceases to shine upon
them, when he gilds them no longer
with his reflection, they vanish in
a twinkling.

(W, I, 275)

The disillusionment of Dryden's later years, when he wrote these words, betrays a wavering faith in the power of illusion; for him the magic had nearly gone out of theatre, and its technique had become reduced almost to a jargon. He was to find solace in the contemplation of a new vogue, opera.

In opera all these elements of line, tone, colour, rhythm, action, words, and music find their most flamboyant and challenging form of expression. Evelyn had called it

one of the most magnificent and
expensfull diversions the Wit
of Men can invent.⁸

The need to explain the appeal of the heroic play by an analogy with opera can be justified by the comparative neglect shown by modern scholars over the questions of tonal colouring and

⁷ R.E. Moore, Henry Purcell and the Restoration Theatre, (1961), p.10.

⁸ Evelyn, Diary, 4 vols., ed. E.S. de Beer, (1955), II, 450.

rhetorical orchestration in the rhymed drama. The analogy with opera is appropriate since it invokes associations of the mythic and the marvellous which it was the business of the heroic play to exalt to epic status, and it also encourages a useful concept of extemporisation and experiment with formal technique which is once again a central preoccupation of the heroic play. A closer attention to the nuances of the text will, I believe, reveal something of the complexity of the tonal fluctuations besetting the plays and cast interesting lights on their moral ambiguity. In recent years two critics have argued a tentative relationship between the two genres; Norman Suckling, discussing the lyrical and declamatory content of much of All for Love, has likened it to 'spoken opera',⁹ while R.W.Ingram has traced an operatic idiom back to the plays of Beaumont and Fletcher. In fact, Ingram boldly designates all the serious plays of the 1660's as comprising 'typical heroic opera',¹⁰. R.E. Moore also considers Aureng-Zebe as a play belonging to 'a world peculiarly suited to operatic treatment',¹¹, although the play contains much less incidental music and masque-like interpolations than any other of Dryden's heroic plays. What is important here is the fact that these critics have discerned a quality in Dryden that is best described, but not defined, by the word 'operatic'. The crucial problem is one of classification, and

⁹. N.Suckling, 'Dryden in Egypt: Reflexions on All for Love', DUJ, XLV, (1952), p.2.

¹⁰. See R.W.Ingram, 'Operatic Tendencies in Stuart Drama', MQ, XLIV, (1958), p.499.

¹¹. R.E.Moore, Henry Purcell, op.cit., p.21.

how best to avoid its pitfalls. The term 'heroic opera', which Ingram adopts, is, if anything, too purely musical to be of lasting value as a description of the heroic play; it is better confined to the conventions of the eighteenth-century and Handel's opera seria. On the other hand Suckling's notion of 'spoken opera', at once more accurate and more immediately absurd since opera cannot be spoken, seems to belittle the scale on which the writers of heroic tragedy conceived of their work. Also the term 'spoken opera' is too prosaic to do justice to the set-pieces of sonorous verse which permeate the plays and which obtrude into the text like grandiose arias. Although one is reluctant to classify at all, the term which suggests most accurately the suspicion of insincerity and 'playing for effect' which attaches to the rhymed plays is 'heroic melodrama'. Melodrama has the advantage of being both a musical and a dramatic term, and the sensationalism so often attached to the pejorative notion of the 'melodramatic', parallels the kind of excesses hinted at in the similar use of the terms 'operatic' and 'heroic'. Melodrama invokes the grandiose emotional colouring appropriate to the heroic plays, without denying them their essentially narrative dramatic structure. Music, whether external or internal (i.e. in songs or in the formal organization of rhyme) remains incidental to the dramatic interest.

By way of compromise I propose to discuss the heroic plays in relation first of all to opera and to the ideas which the notion of opera evoked in the minds of seventeenth-century critics, and to treat opera as a broad-ranging 'metaphor' for the types of gesture and stylisation which occur in the heroic plays. I also intend to use the term 'melodrama' as an emblem of the interpenetration of genres and literary styles which

is distinctive of the period, and to throw light on the intrusion of mock-heroic into the heroic play. Both 'opera' and 'melodrama' are terms capable of conjuring up a dangerous contrast between the sublime and the ridiculous and are thus ideal for the exploration of certain facets of 'mock-sublime' which grow naturally out of the musical 'eloquence' associated with the 'heroic'.

Although there can be little doubt that the heroic play prepared audiences for the eccentricities of the Italian opera, Dryden's own experiments with opera were surprisingly moderate and were not sharply demarcated from the type of scenario he was accustomed to write for the heroic play. English ideas concerning the nature of opera in the late seventeenth century were vague, confused and prejudiced¹² and Dryden's contribution

¹². For a comprehensive account of this subject see E.J.Dent, The Foundations of English Opera, (1928), still the best scholarly investigation. The following articles are of interest in collating background information: S.A.E.Betz, 'The Operatic Criticism of the Tatler and Spectator', MQ, XXXI (1945), 318-30; J.Kinsley, 'The Music of the Heart', Ren. and Mod.Stud., VIII, (1964), 5-52; W.J.Lawrence, 'Foreign Singers and Musicians at the Court of Charles II', MQ, IX, (1923), 217-25; F.Montgomery, 'Early Criticism of Italian Opera in England', MQ, XV, (1929), 415-25; D.M.Walmsley, 'The Influence of Foreign Opera on English Operatic Plays of the Restoration Period', Anglia, LII (1928), 37-50; J.A.Westrup, 'Foreign Musicians in Stuart England', MQ, XXVII, (1941), 70-89. A particularly fine exposition of Dryden's musical techniques in the great odes (St Cecilia and Alexander's Feast) is to be found in J.M.Hollander, The Untuning of the Sky, Princeton (1961) pp.401-22. For a somewhat spartan handling of Dryden's possible debt to the work of Isaac Vossius, see D.T.Mace, 'Musical Humanism, the Doctrine of Rhythmus, and the Saint Cecilia Odes of Dryden', JWCI, XXVII, (1964), 251-92, and a cryptic reply from H.N.Davies, 'Dryden and Vossius: A Reconsideration', JWCI, XXIX (1966), 282-95.

to the defence of opera is considerable. Again, his toleration of its palpable absurdities stems from the problems of sensational and romantic excess he had encountered with the heroic play and which he knew well how to exploit. I prefer to see Dryden's attraction towards opera in later life not as a form of 'solution' to the epic dream which had haunted the heroic play, but rather as the articulation of an inner principle of musical organisation which had long given strength to his work. The whole corpus of Dryden's work for the theatre can thus be seen as being unified and activated by a particular attitude, best summed up in Professor E.J. Dent's description of what he calls the 'operatic principle',

an operatic principle which is neither the normal musical principle nor the normal dramatic principle. History shows us only too clearly that neither poets nor musicians have grasped it except spasmodically and intuitively.¹³

Professor Dent's idea possesses a breadth and freedom which is peculiarly applicable to Dryden. His 'operatic' intuitions and the workings of his imagination could lead him towards either the heroic or the mock-heroic and 'melodramatic'. Dryden's intuitive grasp of the necessity for presenting a continuous conflict between reason and imagination resulted in some extraordinary perversities of dramatic invention. His juxtaposition of heroic satire and the passions produced plays which were exceptionally musical in poetic content, without ever being oppressively profound. Scene follows scene with the stark inevitability of key-change or modulation, and practised listeners soon become familiar with the conventions which are being satirized. In his use of bizarre and unrealistic effect,

¹³ E.J. Dent, The Foundations of English Opera, op.cit., pp.vii-viii.

extravagant bombast, and striking physical incident, Dryden proved himself a master of ironic dissonance; the satiric dimensions of his 'heroic' world-view could thus be exploited, inverted, or modified to produce alternate effects of instruction and delight in the hearers - also some confusion and suspense. It is through the music of rhyme that Dryden moulds the sensibility of his audience; he creates the appropriate environment for the maximum variety of emotional response and intellectual stimulation. Robert Etherege Moore recalls us to the principles which animated Craig's art of the theatre when he writes,

What enables Dryden to sail
imperturbably through all this
extravagance is that power of
technical control so characteristic
of the best baroque.¹⁴

It is this mastery of technical control which this chapter seeks to elucidate.

The Operatic Principle and the Heroic Play

I. Dryden and the Operatic Principle

Before enquiring further into the exact nature of 'spoken' opera or 'heroic melodrama', it is necessary to distinguish between Dryden's use of operatic techniques in the heroic plays and his actual composition of opera libretti. While Dryden's use of operatic techniques was largely subconscious and manifested the characteristic refinement of his sensibility, his composition of words for music, as in Albion and Albanus (1685), was quite another matter, a deliberate attempt to

¹⁴ R.E. Moore, Henry Purcell, op.cit., p.23.

collaborate with the musician and bring the rationalising power of the word to the conventions of opera. Although heroic play and opera often shared the same stylistic details and stereotypes they were initially directed towards very different ends. As H. Neville Davies has pointed out, the libretto was always

by definition a purposely incomplete production, so written as to find its natural completion through the addition of music and by presentation upon the stage.¹⁵

Also, until Metastasio, the Austrian court poet of the eighteenth century, achieved international recognition as the first master of the dramatic libretto, the literary prestige of the libretto was still questionable. Meanwhile the heroic play, though antedating foreign opera in England by at least a decade and native opera by nearly two, was a deliberately self-sufficient, all-embracing structure. The heroic play incorporated scenic splendour, variety of costume and the sensuous appeal of music into its own peculiar idiom, (the aural magnificence of its eloquent rhyme), and thus strove to produce sonorities which harmonized disparate elements in a still primarily verbal texture. Unlike opera it was not dominated by music, miracles and the deus ex machina, since Dryden had tried to ensure that its poetic sonorities would be equal to the epic aspirations of tragedy, that sublime and notoriously isolated genre. The heroic play, although based on an assimilative technique, thus managed to preserve some measure of independence as a genre. Opera, on the other hand, was dependent on the skills of the musician, the poet and the painter, and novelty in everything - songs, airs, dances, spectacle and machines - had to be its

¹⁵ H.N. Davies, 'Dryden's Libretti in the Light of Seventeenth-Century Ideas about Words and Music', M.A. Thesis, Liverpool (1965)

keynote. Heroic plays could - and did - exist without the sensuous allurements of music; operas could not, and there grew up the suspicion in England that totally 'sung' opera was in some way gratuitous and morally enervating. So while the libretto as a 'verbal structure of calculated incompleteness',¹⁶ constituted a degraded or 'mean' dramatic type, the heroic play was in effect its antithesis, an entertainment based on the rational powers of the 'word' yet incorporating principles of inner musical organisation which allowed setting, characters, and tone to be brought into a harmony through the stylised etiquette of rhyme and the morally uplifting imitation of classical epic.

A glance at even a few Restoration plays will quickly tell us however that many heroic dramas called for quite extended sections of instrumental and vocal music and that these interludes were popular with audiences. The incidental music in Dryden's plays is used to give particular weight and solemnity to the rites of the black mass and scenes of spiritual temptation - Ismeron and Nigrinus from The Indian Queen and Tyrannick Love are highly 'operatic' versions of the necromancer of romance literature. Dryden also uses music as a more direct way of appealing to the emotions; the songs in Secret Love, Tyrannick Love and The Conquest of Granada underscore themes of erotic melancholy in the plays and present fanciful distortions of the golden age of pastoral where nymphs and swains enjoy an uninhibited sexual heroism. Although Dryden's use of such set-piece interpolations is an important pointer to his readiness

¹⁶. ibid.

to explore operatic techniques, it does not actually reflect any particular leanings towards opera per se. In fact, for a large part of his career Dryden shared the prejudice of his fellow-countrymen and evinced little interest in or understanding of the possibilities of the new genre.

Dryden's attitude to opera developed little between 1667 and 1677. The Tempest, which he adapted from Shakespeare under the guidance of Davenant in 1667 is an opera only in name, containing less incidental music and spectacle than either his Indian Queen (with Robert Howard, 1664) or Davenant's celebrated revision of Macbeth with its musical 'flying' witches (1664). In the Preface to The Tempest, Dryden pays tribute principally to Davenant's 'quick and piercing imagination' and it is clearly the fanciful elements of the revision which attracted Dryden most (e.g. the romantic 'doubling' of Ferdinand and Miranda to form an operatic quartet of sexually uninitiated lovers on Prospero's island). Apart from these 'imaginings new and remote' The Tempest offers little which cannot be found in a stock Restoration comedy, and in its reduction of the marvellous (Prospero's magic powers are circumscribed by the naturally sceptical bent of Davenant's wit) it suggests the cynical libertine ethic of comedy rather than the opulent mythology of Baroque opera. Ironically Dryden was to follow this with an exceedingly grandiose heroic play, Tyrannick Love (1669), in which operatic situations and style were much more in evidence. The same breadth of movement and gesture is discernible in The Conquest of Granada (1670-1), a double play which comes closest to Davenant's ideal of an epic poem adapted to the needs of five-act structure. Up until this point however Dryden makes no reference at all to Davenant's experiments with stile recitativo in his 'operas' of the late 1650's (e.g. The Siege

of Rhodes and The Cruelty of the Spaniards in Peru). However, in the Essay of Heroic Plays (1672) Dryden did acknowledge Davenant as the originator of the heroic play. But Dryden's criticisms of the 'opera', The Siege of Rhodes, are all non-musical; he concentrates upon its deficiencies as a heroic play and complains that Davenant should have given it more 'fulness of plot' and 'variety of character' (W, I, 158). After this we hear nothing more of opera until circa 1674 when Dryden suddenly and unaccountably turns Paradise Lost into The State of Innocence; an opera (published 1677).

By 1677 foreign opera had appeared in London, and Dryden's last heroic play, Aureng-Zebe (1675) had demonstrated a surer touch in the depiction of the passions and a firmer control over the range and tonality of the verse. For the first time Dryden turned to a mythic subject as the inspiration for an opera, and although his choice was a misguided one (rhetorical debate, one of the expansive strengths of Paradise Lost, could not be successfully reduced to fit the glib sententiae which were the commonplaces of rhyme), the attempt showed an increasing tolerance towards the absurdities associated with the new genre. Dryden was still not sure enough of his ground to attempt any real distinction between a drama that is sung - 'heroic opera' - and a rhyming play with music - 'heroic melodrama'. The State of Innocence falls into neither category, since its unrelieved iambics are not conducive to musical setting (as a libretto it was never set to music), and its philosophical content too unsuitable to evolve the affective responses appropriate to opera. We find little clue as to why Dryden imagined that to revamp Paradise Lost as a pictorial fable with 'scenes and machines' would improve it. In his

prefatory remarks he expresses only the desire to impress his patroness, Mary of Modena, (who may well have been as puzzled as most critics have been ever since) and to further advance the dignity of the poetic imagination; nowhere is Dryden conscious that his new work is any more 'operatic', say, than any other of his heroic plays. In fact the stage directions call for music in a form much more applicable to the accompanying role it performs in melodrama; there are opportunities for 'a symphony of warlike music', 'a tune of horror' and a 'heaven full of angels and spirits'. One needs scarcely to be reminded of Duffet's operatic parodies of Crowne and Shadwell when one reads Dryden's opening instructions for the depiction of chaos:

Scene I - Represents a Chaos, or a confused Mass of Matter; the stage is almost wholly dark: A Symphony of warlike Music is heard for some time; then from the Heavens (which are opened) fall the rebellious Angels, wheeling in Air, and seeming transfixed with Thunderbolts: The bottom of the Stage being opened, receives the Angels, who fall out of sight. Tunes of Victory are played, and an Hymn sung; Angels discovered above, brandishing their swords: The Music ceasing and the Heavens being closed, the scene shifts...
(SS, V, 125)

Dryden here calls for the utmost invention from composer and stage-designer, and his stage-directions aim somewhat indirectly at a sublime which can only be properly effected through exaggerated heroic verse. The scenic splendours which punctuate The State of Innocence are derived from the tradition of masque, yet they clearly call for innovative techniques and balletic engineering. Dryden's conception of opera is as yet imperfect, and the scenario for the State of Innocence is far more suggestive of a map or design for the epic which Dryden had always wanted to write. The mingling of the marvellous with

the boldly intellectual (a favourite trick of Davenant's) was possible in the heroic play with its supernatural interludes but impossible in opera where fancy must predominate over judgment. Dryden's experiment with 'rational opera' in The State of Innocence was doomed to failure because he could not abandon dialectic. Most important of all, Dryden was still working without a specific composer in mind and without the experience of having worked with a musician; his notion of what he was trying to achieve was not enlightened by any awareness of the musical premiss upon which 'the dramatic' in opera must always subsist.

The State of Innocence pleased neither Milton nor Dryden's actor-managers. Albion and Albanus, however, (1685) marks the coming of age of Dryden as a critic of opera. To some extent an imitation of the French ballet du cour, Albion and Albanus itself is an extended masque designed as a ceremonial prologue to a larger work, e.g. The Tempest or King Arthur (the latter written in the same year, though not published until 1691). Although Albion and Albanus does not exhibit Dryden as an especially proficient practitioner of opera, the Preface displays a much firmer grasp of the subject and an elasticity of approach which is characteristic of Dryden at his best.

Dryden's description of opera is strongly flavoured by his epic obsession, and in his defence of the 'marvellous' he seems to be making certain claims for the 'heroic' nature of operatic activity. He points out that,

The supposed persons of this musical drama are generally supernatural, as gods, and goddesses, and heroes, which at least are descended from them and are in due time to be adopted into their number.

(W, II, 35)

Seven gods and goddesses turn up in Albion and Albanus, complete with retinues of Nereids, Tritons and Furies, and Juno makes her entrance in 'a Machine drawn by Peacocks'. Dryden seems content enough to imitate the spectacular visual effects of the Venetian opera witnessed by Evelyn in the 1640's. What he immediately grasps is the idea that opera, like the heroic play, is a manifestation of 'total' theatre, heavily dependent upon those 'false beauties' of the stage which he had so effectively analysed in the Dedication to The Spanish Fryar (1681) (see W, I, 275). Music, costume and spectacle contribute in opera to a total domination over the spectator's senses, and thus Dryden sees in the genre the natural repository for the scenes of 'fancy' (i.e. of astral spirits, ghosts and magicians) which sometimes seem out of place in the heroic play. Opera was to be deliberately and unashamedly fanciful:

Human impossibilities are to be
received as they are in faith,
because, where gods are introduced,
a supreme power is to be understood,
and second causes are out of doors;
yet propriety is to be observed
even here.

(W, II, 35)

Opera is thus an excuse for florid Herculean excess but also an occasion for caution - the extremely bitter tone of the Prologue to Albion and Albanus shows that Dryden could also be extremely contemptuous of the English submission to 'Julep dance, Ptisan of Song and Show'. Dryden knew that opera could be easily reduced to a formula or a recipe, and saw the dangers of cultivating it simply as an arbitrary mechanism. Yet it represented a challenge to be exploited; the union of myth with all that was frivolous, bizarre and extreme might yield a form of intellectual pleasure which would perpetuate, in however compromised a form, a heroic view of life. Dryden

was therefore prepared to be tolerant of the novelty of opera, whereas he could never be tolerant of the low predictability of farce¹⁷.

The similarity of subject-matter linking the heroic play and opera is further elucidated by Dryden's speculations on what 'spoken opera' might sound like:

If the persons represented were
to speak upon the stage, it would
follow, of necessity, that the
expression should be lofty, figurative,
and majestic: but the nature of
an opera denies the frequent use of
these poetical ornaments ...
(W, II, 35)

What he is really describing here is his own heroic drama with its carefully developed 'high style'. The language of Albion and Albanus is by contrast concise, sinewy and direct, with few tropes and grammatical complexities. Dryden's aim in the piece was to improve upon earlier librettos by Shadwell and Crowne (Psyche (1674) and Calisto (1675)) by procuring 'a more pleasing fable'. The plot of Albion and Albanus blatantly asserts Dryden's heroic conception of opera. The choice of subject is the double restoration (or restoration and apotheosis) of Albion (Charles II) with a backward glance at the major crisis points in recent national history, e.g. the Popish Plot and the Exclusion Bill. Dryden turns again to a mythologised account of contemporary events for support for his epic pretensions. Much of Albion owes its somewhat flaccid gesturing to the conventions of masque, but there are also occasional glimpses of the seventeenth-century Italian opera libretto.

¹⁷. Dryden's hostility to farce crystallizes soon after his successful collaboration with Newcastle on Sir Martin Mar-All (1667). See the Preface to Dryden's next comedy, An Evening's Love, or The Mock-Astrologer, (W, I, 144-55).

In Act II, scene 2, for example, Augusta (the city of London) is discovered alone with a 'snake in her Bosom, hanging down' (representing the fury Alecto) and Dryden gives her an extended passage of verse which obviously calls for an operatic 'scena' of mixed *arioso* and accompanied recitative:

O Jealousy, Thou raging ill,
 Why hast thou found a Room in Lovers Hearts,
 Afflicting what thou can'st not kill,
 And Poysoning Love himself, with his own Darts?
 I find my Albion's Heart is gone,
 My first offences yet remain,
 Nor can repentance Love regain;
 One writ in Sand, alas, in Marble one.
 I rave, I rave, my Spirits boyl
 Like flames encreas'd and mounting high with pouring Oyl:
 Disdain and Love succeed by turns;
 One freezes me, and t'other burns; It burns.
 Away soft Love, Thou Foe to rest,
 Give Hate the full possession of my Breast.
 Hate is the nobler passion far
 When Love is ill repay'd;
 For at one blow it ends the War,
 And cures the Love-sick Maid.
 (CD, XV, 35)

The subject of the scena is characteristically the passions, calling for the composer's ingenuity in combining the conventions of musical affektenlehre. Dryden's heroic plays abound in similar passages, one of the best being Nourmahal's suicide speech in Act V of Aureng-Zebe. But such expressive moments are rarely encountered in Albion and Albanus. Dryden returns to the moral imperatives of Baroque panegyric and creates a retrospective 'coronation opera' in which even the '4 Triumphal Arches erected at his Majesties Coronation' are used for the ceremonial pageant which concludes the first act. The entire composition of Albion and Albanus is governed by the information Dryden puts forward in the Preface about the origins of the Italian opera:

Their first operas seem to have been
 intended for the celebration of the
 marriages of their princes; or for the
 magnificence of some general time of
 joy.
 (W, II, 36)

The emphasis on the ceremonious and studied gesture, the rehearsed quality of all forms of address, the decency and lack of spontaneity which inhibit types and prevent them from turning into characters - all these features, which were to become essential ingredients of the opera seria in Italy, France and England - are all present in embryo in Restoration panegyric and the English heroic play. What Dryden is able to wrest from this combination is freshness and enthusiasm. The whole of his poetic career can be seen to be structured around courtly ceremonial, addressed first of all to the King in ornate panegyric, then dedicated to patrons who represented transcendent and festive heroic ideals and 'promoted' by their favours the ethic of the heroic plays. The celebratory aspects of an epic view of civilization even inspired Annus Mirabilis with an operatic magnificence, in the final vision of Augusta rising Phoenix-like from her ashes, as well as in the introduction of an aria-like 'prayer' for the King at a crucial moment in the nation's reconciliation with God. Elements of the 'coronation opera' and the psychological impact of solemnity and show, were always present in panegyric and in the heroic play, where they eventually came into contact with the mock-heroic and a satiric aura of majestic decadence which Dryden was adept at expressing. In the plays this resulted in irony, piquancy, scepticism and a fast-modulating sequence of witty and often festive juxtaposition; despite this the plays did not part company entirely with coronation solemnity. With the advent of opera, a genre adventurously committed to the sole gratification of the senses, Dryden saw another opportunity to affirm in a manner complementary to panegyric and the heroic drama an optimistic belief in the values of obedience and moral integrity.

Now, far removed from the historical actuality of the Restoration, Dryden was not committed to putting over such beliefs in an unequivocally serious manner. Opera was an ideal mouthpiece. Albion and Albanus and King Arthur represent the mutation of heroic and satiric values into an illusory world of fairytale and the supernatural, in which moral power is tenuously preserved by the agency of myth, and moral efficiency curtailed by the presence of operatic pomp. Both works trivialize heroic praise by making panegyric only a function of the musical, aural and visual expressiveness of the whole. Dryden cocoons his conservative myth in the technical safety of opera as mechanism.

On the other hand, these two 'operas' also testify to the existence of what Walter Scott has termed 'the natural mode of pleasing',¹⁸. Opera does not call for sublime thought or for the elevation required of tragedy. Dryden could thus devote himself wholeheartedly to the creation of pure theatrical pleasure. His speculation, later withdrawn, that operas may have derived partly from Moorish influence and the warlike celebration of the Zambras (W, II, 36), is indicative of his receptive attitude to the exoticism and demand for special effects implicit in the new genre. Although Dryden's two heroic operas are aggressively British in sentiment, his scenic transformations reflect the exotic richness of the heroic plays and provide opportunities for striking and novel musical effect

¹⁸. See Dryden, Works, 8 vols., ed. W. Scott and G. Saintsbury, Edinburgh (1882-84), I, 16. In the Preface to his Don Sebastian Dryden wrote of the trials of 'Having been longer acquainted with the stage than any poet now living, and having observed how difficult it was to please'. (W, II, 45).

(e.g. the famous 'frost scene' in King Arthur). So opera gradually came to epitomize the most Baroque elements in Restoration culture because it yoked myth and farce together in a potentially fruitful tension. Its epic pretensions were palpably frivolous, bizarre and extreme, and Dryden in King Arthur, built his spectacle around extended tableaux of ritual sacrifice and rustic chivalry. The symbolism of opera itself was overtly naïve, and the god who appeared in a machine was a spokesman for the powers of illusion and willing suspension of disbelief; the symphony or ritornello which accompanied his descent invested him with all the pomp of divinity and also prescribed the limits of his influence; the music created the context for his type of gesture, just as the aria was to do for the heroic individual. Dryden progressed ultimately to a belief that opera with 'propriety' could be delightful and refining in its influence. Albion and Albanus boasts a sophisticated Chaconne reminiscent of Lully and concludes with an heroic apotheosis of the 'new deity', Charles. Opera thus reaffirms the cultural possibilities already visible in the shaping and structure of panegyric and the heroic play; its aim is to delight, 'civilize' and enthrall.

A similar view of the refining influence of opera is taken, rather surprisingly, by John Oldham in his Horace's Art of Poetry, Imitated in English (1679). In a passage in which he reviews the condition of the stage following the Restoration he begins to suggest that by the time opera appeared the drama was already beginning to look like Craig's 'masterpiece of mechanism'. The following lines capture with grace and ease some of the sociological effects of drama and music in the period, reminding the reader of Dryden's concern for the

quality of court speech and his schemes for the improvement of the English tongue:

But since our monarch, by kind Heaven sent,
Brought back the arts with him from banishment,
And by his gentle influence gave increase
To all the harmless luxuries of peace;
Favoured by him, our stage has flourished too,
And every day in outward splendour grew;
In music, song and dance of every kind,
And all the grace of action 'tis refined;
And since that opera's at length come in,
Our players have so well improved the scene
With gallantry of habit, and machine,
As makes our theatre in glory vie
With the best ages of antiquity.¹⁹

Oldham is not averse to suggesting that certain spiritual benefits might accrue from the apparently material attributes of 'outward splendour'. He appreciates that polished technique exalts art and he is quick to draw attention to the beneficial foreign influence on speech-training, gesture, deportment and stance in both spoken drama and opera. Betterton's high standards of performance in the theatre were similarly employed in heightening the 'grace of action'. Meanwhile, Charles is depicted as the Sun-King, under whose beams these refinements spring up naturally, like flowers from a grateful soil. Oldham is already lending a half-mythical quality, a reminiscence of the Golden Age, to the advances made in musical and dramatic excellence.

There were other, more vociferous gentlemen however, to whom opera was not one of the 'harmless luxuries of peace'. St Évremond, in his Sur Les Opéras (1667) and John Dennis in An Essay on the Opera's after the Italian Manner (1706), were the chief exponents of the view that opera was an expensive and

¹⁹ Oldham, Poems, intro. B. Dobree, (1960), p.154.

irrational entertainment and that it posed a moral threat both to the superiority of tragedy and to the maintenance of public morality. The threat to bon sens and reason was sufficient to alert Dennis to the dangers of opera when it was applied indiscriminately to the raising of the passions. Music that has become absolute on account of its independent role in opera becomes a weapon:

If the Entertainment which we have from our Opera is a mere sensual pleasure, which says nothing either to enlighten the Understanding or to convert the Will, it is impossible to conceive how it can either raise the Passions to correct them, or infuse generous Sentiments into the Soul, to exalt and confirm the Reason, or to inspire publick Spirit, and publick Virtue, and elevated Notions of Liberty.²⁰

Dennis rather unreasonably expected opera to do the work of tragedy and the heroic play, and his real quarrel lay with the Italian singers and performers who seemed to be divorcing music from reason with their affected vocal acrobatics. St Évremond, altogether less morally outraged, made boredom his prime objection to totally sung opera; tired ears provoke lassitude, and fatigue produces dissipated concentration. Uppermost in St Évremond's mind, as it was in Dryden's, was the question of 'who should take precedence, poet or musician?'. Dryden's practical experience in the manipulation of tone in the heroic plays gave him an undoubted advantage over the theorist-critics. He was not morbidly concerned to eradicate foreign impurities and preserve English art in a chaste and uncultivated state. In his collaboration with Purcell on King Arthur, Dryden showed himself capable of tact and self-discipline

²⁰. Dennis, Critical Works, 2 vols., ed. E. N. Hooker, Baltimore (1939), I, 388.

in the disposition of the 'songish part'; like St Évremond, he wished not to banish the aria from the stage but to make it serve a dramatically appropriate function in the scheme of the passions. If we compare Dryden's definition of opera with St Évremond's we shall see the degree of disparity which can arise between the formulation of an ideal and its realization in practice:

An opera is a poetical tale, or
fiction, represented by vocal
and instrumental music, adorned
with scenes, machines and dancing.
(W, II, 35)

Si vous voulez savoir ce que c'est
qu'un Opera, je vous dirai que
c'est un travail bizarre de Poesie
et de Musique, où le Poëte et le
Musicien également gênés par l'un par
l'autre, se donnent bien de la peine
à faire un méchant ouvrage ...²¹

Both descriptions contain elements of truth, but the prevailing complaint that was made against opera was that it contained no moral substance. The majority of critics (except Oldham and Dryden) interpreted this as a disadvantage. Even Betterton, despite his experience of having witnessed the miracles of continental opera, felt it unequal to the task of forming and directing the passions:

Music therefore ought still, as
originally it was, to be mingled
with the Drama, where it is
subservient to Poetry, and comes
into the Relief of the Mind, when
that has been long in use on some
noble scene of Passion, but ought
never to be a separate Entertainment
of any Length.²²

Betterton, Dennis and St Évremond all used opera like a mistress,

²¹. St. Évremond, Oeuvres en Prose, 4 vols., ed. R. Ternois, Paris (1962) III, 154.

²². Gildon, The Life of Mr. Thomas Betterton, Eighteenth-Century Shakespeare No. 4, (1970), p. 158.

for an hour's distraction and pleasure; then they cast her off and would not accord her any social recognition. However, Dryden's attempt to create a native vernacular opera was of altogether a different stamp.

If we now return to Professor Dent's definition of the operatic principle - 'neither the normal musical principle nor the normal dramatic principle' - we shall be better able to understand its application to the corpus of Dryden's work for the stage, and in particular the heroic plays. Dent's concept, however nebulous, reminds us that total theatre depends on collaborative art and the interpenetration of genres; the 'operatic principle' describes what 'happens' in performance when a-typical verse and a-typical sonorities are introduced. In Dryden's case this applies particularly to his imitation of 'nature'. Nature is an excuse for art; not nature as it exists, but nature 'heightened and methodized' to produce a convincing veneer of artifice. In opera, as in the heroic play, it is human nature, reason, language and gesture that are imitated and occasionally mocked. The operatic principle itself is more a matter of artistic attitude than of any distinctly recognisable style or mode; it is concerned with the nature of the effects sought by musician or poet. Thus the 'operatic principle' upon which Dryden builds his dramas is quite distinct from operatic tendencies within the plays themselves, and distinct again from the content of his 'operas'. The key to its nature lies in Dent's emphasis upon creative intuition. The kind of theatrical intuition which inspired Craig - the man who sought to perfect the technical resources of the living theatre - also inspired Dryden in his search for a 'mixed' form of dramatic entertainment. Dryden's forte is the tragi-comic -

the intermixture of satire with 'feeling' - and the deployment of sentiments which are 'operatically' self-justifying. It is an essentially operatic mode of perceiving which enables Dryden to achieve a consummate dexterity in the ordering and placing of his material; he draws a fine balance between mathematical precision and random carelessness. Dryden realizes that strong emotion needs form and this form he is able to supply in the discipline of wit and the passions. His gestures become vividly theatrical the more 'operatic' and self-exhibitionist they become; the rhodomontade of his villains and tyrants is the equivalent in words of the tyrannical virtuosity of the coloratura singer. Dryden permits much of his inner meaning to be conveyed operatically through his heroic singer or principle; the amount of exaggeration and hyperbole the hero uses is indicative of the melodramatic power of the mock-heroic. Dryden often mischievously substitutes transmogrification for transcendence. And yet he will always juxtapose mock-heroic values with the naïvely heroic; whenever he offers his spectators grotesques like Maximin or Zulema he counters them with characters who attempt to lead a spiritualized Platonic life of self-effacement and humility (e.g. Valeria and Almahide). But even the contemplative life of reason as embodied in St Catherine can be subjected to operatic ridicule, as Dryden demonstrates in some of his most opulent Baroque in Act IV of Tyrannick Love: the sleeping saint is exposed to the machinations of two 'Astral forms', Nakar and Damilcar. The effect of this highly operatic interlude is to make Catherine's spirituality a boldly physical quality. Although she sleeps throughout the masque, Dryden plays

mischievously with the implications of her situation, in such stage-directions and lyrics as these:

Damilcar stamps, and the Bed arises with St Catherine in it.

Damilcar singing. You pleasing dreams of Love and sweet delight,
Appear before this slumbring Virgins sight:
Soft visions set her free
From mournful piety.
Let her sad thoughts from Heav'n retire;
And let the Melancholy Love
Of those remoter joys above
Give place to your more sprightly fire.

.....

A Scene of Paradise is discovered.

.....

At the end of the Song a Dance of Spirits. After which Amariel,
the Guardian-Angel of S.Catharine, descends to soft Musick,
with a flaming Sword. The Spirits crawl off the Stage amazedly,
and Damilcar runs to a corner of it.

(CD, X, 150-51)

Even as early as Tyrannick Love opera is asserting its power to mock 'mournful piety'. Although Dryden's debt to Comus is clear, he is nevertheless establishing a precedent for the introduction of operatic episodes which create a mood of their own, and in this case, a mood which is at moral variance with the purport of the drama.

The deliberate introduction of mock-heroic into the plays highlights the ambivalent nature of their spiritual conflict and demonstrates that such conflict will take place not in the realms of internal questioning inhabited by the tragic hero but in a world of stereotypes whose vocation it is to confront each other with external questions of moral choice. The serious plots of most Dryden plays exhibit a festive perversity, a desire to give emotional colouring to a situation through apparently inappropriate means, e.g. via satire or irony. Because the mock-heroic becomes public through the mediation of the actor between the satirist and his audience there is little sense of conspiracy, only a confusing awareness of

dissimulation. Pretence is set up on all sides, and audience, actor and poet refuse to be hoodwinked into a trusting relationship. The heroic plays thus become simultaneous confrontations and identifications with myth; they are 'anatomies' of society, portraits of barbaric civilizations emerging slowly from the darkness of the medieval feudal system and the ravages of civil war. And yet by piquant allusion to Hobbes, Filmer and Tillotson, Dryden still stresses that 'history is now and in England',²³. But as he gradually perfects his 'mixed style' it is left increasingly to the laconic, satiric side of his social vision to suggest ways in which the deficient integration of his heroes may be accommodated through the use of the superficial données of the drama - gesture, wit, laughter, swagger and song. The theatricality of his heroes and their approximation to the heroic types of the opera seria, gives them the natural prerogatives of dignity and gesture; but their claims on our attention are thus external, not nurtured by an inner crisis of soul.

Dryden's habitual approach to the problem of integration in art was through a process of heightened imaginative activity. He intensifies an essentially conservative, even timid sensibility by pushing convention as far as he can towards the abyss of chaos. Certain idiosyncracies he employed in his treatment of the hero, the passions, and the denouement (features which will receive fuller attention in later sections of this thesis) appear at first to be mutually exclusive,

²³. For Dryden's use of Filmer's Patriarcha in the politics of the plays, see Anne T. Barbeau, The Intellectual Design of John Dryden's Heroic Plays, (1970), esp. pp. 42-50. For the influence of Tillotson, see King, pp. 50-8, and for the debt to Hobbes, J.A. Winterbottom's article, 'The Place of Hobbesian Ideas in Dryden's Tragedies', JEGP, LVII, (1958), 665-83, gives a good general coverage.

designed to disrupt and fragment the drama. However, in performance they do not overturn the total balance of the heroic play, and this is due largely to the technical expertise which Dryden gradually mastered and came to recognise as the essential attribute of a successful playwright. It is his use of an operatic principle - one which allows him unusual freedom in imaginative scope and moral design - which permits him to deviate from accepted intellectual norms while retaining a firm hold on the mythic or providential design of the play. The convention of rhyme cements the stability although it cannot guarantee immunity from the provocations of festive wit. But the exercise of these virtuosic, melodramatic techniques never entirely inverts or invalidates the 'epic unity' which is the root impulse feeding the heroic play. Professor Dent infers that it is an in-dwelling and predominantly occasional inspirational force akin to genius. Without the presence of a lively theatrical sense, 'operatic' in that it was completely familiar with all the variations of which convention was capable, Dryden's heroic melodramas would have seemed fragmented and insubstantial indeed. What we find is a drama which consciously exploits effects of episodic brilliancy coupled with much that seems humdrum and, at first glance, disingenuous.

If we can discern the working of an operatic principle within such a framework, Dryden's approach to the unity of his art becomes clearer. It is broadly speaking an approach akin to paradox. The introduction of satire into the heroic play is the key issue; mock-heroic explodes by hyperbole and is 'grand' after the manner of opera. The experience offered by the heroic play is melodramatic in the sense that it is common to the foibles and imperfections of 'la condition humaine';

just as opera coerces fairly crude emotional situations into a sublimity of feeling evoked by the music, the heroic play uses its rhyme and its 'unreason' to forge for the spectator a self-integrating experience in which the forces of social accommodation are providentially permitted to triumph. Almanzor, the noble savage, is reclaimed by Almahide, the goddess of social conscience, and Albion, the 'godlike' hero and king, is translated to the skies to attain a truer, less tarnished divinity. Thus the tragic plight of the alienated individual or 'exile' (be he 'eccentric hero' or virtuoso opera-singer), is subsumed in an overridingly 'comic' intention, not dissimilar to the purposive instinct which inspired Corneille to invent the new 'mixed' form which he called 'comédie héroïque',²⁴. The heroic play thus partakes of an operatic attitude to resolution and denouement; its ironic pessimism and Stoic philosophy are caught up in a greater festivity of design.

In the experience of a Dryden play every subjective audience response and every gesture made by the individual actor are called upon to supplement the intellectual stimulation of the verse. The total effect is one of gradual revelation during which the spectators assimilate and adjust to widely-contrasting assaults upon their senses. As in opera, the heroic play can only reveal its fullness of design in performance, when technique becomes not a static ideal fixed to the printed page, but a life-giving function of the collaboration between poet, actor, designer and audience. It is when all these discrepant elements are moving either towards liberation, resolution or

24. For the influence of Corneille on Dryden, see A.C. Kirsch, 'Dryden, Corneille, and the Heroic Play', *MP*, LIX, (1962), 248-64, and E.M. Waith, *Ideas of Greatness*, (1971), esp. pp. 178-92. Dryden was certainly familiar with the 'Discours', since he refers openly to them in his *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* (see *W*, I, 63).

comic asphyxiation in the denouement, that the intuitive faculties of the dramatist are most likely to reveal themselves. In the second part of this chapter, I shall be examining the usefulness of the 'operatic' features of the heroic plays in enriching the total meaning which attaches to their performance.

2. Opera and the Heroic Play

The chief similarity between opera and the serious plots of Dryden's heroic plays consists in the use of certain stereotypes of character and musically-inspired 'tropes' or figures of speech. That which links the 'majestic distance' of Dryden's heroic rhyme to the world of operatic gesture is its dependence upon conventions which are also encountered in the later Metastasian opera seria. The predictability of the Metastasian opera libretto encompassed aspects of literary design and social mores that were reassuring to the spectators, and which were capable of being reduced to an art-form of formulaic precision. A recent commentator has been able to give a concise abstract of the recurring pattern of the opera seria:

According to strict rules which he [Metastasio] ascribed to Greek method, six or perhaps eight characters, human beings and not gods, engaged in a series of situations throughout three acts, and were in turn each forced to consider the proper emotional response to a situation and to formulate this response in brilliant exit arias ... The sequence of conflicts of love and reason and honour was brought to an end by the intervention of a generous king or descending god. These formal characteristics made up a paradigm of opera seria.²⁵

²⁵ H.F.G.Swanston, In Defence of Opera, (1978), p.176.

Such a pattern also recalls quite clearly the paradigm of the heroic play. A clear linear development of scenes, a deep interest in human emotion, the use of melismatic interludes (the epic simile and vocal 'aria') and the portrayal of passions as absolutes - rage, love, hate, revenge, in their 'purest' abstract state - are some of the features common to both opera seria and the heroic play. Similarly, the love-and-honour debate introduced so relentlessly into Dryden's plays assumes the inevitability of secco recitative, save that it retards rather than advances the action. As Michael Alssid has perceptively argued, Dryden's most operative techniques were always those in which he encouraged stasis and drew attention specifically to the 'poetic' qualities of the verse²⁶. The formulaic arrangement of characters in the five heroic plays exactly parallels the use of stock types in the opera seria, and character develops as it were accidentally out of a prescribed set of situations designed to produce heightened emotions of conflicting love and loyalty. The satire of The Rehearsal (1671) in which the poet Bayes constructs his plot by simple reference to his 'Book of Drama Commonplaces' were entirely apposite²⁷. It was one of the main contentions of Martin Clifford in his Notes upon Mr. Dryden's Poems in Four Letters (published 1687, written circa 1672) that Dryden's characters were merely 'types' and could lay claim to no particular originality:

²⁶ M.W. Alssid, Dryden's Rhymed Heroic Tragedies, 2 vols., Salzburg (1974), II, 269.

²⁷ Buckingham, The Rehearsal, ed. D.E.L. Crane, Durham (1976), pp. 5-6.

But I am strangely mistaken if I
 have not seen this very Almanzor
 of yours in some disguise about
 this Town, and passing under another
 Name. Prethee tell me true, was
 not this Huff-cap once the Indian
 Emperour, and at another time did
 not he call himself Maximine? Was
 not Lyndaraxa once called Almeria.
 I mean under Montezuma the Indian
 Emperour? I protest and now they
 are either the same, or so alike,
 that I can't for my heart distinguish
 one from the other.²⁸

Even Dryden himself seems to have been aware of the degree to which his heroic dramas were based on a personally evolved system of epic formulae, for in MacFlecknoe he shows himself prepared to satirize this type of characterization in his description of the young actors who train their voices in the 'Nursery':

Where infant Punks their tender Voices try,
 And little Maximins the Gods defy.
 (CD, II, 56)

With stable, repetitive features such as the characterization, the similes, the songs and masque-like interludes, the heroic play could boast a certain solidity (often interpreted as diffuseness by modern scholars) and could assert an encouragingly comprehensive view of human society. In the highest ardours of heroic passion it might well affect a style which approached fustian and which certainly did not offer its audience the idealism of the intellect, but then its overall aim was pleasure, and that pleasure combined many contradicting interests. Restoration playwrights excused themselves from the charge of rant by claiming that what they had raised in the spectators was 'admiration' for the hero; Dryden was adept at critical

²⁸. J. and H. Kinsley (ed.), Dryden: The Critical Heritage, (1971) p. 178.

defences of the need to procure 'admiration' if a serious play was to function smoothly. The episodic nature of the heroic play did not trouble many of his contemporaries; Martin Clifford's complaint about reduplicated characters is an isolated example. The real reasons for his objections are psychological ones. It was not that Dryden's characters were in themselves totally undifferentiated, for by satiric means he was able to point up subtle distinctions in degrees of passion - but rather that their behaviour could be traced to mechanical principles of appetitive motivation which disturbed more hostile critics. Clifford's complaint was principally against the fact that Dryden's vision of society included types or 'humours' which appeared again and again, and which represented the universal characteristics of human nature. Dryden was not by any means poor in invention when he fashioned such characters as Maximin and Almanzor, Almeria and Lyndaraxa. However, the undoubted 'familial resemblance' between them reinforces the idea that Dryden saw the people of his day in terms of categories and types, and that this kind of presentation suited the analytical bent of his genius. There is something deliberately humorous in the fact that we have all met a woman like Lyndaraxa before; today she would probably turn up in a television comedy series as the 'mother-in-law' or the 'woman-next-door' - Dryden's techniques were not so very far removed from our own. In a sense, Dryden's use of the passions protected the integrity of his moral design. Although The Indian Emperour, Tyrannick Love, and The Conquest of Granada are closely linked to one another by similar characterization and duplicated situation, Dryden's attention to the depiction of the passions exhibits a musical sensitivity which gives an individual quality to the rhetoric

of each play. The elevation or depression of tone which controls the passional elements in the narrative is a technique which illustrates Dryden's care for his outer design. Although wit nearly topples Tyrannick Love, and passionate eloquence The Conquest of Granada, Dryden is able to maintain a decorum in rhyme which is integral to the moral directives of his drama. It is to this interaction of dramatic and musical principles that Robert Etherage Moore points, when he describes the source of the vitality of the heroic plays:

It is precisely in the tension between the melodramatic plots (the fierce passions) and the fetters (the heroic couplet) that their power lies ... In the true baroque manner the 'fetters' lend the excitement - the sovereign control of the tumultuous.²⁹

Dryden uses an operatic principle to channel these tumultuous and sensational elements (the 'mock-sublime' of melodrama) into artistic forms which will tolerate their full expression without offending scrupulous taste. He does not always succeed, as he himself admits:

I remember some verses of my own
Maximin and Almanzor which cry
vengeance upon me for their
extravagance, and which I wish
heartily in the same fire with
Statius and Chapman.

(W, I, 276)

Dryden often employs the passions as a means of regulating the peaks and falls of the operatic principle; the harmony of the rhetoric achieves integration through effects of contrast, heightening, even grotesque juxtaposition which the passions spark off. The passions in the heroic drama are more than external visitations, besetting those who are unable to restrain their volatile desires; they are part of a larger organizational

²⁹ R.E. Moore, Henry Purcell, op.cit., p.17.

principle, which sets the idiom of the grand Baroque heroes against a fluctuating backcloth of wit, sentiment, propriety, and innuendo. In miniature, the passions become the customary environment of Dryden's protagonists, who 'breathe-in' an atmosphere of moral doubt, sexual fantasy, and unfixed meaning. When larger than life, the passions become the adopted idiom of the Baroque hero and the instruments of his self-justification; passion exalts him and makes him worthy of 'admiration' and 'la gloire'. The effect of the passions on the heroic play is to invest them with all the colour and life of melodrama, where no-one analyses in detail a character's true reasons for his actions, but will accept his words and gestures as being self-explanatory. Dryden's manipulation of scenic marvels, absurd plot, poetic justice and musical interludes is always tinged with a naïvety which suggests an ambivalence in his attitude towards the passions. In the heroic play, Dryden is never content to accept without question, as he is in opera; he examines the various moods he has created through a process of ironic mutation, in which the seemingly innocent, even banal statement, may cloak satiric deflation. Opera eventually becomes the ideal of un-ambivalent integrated form because 'human impossibilities are to be received as they are in faith'; intellectual questioning is rejected by the pure sensuousness of the form. Dryden, experimenting with the manifest improbabilities of the heroic play, was searching after an ideal which was much more complex in its quest for balance, and which even allowed for a margin of paradox and antithesis. Opera borrowed many of the implicit assumptions of the heroic play and logically simplified them; the heroic play benefitted in its turn from the kind of rhetoric which made the characters and events of opera so appealing to the public of

its times. In the final section of this chapter I shall be examining the implications of the 'operatic principle' for the destiny of the Restoration hero.

The New Hero

The distinguishing speciality of a Dryden hero is his virtuosity. That it is a vocal, rather than a military, virtuosity soon becomes apparent from the amount of time he is made to spend with the spectators in explaining himself. The key to his oppressively static quality is the fact that his dominant passion, heroic pride, is essentially a contemplative, rather than an active, virtue - it is a way of thinking, not of acting, and it is inseparably wound up in the hero's appreciation of his own ego. Heroic pride also fosters the illusion, prevalent in the Almanzor-type, that the hero is somehow exempt from the laws of society and that he exists, like the heroic singer of opera seria, in a world set apart from that of the play. In The Rehearsal, Bayes' definition of the 'fierce hero' is reductive, belittling his stature by emphasising his intense individuality:

a fierce Hero, that frights his
Mistress, snubs up Kings, baffles
Armies, and does what he will,
without regard to numbers, good
manners, or justice.³⁰

In Dryden's plays the role of the hero is in reality usurped by the declaimer, just as in opera the role of hero is usurped by the singer. Both increase the commercialism of the genre they serve, and ultimately contribute to its downfall. It is well-attested that the heroes of rhyming tragedy endeared themselves especially to the ladies; whether as a result of this, or by some kind of spiritual sympathy, the Baroque hero continued to become emasculated, to be forced to imprison his

³⁰.Buckingham, The Rehearsal, op.cit., p.44.

virility and aggression within the dictates of the Platonic school, and to dwindle eventually into the castrato male-soprano-singer of opera seria. Wilfred Mellers, in his study Harmonious Meeting, has carefully traced this decline from Renaissance heroism into the world of the 'un-hero'. The latter class is typified by utter passivity and spinelessness and is usually devoid of decision or action. Albion in Dryden's Albion and Albanus, and Aeneas in Nahum Tate's Dido and Aeneas (1689) are striking examples of the new breed who follow on from Maximin and Almanzor. The rising popularity of the heroine in the plays of Banks and Rowe (both famous for 'she-tragedies') produced what Eric Rothstein has called 'a new staple character for Restoration tragedy, the stupid hero',³¹ Mellers' comment on Tate's libretto for Purcell's Dido and Aeneas is illuminating in this respect:

Aeneas is the traditional man-god gone seedy, as he certainly had in Restoration England; Dido's heroism consists in her being a woman who still can be, emotionally and imaginatively, a queen.³²

Aeneas is the prototype for all 'pious' heroes whose popularity in the period began with Dryden's Aureng-Zebe and Mark Antony. Such excessive sensibility weakens heroic valour and produces states of chronic indecision in the male, combats-d'âme, especially gratifying to the female sector of the audience. Concurrently the women in the plays become more Stoic and more commanding; Statira and Roxana in Lee's Rival Queens (1677) virtually steal Alexander's thunder while heroines like Almahide, Indamora and Octavia hold up moral trumps to their

³¹ E. Rothstein, Restoration Tragedy, Wisconsin, (1967), p. 96.

³² W. Mellers, Harmonious Meeting, (1965), p. 213.

respective menfolk. The gradual transition from the aggressively heroic male to the man of compassionate feeling heralds the demise of the freelance libertine. Libertinage in the heroes of Dryden's plays is kept rigidly in check by a regiment of women; Lucretia reforms the would-be seducer Frederick in The Assignation and Indamora in Aureng-Zebe subdues most of Morat's lechery. The fatal disciplining and subsequent contraction of the hero has begun.

Much of the heroism of the Baroque hero is thus much more apparent than real, and is expressed in various forms of assertion which provide the 'vocalizing' element in the plays. Self-exhibition becomes the most natural mode to adopt and Dryden's heroes are often given 'set-pieces' of description or contemplation. Michael Alssid explains the operative bias of this technique:

Such descriptions stress not only an obsessive self-consciousness in the characters, but their tendency towards volubility, their anxiety to unveil to others the reasons and the meanings of their actions.³³

'Volubility' did not simply mean fustian (superbly parodied nevertheless in the character of Drawcansir in The Rehearsal); it implied the whole tenor of the dramatist's attitude to his hero, who must express every inch of his heroic satire in the movement and action of the verse. The volubility of Dryden's characters is usually their instinctive response to an emotionally charged situation, so that often their words become the counterpart of the aria in opera seria - an analytic moment of consolidation in which the reigning passion or emotion is expressed in the movement of the character towards self-definition.

³³ M.W. Alssid, Dryden's Rhymed Heroic Tragedies, op.cit., II, 271.

This type of volubility is best illustrated in soliloquy, the one dramatic medium which seems to have been an embarrassment to most Restoration playwrights. The simple fact of the matter is that in Restoration soliloquy, a character soon runs out of something to say; this is partially because the restrictions governing the 'aria' also applied to the set-speech in the drama. For, as Patrick Smith writes in The Tenth Muse,

The chief characters in the operas
were not allowed to become complex,
for complexity would lessen their
stature as embodiments of one affect
or emotion.³⁴

This additive notion - that a character could not express more than one passion at a time - is surely responsible for the poverty of Restoration soliloquy. Gone are all the labyrinthine musings of a Macbeth or a Leontes; instead a character on his own gives vent to the feeling uppermost in his mind at that moment, a procedure of rational condescension to the spectators, who must await the next complication of plot before they witness any further development of the emotions. The chief function of the Restoration soliloquy is to convey anxiety and suspense, of a kind often appertaining to a single state of mind³⁵.

³⁴. P.J. Smith, The Tenth Muse, (1971), p.79.

³⁵. It is worth emphasizing here that a single state of mind may comprise compound or 'mixed' emotions (e.g. the passions in combination - rage and hate, or love-revenge), and that these would be especially interesting to the cultivated minds of a Restoration audience. To be 'in a passion' was a composite term which implied a wealth of histrionic versatility and an abundance of subtly differentiated feeling. The pleasure in witnessing this sort of scene lay in discriminating between the passions which were uppermost in a character's mind - subordinate states of feeling and sentiment could thus be traced with something of the pleasure which one would feel from puzzling out a maze or a labyrinth. The exhibition of passion brought the appeal of the heroic play to a broad spectrum of the theatre-going public. Emmett L. Avery's article 'The Restoration Audience', PQ, XLV (1966), 54-61, does much to dispel the illusion that Dryden's theatre was purely for the court.

In Dryden such moments are often golden opportunities to intensify the dilemma of the 'delicate distress' experienced romantically by his characters. Here, for example, is Almahide having won her lover's life from her betrothed:

How blessed was I before this fatal day,
 When all I knew of love, was to obey!
 'Twas life becalmed, without a gentle breath;
 Though not so cold, yet motionless as death.
 A heavy quiet state; but love, all strife,
 All rapid, is the hurricane of life.
 Had love not shown me, I had never seen
 An excellence beyond Boabdelin.
 I had not, aiming higher, lost my rest;
 But with a vulgar good been dully blest:
 But, in Almanzor, having seen what's rare,
 Now I have learnt too sharply to compare;
 And, like a favourite quickly in disgrace,
 Just knew the value ere I lost the place.
 (SS, IV, 110-11)

This is intrinsically a da capo aria (A,B,A) without the repeat of the opening section. The first section is the 'passions' one, contrasting the peaceful lethargy of undisturbed solitude with the havoc wrought by the passion of love. The remaining eight lines apply general philosophy to the situation in hand, and express an inner confusion which can only be resolved in the restatement of the opening lines. The 'aria' basically expresses two sentiments: (a) 'Love is like a terrifying hurricane', and (b) 'I wish I had never seen Almanzor'; it expresses a single state of mind, conveyed with some complexity through the emotional colouring of the 'hurricane' image (it is partially a 'simile' aria, e.g. 'Just as the hurricane of love destroys tranquillity, so Almanzor has robbed me of my rest'), and it serves the function of engaging us more vividly in the heroine's predicament.

The volubility of the dramatic 'aside' is also often elaborated by Dryden into an operatic style of declamation. The telescoping of emotion demanded by the nature of the 'aside' is ideally suited to the economy of the couplet. Again anxiety

is a dominant characteristic; here, for example, is the Moorish king expressing his fear of Almanzor:

Almanzor has the ascendant o'er my fate;
I'm forced to stoop to one I fear and hate:
Disgraced, distressed, in exile, and alone,
He's greater than a monarch on his throne:
Without a realm, a royalty he gains;
Kings are the subjects over whom he reigns.
(SS, IV, 132)

Although Boabdelin is a weak king his diction reflects the noble stereotype associated with monarchy; kings, whatever their faults, should know how to speak in a kingly way. Dryden's trick throughout much of The Conquest is of course to transfer the prerogative of kingly speech to Almanzor, who mingles suppressed megalomania with elevated diction. The mannerisms of heroic speech all rely on variants of simple self-assertion, and simple assertion is the point in opera seria at which opera becomes heroic. The castrato singer has only to say that he is in a passion, with the orchestra reinforcing it musically, to become the 'hero of the hour'; to experience such stylised passion is in itself ennobling, whether it be love, rage or hate. Thus the formality of the aria contains the fury of the passion without robbing it of its powers of suggestion. Extreme passion also indicates the intense scope of the hero's soul and fits him for the possibilities of heroic transcendence. In a valuable article comparing the Cornélian concept of heroism with that of Dryden, Arthur C. Kirsch reminds us of the positive uses of passion as an enriching and enlivening principle of character. He writes:

The constant protestations of Dryden's heroes that they are in the throes of passion are in fact their declarations, virtually their boasts, of the noble capacities of their souls. They are not statements of fatalism.³⁶

³⁶ A.C. Kirsch, 'Dryden, Corneille, and the Heroic Play', op.cit., p.259.

Kirsch sees 'la gloire' as the means of achieving 'the apotheosis of individual integrity'³⁷, and Dryden certainly uses the passions educatively in the formation and social accommodation of his heroes. By expressing the passions operatically, through the opulent rhetoric of self-advertisement, Dryden is establishing the heroic calibre of his protagonists in the direct orchestral texturing of the rhyme; the heroic mode becomes energetic and extravagant according to the degree of heroic pride represented - the use of inflated figures of speech corresponds for example with Handel's use of French dotted rhythms and the tempo marking pomposo in creating the correct idiom for the heroes of his opera serias. Alssid's notion of 'volubility' is a central one for the understanding of the linguistic aspirations of heroic verse. It is verse which seeks to make its heroic qualities self-evident, and which even seeks at times to suspend the critical judgment of the hearer. The 'long majestic march, and energy divine'³⁸ attributed to Dryden by Pope is in reality the application of the musical techniques of word-painting and the operatic conventions of gesture to the verbal structuring of the couplet wit of rhyme. As Alssid ingeniously suggests, rhyme conveys the sense of its own artistry through the 'aura of undramatic premeditation' which it creates³⁹. In An Essay of Dramatic Poesy and A Defence of the Essay of Dramatic Poesy Dryden was to spend the early years of his career as a playwright justifying the 'naturalness' of rhyme to Sir Robert

³⁷. ibid., p.257.

³⁸. See Pope, Poems, ed. J. Butt, (1968), p.644.

³⁹. M.W. Alssid, Dryden's Rhymed Heroic Tragedies, op.cit., II, 263.

Howard, already an opinionated collaborator and adversary. Dryden was at pains to defend the artificial style, which the heroic play called for, and denied that there was anything 'undramatic' in premeditated discourse:

The converse ... which a poet is
to imitate, must be heightened with
all the arts and ornaments of
poesy; and must be such as, strictly
considered, could never be supposed
spoken by any without premeditation.
(W, I, 114)

But whether rhyme was regarded as an elevation of, or a deviation from, 'Nature', it was still true to say that some sort of musical principle was required in which both actor and dramatist had a share. Betterton, according to the Life by Gildon, gave scrupulous attention to ways of varying the inflexions of the voice so as to give appropriate colouring to the individual passions⁴⁰, and Dryden in the Preface to Tyrannick Love wrote with some confidence:

By the harmony of words we
elevate the mind to a sense of
devotion, as our solemn music,
which is inarticulate poesy,
does in churches.
(W, I, 139)

If then we view Dryden's characters as potential 'singers' of heroic verse, then their often absurd extravagance will fall within the accepted norms of operatic convention. That very convention allows for a high degree of sensationalism from the individual by making large provision for self-expression, especially in the 'aria'. The creation of bizarre effects in those characters who employ 'rant' in Dryden's plays arises largely out of the unspecific nature of the debt to operatic gesture. We are never certain how far Dryden is pushing his

⁴⁰. See Gildon, The Life of Mr. Thomas Betterton, op.cit., p. 113.

characters towards self-parody. He brings in epic simile and classical allusion to confuse us and overlay his virtuosic wit with an intended seriousness. The position of the epic simile in the heroic play again has its analogue in the 'simile-aria' of opera seria. As Edward J. Dent explains, this feature is purely ornamental and pertains entirely to the virtuoso:

[it] ... never expresses the emotions of the character who sings it; it merely describes the external surroundings, and not even the feelings, of the object to which the singer compares himself. To the drama it is a perpetual obstruction, however admirable it may be as a mere piece of music.⁴¹

The simile-aria is essentially 'picture-music' whereby the imagination transports us temporarily beyond the world of the play. Dryden felt the importance of this kind of escapism as a mental relief from the emotional complications of his plots, and his frequent use of Virgilian simile fulfils a therapeutic purpose as well as occasionally sheltering an ironic application to the foregoing situation. Martin Clifford's Notes Upon Mr. Dryden's Poems in Four Letters takes the view already popularized in The Rehearsal that such similes constitute a 'viciousness' of style. Clifford's prime objection is that they 'allude to nothing', viz. to nothing connected remotely with the play⁴². However, Dryden possessed a certain expertise in this way of writing which he was reluctant to give up. It also provided him with an 'epic' alibi in the composition of heroic dramas modelled to a certain extent after the example of The Aeneid and The Iliad. The chief danger

⁴¹. See E. J. Dent, 'The Operas', in Handel: A Symposium, ed. G. Abraham, (1969), p. 45.

⁴². J. and H. Kinsley (ed.), Dryden: The Critical Heritage, op. cit., p. 182.

besetting simile in the heroic play was that of concealed grammatical error to which the pedantic university wits of the day were quickly alerted. One of Clifford's examples is taken from the Conquest of Granada and describes Almahide in the process of veiling herself:

As some fair tulip, by a storm oppressed,
Shrinks up, and folds its silken arms to rest;
And, bending to the blast, all pale and dead,
Hears from within, the wind sing round its head,
So, shrouded up, your beauty disappears...
(SS, IV, 108)

Dryden attributes the sense of hearing to a flower already 'pale and dead', the kind of slip which delighted the multiple authors of The Rehearsal, and which was harmful to the credibility of the heroic simile. In operative terms, the simile is designed to please the ear, and to indicate an improvisatory facility in the speaker. The simile, though always the product of premeditated thought, is often introduced to look like the 'effect of sudden thought', especially when it appears unasked, as is customary in a love-and-honour debate.

The connection between the 'passions'-aria and the formal 'simile'-aria is that neither do much to advance the action. There is no physical extension of the action through imagery, and in psychological terms only the classical 'retreat' provided by the spectrum of the simile is permitted. Often Dryden uses both the passions and the simile to extend the tonal range of his verse, but their effect upon the dynamism of the heroic ethos in the plays is on the whole negligible. Although Dryden's heroes do not remain 'singers' throughout, their tendency towards 'volubility' at any given opportunity robs them of dramatic interest. Prevarication and procrastination therefore become 'heroic' activities by virtue of their relationship to the delaying tactics employed by the operative hero in a crisis.

For example, in 1759, Samuel Derrick wrote,

I remember to have seen an Italian
Opera in which a woman, called away
upon business that required immediate
attendance, staid first to sing a song.⁴³

It is important to stress here that Dryden in his heroic plays was not attempting to write opera. What he was trying to do was to write tragedy which would 'elevate and surprise'. To him rhyme was the natural means of procuring elevation of tone, and it had the added advantage of being peculiarly susceptible to satiric underplay. So when I refer to such phenomena as the 'passions-aria' or 'simile-aria' in a text I am applying a musical analogy to a speech calculated to display gestures in sound through the use of image and metaphor. Aria-like outpourings are by no means restricted to soliloquy, while 'simile' arias are nearly always indulged when there is an auditor on the stage. Frequently other dramatis personae are witnesses to the 'passions-aria'.⁴⁴ A particularly good example of the latter type can be found in The Conquest of Granada, Part I (Act II, scene I) in which Almanzor apologises to

⁴³ Derrick, A General View of the Stage (by 'Mr. Wilkes'), 1st edn., (1759), p. 72.

⁴⁴ There is a notable example of such 'eavesdropping' in the first act of All for Love, in which Ventidius looks on in secret at Antony's melancholy passion. Antony's 'fancy' conjures up a 'sylvan scene' with anticipations of Wordsworth and the 'pathetic fallacy':

I lean my head upon the mossy bark,
And look just of a piece, as I grew from it;
My uncombed locks, matted like mistletoe,
Hang o'er my hoary face; a murm'ring brook
Runs at my foot.
(V, 40)

The effect of this extended scena upon Ventidius is strong; he adds, in an aside, 'Methinks I fancy/Myself there too'. Such 'passions-arias' as Antony's can become sublime vehicles for the transference and mutation of emotion; here Ventidius's reactions are intended to guide the sensibilities of the spectators.

Almahide for the inchoate and somewhat crude state of his passion. Dryden allows elements of gentle satire to permeate the imagery and yet preserves the grandiose sonority of the rhetoric. The lines uncover a process of mental self-exposure which is entirely in keeping with the high opinion which the Baroque hero has of himself; the passions of his soul are felt to be definitely worth recounting:

Forgive that fury which my soul does move;
 'Tis the essay of an untaught first love:
 Yet rude, unfashioned truth it does express;
 'Tis love just peeping in a hasty dress.
 Retire, fair creature, to your needful rest;
 There's something noble labouring in my breast:
 This raging fire, which through the mass does move,
 Shall purge my dross, and shall refine my love.
(SS, IV, 74)

Dryden here makes much of two important points; first that passion in Almanzor is 'noble' and second, that it is capable of refinement through voluntary acceptance of suffering and the ethic of obedient service to a Platonic mistress.

As individuals Dryden's heroic types subsist on a diet of repetition and variation; mood is dictated by passion, and the cataloguing of emotion proceeds in non-developing verse because it does not concern itself with growth within the mind. Dryden compensates for this stasis by filling his heroic melodrama with confrontations or 'ensembles'. The liveliness of the debate and of scenes of accusation and persuasion stimulates suspense and curiosity. Dryden's heroes are power-seekers but the power which they really seek is that of the word. T.S.Eliot's justly admired essay on Dryden reminds us of the implicit paradox in the poet's apparent mastery of language;

Dryden's words ... are precise, they state immensely, but their suggestiveness is often nothing.⁴⁵

Eliot quickly appreciates that it is through magnificence of diction that Dryden keeps the emotional conflicts of his plays alive, and yet no unambiguous meaning ever emerges from conduct which is 'noble', 'magnanimous' or 'great'. The pretensions of heroic pride seem self-consciously hollow and become 'trans-prosed' through elevation to the false sublime of mock-heroic. The hero approaches the ideal of his own divinity through imagery which asserts the gross materiality of things.

In The Death of Tragedy, George Steiner makes the valid observation that opera did not achieve even the integration of tragedy until the time of Mozart and Gluck. Until this time there was still a clear line of separation between the values of music and those of the word. His summary of opera is useful because it helps to establish more clearly the kind of artistic impetus which lay behind the vogue for the rhymed play. He writes:

The great majority of operas are libretti set to music, words accompanied or embellished by voice and orchestral sound. The relation between word and music is one of formal concordance, and the development of dramatic action depends on elaborate and implausible conventions whereby speech is sung rather than spoken. The music surrounds the text with a code of emphasis or appropriate mood; it does not fuse with language to create a complete dramatic form.⁴⁶

Rhyme is, quite simply, the dominant vehicle of mood in the heroic play. By using music in a frankly incidental manner,

⁴⁵ T.S. Eliot, Selected Essays, 1917-1932, (1932), p.301.

⁴⁶ G. Steiner, The Death of Tragedy, (1961), p.284.

the heroic play evades the problem of fusing a dramatic unity out of the sister arts, and yet focusses on an analogy which suggests the scope of its attachment to rhyme. It is rhyme which creates a suitable heroic context, a context broad enough to survive the intrusion of wit and satire. The implausibly egocentric hero develops a set of rhetorical conventions which permit him to pass through (and sometimes over) the plot with a degree of independence comparable to that of the opera-singer⁴⁷. Eventually the heroic status of the central character becomes taken for granted; the attention-seeking bluster of Maximin and Almanzor gives way to the self-satisfied passivity of Albion and Aeneas. The more 'operatic' the hero becomes, the greater becomes his reputation for simulated emotion and Tate's Aeneas begins to look suspiciously like Sheridan's Sir Joseph Surface. The curious un-heroism which indirectly resulted from the over-heroism of Dryden's supermen seems to imply that technique begins to take over from 'nature' and that the production of operatic spectacle went on regardless of a continuing need to maintain standards of verisimilitude in tragedy. As the legends and myths used in opera become familiar (they are known to the spectators via classical authors), the need for characterization as such disappears. The heroes of Dryden's last great tragedies, Don Sebastian (1690) and Cleomenes (1692), revert to a Stoicism like that encountered in Shakespeare's Roman Plays. Meanwhile the hero of the rhymed heroic play moves into the fantasy realm of opera to be eclipsed and emasculated by conventions which exalt levels of performance above the interests of the drama.

⁴⁷. Eric Rothstein describes this phenomenon, in Restoration Tragedy, op.cit., as a species of 'inner picaresque', (see pp.56-7).

Chapter 2

The Royal Actor

Introduction

In his series of lectures On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History (1841), Thomas Carlyle wrote,

The most significant feature in the history of an epoch is the manner it has of welcoming a Great Man. Ever, to the true instincts of men, there is something godlike in him. Whether they shall take him to be a god, to be a prophet, or what they shall take him to be? that is ever a grand question; by their way of answering that, we shall see, as through a little window, into the very heart of these men's spiritual condition.¹

The flamboyancy with which the Restoration poets welcomed the return of Charles Stuart from exile is well-known if not already infamous for its excess of jubilant flattery; the almost aggressive theatricality of its panegyric seems to indicate the fact that the mythic status of kingship was entering, or had already entered, a crucial period of transition. It is my intention in this chapter to explore certain aspects of the nation's spiritual condition at the Restoration, giving particular attention to the sort of affective response which was drawn from literary stereotypes of public figures, notably Charles II and Oliver Cromwell. For example, the tact and decency amounting almost to reserve which poets such as Dryden, Waller and Sprat were forced to employ when weighing the heroic qualities of the Protector against the divinely sanctioned

¹ T. Carlyle, On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History, London, New York and Toronto, (1974), pp. 55-6.

attributes of Charles, leaves room for much interesting speculation as to what types of heroism the Restoration populace really expected, and wanted to see. Michael West, in two important articles², has already called attention to the shifting concepts of heroism which characterize the period and stresses that the heroic drama forms a legitimate part of a neglected debate over the nature of heroism itself. Certainly the evidence of the heroic drama will be of particular importance here, since the types of heroism advocated by Dryden often combine the self-created status of the military hero (e.g. the literary Cromwell) with the passive, paternal virtues of the king (the literary Charles). In this context it will therefore be especially important to consider what forms of panegyrical effusion are incorporated into the political arena of the heroic plays and to question how far these panegyric values remain the normative ones when transferred to a theatrical setting. For instance, it soon becomes apparent in Dryden's plays that the development of heroic satire deflects heroic praise and subjects the emotions of 'admiration' and 'emulation' to a persistently nagging irony.

I have chosen to explore the literary convention of the 'royal actor' encountered in Marvell's Horatian Ode as my starting point in the analysis of the concepts of heroic greatness current during the mid-century³. As the panegyrics to the Protector and Charles II are examined more closely, we find that the image of kingship becomes gradually secularized

² See M. West, 'Dryden and the Disintegration of Renaissance Heroic Ideals', Costerus VII (1973), 193-222; and 'Shifting Concepts of Heroism in Dryden's Panegyrics', PLL, X, (1974), 378-93.

³ For a full account of the English heroic tradition see E.M. Waith, Ideas of Greatness (1971).

while the image of the natural man as hero takes on a mythic perspective - the kind of inversion which detaches the image of hero from that of the king and results in a dual or even multiple concept of heroism. Michael West sees these modulations in heroic tonality developing into an uneasy tension in Dryden's plays, where,

his initial admiration for an Aristotelian concept of supra-moral and charismatic heroic virtue is increasingly qualified, then finally discarded as dangerous and redirected toward a concept of magnanimity more compatible with Christian morals.⁴

What is most noticeable about the early years after the Restoration is the 'falling-off' of public confidence in the competency of the royal actor to fulfil his kingly part. The strong moral didacticism of Dryden's panegyrics to Charles suggests an insecurity born of the intestine struggles of the Civil War, and aims at a forced rehabilitation of the kingly ideal along the lines of the ancient classical hero. But however prescriptive and morally optimistic this vein of panegyric, the evidence of Dryden's heroic plays suggests rather a fast-growing disillusionment with the monarchy, despite a doctrinal commitment to themes of restoration, forgiveness, obedience and clemency. The kings in Dryden's plays are nearly all remarkably weak; they are either usurpers or impotent puppets reliant upon the superior political dynamism of the self-created hero. As early as Dryden's first tragi-comedy The Rival Ladies (1664), one character complains to his mistress about his rival:

⁴ M. West, 'Dryden and the Disintegration of Renaissance Heroic Ideals', op.cit., p.218.

He chose to be your Friend, and not your Husband:
 Left that Dull part of Dignity to me;
 As often the worst Actors play the Kings.
 (CD, VIII, 160).

This anti-heroic sentiment, which reflects as bitterly upon kingship as upon the actor, invokes the dullness which many readers will encounter today in reading Restoration panegyric and which is only relieved for them by Dryden's deliberate parody of monarchical succession in Mac Flecknoe (1682). Thus the image of the incompetent actor attaches itself early to the figure of the king in Restoration drama, and is borne out by Dryden's caricatures of decadent despots. All Dryden's potentates in the rhymed heroic plays are either political pawns (e.g. Montezuma, Boabdelin and Polydamas) or impotent exotics (the Old Inca, the Old Emperor, Muley-Moloch), who take little pride in the responsibilities of rule and who demand absolute self-satisfaction as a reward for their status. Marlowe takes a similar attitude to conventional kingship in his Tamburlaine the Great. The significance of the weak kings in the heroic plays is simply one of political and poetic adjustment. Not until Dryden had fully assimilated his historical sense into the structure of epic narrative was he able to translate the imperfect but genial reality of Charles II's nature into the witty sublime of royal David in Absalom and Achitophel. There the mixture of human frailty and unquestioned authority is consummately realised and shows a marked advance in the martialling of satiric powers for beneficent heroic ends.

However, the David of Absalom and Achitophel is a far remove from the idealised, stellar Charles of Astraea Redux and To His Sacred Majesty, A Panegyrick on His Coronation. As we shall see, Dryden and other poets of his day had to

approach the charismatic qualities of heroism (given such credible and realistic form by Marvell's poems to the Protector) with caution and some necessary scepticism. Charles, the optimus princeps of this "watery isle", was also quite distinct from the monarch-politician he soon proved to be in reality; his qualities of dissimulation and ability to assess men's motives made him both astute and respected, but flatly unheroic. The reinstatement of a credible myth of monarchy was thus a work of compromise and time, and it is highly appropriate that Dryden should have achieved it almost accidentally through the medium of heroic satire.

The aim of this chapter then is to analyse the variety of heroic images implicit in the literary formulations of both Cromwell and Charles, and to account for the ritual importance of ceremony in the initiation and credentials of a national hero. The pageant-like processional of coronation panegyric is partially carried over into the political consciousness of the heroic play, in which patterns of piety and military valour are violently contrasted or even injudiciously mingled. The artistic tensions implicit in the heroic plays and some of the early tragicomedies (The Tempest and Secret Love both provide a significant commentary on the duties of monarchy) are resolved in the mixed heroic and anti-heroic world of Absalom and Achitophel. It is in the context of this wider movement away from Renaissance concepts of heroism that Dryden's uncertain and often ambivalent application of heroic principles must be seen to function.

The Royal Actor and the "Horatian Ode"

In Marvell's An Horatian Ode upon Cromwell's Return from Ireland (1650), the imagery of the theatre is introduced in the image of the player king which attaches to Charles. Marvell's strongly secular image of the royal actor follows on from a long tradition developed throughout the Elizabethan and Jacobean drama of associating the moment of death with a specialised type of theatrical performance. For the tragic actor feigning death was the severest challenge he could present to his imagined experience, but it could also constitute his greatest strength. Marvell's placing of his 'royal actor' image is interesting not simply in the context of the Horatian Ode itself but also because of its historical position in the evolution of seventeenth-century politics. In presenting Charles as an 'outmoded actor' Marvell expresses the tragic weakness of monarchy, and surprisingly condones the fundamental change that has overtaken its status and credibility. As James D. Garrison points out,

Charles exists only in the ceremonial world of the play, where his is the role of king. Power resides in the real world represented by the audience of "armed Bands".⁵

Marvell's gift for understatement and the power of omission (the highly condensed portrait of Charles in the Ode gives a curious force to the silences in the poem) enables him to present the king as a largely redundant figurehead while preserving the inherent dignity of the execution scene. The poet is still able to invest the strict verbal economy of his poem with some of the rhetorical solemnity associated in

⁵. J.D. Garrison, Dryden and the Tradition of Panegyric, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London (1975), p.134.

the mind of the spectator with the culmination of a tragic performance.

Nevertheless Charles remains a displaced actor; the subject of the poem is Cromwell and his natural ascendancy. Political necessity reduces the status of the king to little more than "a breath, a little scene/To monarchize, be fear'd, and kill with looks"⁶. Marvell is careful, through the secularization of the king's predicament (the actor-image makes Charles the sport of the vulgar populace), to prevent us from feeling that we are witnessing some Christological re-enactment of sacrificial martyrdom. Marvell even goes so far as to suggest that Charles' role is so precisely dictated by his situation that his ingenuity as an actor is scarcely called upon:

He nothing common did or mean
Upon that memorable Scene:
But with his Keener Eye
The Axes edge did try.
(MM, 88)

Charles plays his royal gesture of noble defeat to perfection, even with humour (the "Keener Eye" suggests wit, a quality similarly out of fashion in the context of the rising Cromwell's virtues). But Marvell makes it clear that impotence and helplessness are the prime ingredients of Charles' political fatedness in the Ode. The irony of the word "memorable" is taken up eight lines later when Marvell reveals the true significance of the execution scene:

This was that memorable Hour
Which first assur'd the forced
Pow'r
(MM, 89)

Charles has been manipulated like a puppet throughout the decent formalities of his execution; the qualities he represents are no longer positive ones, and they do not suggest a capacity for political compromise. The death of Charles serves a primarily

⁶ Shakespeare, Complete Works, ed. P. Alexander (1966), p. 464.

ornamental function, adorning Cromwell's tragic stage. By express favour of the Protector-to-be and his sinister "armed Bands", Charles is permitted to make a dignified exit. Marvell describes Charles' submission to his fate in terms which invalidate his divinity and deny him any spiritual prestige:

Nor call'd the Gods with vulgar spight
To vindicate his helpless Right,
But bow'd his comely Head,
Down as upon a Bed.

(MM, 89)

The graceful positioning of the word "comely", with its eloquent evocation of beauty and innocence, creates an ambivalent moral tone, creating a simultaneous impression of ceremonious dignity and Cavalier effeminacy. The bed-image is unusually striking; it is not often associated with the death of kings. Marvell allows Charles, as a virtuous man, to pass 'mildly away', and will permit him only an aesthetic legitimacy instead of the Divine Right which he can no longer command in the realm of politics. Dryden's martyr-heroine St Catherine, in Tyrannick Love (1670), displays a similar sense of occasion and recognition of the actor's part which is assigned her:

But I am plac'd as on a Theater,
Where all my Acts to all Mankind appear,
To imitate my constancy or fear.

(CD, X, 163)

In Marvell's poem Charles' affinity with the player king who is no more than a "mockery king of snow", is quickly established. In her book Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play, Anne Righter analyses the many roles implicit in the idea of kingship, choosing the moment of death as perhaps the crystallization of them all. She writes,

In the moment of death, the king is parted
from the role with which since his
coronation he had seemed completely
identified. It now appears plainly as

a role, and his position becomes that of the Player King whose drama has come to an end. He lays aside his borrowed splendour, the grandeur which now reveals itself as mere illusion, and his entire life, in retrospect, acquires the quality of an empty show.⁷

This stripping-off of layers of dramatic illusion is mirrored in the Horatian Ode by the juxtaposition of ambiguous theatre imagery with fierce intrusions from concrete reality, e.g., the image of the "Axes edge" and the "bleeding Head". The latter image provides a psychological prolepsis of some power, transferring the physical outcome of the actual beheading to a distant, but no less real past. Lights cast upon the execution-scene from different standpoints (i.e. the tragic scaffold, the armed bands, the Gods, the comely Head, the Capitol, the Architects, the "happy Fate" of the nation) combine to create a texture at once alarmingly simple in form (it amounts to little more than a straight sequence of factual observations enhanced by the use of simile), and complex in meaning. Much of this complexity centres upon the image of the actor himself. To the Puritan, such an image was highly untrustworthy, while even for staunch republicans it held insurmountable associations of hypocrisy and dissembling - drawbacks as readily ascribed to the Puritans in their turn by their Royalist enemies⁸. Milton's prose account of the execution scene, for instance, quickly exposes the type of jeopardy in which the association with the theatre might place a man:

⁷ A. Richter, Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play, Harmondsworth (1967), p.104.

⁸ For a useful summary of Royalist and Puritan self-images up to and including the Restoration, see Politics, Religion and Literature in the Seventeenth Century, ed. W. Lamont and S. Oldfield (1975), esp. pp.82-121.

Who is there among those who die on a scaffold, who when about to finish the drama of life, and seeing the vanity of things mortal, would not act in the same way? and willingly lay aside, or at least pretend so to do, his enmities, his angers, his hatreds, as if now making his exit from the stage, that he may leave behind him in the minds of men a feeling of compassion, or a conviction of his innocence?⁹

Milton takes the line that a self-willed 'stagey' martyrdom is akin to the sin of ostentatious pride. As Jonas A. Barish has written in a highly valuable article on the nature of theatrical gesture:

To court martyrdom was to claim a starring part on the stage of history, to become a "visible saint", theatricalizing one's sanctity by revealing it triumphantly before the Supreme Gaze.¹⁰

It is highly significant that the Charles of the Horatian Ode never achieves this sublime self-realization; the Supreme Gaze remains sublimely indifferent to his "helpless Right".

Later, some of the implications underlying individual habits of performance in society were to become a major concern of Restoration dramatists as they began to master the techniques of greater psychological perception¹¹. Marvell, for instance, outwits the theatrical posturing of Charles because he denies him the full impact of his performance by making it deliberately remote and shadowy. In our own day, Peter Brook has been quick

⁹. In The Works of John Milton, 20 vols., ed. F.A. Patterson, et al., New York, (1933), VIII, 175.

¹⁰. J.A. Barish, 'Exhibitionism and the Antitheatrical Prejudice', ELH, XXXVI, (1969), p.10.

¹¹. For the importance of feigning and dissimulative technique in a social context, see D.R.M. Wilkinson, The Comedy of Habit, Leiden, (1964). On dissimulation with particular reference to the character of Charles II, see Halifax, Complete Works, ed. J.P. Kenyon, Harmondsworth, (1969), pp.251-52.

to remind us of the continuing isolation of the actor within society, and of the degree of security or insecurity this can bring; it is still generally true that the interpretative function of the actor's role remains largely undefined:

Acting is in many ways unique in its difficulties because the artist has to use the treacherous, changeable and mysterious material of himself as his medium. He is called upon to be completely involved while distanced - detached without detachment. He must be sincere, he must be insincere; he must practice how to be insincere with sincerity and how to lie truthfully.¹²

The imagery of the stage occurs more than once in Marvell's Cromwellian panegyrics; always the relationship between spectator and actor is stressed. There is a strong distrust of the rabble, as in Shakespeare's Roman plays; a fear of their false taste and lack of discernment. A marked difference is implied between an actor who fulfils his role by the connivance of the spectators - the actor who, like Charles Stuart, feels at home in his 'dull' part of dignity - and the actor, like the Protector in A Poem upon the Death of O.C. (published 1681), who is forced by vulgar expectation to assume a role which does not express his natural personality. In the Horatian Ode, Marvell carefully distinguishes between the naturally heroic role fate prepares for Cromwell and the artificially heroic one prepared for Charles. The intrusion of almost Wallerian elegance into the vocabulary of the execution scene contrasts boldly with the carefully balanced antitheses which furnish the portrait of the self-made royal actor:

¹² P. Brook, The Empty Space, Harmondsworth, (1972), p.131.

What Field of all the Civil Wars,
 Where his were not the deepest scars.
 And Hampton shows what part
 He had of wiser Art.
 Where, twining subtle fears with hope,
 He wove a Net of such a scope,
 That Charles himself might chase
 To Caresbrooks narrow case.
 That thence the Royal Actor born
 The Tragick Scaffold might adorn:
 While round the armed Bands
 Did clap their bloody hands.
 (MM, 88)

The sinister reverberation of the soldiery's applause touches both Cromwell and Charles, although in the Poem on the Death of O.C., Marvell recapitulates on the role of the audience with an ironic twist. Here all the purposive drive of Cromwell's natural energy is dissipated in an unideal fate: the man who had so consistently represented the force of "angry Heavens flame" thwarts the expectations of a fiction-hungry populace by dying a peaceful, unheroic death:

The People, which what most they fear esteem,
 Death when more horrid so more noble deem;
 And blame the last Act, like Spectators vain,
 Unless the Prince whom they applaud be slain.
 Nor Fate indeed can well refuse that right
 To those that liv'd in War, to dye in Fight.
 (MM, 123)

The clapping of hands is thus associated with the approbation of the mob, perhaps the most fickle of all the rewards of fortune. Marvell counteracts this harsh destiny in the Poem on the Death of O.C. by concentrating instead upon the tender and private virtues of Cromwell the man, a deliberate toning-down of his overwhelming instrumentality in the designs of Providence. Until this moment the odds have remained firmly antagonistic to the interests of the royal actor. Cromwell has rent the firmament, and even altered the progress of time, revealing an inner artistry even in the midst of such world-shaking events. There is an important contrast between the

implicated spectators of the Horatian Ode - Cromwell's Ironsides, or Myrmidons, who clap their 'bloody' hands in self-justification - and the ill-informed minds of the vain spectators in the death-poem, spectators who are unable to keep abreast of developments in Cromwell's spiritual activity, and life of grace. The tragic scaffold of the Horatian Ode remains an essentially private pageant, an organized party-piece engineered by Cromwell and the Parliamentarians, and as such represents a symbolic farewell to the fripperies of Caroline masque. The theatre of the world which Cromwell inhabits is, by way of contrast, universal and illimitable, and Marvell makes Cromwell's earthly progress a topic of mystery and reverential awe.

Although Marvell never openly challenged the sincerity of Charles, the image of the royal actor was nevertheless utterly disqualified by the poetic strategy of the Horatian Ode. The key to this process lies in the function of scale in the poem. There is an immense and unbridgeable gulf between that isolated tragic scaffold and Cromwell's busy, universal activity. While the ostentation of Charles appears as an offshoot of theatrical vanity (in which the moral bias of details like the "comely Head" become much more explicit), the exhibitionism of Cromwell is carefully integrated into the need for his omnipresence in the affairs of the nation. Charles remains static, pinned as it were to a stake, while Cromwell (like Mars) casts his nets and outmanoeuvres him. The sense of dislocation between warrior and king is made acute. Charles dies amidst a turmoil of values which makes it virtually impossible to disengage the private from the public man, or indeed private from public morality¹³. Charles as a private man

¹³. For a historically-based analysis of the relationship between private conscience and public affairs in the seventeenth century, see I. Coltman's thoughtful study, Private Men and Public Causes, (1962).

dies the actor still, assuming in death the bare 'role' or title of his 'helpless' Right - something which is clearly, in the light of Cromwell's ingenious policy, "such stuff as dreams are made on". If we watch the execution scene, as Marvell intends us to, as the death of a private man who 'plays' the king despite the public significance of stock conventions of a 'ham' theatrical tradition, then its significance must be reduced to a mere speck in the millennial work of ages inaugurated by Cromwell. This technique is akin to the distancing and detachment of which Dryden was capable in his best political satires. Although the Ode does possess an unique blend of engagement in history and a reserved attitude towards conventional heroism, I have chosen to stress the contrast between the images of Charles and Cromwell because it seems to me richly suggestive of a number of approaches to the poetic function of kingship, approaches which were to be assiduously explored in the heroic and anti-heroic modes of Restoration panegyric and the heroic play. Convincing or not, the fate of Charles is one with that of the 'forward youth' of the Ode's opening stanza and for whom the Ode itself acts as a kind of formal elegy. Marvell suggests that heroic aspiration must be adapted to the temper of the times (e.g. in this case not adapted to the "inglorious arts of peace"). Hence ideals such as peace itself, the Muses, country retirement and the abstruse refinements of intellectual circles such as Falkland's at Great Tew, may furnish a man with basic aristocratic credentials, but credentials whose true value can only be put to the test in war¹⁴. Therefore, Charles Stuart and the Royalist gentry, anyone in short who subscribed

¹⁴. See ibid., esp. p. 56.

to an older chivalric code such as Shakespeare's Trojans do in Troilus and Cressida, had of necessity to submit to being relegated to a world of dust and shadows, like forsaken stage-properties:

To have done is to hang
Quite out of fashion, like a rusty mail
In monumental mock'ry. Take the instant way;
For honour travels in a strait so narrow
Where one but goes abreast.¹⁵

The restless and resistless Cromwell crowds out all other contenders upon the universal stage, and sets the tone for a new brand of heroism, a heroism not of personal aggrandizement, but of service and moral impetuosity:

Though Justice against Fate complain,
And plead the antient Rights in vain:
But those do hold or break
As Men are strong or weak.
Nature that hateth emptiness,
Allows of penetration less:
And therefore must make room
Where greater Spirits come.
(MM, 88)

Images of the Active Man: Cromwell

As Ruth Nevo has explained in her judicious study The Dial of Virtue, the ascendancy of Cromwell posed a serious challenge not only to the interpretation of Providence and national history, but also called for a crucial re-thinking of heroic activity and its moral significance. The private tragedy of the royal actor becomes eclipsed in Cromwell's rise to a new prophetic and dynastic type of willed heroism:

Not sovereignty, therefore, is the end of
heroic action, but that empire of reason
and faith which is to be realised in and
through the free will of a whole people,
a noble and puissant nation, released from
the fetters of authority to govern itself
in the sight of God. And the heroic quality

¹⁵ Shakespeare, Complete Works, op.cit., p.808.

in Cromwell is just that which makes him the supreme representative of these forces of inward liberation.¹⁶

Cromwell is therefore seen as the Divinely-inspired response to the subconscious desires of a whole people, a man whose heroism is called forth not by his personal ambition alone, but also by dynastic necessity, the "emptiness" in nature which it is his vocation to 'penetrate'. The attempts of such diverse writers as Waller, Marvell, Dryden, and Sprat to maintain an informed and largely impartial stance in this situation resulted in highly ambiguous and half-hearted concessions to traditional heroic codes. Formulations of pious conduct were produced which were seen to be formal and praiseworthy but were nevertheless assumed to be hostile to the demands of the heroic ego.

Since Cromwell rose to power through his natural merit and his good fortune ("If these the times, then this must be the man"), it is not surprising to find that traditional concepts of heroism took some time to catch up with him - that is, if they can properly be said to have caught up with him at all. However, none of the major panegyrics about him are constrained or affected pieces of flattery, the result of a false sense of 'duty'. Each of the four poets, Marvell, Waller, Dryden and Sprat wrote praises of Cromwell as a tribute, and with some genuine recognition of the complex nature of his personality. But Cromwell's greatness could not be forced into heroic clichés and this put Waller and Dryden to greater efforts at subtlety and ingenious circumlocution than they perhaps had to exercise at any other point in their respective careers¹⁷.

¹⁶. R. Nevo, The Dial of Virtue, Princeton, (1963), pp. 90-91.

¹⁷. The only exception to this statement might be Dryden's cunning deflation of Shaftesbury in The Medal (1681), the satire which Charles II expressly encouraged him to write in order to embarrass the Whig faction.

All Cromwell's panegyrists had to accommodate their poetic notions of heroism and greatness to the historical reality of Cromwell's accession to power. Hence personal traits of "show" and "greatness", the pomp and circumstance traditionally associated with the charismatic hero, had to be given a subordinate role and serve merely an ornamental function in the interpretation of Cromwell, the champion and protector of personal liberty.

Thus the literary Cromwell becomes an amalgam of heroic types drawn from the classics, the Bible and even folk-myth, while in fact defying classification in any one of the existing heroic patterns of the time; he is not at home in the Stoic, the Herculean, the Christian or Romance modes, simply because he incontrovertibly represents a power which is generated by natural impetus, supernatural only in that it suggests rather than proves an unique dispensation from higher grace. It is clear from all the major poems to the Protector that his poetic interpreters found him both fascinating and uncanny. Cromwell is the natural man whose greatness expresses not only the heroic 'ego', but an ideal, that of the restorer of a harmonious commonwealth. In Marvell's The First Anniversary of the Government under O.C., the poet sets out to celebrate Cromwell as the architect who carries through the great design inaugurated by Providence. Cromwell's actions are no demonstration in themselves of heroic piety or Christian sentiment; but they do represent industrious energy, unflagging zeal and a capacity for decision-making which are self-justifying in their thoroughness, and support the contention that 'Might is Right'. In the sense that few heroes have ever had to work as hard for their recognition, Marvell's poeticized Cromwell is unique; although

he is a hero by 'fiat' or 'election', his claim to conventional heroism is a tentative one. The reasons why the contradictions within Cromwell's nature were so inimical to the traditions of pure panegyric have been well summarized by Professor J.M. Wallace, who explains the primarily antithetical nature of Cromwell's dramatic impact:

The 'restless' Cromwell, the destroyer, the usurper, and the intimidating and subtle hunter are all unquestionable parts of the total portrait, but while they testify to an awareness of the fearful power which has been concentrated in one man, they are reconciled in the vision of Cromwell's destiny.¹⁸

Such a reconciliation was not achieved with ease. It is only Marvell's hard-won providential interpretation (fully developed for the first time in The First Anniversary) which gives the poetic version of the Cromwell myth its being and rationale; the original animation of the Protector's will by "angry Heaven's flame" indicates the deliberate untuning of an already discordant universe in preparation for a divinely sanctioned resettlement into harmony. Cromwell is justified by works, and the poet by faith.

The complex relationship between the nature of the agent and that of his instrumentality is thus made the central architectural paradox of the First Anniversary and it is upon this almost indefinable quality of unfixed heroism that the success of the young commonwealth depends. When Marvell rebukes the outmoded 'heavy monarchs' for their complacency and laissez-faire, he is commenting on their lack of spiritual inspiration (precisely

¹⁸. J.M. Wallace, Destiny His Choice, (1968), p.100.

rendered in the gross materiality of the images), an inspiration which is always evident in Cromwell's strenuous efforts to curb self-interest:

They neither build the Temple in their dayes,
Nor Matter for succeeding Founders raise;
Nor sacred Prophecies consult within
Much less themselves to perfect them begin.
(MM, 104)

Rigorous self-improvement is practised by Cromwell but only as a habit conducive to the welfare of the nation; Thomas Sprat, in his elegy To the Happy Memory of the Late Lord Protector (1659) constantly reverts to this self-effacing integrity:

Not interest, or any weak desire
Of rule or empire did thy mind inspire:
Thy valour, like the holy fire,
Which did before the Persian armies go,
Liv'd in the camp and yet was sacred too.¹⁹

In Marvell, Cromwell's capacity for intense self-examination and for channelling the heroic potential of his 'vigour', results in the creation of a Cromwell-centred universe in which Cromwell not only resembles, but takes over the function of the Creator:

When for his Foot he thus a place had found,
He hurles e'er since the World about him round.
(MM, 105)

The perception of spiritual realities underlying the potentially charismatic heroism of Cromwell is also a marked and perhaps unexpected feature of Dryden's Heroique Stanzas (1659):

Such was our Prince; yet own'd a soul above
The highest Acts it could produce to show:
Thus poor Mechanique Arts in publique moove
Whilst the deep Secrets beyond practice goe.
(CD, I, 15)

¹⁹. In Works of the English Poets, 21 volumes, ed. A. Chalmers, (1810), IX, 316.

There is a recognition, shared at least here by Marvell, that Cromwell's poor 'Mechanique Arts' are only the superficial tokens of the inner man; they are outward visible signs that can also betray him to the charge of being a Machiavel. As Michael West observes of the Heroique Stanzas;

Dryden had ... devoted much attention to the superhero's difficulty in ever expressing his transcendent essence satisfactorily in this corrupt world.²⁰

The key to Dryden's difficulty lay in the fact that Cromwell's transcendence was not of itself designed to be expressly 'heroic' or to fulfil a heroic stereotype. In fact, 'Heroique Stanzas' were not a truly appropriate form in which to say what needed to be said about the phenomenon of Cromwell.

Of central importance to Marvell's conception of Cromwell and to his place in history had been the millennial dream. In attempting to reproduce the vigour of Cromwell's energizing powers in terms of an impassioned prophetic vision, Marvell was actively invoking the services of poetry in the building of Commonwealth. Although Marvell deliberately tries to coax the 'great work of time' towards completion by the power of poetic imagination, a sense of tragic limitation is admitted as the poet ponders whether the 'times are out of joint' for the achievement of such high designs. Marvell's poetry is a very real attempt to write propaganda which will encourage a clear understanding of the nature of Cromwell's work; it is a commentary on a living and hence volatile 'virtue'. But the threat of frustrated aims eventually narrows the cosmic perspective; the suggestion in the Poem on the Death of O.C. that Cromwell dies of grief is symbolically appropriate for a man who has missed the fruition of his 'mortal act'. The

²⁰ M. West, 'Dryden and the Disintegration of Renaissance Heroic Ideals', op.cit., p.202.

looked-for conjunction of highest grace, highest power and a 'seasonable' people never comes to pass. Therefore in the Death-poem the narrator or Marvellian-persona (more literary and more intrusive than in the earlier poems) struggles hard to accept the reality of 'greatness going off'. If the poem marks a return to personal interest in the narrow sense, and we see Cromwell for the first time in the intimate setting of domestic tragedy, what impoverishes the poem by comparison with its predecessors is not any technical deficiency but the simple absence of that 'soul' which 'moves the great Bulke and animates the whole'. When Cromwell dies, the life-blood runs out of the poetry he inspires. Marvell is left to convey something of his own humility and insignificance compared with the man who stood for a time at the centre of things:

I saw him dead, a leaden slumber lyes,
And mortal sleep over those wakefull eyes:
Those gentle rays under the lids were fled,
Which through his looks that piercing sweetnesse shed;
That port which so majestique was and strong,
Loose and depriv'd of vigour, stretch'd along:
All wither'd, all discolour'd, pale and wan,
How much another thing, no more that man?
Oh! humane glory, vaine, oh! death, oh! wings,
Oh! worthless world! oh transitory things!
(MM, 129)

In sensibility such lines look forward to the self-consciously tender, sentimental drama of Otway. They could almost be taken for a description in words of a Baroque painting of the Passion; it is strong contemplative writing with a strong devotional element to it. The hesitancy over which tense to adopt in the opening lines is wonderfully communicative of the distress of the spectator, and the transformation from the living Cromwell - all vigour and resistless energy - to the Cromwell of posterity, the lifeless object of the panegyrist's moral vision, is painfully made. The 'panique groan' of nature which once greeted the overturning of the Protector's carriage in The First Anniversary is nothing in comparison with this overwhelming impression of desolation and loss. With the calamity

of the Protector's death the authenticity of Marvell's prophetic confidence deserts him; there is no poetic substance behind the wanly voiced hopes for Cromwell's successor, Richard: 'A Cromwell in an hour a prince will grow'. Only in this final Cromwellian poem is Marvell's poetic invention subjected to more conservative structures, accommodating itself to the slower pace of an elegiac retrospect of Cromwell's 'Heldenleben'. Adapting Cromwell's extraordinary virtues to the needs of panegyric was bound to involve some divergence of opinion and technique. If we compare the ways of seeing Cromwell which emerge from the panegyrics of Marvell, Waller, Dryden and Sprat it quickly becomes apparent that each poet had his own conception of the nature, cause and effect of the Protector's heroic qualities. Generally speaking, Cromwell falls between the two predominant categories of 'conquest-hero' and king by 'natural' election. Each poet is anxious to preserve the impression that he is treading neutral ground, yet each is quick to emphasize some specific aspect of Cromwell's heroic greatness. Marvell's Horatian Ode and First Anniversary dramatise and energize his virtù, the dynamic inward power which urges his 'active star'. By contrast Waller's A Panegyric to My Lord Protector (1655) is a poem which celebrates restoration - the harmony which Cromwell's merciful conquest-ethic gives back to the British nation. Waller also celebrates the redemptive power of decorum over the impassioned tendencies of heroic action; he sees Cromwell as 'humble David':

Less pleasure take brave minds in battles won
Than in restoring such as are undone.²¹

²¹. In Silver Poets of the Seventeenth Century, ed. G.A.E. Parfitt, (1974), p.23.

The poem anticipates the descriptive and prescriptive argument of Dryden's Astraea Redux, where Charles II's forgiving mercy is accorded similar treatment. Waller, however, makes it his prime concern that decorum should be the distinguishing heroic characteristic of the Protector; the poem tells 'of mighty kingdoms by your conduct won',²². Sprat, meanwhile, in To the Happy Memory of the Late Lord Protector, is writing a poem about the nature of fame, and its implications for Cromwell's heroic posterity. He is hard put to choose between depicting Cromwell as warrior or as a king, and, as in Waller's panegyric and Dryden's Heroique Stanzas, the end-product combines elements of both images. Sprat's treatment of Cromwell is cast in the form of a Pindaric ode celebrating the Protector's vita mirabilis; Cromwell redirects Britain's inverted destructive impulse (the Civil War) outwards towards empire, commerce, and the 'Promised Land'. Although Cromwell is apothesized as Moses, the great leader of a nation, he is also remembered for his intriguing Janus-like ambiguities:

Thou mayst in double shapes be shown
Or in thy arms, or in thy gown;
Like Jove, sometime with warlike thunder, and²³
Sometimes with peaceful sceptre in his hand.

Elsewhere in the poem Sprat makes the point that Britain has somewhat reluctantly accepted her destiny in Cromwell:

Thou a safe land and harbour for us found,
And savedst those that would themselves have
drown'd;
A work which none but Heaven and thou could do²⁴
Thou mad'st us happy whether we would or no...

²². ibid., p.25.

²³. In Works of the English Poets, op.cit., IX, 315.

²⁴. ibid., 317.

Sprat presents Cromwell throughout as a "refiner" (through fire and the sword) of church and state, and as a private man of 'gentle' and even domestic affections. Sprat accepts the overruling importance of Cromwell's instrumentality and seeks to bolster it with the enumeration of respectable private virtues.

Dryden's Heroique Stanzas take up the problem of power and piety which was one of the central paradoxes in Waller's To My Lord Protector. Dryden's Stanzas are an essay, like his earlier Upon the Death of the Lord Hastings (1649), about the academic qualifications for heroic virtue, and how such qualities may occasionally be encountered in specific men. Dryden's poem is thus about the ideas of greatness suggested to a poet by Cromwell, and in presenting him both as a conquest-hero and as a potentially Davidic king, Dryden explores the 'deep secrets' of the hero's soul in a way which partially accommodates Cromwellian heroism with the moral force attaching to Restoration kingship. Dryden reconciles the opposing forces of piety and valour only by subsuming them in a partially mystical appreciation of statecraft, and by putting Cromwell forward as the sower of seed, the planter of 'ideas' of virtue. The duality of the 'conquest-hero' and 'pious king' images persists uncomfortably to the end.

The major difficulty about presenting Cromwell in a directly 'heroic' manner is that the man who rises to power by natural merit and by the power of the sword is open to Machiavellian interpretation and even to some hint of cultural primitivism. Professor J.A.Mazzeo, the chief exponent of the Machiavellian view, argues that there is a strong link between the opportunism of Marvell's Cromwell and the political doctrine

of necessità²⁵. But the similarities with Il Principe are not totally convincing. Machiavelli does not recommend calculated behaviour for its own sake, but as one distinct feature of the statesman's most essential prerequisite - self-knowledge. Although Marvell avoids all inferences of calculated conduct in his Cromwellian poems, he is especially careful to keep the Protector's own awareness of his political instrumentality to a minimum - it is for the spectator to call attention to the hero's virtue of unselfconsciousness. Any suggestion of private force is always modified and regulated by a more perceptual notion of instrumentality. The resulting sophistication - Marvell simply 'alludes' to conventions of heroic conduct by describing Cromwell, but without giving particular allegiance to any - far outstrips the sagacious cunning of Machiavelli's state-ruler or the self-sustaining confidence of the Marlovian scourge. Cromwell is neither Tamburlaine nor Machiavel, although his actions embody something of their heroic, or even anti-heroic essence.

It is tempting nevertheless to pursue for a moment the similarities between the poeticized Cromwell and Marlowe's 'over-reachers'. In the poems by Waller and Dryden, Cromwell does emerge at intervals not unlike a purely self-motivated conquest-hero suspended between the dominant forces of fortuna and virtù. The superficial resemblance between the poeticized Cromwell and the Marlovian protagonist can be quickly located in this passage of comment from Harry Levin's

²⁵. See J.A. Mazzeo, 'Machiavelli: the Artist as Statesman', in Renaissance and Seventeenth Century Studies, (1964), pp. 145-65.

still unparalleled study of Marlowe's dramatic art; he writes,

His heroes make their fortunes by exercising virtues which conventional morality might well regard as vices. For the most part, they are self-made men; and to the extent that they can disregard the canons of good and evil, they are supermen. They are continually active and, up to a point, incapable of suffering. All of Marlowe's plays are dominated by the animus of such individuals and by the resultant conflicts between the energies of the protagonist and the circumstances into which he hurls himself.²⁶

Levin's summary admirably echoes qualities we have noticed about Cromwell in the Horatian Ode and the First Anniversary. Waller and Dryden's poems go on to accept without question the physical aggrandizement of Cromwell, the 'World-Protector', and attribute to him qualities which are suggestive of the Marlovian prototype as well as the men of 'eccentric virtue' who will later populate the heroic drama.

Waller in fact closes his panegyric with a sudden burst of high style, in which Cromwell accepts the tributes of rival nations with the same haughty disdain with which Tamburlaine treads on the necks of captive kings:

Illustrious acts high raptures do infuse
And every conqueror creates a muse:
Here in low strains your milder deeds we sing,
But there, my lord, we'll bays and olive bring
To crown your head, while you in triumph ride
O'er vanquished nations, and the sea beside,
While all your neighbour princes unto you,
Like Joseph's sheaves, pay reverence and bow.²⁷

Waller deftly anticipates coronation panegyric here without ever more than implying that Cromwell's attributes are king-like. The image of a Cromwell revered by the wealth of nations is flattering, and designed to rear his heroic status. Waller

²⁶ H. Levin, Christopher Marlowe: The Overreacher, (1961), p.48.

²⁷ In Silver Poets of the Seventeenth Century, op.cit., p.25.

has already traced Cromwell's heroic lineage in the poem down through Edward III, the Black Prince, and 'France-conquering Henry', and in Dryden's Heroique Stanzas this list is further extended to include the heroes of Greek history and civilization. The Heroique Stanzas are, as their name implies, founded on a more conservative ideology than Marvell's poems, and they form the perfect complement to Waller's decorous, rather mild gallantry. Earl Miner has summed up the kind of mythic assumptions underlying the Heroick Stanzas in his description of what he terms Dryden's 'heroic idea':

The heroic conception of history may mean many things, but to Dryden it is centrally a vision of man's rising by his own efforts in a providential world to achieve immortal accomplishments.²⁸

Dryden treats the heroic stanza-form (which he borrows from Davenant) as a mental discipline appropriate to erecting a poetic mausoleum to Cromwell; it therefore symbolises the fashioning of an ideal pattern of heroic conduct and achievement which can afford to be revealed in the conscious symmetry of the artefact:

Yet 'tis our duty and our interest too
Such monuments as we can build to raise.
(CD, I, 11)

The most opulent of Dryden's Baroque images of Cromwell is that of the conquest-hero, the purpose of the poem being in part to elaborate upon the virtues of heroic gloire. Eugene M. Waith has persuasively argued the importance of the Herculean typology to Dryden's heroic vision²⁹ and the Cromwell of the Heroique Stanzas

²⁸. E. Miner, The Restoration Mode from Milton to Dryden, Princeton (1974), p. 294.

²⁹. See E. M. Waith, The Herculean Hero (1962).

may be seen to unite the fundamental antithesis between restraint and frenzy, which Dr. Waith recognises as a central feature of the Herculean charisma. Cromwell's diplomatic energy in the Heroique Stanzas is kept austere in balance by the processional nature of the panegyric, a constant passing from one tableau to another, and by the stringency and taut expression necessary to sustain the Gondibert-stanza. Although Cromwell serves virtue with an impetuous zeal and 'heroic haste' which foreshadow the more celebrated of Dryden's over-reachers (e.g. Almanzor, Montezuma, Morat), his actions are comprehended in a Neoplatonic sublimity of purpose, enhanced by the rhetoric of the total design. Dryden is at his most grandiose in his celebration of the Herculean characteristics of Cromwell's heroism:

Swift and resistlesse through the Land he past
Like that bold Greek who did the East subdue;
And made to battails such Heroick haste
As if on wings of victory he flew.

He fought secure of fortune as of fame,
Till by new maps the Island might be shown,
Of Conquests which he strew'd where e're he came
Thick as the Galaxy with starr's is sown.

His Palmes though under weights they did not stand,
Still thriv'd; no Winter could his Laurells fade,
Heav'n in his Portraict (sic.) shew'd a Workman's hand
And drew it perfect yet without a shade.

(CD, I, 12-13)

Each of the above stanzas contributes a separate but mutually enhancing image of Cromwell as military hero. The stanzas recall in turn Alexander the Great ('that bold Greek'), Tamburlaine ('Till by new maps the Island might be shown'), and Mark Antony ('no Winter could his Laurells fade'). But to accept these persuasive images of Cromwell as conquest-hero as totally representative or even without latent irony, would be short-sighted. Waller, for example, is partially embarrassed by the half-truth of such sentiments as 'Every conqueror creates a

muse', partly because he cannot decide whether he altogether approves of Cromwell's martial activity. Dryden uses the image of conquest-hero as a convenient gloss for the earlier atrocities of Clonmel and Drogheda. By placing Cromwell in line with classical heroes like Alexander, Dryden is recognising that brutality has its place in the testing of the hero, but he is really only prepared to consider the 'achieved' qualities of the success won by arms; he depicts Cromwell triumphant rather than triumphing.

Marvell neatly severs Cromwell from too close an identification with the image of tyrannic conquest by concentrating upon the unusually volatile and generous qualities of Cromwell's 'resistless' energy; he nowhere openly avows that Cromwell's ruthlessness is heroic in itself. It is not until The First Anniversary that Marvell feels ready to present Cromwell as a providential actor, but he does so in order to illustrate not only how Cromwell fits into the scheme of things, but also to stress that Commonwealth becomes both profitable and witty under his guidance. Marvell provides Cromwell's re-turning of the spheres with a classical counterpart in the felicitous image of Amphion's dancing city- the implication is surely that the new Commonwealth is poetically, as well as politically alive:

Yet all compos'd by his attractive Song,
Into the Animated City throng.

(MM, 105)

In the sinewy, taut world of 'listening structures', time confounded with space, Cromwell's wooing of the elements is made to reveal an innate artistry and respect for creation. Marvell thus aligns the 'heroic' Cromwell with the musician and poet (an 'Orphean' rather than a 'Herculean' analogy).

Towards the end of The First Anniversary, Marvell pokes fun at the super-heroic view of Cromwell, incorporating effects of the 'monstrous' and bizarre which have obvious connections with the affective overstraining of heroic status which was to become a marked feature of the heroic drama. In the speech which Marvell gives to the 'credulous' foreign ambassador, the rhetoric of the stage is manifested, recalling the grudging admiration which Tamburlaine's opponents are forced to express in Marlowe's play. In the following passage, 'monstrous' imagery is applied to Cromwell's navy, but with the intention of making us fully aware (by implication) of the Gargantuan stature of Cromwell himself;

Theirs are not Ships, but rather Arks of War,
And beaked Promontories sail'd from far;
Of floating Islands a new Hatched Nest;
A Fleet of Worlds, of other Worlds in quest;
An hideous shole of wood-Leviathans,
Arm'd with three Tire of brazen Hurricans;
That through the Center shoot their thund'ring side
And sink the Earth that does at Anchor ride.
(MM, 112)

The satiric distortion employed by the speaker hints distinctly at a vein of cultural primitivism, a feature which links this section of the poem with Dryden's heroic drama, The Indian Emperour. While Marvell here employs primitivism to expose the moral myopia of the speaker, Dryden employs it to add piquancy and heightened emotional effect to the plight of his Mexican Indians:

GUYOMAR: The object I could first distinctly view
Was tall straight trees which on the waters flew,
Wings on their sides instead of leaves did grow,
Which gather'd all the breath the winds could blow.
And at their roots grew floating Palaces,
Whose out-bow'd bellies cut the yielding Seas!

MONTEZUMA: What Divine monsters, O ye gods, are these
That float in air and flye upon the Seas!
Came they alive or dead upon the shore?

GUYOMAR: Alas, they liv'd too sure, I heard them roar:
 All turn'd their sides, and to each other spoke,
 I saw their words break out in fire and smোক.
 Sure 'tis their voice that Thunders from on high,
 Or these the younger brothers of the sky.
 (CD, IX)

Thomas H. Fujimara has drawn attention to Dryden's use of what he calls the 'myth of the golden age' in depicting certain heroic ethics³⁰. Not only in the panegyrics to Charles, such as Astraea Redux and Annus Mirabilis, but in the heroic drama as well, Dryden invokes the symbol of a golden age of peace, prosperity and commerce, in which the innocence and natural response of uncultivated man is contrasted with the policy, dissimulation and treachery of man after the Fall. Dryden's rhetorical gloss for the Interregnum in Astraea Redux is a good example:

The Rabble now such Freedom did enjoy,
 As Winds at Sea that use it to destroy:
 Blind as the Cyclops, and as wild as he,
 They own'd a lawless salvage Libertie,
 Like that our painted Ancestours so priz'd
 Ere Empires Arts their Breasts had Civiliz'd.
 (CD, I, 23)

Dryden's attitude to 'salvage Libertie' is not unequivocal; for him its lawlessness also suggested an iron age; only the paternal sovereignty of a merciful king could ensure the millennial promise of a golden age. The idea of a hidden world, an Utopia reserved for a new hero or conqueror, was an appealing one which still answered a largely political need. References to the East, with its trade, wealth and foreign peoples, often implied a notion of primitivism which usually enhanced the prestige of the conqueror. It is interesting that in both Waller and Dryden's panegyrics to Cromwell there is a vein

³⁰. T.H. Fujimara, 'John Dryden and the Myth of the Golden Age', PLL, XI, (1975), 149-67.

of primitivistic thought which suggests some kind of affinity between Cromwell and the noble savage. Waller asserts that the Scots people symbolize the 'hidden' world reserved by fate for the sword of Cromwell. By subduing a primitive people, Cromwell demonstrates his own natural ascendancy and consolidates his own glory. The Caledonians, "armed with want and cold", are presented like Dryden's Mexicans; distrusting at first, they are brought to a reluctant acceptance of the invading power's 'acts of peace':

They that henceforth must be content to know
No warmer region than their hills of snow,
May blame the sun, but must extol your grace,
Which in our senate has allowed them place.

Preferred by conquest, happily o'erthrown,
Falling they rise to be with us made one;
So kind dictators made, when they came home,
Their vanquished foes free citizens of Rome.³¹

In Waller's eyes the Scots have been preserved expressly to glorify Cromwell and his beneficent purpose. In the Heroique Stanzas, primitivism is not restricted to the nature of rebels and the conquered, but extends to the natural sympathies evident in Cromwell's own disposition:

'Tis true, his Count'nance did imprint an awe,
And naturally all souls to his did bow;
As Wands of Divination downward draw
And point to Beds where Sov'raign Gold doth grow.
.
For from all tempers he could service draw;
The worth of each with its alloy he knew;
And as the Confident of Nature saw
How she Complexions did divide and brew.

(CD, I, 13-14)

Cromwell's instinct for judging men and assessing their capabilities is celebrated in essentially pagan terms; his imperious looks are the result not of birthright but of 'nature' - he attracts like-minded souls just as Almanzor calls forth heroic

³¹. In Silver Poets of the Seventeenth Century, op.cit., p.23.

aspiration in his opponents. Cromwell is also the magus, or wizard of 'Nature', a shrewd observer of the natural disposition of men. Cromwell's catalysing action is reflected in the use of surprising verbs in the imagery - 'And point to Beds where Sov'raign Gold doth grow', 'How she Complexions did divide and brew'. The hints of primitivism are interesting in the light of the satiric view Dryden was to take of conquest in The Indian Emperour³². In the Heroique Stanzas, Dryden extemporizes upon an emblematic presentation of Cromwell. He carefully selects the qualities he desires to emphasize most - 'Grandeur', (stanza 6), 'Peace' (stanza 16), 'Love and Majesty' (stanza 18), and these happen to be the qualities which most imply an assimilation of Dryden's Cromwell to the Davidic or Stuart king. The whole drift of Dryden's poem is suggestive of coronation ceremonial (e.g. the epic funeral rites which open the poem) and he conceives of the hero's life in terms of a theatrical parable or 'speaking picture' in which the Horatian analogy between poetry and painting is subconsciously invoked as an artistic fulcrum³³. Ruth Nevo correctly diagnoses much less ideological conflict in Dryden's poem; the effect is rather one

32. In The Indian Emperour Dryden takes a cynical attitude to the indoctrination and brutality implicit in Christian conquest (Marlowe had done virtually the same in his black comedy The Jew of Malta). In The Conquest of Granada, Dryden extended his championing of the 'noble savage' (Almanzor) but softened the satirical approach to Christianity by deliberately associating the Spanish Christians with the refined and civilizing doctrines of Neoplatonic love.

33. For a thorough investigation into the popularity of ut pictura poesis techniques in the period, see J.H.Hagstrum, The Sister Arts, Chicago (1958).

of consolidation as Cromwell's heroic greatness begins to take on a statuesque quality appropriate to the Baroque³⁴. There is little urgency about the poetic ideas and none of the hastening process which impels Marvell towards the conclusion he makes about the cosmic significance of Cromwell. Despite the terse structure of the Heroique Stanzas, the poem lacks Marvellian sinew and toughness. The predominance of rhetoric and oratory is partially responsible; Dryden was using Cromwell as the means of expressing an heroic idea, while Marvell had been forced to invent a poetry of ideas to enable him to explore the phenomenon of Cromwell.

The heroic apotheosis of Cromwell is part of Dryden's inevitable attraction towards the grand concept of nobility and decorum. However, in a poem far more static than The First Anniversary, Dryden still manages to convey the haunting power of Cromwell's perpetuum mobile and dominion over the spheres; as a world-force he is able to enact victories even by spiritual sympathy:

When absent, yet we conquer'd in his right;
For though some meaner Artist's skill were shown
In mingling colours, or in placing light,
Yet still the faire Designment was his own.
(CD, I, 14)

Dryden's analysis of the paradox of power - its unique blend of valour and piety - is comprehensively undertaken in the Heroique Stanzas, but it is far from penetrating. Dryden steers the poem towards the surface trappings of greatness, partly because Cromwell can never be for him the ideal hero; he is neither morally unimpeachable nor, however kingly, actually the king. Dryden pays tribute to Cromwell's consummate

³⁴. See R. Nevo, The Dial of Virtue, op.cit., pp. 133-37.

tact in handling a potentially explosive situation, but in doing so he softens his image by bringing it closer to the ethic of merciful passivity associated with Stuart panegyric. The Cromwell who 'creates' by poetic activity in Marvell's poems, is reduced to the Cromwell who exists purely through the grace of poetic sanction in the Heroique Stanzas; the riveting and potentially dangerous attraction of Cromwell's heroism is de-fused by a Baroque reliance on gesture, words, and 'show'.

In her book, Ruth Nevo astutely observes that, by the Restoration, a dislocation had occurred between the fictive imagination and historical events, so that the gap between them became bridged by a largely specious mythologizing tendency, totally reliant upon gesture. This is the kind of gap which does not impinge, for example, on the world of The Horatian Ode or The First Anniversary, but which provokes the unintentional intrusion of the comic muse into certain lines of Astraea Redux and Annus Mirabilis³⁵. In tracing the development of the images of Cromwell through the poetry of Marvell, Waller, Sprat and Dryden, I have tried to show that the basic fact of Cromwell's existence presented an unique challenge to the then-growing vogue for heroic poetry. Few of his panegyrists (except Marvell) considered Cromwell a truly competent actor, or even strove to relate him in any way to the 'royal actor born'. The most which writers like Dryden and Waller dared openly acknowledge was that Cromwell might fit into a scheme of 'natural' kingship

³⁵. Examples of Dryden's (presumably) unintentional self-parody may be found in Astraea Redux (lines 79-82, and 284-87) and Annus Mirabilis (lines 889-96, and 1117-1124).

displaying virtues which, however heroic in themselves, were still evidence of a primitive tendency towards ruthlessness and Machiavellian cunning. To Dryden, Cromwell's civilising powers appeared artful, rather than sincere; they could be appreciated best in a political vacuum, in which conquest reflected personal glory, not moral significance. Cromwell's panegyrists were wary of endowing the Protector with too literary or theatrical an appeal; his real dynamism made all such attempts look cheap (and in many ways the Heroique Stanzas fail, in that they commemorate the man through the medium of an alien and Royalist sensibility). But the influence of Cromwell's appearance in the 'theatre of the world' was immense; the intense concentration Marvell was able to give to Cromwell's self-sufficiency, self-command and spiritual determination, created the illusion of a man who was author of his own integration into the cosmic purpose. Dryden had to work hard to re-establish the legitimacy of Charles II as a national leader and to write social dramas in which heroism would reflect neither the harsh modernity of Cromwellian power-politics nor be seen merely as a vestige of the enfeebled and archaic 'royal actor'. In the remaining section of this chapter we shall see how far he succeeded.

Images of the King: Dryden and the Absent God

When Charles II, newly restored to his throne, lent the ceremonial coronation robes to the principal actors in Sir William Davenant's Love and Honour, revived in 1661 for the opening of the new Dorset Garden Playhouse, he was performing

a symbolic gesture³⁶. By allowing actors to parade in the robes which had actually been used in the coronation ceremony, Charles was throwing in his lot with the Player King. What appeared to be simply a gesture of indulgent informality, a particular favour towards Davenant, became symbolic of a decline in the divinity hedging the Restoration king; court ceremonial could, without incongruity, be thought of in terms of an elaborate stage property. Charles behaved to the actors as Hamlet did to the players, only omitting to instruct them how they should speak their speeches.

Charles was astute enough to sense the need for some sort of distinction between the role of the Player King and the actuality of the political potentate at Whitehall. There had been a long tradition of close association between the two; Renaissance and morality drama had stressed a close relationship between existing and ideal monarchy in plays as diverse as Magnyficence, Gorboduc, and Richard II. The Elizabethan drama explored in depth the kind of personal qualities which equipped a man for kingship, a kingship which still had an important and well-established ritual significance. The Jacobean and Caroline masque tended to focus exclusively upon formal decency, ceremoniousness and heroic delicacy, a situation in which the idealized notion of kingship became deliberately distanced from the intricacies of personality. Thus, by the time he returned from exile, Charles II understood well enough that the glamour of kingliness was a predominantly histrionic

³⁶. At the performances Betterton played Alvaro in Charles' Coronation Robes; Harris played Prospero in the robes of James, Duke of York; and Price wore the robes of the Earl of Oxford for the part of Leonell.

quality; his father's martyrdom had proved that the value of kingship per se might be preserved only at the cost of life. Charles II was far too wise, and too sceptical, to risk the danger of a repetition. By handing over his divinely invested insignia to the King's Men - dressing them for once in 'borrowed robes' - he could circumnavigate the dangers of living up to a Stuart image which many had regarded, and might still regard, as pernicious. The Player King would take over the reins, while the real king retired to fulfil his true function as a man of business in a more shadowy beaurocratic world. Charles early proved himself adept at eschewing with great charm and tact all his 'heroic' responsibilities; he could trust to his courtiers and mistresses to supply the glamour, and he had his cabal of poets, dramatists, wits and painters to perpetuate all kingly illusions which would satisfy the popular taste for spectacle. In writing lavish and elaborate panegyric to such a man, Dryden was employed on an ironic task - to supply a mythology which would lend credible transcendence to a king who was not expected to repeat the mistakes of his father and who was, in consequence, notoriously careless of his own greatness.

In poetry the most significant event of the decade was the restoration of the 'absent God' to his repentant and willing nation. Coronation panegyric is accordingly highly exuberant in its theatrical manipulation of drums, trumpets, gods, angels, and other emblems of solemn jubilation. Cowley's Upon His Majesty's Restoration and Return sets the tone. Cromwell is openly denounced as an imposter (Dryden characteristically never does this, even in Astraea Redux), and Puritan scruples are finally overcome in a righteous appeal to the rites due to ceremony and festivity:

With wine all rooms, with wine the conduits flow,
 And we, the priests of a poetic rage,
 Wonder that in this Golden Age
 The rivers too should not do so.
 There is no stoic sure who would not now
 Even some excess allow,
 And grant that one wild fit of cheerful folly³⁷
 Should end our twenty years of dismal melancholy.

The almost aggressive insistence on spectacle is also reflected in Robert Wild's propagandist Iter Boreale (1660) a panegyric to George Monck, chief engineer of the Restoration. When Wild anticipates the splendour of the coronation his enthusiasm carries him almost to the point of doggerel:

The conduits will be ravished and combine
 To turn their very water into wine,
 And for the citizens, I only pray
 They may not, overjoyed, all die that day.
 May we all live more loyal and more true,
 To give to Ceasar and to God their due.³⁸

In less than six years such pious hopes were to be destroyed by the fiasco of the Dutch Wars and by the emergence of Marvell as a consummate political satirist. Meanwhile, Dryden was engaged in trying to separate the image of the military conqueror from that of the Christian hero; his poetic representations of Charles had to satisfy the popular need for myth and be able to

37. In Silver Poets of the Seventeenth-Century, op.cit., p.233.

38. In Anthology of Poems of Affairs of State: Augustan Satirical Verse, 1660-1714, ed. G. de F. Lord, New Haven and London (1975) p.17. Wild's poem is a salutary reminder that hack poets in every age are often attracted by the subject matter of occasional poetry. Dryden's achievement in public praise needs to be seen in the context of such journey-work as Wild's. Dryden's Restoration poems transcend the commonplace and always imply a providential 'mystery' at the heart of State affairs. In this connection see G. Reedy, S.J., 'Mystical Politics: The Imagery of Charles II's Coronation', in Studies in Change and Revolution, ed. P. J. Korshin, Menston (1972), pp.19-42.

bring home to the king himself the benevolent realities of exercising tolerance and clemency. But Charles, the new Augustus, was no longer the Royal Actor; instead, the king was the auditor in Dryden's panegyrics and received the wishes and requests of his people through the mediation of a public spokesman. Dryden was trying to compromise between the different levels of receptivity to heroism and between the variety inherent in heroism itself. He did more than any other Restoration poet to give viable aureate colouring to his panegyric, but the uneasiness he felt over the efficiency of the new heroic types was manifested for many years to come, in the imagery and situations of the heroic plays.

Any serious return to the image of the Player King at the Restoration was largely out of the question. It is the tendency for panegyrists to treat Charles in a theatrical manner which has given Restoration panegyric its stigma of frivolity. Even Dryden, in To His Sacred Majesty, seems unable to resist the temptation of turning Charles into the May-King hero of some giant folk-festival:

Soft western winds waft ore the gaudy spring
And opend Scenes of flow'rs and blossoms bring
To grace this happy day, while you appear
Not King of us alone but of the year.
All eyes you draw, and with the eyes the heart,
Of your own pomp yourself the greatest part:
Loud shouts the Nations happiness proclaim
And Heav'n this day is feasted with your name.
(CD, I, 33-4)

Even if Dryden is here attempting to exalt the mystical status of ceremonial through the 'material data of the senses'³⁹, the insipidity of the verse seems to require the aid of music to

³⁹ See R. Nevo, The Dial of Virtue, op.cit., pp. 153-54.

render its paeans less embarrassing; it looks forward in style to the infamous royal 'birthday odes' of the eighteenth-century. However, such appeals to the visual and aural pleasures were becoming fashionable, and had not been absent even from Marvell's Cromwellian panegyric. In the Poem upon the Death of O.C. the mannered resonance of the Baroque had already appeared in the apotheosis of Cromwell:

Thou in a pitch how farre beyond the sphere
Of humane glory tow'rst, and raining there
Despoyl'd of mortall robes, in seas of blisse,
Plunging dost bathe and tread the bright abyse.
(MM, 130)

Partly as a result of these new affective tendencies (penitential emotion occupies a fair proportion of a poem like Astraea Redux) the hold of Restoration panegyric upon a clear-sighted concept of the heroic relaxed, and drifted into an often ambiguous use of biblical and classical analogy. What is most striking of all is the contrast between heroic election by providence (as illustrated by Cromwell), and the equally 'heroic' lethargy of legitimate successors (as illustrated by Charles). Cromwell had in one respect provided an unforgettable alternative to the outmoded gestures of monarchy, an alternative which Marvell had correctly interpreted as revolutionary. In The First Anniversary he had been critical of kings and of their theatrical vanity:

Thus (Image-like) an useless time they tell,
And with vain Scepter, strike the hourly Bell;
Nor more contribute to the state of Things,
Then wooden Heads unto the Viols strings.
While indefatigable Cromwell hyes,
And cuts his way still nearer to the Skyes,
Learning a Musique in the Region clear,
To tune this lower to that higher Sphere.
(MM, 104)

This situation is strangely paralleled in a poem which should, technically-speaking, have argued against it, Davenant's Poem to the Kings most Sacred Majesty (1660). Davenant is a neglected

and rewarding Restoration panegyrist, and he possesses the singular ability of being able to detect the weaknesses inherent in the system he defends. In this poem he re-casts the Stuart myth by arguing that Cromwell was a bad 'Idea' of heroic worth and not to be imitated; while Charles, - like the despised Cinderella of the fairy-tale - steps neatly back into the royal slippers. Davenant's alarming candour however nearly reduces the reassumption of majesty to a trivial formality; the restoration is taken to be a sign of the omniscient indifference of the Almighty:

Kings, to the stretch of thought for ever bent,
Have chang'd his Image whom they represent:
Who in Creation wrought not hard nor long:
His work is still as easie as 'tis strong:
As all was by his sodain Fiat wrought,
So 'tis preserv'd without his pains or thought.⁴⁰

Gone is all sense of striving or of the potential of the human will to work towards the realization of a consenting frame of order. A simplistic hierarchy is reasserted in which it is difficult to trust the assertion that kings are forever devoted to the 'stretch of thought' - certainly the kind of power they now represent is not of/^aplastic or malleable nature. The Restoration patriarch, - whether seen as the image of the Davidic King, or ultimately of God Himself, - is an easy-going being, exercising for the most part beneficent sloth. Dryden sees him as the embodiment of a paradigmatic reversal of the state of nature; by his civilising use of power, Charles becomes the equivalent of a 'culture-hero', the founder of the institutions of society and protector of its rituals:

⁴⁰. Davenant, The Shorter Poems, and Songs from the Plays and Masques, ed. A.M. Gibbs (1972), p.99.

When Empire first from families did spring,
 Then every Father govern'd as a King;
 But you that are a Sovereign Prince, allay
 Imperial pow'r with your paternal sway.
 (CD, I, 35)

The kingship of Cromwell as portrayed by Waller and Dryden was a kingship of natural energy, endeavour and commercial enterprise. The divine kingship of Charles is without this element of activity and spontaneity. D.W. Jefferson has thoughtfully summarized the major defects of Restoration panegyric, and demonstrates that there is an underlying crisis of values:

Behind the apotheosis of the monarch we are only too aware of the drossy pretentiousness of a mere man, but the art is often saved by a sublime complacency. We enjoy the magnificent effect and the complete confidence with which it has been created and the lack of spiritual reality may be accepted tolerantly and perhaps with amusement.⁴¹

Albert Ball, writing on Dryden's treatment of Charles as Christian hero⁴², makes the similar claim that Charles' appeal is neither wholly sensual nor spiritual. In passing from the idealized stereotype of the heroic temper in the Heroique Stanzas to the ambivalent heroic types suggested by Charles - among them Caesar, Augustus, Noah, Joseph, Moses, Saul, David and Christ, - Dryden experienced some difficulty in unifying his mythological analogues and welding them into a local, historical perspective. It is perhaps because Dryden maintained both a mystical and political understanding of Charles's function,

⁴¹ D.W. Jefferson, 'Aspects of Dryden's Imagery', EIC, IV, (1954), p.33.

⁴² A. Ball, 'Charles II: Dryden's Christian Hero', MP, LIX, (1961), pp.25-35.

incorporating elements of divine heroism which he was not over-inclined to trust, that Charles seems heroic only in a limited sense. All the early panegyric to Charles II exists in anticipation of the full flowering of his untra-heroic, god-like qualities, qualities which were not to be given full poetic expression until Dryden's satiric adaptation of the truth in his portrait of promiscuous David in Absalom and Achitophel.

Astraea Redux, though aiming at grandiose effects, is a weak poem by virtue of its discursive nature; Dryden scans history for an opportunity to shed the most favourable light possible on the Restoration, and despite the achievements which are self-evident in the Heroique Stanzas, he is compelled to reflect anew upon the merits and demerits of the Interregnum. Any compliments to the discarded régime have now to appear back-handed, like an unwilling concession. It is interesting to observe, however, that Dryden comes very close to praise in his attempts to pass over the Commonwealth. In the midst of his reflections on the Rump parliament and the Sects, for instance, we find the couplet:

'Twas hence at length just Vengeance thought it fit
To speed their ruine by their impious wit,
(CD, I, 27)

in which the word 'wit' suggests a superior and fluent intelligence at work, however 'impious' it may be morally. A few lines later the nation's fall from grace (much of the poem prepares the ground for the final tableau in which the penitent shores of Albion move out to greet the long-absent king), is tacitly linked with the example set by the all-powerful - but unnamed - Cromwell:

For by example most we sinn'd before,
 And, glass-like, clearness mixt with frailty bore.
 (CD, I, 28)

The word 'clearness' has interesting if uncertain shades of meaning. If denoting transparency, even innocence to a degree, it perhaps operates as a euphemism for the political naïvety with which people felt obliged to remain loyal to ^{the} Cromwellian junta during the years of the Interregnum. Conversely, it could as easily suggest that there is something intrinsically sincere about the régime, whatever its demerits. Dryden's vagueness in Astraea Redux about specifying the limits of both 'clearness' and 'frailty', suggests a significant admission of the unresolved condition of his own inner levels of adjustment. So also does his unwillingness to move on to the depiction of the Restoration proper. He celebrates Time's 'whiter series' as the future of a nation as yet unaffected by the consequences of Charles' government. Charles is portrayed as the fate-tossed Aeneas, able to overcome his destiny and use it to moral advantage; he must be 'to bus'ness ripened by Digestive Thought'. The welcoming of the absent hero forms the culminating tableau of the poem, and the expiation of past crimes is made to correspond even with the weather on the day of Charles' landing at Dover:

The same indulgence Charles his Voyage bless'd
 Which in his right had Miracles confess'd.
 The winds that never Moderation knew
 Afraid to blow too much, too faintly blew;
 Or out of breath with joy could not enlarge
 Their straightned lungs, or conscious of their Charge.
 The British Amphitryte smooth and clear
 In richer Azure never did appear;
 Proud her returning Prince to entertain
 With the submitted Fasces of the Main.
 (CD, I, 28-9)

Because Dryden postpones the achievement of fully heroic status in the King, he is able to integrate his own didactic fervour with the anticipated clemency of the monarch, and engage his royal auditor more deeply in the missioning purpose of his poem; the establishment of a right relationship between the prince and his subjects. If Dryden's welcome to Charles is couched in imagery which seems to expose too blatantly the ease with which Charles reassumes the throne, then there is also deliberate ambivalence about the flamboyantly sensuous imagery with which the poet greets the prospect of a lenient and forgiving monarch:

Your Goodness only is above the Laws;
Whose rigid letter while pronounced by you
Is softer made. So winds that tempests brew
When through Arabian Groves they take their flight
Made wanton with rich Odours, lose their spight.
(CD, I, 29)

Dryden is investing national hope in Charles's acts of indemnity and oblivion, prescribing them as peaceful, reassuring, and as good omens. The image of 'wanton winds' however suggests sluggish lethargy, a power which subsists by means of laissez-faire rather than by positive commitment to diligent government. The slick efficiency of Cromwell's machine of state is relinquished for a more relaxing, less potently heroic ideal. While Cromwell has brought wealth and prosperity to the nation, the effects of Charles' ministrations are all conditional, still dependent in poetic terms upon the promises of the sovereign and upon the desire of the people to reinstate their absent god with full honours.

Even in Dryden's panegyric To His Sacred Majesty, the poet seems anxious to recall time past, rather than dwell on the political responsibilities of the present. He justifies Charles' prolonged absence and the tactful delay before the coronation in terms which leave no doubt about his use of the king as a

moral symbol:

Had greater hast these sacred rights prepar'd
 Some guilty Moneths had in your triumphs shar'd:
 But this untainted year is all your own,
 Your glory's may without our crimes be shown.
 (CD, I, 33)

Dryden is at considerable pains to show throughout this

panegyric that although Charles is expected to play a central part in the masque of Restoration, the King himself is not acting, but is genuine in his moral integrity:

Among our crimes oblivion may be set,
 But 'tis our Kings perfection to forget.
 Virtues unknown to these rough Northern climes
 From milder heav'ns you bring, without their crimes:
 Your calmnesse does no after storms provide,
 Nor seeming patience mortal anger hide.
 (CD, I, 35)

Meanwhile Charles is surrounded by all the theatrical imagery of Coronation ritual - pomp, conquest, the temple, sacred oil, music and incense - and is greeted with gaudy invocations to the spring. In the midst of the mythologizing conventions of ceremonial, Charles is presented as the bringer of life to the nation - but a life based on political realities as well as upon extravagant promises. Dryden thus fits Charles into a mythological scheme - the rescue of Noah from the world's first Deluge - while insisting that his real power must be limited by discretion and decorum; the heroic, for Charles, is a compromise between the poetic values of Baroque apotheosis and the political realities of the council-chamber.

But absence from involvement continues to characterize Charles in the political poetry of the period. Waller, writing with suave maturity in To the King, Upon His Majesty's Happy Return, even goes so far as to make absence into a sublime virtue, and he congratulates Charles on his accumulation of worldly wisdom during his fortunate exile:

And though it be our sorrow and our crime,
 To have accepted life so long a time
 Without you here; yet does this absence gain
 No small advantage to your present reign:
 For, having view'd the persons and the things,
 The councils, state, and strength of Europe's kings,
 You know your work; ambition to restrain,
 And set them bounds, as Heaven does to the main.⁴³

Waller, like Dryden in Astraea Redux, concentrates upon the moral imperatives underlying Charles' Christic years in the wilderness, and uses them to bolster the notion of the king's vocation to a pious Christian heroism of restraint. Later, in Annus Mirabilis, Dryden introduces Charles as if he were some benevolent deity whose prayer alone has sufficient power to bend the will of the Supreme Being. The king's sympathetic attitude towards the sufferings of his people still signifies a moral rather than a wholly political sensibility; Charles' contribution is an intensely personal one, since Dryden chooses to portray him in private prayer (he 'out-weeps an Hermite, and out-prays a Saint' - stanza 261), but this becomes ceremoniously symbolic of the patriarchal role which Dryden has already assigned him:

The Father of the people open'd wide
 His stores, and all the poor with plenty fed:
 Thus God's Anointed God's own place suppli'd,
 And fill'd the empty with his daily bread.
 (CD, I, 102)

But the introduction of Charles is only a part of the general cultural movement of the poem; he fosters a spirit of progress and repairs the nation's fortunes, but is suspended uncomfortably between supplying a ritual, emblematic role and embodying a personal ethic of tender compassion. Charles does not represent any definite code of heroism in Annus Mirabilis, but expresses the ambiguities of a nature part-human and part-divine. For

⁴³. In Works of the English Poets, op.cit., IX, 64.

most of the poem he is designedly absent, a characteristic pattern which was to be repeated not only in Marvell's satires but also in Absalom and Achitophel. In the Last Instructions to a Painter (1667), Marvell shows Charles in his bed at night, confronted by a vision of Peace in the form of a shapely girl who tempts the king to exploit the sexual rather than the moral potential of the situation (lines 885-906). Dryden could well have taken the hint from Marvell for his masterly evocation of the lascivious yet authoritarian David, whose influence over the moral action of Absalom and Achitophel is apparently negligible yet sustainedly felt. As Albert Ball points out: "Though absent from the scene throughout most of the poem, the king is on everyone's lips to the extent that his is at least a spiritual, if not a physical presence."⁴⁴ It is this spiritual awareness of the symbol of king that continues to haunt Dryden's heroic drama and give it much of its air of piquant decadence.

The Royal Image in the Heroic Drama

Dryden's psychological interest in the charismatic appeal of the military hero was balanced by an almost protective affection for the doctrine of obedience, and the patterns of magnanimous and generous behaviour it could inspire. While many of his aggressive heroes are yoked, deliberately or subconsciously, to a Lucretian or Hobbesian interpretation of the universe, the 'forgiving' or self-sacrificing heroes are attuned to a divergent species of Christian, neo-Stoic heroism.

⁴⁴ A. Ball, 'Charles II: Dryden's Christian Hero', op.cit., p.33.

Often the most ceremonious, formal and elaborate scenes in the heroic plays are those in which the theme of forgiveness plays an important part. The noble or godlike action underlines the essential royalty within man's nature and Dryden uses imperious gesture to dignify his characters. The moral imperative of his early panegyric survives in some of the 'norms of virtue' he recommends in his plays. Particularly important in this respect is the sequence of plays from Secret Love (1667), to Aureng-Zebe (1675). Here Dryden develops situations in which noble characters are expected to show obedience even at the expense of their personal happiness.

Aureng-Zebe represents the glowing culmination of ideas which are worked out in the usually neglected middle-comedies Marriage à la Mode and The Assignation. The didactic part of both plays is focussed on the problem of filial obedience and whether it is possible to command affection where nature will not supply it. Although Leonidas in Marriage à la Mode will owe no duty to an usurper, he is compelled to clear his own integrity while he believes Polydamas to be his true father; the see-sawing parentage of the royal lovers, Leonidas and Palmyra, becomes ultimately farcical, but it illustrates a growing curiosity of Dryden's concerning the filial dilemma. Even more striking is the serious plot of The Assignation in which, from the half-way mark, father and son are rivals for the same woman's love. The final scene reads like a trial run for the opening act of Aureng-Zebe, the play in which Dryden was to essay his first extended portrait of a hero motivated by piety and conscience. Duke Frederick, in The Assignation, finds himself unable to rebel, and surprisingly offers himself as a sacrifice to his father's will:

FREDERICK: (Kneeling): This is not, sir, the posture of a rebel
 But of a suppliant; if the name of son
 Be too much honour to me.
 What first I purpos'd, I scarce know myself.
 Love, anger, and revenge then rolled within me,
 And yet, even then, I was not hurried further
 Than to preserve my own.

DUKE: Your own! What mean you?

FREDERICK: My love, and my Lucretia, which I thought,
 In my then boiling passion, you pursued
 With some injustice, and much violence;
 This led me to repel that force by force.
 'Twas easy to surprise you, when I knew
 Of your intended visit.

DUKE: Thank my folly,

FREDERICK: But reason now has reassumed its place,
 And makes me see how black a crime it is
 To use a force upon my prince and father.

DUKE: You give me hope you will resign Lucretia.

FREDERICK: Ah no; I never can resign her to you:
 But sir, I can my life; which on my knees
 I tender, as the atoning sacrifice:
 Or if your hand (because you are a father)
 Be loth to take away that life you gave,
 I will redeem your crime by making it
 My own: So you shall still be innocent and I
 Die blessed, and unindebted for my being.

DUKE: Oh Frederick you are too much a son, (Embracing him).
 And I too little am a father.

(SS, IV, 469-70)

The sentimental idealization of the father-son relationship produces an ironic inversion of the true situation; in moral awareness Frederick is master of the Duke Senior, and not vice versa. The scene gathers together the complex strands of heroism encountered throughout the play. Frederick has earlier been held up for admiration not only as a proper gentleman displaying courtesy and manners, but also as the epitome of bawdy, libertine wit; however, Dryden expects us to accept that his coarseness does not reflect adversely on his sense of moral values⁴⁵. In this final scene, Frederick proves incontestably that his 'duty' as a son has its roots in the tender conscience

⁴⁵. For a stimulating reading of the play as Cornélian 'comédie héroïque', see F.H. Moore, The Nobler Pleasure, Chapel Hill, (1963), pp. 111-125.

of the sentimental and forgiving hero; he willingly forswears his adopted role as a revenger and assumes the natural piety and moral exaltation of the suffering and penitent son. This inner conflict however produces heroic traits which are common to both Morat and Aureng-Zebe in the later play; Frederick's loyalty to his father, like that of Aureng-Zebe, is a free gift, unconstrained, and indifferent to rejection; his refusal to cede Lucretia to his father is, however, more reminiscent of Morat's failure, on his conversion to virtue, to break loose from mercenary considerations and give up hope of Indamora. Both Frederick and Aureng-Zebe thus specialize in a degree of self-abasement which embarrasses their mentors into discharging their obligations towards them. The sacrificial imagery employed by Frederick (e.g. 'the atoning sacrifice', 'I will redeem your crime') introduces a spiritual element into the emotional bartering and anticipates the Christic overtones in the language of the first act of Aureng-Zebe. In that play Aureng-Zebe supposedly 'redeems' Indamora from the state of slavery by falling in love with her. The old Emperor however sells her back into slavery (i.e. consciousness) of sin by pressing his unwanted attentions upon her. This little drama of the Fall of Man (with the old Emperor as the wily serpent) turns full circle when, at the conclusion of the first act, Indamora herself redeems Aureng-Zebe from his parricidal impulse to revenge the injury done to her honour.

The theme of the reassumption of reason in The Assignation and Aureng-Zebe has become a crucial one. The patterns of the Fall which underline the texture of both Astraea Redux and Absalom and Achitophel are translated into an epic action designed for the stage. This is perhaps why Dryden, with the

project for his unwritten epic still fresh in his mind, makes so much satiric play with the divine elements of heroism in Aureng-Zebe. Scott was quick to perceive how fundamental were the changes made by Dryden in the character of the hero of the source, Bernier's Histoire de la Dernière révolution des états du Grand Mogul (1670). The violent insurrections, murder and dissimulation employed by the man who forced his path to the Indian throne in 1660 are excised from Dryden's moralised political allegory of Restoration England⁴⁶. Dryden allowed the controversial topics of succession, exclusion and civil war to stand, but adapted the type of kingly heroism advocated in the figure of Aureng-Zebe to that of the once-idealized Charles. The strong element of nostalgia for an ultra-heroic past, however, points to a recognition that the promise of his early panegyric was never fulfilled, and the 'primrose path of dalliance' trod by the old Emperor is equally applicable to a middle-aged and politically devious Charles II. The corresponding glorification of youth in the play has a quality of autumnal resignation about it; the challenge to Aureng-Zebe and Indamora to inaugurate a new regenerative cycle based on the promise of self-knowledge and Christian chivalry is only necessary because the Old Emperor has allowed firm principle to go the way of all flesh. His once resplendent and now forfeited military heroism - when in the 'vale of Balasor' he fought (one thinks of Charles' heroic exploits at the battle of Worcester) survives only as a gaudy memory. The play explores in imaginative terms the degree to which the godlike faculties of man can be exploited and distorted. Dryden makes a necessary distinction between the active watchfulness of a benevolent monarch and an irresponsible squandering of

⁴⁶ See SS, IV, 181-85 for an account of these changes.

the arts of peace. Nearly all the characters possess different standards of what it is to be 'godlike, great and good', and each pursues their ideal with very little attention to the welfare of his brother. Even Aureng-Zebe and Indamora display the chilling confidence of self-righteous indignation when they picture themselves as heroic individuals arming their minds against the assaults of opportunism. Aureng-Zebe's moral exaltation approaches the opulent fervour of much of Dryden's early panegyric:

Shame is but where with wickedness 'tis joined,
And while no baseness in this breast I find,
I have not lost the birthright of my mind.
(L,61)

Although Dryden makes

a private virtue, removed from the
notion of pomp and vanity, confined
to a contemplation of itself, and
cent'ring on itself,
(L,8)

the inspiration for his central character, he nevertheless preserves the formal rhetorical decency associated with the moral didacticism of panegyric. Aureng-Zebe is known to his followers as a man who controls his 'interest' (a key word in the play) by 'prudence'. When, at the beginning of the second act, the hero has repulsed Morat's troops, he is in a strong position to usurp the throne and win Indamora.

However he meditates:

Let them who truly would appear my friends
Employ their swords, like mine, for noble ends.
No more. Remember you have bravely done.
Shall treason end what loyalty begun?
I own no wrong; some grievance I confess,
But kings, like gods, at their own time redress.
(Aside) Yet, some becoming boldness I may use;
I've well deserved, nor will he now refuse.
I'll strike my fortune with him at a heat,
And give him not the leisure to forget.
(L,34-5)

Aureng-Zebe's attitude to kingship is ambiguous; he knows he

must respect his father's royalty and yet he indulges in a realistic jibe - 'But kings, like gods, at their own time redress'. His justification of 'becoming boldness' is one of degree; he will employ just as much persuasion as decorum and good sense will permit. All the prescriptive panegyric to Charles had implied a sustained attack upon the sort of man who achieves power by brute military force. Aureng-Zebe is thus placed in a delicate situation; he has to take advantage of his superior military position without appearing to be autonomous, proud or self-seeking. Davenant in his Poem Upon His Sacred Majesties Most Happy Return to His Dominions (1660) had celebrated Charles' moderating influence upon the heroic aspirations of the private will, and in language not dissimilar to that used by Dryden in his play:

Your Valour has our rasher courage taught
 To do, not what we dare, but what we ought;
 Not to pretend renown from high offence;
 Nor braver boldness turn to impudence;
 Nor claim a right where we by force enjoy;
 Nor boast our strength from what we can destroy.⁴⁷

This view obviously casts a pejorative light on many of Dryden's super-heroes (especially Almanzor, who is continually justifying the use of imperial gesture by the prerogative of natural right).

It becomes increasingly clear as we look at the fluctuating standards of conduct in the heroic plays that Dryden thought of heroic divinity (i.e. the 'god-like' action) in a complex and ambivalent way. He associated it either with the military hero - "those ungodly man-killers, whom we poets, when we flatter them, call heroes" (W, II, 167) - or with the passive, forgiving saint. The association of dynamic energy with the

⁴⁷ Davenant, The Shorter Poems, op.cit., p.87.

divine heroic essence probably owed much to the traditions of the mythical life of Hercules, as Eugene M. Waith has shown⁴⁸, and also something to the more military types of hero with whom Dryden was acquainted in his reading of romance, e.g. Artaban, Rinaldo, Achilles. The other, more passive vein of heroism, derived from the Christianising platitudes of panegyric. Both types were in some respects interchangeable and were extensions of the wish-fulfilment attending the hope of a new Golden Age; peaceful prosperity in trade and commerce would co-exist with the nobility and dynamic impetus of the sophisticated Neoclassical heroes.

As Dryden delves deeper into the problems of heroic status in Aureng-Zebe, the ironies multiply. Aureng-Zebe himself is frustrated in trusting to the old heroic code of his father because the old Emperor has gone to seed. As Arimant points out:

He promised in his east a glorious race;
Now, sunk from his meridian, sets space.
(L, 19)

Meanwhile, Morat, with his vicious insistence on 'interest' and his utter contempt for 'birthright', does not provide an alternative type of conduct worthy of emulation. Aureng-Zebe wants to become the 'hero of the age' in an age which has become manifestly unheroic. To become godlike, or even to seek to become so, is fraught with dangers. The Old Emperor reveals his potential as an Almighty Anarch:

Were I a god the drunken globe should roll;
The little emmets with the human soul
Care for themselves, while at my ease I sat,
And second causes did the work of fate.
(L, 60)

Dryden thus takes a predominantly satiric view of the 'godlike' in Aureng-Zebe. It is not related in any specific way to

⁴⁸. See E.M. Waith, The Herculean Hero, op.cit.

monarchy, but is deeply relevant to the ability of certain human beings to behave responsibly within society. Only at one point in the play does the hero make an ambiguous reference to the cult of the military hero, and that is when he imagines himself within sight of rescuing his father, winning Indamora, and emulating his 'great original': as he rushes off to fight for these ideals, Aureng-Zebe exclaims:

With glory and with love at once I burn;
I feel th' inspiring heat and absent god return.
(L, 94)

Aureng-Zebe never really does reassume his 'absent god'; as Michael West has perceptively put it,

Throughout the play Dryden does not want us to admire Aureng-Zebe as a divinely inspired hero, but as a noble man with an 'absent God' and that God rather clearly explicable in terms of human psychology and physiology⁴⁹.

Aureng-Zebe shows Dryden uneasily reassessing the moral values of the Restoration with some of the cynical wisdom which habitually attends political disillusion and the sense of a waning epoch.

It is in The Conquest of Granada that Dryden attempts his most extensive analysis of the superficial relationship between imperial gesture and the heroic code. The basis for this examination is again largely satirical. Almanzor arrives at Boabdellin's court to find a bad actor in the role of the king. Since he can act the part better himself, Almanzor assumes that his is a natural right to power. An early interchange with Abdalla, another would-be king, is revealing in its mixed response to monarchy:

⁴⁹. See M. West, 'The Disintegration of Renaissance Heroic Ideals', op.cit., p.206.

ABDALLA: The majesty of kings we should not blame,
 When royal minds adorn the royal name;
 The vulgar, greatness too much idolise,
 But haughty subjects it too much despise.
 ALMANZOR: I only speak of him,
 Whom pomp and greatness sit so loose about,
 That he wants majesty to fill them out.
 (SS, IV, 60)

Dryden makes it clear throughout that the major defect in the political situation is the fact that the ruling monarch does not possess a royal mind equal to the name and status of king. Almanzor, who epitomises the 'brave bold man' and manifests Cromwellian vigour and energy, appropriates all kingly prerogatives of making laws, sentencing subjects, juggling allegiances and exacting vassalage, supposedly in the interest of the private man who will acknowledge submission to no-one. Dryden therefore makes Almanzor's flair for lordly gesture the object of subtle comedy; the exaggeration makes deliberate nonsense even of the Cromwellian prototype of energized heroic virtue:

The minds of heroes their own measures are,
 They stand exempted from the rules of war.
 One loose, one sally of the hero's soul,
 Does all the military art control:
 While timorous wit goes round, or fords the shore,
 He shoots the gulf, and is already o'er;
 And, when the enthusiastic fit is spent,
 Looks back amazed at what he underwent.
 (SS, IV, 180)

Almanzor's conduct throughout the play is too volatile and 'eccentrique', too subject to the 'enthusiastic fit' and the 'calenture' to permit us to think that Dryden could possibly have envisaged such a temperament as fit to guide the throne. Jonas A. Barish has exactly caught the spirit of the particular form of 'admiration' Dryden was aiming for in this play; attitudes towards heroic monarchy are kept deliberately theatrical, even absurd:

Almanzor's exhibitionism marks him off from the rest of his kind, and so forms an

inseparable aspect of his greatness. The faint absurdity of the whole portrait, of which Dryden was perfectly aware, the fact that Almanzor's vainglory must so explicitly be argued, points to the decline of ostentation as a natural privilege even of those in high place. The hero who exemplifies it is beginning to be felt as an exotic outsider, a meteor to be marvelled at but not imitated.⁵⁰

Ruth Nevo's premise that the Baroque hero justifies his existence solely by gesture⁵¹ is amply illustrated by the arbitrary nature of Almanzor's appeals to ceremony. The dislocation of his kingly utterances from any sense of sanctity is symptomatic of the decline in poetic identification with the symbol of the crown. To illustrate more clearly the development of this trend, I should like, for a moment, to compare Dryden's sentiments with the decorum of language employed by the protagonists in Shakespeare's Richard II. In that play the question of poetic identity is exclusively concentrated upon the power and charisma of the crown-symbol. The scene of Richard's deposition is a humiliating spectacle because he is unable to divorce his real personality from the ready-made identity provided by the role of Player-King. Richard's crown is hollow in a terrifyingly personal sense; death is not so much the externalized 'antic' or demon who sits scoffing at the king's state, but rather symbolizes the empty spiritual death of the self 'un-kinged' - the image of himself that Richard is quite unable to visualize. In the celebrated soliloquy with the mirror, Richard attempts to see into the truth of this 'un-kinged' self only to find himself confronted by the brittle glory of the trappings of kingship.

⁵⁰ J.A. Barish, 'Exhibitionism and the Antitheatrical Prejudice', op.cit., p.21.

⁵¹ R. Nevo, The Dial of Virtue, op.cit., p.137.

Bolingbroke presides with Cromwellian taciturnity over this extraordinary ritual, in which Richard parodies and inverts his own Coronation. When Bolingbroke does speak, it is to insinuate himself into his opponent's game; he starts playing with words just as Richard does, appealing to his emotionalism and discrediting it at one stroke:

RICHARD: Mark, silent king, the moral of this sport -
How soon my sorrow hath destroy'd my face.

BOLINGBROKE: The shadow of your sorrow hath destroy'd
The shadow of your face.

RICHARD: Say that again?

Ha, let's see.

'Tis very true; my grief lies all within;
And these external manner of laments
Are merely shadows to the unseen grief
That swells with silence in the tortur'd soul,
There lies the substance; and I thank thee, King,
For thy great bounty, that not only giv'st
Me cause to wail, but teachest me the way
How to lament the cause.⁵²

Bolingbroke cheats Richard even of the power of his own words, and the 'self unkinged' can only retaliate in the accents of weak sarcasm. Shakespeare's language brings us very close to the heart of the conflict. However, Dryden, in The Conquest of Granada brings us face to face with the theatricality of all personal conflict, and focusses our attention on the banter and repartee in which crucial ideological issues are discussed.

One of Almanzor's most characteristic rhetorical habits is the delivery of a taunt which is reductive in intent. Instead of confronting his rivals with words, he chooses to negativize or eliminate their claims to his attention. The mode of arbitrary dismissal he employs is usually stunning in its

⁵². Shakespeare, Complete Works, op.cit., p.472.

audacity. Almanzor simply equates lordly behaviour with superior eloquence and breathtaking vowels. He parodies the indecision of weak characters such as Boabdelin and Abdalla by affecting a total control over and indifference to their fates. Almanzor's most regal qualities are his aloofness, his self-absorption, and stubborn inflexibility. His vainglory approaches the megalomania of Maximin in Tyrannick Love, but his conception of the majestic is governed by a genuine reverence for the supreme and godlike aspects of man:

Like heaven, I need but only to stand still,
And, not concurring in thy life, I kill.
Thou canst no title to my duty bring;
I'm not thy subject, and my soul's thy king.
(SS, IV, 77)

Almanzor's verbal technique is always to 'out-Herod Herod'. He has a clear, simplistic and naïve vision of what it entails to be a king, and thus he can outface Boabdelin with a total parody of a monarch's pretensions to power:

Where'er I go, there can no exile be;
But from Almanzor's sight I banish thee.
(SS, IV, 107)

In his most aggressive moods Almanzor's self-assertion takes the paradoxical form of a sublime and crushing indifference to the established moral order. His moral education only develops when he begins to notice the values of self-sacrifice recommended by the virtuous Almahide, and falls under the influence of the strongly patriarchal figures, Arcos and Ferdinand. Elsewhere in the play Dryden delights in exploring the ambiguities inherent in elective heroism of the type once associated with the Cromwell of the Heroique Stanzas. Neither Abdalla nor Abdelmelech, however, are granted the fortune of being 'heaven's high favourite' and Marvell's doctrine of necessità

('If these the times, then this must be the man') is wittily travestied in Lyndaraxa's opportunist solution:

I will be constant yet, if fortune can;
I love the king, --let her but name the man.
(SS, IV, 80)

Lyndaraxa's obsession with the crown, Almahide's vestal complacency, Boabdelin's whining majesty and Almanzor's ebullient Narcissism are all part of Dryden's imaginative scheme for the play; each character makes an enforced ritual out of his or her allotted role and occasionally attempts to discover another more satisfactory part. The image of the player-king is scarcely felt at all-- monarchy appears rather to be a state of non-being in the individual, a lethargic stupefaction which imprisons rather than releases the heroic mind. Dryden's preoccupation throughout this play is with the empires of the mind; the Conquest of Granada is a thought-provoking study of the growth of obsession and illusions of grandeur in the imagination.

Dryden does not always present unfavourable dramatic portraits of royalty however. In Secret Love (1667) he sets out 'to show one great and absolute pattern of honour' (W, I, 106) in his poem, namely the Queen, who foregoes her own passion for a low-born favourite to secure the good of her country. Dryden's treatment of this theme is tactful and dramatically effective. The emphasis falls not upon 'godlike' intervention or military powers, but upon the spiritual value of majesty itself. The word which echoes repeatedly through the text is 'glory', a concept of grandeur d'âme or gloire made familiar to Dryden through the plays of Corneille. Dryden makes it obvious from the start that there is a right and a wrong sort of glory. The right sort is that which enhances the self-respect of the monarch by converting idle passions into

which
 constructive action, and/prepares the individual to sacrifice
 selfish desires. The wrong sort - embodied in the ambitious
 Prince Lysimantes, and even Philocles once he learns he is
 loved by the Queen - is an appetitive, even a carnal passion,
 swayed by covetousness and the ethic of self-aggrandizement.
 As Philocles struggles with the bright temptation of the crown
 in Act Five, he exclaims:

If Glory was a bait that Angels swallow'd
 How then should souls ally'd to sence, resist it?
(CD, IX, 187)

Dryden's Queen is sympathetically drawn, although she is nearly
 as self-preoccupied as her cool successor, St Catherine in
Tyrannick Love. Dryden makes the point, however, that the
 care of majesty, like that of virtue and obedience, must be
 for itself, an essentially inward-looking quality. The Queen
 is continually aware of her own spiritual condition at any
 given point during the action. Dryden builds up the impression
 of her greatness in Lysimantes' panegyric tribute:

For doubtless she's the glory of her time;
 Of faultless Beauty, blooming as the Spring,
 In our Sicilian Groves; matchless in Vertue,
 And largely soul'd, where ere her bounty gives,
 As with each breath she could create new Indies.
(CD, IX, 130)

When we first see the Queen, however, this 'glory' is in a
 decline; she declares herself to be under a consumption to her
 secret love for Philocles - "like lillies wasting in a Lymbeck's
 heat" (CD, IX, 136). Ironically, when Philocles confronts her
 with his request to marry Candiope, and is refused, he addresses
 the Queen as

You who alone love glory, and whose soul
 Is loosned from your senses,
(CD, IX, 145)

As Dryden pursues the Queen's progress through the vagaries of 'headlong passion' he approaches a central definition of 'glory' in a ruler. Asteria, the Queen's confidante, asks:

Where is that harmony of mind, that prudence
Which guided all you did, that sense of glory
Which rais'd you, high above the rest of Kings
As Kings are o're the level of mankind?

(CD, IX, 148)

Dryden's moral ideal appears to be transcendence over passion, the achievement of a heroic serenity which is consistent with the compassionate paternalism of the Christian hero. The rest of the play examines the Queen's stoic efforts to overcome her feelings and 'reinstate' herself into this suprarational tranquillity. Dryden is seeking to realize in dramatic terms the kind of apotheosis he had attempted in his early panegyrics to Charles. What he aims for is a sense of opulent confidence in the moral efficiency of the conduct of the ruler - something he is not able to put across with any success, until the operative solution proposed in Albion and Albanus (1685).

The most effective way to demonstrate this confidence and to further complicate the ironies of the ambivalent types of 'glory' in question, was to develop an episode involving the themes of rebellion and restoration. The final scenes of Secret Love are taken up with the double revolt of Philocles and Lysimantes against the Queen. Philocles, still in ignorance that he is the cause of the Queen's ignoble passion, styles himself a traitor in the best of causes:

No motive but her glory could have wrought me.
I am a Traytor to her, to preserve her
From Treason to her self.

(CD, IX, 175-76)

The final responsibility for the restoration of order, however, rests with the Queen herself; it is she who must direct events

back towards the 'harmony of mind' which existed throughout her kingdom before she fell a victim to passion. By publicly handing over Candiope to Philocles, the Queen reinstates the moral order and channels Philocles' errant passions (he was beginning to find himself in love with both women) into the natural redemptive course of marriage. The Queen also settles the question of the succession and the play ends with a solemn and ceremonious covenant between sovereign and people:

The cares, observances, and all the duties
Which I should pay an Husband, I will place
Upon my people; and our mutual love
Shall make a blessing more then (sic) Conjugal,
And this the States shall ratifie.

(CD, IX, 197)

The decorously sentimental tone throughout the play looks ahead to the themes of filial piety and forgiveness in the plays of Dryden's middle period, and the comparatively didactic action of the main plot is further extended in that of the Spanish Fryar (1680) where the sovereign is again a woman. Secret Love provides an optimistic paradigm of the ideal conduct of a monarch and Dryden enjoys arranging a set of characters whose relation to one another is largely governed by the panegyric values of magnanimity and honour. He later heightened the moral dilemma associated with rebellion by making Leonora, the queen in The Spanish Fryar, an usurper and an apparent murderess, giving opportunity for stronger dramatic conflict than existed in the earlier play. It is interesting to observe that in the heroic plays Dryden was more at home in the depiction of imperial conduct in women than in kings, and that his attitudes to the propriety of royal conduct often required the sugary alloy of sentiment. Secret Love, with its restoration of 'glory' in a constructive national sense, represents an important stage in Dryden's thinking and

demonstrates his attraction towards heroic passivity and the doctrine of inhibition. The Queen's heroism is inward-looking and denotes the acceptance of moral responsibility. The ranting heroes of the rhymed plays display instead an 'eccentric' fame - one which emanates outwards from the centre of their own personalities - rather than a 'concentric' fame which expresses itself by the inward regulating of the passions and the will.

The extent of the influence of Charles II's own personality on the literature of the Restoration is on the whole difficult to assess⁵³. Ruth Nevo is certainly correct when she points out that "Among other things which the Restoration was able to restore was the old certitude that the King was the natural repository of the princely virtues",⁵⁴ but the fact remains that the Restoration only half-succeeded in affirming it. The idealized Charles was as much a literary construct, as his antithesis, the energetic Almanzor. Charles's 'heroism' had been created for him out of values and ethics which gave poetical eloquence and reassuring platitudes to a court-based culture. The Restoration panegyrists eased Charles into a passive paternalism based on a sentimentalized ethos of mercy and forgiveness. It was to be Dryden who ultimately succeeded in expressing the mixture of majesty and informality which Charles had made uniquely his own. In Absalom and Achitophel (1681), Dryden did not disguise the king's human failings but made them the instruments of his larger claim to

⁵³. See J. Sutherland, 'The Impact of Charles II on Restoration Literature', in Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Literature, ed. C. Camden, Chicago (1963), pp. 251-63.

⁵⁴. See R. Nevo, The Dial of Virtue, op.cit., pp. 143-44.

humanity, to the virtues of generosity and good-humour, and the noble nature of mercy. The restoration of the 'godlike David' is not achieved without the cost of irony and even some laughter; but Dryden's conception of the 'godlike' in Absalom was tailored to fit the 'grosser mould' of man as well as his transcendent qualities. The godlike action is thus seen as being one of compromise, a yielding of personal desire for glory to the exigencies of politics and the imperfections of the human condition.

The reconciliation between fact and fiction which makes Absalom and Achitophel supremely unusual for its day is not encountered in so fluent a form anywhere else in Dryden. The poet was to find it increasingly difficult, especially after MacFlecknoe (1682), to give credible emotional colouring to the status of kingship. That is why the political content of his later plays, e.g. The Spanish Fryar or Love Triumphant partakes more of fantasy than reality, and is geared towards the purely mechanical production of melodrama. Throughout his life Dryden was trapped between his intellectual appreciation of heroism, (and the extreme and powerful lengths to which it could go,) and his realistic awareness that such heroism was hopelessly impractical in the society he lived in. The double standard of heroism which he uneasily followed in his heroic dramas ultimately gave him a flexibility which dissipated the strength of his arguments and gave a sense of disintegration to his commitment to order. By the time he came to write The Aeneid and the Fables he had retreated with some relief into the world of the Ancients, bringing to classical Rome and medieval England some of his characteristic cynicism and courtliness, but without the pressure of having to assess the direction in which he, or his fellow-men, were going. The

work of his early and middle period is more compelling because these issues of order and society were more vividly present to his imagination; it is possible, for instance, to discern in each of the heroic plays some practical application of the drama to the exploration of a political dilemma, be it the nature of conquest (The Indian Queen, The Indian Emperour), the appropriate behaviour for a single monarch (Secret Love), the harnessing of fancy and control over the imagination (The Conquest of Granada, Aureng-Zebe), or the discipline of love in a political setting (All for Love). Even if these dramas do not hold out ready-made solutions to the problems they tackle, their value, and often their merit, lies in their readiness to examine the transitional stages which create a civilization out of barbarism, and the constant readjustments in heroic sensibility which such transitions require. In 1667, Milton had only just announced his intention, in the ninth book of Paradise Lost, to reject his 'fabled knights in battles feigned' for the 'better fortitude of patience', and 'heroic martyrdom unsung'. Dryden too, was turning in this direction, exploring more passive and 'religious' modes of spiritual heroism, but without abandoning the ornate sensuousness and ceremonial rhetoric of rhyme. Perhaps the most lasting impression created by heroic panegyric is that kingly identities are ritual and moral constructs, not easily accessible to poets. Restoration writers of panegyric studiously avoid the intrusion of personality into their work; instead they concentrate diligently on creating the right sort of music for public occasions. They cannot be altogether blamed if we remember something of the music, but virtually nothing of the occasion.

Charles's demise in 1685 was greeted with verse of considerably less distinction than that which celebrated his return to the throne. Dryden's Threnodia Augustalis is a sentimental, and at times inept, handling of the 'piety' which Restoration poets and their audiences seemed to expect of such occasions. Static apotheosis is the only fate left for the unfortunate Charles. Davenant, fifteen years earlier, had neatly summarized the disadvantages attending this operative device:

Kings rais'd to Heaven, by an unskilful Pen,
Scarce look, when made ill Gods, so well as Men.⁵⁵

Dryden's pen had not always been unskilful; but by 1685 he had been overtaken by the general disenchantment with royalty, a disenchantment which is inadvertently registered in the insipidity of Britannia Rediviva, Dryden's only panegyric to James II. A corresponding decline in the impressiveness of ceremony is felt in the poem; compliment is clichéd and deliberate, and Dryden is unable to recapture the zest and enthusiasm which empowered his verse in 1660. There were foreshadowings of this situation throughout the uneasy tensions of the 1660's. As general optimism waned, and Marvell's satires began to bite, fewer poets felt they could afford to take a heroic line. The vicious portrait of Douglas in Marvell's Last Instructions to a Painter (lines 649-96), wickedly parodies heroic diction and mercilessly exposes the futility of 'honour in the field'. Opportunities for polemical satire soon arose even from a nominal acquaintance with Charles and his habits, the court, naval and financial mismanagement, and the difficulties which beset king and parliament. In Dryden (and Howard's)

⁵⁵ Davenant, The Shorter Poems, op.cit., p.102.

Indian Queen (1664), the adventuress Zempoalla was voicing a scepticism which soon became widely felt and affected the morale of the entire nation:

Hard fate of Monarchs, not allow'd to know
 When safe, but as their Subjects tell them so.
 Then Princes but like publick pageants move,
 And seem to sway because they sit above.
 (CD, VIII, 206)

The play which most crushingly reflects the inadequacy of the Royal Actor during the Restoration is The Tempest (1667). Here, considerably influenced by his collaboration with Davenant, Dryden allows the darker side of his political vision to emerge. Prospero in Shakespeare's play is a commanding, authoritarian, but reassuring figure, wholly in command of his faculties, and balancing human compassion with moral concern. In Dryden's version, Prospero is a daunting and dispiriting creature, a man who employs necromancer's tricks to achieve basically selfish and materialistic ends. Dryden and Davenant transform the 'Enchanted Island' from a place of magic and spiritual regeneration to a Restoration Butlins, - a sex-paradise where Caliban freely enjoys incest with his sister Sycorax, and Miranda and Dorinda (Prospero's daughters) make it their prime concern to find suitable husbands. As crude comedy the naïve expectations of sex evinced by the girls provides acceptable titillation; the serious import of Shakespeare's play, however, entirely disappears. The authority of Prospero is played down; he shares the island with Caliban and Sycorax, and his command over the elements (and over Ariel) is subject to disturbing lapses. His trust in Providence is lukewarm, and he affects a cynically 'informed' attitude to questions of necessity and free will. His redemptive plan revolves more around marriage than around the expiation of crimes past; instead of setting up a

fruitful environment for repentance and forgiveness, much of his energy is devoted to restraining the natural inclinations of the four lovers under his charge. He even threatens to turn revenger himself, when Ferdinand accidentally 'kills' Hippolito (Act IV, scene 111). Significantly, in the final tableau, Prospero has forgiven Alonzo off-stage, and the lovers dominate the action. This reduction of the plot to trivial combats of love-and-honour does Shakespeare's play inordinate harm, and also reveals to us something of the spiritual crisis besetting Restoration minds. Prospero is non-assertive; his most profound remark is made in prose, and consists of no more than this:

... perhaps my Art it self is false: on
 what strange grounds we build our hopes
 and fears; mans life is all a mist, and
 in the dark, our fortunes meet us.

CD, X, 63-4)

This 'dark side' of Dryden's temperament was to be developed a few years later in his more 'sensational' dramas, notably Amboyna (1673), Limberham (1679), and The Duke of Guise (with Lee, 1682); prevailing cynicism, suspension of moral values, and a crumbling belief in authority characterize these plays, which are not among Dryden's most studied works.

Although Dryden could write confidently enough in the Dedication to the Conquest of Granada, that

The feigned hero inflames the true; and
 the dead virtue animates the living,
 (SS, IV, 11)

his plays are no real testimony that he believed it. Dryden's contribution to the unofficial debate on heroism was piecemeal. He did not evolve a formulation of heroic or even anti-heroic conduct which exactly matched the cynical detachment of some of his contemporaries (e.g. Davenant, Etherege and Rochester),

nor did he vindicate successfully his literary allegiances to the mythic heroes of epic and romance. Heroism evoked in him a curious feverishness of intellect. In choosing the medium of the heroic drama he could be flippant, witty, and imaginative in his analysis of kings and heroes; it was a breadth of canvas he needed, before he could feel at home in the role of social commentator. The experience of having lived through the Interregnum can be seen in the political ferment which Dryden examines in nearly every one of his plays; the almost obsessive need to introduce political debate argues some degree of insecurity arising from having witnessed too many changes in a contracted period of time. Doubts continued to plague Dryden right up until the composition of The Secular Masque (1700). When Momus ridicules the wars of Mars and the loves of Venus, the epic view of life collapses, and we pass on to a new age, with its new hopes and aspirations. Dryden, like the Yeats who at the end of his life wrote the self-satirical Death of Cuchullain, is asking us to accept the fact that heroics, as far as he has understood them, are things of the past. The triumph of Momus signalizes the triumph of that satiric realism from which Dryden had usually protected himself by his stubborn allegiance to the heroic. Momus's laughter ushers in a secularized Iron Age and completes the relentless demythologizing of the Restoration gods:

The World was a Fool, e'er since it begun,
And since neither Janus, nor Chronos, nor I
Can hinder the Crimes,
Or mend the Bad Times,
'Tis better to Laugh than to Cry.⁵⁶
CHORUS: 'Tis better to Laugh than to Cry.

⁵⁶. In The Poems of John Dryden, 4 vols., ed. J. Kinsley, (1958), IV, 1762-763.

Chapter 3

Dryden's Festive Wit and the Bizarre in 'Tyrannick Love'

In Walter Charleton's A Brief Discourse concerning the Different Wits of Men (1669), a distinction is made between 'malignity' and 'festivity' of wit. Charleton contrasts the petty cavilling of the lampoonist with the genial virtues of a moderate, 'festive' wit. Festivity is described by Charleton as

a Quality consistent both with Honesty and good Manners, as denoting the Alacrity of his (i.e. the poet's) Disposition, and Tranquility of his Spirit (both signs of Virtue) and often also the Dexterity of his Wit, in that he is able to give a delightful and new colour to the absurdity at which he moves his company to smile.¹

Here we have in miniature a portrait of the most striking qualities of Dryden's dramatic wit. Implicit in Charleton's account of 'festivity' is the simultaneous elevation and surprise so characteristic of Dryden, a mixture of dignity and absurdity which was noticed later by Samuel Johnson:

Next to argument his delight was in wild and daring sallies of sentiment, in the irregular and eccentric violence of wit.²

Dryden employed the 'violence of wit' primarily to delight and to fascinate his audience. It usually fulfils entirely Charleton's stipulation that wit should give a 'delightful and new colour' to absurdity, since with Dryden wit is also

¹ Charleton, A Brief Discourse Concerning the Different Wits of Men, 2nd edn., (1669), pp.133-34.

² Johnson's Lives of the Poets: A Selection, ed. J.P. Hardy, (1971), p.194.

a question of timbre. Dryden's witty, conceited style tends to be read by critics as a dissipation of the mental sinew associated with the popular Metaphysical poets of the early seventeenth-century, but Dryden's uneasy mingling of the lofty and the bland, often reducing metaphysical conceit to banal ornamentation rather than employing it as a vehicle for the organization of poetic ideas, can be seen as a symptomatic indication of the shift overtaking the context and rhetoric of wit in the mid-seventeenth-century. Dryden's use of a semi-parodic wit which can be interpreted as either benevolent ('festive') or mischievous would not seem unusual if its use was restricted to polemical satire. What surprises is its new-found context in the world of the heroic play. By transferring critical preoccupations as to the 'propriety' or 'correctness' of wit to the stage, Dryden was reminding his audience that wit could no longer be regarded as the individual province of the writer but that it had become the central expressive problem of the century. Wit was a subject on which everyone was expected to have an opinion and on which any variety of opinions might attain equal validity. In the 'wit and learning' which Rochester grudgingly saw as one of Dryden's major attractions in the heroic plays³, the modern reader can discern a searching after new forms of rhetorical persuasion in poetry and a vigorous attempt to bring poetic wit into line with the lives and concerns of the theatre-going public.

³. For Rochester's critique of Dryden's plays in An Allusion to Horace, see Spingarn, II, 282-85.

The theatre usually invites an intimacy of relationship between dramatist and spectators which is unique. However, Dryden showed himself alert to the prevailing temper of his age by being nonchalantly prepared to throw over the truly confidential nature of this bond. Dryden's wit defines areas of non-relationship rather more clearly than it suggests a common ground between spectator and dramatist; his dramatic wit is often interpreted as an instrument of detachment⁴, a means of standing back from the emotional demands of tragedy. Thus the intellectuality of Dryden's wit - a striving after conscious effects - may well seem diametrically opposed to the best interests of drama, if we accept by the term 'best interests' that situation in which the spectator is assumed by the dramatist to be able to 'identify' or sympathize with the characters he is depicting. However it is important that we realize that Dryden's concepts of wit were more broad-ranging than the self-regarding disciplines evoked by the word 'detachment'. Dryden did not always use wit to detach his audience from emotion itself - what he did was to control their degree of involvement in emotion. Disproportion, incongruity and bathos were the tools with which he could produce states of emotional surprise which made the subtle interdependence of 'wit' and 'feeling' much more explicit. Dryden's dramatic wit establishes a twilight mood in which engagement and detachment merge imperceptibly or take on a relationship to one another which can only be described by allusion to the

⁴ See A.C.Kirsch, Dryden's Heroic Drama, Princeton (1965), p.153.

chiaroscuro technique in painting. It is salutary to recall that Dryden's favourite, most memorable images (e.g. the tarantula, the tower, the poppy, the tulip, numerous images of 'rubbish', atoms, and the universe at its creation) possess an affective significance which gives them a ballast and stability not apparent in the absurdity with which they first break upon us. Incongruity in Dryden becomes an almost epic quality because it can evoke an emotional response which can often partake of the dignity of tragedy; in MacFlecknoe we see how even mock-seriousness can approach its own sublime when dullness is apotheosized in Fleckno's 'succession address' to his 'son', Shadwell. Dryden indicates here that to be called witless and a dunce is the highest compliment of which Fleckno is capable. Just as this technique is far removed from the pure denigration of the hostile satirist, so the wit of the plays moves between many nuances of panegyric and satire, establishing a fluency, even an inherent lyricism, discernible in the basic festivity of approach. The understanding of the eccentric and violent wit of these plays depends on how clearly we can see how the mock-heroic can 'elevate' tone until 'grotesque' becomes a mode as plainly justifiable as the heroic mode itself. In the heroic plays Dryden's wit has a large canvas; it flourishes best in an environment where the grotesque is mysteriously dignified (largely through villainous 'anti-heroic' characters such as Zempoalla and Nourmahal who 'gloriously offend'), and where an alliance of seriousness and levity is perfected by a minute attention to the affective nuances of tone which it is the business of Baroque wit to create.

In The Proper Wit of Poetry, George Williamson

pertinently reminds us that sentiment, far from being always antagonistic to wit, very often lies behind it. He says,

although the faculty involved in poetic wit is the same as that in facetious wit [i.e. the wit of 'conversation'] the feeling is not; it is not pure levity, but mingles levity with seriousness, or produces a mixed effect.⁵

The question of a 'feeling' for wit, an instinctive awareness of the capacity of a word to evoke conflicting responses in the hearer, is central to the humour and irony of Dryden's heroic wit. His bizarre images are usually the product of innate imaginative habit and he recognizes that wit becomes immediately richer and more powerful when yoked to the ambiguous inflation of mock-heroic. Thus even rant and fustian, a rhetorical no-man's-land in which semantic precariousness is an omnipresent threat, can be made to serve a precise function by indicating to the spectator that varying degrees of stylistic satire are intended. Dryden moves towards 'celerity of imagining' and 'quickness' rather than 'sharpness' of conceit, an emphasis on mood rather than content which allows his wit a fairly free form; often it can be both playful and urgent, flamboyant and aggressive, militating against the clarity and precision Dryden strives for in his meticulous scenes of argumentation. Dryden exploits the blunt materialism of Restoration wit for the grotesque and high-flown analogies it provides for the

⁵ G. Williamson, The Proper Wit of Poetry, (1961), p.16.

spiritual inertia or uncertainty of his day; the often predominantly sensual colouring of the wit (particularly where it exposes diseased imagination or perverted sexual longing in the speaker) produces an appeal to the emotions which threatens the 'judgment' and detachment of the more academic spectator. Again, George Williamson points to the essential flexibility of wit in the later seventeenth-century when he writes,

... while poetic wit emphasized ingenuity, it could blend serious and comic effects or violate other aspects of propriety without jeopardizing its claim to wit.⁶

In practical terms, i.e. from a close reading of the five heroic rhymed plays, Dryden was certainly aware that wit involved the co-operation and sometimes the distortion of the other elements of drama, notably sentiment, irony, imagination, judgment, elocution and finally rhyme itself.

In his treatise Of the Different Wits of Men we find Charleton aligning festive wit with the honourable art of ridicule and the fine raillery associated with genteel satire⁷. Charleton's work is strongly influenced throughout by Hobbesian views of the fancy and the judgment and is beset by the familiar tensions between the two. The fancy, for example, gives rise to extravagance and 'ranging' wit (Charleton also calls it an 'undecent shifting of thoughts') and is thought of as pernicious to the setting up of a just, 'well-regulated' wit. Judgment, on the other hand, although

⁶. ibid.

⁷. For some of Dryden's mature attitudes towards genteel satire, see his strictures on raillery in The Original and Progress of Satire, W, II, 136-38.

it procures the 'perspicacity of mind' which heralds discretion, severely limits the pleasing powers of the fancy and hence threatens the ideal of aesthetic taste in art. Charleton predictably places his ideal standards for wit between these two extremes; wit must be neither superficial nor facetious, but must be elegantly adapted to its subject (a foreshadowing here of Dryden's 'propriety of thoughts and words'.) The norm is set forth as that of unambiguous conversation, guided by prudence and a 'good' (i.e. purposive) wit, yielding delight in equal proportion to instruction. Festive wit is thus associated by Charleton with the virtues of a 'modest raillery', an ideal which was later the impetus for the 'rebaited' satire of Dryden's Absalom and Achitophel. Festivity, or 'raillerie', says Charleton, is that quality,

whereby a Man modestly and gently touches
upon the Errours, Indecencies, or
Infirmities of another, without any
suspicion of hate or contempt of his
Person, pleasantly representing them
as only ridiculous, not odious.⁸

Nearly thirty years later, Dryden, in his Discourse Concerning The Original and Progress of Satire (1693) was stressing the need for good nature and right reason as correctives to vindictive satire, citing the example of his own Zimri:

I avoided the mention of great crimes,
and applied myself to the representing
of blindsides, and little extravagancies.
(W, II, 137)

Charleton's modest standards for festivity in writing later find a sympathetic counterpart in Dryden's preference for a

⁸. Charleton, Concerning the Different Wits of Men, op.cit., p.133.

style of satire which, like that of Horace, exposes the follies of mankind rather than lashing their vices.

The importance of Charleton's concept of 'festive wit' (an original coinage for the time), can only be seen in perspective when placed alongside Dryden's development of Baroque wit in the early heroic plays. Generally speaking Dryden's wit operates within the benevolent context of the providence of his plays, however much it may incidentally subvert the values which are eventually upheld in the denouement. Dryden of course does not always eschew facetious for poetic wit, and much of the piquancy of the debate scenes is influenced by the spirit of comic repartee. But what is most characteristic is Dryden's mischievous introduction of high-flown conceit into highly charged emotional situations, a habit which gives the heroic plays their unique irony and argues an individually festive approach. The issue is complicated by another recurring feature of Dryden's early style - his attraction toward the grotesque - and its undoubted influence on the kind of wit which he employed. J.H. Hagstrum, in a stimulating and important article⁹, has indicated the range of Dryden's use of grotesque in the plays dating from the 1660's, dividing its use into three categories, a 'social grotesque', a grotesque of superstition, and a grotesque of power. As these subdivisions suggest, the difference often lies in the degree or severity of the grotesque employed; the 'social grotesque', for instance, is little more than a heightening

⁹. J.H. Hagstrum, 'Dryden's Grotesque: An Aspect of the Baroque in his Art and Criticism', in Writers and their Background: John Dryden, ed. E. Miner, (1972), pp. 90-119.

of the satiric vision of society promoted by the comic dramatists (e.g. Etherege and Wycherley), while it is clear that in a character such as Maximin, who symbolizes the 'grotesque of power', Dryden went far beyond his contemporaries in the creation of a monstrous distortion of personality which scarcely had its place even within the scope of an 'imitation of nature'. Hagstrum's article is valuable primarily because it isolates a specific feature of Dryden's dramatic sensibility without aligning it too closely with the ideas of Hobbes, Filmer, Tillotson or other philosophical writers of his day. Hagstrum's psychological approach may well be controversial, even over-romantic, e.g. when she suggests that Dryden's grotesque

is the result of an imperfect
society pressing in on the mind
of a sensitive and articulate
observer,¹⁰

but it permits a view of Dryden as a developing observer of human nature which is refreshingly unshackled by the spectre of genre. If we keep Charleton's ideas firmly in the background at least we know that other men could share Dryden's temper and appreciate the ironic grotesque which permeates the language, and often the incidents, of the heroic play.

Dryden's grotesque is built firmly into his mode of perceiving ultra-heroic character, and usually expresses a mixture of the comic and the terrifying. Maximin, Zempoalla and Nourmahal, grotesques of varying sorts (power, passion and incestuous lust) frequently slip in and out of caricature.

¹⁰. ibid., pp. 94-5.

Hagstrum describes Dryden's handling of the 'social grotesque' as the situation encountered so often in the plays, of the eccentric or foolish individual setting himself up in opposition to society. This trick is aimed at promoting a clash of values which energizes the personal conflicts within the play. The self-seekers or 'bully-heroes' are only selfish or greedy in relation to their rivals; for example, because Almanzor encounters no foil of any stature (he runs rings round the mealy-mouthed Abdalla), we are left doubting as to whether Dryden intended him to be genuinely heroic or secretly foolhardy. However the 'forwardness' of eager young heroes such as Montezuma in The Indian Queen, or Cortez in The Indian Emperour has to be judged against the excesses of those whose lust for power is even more unscrupulous. Indeed the duality implicit in the heroic personality is well summed-up in the abrupt change in the presentation of Montezuma in The Indian Emperour; the dashing young hero of The Indian Queen has become mastered by the darker heroic forces of self and sex, and Dryden subjects his one-time paragon to merciless scrutiny. It is significant that Dryden's true grotesques usually commit suicide (e.g. Zempoalla, Almeria, Melesinda, Nourmahal); very often these suicides are symbolic of the dilemma of the grotesque, who finds himself a constant prey to intolerable mental restlessness. While these grotesques remain alive a feverish tension accumulates around the world of the play, revolving round primal conflicts of reason and passion, appetite and control ('will'). The 'grotesque' state may indeed be interpreted as an anarchic inversion of the conditions inspiring ceremonial panegyric;

instead of stability, order, dignity, and stasis we find instability, disorder, indignity and flux in which, instead of the celebration of some Jehovic figure embodying parental love and jurisdiction, we are subjected to the defective reasoning and abnormal freaks of personality which characterize megalomania and infatuation. It is rare in Dryden (though not in Lee) to find such extremes of presentation; lesser degrees of the grotesque, e.g. eccentricity, the bizarre and the absurd, are also present in characters who are designed to offset the grotesques, and Dryden gives plenty of philosophical reminders throughout the plays that all walks of human life are subject to such change and decay as result from irrational behaviour. However, Dryden's acclimatization to the psychological demands of grotesque was gradual; in Tyrannick Love he reached his most unrestrained flights, thereafter tailing off into the mellower, more domestic emphasis of Aureng-Zebe, in which the monumental quality of his earlier grotesque is replaced by a pervading sense of anxiety-neurosis. Dryden's greatest statement of grotesque as inverted pageant was still to come, in the MacFlecknoe of 1682.

The element of grotesque directed Dryden towards a vein of rhetorical wit with a strong emotional flavour. At times the emotional colouring of the grotesque could lead to major artistic imbalance, as in Tyrannick Love, in which the tyrant Maximin achieves so complete a domination over the imagination of the poet as to subvert his didactic intention in the play. In the plays which followed Tyrannick Love, Dryden had in fact to come to terms with his own grotesque, a mode he had set out to create, but which could,

like the man-made Frankenstein, run dangerously out of control. In the Preface to Tyrannick Love he had written of one of his favourite mental images for the grotesque while defending the presentation of Maximin:

If with much pains and some success
I have drawn a deformed piece, there
is as much of art, as near an
imitation of nature, in a lazar as
in a Venus.

(W, I, 140)

Dryden here stretches the point about deformity counting as an 'imitation of nature' in order to justify the horrid fascination which Maximin exerted over audiences. At this stage in his career Dryden was still insufficiently prepared for the overbalancing effects of the grotesque upon the proprieties of tragedy. Since Tyrannick Love poses such interesting problems about the relationship between wit and the grotesque, and about the unpredictability of audience reaction, I propose to devote a large section of this chapter to a detailed examination of the play. The fact that the portrayal of Maximin falls between the two extremes of 'imitation' (nature heightened to its ideal state) or 'deviation' (nature transmogrified to a mock-sublime), suggests that Dryden was either naïvely oblivious to the sensationalism of the grotesque (which seems unlikely, when he was working in so sensational and exotic a genre), or that he was attempting a mode of festive satire too specialised to be perceived by his audience. The Lazar and Venus antithesis in fact suggests not simply a clash of opposites, but a remarkable foreshortening of the gulf which separates them. As 'imitation' quickly becomes confounded with 'deviation', a mingling of affective response is set in motion and Dryden feels free to indulge his

particular talent for a mixed mode of wit. Intellect vies with feeling, and vice versa. In the Prefatory Epistle to Annus Mirabilis he had already used the Lazar-Venus comparison to illustrate the distinction between the wit of heroic poetry and that of burlesque:

for the one shows nature beautified,
as in the picture of a fair woman,
which we all admire; the other shows
her deformed, as in that of a lazar,
or of a fool with distorted face and
antic gestures, at which we cannot
forbear to laugh, because it is a
deviation from nature.

(W, I, 101)

Although Dryden here seems to indicate a clash of opposition, the passions of admiration and laughter are in reality closely connected, and the heightening associated with the Venus can be readily pushed towards the grotesque overstatement of the Lazar. That deformity should provoke laughter was attributed by Hobbes to the 'vain-glory' we experience at finding ourselves superior to others. Hobbes also interpreted admiration as a thirst for knowing causes, a curiosity proper to those who were thrilled by witnessing heroic deeds or listening to heroic tales¹¹. Admiration and laughter are both passions bred by pride and emulation; the admiration we feel for a hero may easily transform itself into the contemptuous, self-satisfied pride which makes us feel superior to the grotesque. This 'darker' side of heroic admiration attracted Dryden strongly in his early plays, although to suggest that he openly condoned a theatre of cruelty, modelled on the malignant wit of the lampoonist,

¹¹. For Hobbes' ideas on admiration and laughter, see Leviathan, ed. M. Oakeshott, Oxford (1946), pp. 35-6.

would be mistaken. Dryden's delight in exploring the duality and unpredictability of Restoration wit, with all its Duesse-like changes of shape, colour, and emphasis, is entirely typical of his day; the shock tactics of sudden metamorphosis preserve kinetic vigour and variety in the tone of his plays. Dryden attempted to defuse the malignity of the laughter attracted by deformity by divorcing it from a sense of reality; his Maximin is a booby-hero of gigantic proportions who is neither totally nauseating nor awe-inspiring. Dryden encourages us, in his presentation of Maximin, to examine deformity as a moral as well as a physical quality (Achitophel in Absalom and Achitophel is a fine example of how physical deformity - the 'pigmy body' - mirrors deformity in the soul of the inner man), and he is able to suggest, through the interpolation of festive wit into a highly serious context, that Maximin's imbalance is in some way symbolic of the anarchic powers at work in the will, imagination, and appetite.

In his study Dryden's Major Plays, Bruce King, in a distinguished and controversial analysis of the dramatic wit, argues that satiric or malignant intention is never far from the surface of Dryden's text. King appreciates the subtlety of the wit and neatly positions its operation as existing between the realms of mock-heroic and grotesque. However the general drift of King's argument lays too much stress on the aggressive aspects of the wit and tends to ignore the existence of a more genial 'providence' which helps to integrate the wit into the artistic design, especially during the denouement. Dryden's heroic wit is certainly not as destructive as Professor King believes, since the poet never entirely abandons faith in heroic ideals even when satirizing

them. Baroque wit in Dryden often takes the form of a specialized type of raillery in which satiric detachment is mingled with affective overtones, a curious blend of wit and feelings, which I have earlier referred to as 'satiric engagement'. King also overestimates the speed with which Dryden rose to satiric maturity; as early as 1670, the year of the first part of The Conquest of Granada, he talks of Dryden's wit 'shaping' the satire in the plays, as if the satiric intention had by now settled into some conscious, pre-set system. If one reads the plays no such definitive or normative pattern emerges, and 1670 is only one year after the production of the idiosyncratic Tyrannick Love. As an amendment to King's view I should like to suggest that Dryden's deployment of wit between 1666 and 1677 was far from schematized or dependant upon theoretical formulation; instead it sprang almost accidentally from involvement with other controversial areas, in particular questions of the grotesque, admiration, 'circumscribing the fancy', and the use of the probable and the 'marvellous'. The salient feature of the wit in the heroic plays is its refreshingly impulsive nature; it has a spontaneity which overrides Dryden's more academic handling of the 'unities' or the 'epic' requirements of the heroic drama. (see, for example, how the wit of the images - the 'poppy simile' and the 'imperfect bellowing' - gives life and animation to the epic description of the bull-fight in the opening scene of The Conquest of Granada). In terms of wit, the heroic play became a free-ranging playground for the permitted eccentricities of a decadent and sportive metaphysic. Upon Dryden alone rested the

responsibility for ensuring that the Restoration audience would be able to cope adequately with the inevitable refinements in tone.

In Dryden's critical essays from 1666-1670, there are some tentative attempts to establish a criterion for the proper use of wit. Rather as Cowley had found in his celebrated Ode¹², Dryden discovered that the techniques of wit were better expressed by negatives than by definitive statement; it was easier to say what wit was not. His discussions of wit tend to be disappointing because they offer us observations on only isolated qualities - but this was perhaps being prudent in a case where fools often 'rushed in'. Hence Dryden's ideas on wit seem predominantly sporadic, the effect of random thought. At one moment wit is ornamental, it is 'delightful imaging' (W, I, 101), at another it is didactic, (though still accessible to the average mind);

most to be admired when a great
thought comes dressed in words
so commonly received that it is
understood by the meanest
apprehensions. (W, I, 40).

The definition of wit which Dryden made later, ('a propriety of thoughts and words, 'W, I, 207), seems almost reactionary in its conservatism and foreshadows Dryden's repudiation of the heroic play in favour of blank-verse tragedy. 'Propriety' now seems a far cry from the 'life touches' which Dryden considered essential to the 'imitation' of real life in his

¹². For a sound discussion of the themes and ideas in the Ode 'Of Wit', see S. Elledge, 'Cowley's Ode, Of Wit, and Longinus on the Sublime: A Study of one definition of the word Wit', MLQ, IX, (1948), 185-98.

early dramatic criticism. But this later formulation at least indicates that wit could be interpreted in two very divergent and essentially complementary ways. It could either denote the qualities of judgment, decorum and 'correctness', or it could stand for the fancy, the imagination and the felicitously satiric (e.g. Dryden's consciously mischievous use of 'astral spirits' in both Tyrannick Love and The State of Innocence). In this early period (1666-1670) Dryden was clearly aware of the need to establish a stylistic norm which would secure the poetic validity and effectiveness of wit. Thanks to the example of the 'school' of Shakespeare and Jonson, wit was felt, by Restoration poets, to be something worth improving upon, and by Dryden's time Waller, Denham and Cowley, had already established sound reputations on its laurels. However Dryden was aiming at something more than 'smoothness of numbers' and the creation of mellifluous cadence. Wit was something which offered unique new opportunities to the drama. It is scarcely surprising, therefore, that Dryden should not have achieved so polished a result, being divorced by temperament and inclination from the metaphysical aims of Donne and his contemporaries, and by the quest for novelty from the pioneering lyricism of Waller and Denham.

The novelty of Dryden's wit is in many ways its leading characteristic and its effect is often dependent upon an apparent remoteness from a continuum of tradition. Dryden was by no means a Metaphysical, and yet he was still far from being some Augustan, who might pride himself on a well-tailored, over-precise diction. The spectator who hears Dryden's wit is first startled, then bewildered, then

pleased - the Augustans preferred greater perspicacity. Suspended precariously between the tentative and the bold, Dryden's wit is experimental in the sense that he uses it like a lens, to bring the dimensions of the heroic constantly in and out of focus, although such a procedure involves deliberate distortion and 'blurring'. However Dryden felt that such willed imperfections and flaws gave a sense of authenticity to the finished product and gave it the illusion of being drawn 'from the life'. If he did not particularize his style as much as the Metaphysical poets (Dr Johnson complained that they 'broke every image into fragments',)¹³ he was still capable of creating imagery which harmonized the magnificent and the trivial without detracting from either. Thus it answers perfectly Dr Johnson's dignified conception of a wit 'which is at once natural and new',¹⁴. By calling it 'natural' one draws attention merely to the fact that the images in Dryden's wit are usually drawn from easily recognisable and familiar objects (viz., flowers, animals, insects), although the mock-heroic inversion which broods over them may make them highly 'unnatural' in the sense that they court the grotesque. This type of mixed heroic style is anticipated in some of Cleveland's poetry, notably in lines like these from The King's Disguise:

¹³. Johnson's Lives of the Poets, op.cit., p.13.

¹⁴. ibid., p.12.

Angell of light, and darknesse too, I doubt,
 Inspir'd within, and yet possess'd without.
 Majestick twilight in the state of grace,
 Yet with an excommunicated face.
Charles and his Maske are of a different mint,
 A Psalme of mercy in a miscreant print
 The Sun wears Midnight, Day is Beetle-brow'd,
 And Lightning is in Keldar of a cloud.
 Oh the accurst Stenographie of fate!
 The Princely Eagle shrunke into a Bat.¹⁵

Cleveland's compressed style mingles the noble with the coarse without any embarrassment, anticipating Dryden's witty adoption of religious terminology (e.g. 'excommunicated', a 'psalme of mercy') for satiric purposes in Absalom and Achitophel. The King's Disguise is a political satire, and it is easier to see here foreshadowings of Shimei, Doeg and Og. But something of the violence with which ideas are yoked together (e.g. 'The Sun wears Midnight', 'Majestick Twilight') remains a feature of the wit of Dryden's heroic plays.

Dryden's dramatic wit does not always reflect the ill-concealed malignity of the satirist; his targets are fictions, not realities; they are shadows of real emotional and political situations. Indeed Dryden's delight in dramatic wit was the delight of the gentleman who understood it as both a pleasurable and a profitable pastime. Refinement in wit stood for man's sociability, and testified to his desire for co-operation in society. Conversation, the natural environment for wit, was known to flourish at court, and Dryden openly made the standards of the court his ideal standards for wit¹⁶. Given a new setting in the theatre, wit

¹⁵. Cleveland, Poems, ed. B. Morris and E. Withington, (1967), p. 7.

¹⁶. For Dryden's confident views of the civilizing effects of court conversation, see his Defence of the Epilogue, in which he assesses its influence upon theatrical wit, W, I, 178-82.

became the prime vehicle for intellectual comedy, and gave the patrons of the 'serious' drama new pleasure when it flattered them with 'heroic' attributes. A following for the heroic drama could soon be regarded almost as a clique activity, the pastime of a cabal. The disciples of the heroic plays were asked to swallow all in faith, to countenance an incongruous medley of humour, grandeur, wit, and passion, without a suspicion that such art might be meretricious. Dryden often directs the focus of his wit towards indirect objects, especially the uncovering of social and audience attitudes to iconoclasm, faction, incest, torture, sexual fantasy, jealousy, and other topics encouraged by the scenarios of the heroic plays. By fostering an atmosphere of humorous but informed self-analysis, the wit enables its audience to become not less critical, but more receptive, even at a sentimental level; through a growing familiarity with a variety of pace and tone, Dryden's audience learn the techniques necessary for the appreciation of his ironic moral fables. This extends the popular Restoration concept of wit as 'leisure' (the occupation of a gentleman such as Dorimant) until it becomes something more than mere entertainment; it is an idleness which educates.

Although Dryden frequently uses wit as a 'revealing feature of character',¹⁷, exposing areas of moral blindness in his heroes or villainesses, it often outstrips the intention, and often the intelligence, of the speaker to

¹⁷. See King, p.31.

whom it is given. Thus many characters express themselves in a manner which appears self-satirizing, while the wit of their statements has in fact assumed a separate poetic life of its own, divorced from a particular applicability to that character. Wit often takes Drydenian characters 'out of themselves', and they lose themselves in abstruse and often absurd conceits. This is a deliberate part of Dryden's strategy and means that he can assert monarchical control over the fates of his puppets; wit, as a part of eloquence, is a God-given gift, showered by the poet upon his creations at moments in which their absurdity or inadequacy can be shown up to advantage. Almanzor's wit, for example, obtrudes even at his deadly-serious parting from Almahide at the end of The Conquest of Granada, Part One:

I go - but if too heavily I move,
 I walk encumbered with a weight of love.
 Fain I would leave the thought of you behind,
 But still, the more I cast you from my mind,
 You dash, like water, back, when thrown against
 the wind.
 (SS, IV, 114-15)

Here the seriousness of the emotional situation (Almanzor is never supposed to see Almahide again) is made tolerable, even pleasurable, by a vein of wit which seems to crudely parody the intellectual expectations of conceit; it is wit debunking wit. Dryden celebrates the spiritualized yearnings of a high-flown parting scene in one grossly physical image - 'a weight of love' - and with one common domestic image, that of water being thrown out (probably as refuse). The attempt at sublimity is upturned by the violence of the image - 'you "dash" like water back' - and by its undistinguished associations. The intention is

plainly epic, but the language is not. The ensuing anti-climax (oddly teased out in the awkward syntax of the final alexandrine) seems to indicate the depth of Almanzor's frustrated sex drive, apart from epitomizing the air of mischievous inconsequence so often found in festive wit. A passage like this, mildly irritating even to Dryden enthusiasts, calls for some explanation which does not glibly dismiss it as nonsense. Dryden clearly intended the speech to be totally in keeping with other instances of Almanzor's verbal pyrotechnics; what must always remain somewhat in doubt is exactly how the Restoration audience responded to it.

Dryden's wit habitually operated within the context of a Hobbesian problematic, and often involves gentle mockery of human trains of thought. The intellectuality of the wit requires that even wit itself, especially the 'wit-writing' faculty that is released through the dialogue of the characters, should be analytically presented as a facet of personality. This explains the frequency with which Dryden's characters stand 'outside themselves' (in this they are reminiscent of Marlowe's 'over-reachers') - a favourite habit is for a speaker to halt his train of thought to examine his discourse or the state of his soul. Dryden keeps firm control over his characters (except in the case of Maximin, as we shall see) and he imprisons them in their passions and subjects them to the tyranny of the fancy. It is customary for a Dryden character to inform the spectators quickly of his or her most intimate thoughts. Dryden seems to take a particular delight in

exploring the dark recesses of man's mind, perhaps after the inspiration of Hobbes:

The secret thoughts of a man run
over all things, holy, profane,
clean, obscene, grave, and light,
without shame, or blame; which
verbal discourse cannot do,
farther than the judgment shall
approve of the time, place, and persons.¹⁸

Dryden utilizes 'judgment' in a sly manner. According to Hobbes it is the judgment which selects which topics (i.e. out of the 'holy, profane, clean, obscene, grave, and light') will be suitable for verbal discourse, and which will not offend the sensibility which governs polite conversation. Dryden uses 'judgment' as if it were an inverse process; his stage-characters are constantly being 'indiscreet' by polite standards, exposing their obsessions and revealing their carnal desires. Dryden effects this through wit which is in itself an effect of judgment; he predetermines to what extent he will permit a hitherto prohibited degree of licence. Wit becomes the means whereby the dramatic characters can formulate the excesses of their own aberrant imaginations. Dryden exploits the rationalized creativity implicit in 'judgment', together with the conventions of heroic rhetoric, to give an almost improvisatory tone to much of the thought in his plays. Many beautifully-modulated sentiments strike us as the effect of sudden or random thought - while the wit gives them their 'naturalness' and spontaneity, the rhyme gives them their aura of premeditated artifice. Thus what we have in Dryden's plays is a recurrent

¹⁸. Hobbes, Leviathan, op.cit., p.44.

type of 'statement' - an impulse of the mind immediately canalized into the pre-set structure and idiom of the couplet. This imprisons the chaotic forces but also encourages an illusion of space and freedom.

Aureng-Zebe is a play redolent with witty examples of the introspective worlds inhabited by the thinkers of Dryden's plays. There is an amusing scene in the second act, in which Arimant, an elderly courtier, woos the Princess Indamora by a system of logic and analytical probability. Arimant uses Polonius-like 'indirections' to come to the point, and Indamora's irritation quickly throws him out of key:

ARIMANT: I dare not ask for what you would not grant,
 But wishes, madam, are extravagant.
 They are not bounded with things possible;
 I may wish more than I presume to tell.
 Desire's the vast extent of human mind;
 It mounts above, and leaves poor hope behind.
 I could wish -

INDAMORA: What?

ARIMANT: Why did you speak? You've dashed my fancy quite,
 Ev'n in th' approaching minute of delight.
 (L, 35-6)

The humour and irony of this exchange depends upon perceiving the wit in Arimant's situation; the axis of his speech turns upon his capacity (or non-capacity) to give birth to his thought. The laboured result is his feeble attempt to enfranchise his fancy, which is restrained by social habits such as custom, duty, and good-breeding. Dryden blatantly poeticizes Hobbes for satiric effect; Arimant uses the maxim, 'Desire's the vast extent of human mind', to cloak the social inequality of his passion in rather obvious allegory. He employs the stock ratiocination of the heroic hero, but the tone is petulant rather than commanding.

Dryden typically deflates the climax of Arimant's appeal; his 'I could wish' is brutally interrupted, and a mood of anticipation gives way to one of inadequacy (the 'dashed' fancy). Arimant's mind flits between ideas of passion but never lights on passion itself. He illustrates a species of 'ranging' which Hobbes had equated with a particular kind of madness:

such as they have, that entering into any discourse, are snatched from their purpose, by every thing that comes in their thought, into so many, and so long digressions, and parentheses, that they utterly lose themselves: which kind of folly, I know no particular name for.¹⁹

Although Arimant does not manifest the wild ranging of poetic madness and inspiration (the kind which has festive overtones in Maximin's attempts to speak 'poetically' to St Catherine) his wavering discourse does indicate unsteadiness of thought and lack of purposive direction (which nearly always implies moral stigma in Dryden). The 'approaching minute of delight' is the feverish pre-occupation of most of Dryden's rhetorical Hedonists; they attach a prestige to the anticipation of pleasure and the whetting of appetite which far outstrips the value of gratifying them. Thus for men such as Almanzor, Maximin, and Morat, who takes a conscious pride in their wit, any failure to 'achieve' the fancy in the appropriate mental image is tantamount to public disgrace. Their insistence on the ranging of the imagination is an all-important if misplaced act of faith, a commitment which none of them will relinquish even when it begins to threaten their heroic integrity. It is the task of the spectator to decide for

19. ibid.

himself whether he regards these 'heroes' as abusers of the fancy; he must be able to distinguish between the healthy, purposive ranging of alert and vital minds, and the distempered, futile ranging of the impotent and senile. At its most fundamental level, Dryden's wit thus alludes to the incapacity of mortals to integrate thought and action, to husband their passions, or to square their verbal with their mental discourse.

Several of Dryden's best characters indulge in supremely comic mental flightiness. A good example is Lyndaraxa in The Conquest of Granada. Her mind is in a continual state of flux and contradiction, a situation physically acted out in the play by her ambiguous relationship with her two rival suitors, Abdalla and Abdelmelech. Lyndaraxa is the precursor of Zimri, the fatally volatile dabbler in the arts and sciences. Like Zimri, Lyndaraxa is 'everything by starts, and nothing long'; she longs to be borne along on the tide of popular opinion, and measures her own conduct only according to her whims and pleasures. Lyndaraxa's self-defining principle is to 'live without control', by which she means freedom of action without moral responsibility. Her conduct is motivated by her lust for empire, and she will wed any man who wears a crown. Although Dryden ruthlessly satirizes her for the absurdity of her reasoning, he is also much attracted to the quicksilver changes of mood which characterize her nature. When he came to write his Stoic tragedy of Cleomenes in 1691 he chose to model Cassandra, his greatest villainess, quite closely on the portrayal of Lyndaraxa. The techniques of fine raillery

and genteel satire can be found in Dryden's depiction of the 'manners' of the lady; Lyndaraxa only makes herself slightly less ridiculous than the affected Melantha in Marriage à la Mode by assuming an inflated image of herself, frequently cast in an entirely inappropriate heroic mould:

I'll to the turrets of the palace go,
And add new fire to those that fight below:
Thence, Hero-like, with torches by my side,
(Far be the omen, though) my love will guide.
No; like his better fortune I'll appear,
With open arms, loose veil, and flowing hair,
Just flying forward from my rolling sphere:
My smiles shall make Abdalla more than man;
Let him look up, and perish if he can.
(SS, IV, 68)

Dryden here depicts her as a psychological parody of the goddess Fortune. The visual starkness of the imagery (e.g. the amusing and grotesque impression of motion in the line 'Just flying forward from my rolling sphere'), is characteristic of the exuberance which so often propels Baroque wit towards the absurd. Similarly the idea that Lyndaraxa's smiles can infuse virility into her hero - make Abdalla 'more than man' - is broadly comic. Her choice of the Hero and Leander comparison is also ironic; she realizes the ineptness of the analogy and rejects it two lines later, and the pun on 'Hero-like' establishes her as an Amazonian type, full of courage and big words (in the context of the play, clearly a joke at Almanzor's expense). The grotesque is evident in the 'open arms, loose veil, and flowing hair' which conjure up associations of the demented Cassandra of Troy, rather than Abdalla's 'better fortune'. The constant mental swerving, the inability to rest on any image, the need for hurry and transience - all are borne out in her other speeches throughout the play.

Lyndaraxa's distemper is subtly different from Arimant's; she has no difficulty in articulating her desires, but they run too fast for her reason, as she admits in one of those moments in which Dryden makes his creation see herself as others see her:

O, could I read the dark decrees of fate,
That I might once know whom to love, or hate!
For I myself scarce my own thoughts can guess,
So much I find them varied by success.
As in some weather-glass, my love I hold;
Which falls or rises with the heat or cold.
(SS, IV, 80)

This speech not only shows Lyndaraxa fettered in a mental labyrinth, it also shows her capable of representing her position in a frank, amusing way. What this speech reveals is the fact that Lyndaraxa, had she been unburdened with ambition, might have made a truly creative thinker. However muddled with passion, the reasoners in Dryden's plays all possess a dignified charm. Apart from those like Arimant and Alexas, who seem chosen by nature for the philosophical role, it is the sudden insights of the characters normally victimized by passion that most often produce a delightful pathos. But Dryden mocks at their disordered reason with humane understanding, and characters like Zempoalla, Almeria and Lyndaraxa are never uncharitably degraded by satire.

Before we come to Tyrannick Love I should like to look briefly at the flexibility with which Dryden is prepared to use the single word in the service of his festive wit. On several occasions he will be tempted to use a word for its aurally comic potential. Nourmahal's use of the word 'rubbish' in Act Five of Aureng-Zebe is a striking example of how Dryden will disperse precise meaning for the sake of emphasis - the line is a gift for any imaginative actress:

Heav'n did, by me, the outward model build;
 Its inward work, the soul, with rubbish filled.
 (L, 104)

Dryden's grotesque possesses a light and dark side. The dark side comprises the garishness of some of the images, and the degree of distortion to which they are subject; the light involves the mood in which they are conceived, which is often humorous, cheeky, or 'festive'. Both dark and light aspects of the grotesque are fuelled by a highly visual application of images to ideas; on hearing one of Dryden's metaphors a spectator will often be presented with a highly disturbing visual picture, which momentarily fills the mind. As, for instance, in the lines,

He blasts my early Honour in the bud,
 Like some tall Tree the Monster of the Wood.
 O're-shading all which under him would grow,
 He sheds his venom on the Plants below.
 (CD, X, 120)

The passage is typical of many in which a blustering hero gives an impression of power through the martial ebullience of his language. Michael Alssid has made an interesting classification of Dryden's imagery into two groups, which he calls 'overt' and 'submerged'. This notion is of assistance here in helping us to appreciate the influence of the grotesque upon the language of this passage. Alssid regards the overt or 'concrete' image as the most prominent to appear in Dryden's wit, while 'submerged' images (those which suggest rather than realize actual objects or situations) contribute more to the 'thinking' response of the audience²⁰. The sensory perceptions of the audience are normally directed towards the 'overt' images, which create a pictorial language

²⁰. M.W. Alssid, Dryden's Rhymed Heroic Tragedies, 2 vols., Salzburg (1974), II, 291-2.

of escapism, especially in the use of extended simile. However, 'submerged' images may have much to contribute to the emotional effect of the verse, since impressions created by them help to establish mood and tonality. The four lines above, for instance, rely principally upon 'overt' images for their bizarre effect. The language is over-strained and vehement (the onomatopoeic explosion of 'blasts' in the opening line), the images overcompensate for the sentiments (the occasion of the speech is mild jealousy or pique), and the general purpose of the speech is to shock and confound. The overt image of the tree dominates the lines, as does the extraordinary analogy between the tree and monstrosity. Dryden thus makes the ruthlessly incompatible the norm for these four lines; the tree as the 'Monster' of the wood conjures up a visual image of a gigantic forest instinct with its own life. Dryden concludes with a switch into a 'submerged' or half-realized image; the tree casts a shadow like that of a huge serpent which exudes a cloud of venom - the language and its associations belong to the world of nightmare. As Alssid points out, the 'obvious protrusion' of such images would be enough to jolt even the least attentive member of Dryden's audience²¹. Another submerged image - 'blasts my early Honor in the bud' - suggests perversion through its juxtaposition of the notion of infection (blasts) with the healthy connotations of natural growth. When examined more closely Dryden's submerged image of a 'bud' of honour begins in itself to look faintly ridiculous, faintly off-beat. This all reinforces the powerful

²¹. ibid., p.292.

impression of brooding unnaturalness which surrounds the central image of the monster-tree. What Alssid fails to notice is the effect of these lines in the context of the opening act of Tyrannick Love: the animation of the tree into monstrous ogre-like proportions endows the lines with a ludicrous festivity which reflects off the brooding stage-presence of Maximin. Although Charinus, the emperor's son, is here complaining not of Maximin, but about Porphyrius, the emperor's general, the association between the monster-tree and the Roman tyrant begins to be felt, to be later built upon and embellished through the use of new distorted images throughout the play. Here then we have an instance in which the imagery, though providing an 'escapist' mental picture of unrelated objects, serves an ironic function in the drama by establishing an atmosphere of conscious and arresting gigantism, a mood of overstatement which complements Nigrinus' somewhat purple account of the omens, spectres and 'well-pleased ghosts', and which will then be further developed when brought into direct relationship with the chief 'grotesque' of the piece, Maximin himself.

Another, more celebrated, tree image brings us still closer to some of Dryden's favourite verbal techniques. In MacFlecknoe, an elaborate grotesque on royal succession and the art of panegyric, Shadwell's august and portly presence is given devastatingly literal treatment by means of carefully chosen figurative language. His stature as a monarch has to be apprehended in grossly physical terms, not only because this is appropriate to Shadwell's bulk, but also because he is mentally lethargic and dull. The

tree image here suggests itself as a decorous euphemism both for size and dullness (by association with the shade of the branches):

Besides his goodly Fabrick fills the eye,
And seems design'd for thoughtless Majesty:
Thoughtless as Monarch Oakes, that shade the plain,
And, spread in solemn state, supinely reign.
(CD, II, 54)

The contrast in tone between these lines and the four lines from Tyrannick Love is important. The lines from MacFlecknoe are less overtly satiric because truly aggressive words (such as 'Monster' or 'venim') are absent. Just as the lines in Tyrannick Love were able to suggest the bluntness and vehemence associated with the diction and behaviour of the dominant character, Maximin, the lines from MacFlecknoe reflect a style of expression in keeping with the habits and characteristics of Shadwell. Dryden allows Shadwell to be the author of his own self-deflation. Shadwell's natural element is one of sublime indolence and relaxed posture - this is eloquently captured in the image of 'thoughtless' Majesty. The double-meaning - of a majesty beyond the scope of the imagination, or of a majesty singularly dim-witted - emerges with suave clarity, and the double satire on kingship follows in the image of 'Monarch Oakes'. In these lines Dryden stresses not the animate in nature, but the inanimate and almost fossilized. Shadwell's physical posture relaxes into a festively grotesque image of spreading trees; there are none of the lurid overtones of monstrosity which gave a quite different colouring to the lines in Tyrannick Love. Dryden here uses an extremely genteel brand of festivity; he aims ridicule not through pointed shafts of

satire but by means of a consciously blunted, almost 'sleeping' form of wit. Significantly Dryden does not diminish Shadwell's scale - he exploits it to give a vivid impression of the ludicrous physical posture of the 'sitter' of the portrait. Shadwell possesses all the trappings of benevolent majesty - the presence, the mien, the posture and the gesturing - but all is totally devoid of significance. The elegance of the lines is scarcely upset even by the mirthful implications of the word 'Fabrick', which also has an interesting development in Dryden's output.

'Fabrick' is used twice in MacFlecknoe, once to describe the appearance of Shadwell, and once, in its true architectural sense, to describe the appearance of the Barbican (line 66). Dryden occasionally employed both meanings in a serious context; in Annus Mirabilis (line 1097), for instance, he uses it to describe St Paul's Cathedral, while in the serious-minded Eleonora he applies it in elegy to the virtues of a pious, Christian lady:

These Virtues rais'd her Fabrick to the Sky;
For that which is next Heav'n, is Charity.
(CD, III, 238)

Coming after the satiric application of 'fabrick' to Shadwell's corpulent exterior in MacFlecknoe, the vision of Eleonora's virtues raising her fabrick heavenwards is excusable only on the grounds that it satisfies the Baroque sense of the visual in portraying the relationship between heaven and earth. Dryden obviously strains towards the metaphysical, but the image is uneasily dissociated from its more literal meaning. Even more ambiguous is its curious application to the Princess Almeyda, the somewhat masculine, proud heroine of Don Sebastian. Her lover praises her to

her face with the lines:

Mark her Majestick Fabrick; She's a Temple
Sacred by birth, and built by Hands Divine;
Her Soul's the Deity, that lodges there:
Nor is the Pile unworthy of the God.

(CD, XV, 114)

An outmoded neoplatonic style again urges Dryden to attempt a grandiose metaphysical conceit; however, what is intended as straight panegyric soon converts to the grotesque. Almeyda scarcely attains much tragic elevation, let alone sympathy, from being classified as both a 'fabrick' and a 'pile'. These unfortunate moments do arise with some frequency throughout the plays, and clearly, in this case, Dryden seems to have forgotten that he was writing about human beings²². Sometimes such moments are the outcome of disenchanted vision or flagging energy, and are not deliberate effects achieved through the use of allusive wit. Certainly by the time he came to write Don Sebastian Dryden had tired of the stage; its wit, also, was for him a thing of the past; in blank verse he had assayed new forms of affective experience, which supplanted the need for satiric undercutting.

It is important to grasp that in his attitude towards wit, Dryden was prepared to consider each new play in an individual light, and to compose it with a particular expressive challenge in mind. If we compare the techniques of comedies such as The Rival Ladies, Marriage à la Mode,

22. An interesting foretaste of the satiric use of the word 'fabrick' occurs in Cleveland's The King's Disguise, cited above. Cleveland applies the word neatly to the building up of the 'maske' which conceals the real nature of the king:
His muffled fabrick speakes him a recluse,
His ruines prove it a religious house.
(Poems, op.cit., p.6)

and Limberham, we can see how he applied quite different modes of procedure to each, and that they are creditable and often inspired imitations of Tuke, Etherege, and Wycherley respectively. Similarly Dryden modifies the function of Baroque wit to suit the particular demands of each of his heroic rhymed plays. In The Indian Queen he employs it to expose the passionate atheism of the adventuress, Zempoalla; in The Indian Emperour it becomes the instrument of detection in ferreting out the spiritual hypocrisy of the 'Christian' Spaniards and even attains some tragic dignity as Montezuma's weapon of defiance. By the time we reach Tyrannick Love, wit has become the sublime vehicle for the bizarre and the grotesque, mingling the festive with the lurid, and exploiting deformity for the sake of purgation by laughter. Ultimately, in the mammoth Conquest of Granada, it is the virtuosic agility of the wit which restores eloquence in palatable form to the English stage, sustaining a metrical and linguistic fluidity which matches the patterns of social mobility visible in the play. The satiric aggression (close to 'malignity') which pushes Tyrannick Love close to a 'chaos, and wild heap of wit' is transformed in The Conquest of Granada into a grandiloquent and benevolent assertiveness which has all the brilliancy and lustre of a shooting star.

This disciplining of wit throughout the sequence of the heroic plays is consistent with Dryden's tentative theory and experimental practice of the art. The imaginative problem - an irresistible attraction towards the perversities of the 'fancy' - was to haunt Dryden well into the period of his mature satires. It is a problem closely concerned

with the intention behind the plays, and the aesthetic balance between 'admiration' and detachment. Dryden's foremost commitment was to a style of powerful, evocative drama:

The poet is, then, to endeavour an absolute dominion over the minds of the spectators; for, though our fancy will contribute to its own deceit, yet a writer ought to help its operation.

(W, I, 162)

Such a bald statement on the nature of dramatic illusion may seem to have especially Hobbesian overtones, but Dryden was to insist throughout his career on the necessity of 'poetic feigning', where 'in a playhouse, everything contributes to impose upon the judgment'. (W, I, 275). At the outset of his dramatic career, Dryden, although sympathetic to the merits of judgment and decorum, was primarily concerned with the achievement of an 'absolute dominion' over his audiences. A combination of wit and fancy proved to be ideal assets with which to enrich his poetic texture, waging an unrelenting war with dullness. Dryden desired maximum intellectual stimulation for his spectators and he compensated for an occasionally indifferent dramatic sense in a number of ways, most of them stylistic. It is clear from the Dedication to Amboyna (1673) that for some time Dryden continued to think of dramatic illusion largely in terms of audience subjection to the will of the dramatist; he wrote,

Admiration is that noble passion, to which poets raise their audience in highest subjects, and they have then gained over them the greatest victory, when they are ravished into a pleasure which is not to be expressed by words.

(SS, V, 5)

Dryden's tendency to view his characters as puppets and his audience as competitors, is continually being borne out by the tone of his Prologues and Epilogues. But the zeal he may have felt in seeking out this dominant position with respect to actors and spectators may have inadvertently led him into bolder strokes of fancy than he was prepared to condone as a critic. The unenviable position held by Tyrannick Love in the canon of his plays is sufficient evidence that Dryden could miscalculate quite drastically and produce only a parody of that 'absolute dominion' he so earnestly desired - even at its most exuberant, Tyrannick Love remains an indiscreet production.

But something of the flavour of the 'bizarre' in wit can be captured by glancing at the observations of two contemporary men of letters. Walter Charleton, in his Discourse of the Different Wits of Men describes the imagination, or fancy, as

some certain similitude in objects
really unlike ... which by its
unexpected Fineness and allusion,
surprising the Hearer, renders him
less curious in the truth of what
is said.²³

This quality of 'unexpected Fineness and allusion' the ability to be at once bizarre, economical, and suggestive, is precisely what familiarity with Dryden's dramatic wit leads us to expect. While Charleton perfectly describes the ironical effect of heroic wit upon the spectator, Abraham Cowley, in the Preface to A Proposition for the Advancement of Learning (1661) notes how easy it is even for the judgment

²³ Charleton, Concerning the Different Wits of Men, op.cit., pp.20-1.

to be affected by the infectious excess of the fancy during the process of poetic creativity:

Our Reasoning Faculty as well as
Fancy, does but Dream, when it is
not guided by sensible objects.
We shall compound where Nature has
divided, and divide where Nature
has compounded, and create nothing
but either Deformed Monsters, or
at best pretty but impossible Mermaids.²⁴

Drydenian wit delights in the 'dividing and compounding' of which Cowley speaks; the Venus and the Lazar are held in constant juxtaposition as the wit of the heroic plays veers between that of 'deformed monsters' and that of 'impossible mermaids'. The over-elaboration, so typical of many of Dryden's extended similes, and the abrupt analogies which inspire his metaphors, are both symptomatic of the same type of wit, a wit which encourages immediacy and excess. Cowley's fears for poetry are to some extent subsumed in Charleton's concept of 'Fineness and allusion', since elegance and propriety of diction will often disguise unnaturalness of content. A duality underscores Dryden's experimentation with the techniques of wit; the fineness masks an inner fierceness and brutality, the potential of a satiric vision which could easily thrust beyond the benevolent providence of the fable to assert a disturbing malignity of purpose. But Dryden keeps his monsters and mermaids within the scope of an artificial environment; their creation is sufficiently methodized to make them the embodiments of theatrical brío rather than the scapegoats of an obsessed or faction-ridden society. Dryden's wit

²⁴ Cowley, Works, 2 vols., ed. A.B. Grosart, New York (1967), II, 285-86.

ultimately defends and screens his characters from the kind of analysis which places them 'outside' nature. As neither strict 'imitation', nor 'deviation', Dryden's characters maintain that see-sawing ambivalence and ambiguity which give the heroic plays a crucial status in the line of development from late Metaphysical to early Augustan wit.

Tyrannick Love

The phrase 'Mr Dryden's bizarre in wit' occurs in a critical pamphlet on Dryden published in 1673 under the title The Friendly Vindication of Mr Dryden from the Censure of the Rota by his Cabal of Wits. The tone is one of ironic attack by vindication, and the absurdities of Dryden's 'bizarres' in judgment, decorum and imagery are exposed in some well-chosen extracts from the heroic dramas. One of a series of four pamphlets produced by the university men of Oxford and Cambridge in the early 1670's, The Friendly Vindication claims to have been compiled in the interests of the wit of the nation to chastise the disorder encountered in Dryden's plays and to determine whether

Poets must be allowed so much
variety, as sometimes to exceed
the limits of Moderation and
regular Characters.²⁵

Cast, like the Essay of Dramatic Poesy in the form of a debate, The Friendly Vindication is a predominantly pedantic, academic resumé of the linguistic novelty of the plays, and contains few insights that had not already been given a more popular setting in Buckingham's burlesque The Rehearsal (1671).

²⁵ J. & H. Kinsley (ed.), Dryden: The Critical Heritage, (1971), p. 74.

However the association of the bizarre with Dryden at this period is not accidental. Tyrannick Love, written in 1669 in honour of Catherine of Braganza is one of the most whimsical, odd and fantastic plays of its time. The play is dominated by a dark grotesque which is only occasionally relieved by touches of festive humour. Dryden himself had used the term 'bizarre' in his Preface to Secret Love (1668) where he discusses its importance to the relationship between fancy and judgment. He writes:

But for the ornament of writing,
which is greater, more various and
bizarre in poesy than in any
other kind, as it is properly the
child of fancy, so it can receive
no measure, or at least but a very
imperfect one, of its own
excellencies or failures from the
judgment ... And fancy (if I may
so speak), judging of itself, can
be no more certain or demonstrative
of its own effects than two crooked
lines can be the adequate measure
of each other.

(W, I, 105)

In this passage lies the germ of Tyrannick Love, a 'child of fancy' which relies for witty, emotional effect upon the alienation and estrangement induced by grotesque (in the figure of Maximin) and on an equally severe aesthetic response to the morally austere St Catherine. Both characters represent the 'two crooked lines' that fail to be 'the adequate measure of each other'. The central imaginative problem of the play is focussed upon the depiction of the Lazar and the Venus in striking opposition, and illustrates Erich Auerbach's astute generalisation about the legends of martyrs, where

a stiff-necked and fanatical
persecutor stands over against
an equally stiff-necked and
fanatical victim.²⁶

Dryden's decision to write a tragedy on the subject of the life of a Christian saint was unusual but not without precedent²⁷. According to the Preface, he worked at white heat and had the play completed in only seven weeks. His defence of the astral spirits represented in the fourth act, gave him another valuable opportunity to state his Hobbesian views on the impact of heroic plays;

these heroic representations,
which are of the same nature
with the epic, are not limited
but with the extremest bounds
of what is credible.

(W, I, 142)

The Prologue expatiates further on the extravagance of the play, in which Dryden allowed his fancy the 'full scope and swing' and bid his Muse 'run mad'. In all, Dryden's main satisfaction with the work seems to have been that it provided him with an unimpeachable moral alibi in the recommendation of a 'pattern of piety' (St Catherine), while allowing him, in the impious character of Maximin, to experiment fully with a witty rhetorical sublime. The boisterous nature of the wit in the final act of the play lends support to Mark Aden's view that at this juncture in his career Dryden was

almost willing to hazard all
on one bold assertion of the
autonomy of the fictive imagination.²⁸

26. E. Auerbach, Mimesis, New York (1957), p. 16.

27. For the influence on Tyrannick Love of plays such as Dekker and Massinger's The Virgin Martyr and Corneille's Polyeucte and Horace, see the excellent commentary in CD, X, 380-99. A good article on the status of religious drama in the period can be found in W. E. Stephenson, 'Religious Drama in the Restoration', PQ, L, (1971), 599-609.

28. J. M. Aden, 'Dryden and the Imagination: The First Phase', PMLA, LXXIV (1959), p. 40.

Dryden's attachment to the bizarre in this play is an obvious adjunct to his theories of admiration. Placidius' colourful narration of the prophecies in the opening scene prepares the spectator for the eerie intrusion of the supernatural which serves as a stylistic talisman for Baroque opulence throughout the play:

When first a hollow wind began to blow,
The Sky grew black, and belli'd down more low;
Around the fields did nimble Lightning play,
Which offer'd us by fits, and snatch'd the day.
'Midst this, was heard the shrill and tender cry
Of well-pleas'd Ghosts, which in the storm did fly;
Danc'd to and fro, and skim'd along the ground,
Till to the Magick Circle they were bound.
(CD, X, 119)

This passage, with its hypersensitive visual effect and aural festivity (Dryden enjoys a bizarre mingling of incompatible effects (e.g. 'shrill and tender')) conjures up an imaginative inferno which indicates the dark grotesque of black magic associated from the outset with the heathen Maximin. By contrast Dryden is equally meticulous in creating a pictorial vision of heaven, especially in the description of the painterly paradise which attends Catherine's death:

Betwixt her Guards she seem'd by Bride-men led,
Her cheeks with cheerful blushes were o'rspreed,
When, smiling, to the Ax she bow'd her head.
Just at the stroke ---
Aethereal musick did her death prepare;
Like joyful sounds of Spousals in the Air.
A radiant light did her crown'd Temples guild,
And all the place with fragrant scents was fill'd.
The Balmy mist came thick'ning to the ground,
And sacred silence cover'd all around.
(CD, X, 181)

Here the equation of martyrdom and marriage elevates paradox into the bizarre by inducing the light grotesque of incongruous contrast - 'smiling, to the Ax she bow'd her head'. St Catherine is vindicated throughout the play by supernatural effects which are quite as mechanically

conceived as Maximin's tortures, and which appear to the pagan emperor as mere 'tricks of heaven'. Catherine's rather sombre 'festivity' comprises her blind, almost naïve optimism and uncompromising faith in the spiritual value of martyrdom; however Maximin's taunt that 'Zeal is the pious madness of the mind' can easily be substantiated when we recall her encouragement to Apollonius, the heathen philosopher whom she converts and sends to his death:

Go, and prepare my Seat: and hovering be
Near that bright space which is reserv'd for me.
(CD, X, 134)

Self-righteousness, stubborn will (St Catherine is singularly uncooperative with Berenice and Porphyrius in Act IV), and spiritual pride are the weapons which Catherine uses to deflect the emperor's lust - or indeed anything else that might threaten her progress to glory. By contrast Maximin's avowed lust and blasphemy seem honest and frank. Dryden heightens the contrast between his Lazar and Venus only to demonstrate how identical they become when the egocentricity of their motives is revealed. Maximin's constant indifference to the feelings of his empress or his daughter is strikingly paralleled in St Catherine's self-righteous correction of her mother in Act V. Although 'anti-hero' and heroine covet different objectives, they achieve only a mock-dignity because their behaviour is exaggeratedly selfish. Like Isabella and Angelo in Measure for Measure both suffer from inflexible thinking and a tendency to hysteria. In her interviews with Maximin Dryden makes it clear that there is a potential basis upon which St Catherine might establish an emotional relationship - but bluntness, arrogance, hypocrisy and repression contrive to keep the couple apart, the callousness of the tyrant being ingeniously played off

against the calculating serenity of the would-be saint.

The taut construction of the play (Dryden prided himself on his strict attention to the unities) gives ample opportunity for the author to engineer situations which quickly reveal the latent instability of Maximin. The first act, a model of neoclassical exposition, charts Maximin's transformation from confident emperor in the opening speech, to a suspicious and autonomous grotesque. One of the expressed intentions of the play, which Dryden outlined in the preface, was to inculcate 'holiness with good manners', and much of the comedy of the opening scene arises from the contrast between the portentous mockery of destiny used by Maximin, and the cold formalities practised by the courtly lovers, Porphyrius and Berenice. The high heroic tone is quickly established in the martial repartees of Maximin and Charinus; an almost Marvellian view of historical instrumentality is introduced, recalling the kind of power invested in Cromwell on his return from Ireland:

The Gods fore-knowledge on our Swords will wait:
If we fight well, they must fore-show good Fate.
(CD, X, 119)

Maximin's defiance of the gods is competitive; he regards Fate as a bungler, and is confident he can do better himself as a 'self-made' warrior. The first act ironically contrasts his command that the captive princess, Catherine, should be 're-converted' to heathenism, with his utter vulnerability to the news of his son's death. Maximin's attitude to fortune leaves him without rational defence; his loud emotionalism violates the accepted ideal of Stoic Roman decorum, and Placidius (foreshadowing Indamora in Aureng-Zebe) reminds him that :

Fortune should by your greatness be controul'd:
 Arm your great mind, and let her take no hold.
 (CD, X, 123)

The moral dilemma of the rest of the play is now revealed. Which is the best kind of greatness? Is it an outward or an inward quality? How far should it be moral, and to what extent should autonomous desires dictate the fates of others? From the point where Maximin envisages the decimation of his centurions and 'killing' the gods in revenge for the death of Charinus, Dryden's attitude becomes mischievously analytical, intent upon exposing varying levels of moral and psychological degeneration.

Maximin's unacknowledged gift from heaven (he prides himself throughout on his totally self-regarding sufficiency), is his animal cunning. It is this which produces the shrewd, festive wit which enables him to sum up the predicaments of his dependants in a brilliantly epigrammatical manner. Nothing is sacred. For example, he suddenly perverts the Platonic raptures of his general and his Empress, by commenting publicly upon their exchange of courtesies:

MAXIMIN: (to BERENICE) You did Porphyrius as a Courtier know,
 But as a Conqueror behold him now.
 BERENICE: You know (I read it in your blushing face) To Por.
 To merit, better than receive a grace:
 And I know better silently to own,
 Than with vain words to pay your service done.
 PORPHYRIUS: Princes, like Gods, reward e're we deserve;
Kneeling to kiss her hand
 And pay us in permitting us to serve.
 Oh might I still grow here, and never move! (Lower)
 BERENICE: How dangerous are these extasies of Love!
 He shows his passion to a thousand Eyes!
 He cannot stir, nor can I bid him rise!
 That word my heart refuses to my tongue! Aside
 MAXIMIN: Madam, you let the General kneel too long.
 (CD, X, 122)

The amusing counterpoint achieved in Maximin's speeches is to be renewed even more aggressively in the final scene of

the play where Maximin's tyrannic wit mocks at every sentiment including his own and threatens the tragic denouement with ludicrous anarchy.

Maximin's control over his subjects extends to all except St Catherine and her supernatural agents. In Acts II-IV, Dryden pursues the idea of Maximin as a booby of nature and a gross abuser of Heaven's free gift of grace, while St Catherine expounds her somewhat smug principles of self-abandonment to divine providence. Catherine abhors Maximin as a lover (she exits swiftly after his appearance in Act III) but maintains her ground with him or his representatives in polemic. She strives formidably to reveal to him the error of his ways and to explain why his grotesque of power (I'll find that power o'er wills which Heav'n e'er found) is an hallucination, but she shirks any form of emotional confrontation and leaves Maximin's impious wit to have the last word. She reiterates Porphyrius' advice of the first act, within the context of Christian Neo-Stoic resignation:

Your mind should first the remedy begin;
You seek without, the Cure that is within.
(CD, X, 159)

Maximin's 'grotesquerie' however only becomes more pronounced as he sees the object of his desires escaping his grasp. Dryden creates his most sinister effect of the bizarre in the portrayal of Maximin's unusually infantile trains of thought; instead of being merely playful and 'festive', the banality of Maximin's desires becomes symbolic of a diseased and potentially criminal imagination. The explosive force of the dark grotesque is unleashed in Maximin's verbal attempts to compass absolute aggrandizement. That he misconstrues not only St Catherine's doctrine, but also

her person is made obvious by his obsessive sexual megalomania:

Ev'n Jove would try more shapes her Love to win:
And in new birds, and unknown beasts would sin;
At least, if Jove could love like Maximin.
(CD, X, 136)

In these three lines Maximin confounds the nature of love and sin until they become synonymous, a devaluation of the divine through ruthless subjection to the bestial. The speech outlines the Protean qualities of Maximin's fancy which 'ranges' excessively in the realms of erotic fantasy. The sinister parody of the creation implicit in the phrase 'unknown beasts' is backed up by further dimly-veiled biblical allusions throughout the play, the most striking being the Mephistophelian sentiment,

A Monarch is
The Spirit of the World in every mind;
He may match Wolves to Lambs, and make it kind.
(CD, X, 156)

with the subtle glance at Isaiah, Chapter 11, verses 6-8. Maximin's delusion of grandeur is sustained by the use of powerful cosmic images reflecting the jostling unpredictability and terror of the Lucretian universe. When confronted with the recalcitrant lovers Valeria and Porphyrius, who are struggling to stave off a forced marriage, Maximin inflates his own instinct for creativity into monstrous proportions.

Mine is the business of your little Fates:
And though you war, like petty wrangling States,
You're in my hand; and when I bid you cease,
You shall be crush'd together into peace.
(CD, X, 156-57)

These lines are characteristically applied to a sexual situation, but their bizarre effect depends on the grotesque image of a slap-happy Artificer or Supreme Being, fashioning the universe and tearing at it, as if it were putty in his

hands. The image of matter conjured up by the verb 'crush'd' reduces any question of human rights or personality to a void. In Maximin's fantasy, Valeria and Porphyrius, when legally married to secure the political safety of the state, will have no more meaning than a conglobate mass of inert form - a parody of the 'one flesh' traditionally associated with Christian marriage. An infantile streak can be observed again in Maximin's tendency to regard all human beings other than himself as puppets or playthings, and to envisage the whole of life only as a feverish quest for carnal gratification:

Old as I am, in pleasures I will try
 To waste an Empire yet before I dye:
 Since life is fugitive, and will not stay,
 I'll make it flye more pleasantly away.
 (CD, X, 167-68)

Self-conscious banality such as this is designed to evoke the empty-mindedness of the speaker and to emphasize the bizarre effects produced by an adult whose mind is essentially childish; nowadays much the same effect of shock could be produced by the depiction of a retarded, victimized, or mentally handicapped character (e.g. Stanley in Harold Pinter's The Birthday Party, or Child Manatond in David Rudkin's The Sons of Light).

Dislocation of metaphor and imagery are strong stylistic indications of Maximin's imbalanced attitude to cause and effect. In the following speech, in which Maximin regards the onset of lustful desires during his 'autumn' years, Dryden examines the chance collision of opposites and chaos of matter which inhabit the Lucretian realm of nature; the often arbitrary selection of metaphor and its dislocation from any logical sequence of development,

rational or rhetorical, is indicative of Maximin's distempered spiritual condition and lack of inner harmony. The wit of the images helps to 'assemble' his personality into fragmentary items, drawing waggishly on the principles which govern Hobbesian matter and 'decaying sense'. The mock-heroic in this speech jumbles up the colossal with the banal, and the grandiose images which Maximin feels poetically constrained to employ in the service of his passion noticeably refuse to cohere into a unified pattern; thus there is nothing which suggests the basic integration and healthy moral condition of the original emotion. The lurking presence of comic sexual innuendo is a very obvious pointer to the deliberate 'feigning' of tone in these attempts at magniloquence:

This Love that never could my youth engage,
Peeps out his coward head to dare my age.
Where hast thou been thus long, thou sleeping form,
That wak'st like drowsie Sea-men in a storm?
A sullen hour thou chusest for thy birth:
My Love shoots up in tempests, as the Earth
Is stirr'd and loosen'd in a blust'ring wind,
Whose blasts to waiting flowers her womb unbind.
(CD, X, 136-37)

An almost Rochesterian inference that the 'coward head' of love is a reluctant phallus (where has thou been thus long, thou sleeping form', cf. Rochester's poem The Imperfect Enjoyment) lends spiciness to the sleeping martial image of the first two lines, and sets the imagery upon its course of seemingly irrational metamorphosis. From the comic Tom-Thumb image of the 'peeping coward', love moves into the abstract majesty of a 'sleeping form', after which it becomes pluralized in a rather distant simile (like drowsie seamen). The oppression of Maximin's vital spirits in age is conveyed by the sluggish association with the 'drowsie seamen' who

wake in uncertainty and confusion, and the 'sullen hour' love chooses for its birth provides a sense of unpropitious anxiety. The final images which Maximin selects to describe his love liken his passion to a tornado, meteor, or shooting star, with a renewed sexual innuendo ('my love shoots up'). The physical devastation of nature which results (a tempest which upturns the earth and dishevels the once innocent and unpolluted flowers) anticipates the disastrous and frustrated outcome of a passion which is as unnatural in its conception as its expression is grotesque. Dryden here perfectly suits the idiom of the speaker to the content; the free association of thought throughout the speech culminates in deliberate syntactical clumsiness ('whose blasts to waiting flowers her womb unbind - almost a parody of Milton's Latinate diction) and meaning transmogrified into an uneasy metaphor of birth ('her womb unbind'). Maximin's absurd attempts at pastoral produce fustian and a weird mingling of voiced and unvoiced alliteration (e.g. the odd effect of the silent 'b' of womb in a line which contains the aggressively sonorous 'blasts' and 'unbind'). Dryden thus promotes by conscious and subconscious linguistic techniques, a mode of character presentation which is dependent upon the hearer's sensitivity to the emotional effect of a blatant metaphysic; the degree of recognition this will evoke in the spectator will depend on the degree to which he is able to participate in the obsessional thinking of Maximin as it is revealed in distortions of metre and poetic meaning.

In the fifth act the play moves full circle as Maximin again curses the gods, this time for the suicide of his

daughter Valeria, a 'secret martyr' to love. The ebullience of the final pages in which Maximin attempts to stage-manage the deaths of St Catherine, Felicia, Berenice and Porphyrius, looks back towards the Grand Guignol of Jacobean tragedy; as Maximin progresses rapidly towards the abyss of the criminal mentality - his relish for the 'gory gobbets' of Catherine's flesh outdoing Shylock and portraying him, after Herodian, as 'a bloody tyrant, vastus corpore, animo ferus' (W, I, 139) - the more strikingly reminiscent he becomes of Tourneur's atheist D'Amville. The escalation of brutality and murder in Act V comes as a striking contrast to the disciplined respectability of the opening of the play, and invites a sensational atmosphere in which Dryden is tempted to heighten Platonic raptures and pietist feeling (Felicia's narrative) in order to keep the tone on a par with Maximin's insistent rant. The explosion of festive wit which follows this 'dumb-show of death' in Nell Gwyn's delightful epilogue (Hold, are you mad? You damn'd confounded dog!) is a necessary release after the artistic tensions built up throughout the unfolding of the denouement.

Something decidedly goes amiss in the final portion of the play and I should like to suggest quite simply that Dryden's 'bizarre' here takes on a life of its own and breaks all restraint. In order to be true to the imaginative principle upon which he built the play Dryden had to maintain a consistent attitude to the verisimilitude demanded by his characters; in order to make St Catherine appear more saintly, more transcendent, it was necessary to make Maximin more perverse, more incorrigibly freakish in his behaviour. This is precisely what happens as Maximin proceeds to treat

life primarily as a farce; he now hopes to win Catherine not because he loves her, but because it will be diverting to his age:

I in my Autumn do my Siege begin;
And must make haste e're Winter comes, to win.
(CD, X, 173)

For Catherine, who is at last forced to become emotionally involved by the capture of her mother, life has never been more serious; she now has to preach to the converted and persuade Felicia that to ask grace of a tyrant is tantamount to committing a mortal sin. Maximin, on the other hand, becomes even more recklessly witty, displaying on occasion a gift for brilliant improvisation which can make the most critical situation appear suddenly festive. Maximin now uses wit as his prime defence against his passions (especially his feelings for Catherine); consequently it contains a ruthlessness which sharpens the comedy and which adds a virtuosic zest to the dialogue. He snubs Catherine and her mother with a jibe at their own comparative insignificance;

I cannot with your small concerns dispence;
For deaths of more importance call me hence.
(CD, X, 175)

and a little later he scores off Berenice who has just confessed to her conversion to the Christian faith by pronouncing the mercilessly funny verdict,

How much she is to piety inclin'd!
Behead her while she's in so good a mind.
(CD, X, 182)

This vein of arrogant exuberance extends also to his blasphemy, which takes on even more heroic-grotesque proportions:

Look to it, Gods—for you th' Aggressors are.
 Keep you your Rain and Sun-shine in your Skies,
 And I'll keep back my flame and Sacrifice.
 (CD, X, 188)

Maximin's savage wit expands to give dynamic momentum to the final scenes, catalysing events and twisting them into lurid distortions which confound all sense of rational value.

Maximin's behaviour moves into the realm of hallucogenic distraction. His megalomania takes a purely sadistic turn, as he attempts to control the will of others by subjecting their bodies to a variety of crude mechanical tortures.

Michael Alssid has put forward the interesting theory that Maximin here usurps Dryden's role as playwright and tries to impose his own scenario upon the conclusion of the play²⁹.

The intervention of the angel Amariel who smashes the torture-wheel is treated as a comic interlude which mingles the benevolent supernatural of the Holy Spirit with the dark supernatural of Maximin's thoughts as he tries to assert the demonic powers of destruction; Dryden quite consciously embodies Heaven and Hell in his two major protagonists and lets fate resolve which of them has the greater divinity. Maximin's defective moral insight is now regarded less as a tragic flaw than as a positive source of evil. The kind of festive humour which goes with such evil is the kind which arises out of a state of ironic melancholia, an essentially sadistic and satiric ethos which also feeds Milton's great evil characters, Comus and Satan. In Maximin's case this

29. For the interesting development of the idea of Maximin as 'usurping playwright', see M.W. Alssid, Dryden's Rhymed Heroic Tragedies, op.cit., II, 276-80.

brand of humour does not simply increase the suspense and add pleasurable anxiety to the sensations of the audience; it also redirects the spectators back to a more redemptive view of humanity. It enables them to exorcize the demonic spirit of the wit by laughing at its incongruity and distortion. In such a way the grotesque is able to impose certain controls on the forces which it unleashes.

A passage in which this type of redirection of sensibility can be seen to permeate the dramatic action occurs in the scaffold scene. Dryden here employs an incongruously materialistic realisation of Neo-Platonism to bring the high-style of the lovers into a clear relationship with the by now facetious wit of Maximin. Tonal ambiguities accumulate antiphonally over a number of speeches as Maximin offers a commentary upon the action. Rather in the style of other Drydenian commentators, notably Ventidius, Maximin's interjections reveal a mixed response to the high seriousness of the interview he is witnessing, and the suggestion of satiric exposure is completed by his profession of shedding tears - a compassionating element totally alien to his nature and brought in merely to illustrate that Maximin's 'emotions' go no deeper than to the level of a mechanical response. The passage is given in full, so that the reader may determine for himself the mutations of tone and discrepancies of style:

MAXIMIN: The best return that I to both can make
 Shall be to suffer for each others sake.

PORPHYRIUS: Barbarian, do not dare her blood to shed,
 Who from my vengeance sav'd thy cursed head:
 A flight no Honour ever reach'd before;
 And which succeeding Ages will adore.

BERENICE: Porphyrius, I must dye!
 That common debt to Nature paid must be;
 But I have left a debt unpaid to thee.
 To Maximin ---
 I have perform'd the duty of a Wife;
 But, saving his, I cast away thy life.
 Ah, what ill Stars upon our Loves did shine,
 That I am more thy Murd'rer than he mine.

MAXIMIN: Make haste.

PORPHYRIUS: So hasty none in execution are,
 But they allow the dying time for pray'r.
 Farewel, sweet Saint, my pray'r shall be to you:
 My Love has been unhappy, but 'twas true.
 Remember me! Alas what have I sed?(sic)
 You must dye too!
 But yet remember me when you are dead.

BERENICE: If I dye first, I will ---
 Stop short of Heav'n, and wait you in a Cloud;
 For fear we lose each other in the crowd.

PORPHYRIUS: Love is the only Coyn in Heav'n will go:
 Then take all with you, and leave none below.

BERENICE: 'Tis want of knowledge, not of Love, I fear,
 Lest we mistake when bodies are not there;
 O as a mark that I could wear a Scroul,
 With this Inscription, Berenice's Soul.

PORPHYRIUS: That needs not, sure, for none will be so bright,
 So pure, or with so small allays of light.

MAXIMIN: From my full eyes fond tears begin to start;
 Dispatch, they practise treason on my heart.
 (CD, X, 183-84)

Platonic sensibility is here exploited to achieve full sentimental effect; at first it contrasts oddly with Maximin's blunt pragmatism, later it achieves a 'local' success by producing an unlikely flow of tears in the emperor. The imagery describes the standard jargon of Platonic 'devotion', rather less transcendent than St Catherine's reliance on reason and faith. The speculation as to the fate of souls and the nature of heaven is gratuitous Baroque, evoking the world of the painter with his elaborate frescoes choked with saints, angels, cherubim and seraphim. Dryden's intentions at this point are very ambiguous. Berenice's conceit about waiting on clouds may be intended to be affecting or perhaps gently ironic; a similar conceit in Settle's Empress of Morocco where it is spoken by the villainous Empress herself, makes the tone more overtly

satiric by applying more realistic standards to poetic fiction:

But I've remov'd that Rival: thanks to me;
Her wandring Soul is mounted to a Cloud,
But you may Court her still - in Heaven - ^{if} she
Can hear so far, and you can talk so loud.³⁰

Dryden insists on maintaining Platonic decorum, despite the irreverent lunacy of Maximin and his predetermined 'puppet-show' of death. The emperor's revenges are constantly interrupted by Platonic raptures which make his impatience and involuntary weeping doubly amusing. A mixed effect like this is typical of Dryden; he expects his audience to alter their emotional allegiances within a very few lines, and writes confidently enough to betray some faith in their ability to do this. In fact, it is in such fluctuations and sudden reversals that Dryden grounds the major aesthetic appeal of the play.

Tyrannick Love concludes with a nauseating image of the Lazar. St Catherine, restored to blind faith in God, has left the stage in dignified rejection of human passion; trusting to the love of God, she has no further use for reason. Meanwhile Maximin descends to the basest of revengeful acts, stabbing his assailant Placidius with vicious glee as he grapples for the last time with the problem of human limitation,

My coward Body does my will controul;
Farewel thou base Deserter of my Soul.
I'll shake this Carcass(sic) off, and be obey'd;
Reign an Imperial Ghost without its aid.
(CD, X, 189)

Maximin looks forward to further autonomy of the will in the after-life, where his Phoenix-like transformation will

³⁰. See Five Heroic Plays, ed. B. Dobree, (1960), p. 166.

be no less aggressively performed than his military aggrandizement in life:

And shoving back this Earth on which I sit,
I'll mount --- and scatter all the Gods I hit.
(CD, X, 189)

Maximin's death, however, is not a morally satisfying denouement. It removes the element of grotesque from the human arena, but leaves vital questions about the precise nature of evil unanswered. Even Dryden's mischievous theatrical attachment to the divine powers, in the shape of angels with flaming swords, cannot resolve the basic paradox of man's nature and the question of its perfectibility. That final picture of Maximin, sitting unsteadily upon a prostrate subject whose body he uses like a pin-cushion, represents at one level a 'comic creation, a foreshadowing of MacFlecknoe'³¹, at another an image of instinctual and ritual violence quite as terrifying as the 'muggings' in A Clockwork Orange.

Never again was Dryden to push heroic wit so far into the realms of the grotesque. It invested him with an unusually sensational form of dramatic power, a power over which he felt somewhat uneasy. In Tyrannick Love the irreverence of the wit (irreverence which is not merely 'blasphemous' but which is more fundamentally subversive) all but invalidates the conventions upheld by design and plot. The element of festive disproportion ultimately defeats the moral intention of the play, since the tragic potential of martyrdom is perverted into material for a

³¹. King, p.38.

theatrical charade. Maximin becomes an embryo 'Mr Bayes' attempting to engineer impossible effects of admiration by equally implausible means. If the tragic degeneration of Maximin is the clue to Dryden's psychological interest in the play - and so much may be inferred from the Preface - then he soon found out that involvement in the passions gave rise to a satiric enquiry into their origins and manifestation. Dryden thus produced a pantomime ogre of epic proportions to lend realism to his analysis of incongruity. Tyrannick Love abounds with the quality which Dr Johnson regarded as one of Dryden's most pernicious and mysterious attributes - 'false magnificence',³².

For all that, the play is an unique, not to say remarkable achievement. It epitomizes one of Thomas Browne's contentions in his Religio Medici, where he writes,

there is no deformity but in monstrosity,
wherein notwithstanding there is a kind
of beauty, Nature so ingeniously
contriving the irregular parts, as they
become sometimes more remarkable than
the principall Fabrick.³³

Dryden's 'bizarre' in this play turns on a complex relationship between humour and pathos, and as Richard Boston reminds us in An Anatomy of Laughter,

Humour delights in the quirky, the
eccentric, the odd, the sheer variety
of human conduct.³⁴

Maximin's tragedy is built upon the full eccentricity of the 'humours' character; it is a tragedy of defective faith and

³². Johnson's Lives of the Poets, op.cit., p.193.

³³. Browne, Religio Medici and Other Works, ed.L.C.Martin, (1967), p.16.

³⁴. R.Boston, An Anatomy of Laughter, (1974), p.80.

moral obliquity which ought not to evoke a sympathetic response. However, there is a certain pathos in the irony of Maximin's blind will. Also the heroic wit which depicts Maximin's freakish improbability is an instrument of satiric pleasure as much as one of detachment, a pleasure which surpasses the feelings of superiority enjoyed by a Hobbesian audience holding themselves aloof from the morally contemptible in Maximin. The engagement experienced by the spectators of this play remains primarily intellectual, but it does involve being able to assess the false emotions governed by tyrannic pride and religious mania.

In creating a central character who spurns the benevolent 'providence of wit', or indeed any providence except that which he dictates for himself, Dryden had fashioned a 'type' who would be the symbol for the lawless powers of the imagination. Dryden was here able to use an excess of wit to redirect the audience back to the stability of the norm - in poet's terms, the search for a rational solution to poetic frenzy. Valeria is the only normative character in the play; her passions are entirely natural, and she is not governed by sick obsession. However in a world crammed with so many self-preoccupied extremists she is forced into suicide, the ultimate dramatic symbol for alienation and retreat. St Catherine's rationalism is analytically sound, but devoid of all human warmth, while Berenice's Neo-Platonism is developed into a euphemistic idealization of sex carried almost to the level of a fetish - Maximin is by no means the only 'grotesque' in this play. Dryden consistently makes his wit serve the interests of the individual characters and point up the striking contrasts

between them.

As in the grotesque of Mozart's Don Giovanni, with its living statue, Dryden produces in Tyrannick Love a dramma giocoso in which light and dark shades of humour interpenetrate and give rise to subtle distinctions in psychological analysis. Distinctions between degrees of distortion are important for judging the tone of particular scenes - Maximin behaves very differently, for example, when speaking to characters to whom he has assigned some sort of predetermined role, e.g. Porphyrius (the prospective son-in-law), Placidius (the go-between), Berenice (the abandoned wife), and Catherine (the intended mistress). The relatively static position between the Lazar and the Venus themselves - the lack of action in the 'love-story' between Maximin and St Catherine - is Dryden's deliberate attempt to keep problems of moral choice and social responsibility in the foreground, focussing a deeper engagement on the clashes of personal and public values brought about through the scenes of confrontation and debate. The artistic tensions unleashed by the explosion of wit in the final act constituted a long-term problem for Dryden, which he only solved by a closer attention to the moderating influences of sentiment and compassion. Aureng-Zebe, with its tauter control over the 'ranging' of the fancy illustrates the type of compromise which was needed after the exhilarating descent into Hades symbolized by the unwieldy coda of Tyrannick Love. However, it is as a psychological record of the satanic, more demonic forces at work in Dryden's imagination that Tyrannick Love achieves a stature and grandness of conception not encountered in any other

Restoration play. Its significance as a stepping stone to the mature, assimilated wit of the great satires is undisputed. Despite its grandiose faults, Tyrannick Love is impressive; as broad farce, or black comedy, it is a profoundly disturbing play, capable of reaching forward toward the theatre of the absurd in our own times, foreshadowing the work of Pinter, Ionesco and Albee.

Chapter 4

'The Conquest of Granada' and the Love-and-Honour Debate

The Conquest of Granada has the double distinction of being Dryden's one outstanding success in the theatre and of representing what might be considered as the epitome of the heroic play. Its scope equals and even surpasses that of Marlowe's Tamburlaine the Great, since it was originally conceived as a two-part drama, without the kind of 'padding' so frequently encountered in sequels. Its central position in the Dryden canon has remained undisputed, and its vehement energy and literary extravagance make it superior as an aesthetic experience to plays like The Indian Emperour and Aureng-Zebe. Scott, in his appraisal of the play, was quick to grasp Dryden's epic aspirations, while at the same time acknowledging that Dryden was writing popular, romantic drama:

If ... the reader can abstract his mind from the qualities now deemed essential to a play, and consider the Conquest of Granada as a piece of romantic poetry, there are few compositions in the English language, which convey a more lively and favourable display of the magnificence of fable, of language, and of action, proper to that style of composition.

(SS, IV, 6)

Scott did not find the rhetoric of The Conquest of Granada undramatic; but he perhaps felt, as non-academics of today tend to feel about Tamburlaine, that a work of such proportions could not hope to sustain the suspense and excitement familiar to us from more economical and concise plays. Dr Johnson's criticism had also paid tribute to the stature of the work, and its heady effect upon the minds of the audience:

The two parts of The Conquest of Granada are written with a seeming determination to glut the public with dramatic wonders, to exhibit in its highest elevation a theatrical meteor of incredible love and impossible valour, and to leave no room for a wilder flight to the extravagance of posterity.¹

In passing from the stylistic excesses of Tyrannick Love, Dryden seems to have carried over his love for the bizarre into the general conception of his next play, and the scenario is accordingly based on a desire to assault, astonish and stypefy the senses of the spectators. Dr Johnson and Scott are both adept at gauging the general effect of the play upon the reader or listener, but their very facility in this makes it difficult to attempt a critical analysis which lays stress on any one particular aspect of the drama. It is indisputable that in The Conquest of Granada, Dryden was aiming for a roundedness of epic design which would lend his play the authoritative resonance of broad-sweeping verse and a breathtaking illusion of scale.

However, implicit in Dr Johnson's description of 'incredible love and impossible valour' is the distinguishing feature of The Conquest of Granada. Its treatment of the subject of love, quite alien to the presentation of the same passion in All for Love, is a superb example of the stereotyping, sophistication, wit and self-parody which Dryden used to examine the conventions of his day. If The Conquest of Granada is the most overtly 'heroic' of all Dryden's productions, then its love-and-honour debates are among the most lively and picturesque in Restoration drama. Scott, with his usual meticulous care for historical

¹ Johnson's Lives of the Poets: A Selection, ed. J. P. Hardy, (1971), p. 125.

accuracy, looks to the source material Dryden used in his depiction of the rites and customs of Moorish society. Scott believes that the sociological implications of Almanzor's actions are more far-reaching than at first appears:

But it is not only the actual effects of Almanzor's valour, which appear to us unnatural, but also the extraordinary principles and motives by which those exertions are guided ... Honour and love were the sole deities worshipped by this extraordinary race, who, though their memory and manners are preserved chiefly in works of fiction, did once exist in real life, and actually conducted armies, and governed kingdoms, upon principles as strained and hyperbolic as those of the Moorish champion.

(SS, IV, 2)

Scott's emphasis here draws attention to the important point that Almanzor acts as a kind of talisman for the society he represents. Hence what is bizarre or extravagant in the hero is a reflection of the aspirations or preoccupations of those who surround him. The implication which can most clearly be drawn from the play itself is that Dryden believed (rightly or wrongly) that the customs of love-and-honour were matters of social concern to a Restoration audience, especially an audience which could be flattered by the moral vision of an ultra-heroic society taking its lead from antique chivalric codes. Certainly most of the artistic tensions which give The Conquest of Granada its powerful dynamic, stem from the ambivalent attitudes current in Dryden's day concerning the status of neo-Platonic fashions and doctrine. After The Conquest, although the heroic play still survives, the rigorous insistence on the well-worn theme of love-and-honour goes into a decline. Was Dryden merely pandering to a vogue which had reached its apogee at the turn of the decade, or was he consciously exploiting established patterns of formal romantic

debate to suit the exhibitionist nature of his heroic drama? In the ensuing chapter, I hope to show how the civilities of the love-and-honour debate were adapted to fulfil the requirements of innuendo, repartee and social satire, and to argue that the love-and-honour debate, for all its predictability, provided an essential environment for the play of wit and the mutation of style.

The persistence of this type of scene - in which three or four 'noble' characters conduct circular arguments about their moral responsibilities and the necessities of 'love' and 'duty' - can easily seem to modern readers the most tedious and redundant feature of Restoration drama. However, dissatisfaction with the debate had set in long before Dryden himself repudiated love-and-honour as the 'mistaken topics of tragedy' (W, II, 45) in his Preface to Don Sebastian (1690). Although love-and-honour was an undoubted ingredient of the 'seriousness' expected of high tragedy, a spirit of in-built mockery haunted it from the start. A strong vein of anti-Platonic sentiment from poets like Cleveland and Suckling quickly showed that, even in the 1630's, there were some who found it difficult to accept the ideal of spiritualized love as ennobling or inspiring. Despite the effectiveness of much anti-Platonic satire (e.g. Suckling's Aglaure in 1638) playwrights continued to use love-and-honour as a perpetual heroic standby, Davenant making it the entire basis for his heroic conquest-opera, The Siege of Rhodes (1658-60). However, by the time that love-and-honour had found its way into the heroic play, where it was immediately brought up against the iconoclasm of Baroque wit and the realism of the libertine ethic, it began to develop, in the hands of a playwright such as Dryden, into a much more sophisticated 'game of chess', in which the language of spiritual devotion masked

the hypocrisy of materialistic bartering.

To take these advances in nuance and stylization too far has its dangers. Some critics have been tempted to interpret the somewhat arbitrary incorporation of neo-Platonic fashion in Restoration plays as a denial of any moral concern; for instance, Thomas H. Fujimara discerns in Dryden's love-and-honour debates,

neither a spiritual nor a moral ideal
but rather a passional commitment to
sex and self-aggrandizement.²

However this is to overlook the fact that Dryden, through systematic attention to the Caroline drama of his predecessors and to the prevailing trends of his own age, was able to transform 'love-and-honour' into a singularly practical type of oratory which went beyond the scope of the often cloying or clichéd sentiments. Debate was, for Dryden, the art of rational persuasion, and his love-and-honour debates bear the stamp of an analytic, and sometimes irreverent mind, ranging over a variety of thoughts and images in pursuit of an intellectual discipline. While this makes his scenes of argumentation admirable in an academic sense, an innate sense of mockery renders them palatable aesthetically, and neo-Platonic excess is restrained by the use of gentle but consistent irony. Dryden's debate-form thrives on its own brand of self-conscious archaism (like the debate in hell in Paradise Lost, it forms a vital link between the Ancients and the Moderns), and takes delight in upholding the ideal of a commitment to rationalism, while at the same time admitting that this is beyond the capabilities of most erring mortals. It is through these didactic, not always

² T.H. Fujimara, 'The Appeal of Dryden's Heroic Plays', PMLA, LXXV, (1960), p.40.

fruitful, debate scenes that Dryden expresses his moral and political anxiety and assures his audience that the playwright is always a 'prisoner of conscience'. The debate-form expresses this concern contrapuntually, and within certain set and recognised formal limits. On the other hand, exuberance of passions and the brilliance of repartee assert values other than those suggested by the disciplines of art. The co-existence of the idealistic and the naturalistic is typical of Dryden's scrupulous 'fairness'; the 'even-handed justice' of his rhymed debates may be sublimely entertaining to some, to others profoundly irritating. However, the recurrence almost to the point of weariness, of the love-and-honour debate in his plays, suggests that Dryden needed an outlet for his deep sense of public and social responsibility (and in this he rises to Miss Barbeau's apt but over-strained comparison with Shaw)³, and that he was reluctant to let go of the instruments of control and detachment. The vitality of Dryden's engagement in the moral imperatives of his plays, and his almost obsessive introduction of debate, wherever possible, are important elements in establishing what sort of responsibility Dryden may have felt he had as a dramatist. At a time when playwrights were offering new insights into the manners and mannerisms of society, it is only right that we should enquire into the nature of Dryden's aims, and seek to understand in what ways he sought to pleasure, enlighten and perhaps sustain his fellow-men.

³. See A.T.Barbeau, The Intellectual Design of John Dryden's Heroic Plays, New Haven and London, (1970), p.3, 5, & 9.

The following chapter, then, is cast in the form of a resumé of some of the background to the neo-Platonic debates in Dryden's plays. Finally, it assesses the implications of this background for the success of The Conquest of Granada, and illustrates how Dryden could transcend the limitations of form when provided with characters who were morally 'alive', and who could turn moral fervour into kinetic energy and sexual drive

The Debt to Davenant

Dryden's indebtedness to William Davenant in his treatment of love-and-honour is unquestionable. He openly refers to the stimulus he had received from the older dramatist in the Preface to The Tempest (1667), and in the essay Of Heroic Plays (1671). However, Davenant's influence is greater than Dryden's genial compliments allow; for Davenant's concept of love-and-honour was the outcome of a life-long acquaintance with heroic poetry and with the stage, a situation which was unconsciously paralleled (or perhaps a little consciously emulated) by the young Dryden. The personal qualities which Dryden admired most in Davenant were his experience and his quick 'fancy'⁴; these were hard-earned qualities which were the product of much study as well as natural instinct. Davenant combined a practical sense of theatre with an almost mystical reverence for the didactic power of the heroic poem; from his ideology Dryden culled a great deal of imaginative vigour and theatrical impetus.

Davenant's idealized concept of the heroic had found its most intense expression in the Preface to Gondibert (1651), a poem designed as one of the great epic poems of the age, and admired by Thomas Hobbes for its 'shape of Art, health of Morality, and vigour and beauty of Expression'⁵. Many of

⁴ See W, I, 135.

⁵ Spingarn, II, 65.

Davenant's prescriptions for the epic poem lay close to the philosophies of the Cambridge Platonists, especially in his emphasis on reason. Davenant knew the value of the epic poet in reforming the moral sensibility of the nation, and often assigned a specifically spiritual role to the activity of heroic poetry. It illustrates, he writes, 'virtue in action', and educates people by showing them

Princes and Nobles, being reform'd
and made Angellicall by the Heroick.⁶

In Gondibert, Davenant trusts more to pattern and example rather than to precept, and concentrates on portraying figures who epitomise the virtues of 'heroic action'. Davenant claims that a lively depiction of heroic conduct is indispensable for raising the moral tone of society:

And since Nature hath made us prone
to Imitation, by which we equall the
best or the worst, how much those
Images of Action prevail upon our
mindes, which are delightfully drawn
by Poets.⁷

The moral necessity for a character like Dryden's Almanzor is already implicit in these words, however much an Almanzor may seek to upset the status quo. Davenant uncompromisingly asserts a notion of the heroic which is based on ideals of admiration and spiritual conversion. It is these values which still reverberate throughout The Conquest of Granada.

Heroic action in Davenant becomes the outward manifestation or symbol of inner spirit, combining the moral goal of 'vertue'

⁶· ibid., 45.

⁷· ibid., 36-7.

with the inner dynamism or virtu of the hero⁸. An inner spirit of magnanimity, generosity and courtesy become directed outwards towards the courtly ideals of love-and-honour, a quest for 'truth' which sanctifies the actions of the heroic warrior⁹. The Cambridge Platonists had acknowledged a close link between external conduct and religious faith, using the hallowed powers of reason as a bridge between the two. The recurrent emphasis on heroic 'action' in the serious drama of the Restoration incorporates the recognition of a vitalizing principle, the power of the heroic to perform miracles and reconcile the divisions between body and soul, reason and passion. Heroic action can thus be interpreted as an energizing of inner moral integrity, an integrity which can be seen as a unifying aspect of character. Even secular action - the self-aggrandizement of the Baroque hero - may be set within the context of a spiritual and moral framework, a rationalization of individual behaviour which is motivated by the benevolent piety of Christian doctrine. Thus in The Conquest of Granada, Dryden demonstrates how Almanzor's dynamism is capable of being seen in two lights; first of all as pure appetitive man 'in motion', later as a force for harmony and supreme good. This blending of the spiritual and moral with the materialistic philosophy of Hobbes became a crucial challenge for men like Dryden and Davenant. Each solved the problem in his own way.

Davenant's solution was to make the spiritual goal of the

⁸. For a comprehensive account of the differences between 'virtue' and virtu, see R. Nevo, The Dial of Virtue, Princeton, (1963), esp. pp. 80-87, and J. A. Mazzeo, Renaissance and Seventeenth-Century Studies, (1964), esp. pp. 168-208.

⁹. For a thorough and competent account of the varying types of heroism acceptable to seventeenth-century thought, see E. M. Waith's comprehensive study, Ideas of Greatness, (1971), esp. pp. 1-34.

Christian's desire for self-improvement accessible to the more secular traditions of courtly chivalry. The reason he gives in the Preface to Gondibert is simply this:

because the Principles of our Religion
conduce to more explicable vertue, to
plain demonstrative justice, and even to
Honor ... then any other Religion that
e'er assembled men to Divine Worship.¹⁰

In Davenant the love-and-honour debate becomes symbolic of the most enlightened tenets of Christian humanism; the purpose of debate is to unravel the complications and dispel the obscurities which prevent man from allying himself with the divine nature. The purpose of the love-and-honour contention is to achieve clarity and establish a true relationship between motive and action. Implicit in this quest for balance and moral certainty is the ordeal of the passions; without purgation by the dominant passions of jealousy, love, fear and revenge, characters who insist on their own moral heroism are little better than self-deceivers. By the time that Dryden came to write his heroic plays, a stronger vein of scepticism was allowed to permeate the issues at stake in the love-and-honour controversy. As the debate itself became symbolic of a vital social congruity, an 'order in variety' in which the highest ethical questions of private will and public morality could be discussed and delicately weighed, the suspicion arose that such idealism was misplaced, and was even totally unsuited to the needs of a materialistic society. Dryden treated the love-and-honour debate with less reverence than Davenant had done, and used it as a means of analysing more closely the relationship between motive and action. Whereas Davenant's view of human psychology is often simplistic and dictated by the almost

¹⁰. Singarn, II, 9.

allegorical power of moral idealism, Dryden's is wittily alert to discrepancies in individual behaviour, noting the dissimulative habits which people use when they are trapped in an emotional quandary. Dryden introduces debates into his plays because they are potentially a perfect setting for the conservative assumptions - viz. propriety, decency, decorum - upon which society thrives. He then settles down to watch how characters will introduce disproportion and incongruity into this environment, thus subverting the very order they seek to uphold. This complexity of attitude is possible only in a tightly-structured rhythmical debate in which neo-Platonic conventions and libertine wit enjoy a new, largely satirical relationship.

The antithesis between the idealized attitude to love-and-honour and its satirical, reductive counterpart can be traced to Davenant's varied treatment of the theme. When his heroic vein was high, as in Gondibert, Davenant ruthlessly excluded the possibility of ridicule. His strictest concept of heroic virtue is to be found in his 'opera' The Siege of Rhodes. Davenant took himself quite seriously when he described his subject:

The Story represented ... is Heroical
... intelligibly convey'd to advance
the Characters of Vertue in the Shapes
of Valour and Conjugal Love.¹¹

This austerity of design is borne out by the conduct of the play, which sets out to prove that 'Virtues force all vicious pow'r controles'¹². The hero and heroine, Soliman and Ianthé,

¹¹. Davenant, The Siege of Rhodes, ed. A-M. Hedbäck, Stockholm, (1973), p.4.

¹². ibid., p.98.

are not related by marriage, but are potentially adulterous; their heroism is steadfastly moral, and their 'virtues' (humility, generosity, forbearance), are proof against the corrosive jealousy of their respective spouses, Roxolana and Alphonso. The Siege of Rhodes works best when seen in the context of Gondibert. Gondibert suffers from an unenviable stiffness, which is largely the result of its being overburdened with the responsibility of moral design. The Siege of Rhodes, although arranged in dramatic episodes, suffers because of similar limitations in moral outlook. Ianthé's charm and Soliman's magnificence are like echoes from some antique fairy-tale; in asserting the supreme force of heroic and conjugal valour Davenant has largely overlooked the psychological pressures of his times. The Siege of Rhodes has no humour, and Davenant had significantly abandoned the composition of Gondibert just when he had complicated his serious 'plot' with the introduction of subsidiary characters and a lower, more farcical brand of narrative¹³.

The two plays of Davenant's which tell us much more about the background to the love-and-honour debates in Dryden's heroic drama are Love and Honour (1634) and the tragic-comedy The Platonick Lovers (1635). Both plays examine the relationship

¹³. In the last completed canto of Gondibert (III,6), Davenant introduces the subsidiary episode of Dalga, the coloured courtesan, who lures Goltho, one of BIRTHA's numerous suitors, to her boudoir. Although Davenant also stopped writing his epic because he was sentenced to execution (see his Recantation) I believe that his epic design had by now become too diffuse for him to sustain any further interest in the story of Gondibert and BIRTHA. The introduction of satirical material just prior to leaving off the project would suggest that the heroic poem did not offer Davenant an outlet for every facet of his personality. See the canto in question - a supreme essay in miniature comedy - in Gondibert, ed. D.F.Gladish, (1971), pp.241-50.

between the sexes rather more acutely than The Siege of Rhodes and reflect a revival of the conventions of Renaissance Petrarchanism, in which the hero seeks a moral absolute in the person of his distant beloved. Love and Honour, or The Courage of Love, is a brooding Fletcherian romance in which three noble warriors contest in generosity for the affections of a captive heiress. The play is heroic in tone, recalling the 'high seriousness' of Chaucer's The Knight's Tale, but the characterization is immediately more appealing than in The Siege of Rhodes. Davenant examines love-and-honour intellectually throughout a series of debates which quickly challenge the ethical responsibilities of amour courtois. The opening scene includes a strong interchange between the young Duke Prospero and his newly-acquired captive, Evandra:

PROSPERO: It is the sad pre-eminence of your
 Exemplar birth and beauty, to confer
 Honour on him that is your conqueror.
 EVANDRA: Honour? Is that the word that hath so long
 Betray'd the emulous world, and fool'd the noblest
 race
 Of men into a vex'd and angry death?
 If 'twere a vertue 'twould not strive t'inthrall
 And thus distress the innocent.¹⁴

Davenant encourages a spirit of enquiry here which he never really permits in The Siege of Rhodes. In Love and Honour Davenant allows his heroine to challenge the assumption that love-and-honour are really ennobling ideals. Although comedy is not openly encouraged, there is one moment in the climactic scene of the play in which a hint of parody is introduced to point up the needless intricacy of the love-and-honour convention. In the central set-piece (Act III, scene 4) Alvaro,

¹⁴ Davenant, Dramatic Works, 5 vols., ed. J. Maidment and W. H. Logan, Edinburgh (1872-74), III, 103-4.

Duke of Savoy, and Prospero, his general, both offer to lay down their lives for that of the heroine, who is sentenced to death. The characters embroil themselves in a potentially amusing plethora of courtly obligations:

ALVARO: Use her
 With such respective holiness as thou
 Wouldst do the reliques of a saint enshrin'd,
 And teach thy rougher manners tenderness
 Enough to merit her society.
 PROSPERO: What need this conjuration, sir? I mean
 To die for her, that I may save your life.
 A brave design! dissuade me not. Though I
 Fail oft in choice of fitting enterprise,
 I know this is becoming, sir, and good.
 ALVARO: Thou die for her? Alas, poor Prospero.
 That will not satisfy, the shaft aims here;
 Or if it would, I do not like thou should'st
 Thus press into a cause that I reserve
 To dignify my self. Urge it no more.
 PROSPERO: What am I fit for then, if not to die?¹⁵
 EVANDRA: How am I worthy of this noble strife?

Here consideration for the male ego entirely overpowers any opinion which Evandra might have on the matter; 'honour' is clearly a gloss for self-interested glory, as Alvaro's social snubbing of Prospero indicates. Again Evandra's questioning is ironic, as she realises that she is simply a worthy 'cause' which her lovers consider fit to evoke the appropriate sentiments of 'heroic' self-sacrifice. Davenant clearly lets us see how much spiritual pride can lurk under the semblance of generosity.

In his heroic plays Dryden takes little discrepancies of love-and-honour even further. In the scene above, Alvaro has in effect warned his friend not to usurp his 'virtue' by taking advantage of his death to further his own cause with his mistress. This is a situation which often occurs in Restoration comedy but Dryden introduces subtle variants of it into his serious plays.

¹⁵. ibid., 146-7.

In Act Five of The Indian Emperour, Dryden engineers a similar build-up of protestations and counter-statements. In this instance the male figure is helpless and the contention is left to the women (a feature which is characteristic of Dryden's love-and-honour debates). The vengeful Almeria holds her sister Cydaria hostage in a tower, and threatens to kill her for daring to love the same man that she loves (Cortez). Almeria's designs on her sister's lover are purely mercenary, but she disguises their true nature in the beguiling civilities of polite conversation:

CYDARIA: But what's my Crime?

ALMERIA: -----'Tis Loving where I Love.

CYDARIA: Your own example does my act approve.

ALMERIA: 'Tis such a Fault I never can forgive.

(CD, IX, 107)

Dryden hugely enjoys making her assume virtuous poses and excel in the quickfire repartee of love-and-honour banter:

ALMERIA: Your Father, with his Life, has lost his Throne:
Your Countries Freedom and Renown are gone.

Honour requires your Death: you must obey.

CYDARIA: Do you dye first; and shew me then the way.

ALMERIA: Should you not follow, my Revenge were lost.

CYDARIA: Then rise again, and Fright me with your Ghost.

ALMERIA: I will not trust to that, since Death I chuse,
I'll not leave you that Life which I refuse:

If Death's a pain, it is not less to me;

And if 'tis nothing, 'tis no more to thee.

(CD, IX, 108)

Dryden experiments deliberately with a comedy of manners as both women argue whose prerogative it is to die first; the naïvety of the reasoning is a mask for the quick-wittedness of the speakers, who bait each other with a ferocity not unlike that of Goneril and Regan.

Dryden's cultivation of this particular brand of piquancy could well have developed from a familiarity with the neo-Platonic satire included in certain Caroline plays, notably Suckling's Aglaure and Davenant's The Platonick Lovers. The

latter provides a scathing but light-hearted examination of the fads and idiosyncracies of Platonic devotion. Davenant's drama casts ridicule as much on male 'Platonicks' as upon female ones, and the plot is concerned with the fastidious decorums of Theander and Eurithea, two noble precieux, and the effect of their Platonic passion upon the normal sexual appetites of Ariola and Phylomont, a couple who desire to marry for 'natural ends'. Davenant takes the attitude throughout that 'Platonicks' may be tolerated provided that their doctrine does not pervert the procreative instinct. He foreshadows Dryden in his sensitive observation of the effeminate mannerisms and effete diction adopted by those of the Platonic school. Preciosité and a mock-religiosity is invoked to give Platonic passion its aura of intellectual superiority; the jargon of vows, piety, saintliness and inviolable chastity decorously screens the timid sensibility from the physical reality of sex. Theander, Davenant's male 'Platonick', is a finely-drawn portrait of a hypocrite who conceals the brutishness of his own desires beneath a veneer of frigid ecstasies on the subject of spiritual love. He counsels his friend Phylomont on love-making with the advice:

Beget reflections in each others' eyes;
 So you increase not children but yourselves
 A better, and more guiltless progeny;
 These immaterial creatures cannot sin.¹⁶

Prudery reaches its height, however, in the scene in which Phylomont tells Theander of his intentions towards Ariola:

PHYLOMONT: Your sister I would marry, sir, and then
 As lords and princes use, that love their wives:
 Lye with her.

¹⁶. ibid., II, 43.

THEANDER: You are too masculine!
 Name not those words again: you blast me with
 Your breath. Poor ruffians in their drink, that dwell
 In suburb alleys and in smokey lanes
 Are not so rude.¹⁷

Theander's equanimity is later upset by the effects of a potion which induces a burning fit of lust, and he is eventually forced to admit that he needs marriage himself as a means of channelling his incontinence. There are some amusing scenes for Theander and Eurithea masquerading as shepherd and shepherdess, apeing pastoral innocence and virginity, but the play ends with a triumphant vindication of 'natural' love and the restoration of normal relations between the sexes.

Buonateste, a wise apothecary who foreshadows Astragon in Gondibert and Sidrophel in Hudibras, laments that the name of Plato has ever been soiled with this 'court calumny', and the pungent moral of the play is that

Whining and puling love is fit for eunuchs,
 And for old revolted nuns.¹⁸

Davenant saw that to make the 'Virtue' of the love-and-honour debate attractive, his characters would either have to advertise it themselves, or submit to a certain amount of ridicule. If those who practise virtue are not seen to be pleased with themselves, there will be little incitement to others to follow their example. However, the self-congratulatory tone which is characteristic of the lovers of virtue and duty in most Caroline and Restoration plays is an ideal target for satiric deflation, and in Dryden the love-and-honour debate enters what might be called its 'decadent' phase, in which

¹⁷. ibid., 48.

¹⁸. ibid., 104.

Platonic raptures are subject to habitual invasion by mock-heroic and burlesque. The anti-Platonic sentiments were those which took account of the outmodedness of medieval chivalry, in an age in which civil bloodshed and dictatorship had severely shaken national confidence. Davenant's Siege of Rhodes in many ways sums up the ambivalence of dramatists' feelings towards loyalty, piety, and magnanimity, all the chivalric values traditionally associated with romantic love. His prologue to the Second Part (1659) betrays some anxiety about the topicality of his subject-matter:

For you shall hear such course complaints of Love,
Such silly sighing, as no more will move
Your Passion then Dutch Madrigals can doe,
When Skippers, With wet Beards, at Wapping wooe.¹⁹

The intrusion of the burlesque image - 'Dutch madrigals' - is significant, and yet, in the last lines of the opera, honour is celebrated in a grandiose paean which still seems to assert the validity of the old standards:

Honour, adorn'd in such a Poet's song
As may prescribe to Fame
What loyal Lovers name,
Shall farr be spread, and shall continue long.²⁰

The Ephesian Matron

Dryden, no less than Davenant, was guilty of perpetrating the myth of Platonic fulfilment. The Conquest of Granada introduces the formidable Spanish queen, Isabella, whose prime function is to attest the durability of the heroic view of life:

¹⁹. Davenant, The Siege of Rhodes, op.cit., p.49.

²⁰. ibid., p.100.

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.
 (SS, IV, 128)

However, there is sufficient evidence, both within the play and beyond it, to suggest that Platonic love more readily produces neurotic states of sexual anaesthesia and morbid frustration, and that a belief in such truisms is detrimental to a healthy state of mind.

An interesting analogue to the lofty debates in the heroic plays is to be found in Walter Charleton's The Ephesian Matron (1668). An amalgam of short prose romance and philosophical treatise, it analyzes the origins of the sexual drive, the effects of the passion of love, and the whole vogue for the love 'styled Platonical'. Charleton's sceptical wit is in places highly reminiscent of Dryden's, and his treatment of this somewhat dubious tale from The Satyricon of Petronius is deftly orchestrated by a range of tone and nuance that immediately indicates a parallel with Dryden's rhymed debates.

The story itself - an elementary tale of a young widow who succumbs over-hastily to the blandishments of a soldier who finds her unconscious on her husband's tomb - is of less importance than Charleton's expostulations and reflections upon the moral and philosophical issues it raises. He even includes observations on the effects of strong drink upon the animal spirits for the benefit of his medical colleagues. Charleton's prevailing humour throughout is delicate irony; his style is deliciously mannered and he is never uncharitable towards the fair sex. He juxtaposes a mechanistic, even bestial, interpretation of the passions with an unexpectedly sympathetic portrait of the young widow, so that there is an almost continuous

tension between scientific fact and literary embellishment. Charleton expects us to be cynically aware that 'Natural Inclination' provides the basis for the story, yet hopes we will find the Ephesian Matron herself 'a beautifull and good-natured Creature'. (EM, Sig.^V.A) The tone vacillates between emotional engagement and philosophic dismissal, and Charleton shows considerable ingenuity in inventing euphemisms for the sordid facts of the story. The result is a texture of great blandness in which lurking satiric malice is beautifully deflected by the impeccable taste of the raillery.

The Epistle Dedicatory sets the tone, and Charleton displays his Chaucerian addiction to a complex narrative persona. In the manner of the Prologue to the Franklin's Tale he explains that the pleasant nature of his task vastly outweighs his own skill, and fears that owing to his own morose humour he has dressed the tale in too 'sad colours, and plain useful garments' (EM, Sig.^r.A2). However in doing this he indirectly assaults the Platonic school, for he conforms with:

the mode of the time, wherein the
greatest levity and licentiousness
is commonly wrapt up in the most
austere looks and sober formality
of dress.

(EM, Sig.^r.A2^v)

He then passes on to an ironic vindication of his Matron, whom he affects to distinguish from the female Platonic tribe of modern times; she is 'of old Epicurus' faith' and is a disciple of instinct, sense and nature (also Hobbesian qualities). Charleton soon reveals that 'modern Philosophicall Ladies' are the real butt of his scorn when he asserts that the amours of his Matron 'tend to the propagation of somewhat more Material, than the simple Ideas of vertue'. (EM, Sig.^v.A4^v). Later on when the Matron has undergone her 'sudden metamorphosis' of

love for the soldier (hitherto a complete stranger) Charleton expands his tonal range to incorporate a simulated naïvety on the subject of women, and upon how easily they may be believed:

There is not an Attribute their
 Excellencies challenge even in their
 own opinion (which all allow to be
 favourable enough) but I am ready to
 give it them: nor can I doubt the
 verity and weight of any thing they
 say, but admire and believe them as
 Oracles. My Ears cannot so soon drink
 in their promises, as my Faith swallows
 them down, for Sacramental and inviolable
 obligations. If I hear any Lady but say,
 (though she use no protestations) that
 she either hath been, or will be constant
 and firm to her Servant; I am ready
 instantly to believe and swear, the
 Heavens themselves even in their
 substance are more subject to
 Alteration, that Nature her self can
 sooner change her Course, her Laws, and
 run into the confusion of her primitive
 Chaos; than she be removed from the
 Object, upon which she hath placed her
 Love. When any Widow sighs and weeps at
 the funeral of her Husband; I compassionate
 the Reality and Profoundness of her Grief,
 am afraid she should despair, and destroy
 her self; and I sooner expect to see her
 Husband revived, than her to entertain
 any the least thought of admitting
 another into her bed.

(EM, 36-7)

Charleton is a past master at purveying a persuasive brand of ironic panegyric, in which the graceful flattery of court hyperbole mingles with the grand heroic assertion of the rhyming plays. He has a fine ear for rhetorical effect, and a fastidious nicety of diction, features which correspond exactly with the stylistic aims of Dryden's rhymed debates. Charleton exalts his theme until it is made to appear crucial to the unfolding of Divine Providence, and the orderly conduct of the universe. His use of techniques already perfected by the comic dramatists and the writers of prose dedications (especially Dryden) indicates the extent to which a Restoration writer was expected to be proficient in a number of styles,

and how literary artifice and 'dissembling' could co-exist in harmony with the factual demands of more lucid, scientific prose.

Charleton's major attack on the extravagance of the neo-Platonic mode is reserved for the appended discourse 'Of Love'. He claims that Platonic love is no more and no less than simple 'desire of different sex'. He follows Hobbes closely in attributing the good of an action to a mere consideration of personal profit, especially in its relation to pain and pleasure. Rochester, in his A Satyr against Reason and Mankind (1675-6) was to give an apt summary of the Hobbesian premiss upon which social analysts such as Charleton based their observations:

Look to the bottom of his vast design,
Wherein man's wisdom, power, and glory join:
The good he acts, the ill he does endure, ²¹
'Tis all from fear, to make himself secure.

In the context of The Ephesian Matron fruition, or copulation, is the supreme good coveted by mankind, and Charleton considers it affectation to distinguish between lust (passion directed universally) and love (passion directed at a particular person). Charleton's ruthlessly naturalistic bias leads him to favour the implications of primitivism at play in Hobbesian society; consequently he rejects entirely the mysticism of Platonic love, and disqualifies the model relationship between Socrates and his pupil Alcibiades by claiming that,

The Continent have the Passion they
contain, as much, and more than they
that satiate the Appetite,
(EM, 66)

²¹. Rochester, Complete Poems, ed. D.M. Vieth, New Haven and London, (1974), p.99.

which is a direct citation from Hobbes, 'the greatest Philosopher of our age',²². Charleton's rigid insistence that the passions govern our actions spells defeat for the neo-Platonic ideal of sublimating and purifying the affections; consider the suave ease with which he now demonstrates how the new Platonism is not merely distinct from that of the Ancients, but is in fact a gross distortion of the old:

First,our Platoniques are generally of different sexes; whereas Socrates and his Darling,Alcibiades,were both Masculine. Secondly ours are commonly both Young,and in the Canicular or scorching years of life:but Socrates was Ancient,and superannuated for the incitements of wanton desires. Thirdly, Ours are generally far short of that Wisdom and those Virtues,that are requisite to engender the like Excellencies in others. Again,Ours pretend to love,because they would Learn,not Teach,and the Male Platonique (forsooth) is ever admiring and extolling the content he takes in contemplating the Idea's of those rare Virtues,which he discovers daily in the Female while she (good modest Soul) is as much transported with those perfections of Mind,she discerns in Him: when,indeed,those Virtues and Excellences are kept so close,that no person else can perceive any such in either of them. Lastly,Ours, (especially the Women) are for the mostpart Married to others,and so ought to propagate Virtue (if they have so much as to spare) rather in their Husbands and children, than in Strangers; but,alas! those Relations are despised,in comparison of the noble Lover,who alone deserves to be made wiser and better. I could reckon up many other Differences more,but these are enough to let you see,what vast disparity is betwixt the Platonique Love of the Ancients,and that of Modern Puritan Lovers; and how little reason they have to usurp either the example of Socrates, or authority of Plato,for their patronage.

(EM, 66-7)

²². See Hobbes, The English Works, 11 vols., ed. W. Molesworth, (1839-45), IV, 50.

Charleton's critique is clear-sighted, wry and humorous, with just a touch of moral anxiety creeping in. By comparison, Collier's celebrated attacks on the immorality and profaneness of the stage at the turn of the century seem episodic, ill-argued and ham-fisted. Charleton's little pastiche of love-and-honour has stylistic affinities with the ironic techniques of the drama, especially in the see-sawing of mood, and the introduction of material which is erudite and surprising. The conclusion of the tale is treated with the grim humour which its macabre twist requires, and the widow sanctions the mutilation of her 'dearest All' with a gaiety that recalls the festivity of Dryden's villainesses. The mood of the tale is one of scepticism rather than malice; the effrontery of the lampoon is altogether avoided, and Charleton relies on a keen dramatic sense to enliven the more lurid aspects of the story. Its moral - if it has one - underlines its relationship to other treatments of love-and-honour in the poetry and drama of the period; Charleton unquestioningly accepts that Nature and Inclination are universal gods, and despises, yet half-pities, human subjection to them. Although the tale itself offers few opportunities for heroic high style, Charleton enjoys making his widow justify herself according to the tenets of courtly behaviour. Like Iras in All for Love, Charleton's widow is a pragmatist, and will accord a dead hero no more than his due:

Well then,saith this Good-Woman; since
the body of the best and greatest of
mortals,is but a lump of Clay, after
the departure of the soul ... why
should not I dispense with the

Formality of posthume Respects to
the putrifying Corps of my deceased
Husband, and make use of it for the
preservation of my living Friend ...²³
(EM, 77)

In The Ephesian Matron, Charleton takes his standards of reference from the heroic drama, and from the philosophic bias of anti-Platonic satire. By suspending love-and-honour between extremes of heroic chivalry and anti-heroic bestiality he achieves a curiously lucid perspective in which the futility of human desires is not seen as merely disgusting, and yet a Hobbesian view of nature may still be justified. Its style recalls the mixed wit of Dryden's bizarre, and it casts deeper shadows over the implications of love-and-honour in some of Dryden's more apparently frivolous plays, notably Tyrannick Love and Marriage à la Mode. By understanding the moral abyss which Charleton so much feared would be the result of the Platonic vogue, we can gain new insights into the raptures of couples like Berenice and Porphyrius and Leonidas and Palmyra. The Reparteers of Cat and Puss

Dryden's first essay in the love-and-honour debate was in his tragi-comedy The Rival Ladies (1663), in which two speakers, Julia and Gonsalvo, spark off the characteristic war of words about the toils of love and duty (Act IV, scene i). Thereafter he used it primarily as a stock ingredient of his early plays. notably The Indian Emperour and Tyrannick Love, while after

²³. In Act Five of All for Love Iras points out to Cleopatra that the dead Antony is no more than 'a lump of senseless clay, / The leavings of a soul' (V, 127). Dryden often took a perverse delight in the irony of death. His early Elegy on the Death of the Lord Hastings comments in a similar way on the indignity of dying, and counsels Hastings' widow to copy the 'ideas' of her husband's nobility as a substitute for his mourned absence.

The Conquest of Granada it appeared with much less frequency, occurring in much-modified form in Aureng-Zebe and All for Love. In most of his rhyming debate scenes Dryden deliberately courts a suspension of moral values, giving a mildly unhinged quality to the atmosphere generated. The introduction of passionate characters who converge in jealous debate provides excitement, and prepares the audience for a virtuosity of ideas which was to become Dryden's most envied talent. As a representative example of a typical Dryden debate, I have chosen one from the comedy, Marriage à la Mode (1673). Several of Dryden's favourite devices are in evidence here, especially the way in which a subversive libertine ethic is presented in conflict (and simultaneous interpenetration) with the sexually chaste love-and-honour tradition. In the somewhat pedestrian subplot of the play Dryden charts the progress of the childhood sweethearts, Leonidas and Palmyra, from a pastoral upbringing to their adoption into the court. He gives an intriguing and often amused account of their awkward acclimatization to the tenets of Platonic decorum. Such decorum (as is habitual in the rhymed plays) inevitably comes into conflict with natural feeling, and as the pair become further removed from their pastoral environment they become accordingly more suspicious of each other, in subconscious compliance with the atmosphere of dissimulation and unease which they find at the usurper's court. In Act IV Dryden works up a fine quarrel scene between the lovers, along conventional lines, but emphasising their confusion of values. Both are playing roles in which neither is at home, and stilted diction (particularly from the female) masks true motives in the language of compliment and calculation:

LEONIDAS: Fortune, once more has set the balance right:
 First, equalled us, in lowness and in height.
 Both of us have so long, like gamesters, thrown,
 Till fate comes round, and gives to each his own.
 As fate is equal, so may love appear:
 Tell me, at least, what I must hope or fear?

PALMYRA: After so many proofs, how can you call
 My love in doubt? Fear nothing; and hope all.
 Think what a prince, with honour, may receive,
 Or I may give, without a parent's leave.

LEONIDAS: You give, and then restrain the grace you show;
 As ostentatious priests, when souls they woo,
 Promise their heaven to all, but grant to few.
 But do for me, what I have dared for you:
 I did no argument from duty bring:
 Duty's a name, and love's a real thing.

PALMYRA: Man's love may, like wild torrents, overflow;
 Woman's as deep, but in its banks must go.
 My love is mine, and that I can impart;
 But cannot give my person, with my heart.

LEONIDAS: Your love is then no gift:
 For, when the person it does not convey,
 'Tis to give gold, and not to give the key.
 (SS, IV, 338)

Dryden here employs his favourite trick of using the similitude-debate (i.e. the use of such comparisons as 'you are like an ostentatious priest' or 'love is like a river') as a metaphoric extension equivalent at times to sexual innuendo. Leonidas makes an indirect bid for free love in an appropriately worldly fashion - 'Tis to give gold, and not to give the key', - and accuses Palmyra of being a jilt. Palmyra is entirely typical of one of Dryden's heroines of 'strict virtue'; she makes cheeseparing distinctions between love in abstract and the person who loves, which makes her passion virtually worthless. Her exhortation to 'fear nothing; and hope all' ironically highlights the sexual starvation she enforces on her lover; she enjoys a Narcissistic vein of dissembling which is well illustrated in one of Sir Charles Sedley's ballads, Walking among thick Shades alone. Sedley tells a familiar story of disappointed love, but here it is the nymph who seduces the swain with no other purpose in mind than that of displaying the agility of her dissimulative

technique. She exults in being able to subject her lover to the formalities of artifice, but Sedley makes it plain that in compromising her seeming artlessness by exposing her own hypocrisy the nymph is in fact transgressing the social code:

She seem'd of her new Captive glad;
Proud of his Bondage He,
No Lover, sure a Prospect had
Of more Felicity.

But the false Maid, or never lov'd,
Or gave so quickly o're;
E're his was to the height improv'd,
Her Kindness was no more.

Even her Dissemblings she let fall,
And made him plainly see,
That though his Heart she did enthrall,
Her own was ever free.²⁴

The nymph exhibits a perverse delight in an unashamed moral nakedness far more subversive than her actual nakedness would be; in Sedley's eyes she might drop her petticoats but not her 'dissemblings', and her artifice is exposed as little else than mean trickery.

Although Dryden employs the debate-form principally to explore the contest between the heart and the will, and the moral questions of necessity and choice this entails, he frequently turns the formality of the debate against itself, using it as an inverted reflection of the passions and appetites which are uppermost in the speakers' minds. This is why so much depends on the often ephemeral sallies of wit and repartee. Dryden dramatized the courtship struggles of society in similar terms to the contest of wits between the

²⁴. Sedley, Poetical and Dramatic Works, 2 vols., ed. V. de S. Pinto (1928), I, 24.

'gay couple' of Restoration comedy. The added formality of debate, which enabled speakers to harmonize repartee into the well-ordered steps of a dance, or to move rhetorical position like pieces on a chess-board, was Dryden's mode of giving ritualized expression to primitive passions, in which language, manners, and motives were all presented in a succinctly methodized form. This is why the sallies of wit so characteristic of comedy are much more closely allied with the patterns of love-and-honour than might at first appear; in Dryden's debates we witness what D.R.M. Wilkinson has called

a subordination of human aims and motives to the local success of the repartee.²⁵

A work which is of singular value in helping to establish the appeal of the love-and-honour debate, and the direction which it usually takes, is Butler's mini-satire, Repartees between Cat and Puss at a Caterwauling in the Modern Heroic Way. Somewhat more specialized than the anti-Platonic episode of the knight and the widow in Hudibras, the Repartees provides a very detailed account of the failings of the romantic rhymed play. Although it cannot be accurately dated (John Wilders places it anywhere between 1665 and 1675)²⁶ it seems likely from its style and tone that several of Dryden's heroic plays had already appeared.

In his poem Butler infuses strong ironic elements into what is fundamentally a burlesque situation; the result is, for Butler, unusually suave and mannered. He achieves this by a precision of tone which renders his appropriation of stylish iambics - the

²⁵. D.R.M. Wilkinson, The Comedy of Habit, Leiden (1964), p.71.

²⁶. See Butler, Hudibras Parts I and II, and Other Selected Writings, ed. J. Wilders and H. de Quehen, (1973), p.306.

'Modern Heroic Way' - remarkably fluent. Butler neatly parodies the formal composition of the Platonic love-debate, particularly such items as the tendency towards self-analysis, the elliptical oratory, and the introduction of alien ideas and figures of speech. His mock-heroic elevates the predatory sex-urge of a randy alleycat (Puss), to the level first of romance-narrative epic (lines 1 - 40), then to that of the grandiose heroic drama (lines 40 - 122). Sustained throughout is the awareness of underlying sadism and brutality - the 'unfeigned realities of love' so much insisted upon by Sir Hudibras's lady²⁷. Within a very small compass Butler touches on central libertine issues reminiscent of the questioning behind the anti-Platonic poetry of Suckling and Cleveland. The nature of passion, the love-dream and the erotic fancy, the relation of pleasure to pain, and the concepts of suffering and reward are some of the major themes handled in the poem, as well as other questions more specifically linked to libertine tradition, viz., why should sexual possession entail the decline of appetite?, or, why should passion be satisfactory only in anticipation? In his treatment of these matters, Butler usually inverts the expected response, with the result that the debaters, Cat and Puss, are continually putting each other out of joint and distracting themselves from a discussion of those issues which are of the highest importance to their mutual satisfaction. The level of satire is high, as in Charleton's The Ephesian Matron, and is perfectly assimilated to the movement of the heroic couplet, which ensures a surface texture of infinite flexibility, most eloquent when voicing the ironies inherent in

²⁷. See ibid., p.118.

Platonic jargon. Humour and irony are here chiefly dependent upon the reader's capacity to keep in mind the realism of the initial situation, concentrating meanwhile upon a highly allusive texture.

Butler exploits to the full the vogue for metaphysical love-paradox, and the spirit of intellectual enquiry at work in all Platonic lovers to observe and moralize upon the dichotymies arising from discrepant emotions. Thus Puss's nocturnal dreamings (which conclude the mock-epic, narrative section of the poem) culminate in a decorous euphemism for seminal emission - nevertheless in language still highly appropriate to this antithetical tendency:

And, as in dreams love's raptures are more taking
Than all their actual enjoyment waking,
His amorous passion grew to that extreme
His dream himself awaked him from his dream.
(RCP, 223)

In pursuit of the object of his sex-vision, Puss assumes a heroic vigour which suggests nothing so clearly as a modern animated cartoon, and he moves like greased lightning:

With that he leapt
Up from the lazy couch on which he slept,
And, winged with passion, through his known purlieu
Swift as an arrow from a bow he flew.
(RCP, 223)

He finds his beloved with little searching, and without ceremony, assaults her with his customary physical dynamism. Shortly after this, - Butler leaves the precise moment tantalizingly vague - Cat protests, and with this is concluded the 'heroic action' of the poem. From the debate which ensues it becomes increasingly obvious that the Cat seeks a rational explanation for the nature of Puss's assault on her; having suspended 'love-making' just at the crucial point of penetration, the moment seems well-chosen to discuss the pain and pleasure antithesis which has just arisen.

The Cat complains, not of penetration itself, but merely of

the fact that Puss has hurt her; also his lack of ceremony (bed first, words after) implies a discourteous attitude to generally acceptable standards of decorum. In paying his debt to pleasure he is violating, not her honour, but simply this very decorum. Predictably, these standards, when voiced by the Cat after the manner of a true Platonic heroine, are then exposed as mere pretension. This inversion of values foreshadows very pertinently the treatment of sexual mores in Pope's The Rape of the Lock and Gray's Upon the Death of a Favourite Cat drowned in a Tub of Gold Fishes, where Belinda and Selima, respectively, combine the heroic aspirations of the tragedy-queen with the affectation of the society belle. Butler scores off the Restoration instability of meaning in creating a precarious see-sawing between the respectable and the 'mannerly obscene'. In the following passage, Butler makes the time-honoured 'war-of-love' metaphor serve the interests of sexual innuendo:

PUSS: Your wounds are but without, and mine within;
 You wound my heart, and I but prick your skin;
 And while your eyes pierce deeper than my claws
 You blame th'effect of which you are the cause ...

... CAT: The darts of love, like lightning, wound within,
 And, though they pierce it, never hurt the skin;
 They leave no marks behind them where they fly,
 Though through the tenderest part of all, the eye;
 But your sharp claws have left enough to show
 How tender I have been, how cruel you.

(RCP, 225)

By making physical assault the mainspring of the debate (note the play on both literal and figurative meanings of 'tender' in the last line of the above passage) Butler undercuts any attempt by the felines to prettify emotion and dress appetite up as passion, despite the coy parenthesis of the 'eye' for 'the tenderest part of all' (a sly euphemism for the vulva).

Even Puss's philosophy of 'Pleasure is pain' (line 101) is only a less equivocal, more extreme formulation of a standard

love-paradox. Alexis, in the lyric from Dryden's Marriage à la Mode also finds 'the fierce pleasure too hasty to stay' (SS, IV, 328); slightly exaggerated, this forms the basis of Puss's sadistic ethos and transgression of the courtly code. He regards sexual scoring as a form of bloodletting (line 44), and sees pain as an integral part of the pleasure of love-making - in keeping with the libertine taste for deflowering as an expression of primal struggle and creativity. It is enough to affront the false modesty of any mistress. But perhaps the Cat has genuine grounds for her squeamishness: Puss's claim that 'Pain is more dear than pleasure, when 'tis past' is sufficiently subversive to suggest a parallel with Hobbes and the battering down of watertight distinctions between good and evil, and black and white morality. The Cat indignantly points out:

Preposterous way of pleasure and of love,
That contrary to its own end would move.
(RCP, 225)

But since the Cat will not openly concede that being taken by force is pleasurable, Puss refuses to relinquish his pleasure-pain analogy. They now reach a climactic deadlock in the love-and-honour debate. He upbraids her for her prudishness and she reproves him for his lack of consideration, or, in her refined terminology, 'want of passion'. Butler deftly concludes the piece with a reminder that heroic passion, although the ostensible subject of the debate, has never once been part of the original situation.

Into the Masquerade scene in Marriage à la Mode (Act IV, sc.111), Dryden introduces his tenderly obscene lyric Whilst Alexis lay prest. This undercuts the theatrical posturising of heroic refined lovers by evoking a world of primal sexual encounter, through the medium of decorous courtly pastoral,

reminiscent in tone and manner of Sedley. In its pseudo-serious way, the prettified shamming of the 'Alexis'-lyric immediately establishes a vital point of contact between the world of Leonidas and Palmyra and that of Cat and Puss.

The dislocation of natural timing in orgasm forms the central theme of the lyric; this mirrors the social dislocation of Leonidas and Palmyra in the play. The attribution to direct speech within the lyric is significant here; it is all given to the nymph. Alexis, like Puss initially, concentrates all his efforts into fulfilling the 'heroic' male role demanded by sexual encounter. Consequently we get little impression of character, merely of a male stereotype, an average Restoration courtier. The story told in the lyric is simple, and reveals a pattern in which female sexual demand (puffed up with romantic notions of the courtly stereotype) inhibits the natural capacity of the male to satisfy it. In both the Butler and Dryden works investigated here, male ego becomes a substitute for sexual potency and virility. Male appetite is disqualified in part by the over-fastidious desire of the female to set male sexuality in its rationally civilized context. It is interesting to note that when the male himself does this, e.g. the libertine Rochester in poems like A Ramble in St. James's Park and A Satyr against Mankind, the result is self-depredation, misogyny and a strong disgust at the debasing aspects of the physical life.

Female fastidiousness often has something of the effect of inverted innuendo, a phenomenon which dramatists like Wycherley were quick to exploit. Instead of the respectable word (e.g. Wycherley's 'China') working overtime for the unmentionable reality (sex), the value of that reality becomes cheapened by the veiling process by which it is 'half-admitted' into the sophisticated word. The word contracts and euphemizes the

experience, instead of suggesting (as in innuendo proper) illimitable realms of yet unfathomed experience, allowed a tacit value largely through the frankness with which the circumlocution is employed. Wycherley's 'China' in The Country Wife is thus a species of healthy innuendo, as used by Horner for a specific purpose - the satisfaction of an appetite - and it is taken up and respected as such by Lady Fidget. Wycherley demonstrates the inverse process in his depiction of Olivia's prudish reactions to the 'china of the stage' in The Plain Dealer. He sets out to prove that it is the prudes who possess imaginations as foul and rank as Vulcan's stithy²⁸.

This type of inverted innuendo - the words of the prude inhibiting rather than encouraging virility - may be illustrated from the Alexis-lyric. The Nymph's encouragement of Alexis appears stilted, formal and to some extent patronising:

She cried--Oh my dear, I am robbed of my bliss!
'Tis unkind to your love, and unfaithfully done,
To leave me behind you, and die all alone.
 (SS, IV, 328)

To be robbed of one's bliss is no laughing matter in a sexually competitive society. The word 'bliss' is euphemistic, but suggests a cheapening of what its artifice is intended to convey - as indeed do Restoration uses of words like 'heaven' and 'death' to invest the earthly paradise of sex with mock-religiosity.

28. It is interesting to note that D.R.M. Wilkinson, in The Comedy of Habit, op.cit., also associates the skills of innuendo with male badinage. He writes:

It might be said in all fairness that the giving of a certain instability to the meanings of conventional words was part of the libertine's very conversational purpose. (p.57).

In their own way, Butler and Dryden can be seen as reinforcing the moral vision underlying Wycherley's The Country Wife: a vision that is also summed up when the repartees of Cat and Puss are at their height:

CAT: Force is a rugged way of making love.
 PUSS: What you like best you always disapprove.
 (RCP, 225)

If in Dryden's heroic dramas Thomas H. Fujimara has found

neither a spiritual nor a moral ideal
 but rather a passional commitment to
 sex and self-aggrandizement,²⁹

passional commitment seems hardly to be the outcome of these love-and-honour debates. Rather they record the flouting of such a commitment through the rejection of the passionate hero by the female. The Hedonist-Epicurean libertine is subjugated by the Stoical nun, and the male libido shackled by the female prudery condoned and encouraged by society. Works such as the Repartees and The Ephesian Matron enable us to see more clearly what Dryden was up against in his ambition to portray heroic virtue as consistent with heroic passion. Although it is thought that his debate-scenes gave particular pleasure to the female section of the audience (since Dryden's Platonic heroines seem to argue themselves cogently into the domineering position), I think it more likely that Dryden enjoyed creating dangerous tensions around the ambiguous position of the male, whose sexual prowess and virile exterior (Almanzor is as shining as a god) are sufficient to make the conventional 'Platonic' victory seem a narrow one. In a sense Dryden plays God with his creations, setting them against one another in labyrinthine

²⁹ T.H. Fujimara, 'The Appeal of Dryden's Heroic Plays', PMLA, LXXV (1960), p.40.

disquisitions on the nature of passion, when all that is required is a little action. However the creation of a frisson of suspense compensates for occasional lapses in place, and Dryden's habitual stance is that of the amused observer, watching his heroic lovers teetering on the brink of immorality, and calculating the precise moment at which he can bring them safely off. This element of risk is capable of producing highly imaginative scenes, in which the intensity and compression of language more than compensate for the lack of physical action. Take, for example, these lines, from The Conquest of Granada:

ALMAHIDE: Your honour cannot to ill thoughts give way,
 And mine can run no hazard by your stay.
 ALMANZOR: Do you then think I can with patience see
 That sovereign good possessed, and not by me?
 No; I all day shall languish at the sight,
 And rave on what I did not see all night;
 My quick imagination will present
 The scenes and images of your content,
 When to my envied rival you dispense
 Joys too unruly and too fierce for sense.
 ALMAHIDE: These are the day-dreams which wild fancy yields,
 Empty as shadows are, that fly o'er fields.
 Oh, whither would this boundless fancy move!
 'Tis but the raging calenture of love.
 Like a distracted passenger you stand,
 And see, in seas, imaginary land,
 Cool groves, and flowery meads; and while you think
 To walk, plunge in, and wonder that you sink.
 (SS, IV, 153).

Almahide's extended simile acts both as a safety valve and a corrective, restoring decorum to a situation in which Almanzor's aberrant fancy threatens to annihilate Platonic values. His evocation of the 'unruly joys' of her marriage bed tarnishes her image with the bestial, a delusion she tries to erase by laughing him out of his 'calenture of love'. She does this in language equally elaborate, but with images carefully chosen to reinforce the invalidity of Almanzor's words - 'distracted passenger', 'imaginary land' - and to moderate the heat of his distemper - 'in seas', 'cool groves, and flowery meads'.

Although Almanzor's reply demonstrates that complete self-possession has not returned, he does make a distinction divorcing the substance from the shadow and paves the way for a return to more commonplace, less volatile topics:

Love's calenture too well I understand;
But sure your beauty is no fairy-land!
Of your own form a judge you cannot be;
For glow-worm-like, you shine, and do not see.
(SS, IV, 153)

The hint of the bizarre in the image of the glow-worm does not invalidate its applicability. The poetics of Almanzor's 'eccentric' heroism involves the creation of a metaphysic which relies on the observation of natural phenomena - trees, flowers, birds, animals, and insects - as well as upon intellectual abstractions; it is a metaphysic which is inverted against itself by the blatant physicality of the poetic image. This may appear ludicrous at first, but the inclusion of incongruity is characteristic of Dryden, who makes extravagant language Almanzor's norm of impetuosity. Where upon the printed page a passage taken in isolation may seem preposterous, it is often in keeping with the spirit of the play when set in its proper context. I shall devote the remainder of this chapter to a detailed analysis of the love-and-honour conventions in The Conquest of Granada, and assess how these can help us towards a better understanding of Dryden's intentions in writing his most colossal heroic play.

The Conquest of Granada (1670)

It is singularly appropriate that in Dryden's most opulent and epic heroic drama the language of love-and-honour should be put severely to the test. The general outline of the play closely follows that of The Siege of Rhodes, moving from the simple glorification of heroic action in the first part (Almanzor's meteoric appearance in the Moorish court), towards

the deeper implications of pursuing a self-motivated heroic code in Part Two (the relationship between Almanzor and Almahide). Sir Walter Scott, in his notes on the play, claims that what Dryden aimed to represent was,

the aspirations of a mind so heroic
as almost to surmount the bonds of
society, and even the very laws of
the universe.

(SS, IV, 4)

If this is true - and the sincerity of the poet's epic allegiances cannot really be doubted - then Dryden did so in full awareness of the degree of satire he might employ in both the presentation of 'strict' and 'eccentric' virtue. Dryden's underlying motives were undoubtedly moral - in political terms the play is almost a paradigm of the Restoration settlement, with Ferdinand and Isabella as emblems of the reinstated Charles - but he knew that there was a lot of excitement to be gained from the discipline of the heroic temperament, and Almanzor is Dryden's most detailed examination of such a discipline in process. Almanzor undergoes a series of ordeals, first inspired by valour, later by love, to emerge in Arthur C. Kirsch's words as 'a socially realizable hero'³⁰; this means that he will be eventually prepared to cede the demanding authority of the self and submit to the responsibility of caring for others in a romantically-orientated Christianized society. The play presents a strongly didactic experience, in which the hero undergoes a 'sentimental education' through conversing with his mistress. When he first appears on stage

³⁰. A.C. Kirsch, Dryden's Heroic Drama, Princeton, (1965), p.64.

as a 'noble savage', fresh from the woods, he receives no moral stimulus whatsoever from the weak king, Boabdelin, whose nation is torn by the civil strife of warring factions. Only when Almanzor meets Almahide is there a possibility of moral awakening and re-armament. Although their relationship is not without its amusing side, Eugene M. Waith correctly interprets Almahide's influence over Almanzor as the thematic centre of the play³¹.

Almahide's Stoicism in the play has been much misjudged. She does not exist simply as the embodiment of a passive, retiring virtue, but also acts as an important anchor for the spiritual values so much lacking in the Moorish (and exclusively Hobbesian) empire. Almahide, however, possesses wit and insight; she is not a run-of-the-mill Platonic madam, but learns how to cope with Almanzor's riotous nature verbally, in the same way that Harriet does with Dorimant in The Man of Mode (1676). Dryden ensures that Almahide is a perfect foil for the rough Almanzor. She possesses equal stubbornness; in Part One her loyalty to her country and to her betrothal-vows are quite as perverse as Almanzor's self-sufficient boasts of lording it over himself. Almanzor and Almahide start their relationship in unpropitious circumstances; she is about to be married to Boabdelin (the marriage does in fact take place in the interval between Parts One and Two), and Almanzor, through ignorance of courtly fashions, underestimates and misunderstands her concept of self-sacrifice. In Part One both partners are trying to map out their values in a society which

³¹. See E.M.Waith, The Herculean Hero, (1962), p.158 and pp.159-60.

seemingly possesses none. In the Second Part, Dryden focusses more closely upon the developing relationship of the lovers, using the love-and-honour debate with increased sensitivity as a means of exploring the hypocrisy which surrounds what is commonly called 'conventional morality'. Almahide's reserve weakens, as Almanzor pressurizes her to succumb to passion, but the supernatural intervenes, and divine redemption saves both of them from slavery to self. Trust, faith, and responsibility are the hallmarks of the ideally Platonized love-relationship advocated in the second part of the play. When Providence eventually frees Almahide to go to her lover, and be blessed by the Christian Spaniards, lustful desires and frustrations receive their final sanctification. The story ends neatly as Isabella of Spain performs the symbolic rites of restoration and reconciliation.

The grandeur, and the improbability, of such a pattern of moral progress, should not blind us to the elements of satiric wit and mockery which continue to add colour to the emotional quality of the debates. It is also true that the staleness of the love-and-honour conventions has to be counteracted in language of such unusual verve that clichés become forgotten in pure admiration for the strength of the sentiments. The play offers a panoramic perspective on love-and-honour, from the tedious and rather pedestrian exchanges of Osmyn and Benzayda to the more spirited interviews between Almanzor and Almahide, and Dryden elevates his use of wit and the passions in accordance with the social standing of the characters he depicts. Hence Almanzor and Almahide become the 'gay couple' around whom the most outrageous and novel sallies of wit are woven, while Dryden concentrates upon more domestic

issues of filial duty and compassion in the Osmyn-Benzayda plot.

The refreshing spirit of levity and grace which enlivens the courtship rituals of Almanzor and his lady, is most noticeable in the complexity of feeling evoked by the mere sight of one of the partners. It is necessary to dispel the too-easy impression of Almahide's passivity, by noting how she selects Almanzor as her partner on first sight; she is immediately alerted to his animal attraction:

Mark but how terribly his eyes appear!
And yet there's something roughly noble there,
Which, in unfashioned nature, looks divine,
And, like a gem, does in the quarry shine.
(SS, IV, 70)

There is little of Platonic decorum in such an admission, although Almahide only discloses her feelings to her confidante. It is the language of Restoration sex appeal, in which phrases such as 'something roughly noble' and 'unfashioned nature' act as glosses for the primal sexual instinct. Rather like Lady Chatterley, Almahide, when presented with a choice between an emotional cripple (Boabdelin) and a demi-god, opts for the divine. Almanzor's first reactions to her importunity are equally violent; he blurts out:

'Tis you have raised that tempest in my will.
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.
But lion-like, has been in deserts bred,
And, used to range, will ne'er be tamely led.
Restore its freedom to my fettered will,
And then I shall have power to use you ill.³²
(SS, IV, 72)

³² The punctuation of this passage in the Scott-Santsbury edition is surely incorrect, and the middle section of the speech might read as follows:

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;
But, lion-like, has been in deserts bred,
And, used to range, will ne'er be tamely led.

We are still awaiting the authoritative text of The Conquest, from the California Dryden edition, and, in the meantime, a separate critical edition of the play could be undertaken with profit.

Dryden thoroughly enjoys the violence of the onset of passion in Almanzor, and the subsequent debates between the lovers are largely concerned with coming to terms with the immediacy of their sexual attraction:

Who dares touch her I love? I'm all o'er love:
Nay, I am love; love shot, and shot so fast,
He shot himself into my breast at last.
(SS, IV, 72)

Almahide is treated to a stormy exhibition of the potential lawlessness of Almanzor's will, and although she responds to the inner spirit of the hero, she cannot presume to sympathize openly. However she uses her powers of perception to lead Almanzor away from imagining carnal delights towards accommodating his passion in the more sociable virtues of Platonic decency. As we shall see, however, something essential is lost by this; the Almanzor and Almahide who sue for benediction to the Christian Spaniards are not the same couple who fought against sexual temptation in a heathen society.

The first meeting between the lovers (Part One, III, 1), is one of Dryden's best and most original scenes; it is surprisingly free from Platonic clichés. When Almanzor discovers that Almahide is already betrothed to Boabdellin, his curse achieves an almost Shakespearian rhythm:

Good heaven, thy book of fate before me lay,
But to tear out the journal of this day:
Or, if the order of the world below
Will not the gap of one whole day allow,
Give me that minute when she made her vow!
.....
It wonnot be; the fugitive is gone,
Pressed by the crowd of following minutes on:
That precious moment's out of nature fled,
And in the heap of common rubbish laid,
Of things that once have been, and are decayed.
(SS, IV, 73-4)

The impossibility of reclaiming time is almost contradicted

by the initial sweep of the opening lines, but is accepted in the measured more resigned tone at the end of the speech.

Almahide's response to Almanzor's love conveys a similar mixture of aspiration and regret; violence is gradually subsumed in more tranquil reflection:

Your passion, like a fright, suspends my pain,
It meets, o'erpowers, and beats mine back again:
But as, when tides against the current flow,
The native stream runs its own course below,
So, though your griefs possess the upper part,
My own have deeper channels in my heart.
(SS, IV, 74)

In this opening scene Dryden presents love-passion in its crude, embryonic state. The interview has little of the courtliness of Leonidas and Palmyra, and much more of the energy and vigour of Cat and Puss. Abrupt and striking images (e.g. the celebrated 'tarantula', SS, IV, 71), help to propel the verse along and create moments of high suspense, when the formality of the couplet seems to be endangered (Dryden uses the caesura continually to break up the regular flow of the metre).

The second interview between Almanzor and Almahide occurs after a scene of physical violence (Part One, IV, 11) in which Almanzor rescues Almahide from Abdalla's revolutionaries. At first the tone between the lovers is portentously heroic: 'Conquest attends Almanzor everywhere' (SS, IV, 94) - but Almanzor soon challenges Almahide on the subject of sexual satisfaction. When he finds her reneging he assumes a more military style, pushing the excesses of heroic rhetoric into his personal demands:

ALMANZOR: Madam, I cannot on bare praises live;
Those, who abound in praises, seldom give.
ALMAHIDE: While I to all the world your worth make known,
May Heaven reward the pity you have shown!
ALMANZOR: My love is languishing, and starved to death;
And would you give me charity -- in breath?
Prayers are the alms of churchmen to the poor:
They send's to heaven, but drive us from their door.

ALMAHIDE: Cease, cease a suit
 So vain to you, and troublesome to me,
 If you will have me think that I am free.
 If I am yet a slave, my bonds I'll bear;
 But what I cannot grant, I will not hear.

ALMANZOR: You will not hear! --- You must both hear and grant,
 For, madam, there's an impudence in want.

ALMAHIDE: Your way is somewhat strange to ask relief;
 You ask with threatening, like a begging thief. --
 Once more, Almanzor, tell me, am I free?

ALMANZOR: Madam, you are, from all the world -- but me! --
 (SS, IV, 94-5)

The repartee here takes fire in a manner quite unusual to love-and-honour debates. Although the substance of the argument is very similar to that in the interchange between Leonidas and Palmyra cited above (p.254), the verse does not fall off into an insipid catalogue of Platonic commonplaces, but concentrates emotional attention upon the verbal skills used by the speakers. Almanzor will not be fobbed off with Platonic excuses, and when Almahide realizes that he intends to be forceful she responds with a similarly down-to-earth approach. Almanzor's daring vaunts match the aggressive sexual instincts of Butler's Puss, and breathtaking assertion is the dominant feature of the hero's 'impudence'. Almahide is quick to discern her lover's spiritual insufficiency; later in the scene she praises him in lines which mingle reproach with unmistakably admiring panegyric - a feature which was to recur in the portrait of Shaftesbury in Absalom and Achitophel:

Great souls discern not when the leap's too wide,
 Because they only view the farther side.
 Whatever you desire, you think is near;
 But, with more reason, the event I fear.
 (SS, IV, 96)

Almanzor then responds with a celebrated heroic apotheosis of the fortunatus, the 'brave, bold man' who acts in harmony with his destiny; he contradicts Almahide's fears by asserting,

True, 'tis a narrow path that leads to bliss,
 But right before there is no precipice:
 Fear makes men look aside, and then their footing miss.
 (SS, IV, 97)

The remainder of the scene bears out the mood of tolerance towards the eloquence of 'eccentric virtue'; Almahide reproves Almanzor for over-confidence but praises him for 'inborn fire'.

In the first part of The Conquest of Granada, Almanzor is presented as a man dictating his own laws, half-conscious, like Cromwell, of his political instrumentality until distracted by love as by a 'scene of fancy'. Almahide traces the moral evil which is sapping the strength of the Moorish community to the supreme selfishness of key individuals, especially Boabdellin and Almanzor. When in the great parting scene which closes the first part of the play, Almahide informs Almanzor that he is rash and 'impotent of will' (SS, IV, 112) she touches on a crucial spiritual factor. The impotence of true kingship, in the shape of Boabdellin's lamentable attempts at diplomacy, gives place to the delusion of self-styled 'kingship' in Almanzor, who follows natural, not civil, law. The frequency with which he changes his allegiance in Part One, serves as an indication of his unpreparedness for commitment to any interests other than his own. It is these magnificent blemishes in Almanzor - his glorious confidence, rash impulse, and ebullient physical energy - that Almahide sets about reforming in the second part of the play. Her prescriptive reproaches are not simply the outcome of detached analysis, the cool prerogative of many a Platonic mistress; they emerge out of too painful an engagement in the whole problem of Almanzor's heroic identity, a susceptibility to feeling which could have dangerous moral consequences. In the parting-scene, Almahide's remonstrances are severe because her emotions have been violently disturbed. The problem of dealing with the potentially 'god-like'

man is effectively conveyed through the surging violence of the imagery:

ALMANZOR: My joys, indeed, are dreams; but not my pain:
'Twas a swift ruin, but the marks remain.
When some fierce fire lays goodly buildings waste,
Would you conclude
There had been none, because the burning's past?

ALMAHIDE: It was your fault that fire seized all your breast;
You should have blown up some to save the rest:
But 'tis, at worst, but so consumed by fire,
As cities are, that by their falls rise higher.
Build love a nobler temple in my place;
You'll find the fire has but enlarged your space.³³

(SS, IV, 113)

In the second part of the play Dryden concentrates upon bringing Almanzor's 'eccentric virtue' into the sphere of social control, modified and disciplined by the representatives of the temporal powers, Ferdinand and Isabella, and by an increasingly

33. This striking image is a reminiscence of the fire of London passage in Annus Mirabilis (1666). King Charles directs the city in controlling the outbreak of the fire: (stanzas 244-45):

He sees the dire contagion spread so fast,
 That where it seizes, all relief is vain:
 And therefore must unwillingly lay waste
 That Country which would, else, the foe maintain.

The powder blows up all before the fire:
 Th'amazed flames stand gather'd on a heap;
 And from the precipices brinck retire,
 Afraid to venture on so large a leap.

(CD, I, 96)

The conclusion of Almahide's simile, in which she counsels Almanzor to forego his passion, and build a new love on old foundations, also parallels the coda of Annus Mirabilis, in which Dryden foretells the future glories of the restored city of London: (stanza 295):

More great then humane, now, and more August,
New deifi'd she from her fires does rise:
Her widening streets on new foundations trust,
And, opening, into larger parts she flies.
(CD, I, 103)

The hint of a transition from cultural primitivism in the fate of the old, to sophistication and civilisation in the apotheosis of the new, is also implicit in Almahide's advice to the as yet 'unfashioned' Almanzor.

neurotic and repressive Almahide. It is as if the fairy-tale quality of Almanzor's first appearance and behaviour has now to give way to a more formal, less adolescent mode of conduct. In Part Two, Dryden looks more closely, like Davenant in Siege of Rhodes II, at the love-and-honour debate and how it can be made to serve the interests of socially accepted ideas of normative behaviour. The use of debate here thus follows a more conventional pattern, and has not the same expository function with respect to the personalities of the noble lovers. The sensational and enlightened notions of heroic grandeur held by an Almanzor who was fresh from the 'state of nature' gradually give way to more sober concepts of the virtues of a private man. As Dryden's satire flows less easily, what was rash and importunate now becomes, via subjection to an essentially Christian code of toleration and forgiveness, a transforming and integrating power which augurs well for Almanzor's acceptance of obedience in the new régime set up under the Spaniards. In symbolic terms, the hero is spiritually enfranchised by the moral intercession of his Platonic mistress, and is able to cast off mercenary desires, challenging a dependence, hitherto entirely absent, upon the good husbandry of the will. Thus from being merely the object of Almanzor's desires, Almahide becomes the means by which they receive sanctification and through which the hero learns the duty of vassalage. Almahide makes deliberate and new appeals to 'unbribed' virtue and disinterested service; if Almanzor accepts subservience on her terms, then he is fertile ground for the implantation of all the correct social graces.

The Second Part opens in a mood of ceremonial panegyric; Ferdinand and Isabella, paragons of married 'Platonic' love

(they are much addicted to the courtesies of courtly chivalry), celebrate together the harmony which obtains in an ordered moral universe:

The courts of Kings
To all distressed should sanctuaries be,
But most to lovers in adversity.
(SS, IV, 128)

This constitutes perhaps the chief structural weakness of the play; the Christian 'heroic love' recommended by the royal pair is not ostensibly distinguishable from the love-vows of Osmyn and Benzayda, or the trite Platonic compliments regularly trotted out by Lyndaraxa's lovers. The firm emphasis upon the respectability and 'correctness' of all that Ferdinand and Isabella represent, poses grave problems for the integrity of the play. The outer design of the plot moves inexorably towards the harmonisation of Almanzor and Almahide's passion with the ethics of Christian conquest; apart from the fact that fate will now permit the two to marry there is virtually no distinction between Christian and neo-Platonic values. Perhaps because Dryden secretly doubted whether his Almanzor could ever submit to the self-annihilation implied in the doctrine of Christian obedience, he deliberately kept up the chivalric implications of the medieval crusade when moving towards the denouement. It is pertinent to remind ourselves here of what Dryden said concerning 'eccentric virtue' in his Dedication to The Conquest: he wrote,

But a character of an eccentric virtue
is the more exact image of human life,
because he is not wholly exempted from
its frailties; such a person is Almanzor
... I designed in him a roughness of
character, impatient of injuries, and a
confidence of himself, almost approaching
to an arrogance. But these errors are
incident only to great spirits; they are
moles and dimples, which hinder not a
face from being beautiful, though that
beauty be not regular; they are of the
number of those amiable imperfections

which we see in mistresses, and which
 we pass over without a strict
 examination, when they are accompanied
 with greater graces.

(SS, IV, 16)

When Dryden actually comes to the final scene, he lets these
 'moles and dimples' dictate the terms of Almanzor's submission
 to Ferdinand. The noble savage acquiesces to the patriarch not
 as a slave, but as an equal, a sharer of the proud inheritance
 of the Kingdom of Heaven:

I bring a heart which homage never knew;
 Yet it finds something of itself in you:
 Something so kingly, that my haughty mind
 Is drawn to yours, because 'tis of a kind.

(SS, IV, 221)

After hearing words such as these can we be utterly convinced
 that Platonism has tamed Almanzor? And at the end of the play
 Ferdinand sanctions his return to the forests from which he
 came:

FERDINAND: Meantime, you shall my victories pursue,
 The Moors in woods and mountains to subdue.
 ALMANZOR: The toils of war shall help to wear each day,
 And dreams of love shall drive my nights away.---
 Our banners to the Alhambra's turrets bear;
 Then, wave our conquering crosses in the air,
 And cry, with shouts of triumph, ---Live and reign,
 Great Ferdinand and Isabel of Spain!

(SS, IV, 223)

The basic problem is that Almanzor seems to adopt the standards
 of the Christian Spaniards while still holding desperately to
 his original convictions; before wedding Almahide he will
 return to a make-believe world of romance, in which he will
 go back to the same boyish showmanship and sexual fantasizing
 which Almahide's reasonings hoped so much to dispel. And this
 is Almanzor on society's terms - 'cribb'd, cabin'd and
 confin'd' - not on the terms to which his nature is accustomed:

No man has more contempt than I of breath,
 But whence hast thou the right to give me death?
 Obeyed as sovereign by the subjects be,
 But know, that I alone am king of me.
 I am as free as nature first made man,
 Ere the base laws of servitude began,
 When wild in woods the noble savage ran.
 (SS, IV, 43)

As I suggested earlier, something vital seems to have been lost, in the dexterity with which Dryden arranges his artful compromise.

But there are still many discrepancies to be dealt with before this extraordinary resolution, in which Almanzor and Almahide are symbolically admitted to the Christian faith and family by accepting a new dukedom (that of Arcos) and, in the case of Almahide, a new name ('Isabella of Granada'). In the first four acts of the Second Part, Dryden explores Almanzor's progress in the new Platonic codes with his customary wit, though with perhaps muted extravagance. The striking change in the relationship between the lovers lies in Almanzor's readiness to undertake a vow of unconditional surrender to the will of his mistress, even when that means acting on behalf of her husband. Dryden reinforces the impression of Almanzor's steadfastness by including the spirited scene in which he rejects the advances of the beautiful and wily Lyndaraxa (Part Two, III, 111). Almanzor demonstrates his growing discipline in the school of virtue by rejecting those qualities in Lyndaraxa which are most closely allied to his own ambitions and charisma:

Fair though you are
 As summer mornings, and your eyes more bright
 Than stars that twinkle in a winter's night;
 Though you have eloquence to warm and move
 Cold age and praying hermits into love;
 Though Almahide with scorn rewards my care, ---
 Yet, than to change, 'tis nobler to despair.
 My love's my soul; and that from fate is free;
 'Tis that unchanged and deathless part of me.
 (SS, IV, 174)

He adamantly refuses to be seduced from his political loyalties, and his personal integrity is put to the supreme test when Almahide's reputation is tarnished by Zulema's spiteful rumour of her infidelity with Abdelmelech - a rumour which induces the weak-minded Boabdelin to put his wife on trial for adultery. But even here, Almanzor's ideals are more strictly governed by Platonic convention; even when he believes her guilty, he is prepared to accept the moral responsibility of acting as her champion:

I have outfaced myself;and justified
 What I knew false,to all the world beside.
 She was as faithless as her sex could be;
 And now I am alone,she's so to me.

 Yet her protection I must undertake,
 Not now for love,but for my honour's sake.
(SS, IV, 201)

Almanzor is now reasoning quite as nonsensically as Alvaro and Prospero in Davenant's Love and Honour; he is ready to trust the empty sound of the word 'honour' rather than trust to hitherto reliable instincts.

But Dryden also makes Almanzor's 'conversion' a prey to backsliding. In the climactic Gallery scene (Part Two, IV, iii) Almanzor surprises Almahide on her way to bed, and the sexual temptation is overpowering. In this strongly written scene, Dryden momentarily returns to the passionate flesh-and-blood characterization of the debates in Part One, portraying both lovers as complex and rich personalities. After the forced civilities and dissemblings of the 'scarf' episode (based on an idea borrowed from Othello) it is refreshing to find Almahide once again giving full sway to her un-Platonic feelings. Almanzor in fact threatens to undermine Platonic values irrevocably by appealing to pagan concepts of the 'god-like' life:

ALMANZOR: A happiness so high I cannot bear:
 My love's too fierce, and you too killing fair.
 I grow enraged to see such excellence! ---
 If words, so much disordered, give offence,
 My love's too full of zeal to think of sense.
 Be you like me; dull reason hence remove,
 And tedious forms, and give a loose to love.
 Love eagerly; let us be gods tonight;
 And do not, with half yielding, dash delight.

ALMAHIDE: Thou strong seducer, opportunity!
 Of womankind, half are undone by thee!
 Though I resolve I will not be misled,
 I wish I had not heard what you have said!
 I cannot be so wicked to comply;
 And, yet, am most unhappy to deny!

(SS, IV, 193)

Almanzor's appeals to madness, and the libertine naturalism of the Restoration comedy attitude to sex, are nearly too much for Almahide. With Nell Gwyn taking the part of the lady this must have been a truly excellent scene, with the heroic mode battling unsuccessfully against the salacious forces of innuendo³⁴. Almahide extricates herself only by threatening suicide, and Almanzor has previously been warned by the Ghost of his Mother (Dryden once again in festive mood) against perpetrating 'known crimes of lawless love' (SS, IV, 190). So Dryden once again brings his lovers off unscathed, but with as much excitement and suspense as if they had really enjoyed each other. Doralice, the worldly-wise heroine of Dryden's sparkling Marriage à la Mode, addresses her disappointed servant Palamede in terms which throw light on Dryden's attitude to this type of 'narrow escape':

For aught I know, 'tis better that we
 have not [i.e. enjoyed one another];
 we might upon trial have liked each
 other less, as many a man and woman,
 that have loved as desperately as we,
 and yet, when they came to possession,
 have sighed and cried to themselves,
 Is this all?

(SS, IV, 352)

³⁴. For the authority on Nell Gwyn's casting in The Conquest of Granada, see J. Downes, Roscius Anglicanus, intr. J. Loftis, Augustan Reprint Society Publication No. 134, Los Angeles (1969), p. 15.

The final ironies of Almanzor and Almahide's love are reserved for the coy rejoicings which conclude the play. The lovers are both tongue-tied, like the unwilling Beatrice and Benedick, and Isabella has to prompt them both to declare their true feelings. Almanzor makes his last assault on Platonic fastidiousness, while at the same time trying to be just to the nature, cause and effects of erotic passion:

ALMANZOR: I'm now to conquer ghosts, and to destroy
The strong impressions of a bridal joy.
ALMAHIDE: You've yet a greater foe than these can be, ---
Virtue opposes you, and modesty.
ALMANZOR: From a false fear that modesty does grow,
And thinks true love, because 'tis fierce, its foe.
'Tis but the wax whose seals on virgins stay:
Let it approach love's fire, 'twill melt away: ---
But I have lived too long; I never knew,
When fate was conquered, I must combat you.
(SS, IV, 222)

In this case, although he urges the dynamic argument of Puss against Cat, Almanzor is right in condemning the over-scrupulous modesty of Platonic fashion. However, there is also a hint of archness in Almahide's tone, which suggests that, like Florimel with Celadon or Harriet with Dorimant, she is making her final choice on the basis of a contest of wit in which dissimulation acts as an instrument of self-defence. Almahide shies away from sex, using the clichés which society expects her to use for her own protection. As in Love's Labour's Lost, the wedding of the happy pair is postponed for a year (so that mourning rites may be observed). The impression of anti-climax is difficult to dispel. Whereas in Love's Labour's Lost the anti-climax fulfils a major function in the spiritual movement of the play - Berowne must prove his constancy by moving 'wild laughter in the jaws of death' as a jester in the hospitals - in The Conquest of Granada it seems little more than a final hitch. Almanzor will while away the interim in guerilla warfare against the Moors, until social decorums

have been suitably fulfilled.

Dryden's play then explores the relationship between those 'unfeigned realities of love' so dear to the hearts of court wits such as Sedley and Rochester, and the often tedious but necessary social forms in which they have to be expressed. The manners in the love-debates thus become a focus for the characterization in The Conquest. Almanzor forces himself into decorous compliment as into a strait-jacket; his energy makes the debate-form crack at the seams. The distinctions between Platonic and anti-Platonic sentiment become blurred as it transpires that Almanzor's prime concern is less with the cold 'ideas' of love and virtue, than with the imaginative quality of a love-relationship. Dryden's concept of 'eccentric virtue' here serves a similar need to that of his juxtaposition of the Venus and the Lazar; just as the Lazar enables Dryden to create magnificent caricature in Maximin, the governing principle of 'eccentric' virtue enables him to depict in Almanzor some of the essential madness, charisma, and decadence inherent in the finest excesses of Herculean heroism.

It is not surprising that Dryden should have felt he had stretched the debate-form beyond its usefulness in this play; he virtually abandoned it afterwards until it makes a strange re-appearance in Love Triumphant, his last enigmatic tragedy-comedy. Dryden's summary of the value of heroic poetry in the Dedication to The Conquest of Granada scarcely does justice to the complexity of attitude we encounter in the love-and-honour debates of Almanzor and Almahide:

The feigned hero inflames the true;
and the dead virtue animates the living.
Since, therefore, the world is governed
by precept and example, and both these
can only have influence from those persons
who are above us; that kind of poesy,
which excites to virtue the greatest men,
is of the greatest use to humankind. (SS, IV, 11)

Almanzor is not a man who 'feigns' by nature, nor is Almahide a strictly 'dead' representative of the strife implicit in virtue. Dryden's ironic vision of the paradox of love-and-honour, and its usefulness or non-usefulness to society at large, draws on a wealth of neo-Platonic and anti-Platonic spirit found in other writers of his time, especially Butler, Tuke, Orrery, Etherege, and Charleton. He delights in contriving situations which will call forth the richest associations with other works and styles, adding his own inimitable zest for passion and idiosyncrasy. Almanzor and Almahide themselves transcend the substance of the love-and-honour debate by their own intense individuality; the debate becomes for them less of a barrier between dangerously explicit feelings than a common meeting ground where both may betray (quite helplessly) what is really taking place in their hearts. As ever in Dryden, the outcome is inconclusive; the festivity of approach tones down into a respectable and self-thwarting denouement. However, satiric voices do lurk in the shadows throughout the play. In Lyndaraxa's debates Dryden exerts to the full his gift for portraying inconsistency and inconsequence. One may even see, as Arthur C. Kirsch has done, something intrinsically amusing in the way in which Almanzor adapts his manners to those of a Caroline gentleman, after so much huffing and eloquence. Kirsch's view of the play, however, does offer one supremely valuable insight, which harmonizes many of the discrepant and contradictory influences which contribute so much diversity to the text; he strikes just the right note when he says,

There is comparatively little question of morality for either Almahide or Almanzor - she is motivated by heroic pride as surely as he is; but her own gloire is couched in the metaphor of a public trust, and Almanzor's refinement in his love for her permits

him to achieve that uncompromising fusion of the public and the private man which in these plays was perhaps the final heroic grace beyond the reach of art.³⁵

The fable of The Conquest is of secondary importance; what matters is its opulent confidence, and its utilization of a number of styles to locate, analyse and vindicate heroic aspiration in man - that which Kirsch calls the 'final heroic grace beyond the reach of art'. This is also what Sir Walter Scott had in mind when he noticed that Almanzor's rhetoric leaves us

often in doubt whether the vehemence
of the wish does not even disguise the
impossibility of its accomplishment.
(SS, IV, 4)

The paradox of involvement with 'incredible love and impossible valour' reaches its finest and most rounded expression in this play. Dryden allows the powers of fancy and delusion to interpenetrate the traditionally conceived 'heroic view of life' until the tensions within the individual will are revealed in the full splendour of their vigour and complexity. Almanzor and Almahide represent the elements of unresolved conflict in the eternal battle of the sexes; behind their generous and often tumultuous strife lurk the shades of Cat and Puss, and the darker sonorities of Charleton's matron. But nowhere else does Dryden preserve the freshness and spontaneity of his chivalric vision in such compellingly imaginative terms. From the dance-like rotation of birth, death, courtship, marriage, glory and death, the inescapable rituals of any Western civilization, Dryden creates a fascinating commentary on the lives of Restoration men and women, tuning their secret desires, ambitions and foibles to the exotic dance-like motion of the tarantula which first stings Almanzor into love. The Conquest

of Granada deserves more than a passing mention in the history of seventeenth-century drama; as a complementary work to Leviathan and Paradise Lost it has a right to be both heard and seen, as one of the most curious, and exciting, productions of its age.

Chapter 5

'Why was my reason made my passions' slave?';
Aureng-Zebe and the Use of the Passions.

Aureng-Zebe has long been regarded as Dryden's most accomplished and mature heroic play¹. The reasons for this are not difficult to find. The play unites discipline of technique with imaginative vitality and offers the spectator a variety which always engages the attention. Dryden returns to the kind of benevolent or 'mischievous' wit which animated the comedy implicit in Tyrannick Love, but here unites it much more successfully with the prevailing scepticism which gives the play an often contemplative, philosophical atmosphere. The private world of conscience, filial piety, and voluntary suffering is embodied in the figure of Aureng-Zebe, while the showy attitudinizing of Baroque hero is shown to be either morally inept (in the character of the Old Emperor) or redundant (in the puppet-like activity of Morat, a 'little Maximin' who finds the world 'too little for his sway'). After the aggressively epic perspective of earlier plays such as The Indian Emperour and The Conquest of Granada we turn with relief from the grandiose

¹. Aureng-Zebe has received more critical attention in recent years than any other Dryden play except All for Love. Articles of major importance to the study of Aureng-Zebe, and which have been of great value in directing the focus of the present chapter are: M.W.Alssid, 'The Design of Dryden's Aureng-Zebe', JEGP, LXIV (1965), 452-69; W.Frost, 'Aureng-Zebe in Context: Dryden, Shakespeare, Milton and Racine', JEGP, LXXIV (1975), 26-49; A.C.Kirsch, 'The Significance of Dryden's Aureng-Zebe', ELH, XXIX (1962), 160-74; and R.S.Newman, 'Irony and the Problem of Tone in Dryden's Aureng-Zebe', SEL, X (1970), 439-58. There are also useful chapters on the play in King, *op.cit.*, and R.L.Larson, Studies in Dryden's Dramatic Technique, Salzburg (1975).

doctrines of love-and-honour to a play in which heroics are restrained or lightly parodied and the intimate domesticity of the passions prevails. Aureng-Zebe himself is amongst the most responsible heroes of Restoration drama; seeking self-discipline with regard to his own passions he asserts the supremacy of the 'birthright of his mind', and sensibility is used as an educative, even contemplative step towards preparation for kingship. Arthur Kirsch, Bruce King and Richard Larson are among those critics who have noticed the predominance of sentiment in Aureng-Zebe; tears and compassion, the fruits of affective tragedy, abound and co-exist harmoniously with Dryden's inimitable irony and 'delicate mock-heroic'. But the focal point of the play does not rest wholly with individual features such as wit or sentiment. The play demonstrates the need to curb the will through the discipline of the passions and the use of 'right' reason. It is true that while writing Aureng-Zebe Dryden became disenchanted with the heroic play, but this did not prevent him from toying even more skilfully with the clichés of heroic life. He penned an ironic drama as a commentary on the 'vanity of human wishes' which is quite as arresting in its implications as the great satirical poems which were to follow it.

To see Aureng-Zebe as a compendium of commonplaces drawn from seventeenth-century politics, religion, moral philosophy and medicine is not to belittle its power to move or to suggest to us a richer perspective of life. Robert S. Newman sees in the play's cosmopolitan atmosphere an admission of the failure of the heroic pose to fulfil

the true feelings of contemporary Restoration society². The play is dogged by outbursts of maudlin reminiscence, especially from the Old Emperor, whose moral schizophrenia is complicated by what appears to be an entirely genuine nostalgia for a golden past. Bruce King interprets the play in a fairly dynamic manner, arguing that ceaseless mental activity and the 'disquieting effects of the imagination' are the dominant aspects of this Hobbesian drama³. King's analysis of the anxiety syndrome in the play is illuminating, but seems merely symptomatic of a larger movement away from the eloquent wit of the full-blooded heroic play towards the kind of play that Dryden now knew he wanted to write - a drama in which the passions would delight and instruct, and in which the discourse would be natural and passionate. There are certainly many factors involved if we have to account for the transitional nature of Aureng-Zebe, but if we see it either as a revolutionary departure from heroic convention or as a simple preparation for the blank verse of All for Love, then we are blinding ourselves to the unique sensitivity, which permeates the text and refines the range of the spectator's responses engaging him in a complex form of mental dialogue with the characters.

The greatest advance made over Dryden's earlier plays lies in the discipline of scale. Attitudes, opinions and passions, whether political or moral, are skilfully disseminated through the voices of characters whose attempts to outwit each other never succeed. Despite the surface havoc

². See R.S. Newman, 'Irony and the Problem of Tone', op.cit., esp. pp. 440 and 457.

³. King, p. 119.

induced by the effects of passion upon a decadent, non-purposive society, the fundamental impression created by the verse and wit of the play is one of integration and of mutually shared norms. Although certain aspects of the play parody the situation in King Lear, Aureng-Zebe and Indamora do not build their new kingdom entirely upon the hopeless ruins and universal devastation of the old. The seeds of a just society are hidden behind the gross materiality and earthiness of human needs and desires, and Dryden reinstates the theme of the perfectibility of man by showing us that his Tamino and Pamina can successfully pass through the ordeal of **their passions**. As Dryden moved further away from the self-conscious declamation so popular with audiences of the 'ranting tragedy', his dramatic technique became firmer, more rounded, and more polished. The consummate artistry with which irony and tone are modulated to produce exciting fluctuations between naturalism and the grotesque is testimony to Dryden's capacity for growth and receptivity in the development of a personal style. In order to appreciate more fully some of the influences that may have contributed to this intensification of technical control we shall have to explore the growing interest in 'passions-psychology' that began to manifest itself in the drama of the 1670's.

Dryden's Attitudes to The Passions

Dryden's chief observations concerning the passions occur in three essays spanning a decade, The Essay of Dramatic Poesy (1668), The Heads of an Answer to Rymer (1677) and

The Grounds of Criticism in Tragedy (1679). These observations accumulate rather than develop and are obviously fed and stimulated by the practice of writing heroic plays in which the passions provided the most sustained source of emotional excitement. Discussing the overall effect he desired from the heroic drama in the essay Of Heroic Plays (1672), Dryden wrote that his aim was

to raise the imagination of the audience, and to persuade them, for the time, that what they behold on the theatre is really performed.

(W, I, 162)

For Dryden the most natural means of achieving this control over his spectators was through the representation of passions which were as life-like as art could make them, and consequently there is a strong emphasis in his early discussion of the passions on their relation to 'verisimilitude' and 'propriety'. In the Essay of Dramatic Poesy he had argued that Ovid, of all classical writers, had the genius most proper for the stage because

he had a way of writing so fit to stir up a pleasing admiration and concernment which are the objects of a tragedy, and to show the various movements of a soul combating betwixt two different passions.

(W, I, 41)

Ovid knew how to balance the intellectual appreciation of the passions with their emotional content, thus presenting an entirely satisfying aesthetic experience to his listeners. Dryden's belief in the instrumentality of the passions as a means of reinforcing dramatic illusion was never to leave him, and he anxiously emphasized that passion, when 'well-painted', should bring the emotions concerned quite vividly

before the mind's eye. Long before Dryden embarked on the serious study of Shakespeare which was to lead him to write All for Love and adapt Troilus and Cressida he had discovered Shakespeare's unique power to put across this life-like experience:

When he describes anything, you
more than see it, you feel it
too ... he needed not the
spectacles of books to read
nature; he looked inwards, and
found her there.

(W, I, 67)

Looking inwards was a not inconsiderable part of the duty of any poet who pretended to depict or 'paint' the passions. In the mood of disenchanted scepticism in which he wrote the Dedicatory Epistle to Aureng-Zebe (1675), Dryden begins to show some impatience over the habitual speculations of philosophy which his trade obliged him to make:

The truth is, the consideration
of so vain a creature as man is
not worth our pains. I have fool
enough at home without looking
for it abroad, and am sufficient
theater to myself of ridiculous
actions, without expecting company
either in a court, a town, or
playhouse. 'Tis on this account
that I am weary with drawing the
deformities of life, and lazars
of the people, where every figure
of imperfection more resembles me
than it can do others.

(L, 9)

We glimpse here some of the tensions besetting a dramatist who habitually worked up character from a satiric basis; Aureng-Zebe contains no Gargantuan 'lazar of the people' like Maximin, but it does contain a reductive view of humanity in which all moral endeavour is exposed to primitive images of the 'brute soul' and lower forms of life (e.g. emmetts, insects). Introspection, with Dryden, led naturally

to analytical habits which caused him to distrust pure emotions, and so blend them with the moral austerities of corrective satire. Dryden's particularly Rochesterian mood at the time of composing Aureng-Zebe is unusual but it persists until after the completion of Limberham (1678).

A work of the same period which evinces a similar mood is Walter Charleton's treatise A Natural History of the Passions (1674), written in country retirement and designed to divert a friend with the 'little Theatre of the Passions'. The final section of the treatise takes the form of a meditative apologia in which Charleton elaborates on his reasons for attempting the work:

That all the Good and Evil of
this life depends upon the
various Passions incident to
the Mind of Man; I need no
other document than my own
dearly bought Experience:
which hath too often convinced
me that while I out of weakness
suffered my self to be seduced
and transported by the ardor
and excesses of my Affections,
I have fallen into Errors, that
have more dejected my spirit
than a long succession of
infortunes could ever do; and
from whence I could not expect
better fruit, than that of
shame, sorrow and repentance.⁴

His treatise, which is indebted to other works by Bacon, Gassendi, Descartes, Willes and Hobbes⁵, consists of a physiological analysis of passion in general, followed by an inventory of the passions in particular, and is typical

⁴. Charleton, A Natural History of the Passions, 2nd ed., (1701), p. 168.

⁵. The principal works upon which Charleton drew for his Natural History were Descartes, De Passiones Animae, Gassendi, De vita et moribus Epicuri, and Willis, De Anima Brutorum.

of the scholarly works of its type in the period; for instance it helped popularize the kind of general knowledge which we encounter in Dryden's Dedicatory Epistle to Aureng-Zebe, e.g.

Our minds are perpetually wrought
on by the temperament of our
bodies, which makes me suspect
they are nearer allied than either
our philosophers or school divines
will allow them to be.

(L, 12)

Dryden's intensified appreciation of the significance of the passions while in a gloomy mood in the mid-seventies, suggests a growing awareness of passions-psychology as a science, and even that Dryden may have been personally acquainted with works such as Jean-Francois Senault's De L'Usage des Passions (re-issued in Henry Cary's translation in 1671) and Charleton's Natural History. As Dryden progressed, through his study of Shakespeare, towards a deeper commitment to tragedy, he wrote,

it requires philosophy as well as
poetry to sound the depth of all
the passions; what they are in
themselves, and how they are
provoked; and in this science the
best poets have excelled.

(W, I, 200)

The accent on moral philosophy has already been heard in the Dedication to Aureng-Zebe, and the play itself abounds with philosophical passages which were to delight the moral tastes of Dr Johnson. If in Aureng-Zebe Dryden makes use of the passions to substantiate a moral view, then it behoves us to ask what sort of effect he expected his play to have. If the play genuinely moves further towards the pathetic tragedy type practised by Otway then how far do its ironies obscure the moral fable? The play appeared just two years

before Rymer's seminal critical essay The Tragedies of the Last Age (1677), and yet it already moves towards the affective softening of tone which distinguishes All for Love. Whereas in The Indian Emperour and Tyrannick Love the passions are exploited satirically to give added zest to a witty conglomeration of loyalties, in Aureng-Zebe the accent is on the battle of the spirit and the will against the destructively mechanical nature of arbitrary passion. The passions become less of an excuse for isolated grandiose effect; they are fundamentally integrated into the psychological needs of the characters and take on an analytical function appropriate to the harmonies of the wit.

Dryden's fundamental attraction towards the passions was aesthetic. As poetical ornament the passions represented the greatest challenge to the dramatist, and gave the greatest opportunity to the virtuoso actor:

All passions may be lively
represented on the stage, if
to the well-writing of them
the actor supplies a good
commanded voice and limbs
that move easily, and without
stiffness.

(W, I, 51)

Dryden was attracted first of all by the capacity of the passions to delight, move and instruct an audience. In the Essay of Dramatic Poesy he accords the passions supreme moral status as 'high concernment', and in the Grounds of Criticism in Tragedy he remarks that

nothing can move our nature,
but by some natural reason,
which works upon passions.

(W, I, 247)

In tragedy, he asserts in the Heads,

all the passions in their turns
 are to be set in a ferment: as
 joy, anger, love, fear are to be
 used as the poet's commonplaces.
 (W, I, 213)

From the time he began writing heroic plays Dryden had a clear-cut conception of the dignity proper to a serious or tragic entertainment and this dignity was largely dependent upon the elevation and eloquence of the passions. Corneille and Shakespeare were his models and he understood that the true refinement of his art could only evolve out of a scrupulous attention to the decorum with which the passions were depicted.

Dryden's early attitudes to the passions were optimistic - he clearly intended to exploit them for their theatrical effectiveness - but were complicated by the desire to eschew vulgar bombast. The vein of grotesque which runs through almost all his heroic plays demonstrates just how much he was attracted to the violence or 'vehemence' of the passions. Dryden maintained a double viewpoint about the aesthetics of heightening the passions; in the Grounds of Criticism in Tragedy he openly inveighs against rant -

the passions, as they are considered
 simply and in themselves, suffer
 violence when they are perpetually
 maintained at the same height,
 (W, I, 255)

but then he proceeds to condemn those features of the drama which are inimical to pure 'concernment' and to the 'violence of passion' (W, I, 256). Hence pointed wit, multiple or mixed passions, and insufficient preparation of the audience, may be amongst the elements which can impair a just affective response. Dryden was trapped between wanting an almost visual directness in his presentation of the passions, and resisting the bathetic sublime which could result when

passion was exaggerated or 'heightened' into the realms of nonsense (Settle's Empress of Morocco in 1673 had been an object-lesson in the careless and inept handling of the passions, and its theatrical success must have been galling to a man of Dryden's fastidious aesthetic tastes)⁶.

In the early Essay of Dramatic Poesy, Dryden is indirectly faced with the problem of how to keep the heightened 'imitation of nature' which is due to the passions distinct from that which is monstrous and disfigured. Two contradictory statements made by Neander reveal exactly how tortuous were the neoclassical attitudes to realism. Both statements take as their theme the analogy of statuary.

⁶. Settle's Empress of Morocco (1673) abounds in examples of extreme passion. As an example of the somewhat bizarre ideas which could arise from a casual acquaintance with the passions-theories of the day, I cite here Morena's speech from the opening act, in which she mingles a Neoplatonic vision of the after-life, with philosophical speculations as to the insights of spirits into the nature of the passions; it makes very curious reading:

For when we'er dead, and our freed Souls enlarg'd,
Of Natures grosser burdens we're discharg'd
Then gentle as a happy Lovers sigh,
Like wandering Meteors through the Air wi'll fly;
And in our airy Walk, as subtil Guests,
We'll steal into our cruel Fathers Breasts,
There read their Souls, and track each Passion sphear,
See how Revenge moves there, Ambition here:
And in their Orbs view the dark Characters
Of Sieges, Ruins, Murders, Blood and Wars.
We'll blot out all those hideous Droughts, and write
Pure and white forms; we'll with a radiant light
Their Breasts incircle, till their Passions be
Gentle as Nature in its Infancy.

(in Five Heroic Plays, ed. B. Dobrée, (1960),
p.109)

First of all Neander finds fault with the formal and essentially passionless nature of the French drama:

those beauties of the French
poesy ... are indeed the beauties
of a statue, but not of a man,
because not animated with the
soul of poesy, which is imitation
of humour and passions.

(W, I, 56)

Here statuary and the techniques associated with it are aligned with the stiff, lifeless and enervate qualities in art. However, later on Neander turns again to the definition of a play with the words,

A play, as I have said, to
be like nature, is to be set
above it; as statues which
are placed on high are made
greater than the life, that
they may descend to the sight
in their just proportion.

(W, I, 88)

This seems to be a call for the statuesque or Collossus-like hero of the rhymed tragedy to throw off what is lifeless and assume the lively grotesquerie of a 'monster of nature', one who is deliberately 'greater than life'. It is the familiar problem of the Venus and the Lazar, and their respective disguises; for a play to be as perfect as art will permit, the Venus must submit to the demands of the Lazar, for without the leeway of distortion no convincing elevation into beauty can be possible.

Dryden's central problem in his handling of the passions was how to make them quite as important, if not more so, as the fable and yet preserve them from transmogrifying his work into farce. He solved the problem indirectly by sanctioning the use of a subversive wit, thus drawing potential laughter away from the passions themselves. But

this solution was instinctual rather than academic and Dryden's theories of the passions remain curiously unpolished compared with his practice of them. The animation, novelty and delight in the passions which he derived from his reading of Boileau and Longinus led him eventually to abandon the heroic play as too frivolous a vehicle for unmitigated passion. The complex ironies and overlayers of meaning which make Aureng-Zebe an intellectually and emotionally enjoyable play were to be gradually discarded in favour of a much purer, affective appeal to the passions of pity and fear in tragedy. The heroic play could present at best the hierarchies of the passions and display their interaction and metamorphoses through a sequence of episodic confrontations. Aureng-Zebe does this more effectively than any other Restoration play - but it could not attain the simple tragic dignity of the Ancients.

One major question that arises out of this new trend is 'What major advantages did the passions have over alternative methods of procuring theatrical pleasure, viz., especially the Jonsonian technique of the "comedy of humours"?'. The most obvious advantages of the passions lay in their variety and intensity; they made an immediate appeal to the sensibility of the audience. However, from Neander's discussion of 'humour' in the Essay of Dramatic Poesy we can tell at a glance that Dryden in his quest for a greater sense of the 'natural' on stage, was already beginning to extend his idea of the term 'humour' (an inheritance from the Elizabethans, hence fair game for a certain degree of refinement) to incorporate some of the effects which were currently being achieved through a deeper exploration of

the passions. For example, Neander reminds his interlocutors that a character such as Falstaff is

not properly one humour, but a
miscellany of humours or images,
drawn from so many several men,
(W, I, 72)

- a compendium, in other words, of the passions. Soon afterwards Neander gives a comprehensive description of humour as

some extravagant habit, passion,
or affection, particular ... to
some one person.
(W, I, 73)

These two statements sum up the major themes of the crucial debate surrounding 'humour' in the Restoration theatre; either you applauded it because it represented the eccentricity and bizarre conduct of society's grotesques, or you approved it because it epitomized the follies and vices incident to mankind in general. Neander quickly associates 'humour' in the narrow sense (odd behaviour which immediately distinguishes a man from his brothers) with the contemptuous laughter attracted by a Hobbesian sense of superiority, and with the monstrous and deformed. Hence the chief obstacle to building one's drama entirely around a system of humours was that these might evoke the atmosphere of malignant wit all too familiar from the satiric grotesque, and that while this might be adequate for the blurred distinctions between Jacobean revenge-play and citizen comedy, it was clearly not sophisticated enough to satisfy the demands of both the Restoration comedy of manners and the romantic heroic tragedy. By the Restoration there was a marked tendency for Jonsonian 'humours' to become embellished with decorum, and to be made more polite. Even

Shadwell, a slavish follower of Jonsonian principles, wrote in his Preface to The Humorists:

For if a man should bring such a humor upon the Stage ... as onely belongs to one or two persons, it would not be understood by the Audience, but would be thought, for the singularity of it, wholly unnatural, and would be no jest to them neither ... for a humor, being the representation of some extravagance of Mankind, cannot but in some thing resemble some man or other, or it is monstrous and unnatural.⁷

A concept of 'humour' which divorced itself from the eccentric or bizarre lost much of the dramatic vigour which Jonson's example ought to have bequeathed to Restoration playwrights. Shadwell's comedy examines society in the light of 'universal' humours, taking each individual character as an illustration of a general humour which is recognisable to the audience. The position of the humour was thus highly unsatisfactory; if it retained its bizarre connotation it could never, on its own, arrive at the degree of decorum requisite to serious Restoration tragedy. If it became eclipsed in a general theory of 'social humours', then it forfeited its right to violent effects and sensationalism. If you wished to combine violent incident with tender, even sentimental emotion, then the passions offered an altogether more subjective, less

⁷. Spingarn, II, 157. Bruce King's interpretation of the status of the 'humours' at this period is illuminating; he writes: 'Where Thomas Shadwell made the mistake of simplifying comedy to some single eccentricity, Dryden had the genius to apply the humours technique to the heroic play. It is useful to remember Dryden's definition of dramatic wit as an illustration of minds discomposed by passions. Dryden, like Jonson, exaggerates the behaviour of his characters to reveal their emotional impulses. Dryden, not Shadwell, is the real heir to Jonson in the Restoration'. (King, p.13).

mechanical approach.

In practice it was less a matter of choosing between two reasonably defined systems of 'humours' and 'passions' than one of distinguishing between the sorts of style appropriate to tragedy and comedy. The basic differences between humours and passions, and some indication of their respective ranges, is given by Edward Philips, in his Preface to Theatrum Poetarum (1675). In this passage he is discussing the right kind of 'decorum' needed for the elegant conduct of a tragedy:

Next to the Heroic Poem (if not, as some think, equal) is Tragedy, in conduct very different, in height (sic) of Argument alike, as treating only of the actions and concernments of the most Illustrious Persons, whereas Comedy sets before us the humours, converse, and designs of the more ordinary sort of People: the chief parts thereof are the ~~Tragedies~~ ^{Tragedies} and ~~Tragedies~~ ^{Tragedies}, by which latter is meant that moving and Pathetical manner of expression, which in some respect is to exceed the highest that can be delivered in Heroic Poesie, as being occasioned upon representing to the very life the unbridled passions of Love, Rage, and Ambition, the violent ends or down falls of great Princes, the subversion of Kingdoms and Estates, or what ever else can (be) imagined of funest or Tragical, all which will require a style not ramping, but passionately sedate and moving.⁸

Philips' somewhat archaic diction places the emphasis securely upon the affective response invited by tragedy, and the pleasure of the passions consists in their capacity to evoke ambiguity or pleasant confusion of feeling -

⁸. Spingarn, II, 269-70.

'passionately sedate'. The heroic play, with its undisguised vein of social analysis, did this only partially, but it relied more upon passions than humours for the generation of spontaneous emotion.

It would also be true to say that the heroic play did not encourage a deeply-felt sympathy for a central character, which is the usual object of tragedy. In fact the heroic-play-attitude towards passion is often satirically frivolous; this may lead one or two readers to expect Dryden to be a 'humours' writer, but strangely enough, this is not the case. In the heroic plays he gets too much fun out of pushing the physiological interpretation of man to extremes to come down heavily on the side of either passions or humours. Eccentricity is usually linked with passion, but passion itself may be either serious or ridiculous, according to context, and frequently it is both. The intellectual self-consciousness of characters trapped by passion in Dryden's plays usually militates against our feeling that their plight is in any way tragic, and yet their helpless subjection to passion invites an undeniable pathos. In one sense these passions are not meant to be real; they are tokens or badges of the human dilemma, greater than life-size exaggerations, and their purpose within the plays is to divert and amuse rather than to terrify. The heroic play also demonstrates quite clearly that passions are only distempers to those who view them as such; it is usually the opportunists, fatalists or atheists who interpret them primarily as ill-timed visitations inspired by a hostile Fortune which governs the universe. Lovers of virtue, like St Catherine, Almahide, and Indamora, view

them as brief tests of endurance on the path to spiritual peace, harmony and tranquillity.

Like the imagination, the grotesque, and all the other richly-coloured elements in Dryden's dramatic technique, the passions are prone to a certain festivity. They are subversive and dignified, absurd and glorious, constantly varied. Although the passions normally do become part of Dryden's redemptive moral framework, as instruments of purgation and exuberant release, moral design is frequently vitiated by the stubbornness with which passion may assail even the most exemplary characters. In many ways Aureng-Zebe fulfils all the expectations of the comedy of 'humours' with its broad social vision and variety of eccentrics (e.g. The Empress, Melesinda, Morat, and the Emperor), while remaining essentially a play about the nature of passion. Dryden moves with agility, taste, and skill towards a greater naturalism; he chooses for his subject only a 'practicable virtue, mixed with frailties and imperfections of human life'. (L,11).

In Aureng-Zebe Dryden achieves a reconciliation between the opposing values of the Lazar and the Venus; the grotesque vein is modified by a more detailed approach to the passions, and a recognition (despite Dryden's later complaints about 'multiple or mixed' passions) that the emotions attaching to a particular passion are compound and ambivalent. For example Robert S. Newman astutely points out that

the Empress is as much heroicized
as ridiculed for her pretensions
to sexual beauty and martial power.⁹

⁹ R.S.Newman, 'Irony and the Problem of Tone', op.cit., p.445.

She combines the ethics of the Venus and the Lazar, and the moral climax of the play occurs in the scene in which she offers incestuous love to the hero, blaspheming his self-styled sanctity and inspiring suicidal impulses. A mixture of admiration and ridicule emerges from Nourmahal's attempted euphemism for her passion; she employs the language of dreams, which Dryden richly exploits to give a vivid impression of repressed eroticism, and a 'heroic' desire for self-glorification. The speech foreshadows the famous account of Cleopatra on the Cydnus in All for Love, but is in many ways equally as fine, making the best of pictorial techniques to lend an atmosphere of the visual arts to the imaginative world of the love-vision:

I dreamed your love was by love's goddess sought.
 Officious cupids, hov'ring o'er your head,
 Held myrtle wreaths; beneath your feet were spread
 What sweets soe'er Sabeian springs disclose,
 Our Indian jasmine, or the Syrian rose.
 The wanton ministers around you strove
 For service, and inspired their mother's love.
 Close by your side, and languishing, she lies,
 With blushing cheeks, short breath, and wishing eyes;
 Upon your breast supinely lay her head,
 While on your face her famished sight she fed.
 Then, with a sigh, into these words she broke
 (And gathered humid kisses as she spoke):
 "Dull and ingrateful! Must I offer love?
 Desired of gods, and envied ev'n by Jove,
 And dost thou ignorance or fear pretend?
 Mean soul! And dar'st not gloriously offend?"
 (L, 77)

All Nourmahal's dominant passions are present in this Narcissistic self-portrait. Wish-fulfilment prompts her to imagine herself Venus, but the details of the goddess's posture ('blushing cheeks, short breath, and wishing eyes', 'supine', and with 'famished sight'), indicate an absurd prostration to passion. The heroic is interspersed with the banal; the tone conveys a sense of sickened appetite (the heavy-scented vocabulary of 'Indian jasmine', 'Syrian rose',

and 'humid kisses') and of pretentious histrionics (e.g. 'Dull and ingrateful! Must I offer love?'). The interesting aspect of Dryden's technique here is that he intends the mock-heroic to achieve a certain stylishness which almost elevates it into the genuinely heroic. He cultivates in *Nourmahal* a vein of heroic posturing which just misfires, and consistently flirts with anti-climax. Dryden's ability to maintain this level of dramatic insight is relatively new; the degree of control is considerably refined, and surpasses anything which can be found in the earlier heroic plays.

The second fable of the *Venus and the Lazar* in the play concerns the virtuous and strong-willed *Indamora* who encounters the *Lazar* in the passions of three men; impotent lust from the Old Emperor, lust and power from *Morat*, and jealousy from her betrothed, *Aureng-Zebe*. *Indamora*'s resilience is totally dependent upon individual will; only when she momentarily succumbs to fear is her faith in herself ever shaken. She combats passions along the lines recommended by Christian morality; she turns the other cheek and deflects the response expected of her while at the same time advertising the piety of her own magnanimous conduct:

If, sir, I seem not discomposed with rage,
Feed not your fancy with a false presage.
Farther to press your courtship is but vain;
A cold refusal carries more disdain.
Unsettled virtue stormy may appear;
Honor like mine serenely is severe.
To scorn your person and reject your crown
Disorder not my face into a frown.

(L, 72)

Dryden may here be poking fun at French standards of civility, but he is also revealing a moral emphasis central

to the message of the play. Indamora's rejection of the passions of anger and scorn enables her to assume a stoicism of Herculean proportions. All the characters in Aureng-Zebe are brought, like Hercules, to a crossroads where they must choose whether to cast in their lot with passion or reason. For each situation a choice of passions is available and it is the nature of this choice which interests Dryden and works up suspense for the audience. The most resonant and haunting line in the play is the Old Emperor's lament "Why was my reason made my passion's slave?" (L,86), and the play attempts through various means to show that passion, though in itself often vicious, is capable through grace, reason and persuasion, of transformation into virtue. As with all of Dryden's heroic plays the plot appears to be arbitrary and simplistic. What matters is how the writer handles the development of the passions within a totally conventionalized and by now familiar framework.

John A. Winterbottom, in a valuable article¹⁰, argues persuasively that Charleton and Dryden could well have exchanged ideas prior to the composition of Aureng-Zebe. By the time he wrote the Preface to All for Love, Dryden asserted with some confidence that 'our passions are, or ought to be within our power' (W, I, 222). The treatises by Senault and Charleton which appeared in London during the early seventies promoted an essentially optimistic and, in the case of Senault, a specifically Christian attitude towards the passions. Both men acknowledge that passion is a distemper and poison to the mind (Dryden's prolific use

¹⁰ J.A. Winterbottom, 'The Place of Hobbesian Ideas in Dryden's Tragedies', JEGP, LVII (1958), 665-83.

of fever imagery in Aureng-Zebe has been well documented by Bruce King)¹¹, but both see in these 'troubles, commotions or perturbations' an opportunity for man to assert his moral allegiance to Supreme Good. Senault's treatise, which is dedicated to 'our Lord Jesus Christ', concludes on the note that

There is no Passion in our Soul,
which may not profitably be
husbanded by Reason and Grace
... our Welfare depends only
upon the Use of the Passions;
and Virtue subsists only by
the good employment of our Souls
Motions.¹²

Although Senault is more heavily influenced by the mystics, and accentuates the need to pass beyond the life of the senses to attain spiritual benefit, Charleton, with rather more help from reason and medical science, makes very similar claims for the moral well-being induced by the discipline of the passions:

I will conclude then, that I
commit Errors in passion, not
because I want an omniscious
Understanding: but only because
I make not a right use of that
finite indeed, yet sufficient
Understanding God hath given me,
in the conduct of that Cupidity
my passions excite in me.¹³

If we translate these ideas into dramatic form we find a very useful example in the work of Sir Samuel Tuke, who in 1671, penned a revised preface to his highly successful

¹¹. See King, pp.116-32.

¹². J.F.Senault, The Use of Passions, translated by H.Cary, Earl of Monmouth, 2nd ed., (1671), p.510.

¹³. Charleton, A Natural History of the Passions, op.cit., p.173.

and unsmutty comedy of 1663, The Adventures of Five Hours.

In the new Preface Tuke writes,

for Plays being Moral Pictures,
their chiefest Perfections consist
in the Force and Congruity of
Passions and Humours, which are
the Features and Complexions of
our Minds.¹⁴

This formulation unites the Drydenian delight in the vivaciousness of the passions with the need for propriety and moral restraint. It is interesting to find in the opening speech of Tuke's play a virtual abstract of the later passions treatises of both Senault and Charleton; Don Henrique's recipe for happiness mingles Stoicism with the Aristotelian dependence on reason as a curb for the passions:

How happy are the Men of easie Phlegm,
Born on the Confines of Indifference;
Holding from Nature, the securest Tenure,
The Peaceful Empire o'r themselves, which we
Th' unhappy Men of Fire, without th' aids
Of mighty Reason, or Almighty Grace,
Are all our lives contending for in vain.
'Tis evident, that Solid Happiness,
Is founded on the Conquest of our Passions;
But since they are the Favourites of Sense,
Self-love bribes Reason, still in their defence.¹⁵

Although this speech is scarcely the quintessence of gripping drama, it maps out clearly the moral pattern to be explored by the conflicting loyalties and mistaken identities of the ensuing comedy. The tone foreshadows the famous generalisations on life and virtue made by Dryden's self-mortifying hero in Aureng-Zebe.

The passional landscape of Dryden's last rhymed play is more susceptible to allegorical interpretation than that of any other of his plays. The distribution of passions

¹⁴. Tuke, The Adventures of Five Hours, ed. B. Van Thal, (1927) p. 5.

¹⁵. *ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

amongst the dramatis personae is calculated to indicate that there will be rhetorical opportunities for conversion scenes. In his History of the Passions Charleton divides the passions into two general classes, 'Simple' (or Primitive), and 'Mixt' (or Compound). In addition, passions may be either merely physical (i.e. with no apparent cause), metaphysical (directed towards God), or moral (directed towards good or evil). Dryden's line-up of characters presents formidable challenges to such a classification. On the score of primitive passions those characters who display openly Hobbesian traits (e.g. Nourmahal, Morat and the Old Emperor) exhibit the most lively and vicious ones, e.g. heroic pride, audacity, rage, ambition, lust, jealousy, revenge and envy; while on the side of 'mixt' or compound passions, are the more tender affections associated with the intrinsically virtuous and virtue-loving characters, Aureng-Zebe, Melesinda, Indamora and Arimant. These exhibit the instructive, educative or 'counselling' passions of hope, fear, filial piety, indecision, duty, dejection, melancholia, submission and resolution. Largely speaking, the more passive characters in the play are the more responsive to the operation of self-improving passions which on the whole they welcome, while the more villainous and exuberant characters feel themselves trapped and dominated by urgent passions which they know full well can only make them look ridiculous. Of course the inter-connection of passions in the play works at a much more complex level than this, owing to the modulations and nuances of language and a constant sliding backwards and forwards between heroic and anti-heroic modes. Characters

strive to live more fully in the passionate 'present moment' and to shut out either anticipation or memory. The only refuge for those tormented by passion is an increasing degree of commitment to temporal pleasure - something whose immediacy gives them no time to analyse or catalogue their own anxieties. Those who try to eschew or modify their passion are consequently betrayed into a spiritual struggle with the forces of memory and desire; Aureng-Zebe himself remains constrainedly passive in the face of both the recollection of a once exemplary Golden Age and the necessity of a political crisis that calls for immediate action. Robert S. Newman exactly captures the moving spirit of the play when he says that,

for Dryden, as for Hobbes and
Descartes, the surest and simplest
way to control the passions is
to avoid acting in haste, i.e.
to always consider the future
consequences of proposed actions.¹⁶

To some spectators the character of Aureng-Zebe himself may appear too self-righteous; with a sometimes disturbing naïvety, he appears almost too priggishly intent on the completion of his own spiritual exercises. Certainly he cannot be regarded as an entirely satisfactory foil for the engagingly blunt Morat. But Dryden's problem here is similar to Milton's difficulty in giving the part of the Lady in Comus any intrinsic interest. Aureng-Zebe's moral heroism is no match in dramatic impact for the decadent freakishness of his rival Indian potentates. Dryden's

¹⁶ R.S. Newman, 'Irony and the Problem of Tone', op.cit., p.444.

affective sympathies still lie with the grosser appetites of the flesh and with characters who but rarely overcome their baser instincts.

The conflict then, which animates Aureng-Zebe is that of the flesh versus the spirit. Through the intestine wars of the passions we are taught quickly to recognise the Venus and the Lazar in everybody and to distinguish between diabolic and angelic values. In this play Dryden gives perhaps his best dramatic handling of the theme of the Fall; an exploration in the first act of the implications of a captive princess sold into the slavery of the Old Emperor's sin and secret shame. The predominance of the passions throughout signifies that a serener age has passed away and that modern men lack the resources to attain that 'constant Tranquility of Mind' which can only be found through the use of 'right reason'. In Senault's treatise the author raises the question of the nature of the passions before the Fall and concludes that Pre-Lapsarian man was afflicted with 'only just fears and rational desires',¹⁷. Adam in the state of grace knew only passions which were obedient to him. Aureng-Zebe, the new Adam, has to do battle with obsessive jealousy and sexual frustration, disobedient passions, before he can begin to learn from Indamora the wisdom of the self-restraint which leads to perfection. Dryden raises new life out of the dregs of a decaying civilisation through the agency of powerful and violent passions which either consume themselves to ashes or convert a negatizing apathy into

¹⁷·J.F.Senault,The Use of Passions,op.cit.,p.44.

an active and vigilant faith in virtue.

Many years later in his Dedication to the Aeneis (1697)

Dryden wrote:

The passions, as I have said,
are violent; and acute
distempers require medecines
of a strong and speedy operation.
(W, II, 228)

As Dryden grew older his interest in the passions became more academic as he praised the fiery spirit of passion which animated Homer and recognised it as being amongst the more 'painterly' of poetic techniques. In his Parallel betwixt Painting and Poetry (1695) he called the two arts

imitations of the passions
which always move, and
therefore consequently
please.

(W, II, 194)

The peak of Dryden's creative involvement with the passions occurs in the extended quarrel scenes he wrote for Antony and Ventidius in All for Love, and for Hector and Troilus in Troilus and Cressida. After this exploration of how to intensify the affective appeal of heroism he seems to have slipped back into the rather casual habits of the rhymed play - introducing passion as arbitrary heightening, 'chiaroscuro' or witty commentary. But by the time he created characters such as Muley-Moloch (Don Sebastian) and Cassandra (Cleomenes) Dryden's interest in the passions had greatly diminished. These 'new' characters are grandiose reminiscences of earlier plays in which their emotional counterparts (The Old Emperor and Lyndaraxa), had more brio and flair. So, although Dryden's attraction towards passion was sustained throughout his whole career, it was subject to certain changes of direction and fluctuations in intensity.

Aureng-Zebe is arguably his most satisfactory play because it anticipates a growing insight into the passions which perhaps All for Love and Don Sebastian never completely fulfil. Aureng-Zebe hints tantalizingly at possibilities of transcending the strait-jacket formula of the heroic play and deepening its psychological effectiveness through focussing upon characters who strive hard to be true to themselves after the genuine tragic manner. Dryden restrains the abandonment to frisky passions which makes plays like The Indian Emperour and Tyrannick Love exert something of the fascination of the 'thriller' or 'horror-movie'. Passions in Aureng-Zebe are still violent but their violence does not result in a lapse of moral dignity. The emotional struggles of those characters who 'gloriously offend' are as edifying and empathy-inducing as the moral trials of the serener characters. Colley Cibber's well-known account of the 'laugh of approbation' which sometimes attended Morat's line 'I'll do it to show my arbitrary power' in Act IV, sc. 1. (see L, 80)¹⁸, points to the presence of a benevolent affective response in the spectators. Gradually Dryden allowed his audience to become emotionally engaged in the ferocity of animal passion while preserving a corrective awareness of their own tastes, opinions and prejudices. In the remainder of this chapter I shall be examining what is new and also unique in the treatment of the passions in Aureng-Zebe.

¹⁸. C. Cibber, An Apology for the Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, 2nd ed. (1740), pp. 102-04.

'The Specious Tower': Methodized Passion in 'Aureng-Zebe'

Towards the end of the play, when Aureng-Zebe is confronted by what he thinks is incontrovertible evidence of his loved-one's infidelity he speaks the following lines:

I begin
To stagger, but I'll prop myself within.
The specious tow'r no ruin shall disclose,
Till down at once the mighty fabric goes.
(L, 110)

The 'specious tow'r' to which he refers is comprised of simulated or mock passion. For the first time in the play the hero is reduced to the mean trick of dissembling with his mistress; he succumbs once more to the distorting and insidious power of jealousy. The image of the tower has appeared before in Dryden. In the final act of The Indian Emperour Almeria and Montezuma retire to the safety of a 'Zoty' or watch-tower, symbolising their isolation in passion and their lack of sympathy for the cant and brutality of the Spanish Christians. Lyndaraxa, in The Conquest of Granada, retires to the ambiguous neutrality of the Albayzyn as she balances the pros and cons of the fortunes of her two lovers. Here the tower represents moral obliquity and the passions of heroic aggrandizement and ambition. Lyndaraxa's lust for a crown (by allying herself to any man who wears it) is characterized by her haughty pride, a hollow passion devoid of moral stamina. When she is eventually frustrated in her schemes Dryden gives her an amusing speech in which she likens herself to a tower:

All arts of injured women I will try:
First I will be revenged; and then I'll die.
But, like some falling tower,
Whose seeming firmness does the sight beguile,
So hold I up my nodding head a while,
Till they come under; and reserve my fall,
That with my ruins I may reach them all.
(SS, IV, 185)

The image barely conceals grotesque overtones, and Lyndaraxa's revenge-passion is gently ridiculed by the outlandish simile she employs. The most natural terms in which she can visualize revenge are those in which the chaos of her internal passions is mirrored by a vague concept of outward physical 'ruin' and desolation. For Lyndaraxa the tower image serves as a refuge from degradation and as the last vestige of respectability for a would-be tragedy queen. The tower image represents no moral threat whatsoever; it suggests merely the hollow nature of the tragic gesture which Lyndaraxa longs to make. Her dissembling and connivance throughout the play condition us to receive such an image in a spirit of mock-solemnity. Dryden later returned to the tower-image in his translation of Juvenal's Tenth Satire, where it is used in mock-heroic to denote the colossal scale of Sejanus' crimes in contrast with his insect-like activity:

For he who grasp'd the World's exhausted Store
Yet never had enough, but wish'd for more,
Rais'd a Top-heavy Tow'r, of monstrous height,
Which Mould'ring, crush'd him underneath the Weight.
(CD, IV, 217)

In Aureng-Zebe the 'specious tower' - the decorous social front which characters adopt to mask either the nature or the object of their passions - is always shown to be morally inferior to direct plain-speaking. Whereas in his earlier passions-plays Dryden used passions as mechanical vehicles for the repartee of the love-and-honour debate (see especially his quick-fire treatment of the passions in The Indian Queen Act IV, sc.i), in Aureng-Zebe he uses them as clues to deeper springs of character-motivation, with the governing idea that each passion will

eventually reveal an intrinsic moral dilemma and force its victim into conscious decision-making. Dryden still employs irony to point up the habits of self-deception practised by a passionate character in order to make himself socially acceptable or deserving of pity; the Old Emperor is one of Dryden's most penetrating studies of a man whose moral sense atrophies and who is stirred into generous action only by bitter necessity rather than by inner promptings of guilt and shame. By employing Indamora as an interpreter of other people's passion Dryden keeps the spectator's attention firmly fixed on perceiving the passions as they truly are. Only Indamora's almost evangelical taste for 'conversion' (she attempts the Old Emperor, Arimant, Morat and even Aureng-Zebe himself) remains largely exempt from satirical comment since she is the spokesman for the proper 'use of the passions' within the play. By giving her the common human frailties, especially the fear of death (see Act V), Dryden establishes her with some success as a normative character. The emotional tangle of the plot revolves round her and it is through her perceptions of the passions at work in others that the audience is encouraged to participate in a not altogether serious anatomy of the passionate distempers of man. As Bruce King has observed, the stylisation of passions in Aureng-Zebe is largely humorous, (i.e. both 'amusing', and reliant upon the 'humours') and involves only familiar and easily-recognisable emotions¹⁹.

Not surprisingly then, this is the one play of Dryden's in which wit and the passions complement each other most

¹⁹. See King, p.117.

perfectly; the main themes of the play provide an excellent framework for the articulation of what is best in both.

The first major theme is that which King indicates in his Hobbesian interpretation of the play; an acute restlessness of thought and desire. However, Dryden deliberately moves the battleground of passions away from the purely material goals of physical conquest; the character of heroic energy and aggrandizement like Morat, is being superseded by the man of contemplative sinew, Aureng-Zebe. As passive resignation and fortitude come to be seen as more heroic, because more stable qualities, Dryden gives more attention to the nature of passional conflict within the mind, exploring in Aureng-Zebe himself a self-questioning temperament which is of an unusually melancholic cast. Parallel with this contrast between restless desire and stasis runs the theme of frustrated conquest, summed up very well in Nourmahal's lament over Aureng-Zebe's supposed death:

I fought and conquered, yet
have lost the prize.
(L, 103)

Each character who is beset by vicious passion strives to attain self-mastery, and with it some degree of rhetorical competence. Often an over-attention to rhetorical effect (speakers like Nourmahal and Morat in particular) results in a vitiated moral awareness whose outcome is futility. Ulterior motive can be soothed away by a charm of words, and quietly forgotten about. For instance, it is as futile for Morat to imagine that he really stands a chance of winning Indamora, as it is for Nourmahal to believe that she can seduce her stepson into an incestuous relationship.

Equally futile is the persuasion of both the Old Emperor and Arimant that they must both be irresistible to a young captive princess. Dryden employs a lively strain of domestic comedy to point up the theme of frustrated conquest and its implications for the fantasizer. The two peaks of comedy in the play compromise the domestic squabble between the Emperor and the Empress (in which the usually grotesque Nourmahal urges the Old Emperor to assume a realistic attitude towards the problems of impotence and age), and the episodes in which Arimant, the would-be lover, is consistently employed by the object of his devotion as a go-between between her and her lover.

Assumed notions of emotional grandeur resulting from differences in social caste contribute considerable satiric edge to the kind of passion a character professes at any given moment. The Empress's complete inversion of what properly constitutes the 'god-like life' is amusingly expressed in Act III in the scene in which she first confides her incestuous passion to her maid:

ZAYDA: Sure, Aureng-Zebe has something of divine,
Whose virtue through so dark a cloud can shine.

.....
EMPRESS: Could Aureng-Zebe so lovely seem to thee,
And I want eyes that noble worth to see?
Thy little soul was but to wonder moved;
My sense of it was higher, and I loved.
That man, that god-like man ...

(L, 65-6)

Nourmahal unwittingly pollutes Zayda's innocent and just panegyric of the prince by substituting her own wilful interpretation of the moral order. Her ideas of justice and propriety are distorted because she assumes that the moral order moves outward in a concentric ring from the seat of her own passions. This means that by prosecuting her own passion for Aureng-Zebe she is violating the new

standards of heroism, in which inner peace and contemplation are the keynotes. Her fiery nature brings Aureng-Zebe face to face with the 'deformity of life' in the climax of the prison scene, where her conduct perfectly illustrates D.W. Jefferson's claim that,

Dryden's plays are full of
pleasing speeches in which
depravity finds arguments
for itself.²⁰

Nourmahal's growing instability and megalomania throughout the play are finely handled and have their psychological roots in the marital discord in which we encounter her first. Her passionate dilemma is even bathetically treated at one point, where she taxes her husband with the charge:

You wrong me first, and urge
my rage to rise,
Then I must pass for mad.
(L, 42)

The Old Emperor rejects what he satirizes as her 'clamorous virtue'; and thus 'abandons' her to her least responsible instincts. Envy and the need for reassurance dominate Nourmahal's erratic behaviour throughout the rest of the play until, in her confrontation with her rival, we see the true extent to which the delusions of passion have poisoned her sense of realities:

Heav'n did, by me, the outward model build;
Its inward work, the soul, with rubbish filled.
Yet oh, th' imperfect piece moves more delight;
'Tis gilded o'er with youth, to catch the sight.
The gods have poorly robbed my virgin bloom,
And what I am, by what I was, o'ercome.
Traitor, restore my beauty and my charms,
Nor steal my conquests with my proper arms.
(L, 104)

²⁰ D.W. Jefferson, 'All, all of a piece throughout', :Thoughts on Dryden's Dramatic Poetry', in Restoration Theatre, ed. J.R. Brown and B. Harris, (Stratford-upon-Avon, Studies 6) (1965), p.170

Nourmahal's rage could well have been the model for Lee's passionate Roxana in The Rival Queens (1677). Dryden in his verse epistle on the play, To Mr Lee, on his Alexander, indicates some of his preferences in the matter of raising the passions²¹. Although by now Dryden had turned to more sober and sophisticated modes of emotional colouring in All for Love, he could still address his fellow-dramatist with these words:

-
21. There are notable similarities in feeling between Dryden's verse-epistle to Lee and his elegy, To the Memory of Mr. Oldham (1684). Just as Dryden commends Lee's warmth and vigour of expression, so he recalls Oldham's youthful qualities as a satirist. Between the years 1675 and c.1680, Dryden seems to become increasingly conscious of his years and to value more the zest and enthusiasm of his younger contemporaries. Oldham and Lee were partakers of his good opinion, and Dryden was prepared to make generous excuses for flaws or excesses in their style. The comparable passage in the Oldham elegy runs thus:

O early ripe! to thy abundant store
 What could advancing Age have added more?
 It might (what Nature never gives the young)
 Have taught the numbers of thy native Tongue.
 But Satyr needs not those, and Wit will shine
 Through the harsh cadence of a rugged line:
 A noble Error, and but seldom made,
 When Poets are by too much force betray'd.
 (CD, II, 175)

It is not unlikely that the 'Force' so much admired by Dryden in these younger men was the one quality which had cost him more anxiety than any other throughout his dramatic career. Dryden was well aware that he lacked the imaginative impetus and daring of Lee, and that his satire was of a type very different from Oldham's. The two poems complement each other so well as to suggest a degree of wish-fulfilment on the part of the mature and established poet.

Such praise is yours, while you the Passions move,
 That 'tis no longer feign'd; 'tis real Love:
 Where Nature Triumphs over wretched Art;
 We only warm the Head, but you the Heart.
 Always you warm! and if the rising Year,
 As in hot Regions, bring the Sun too near,
 'Tis but to make your Fragrant spices blow,
 Which in our colder Climates will not grow.
 They only think you animate your Theme
 With too much Fire, who are themselves all Phle'me.
 (CD, I, 107)

Lee's Rival Queens was his first play in blank verse, and one of the first successful illustrations of the contention Dryden had made in the Prologue to Aureng-Zebe that "Passion's too fierce to be in fetters bound". Nevertheless Dryden was content to leave ferocity of passion to the impulsive talents of his younger disciple, whose imaginative flights took him into realms of rhapsody which today have more than a hint of the surrealist. Erotic and demonic passions govern Lee's early plays, in which Dryden was prepared to concede enough of genius to cancel out any excesses. Also it was in Aureng-Zebe that Dryden had produced some of his liveliest and most violent emotions.

The disciplined structure and tone of Aureng-Zebe meant that very little violent emotion was actually squandered as rant. Dryden was careful to marshal his resources to secure the maximum variety of passion within a very small compass. For example, in the second act, the Emperor has a stormy interview with Indamora which suddenly disintegrates into banter which would not disgrace a Restoration comedy:

INDAMORA: But piety to you, unhappy prince,
 Becomes a crime, and duty an offense.
 Against yourself you with your foes combine,
 And seem your own destruction to design.

EMPEROR: You may be pleased your politics to spare;
I'm old enough, and can myself take care.
INDAMORA: Advice from me was, I confess, too bold;
You're old enough - it may be, sir, too old.
EMPEROR: You please yourself with your contempt of age,
But love neglected will convert to rage.
(L, 40-41)

Just at the point when the Emperor is committed to vengeance Arimant enters with the news of the approach of the Empress, also in a high fury. Dryden plunges us suddenly into an electric atmosphere reminiscent of Lee's heroic plays as Nourmahal enters, hurling recriminations. The Old Emperor, recently roused himself, now retreats into the rôle of nervous pacifist, employing a dissembling idiom:

Have patience. My first flames can ne'er decay;
These are but dreams, and soon will pass away.
Thou knowest my heart, my empire, all is thine;
In thy own heav'n of love serenely shine,
Fair as the face of nature did appear
When flowers first peeped and trees did
 blossoms bear,
And winter had not yet deformed th' inverted year;
Calm as the breath which fans our eastern groves,
And bright as when thy eyes first lighted up our
 loves.

(L, 42)

The speciousness of this opiate pastoral does not deceive the Empress, for whom these images of vernal innocence and spring now seem singularly inappropriate. After both of them have teased out the basic reasons for their quarrel (jealousy, boredom, impotence and infertility), the emotional and spiritual crux of the scene devolves onto these lines:

EMPEROR: When we lay next us what we hold most dear,
Like Hercules, invenomed shirts we wear,
And cleaving mischiefs.
NOURMAHAL: What you merit, have,
And share at least the miseries you gave.
(L, 44-5)

The invocation of Hercules is significant. If in Dryden's

earlier heroic dramas we have witnessed the egocentric 'gloire' of the Hercules of the Labours, heroes with 'world-astounding terms' and grandiose designs for self-perfection and apotheosis, then in Aureng-Zebe we witness the fatal disintegration of the Herculean view of heroic personality; we see Hercules furens, heroes possessed by madness, ambition and lust, subjected to passions which consume them like a fire (Nourmahal's death by poison is probably borrowed from the myth of Hercules and Deianeira). Nourmahal makes it quite plain in this early scene that her addiction to power is an emotional substitute, although Dryden later uses it as a means of establishing her blood-relationship with her son Morat. In Aureng-Zebe, Dryden concentrates far more upon the effects of sudden passion upon the moral outcome of a situation, than on the elaborate rivalries between families and generations which account for the passional jealousies of The Indian Queen and The Indian Emperour. It is precisely because the Old Emperor and Nourmahal can behave reasonably and refuse to be consistently cruel to one another that their failure to unite in a politically responsible relationship indicates a fatal weakness of the will, a moral decadence which is merely the result of selfishly-indulged passion and emotional greed. In fact it is somewhat surprising to find Dryden dispensing with his favourite 'family-feud' material in the political philosophizing of Act I. After its fairly formal opening, Aureng-Zebe quickly develops into a drama of individual wills and passions. Some indication that Dryden was turning away from the 'parallel' characterisation which he had practised in The Indian Emperour and The Conquest of Granada is given by the fact that he neglects to bring two

characters - the rival brothers Darah and Sujah - on stage to complicate the action. Also it is especially noticeable that where double characterisations do exist, e.g. in the 'double-hero' (Morat-Aureng-Zebe) and 'double-heroine' (Indamora-Melesinda), Dryden has taken care to ensure that each character appears in his or her own right. Characterisation in Aureng-Zebe is rarely insipid and this makes a pleasant change from the Tweedledum-and-Tweedledee situations in some of the earlier plays, in which brotherly couplings such as those between Odmar and Guyomar, Abenamar and Selin, Abdalla and Abdelmelech, tend to be tedious and uninspired. Dryden quickly shifts the political setting of Aureng-Zebe to one side, so that he can develop the portrayal of the passions in the individual protagonists; any sense of community which emerges from the play derives much more from the characters' mutual dependance on passion and its fantasies, than upon national pride, military bravado or political solidarity.

That is why the function of Indamora as a catalyst is of such paramount importance in the play. Dryden clearly understood the symbolic value of her rôle, as he spends much time in the Epistle Dedicatory, defending her conduct from the scruples of 'les precieuses'. What Dryden was trying to do was to make her rôle engaging and interesting - a difficult task as she resembles many a pallid heroine of opera seria (e.g. Ilia in Mozart's Idomeneo). It is through Indamora's reactions to the passions, however, that Dryden's stance as playwright ought to be judged; despite the fact that Aureng-Zebe is declared by the faithful Arimant to be 'by no strong passion swayed/except his Love', the hero is

already guilty of jealous mistrust by the conclusion of the first act and is in need of Indamora's spiritual counsel. Dryden is developing his plot structure along the lines of the 'sentimental education' which he began in his depiction of the 'Platonic' partnership of Almanzor and Almahide.

There can be little doubt that sentiment is the quality in Aureng-Zebe which most easily renders the moral characters nauseous. Both Aureng-Zebe and Indamora advertise their virtue by adopting a moralistic tone which often provokes hostile reactions (Morat's snub to Aureng-Zebe that he is a 'preaching Brachman' and a 'dreaming priest'). It is her assumption of moral superiority which infuriates Indamora's elderly interlocutors and only embroils them further in passionate outburst. Yet, carefully examined, Indamora's moral Stoicism is governed by mercenary consideration and political savoir-faire. Aureng-Zebe is only nominally the hero of the play; the chief engineer of all the major passionnal developments is his mistress, a woman who sets a definite price on all her actions:

To show the truth of my unaltered breast,
 Know that your life was given at my request -
 At least reprieved. When Heav'n denied you aid,
 She brought it; she whose falsehood you upbraid.
(L, 89)

Indamora's resemblance to Dryden's St Catherine is marked, but the one represents a development or refinement of the other. While St Catherine rejects all earthly passions and will only talk of spiritual ones, Indamora acknowledges the union of both as the path to racial harmony and social stability. Her object in the play is to articulate the passions of others, to stay them in their headlong career and confront them with debate until their intensity is moderated. By thus making the passions 'discourse',

indiscreet or iconoclastic 'heroic' action may be prevented and eccentric desires drawn off. St Catherine, in Tyrannick Love, spends the majority of her time engineering her own heroic martyrdom and refusing to accept the reality or significance of human passion (which means that Maximin's potential sex-appeal is reduced to a farcical irrelevance). Indamora, on the other hand, knows and recognises the tyrannical hold of beauty, power and sex over men, and accepts these dominant passions as instruments to guide them towards more transcendent values of love-and-honour. Indamora is significantly not shocked by her lover's eruption into erotic poetry during one of their quarrels; when his passion has subsided, she calmly offers him her hand and says 'Be no more jealous' (L, 92). Indamora's tolerance of passion is born out of her experience; she has learnt to deflect the unwanted passion of other men - the Emperor, Arimant, and Morat. She treats these passions symbolically, as an indication that 'something is rotten in the state of India': subordinates like Morat and Arimant step out of line by daring to love her, and the Old Emperor violates the benevolent course of old age by indulging in an adolescent infatuation. While Aureng-Zebe spends his time in procrastinating, resisting the temptations of Dianet to lead a rebellion, Indamora is conducting a spiritual warfare on the success of which the hero's ability to act solely depends. In the realm of public action Aureng-Zebe does nothing except remain the people's favourite by strict endurance, self-denial and fortitude. Revolution in the state depends largely on spiritual regeneration, and

Indamora's conversion-therapy in the more private arena of the passions.

In Michael Alssid's stimulating interpretation of the play²², Indamora is seen as a character who symbolises the moral welfare of India; she brings the nation new life through her untiring efforts to bring new vision into a decayed heroic code. Alssid states that,

she attempts, moreover, to
use her beauty and intelligence
as a positive force for the
nation's good and for her own
happiness.²³

However such idealism, with Dryden, is never unequivocal. It is scarcely to be believed that while manipulating the passions of others Indamora should herself remain untarnished. The language of conversion which she uses sounds dangerously at times like the language of flattery and seduction. Her treatment of Arimant mingles the tantalising with the frigid:

For counsel, valour, truth, and kindness too;
All I could wish in man, I find in you ...
...Mistake me not, good Arimant; I know
My beauty's power, and what my charms can do.
(L, 36-7)

She assumes the prerogatives of a Platonic mistress over the men whose passions can be of use to her in furthering her union with Aureng-Zebe, and this ambiguous position is fully exploited by Dryden in the ironic misunderstanding of her 'conversion' of Morat. Indamora thinks that Morat dies her convert, and that she has raised him from the slavery of the 'brute soul' to 'something of divine'. But Dryden betrays his heroine into using language which can be

²². See M.W. Alssid, 'The Design of Dryden's Aureng-Zebe', op.cit.

²³. ibid., p.461.

interpreted as eros rather than caritas; she over-estimates Morat's capacity for altruistic principle and Stoic contempt of reward. The language with which she converts Morat approaches a moral sublime which he has never known, but which flatters his sensual ego into a realisation of his own potential transcendence. Consequently he desires the woman who inspires this vision even more avidly by comparison with the weak-minded anxieties of his fretful wife, especially when he is tempted with such words as these:

What pity 'tis you are not all divine!
 New molded, thorough lightened, and a breast
 So pure to bear the last severest test;
 Fit to command an empire you should gain
 By virtue, and without a blush to reign.
 (L, 98)

In the last act Dryden plays out a partially comic confusion of motive in which Indamora becomes the loser. The theme of betrayal rears its ugly head just as it does in the Dolabella episode in Act IV of All for Love. In Aureng-Zebe this theme is introduced just when Indamora is within striking distance of moral success. Having reconciled Morat to the better use of hitherto vicious passions (but leaving his 'mercenary mind' with respect to her person untouched), Indamora falls victim to Aureng-Zebe's misanthropy and misplaced pride. She decides to part from her lover, repeating the familiar pattern of frustrated conquest. At this point the play approaches unmitigated tragedy, and in All for Love a similarly triangular situation between Antony, Cleopatra and Dolabella is permitted to hasten on the tragic denouement. Ultimately Indamora's victory over passion is shown through the Old Emperor's generous, but testing reconciliation of the couple - 'I'll make you happy in your own despite' (L, 115). The quarrel is pieced

up, and Indamora's predicament resolved. Her pride stood in the way of reconciliation and Aureng-Zebe formally repents of words which 'were the froth my raging folly moved/When it boiled up' (L, 116). The play ends like a fairy-tale and almost looks forward to the sentimental comedy of the eighteenth-century, when Mrs Manley might well have restyled it 'Indamora's Lovers: or, The Vicissitudes of Passion'.

But the plot, with its didactic ethic of the discipline, even the exploitation of passion by virtue, also contains dissonances which suggest deeper realms of experience. The build-up of sensational deaths in the final pages of the play may seem like a dramatic after-thought, but the deaths are there to remind us that passion is the inevitable destiny of the human condition, and that people are very often prepared to die for it. Nourmahal expiates her roseate imaginings of an incestuous paradise with her stepson by undergoing the self-torture of death by poison; Melesinda, the victim of an unhappy marriage in life, goes joyfully heavenwards with Baroque optimism to enjoy her 'better nuptials' by mingling her ashes with Morat's. Both these deaths offer alternative approaches to the purification of passion; Melesinda as the 'Martyr' of love symbolises angelic transcendence, Nourmahal as a casualty of passion recommends the diabolic consummation of purging by fire. The Emperor's wry benediction over his dead wife exposes our human incapacity to come to terms with the profundity of passionate experience:

With thy last breath thou hast thy crimes confessed.
Farewell; and take what thou ne'er gav'st me, rest.
(L, 118)

The Emperor then abdicates and devotes himself to the opiate existence that will soften the cares of his old age; he renounces his ultra-heroic pretensions to be the charioteer and will now 'sleep within the chariot which he drove'. The moral victory of Indamora and Aureng-Zebe needs neither justification nor comment; it is the life of passion which does.

It has often been noticed that the mood of Dryden's last heroic rhymed play is mellow and autumnal; the stricter control over the epic turn of phrase assures that, yet there is also much that is fresh, vigorous and exciting, and in the increased attention to stage-directions we can observe Dryden making sure that his passions-play should be very much a vehicle for talented and imaginative actors. Melesinda's tears and Indamora's frowns are indicated in the text as well as the kind of stylisation required of the larger gestures, e.g. 'She turns and sees Aureng-Zebe by her, and starts', or 'As she is going to stab Indamora, Morat raises himself and holds her hand'. Much of the play's fine language is similarly employed in providing a framework for the actor; characters who enter 'hastily' are usually reported in advance to be in various states of passion, and the techniques of 'painting' these passions through use of posture, countenance and expression are often indicated, as in this reciprocal interchange between Indamora and Melesinda:

INDAMORA: When graceful sorrow in her pomp appears,
 Sure she is dressed in Melesinda's tears.
 Your head reclined (as hiding grief from view)
 Droops like a rose surcharged with morning dew.
 MELESINDA: Can flow'rs but droop in absence of the sun
 Which waked their sweets? And mine, alas, is gone.
 But you the noblest charity express,
 For they who shine in courts still shun distress.

INDAMORA: Distressed myself, like you, confined I live,
 And therefore can compassion take, and give.
 (L, 56-7)

Here the couplets help to give formal dignity to the countenances of the actors, indicating the sort of elegance expected of them by the Restoration audience. The passions must be both decorous and moving, and as we know from Betterton's coaching techniques, the study of the passions and of 'history-painting' was the first priority of the tragedian²⁴. Thus Dryden makes use of the exhibitionist tendency of Baroque heroics to create a tableau of characters whose attitudes, facial expressions and body movements may all be influenced or directed by the statements of a single speaker. Frequently, as in the case of the bold Almanzor, the rhetoric of the central character defines the habitual bearing of those around him; in the early scenes of The Conquest of Granada, for instance, Almanzor quickly intimidates Boabdelin, the Moorish king, into adopting a subordinate rôle which then remains the king's throughout

24. Charles Gildon in his Life of Betterton (1710) reports several opinions of the actor's concerning the relationship between history-painting and the passions. Betterton is reported as saying: 'The History Painters indeed have observ'd a Decorum in their Pieces, which wants to be introduc'd on our Stage; for there is never any Person on the Cloth, who has not a concern in the Action' (p.37). Betterton goes on to relate theory to practice by commending the high standards achieved in tragedy by Mrs Barry: '...her Action is always just, and produc'd naturally by the Sentiments of the Part, which she acts... And I have frequently observ'd her change her Countenance several Times as the Discourse of others on the Stage have affected her in the Part she acted. This is being thoroughly (sic) concern'd, this is to know her Part, this is to express the Passions in the Countenance and Gesture'. (pp.39-40). (See Gildon, The Life of Mr. Thomas Betterton, Eighteenth-Century Shakespeare No.4, 1970).

the play. Similarly, in Aureng-Zebe, the Old Emperor and Morat take their cue from Aureng-Zebe's air of self-righteousness, in adopting a superior, contemptuous tone towards him. It thus follows that Aureng-Zebe will provoke Morat as much by his carriage and deportment as by his elevated language; body-posture is often implicit in the sweep of the language:

Shame is but where with wickedness 'tis joined,
And while no baseness in this breast I find,
I have not lost the birthright of my mind.
(L, 61)

Heroic self-definition therefore often serves an immediate, theatrical function, giving some indication to the actors of raising and calming the passions by degrees. The most violent passions, as Dryden well knew, presented little difficulty; it was their modulation into less easily definable states of unease and anxiety, transitions of mood which were quite as important in preparing the climaxes of the play, which had to be skilfully presented. Dryden deliberately makes his characters hypersensitive to sudden changes in passion or complexion; they are uncannily quick to comment on it, e.g.

MORAT: A little yielding may my love advance,
She darted from her eyes a sidelong glance
Just as she spoke, and like her words it flew,
Seemed not to beg what yet she bid me do.
(L, 73)

or, the Old Emperor, to Morat:

Pow'r, like new wine, does your weak brain surprise,
And its mad fumes in hot discoveries rise.
But time these giddy vapours will remove...
(L, 85)

The language of the passions has to evoke an excitation of feeling either by agitating the spectator with a display of symptoms (as Arthur C. Kirsch points out, blushing and weeping are commonplace in Aureng-Zebe)²⁵, or by pleasuring him with an abstract description of what it is like to be in a high passion. Brewster Rogerson has called attention to the vogue during the neo-classical period for a tradition of what he calls 'sculpturesque acting', in which admiration was created by concentrating upon rather grandiose conventions of depicting the passions. Aureng-Zebe calls for all the variety that a Restoration audience would normally expect from the actors. As Rogerson says of the neo-classical audience,

It looked not merely for
individualizing details,
or for the underlining of
a humor or a ruling passion,
but for a style of action
that would show the character
directly engaged by each of
the human passions called
forth through the events of
the play.²⁶

A knowledge of the appropriate affektenlehre would thus have been essential for a lively and challenging performance of Aureng-Zebe to take place. From the stricter control which Dryden exerts in his text over episodes of violent passion (he never heightens nature to the degree of caricature invited by the rants of Settle or Lee), we begin to discern a new refinement in affective taste developing in the mid-seventies. It is instructive at this point to

²⁵. See A.C. Kirsch, Dryden's Heroic Drama, Princeton (1965) p.124.

²⁶. B. Rogerson, 'The Art of Painting the Passions', JHI, XIV (1953), p.80.

compare Aureng-Zebe with a play by one of Dryden's younger contemporaries which owes much to its example and appears the following year.

Otway's Don Carlos (1676) was, by the author's own admission in the Preface, regarded as one of the best heroic tragedies of its day²⁷. It is economical and compact and is replete with passions which create suspense and invite pathos. Otway's characters delight in 'transport', a refined Longinean emotion of the soul which proclaims them noble and godlike and provides them with the perfect alibi for illicit love. The melodramatic progress of the action concerns the marriage of Philip of Spain to Elisabeth de Valois and the effect of incurable jealousy on the fortunes of the Queen and her stepson Don Carlos, to whom she has been previously betrothed. Carlos is a more lyrical version of Aureng-Zebe. Despite several passionate rendez-vous with Elisabeth, he is urged to 'put a true obedience on' and 'express himself a son'. The King, his father, is dominated by suspicion and revenge, and is similar in constitution to the Old Emperor:

Oh how my Passions drive me to and fro!
Under their heavy weight, I yield and bow.²⁸

The King's delusions cause him to leave his marriage unconsummated and denounce his innocent wife as 'all one incestuous blot'. Ultimately his near-Jacobean revenges bring Elisabeth and Carlos to their deaths and the King

²⁷. For the Preface to Don Carlos see Otway, Works, 2 vols., ed. J.C. Ghosh, (1968), I, 173-74.

²⁸. *ibid.*, p. 197.

himself to successive states of repentance and madness. Otway also makes fine use of the Princess Eboli as a strong subsidiary character whose unrequited passion for Carlos leads her to turn revenger. The plot is motivated by an older native tradition of drama than that which inspires Aureng-Zebe, but the emphasis upon pitiable passions reflects the growing vogue for tender sentiment. Otway occasionally slips into snatches of imitation Drydenian wit, but on the whole his chief concern is the depiction of the passionate relationship between Elisabeth and Carlos, closely modelled upon that of Almanzor and Almahide in The Conquest of Granada. Otway constructs his drama around large ceremonial tableaux which provide a good opportunity for suppressed passion to be made public. One of the most eloquent is the great scene in Act IV in which Philip sentences Carlos to death. The behaviour of the Queen throughout this scene is calculated to produce maximum audience response and to draw tears and compassionate pity; the stage-directions present her as 'ready to sink with passion', not long after which she 'throws herself on the floor'. Dryden's Antony in All for Love also learns this new trick of prostration, which would have been considered earlier in Dryden's career as too undignified a posture for a royal personage; for example, the Queen in Secret Love (1667) complains of the moral humiliation of having fallen in love with a commoner, but nowhere is she allowed to express this prostration physically.

Otway's Don Carlos reflects clearly the emphasis already present in Aureng-Zebe on moving the passions. That this was a complex process involving the collaboration

of poet, actor and spectator is indicated by the cynical, world-weary tone of the Epilogue to Aureng-Zebe, in which Dryden confesses that 'to please by rule' is often not enough. The 'correctness' of his new tragedy is only for the discriminating and he sees only a few in his audience who can discern the 'tinsel from the gold'. However the standards of correctness and decorum in his new play are modelled closely on the French, although resisting the element of formal stiffness which makes their 'manners' seem cool;

The action great, yet circumscribed by time;
The words not forced, but sliding into rhyme;
The passions raised and calmed by just degrees,
As tides are swelled and then retire to seas.
(L, 119)

The real success of Aureng-Zebe however must rest, Dryden says, with the wayward fancy of the town and on the power of the play to communicate at a level far beneath its polished and refined exterior.

The problem of how to engage the passions is one which is deeply felt by almost all the major characters in Aureng-Zebe. The prestige and personal integrity attached to being able to interest someone else on one's own behalf is high, and characters frequently undertake to act as spokesmen for each other. Especially revealing in this context is Melesinda, whose attempts to gain favour for Indamora with Morat result in the onset of a disastrous love-affair. The word 'interest' occurs often throughout the play, usually in a political sense of 'participation in profit and advantage', but sometimes in a more intimate sense denoting 'power to engage the passions'. In Act III Melesinda offers to employ her emotional resources to relieve Indamora's

distress:

And if your virtue fail to move his mind,
I'll use my int'rest that he may be kind.
(L, 58)

She later appeals to Morat,

By all the int'rest my past suff'rings make,
And all I yet would suffer for your sake.
(L, 70)

Ironically Morat, never before susceptible to virtue, is inflamed by Indamora's beauty, and Melesinda forfeits her treasured 'interest' with her husband. The confusing sequence of love-rivalries surrounding Indamora reinforces the impression that incongruous passion arises out of contradicting interests; spiritual and material goals become hopelessly confounded, especially when characters such as the Emperor and Nourmahal put forward their own reinterpretations of the moral order to justify their actions. The basic human dilemma is neatly summarized by Arimant in Act III; he shows that every human being is governed by some degree of self-love and that all human aspiration can be reduced to mercenary impulse:

The best of men
Some interest in their actions must confess;
None merit but in hope they may possess.
(L, 55)

However, the presence of Indamora and Melesinda in the play points to the fact that there can be a right and a wrong use of such interest, and that it depends upon the

individual's husbanding of the will²⁹. Both Arimant and Aureng-Zebe are at times tempted, through disillusionment, to envy the existence of the 'glorious brute' who 'grossly feeds on joy' (L, 55 and 114), but to opt for this kind of life is wilfully destructive. Aureng-Zebe himself admits the distorting power of arbitrary passion when he encounters Indamora for the last time with his insane jealousy:

What shall I do? Y'are lodged within my breast;
Your image never will be thence displaced,
But there it lies, stabbed, mangled and defaced.
(L, 114)

This outburst comes from a character who is seen by others as representing the godlike life³⁰. Similar complexities

29. Dryden opens the Epistle Dedicatory to Aureng-Zebe with three references to Montaigne's political ideas in the Essays. While he refers to specific essays, such as 'Of Vanity' (III, ix) and 'Of Utility and Honesty' (III, i), it seems equally likely that another essay from the third book, 'Of Husbanding the Will', (III, x) could have been a formulative influence on Dryden during the composition of the play. The epigrammatic quality of many of the sententiae in Aureng-Zebe may also be influenced by familiarity with the Maximes of La Rochefoucauld, a new translation of which appeared in London in 1670 (Epictetus junior: or, Maximes of modern morality, transl. J. Davies). Much of the play's sceptical philosophy may be coloured by the analytical wit of the maxims, especially in the sentiments of Aureng-Zebe and the Old Emperor.

30. This is one of the rare moments in the play in which Dryden shows us the naked violence of passion. Although Aureng-Zebe is referring to a process which takes place in his imagination, the images of murder suggest a reality which threatens to break through the decorum: the couplet only just contains the vehemence of the sentiments. In his baser moments, Aureng-Zebe's instincts become crudely mechanical, and he exhibits the mentality which in a later century would have been capable of the 'crime passionel'. Dryden treats these moments as melodrama in the heroic plays - like Zulema's attempted rape of Almahide in The Conquest of Granada, Part Two, and the successful rape of Ysabinda in Amboyna (1673) - but in the more muted dialectic of Aureng-Zebe, the power of the sensational tends to be expressed purely in linguistic terms, without the aid of physical violence.

exist within Morat as he comes to recognise that another truth exists beyond the truth of his own glory:

Renown and fame in vain I courted long.
And still pursued 'em, though directed wrong.
(L, 98)

Irony in the play is heightened by the fact that earthy characters like Nourmahal and Morat sense the possibility of redemptive fulfilment through physical union with Aureng-Zebe and Indamora, and that this places a grave spiritual responsibility upon the exemplary characters. Aureng-Zebe ultimately fails Nourmahal because he is revolted by her moral leprosy; Indamora fails Morat because she only half-teaches him the perfection of renunciation.

It is therefore appropriate that the reconciliation of erring man with the divine should come about through the intervention of the Old Emperor, who all along has played the Serpent in the young lovers' Eden. The Emperor now overcomes his own base interest by a final supreme effort of will. This concession promotes forgiveness, reconciliation and harmony, everything which was previously obstructed by the selfish and irresponsible use of passion. The Emperor can now retire unembarrassed by a son who has been so 'excellently good' as to seem unnatural. The waywardness of humanity is present in the Emperor's very real struggle to subdue the grosser nature within him, and foreshadows the penetrating humanity of Alexas in All for Love. Dryden gives the triumph of virtue a final ironic twist; it is the Emperor who has to instruct the idealists by precept and example how they must themselves transcend and overcome the impediments of passion.

In his Life of Dryden, Dr Johnson remarks on the

'fatigue of toilsome passions',³¹ which fill Dryden's plays. Johnson's choice of terms is probably not as pejorative as it might seem to us today, for he quickly appreciates that Dryden understood the 'toils' (viz., labyrinths) of passion to be a major source of dramatic interest. In another part of the Life, however, Johnson talks more specifically about Dryden's uses of the passions, in a passage which has often been misconstrued. He writes,

With the simple and elemental passions as they spring separate in the mind, he seems not much acquainted, and seldom describes them but as they are complicated by the various relations of society, and confused in the tumults and agitations of life.³²

As we noticed earlier in this chapter, Dryden's preference is usually for 'mixed' or compound passions. While Dr Johnson tends to see this as a fault, a fault which takes away from Dryden some of the singlemindedness which gives such harrowing accuracy to certain of Shakespeare's delineations of passion (e.g. jealousy in Othello, ambition in Macbeth), a man of Dryden's temperament and position in society would probably find 'simple and elemental' passions tedious and dull when unrelieved by variety and contrast. Johnson is really complaining because Dryden portrays passions 'in transit' ('confused in the tumults and agitations of life') rather than in the splendid isolation of great tragedy. Dryden's concept of the passions treats them as the means

³¹. Johnson's Lives of the Poets: A Selection, ed. J.P. Hardy, (1971), p.131.

³². ibid., p.192.

to an end - they procure a certain naturalism, especially where they are mingled and confused in such a way as to suggest the unscripted vitality of 'real life'. As Dryden well knew, the language of extreme passion was silence itself - moments at which language alone fails to capture the essence of passionate or tragic experience. There is one profoundly symbolic moment near the close of Aureng-Zebe, when the hero, on the point of becoming reconciled to his mistress, rejects the imagination (the source of all his delusions) and all the pretence (the 'specious tower'), which the articulation of desires into language can create:

INDAMORA: (to Aureng-Zebe, giving her hand, smiling)
 You would but half be blessed!
 AURENG-ZEBE: Oh do but try
 My eager love; I'll give myself the lie.
 The very hope is a full happiness,
 Yet scantily measures what I shall possess.
 Fancy itself, ev'n in enjoyment, is
 But a dumb judge, and cannot tell its bliss.
 (L, 116)

Aureng-Zebe stands aside from the world of the play, which has been propelled along by vain desires, sick longings, mistrusts and uncertainties. Dryden offers no guarantee that the future will be any more exempt from the quandaries of passion, but he assures us that at certain moments a tranquil, calm acceptance can be enjoyed. Throughout the play it is primarily the 'mixed effect' which Dryden aims for; he wishes us to respond not only to the rich variety of his characters but also to the sheer multiplicity of passions, feelings, responses and gestures which any one of them can evoke. Some measure of Dryden's success can be estimated from these lines by an anonymous writer of the early eighteenth-century in a poem, To the Memory of

Mr .Dryden;

Heroics here were lands unknown before,
 Our great Columbus first descried the shore.
 No prophet moved the passions of the mind,
 With sovereign power and force so unconfined:
 We sympathised with his poetic rage,
 In lofty buskins when he ruled the stage;
 He roused our love,our hope,despairs and fears,
 Dissolved in joy we were,or drowned in tears.³³

These lines are written as a confident tribute to a man who obviously afforded spectators the 'pleasure' of tragic experience, a pleasure which was cultivated for its own sake, and which is regarded as either hypocritical or prudish by a twentieth-century audience. Restoration audiences were undoubtedly selective in their responses; they liked to feel they were doing the fashionable thing, but this ought not to discredit the techniques playwrights employed to offer them entertainment which was palatable. The passions in Aureng-Zebe are undoubtedly methodized, strictly controlled, sometimes wittily juxtaposed. But what matters is not the individual passions themselves (even the passions-theorists were reluctant to admit that passions were ever entirely 'un-mixed'), but the effect of a variety of passions upon the general atmosphere of the play. This begs the final question as to what sort of play we take Aureng-Zebe to be: in a nutshell, what is it about?

The answers to this question are almost as various as the passions exhibited throughout the play; morals, manners, decadence, lust, kingship, generosity, greed, nihilism, regeneration - these are all themes which have an important bearing on the events portrayed. In his recent

³³ The Works of John Dryden, 18 vols., ed.W.Scott, (1808), XVIII, 245-46.

critical edition of Aureng-Zebe, Frederick M. Link has concentrated upon what he calls the 'public character' of the play. He sees Aureng-Zebe primarily as a didactic piece, designed

to exhibit the behaviour of
the hero under various stresses
in both public and private roles,

and to recommend the 'proper conduct of a prince' (L, xvii).

I find this an unconvincing view of the play simply because Arimant's early description of the prince as being 'by no strong passion swayed/Except his love' (L, 20) is quickly shown to be an optimistic assessment of Aureng-Zebe's passions. By claiming that we are intended to view the hero solely as the 'paradigm of a governor', Link unnecessarily restricts the tonal perspective of the play, and gives Aureng-Zebe a commanding stature which, in relation to the other passionate characters of the drama, he does not really possess. The wit in Aureng-Zebe's situation lies in his constant efforts to appear aloof and detached from those around him, while he is as subject as they are to emotions of pride, suspicion, self-esteem and jealousy. Link over-reacts in his estimate of the play largely because he mistrusts an 'overemphasis on the exoticism of the heroic play' (L, xx-xxi). But wilfully to eclipse the delightful and often surprising portrayal of the passions in all their life and colour (in the hands of such characters as Nourmahal and Morat passion becomes very colourful indeed), is to treat the play as an academic exercise in the type of austere poetic justice advocated by Rymer, and Aureng-Zebe is far from being an overtly scholarly production.

Robert S. Newman's admirable account of the irony and tone in the play should make the limitations of Link's neatly moralistic interpretation even more obvious. In this play it is wrong to isolate the central character and treat him as some sort of mystical demi-god, who owes more to Baroque panegyric than to dramatic technique. Aureng-Zebe is less outstanding than Dryden's earlier heroes, especially Montezuma and Almanzor, and the discipline here is deliberate. Even Morat, the aggressive, short-tempered type of hero, is 'dwarfed' by a late introduction (he does not appear until Act III) and by continually jarring against the passions of equally strong-willed individuals. The techniques which govern the characterization of Aureng-Zebe look forward to the satiric portraiture of Absalom and Achitophel, where the vicious and the virtuous hang with sedate dignity alongside each other, as in a gallery.

For Dryden, Aureng-Zebe was a last attempt to fuse his talent for wit and repartee with the eloquence he had perfected in heroic verse. Because his tastes and ideas were changing, the results were very different from the somewhat unequal temperament of plays like The Indian Emperour and The Conquest of Granada. Aureng-Zebe marks the fruition of a style which had its roots in the Dryden-Howard collaboration of The Indian Queen; there is the same care for design, the same meticulous shaping of the verse, the same economy in procuring sensational effect, with new advances in the manipulation of tone, and the discretion with which more 'festive' wit is employed. As the culmination of Dryden's experience of the heroic play, Aureng-Zebe is representative of two things. First of all, that an allusive texture of wit and irony could successfully co-exist with

sentiment to provide new and pleasing refinements in the conduct of heroic verse (e.g. Dryden easily rivals the 'smoothness' of Waller and Denham in the two celebrated speeches on Virtue, L, 51, and on Life, L, 75); secondly, that the couplet-form provided an ideal framework in which to make the passions 'discourse'. Certainly there is little room in Aureng-Zebe for genuine tragic passion; high seriousness is too easily deflected by the little 'blindsides' at which Dryden was so adept in the heroic play. Dryden eschews some of the more brash effects of the grander plays, and subjects violent emotion to more methodized techniques by keeping the verse consistent, less flighty, in tone. As a comment on the earlier plays Aureng-Zebe mirrors the grandiose gestures and pageant-like tableaux, but transmutes them somehow into antique mannerisms - there is less commitment to the dictates of old heroic civilizations, and a feeling that in emotion, at least, we are moving towards more modern times (the historical action of the play is, after all, 'Agra, in the year 1660').

The moral directives of the play are to be found in its 'school of passions'. Its broader redemptive idealism, its bland stoicism and its reaffirmation of the duties of a patriot king are the background against which a deliberately schematic, sometimes comic sequence of personal falls from grace is played out. While much of the play's imagery registers decadence and acrimonious frustration, various venial or deadly sins are absolved or exorcised in varying ways. Each character enjoys acting out his or her individual destiny, with some of the brio and self-consciousness that normally attends a family charade. Aureng-Zebe, like Hamlet, gradually recovers from depression

(although he has a final conflict to overcome his jealousy); the Emperor learns to perceive the nature of his own folly, like Lear. Morat, acting out the Icarus-Phaeton myths, soars beyond political ambition into the realms of heavenly virtue, inspired by the illicit love of a foreign princess; his wife, Melesinda, organizes her own scenario for tragic transcendence, and acts out the abandoned Dido, immolating herself on a funeral pyre. Nourmahal, searching blindly for self-expression and love, is driven to suicide, like Phèdre. Personal success is no longer as strictly equated with material aggrandizement as it is in the earlier heroic plays; success is measured by a moral goal of self-mastery, which is achieved only at the expense of distracting, and often distressing, passions. The quest for perfection in Aureng-Zebe is a tragicomic one; comic, because humanity as it is - the 'little emmets with the human soul' - is degraded by its own rapaciousness and greed; tragic because the people who are furthest from salvation actually seek it most earnestly, and have a passionate yearning to attain some spiritual knowledge (e.g. Morat, Nourmahal, ultimately even the Emperor). Dryden's prevailing attitude to life throughout the play is ironic, wry, and witty; despite some fairy-tale improbabilities there is a suggestion of realism in the poignancy with which he laments the passing of youth, and the essential vanity of human wishes. The play is concerned, quite profoundly, with 'making the best' of life; through the example of Aureng-Zebe and Indamora we learn that we must come to terms with human imperfection, accept our wayward natures, and hope only for the dignity and tranquillity not to 'lose face'. Dryden writes without optimism and without

despair; he shows us the alarming ascendancy of passion and laments that human reason is dwarfed by it. In moral terms, of course, the life of passion is not the life of common sense; virtue, decency and decorum are offended; but as Dryden well knew, Restoration theatregoers could affect outrage as easily as they could simulate a smile, and Aureng-Zebe retains its air of rather shadowy ambiguity. Dryden displays the passions but does not offer direct suggestions as to how best to harness them; they are partly specious - an extravagant tool of his trade - partly genuine - 'affecting' to the discerning spectator. In all, the passions modify but do not dictate Dryden's views of what his last heroic play ought to recommend. However, any balanced interpretation of Aureng-Zebe must concede that their influence is felt consistently in the technique which inspires the sensationalism, frivolity, irony, wit, and moral fervour of a play whose best qualities often seem elusive or unexpectedly enigmatic.

Chapter 6

The Achievement of 'All for Love'

Introduction

In All for Love Dryden suddenly drops his heroic pretensions and fights 'unarmed, without his rhyme'. The effect of the change is startling after the specialised environment of the five rhymed heroic plays with their witty tonal ambiguities. At first the play appears as little more than a straight repudiation of the heroic style Dryden had practised and perfected for thirteen years, displaying as it does a more muted, cautious diction, and a smoother linear development of plot and character. These new features betoken a refreshing simplicity of approach and new standards of taste and economy. And yet, closely examined, All for Love is less a new departure in itself than a consolidation and perfection of the best elements already present in Dryden's dramatic technique; it marks a conscious 'improvement' upon the models offered by the rhymed heroic plays. What is most noticeably lacking is heroic rhodomontade, with its insistent nagging at the audience to respond with 'admiration' to the events represented on the stage; if All for Love is still to be regarded as a corollary to the 'illustrious depravity' of the reckless imagination at play in such works as Tyrannick Love and The Conquest of Granada, it makes its point by deliberate understatement and by eschewing the overtly bizarre effects of plot and language which contribute suspense to the earlier plays. To a certain extent Dryden allows some of the dissatisfactions he was experiencing with the heroic form (in particular the whole question of the validity of a heroic ethos) to be expressed in the conflict of values which

permeates the new play; the way in which Antony and Cleopatra are haunted by the spectre of Roman morality throughout is one of its best features. Dryden's position with respect to his own favourite drama was by no means clear. In the Preface he is still at pains to protect the interests of his former plays in verse:

Not that I condemn my former
way, but that this is more proper
to my present purpose.

(W, I, 231)

The decision to 'disencumber' himself of rhyme in favour of neo-Shakespearian blank verse is sufficiently important to make us look for some deeper significance in the play which Dryden felt unhappy about expressing in his customary fluent couplets. Thus, if All for Love deviates from the types of norm set up by the establishment of the rhymed heroic play, and does so deliberately and not against the writer's better judgment, certain conclusions about the direction of serious drama from the mid-seventies must be drawn¹. Dryden's own woolliness over giving any clear indication of his intentions is, in this instance, to be lamented; the Preface only hints at the reasons underlying the change, which must still be regarded as an almost unaccountable volte-face in Dryden's dramatic career. At the outset, the best we can do is to identify the most basic changes. As Richard Leslie Larson writes:

¹ Dryden's ill-fated plans for an epic must have influenced to some extent the style of All for Love. Although in structure the play is less of an 'epic in little' than, say, The Indian Emperour or The Conquest of Granada, in versification it aims at a direct and noble sublimity which may owe its inspiration to Paradise Lost. Further speculations are aired in M. Thale, 'Dryden's Unwritten Epic', PLL, V (1969), 423-33. Dryden's familiarity with Boileau's version of Longinus, also an important factor in the background to All for Love, has been ably discussed by J. M. Aden in 'Dryden and Boileau: the Question of Critical Influence', SP, L (1953), 491-509.

Admiration, whether it be fearful
wonder at rampant strength, or the
desire to emulate exemplary
behaviour, appears to be a negligible
objective of Dryden's rhetorical
strategy in All for Love.²

It is from the recognition of this change of stance that any comprehensive account of Dryden's best-known play must grow.

The exact nature of Dryden's 'present purpose' in 1677 is not altogether easy to determine. Apart from the Prologue to Aureng-Zebe in which he announced that he began to grow weary of 'his long-loved mistress, Rhyme'. (W, I, 192), Dryden seems to have made little critical advertisement of the change to blank verse. His comments on the choice of his material in the Preface require careful sifting in order to see what sort of play Dryden really wanted to write, and perhaps the Prologue to All for Love gives a more substantial clue, when it describes the story as

A tale which often has been told,
As sad as Dido's, and almost as old.
(V, 27)

Dryden's dream of writing an English epic was still fresh in his mind after the experiment (between 1673-7) with The State of Innocence, and All for Love is conceived partially in imitation of the decorum and dignity of The Aeneid (particularly the debates between the royal lovers in Book IV) as well as in imitation of the 'divine Shakespeare'. Certainly the scenes of accusation and persuasion which constitute the major organizing principle of the play³ are reminiscent of the dialogues between Virgil's gods and men, while the plot moves inexorably towards

² R.L. Larson, Studies in Dryden's Dramatic Technique, Salzburg (1975), p. 228.

³ ibid. Larson's chapter, 'The Hero as Listener', makes a good introduction to the distinctive changes in timbre encountered in All for Love. See pp. 220-53.

a peroration which mirrors Dido's melodramatic suicide.

According to the Preface the challenge which Dryden saw in the story of Antony and Cleopatra was the simple one of 'concernment'. Dryden here found a subject which would tax not only his powers of invention and adaptation (the skills required for a successful 'imitation' of Shakespeare's play) but which would establish clearly his power to move the passions and thus keep abreast of the new generation of rising dramatists, notably Otway and Lee. The story of the royal lovers was held to be universally engaging, and had been treated, in Dryden's words, by 'the greatest wits of our nation', (W, I, 221) Daniel, Shakespeare, Thomas May, and Sir Charles Sedley amongst them. With a certain amount of confidence, Dryden asserts that he felt impelled to join the illustrious ranks of these wits (a not unfamiliar weakness in his dedications and prefaces), and that their example was largely responsible for his decision to attempt something different, using the opportunities which the plot afforded him. He writes:

their example has given me the
confidence to try myself in this
bow of Ulysses amongst the crowd
of suitors; and, withal, to take my
own measures, in aiming at the mark.
(W, I, 221-22)

Dryden's 'own measures' should not be underestimated; his play, despite verbal parallels with Shakespeare's, takes a completely opposite view of the story, concentrating the action into the space of a single day and aiming for a smaller-scale effect of closeness to the characters in a much more intimate atmosphere. Dryden intensifies dramatic conflict by embodying it in sentiment, which is in turn thrown into relief by a distinctively symmetrical arrangement of characters and incidents. Dryden may

well have been encouraged in his attempt by the lamentable inadequacy of Sedley's Antony and Cleopatra, which appeared earlier in the same year and which had been cast in the mould of the by now familiar 'love-and-honour' rhymed play. In taking Shakespeare as his yardstick, the standards Dryden was setting himself were high ones, in which he would have to prove himself equal to Shakespeare's 'large and comprehensive soul'⁴; by writing what is in effect the only notable Restoration love-tragedy Dryden was spurring himself to greater efforts of concentration and singleness of purpose than had marked the production of his rhymed heroic dramas. Writing under the shadow of the 'divine' Shakespeare, Dryden was aware just how much the reputation of his own age would depend upon the kind of play he wrote. The shadow of the Ancients, the Elizabethan dramatists, and to a lesser extent the French 'Moderns' lay in the path of many an inspiring Restoration playwright. Therefore, what he attempted was a less ambiguous statement of his own aesthetic preoccupations; All for Love becomes rather than is characteristic of the later Dryden. In its symmetry of design, restrained diction and decorous 'manners' it signals the transition from the impetuous early Dryden to the cautious Dryden of steadier judgement, the writer who produces such works as the Anne Killigrew Ode and the Fables. Dryden's new tragedy is motivated by an underlying ethic of benevolent feeling, not unlike Descartes' formulation of 'l'amour de bienveillance' in his Des Passions de L'Ame (1640)⁵, and

⁴ On this subject, see R. Wallerstein, 'Dryden and Shakespeare's Techniques', RES, XIX (1943), 165-85.

⁵ See Descartes, Oeuvres Philosophiques, 3 vols., ed. F. Alquié, Paris, (1963-73), III, 1014.

combines with its own inimitable gifts for mingling raillery and pathos, irony and sentiment. The careful modulations in the harmonies of All for Love are the fruit of the dissonances of the heroic plays. Thus the 'finished' play (and no drama of its day better illustrates the Restoration concept of 'improving' existing literary material) combines French neo-classical standards of civility (the 'polish of art') with the native 'genius' of the English stage, i.e. the expression of variety in character, and the achievement of a sonorous, majestic verse.

As is customary with Dryden some caution is required when assessing his stated intentions. Many critics have been ensnared by Dryden's hard and fast, no-nonsense moralizing in the Preface, where he claims to exalt 'the excellency of the moral' (W, I, 222). He cites this as the chief attraction of the story for those dramatists who have so far attempted it. I am inclined, however, to see this as a rather superficial reflection, introduced to justify the choice of subject-matter. Having written the tragedy, it probably occurred to Dryden that its plot happily coincided with certain moral requirements put forward by Thomas Rymer, the only 'modern' critic besides himself of any note, in his Tragedies of the Last Age (1677). Thus, All for Love could be recommended on the grounds that it recommended virtue by discouraging vice; Antony and Cleopatra were

famous patterns of unlawful love;
and their end accordingly was
unfortunate.

(W, I, 222)

However, such an empirical statement hardly indicates where Dryden's real interest in the story lay. The predominantly affective basis of his approach begins to emerge in the section of the Preface where he discusses the raising of pity for the

lovers:

All reasonable men have long since
concluded that the hero of the poem
ought not to be a character of
perfect virtue, for then he could not,
without injustice, be made unhappy;
nor yet altogether wicked, because he
could not then be pitied. I have
therefore steered the middle course;
and have drawn the character of
Antony as favourably as Plutarch,
Appian, and Dion Cassius would give
me leave: the like I have observed
in Cleopatra. That which is wanting
to work up the pity to a greater
height was not afforded me by the
story; for the crimes of love which
they both committed were not
occasioned by any necessity, or fatal
ignorance, but were wholly voluntary;
since our passions are, or ought to
be, within our power.

(W, I, 222)

Dryden's interest in 'moral fable' here is only secondary. By linking himself with 'all reasonable men', he asserts a partisan interest in the virtues of the English drama as opposed to the French (who are over-civil) and then invokes his own earlier practice with respect to the 'eccentric virtue' of great heroes. At no time does Dryden express psychological interest in the 'character of perfect virtue', and it is significant that when he does create such a type, in technical emulation of the French, the result is very uninteresting, (e.g. Osmyn and Benzayda in The Conquest of Granada.) But now, instead of the working-up of admiration for the 'imperfect' hero, it is the evocation of pity which has become the chief object. Richard L. Larson observes that it is the first time in Dryden's dramatic career that he seeks to represent 'an unhappy, pitiable character' as his hero⁶. Dryden seems to be aiming for a greater purity of genre in his

⁶ R.L. Larson, Studies in Dryden's Dramatic Technique, op.cit., p.221.

assessment of the true requirements of tragedy than he had striven for even in his panegyrics and 'historical' poems. He recognised that the Aristotelian model, with its stress on order (a beginning, a middle and an end), clarity, and 'pity and fear', afforded a species of tragic pleasure which was in a different class from the allusive, witty discernment induced by the heroic rhymed play. Of modern dramatists, only Corneille and Racine had put Aristotelian principles into practice with successful modifications, and Dryden was anxious to elevate English tragedy to similar heights by an individual application of his theory of 'concernment'. His attitude to inducing sympathy for the tragic hero was modified nevertheless by the experimental use he had made of human frailty and the flaws of nature in the characterisation of his more blustering heroes, Almanzor and Maximin. A growing faith in the compassionating virtues of pity and fear led Dryden to move towards tragedy as a sublime theatrical experience of unmingled emotion; the audience would be dominated by the ennobling sentiments of pity and their unity of response would help to elevate the level of the dramatic experience presented. Unfortunately, past experience had already shown that Dryden's talents were not univocal, and that his wit and skill lay in combining effects of the bizarre and banal to stimulate a complex and mixed response. It is therefore characteristic to find him making a 'tragic compromise' as regards Aristotelian theory, and admitting greater elements of internal conflict into tragic personality. Dryden needed protagonists with ambiguous natures in order to achieve his own unique sublimity, which was never a harmony unmixed with dissonance. Thus when Dryden deliberately eschewed the pointed wit of the

heroic play because of the divided response it provoked, he was to a certain extent limiting his range of stylistic devices. Luckily however, his own meticulous requirements for characterisation led him to introduce a variety of mood into All for Love which compensates for the loss of heroic wit. The 'excellency of the moral' was thus a peg upon which to hang the complexity of characterisation which Dryden needed to sustain his tragic vision, and although the play concentrates single-mindedly upon the raising of pity and the 'agitations of soul' associated with it, Dryden does not in fact relinquish echoes of his earlier 'mixed heroic' style. The key to the variety sustained throughout All for Love is to found in Dryden's depiction of the 'manners' of the piece.

In the Grounds of Criticism in Tragedy, written in the following year, Dryden was to give an important definition of manners, influenced by his deeper acquaintance with Shakespeare during the 'correction' and adaptation of Troilus and Cressida. He writes:

The manners in a poem are understood
to be those inclinations, whether
natural or acquired, which move and
carry us to actions, good, bad, or
indifferent, in a play; or which
incline the persons to such or such
actions.

(W, I, 248)

Dryden found in 'manners' (with a meaning strongly influenced by the French 'moeurs') the psychological motivation of all character, and a just delineation of manners was essential for the proper 'concernment' of the audience in the events of a tragedy. Later in the same essay Dryden writes:

for if there be no manners appearing
in the characters, no concernment for
the persons can be raised; no pity or
horror can be moved, but by vice or
virtue; therefore, without them, no
person can have any business in the play.

(W, I, 250)

Again the element of 'moral fable' - the presence of vice and virtue - is made subservient to the affective basis of tragic drama; extremes of vice and virtue, the kind of 'pattern of unlawful love' provided by Antony and Cleopatra, are present because without them there would be no moral conflict to engage the audience. But Dryden's first priority is the quality of that engagement, how best to engineer the sympathetic involvement of the spectators. For example, the 'crimes of Love', to which Dryden waggishly refers in the Preface to All for Love, were not interesting because they seemed to him intrinsically vicious; it was rather because in them lay the springs of personality, and the power (for Dryden a theatrically vital one) to evoke pity and concernment. In the Preface to his new play he virtually admits that the plot itself contains little dramatic conflict -

that which is wanting to work up
the pity to a greater height,
was not afforded me by the story - (W, I, 222)

but the arena of dramatic action is mental rather than physical, which is why Professor Larson's notion that All for Love deals principally with 'largely uncontrollable shortcomings of personality' seems to me the modern view which most accurately captures the spirit of Dryden's work⁷. In portraying the 'manners' of his hero and heroine, Dryden is laying bare the depths of emotional motivation - for the most part perceived intellectually in the spirit of rational analysis that we should expect from the author of the rhymed heroic plays. The level of 'mental action' in All for Love is complex, layered by the emotional nuances of sentiment, which give the play the uniquely intimate, almost claustrophobic atmosphere of 'closet-tragedy'.

⁷. ibid. See p.253.

It is principally through the 'manners' that the ironic aspects of situation and motive can be perceived. For the internal relationship between actors and spectators to be effective, a virtually static plot is essential - little surface brilliance detracts from the mental arena of All for Love; in its lack of spectacle it is little short of revolutionary for its day. Dryden's play, then, subjects the psychology of six people to close scrutiny, indicating in what ways these characters find it impossible to lead fully-integrated emotional lives. The relevance of 'manners' to their situation is striking, since the obvious, more physical meaning of the term - viz. their outward gesture and deportment - is symbolic of external constraints upon their inner moral being. Hence the decorum, the extreme, almost pedantic care for the sound of the words, the choice of the ripest phrase, which everywhere permeates the diction of All for Love. The characters are all linked by an innate sense of potential individual worth, and by a painful consciousness of unsatisfied desire. It is a tribute to Dryden's skill that even in moments of assertion, the audience is able to detect a basic lack of inner confidence in the speakers. All for Love modifies the techniques of the heroic play by simplifying and reducing them, expanding the areas of social nuance so that the 'politest' of plays actually becomes the most revealing of character. Again the influence of Shakespeare can be alleged with confidence, for in The Grounds of Criticism in Tragedy Dryden wrote:

'Tis one of the excellencies of
Shakespeare that the manners of
his persons are generally
apparent, and you see their bent
and inclinations.

(W, I, 251)

It is precisely this kind of procedure, in which ambiguous

relationships are established between language and feeling, intention and statement, pretence and actuality, which informs All for Love. The 'literariness' of such techniques in no way impairs the emotional satisfaction to be derived from the play, a remarkable feat in a work which is so outwardly contemplative, elegiac and formal.

'All for Love' and the Passions

All for Love, as its title suggests, concentrates almost exclusively upon the passion of love. It has become a modern critical commonplace to decry Dryden's ability to develop and empathise with a passion in which he seems to have shown little interest, in his private life, no less than in his writings; but this is to do him little justice. The school of criticism which began with Scott looked to a romanticised, highly-coloured notion of chivalric medieval romance as the basis of many of Dryden's plots, and expected him to extol the passion of love accordingly. This no early Augustan would wish to do. Dryden enjoyed the examination of love as a phenomenon and enjoyed writing about the feelings it aroused in countless songs from the plays, and in the frequent use of triangular relationships in his tragicomedies. His perspective on love in the more Fletcherian of his plays (e.g. The Rival Ladies and Secret Love) was generally urbane, and he saw it as an opportunity to display the passions in all their variety and intermixture. By the time he came to write All for Love, a deeper involvement with the just portrayal of the passions (observable in the middle comedies Marriage à la Mode and The Assignment, and the mature heroic play, Aureng-Zebe) had come to predominate over the virtuosic deployment of wit which had been a characteristic of the early

plays. Influenced in all probability by the emphasis placed upon individual passions (especially love, hate, grief and fear) by passions theorists such as Descartes, Senault and Charleton⁸, and by his own revaluation of Aristotle's theory of tragedy, All for Love demonstrates a deeper concern for 'verisimilitude' and 'truth to nature' than most Restoration plays in which the term 'imitation of nature' is often a synonym for uneven writing and only sporadically credible plotting.

In his Essay of Dramatic Poesy Dryden had hinted, comparatively early in his career, at the significance of Fletcher as a dramatist of love, and had maintained that love was the passion of the most universal concernment to an audience. Eugenius, in his criticism of the Ancients in the Essay, raises objections which seem to have been strongly felt at the Restoration and which the French critic, René Rapin, was later to take up in his Réflexions sur la Poétique (1674):

... for love-scenes, you will find few
among them, their tragic poets dealt
not with that soft passion but with
lust, cruelty, revenge, ambition, and
those bloody actions they produced;
which were more capable of raising
horror than compassion in an audience:
leaving love untouched, whose gentleness
would have tempered them, which is the
most frequent of all the passions, ...
(W, I, 41-2)

Dryden held that Fletcher had excelled in the 'softer' passions, primarily love, while Shakespeare was sublime in his general comprehension of every passion, especially 'manly' ones, such as friendship and duty. The rising status given to the passion of love in the drama after Davenant was partially due to renewed

⁸. For some account of the work of Senault and Charleton, see above, and below, pp. 291 - 2,360.

interest in the traditions of renaissance epic (Tasso and Spenser), and the precieux chivalric romance (Scudery, de la Calprenède), but it gradually came to be borne out philosophically and medically in the physiological treatises of the later seventeenth century. The drama could thus lay claim to a further alibi for the continuance and development of a literary preference, by presenting the 'science' of love to its patrons. In All for Love Dryden presents a picture of the 'transcendent passion' which is as entertaining as it is instructive; by instructing the auditors in the 'morals' or motives of the actions proceeding from or catalysed by the passion of love, Dryden is indicating to some degree that we can make good use of our emotions when we learn to interpret them aright. The theme of (tragic) misinterpretation is constant throughout the play. In Senault's treatise, De L'Usage des Passions (1641), love is apprehended mystically, called the 'First Inclination', and is a passion which comprehends all others and links us to the divine source (the Godhead); Senault claims that,

there is nothing in nature more
evident, yet nothing more hidden.⁹

Although his treatise contains much advice on the 'right use' of an intrinsically benevolent and potentially sublime passion, it is clear that Senault's vein of mysticism serves to evoke an emotional, affective response even in a work of rational enquiry. This delicate balance is one which Dryden was aiming to achieve in his love-tragedy, in which he exercises a faculty which Eric Rothstein has described as 'empathy with his characters

⁹ Senault, The Use of Passions, trans. H. Cary, Earl of Monmouth, 2nd edn., (1671), p. 194.

through the nature and passion of their discourse¹⁰. Descartes meanwhile, in his treatise Des Passions de L'Ame, avoids ostensibly 'transcendent' or supernatural overtones and divides the passion of love into two distinct classes, the 'amour de bienveillance' (an impulse of good towards the beloved) and 'amour de concupiscence' (carnal desire for the loved object). Descartes' ideal is the former type, the 'amour de bienveillance' which, rather in the vein of Senault's 'first inclination', he insists is at the root of most of our passions, which are initially benevolently motivated. Descartes invests this type of love with a certain spirituality, but not mysticism, when he permits himself to write in an exalted philosophic style; the following passage indicates how well his ideas supplement the increased attention to matters of love in the French and English drama of the 'moderns';

Je dis que cette amour est extrêmement bonne, parce que, joignant a nous de vrais biens, elle nous perfectionne d'autant. Je dis aussi qu'elle ne saurait être trop grande, car tout ce que la plus excessive peut faire, c'est de nous joindre si parfaitement a ces biens, que l'amour que nous avons particulièrement pour nous-mêmes n'y mette aucune distinction, ce que je crois ne pouvoir jamais être mauvais.¹¹

Descartes' view of excessive passion is unusual in that he does not interpret it singly as a medical, moral or social evil. Other passions theorists tend to distrust excess in any form and to associate it inevitably with a strict neo-Stoic or Christianized moral scheme. However, Descartes keeps the nobility of mankind in first place, asserting that man may perfect

¹⁰. E. Rothstein, Restoration Tragedy, Wisconsin (1967), p. 16.

¹¹. Descartes, Oeuvres Philosophiques, op.cit., III, 1055.

himself even through an excess of the well-meaning passion of out-going, generous love. Characteristically Descartes approaches this position from a rational 'profit-and-benefit' angle - a subtle materialism much more delicate than that of Hobbes - rather than from a stultifyingly moral or even religious stance. Dryden's well-meaning hero in All for Love is not altogether remote from the Cartesian attitude towards excess of love; Descartes still allows love a spiritual essence, and a power to transform which permits elements of rationalized 'transcendence' - his major claim is that love must be judged by its intrinsic nature rather than by its effects. Although nearly all the stage action of All for Love represents the effects of Antony and Cleopatra's mutual passion (and thus at first looks as if it will fall into the pattern of Rymer's 'moral fable', where the condemnation of vice is the keynote) Dryden takes considerable pains to analyse the nature of passion and to suggest, through the introduction of pity, that their love was and still is intrinsically noble, despite the 'ruin' it brings on both protagonists.

Some of Dryden's ideas on love already present in the Essay of Dramatic Poesy were to be developed and re-stated further in a critical sketch of considerable interest, the Heads of an Answer to Rymer of 1677. In this short, pithy work, we see Dryden entering the critical controversy which arose during the mid-seventies concerning the validity of Aristotle's concept of tragedy. Rymer's strict and morally overbearing Aristotelianism in his Tragedies of the Last Age had forced Dryden to jot down some personal reservations which he was too generous to publish at the time - it was clear that initially Dryden felt Rymer to be a critic of some importance, and was

able to overlook the excesses of an often bigoted and opinionated style. The concern of the Heads is quite closely related to that of the Essay of Dramatic Poesy, since it continues the subject of a contest for superiority between the ancient and modern poets - but without the fictionalized setting and the division of rhetorical argument into four speakers. Dryden's thoughts come down to us in the merest note-form, but in such a way as to suggest the facility of his invention and the quickness of his mind. What Dryden does is to take issue with Rymer's inflexible requirements for tragedy by suggesting that Aristotle's concept of the importance of pity and terror may be deficient for modern tragedy. Dryden sees the inclusion of a whole variety of passions, suitable to the multiplication of incidents (e.g. the 'counter-turns' and 'underwalks' of a drama) as perhaps the most noticeable advance made by modern English plays. He then returns emphatically to the position he had held in the Essay of Dramatic Poesy, stressing the vital link between the passion of love and the concernment of the audience; in the elliptical idiom of the Heads the passage really comprises the two following statements:

Prove also that love, being an heroic
passion, is fit for tragedy, which
cannot be denied, because of the
example alleged of Phaedra; and how
far Shakespeare has outdone them
[i.e. the Ancients] in friendship, etc.
(W, I, 212)

Then, we are not touched with the
sufferings of any sort of men so
much as of lovers; and this was
almost unknown to the Ancients;
so that they neither administered
poetical justice (of which Mr. Rymer
boasts) so well as we; neither knew
they the best commonplace of pity,
which is love.

(W, I, 218)

Throughout the Heads, Dryden makes repeated attempts to discredit both Aristotle and Rymer for their veneration of 'moral fable', too rigid an adherence to pity and fear, and a sometimes fanatical taste for poetic justice. Dryden wanted to pave the way for a more affective reading of tragedy, more in keeping with the sentiments of Rapin, to whom he refers three times in the work. By far the most curious of these references is one in which Dryden seems deliberately to misuse Rapin's ideas to defend the inclusion of love as a fit subject for tragedy. Rapin's own views on the subject (Reflexions, Book II, Article XX), were in fact nearly the opposite of Dryden's. He felt, for example, that modern tragedy could scarcely maintain the 'genius' necessary to evoke the majestic response of pity and terror known to the Greeks. Consequently, for him the introduction of the passion of love represented a degeneration of tragedy towards the trivial and superficial. Rapin saw it as a frivolous perversion of generic purity which constituted little less than a breach of decorum:

Rien ne me paroist aussi d'un plus
petit sens que de s'amuser à badiner,
par des tendresses frivoles, lorsqu'on
peut estre admirable par tout le
merveilleux des grands sentimens et
des grands spectacles.¹²

In Rapin's opinion it was the abandonment by poets of the strong passions of pity and terror, and the choice of an action capable of exciting them, which had led to the 'effeminizing' and weakening of tragedy.

Dryden, however, carefully concealed this aspect of Rapin's

¹² Rapin, Les Refléxions sur la Poétique de ce Temps, ed. E.T. Dubois, Geneva (1970), p.105.

thought, preferring to take his own measures from the fact that Rapin at least recognized that it was the 'custom' of modern writers to include love in their tragedies. In this passage from the Heads of an Answer to Rymer, Dryden loosely paraphrases a section of Rapin's Réflexions sur la Poétique, giving quite a different impression from that given by the original. The argument is mostly Dryden's but certain phrases are lifted from Book II, Article XX of Rapin's work, and modified accordingly;

That we may less wonder why pity
and terror are not now the only
springs on which our tragedies
move, and that Shakespeare may be
more excused, Rapin confesses that
the French tragedies now all run
upon the tendre; and gives the
reason, because love is the passion
which most predominates in our
souls, and that therefore the
passions represented become
insipid, unless they are conformable
to the thoughts of the audience.

(W, I, 216)

The most striking falsification in the passage begins at the words 'and gives the reason', for in the French of Rapin there is no equivalent in Book II, Article XX for the words 'because love is the passion which most predominates in our souls', which seem to be Dryden's own interpolation. The remainder of the passage is a fairly straight reduction of Rapin's words:

Car en effet les passions qu'on
représente deviennent fades et de
nul goust, si elles ne sont fondées
sur des sentimens conformes à ceux
du spectateur.¹³

Dryden would certainly have shared this latter concern for pleasing the tastes of the audience; what he seems deliberately to ignore (unless he was writing from memory, and the added words constitute an oversight) is Rapin's contempt for 'les

¹³. ibid., p. 103.

tragédies mêlées de galanteries¹⁴. Dryden's notion of the predominance of love in the soul is much more likely to derive from the passions theories of Descartes and Senault, as well as from the kind of moral sententiae he had marketed so blandly in the heroic, rhymed plays, e.g.

Love's an heroic passion, which can find
No room in any base, degenerate mind.
(SS, IV, 128)

It is interesting to note that the reason which Rapin actually does give for the inclusion of love-scenes in tragedy has nothing to do with any conviction that love is an heroic or valorous activity; its introduction is due rather, he says, to the influence of women -

qui se sont érigées en arbitres
de ces divertissemens.¹⁵

- a view which corroborates Dryden's account in the Preface to Aureng-Zebe (1675) of the difficulties he encountered in making Indamora's conduct sufficiently pleasing to the 'ladies of the town'.

Dryden's minor distortion of Rapin is important because it indicates not only how firm a hold his own notions of the 'heroic' still had upon his mind, but also shows how concerned he was to map out a new direction for the tragedy of his day, making it readily accessible and palatable to the type of audience which had been created for the heroic play. Somewhat characteristically Dryden felt himself unable to submit wholeheartedly to the theories of either Rapin or Rymer, yet he still had a very sincere regard for Aristotle. The influence of French thought is nevertheless considerable on Dryden at

¹⁵. ibid., p. 103.

this time, and his own germinating notion of tragedy was aligning itself with recognizably French standards of decorum - in the Heads he writes that tragedy is

to reform manners by delightful
representation of human life in
great persons, by way of dialogue,
(W,I,213)

Dryden's chief pleasure in Rapin was undoubtedly stylistic; he admired the taste and elegancy of the French critic's prose and in the Author's Apology for Heroic Poetry and Poetic Licence numbered Rapin and Boileau among the greatest French writers 'of the age'. Rapin's natural delicacy in matters of diction, his theory of the general 'usefulness' and profit of poetry, and his belief that it must instruct delightfully, would all find a sympathetic response in Dryden. And as for manners, one of the chief concerns of All for Love, Rapin's values epitomised the kind of artistic perfection Dryden hoped to achieve:

La grande règle de traiter les mœurs,
est de les copier sur la nature, et
sur tout, de bien étudier le coeur de
l'homme, pour en sçavoir distinguer
tous les mouvemens.¹⁶

A rather more sympathetic defence of the love-tragedy is made by Boileau, the other French critic for whom Dryden had an intense respect. In his L'Art Poétique, which first appeared in 1674, a substantial part of the third canto is devoted to the subject of tragedy, with prescriptive hints for how best to tackle the subject of the lover. Rapin's misgivings about the propriety of representing heroes on the stage who were inspired 'd'un autre amour que de la gloire', focussed on the issue that the lawful heroes of classical antiquity would lose their true characters if

¹⁶. ibid., pp.43-4.

permitted to succumb to the 'soft passion'; thus the sacrosanct principle of 'vraisemblance' would be violated for ever. Boileau's solution was to keep the relationship between the affective passions and 'nature' (i.e. a just, pleasing, and historically accurate depiction of the character of the hero) in the forefront of the dramatist's mind. Like Rapin, Boileau was contemptuous of too much softening of tragic effect, and in the passage cited beneath, he stigmatizes the conventional romance hero, whose only task is to divert the fancy. Boileau's poem (here in the couplets of the Soames-Dryden translation of 1683) conveys the nicety of discrimination demanded of any poet who considers writing about love within the scope of the Aristotelian régime, and indicates how careful must be the balance between modern and traditional values:

Ingenuous Love, inventive in new Arts,
Mingled in Plays, and quickly touch'd our Hearts:
This Passion never could resistance find,
But knows the shortest passage to the mind.
Paint then, I'm pleas'd my Hero be in Love;
But let him not like a tame Shepherd move:
Let not Achilles be like Thyrsis seen,
Or for a Cyrus show an Artamen;
That, struggling oft, his Passions we may find
The Frailty, not the Virtue of his mind.
Of Romance Heroes shun the low Design;
Yet to great Hearts some Human frailties joyn:
Achilles must with Homer's heat engage;
For an affront I'm pleas'd to see him rage:
Those little Failings in your Hero's heart
Show that of Man and Nature he has part:
To leave known Rules, you cannot be allow'd;
Make Agamemnon covetous and proud,
Aeneas in Religious Rites austere,
Keep to each man his proper Character.

(CD, II, 140)

Dryden's portrayal of Mark Antony is conducted much in the spirit of the above precepts. He is drawn in defiance of the 'bullying' heroes of the earlier heroic plays who rage irrespective of whether they have received an affront or not, and who are

justly mocked by the vignette of Buckingham's Drawcansir. In the Preface to the play, Dryden makes it clear that the hero of All for Love is to be treated sympathetically, while assuring his readers that the evidence of historical sources (Plutarch, Appian and Dion Cassius) will not be disregarded. In opting for the tender-hearted hero Dryden was conscious of moving against the tide of popular opinion, and even imagined the disappointment of the wits at receiving a man who 'bates of his mettle, and scarce rants at all' (Prologue, V, 27). Further passages from Boileau's poem could conceivably have impressed Dryden enough to make him anxious to amend the excesses of his *Almanzor* and *Maximin* long before his 'official' recantation in the Epistle Dedicatory to the Spanish Fryar (1681):

Exact Decorum we must always find.
 If then you form some Hero in your mind,
 Be sure your Image with itself agree;
 For what he first appears, he still must be.
 Affected Wits will nat'rally incline
 To paint their Figures by their own design:
 Your Bully Poets, Bully Heroes write;
 Chapman, in Bussy D'Ambois took delight,
 And thought perfection was to Huff, and Fight.
(CD, II, 141)

Dryden's interest in the glowing terms of heroic rhetoric had been visibly on the wane since the composition of Aureng-Zebe in 1675, and greater acquaintance with Milton and Shakespeare had led to a gradual reformation of his theatrical tastes. The standards invoked in Boileau's poem are those which underscore the rhetorical strategy of All for Love. Although, technically-speaking, Antony's passion is 'founded upon vice', his natural inclination towards plain-dealing makes him continually a prey to benevolent feeling, a susceptibility which, like that of the modern French plays, runs all 'upon the tendre', and occupies that part of the play that would

normally be given to a subplot. The fact that we see him in an almost continuous struggle to master his passions - inspired by the emotions of fine-amour for Cleopatra and amicitia for Ventidius and Dolabella - reminds us that 'of Man and Nature he has part'. The only occasion upon which Antony remains unmoved (until loyalties escalate) is in the entirely 'staged' episode of his reconciliation with Octavia - spontaneous emotion cannot be willed at command. Dryden's prologue to the play ironically admits the inadequacy of Antony's moral position to do full justice to his nature and temperament:

He's somewhat lewd;but a well-meaning mind;
Weeps much,fights little,but is wond'rous kind.
(V,27)

Dryden here exploits the tone of the vulgar town wits, who expect the 'bullying' variety of hero, to heighten the novelty and wonder of the refinement and sensibility of which Antony is the paragon. The appeal to the heart, so unfashionable after the cynical detachment of Restoration comedy, came to be seen as an ennobling procedure, offering tragic participation to the patrons of the drama, rather than the 'cold and bloodless emulation' produced by epic 'admiration'. Certain stylistic devices which occur

frequently in All for Love testify to the increased expectation on Dryden's part of sympathetic audience involvement - dramatic 'asides', expostulation, and the intensifying repetition of key words (e.g. 'ruin', 'soul', and 'trifle') contribute a particular brand of tragic pleasure, fulfilling an internally choric function, building sympathetic response-techniques into the actual texture of the play. That the grand effects of tragedy could still be experienced through a mannered, artificial style is the adamant conviction of all Neo-classical criticism, of which Rapin's is perhaps the most representative example.

Dryden may easily have responded to the eloquent challenge of a passage like this from the Refléxions:

Mais ce n'est pas assez qu'il y ait
de la grandeur et de la magnificence
dans l'expression, il doit y avoir
aussi de la chaleur et de la véhémence:
et il faut sur tout qu'il regne dans
le discours un certain air de grâce
et de délicatesse qui en fasse le
principal ornement, et la beauté la
plus universelle.¹⁷

Rapin required vehemence of thought and striking imagery but knew that it was possible to produce it without recourse to bombast. He insisted instead upon a clear, precise, elegant discourse. Dryden, despite his claim in the Prologue to Aureng-Zebe that 'Passions too fierce to be in fetters bound' (W, I, 192), makes no attempt to evoke the fierceness of passion in the diction of All for Love. He enjoys the freedom of blank verse only in so far as it permits him to create and illuminate sentiments which could only achieve embryonic status in the antithetical movement of the couplet, not as an excuse to raise the heroic tone to greater rhetorical extravagance. Thus Dryden is able to treat blank verse as a medium for the extension of meaning, a widening of dramatic radius which helps to incorporate the spectator into the poetic process.

Some of the 'air of grace and delicacy' so praised by Rapin finds its way into Dryden's 'improved' versification in All for Love, a versification for which the blank verse of the tragedies served as an apprenticeship. As we should expect, the versification of the new play is a highly conscious poetry in which the images are largely self-evident constructs, easily expressing the 'dress of thought' which the poet at any moment

¹⁷. ibid., p. 48.

gives to character, situation or passion. Although the ornamental qualities are altogether less studied and pretentious than the lavish 'beauties' of poesy bestowed on the heroic plays (e.g. the lush similes), the timbre in All for Love remains decorous, attempting a simultaneous exposition and explanation of material through persuasive statement, carefully ordered sentiments, and apt imaging - the images in fact making a distinct contribution to the understanding of the hearer as he receives them. The affective bias of the play is curiously well suited to the new style of verse; although All for Love is built on a sequence of confrontation scenes, the episodic effect it creates is largely due to a general dissipation of emotional precision - it is as if the actors who play the characters are striving to express, by quantifying the 'degrees' and counterturns of their passions, a specific mental state which always eludes them. The verse itself reflects this central aimlessness, or vagueness; it suggests rather than locates areas of emotional susceptibility. Gone is the precision - and the detachment - of the heroic couplet.

The affective appeal of this type of poetry can be seen in those passages from the play in which Dryden most closely paraphrases Shakespeare as, for example, in:

There's no satiety of love in thee:
 Enjoyed, thou still art new; perpetual spring
 Is in thy arms; the ripened fruit but falls,
 And blossoms rise to fill its empty place;
 And I grow rich by giving.

(V, 69)

Such lines embody an overall sentiment - a mode of perceiving, rather than a composite, unified experience progressing organically in easily recognisable stages. Antony's eulogy of Cleopatra elicits impressions of wonder, gratitude, joy, tenderness and nostalgia, but all as a generalized recollected

pleasure, experienced within the design and decorum of the verse, not re-lived within and beyond it as happens so often in Shakespeare. Antony's feelings stimulate in him a desire to vocalise, to express instrumentally the different strands of thought which capture for him the impression of what it is like to love Cleopatra. The images succeed but do not grow out of one another; they suggest modes of transference whereby the transition from one to the other appears perfectly natural, neither arresting the ear uncomfortably nor disturbing the imagination. The speech as a whole still moves antithetically, revealing the predominant mental habit of the couplet, which had become nearly inescapable for Dryden. This basic movement is between two image-clusters, one forward-looking, the other looking back, and these alternately impel and retard the verse to give it an almost stationary vividness - as if one were beholding a 'still life' which somehow expresses the meditative qualities of the loved one. The backward-looking image-cluster is the stronger and anchors the speech in the atmosphere of wistful reminiscence which characterizes the tone of the entire play; it contains the heavily voluptuous consonants and vowels of the phrases 'satiety of love', 'the ripened fruit but falls', and the word 'enjoyed' with its own dying fall - all with some implications of regret, autumnal tranquillity, even finality. The forward-looking images ('thou still art new', 'perpetual spring is in thy arms', 'and blossoms rise...') attempt to counter the effect of placidity by a rising inflection, the impetus of the present tense, and the awakening of a myth of cyclical regeneration in which the Pleasures join with the Seasons in asserting the eternity of love. The resolution of these image-patterns into the final paradox, 'And I grow rich by giving', is totally appropriate, since the action of 'growing

rich' expresses future expectancy while 'giving' sums up the energies associated in Antony's mind with past passion (he means 'having given'). In order to see more clearly the type of function Dryden's language is performing, it is only necessary to reduce the speech to its essentials -

There's no satiety of love in thee,
And I grow rich by giving.,

In these few words Dryden could have chosen to characterize Antony's sensibility. But it would have been a prosaic sensibility. There is no particular loss of meaning in this hypothetical reduction; the missing lines do not contribute anything to the meaning save an imagistic illustration of the basic antithesis 'Cleopatra loves - Antony gives', the two-way process which is the basis of the statement Dryden makes about the nature of love (the intervening imagery 'the ripened fruit but falls,/And blossoms rise to fill its empty place' suggests a see-saw replacement of satiety by satiety, fullness by fullness). What those lines do contribute - and essentially so, since their loss reduces the text to banality - is a decorative element which is at one with the kind of poetic experience informing the play. The decorative, ornamental qualities, though productive of a static art, are nevertheless the dramatic life of the piece¹⁸. The speech is beautifully modulated, carefully laid out to achieve the maximum artistic effect, a distillation of emotion perceived almost passively. What engages us is not the emotion itself - which is now very distant from its source - but the inescapable quality of the

¹⁸. For an unusual discussion of 'Ideal form' in All for Love, and its implications for the structure and interpretations of the play, see J.H. Hagstrum, The Sister Arts, Chicago (1958), esp. pp. 185-96.

diction, the power with which expressiveness per se can reveal itself. It is on such a level of artistic awareness that the reader, the student, or the auditor must approach All for Love. If he comes in search of Shakespearian technique he will be disappointed. The language everywhere reinforces Dryden's main themes - the imprisonment of his characters in their memories, and their obsessive concern to formalize even present experience into a methodized form in which the civilizing process of discourse will give order to irrational impulse. Dryden's Antony and Cleopatra are not earthy creatures of darkness like Shakespeare's - they are rationally in command of their basic situation and are capable of evaluating its consequences. The play charts their struggle to translate the mediocrity and disillusion which threatens their love (from Antony's morbid melancholy as much as from Roman morality) into an elegiac synthesis of past experience which sanctifies and immortalises the present moment, placing it somehow beyond the reach of time, and which has its 'life' more completely in reminiscence than in current reality. This overall trend recalls Rapin's attempts to preserve the decorum essential to tragic dignity, and is most noticeably reflected in the sentimental attributes of the play.

Sentiment in 'All for Love'

In his study of Dryden's major plays, Bruce King complains of All for Love's 'awkward sentimentalities'¹⁹. In an age in which sentiment is perhaps more unpopular than it has ever been, such a view is not surprising. However, Dryden's introduction

¹⁹ King, p.145.

of sentiment into the heroic play needs careful consideration, for in his hands it became a powerful instrument of control upon the responses of his audience, and, indeed, upon those of his readers also. As Paul Parnell has pointed out in his article 'The Sentimental Mask', critics seem still uncertain whether sentiment is a positive or a negative quality, and whether to deplore its presence in works which do not fall within the limits of the 'sentimental movement' of the early eighteenth century. Parnell is forced to admit that sentiment, by its very nature, is open to misconstruction:

... sentimental thinking is balanced delicately between hypocrisy and sincerity, simplicity and duplicity,²⁰ self-consciousness and spontaneity.

The self-consciousness of the sentimental state has been regarded, after the insistent emotional honesty of the romantic movement, as mere posturizing, the assumption of a role which would invalidate the possibility of sincere feeling. It is perhaps wise to remind ourselves that 'sentiment' itself constitutes a paradox; the Oxford English Dictionary describes it as a 'mental feeling', which suggests that it is partially a philosophic concept (perhaps not unlike Descartes' notion of 'émotions intérieures'²¹), partially a distinct 'feeling' or sense-impression. The one thing which is certain is that sentiment is not pure emotion, it is emotion mixed with discrepant elements which confuse the one who experiences it. Another more helpful phrase from the Dictionary - 'feelings collectively as an influence' - illustrates the transience and vagueness which

²⁰ P.E. Parnell, 'The Sentimental Mask', PMLA, LXXVIII (1963), 529-35.

²¹ See Descartes, Oeuvres Philosophiques, op.cit., III, 1063-64.

nearly always accompany the colouring of sentiment.

As I suggested above, sentiment is closely linked to personal modes of expression and will often indicate the mental choice-patterns and selectivity of the speaker. In Dryden's tragicomedies, particularly Marriage à la Mode and The Assignation, it is used as a way of charting the fluctuating feelings of characters in ambivalent situations, and is made the keynote of scenes involving filial piety (e.g. between Polydamas and Leonidas, and Frederick and the Duke). Sentiment, because it is imprecise, allows a variety of feeling to be presented in quick succession, without running the risk of the more positive 'heroic' emotions such as 'gloire', ambition, vengeance and love. The somewhat insipid result can be off-putting to a twentieth-century audience who are accustomed to seeing all subjective feeling properly developed and not left as a peg upon which to hang some apt versification. Pure sentiment simply diverts an audience from one type of feeling to another, without offering an explanation, or even seeming dramatically viable (a good example is Polydamas' arbitrary repentance when he sees Leonidas crowned king in Act V of Marriage à la Mode). The inaccessibility of sentiment is due, if anything, to the fact that the sentimentalist wears, in Paul Parnell's words, a 'sentimental mask' which protects him from self-knowledge and which preserves his decorum intact. Dryden's less well-developed characters - especially those in the early tragicomedies - tend to wear sentimental masks which insulate them from the scrutiny of the audience. Gonsalvo, Philocles, Lysimantes, Argaleon, Polydamas, Sophronia - all these characters are 'sketched' rather than worked out, and for this the general influence of the sentimental mode is ideal,

and commits them to no particular standard of behaviour. It was only after Dryden began to perceive the potential of using sentiment as a control upon the dangerous imbalance of wit in the heroic play, that a deeper, more 'through-composed' sentimental attitude began to colour his work - the results of which can be observed in the characterization of Aureng-Zebe.

There is no suggestion in Aureng-Zebe, or indeed throughout much of Dryden, that sentiment is to be taken as a gloss for insincerity. Although Dryden used it initially as a stabilizing element in the light, easy characterization he required for his Fletcherian tragicomedies, he was in no way contemptuous of it. In Aureng-Zebe, the 'most correct' of his rhymed plays, he looked upon sentiment as an antidote to the enthusiasm of poetic fury, a softening of the threatening and subversive ethos of heroism gone awry - the kind of megalomaniac self-exhibition which he had explored in the character of Maximin, and which was later aped by Elkanah Settle in his neo-Jacobean extravaganza, The Empress of Morocco (1673). The more consistent use of sentiment lowered the ranting tone of the heroic play and encouraged the audience to cultivate a taste for the stylized pathos evoked by heroes pressed by unfortunate circumstances. For example, the mental stance assumed by Aureng-Zebe in the prison scene (Act IV, scene 1) makes it easy for the spectators to engage in his passivity and capacity for suffering; his 'When I consider life, 'tis all a cheat' speech conveys an emotional timbre in keeping with the mental habits of the speaker (e.g. lassitude, sudden dejection, bewilderment). The sentimentality of Aureng-Zebe is an essential part of its

distinctive atmosphere. Once Dryden had realized that he could use it in this way, he was free to introduce it into All for Love as a significant contribution to the propriety and dignity of tragedy. Sentiment in All for Love has the curious effect of rendering illicit passion both natural and respectable. As Eugene M. Waith has observed, Cleopatra and Octavia can both appear as models of wifely virtue²², and Antony's emotional intellectualism (he is 'sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought') tends to deflect incipient moral criticism. Even expressions of joy and exultation are severely moderated; Cleopatra exclaims,

My heart's so full of joy
That I shall do some wild extravagance
Of love in public, and the foolish world,
Which knows not tenderness, will think me mad.
(V, 67)

The key words to the norms of behaviour invoked are 'extravagance' and 'in public'; although there is an implied criticism of 'the foolish world/Which knows not tenderness' (like the world of the wits and pit-fops that Dryden satirizes in the Prologue) the general tone of the speech is a tacit avowal of the power of that world to dictate acceptable modes of conduct. Cleopatra subjects the vehemence of her wish to social norms which are inviolable, and which she and Antony have already guiltily transgressed in the very fact of their relationship. The reality of Dryden's Cleopatra ever putting into practice 'some wild extravagance of love' is considerably more remote than the likelihood of Shakespeare's heroine rising to the challenge - in fact in Antony and Cleopatra Enobarbas vividly recalls the

²². See E.M. Waith, The Herculean Hero, (1962), pp. 194-98. Waith's analysis of Cleopatra's attitude to marriage is perceptive.

Egyptian queen 'hop forty paces through a public street', the sort of jape which is beyond the code of behaviour expected from a Restoration lady. Dryden's Cleopatra is born to decorum and convention, and observes the discipline of sentiment which Dryden himself recommends in his Preface:

'Tis true, some actions, though natural,
are not fit to be represented; and
broad obscenities in words ought in
good manners to be avoided: expressions
therefore are a modest clothing of our
thoughts, as breeches and petticoats
are of our bodies. If I have kept myself
within the bounds of modesty, all beyond
it is but nicety and affection; which
is no more but modesty depraved into a vice.
(W, I, 223)

Dryden seems yet again to be pinning his best hopes on the elegance of the discourse, which will clothe the 'unlawful love' of Antony and Cleopatra with just and elevating sentiments. Dryden humorously apes the French standards of civility which he believes to be over-exact, and his ironic formulation of 'modesty depraved into a vice' again suggests that his attitude to the 'moral fable' of the work is not going to be over-scrupulous. The fact that Dryden's ostensible aim seems to have been to produce a sequence of Lady Wishfort-like 'decorums' in the conduct of his play, should not deter us from looking for hints of his irrepressibly festive wit and for the manifestation of a mature dramatic irony. Dryden's balance of manners and sentiments was genuine enough to rival the best in French neo-classical tragedy, but his natural skills in wit, repartee and raillery died hard, and he wished to leave enough leeway to be able to overstep the bounds of modesty wherever the dramatic situation required it.

The one scene which Dryden himself cites as an example of what would be unacceptable to French taste is the meeting between Cleopatra and Octavia in Act III - a 'flyting' match in which Dryden introduces controlled satire into the play. Having already permitted what Cibber called 'the laugh of approbation'²³ to become a stock-in-trade of the rhymed heroic play, it was unlikely that Dryden should willingly forego the spirited liveliness which had established his reputation, and sacrifice 'eagerness of repartee' to the strict requirements of academic decorum. In Aureng-Zebe he had written what he described as 'the tragedy of wit' (W,I,193), his last essay in a style which was already becoming outmoded. All for Love, in which the mixed heroic wit goes into even sharper decline, could profitably be termed a 'tragedy of manners', in which characterization and the 'observation of nature' predominate, and whose theme constitutes the stifling effect of social custom and convention upon those who are naturally honest, general and open-hearted.

Dryden found the discipline of sentiment a constraint, but he worked best when an inner tension motivated his dramatic design. Although All for Love may appear partly as a manifesto, the outward expression of a stylistic divide in which Dryden felt compelled to reject the couplet as a medium for drama, it does not shake off entirely the vestiges of his earlier 'mixed heroic' style. Earl Miner has made an important general point about Dryden's technique when he claims that,

²³ See Cibber, An Apology for the Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, 2nd edn., (1740), pp.102-04.

the nature of his art, here (i.e. in All for Love) as elsewhere, depends upon seeing clearly even when that requires the admission of dissident elements or mixed feelings.²⁴

Thus although the allusiveness and the bright festivity of wit may be absent, ironic thought-patterns still predominate in All for Love, creating a sense of tragic irony which is never very far removed from a sense of the mischievous. Had Dryden chosen for instance to adapt Romeo and Juliet instead of Antony and Cleopatra for his love-tragedy, it would be a moot question whether he could have resisted the comic inferences of the plot, and whether his play would not have lapsed into the more comfortable realm of tragicomedy, with Friar Laurence a satiric portrait second only to Friar Dominic in The Spanish Fryar. What I wish to stress here is that Dryden, despite his willingness to submit his poetry to the decorous standards of Rapin, knew that his blank verse had not the same 'odour of sanctity' as Shakespeare's and was not immune from sudden invasion by the absurd. Whereas he could profit by this in the type of entertainment furnished by the heroic play, tragedy demanded a more watchful eye, which is why Dryden's high seriousness becomes so deliberate, a much more exact formulation of the grandiose gesture, reduced in scale by a cautious attention to the propriety of thought, imaging, and elocution. Dryden does more to standardize and 'fix' aberrant tone in All for Love than in any other of his plays, and it is

²⁴. E. Miner, Dryden's Poetry, Bloomington, Indiana (1967), p.65.

important to understand why he did so. The 'counterpoint of epic voices' which had enriched the texture of his rhymed plays would have posed a serious enough threat to the mood of All for Love if allowed full imaginative rein. Such a background is essential to our understanding of why Dryden strove so painstakingly to forge a unity of plot and tone in his new play, and why, as in his earlier drama, the shadow of subversive dissonance throws doubt on its artistic success. The problem underlying All for Love was a crucial one for Dryden; if not in the wit of a play, where lay the 'life-giving touches' of the drama? Was it possible to write a play in which liveliness, verisimilitude and concernment could all be welded into a satisfactory artistic unity? The answers to such questions lie in the play itself, to which we will now turn.

Of recent critics, only Derek Hughes, in a perceptive study²⁵, has given adequate attention to the scope and complexity of design in All for Love. He offers a persuasive account of the play's psychological strategy. The private world of the individual becomes the focal point as the play moves further away from the externals of fame, conquest and glory to examine the inner realities of identity, intimacy and self-knowledge. Hughes sees Antony's quest for true identity as the pivotal force in the plot. Throughout, Dryden is keen to emphasize a supra-personal quality which he designates 'largeness of soul', and which gives far more than active military valour - heroic status to the possessor (it

²⁵. D.W. Hughes, 'The Significance of All for Love', ELH, XXXVII (1970), 540-63. I am indebted to this article for the development of ideas in the ensuing paragraph.

incorporates in fact some of the emotional values implicit in the Cornélian concept of 'gloire'). Thus Antony's largeness of soul, and capacity for feeling, is a private credential, the hallmark of a generous and benevolent man, and also of his claim to humanity. Hughes interprets Antony's journey through the play as a spiritual psychomachia in which the Everyman-figure meets and talks with all those who have special relation to his emotional and psychological welfare. Throughout each of these confrontations Antony is expected to locate the correct role he should be playing in relation to his interlocutor. Role-playing becomes an essential feature of the learning process, whereby a child-like hero learns to distinguish between the true and the false²⁶. Antony is nevertheless unable to find the role which suits him or gives integrated expression to the conflicting images of heroic life which emerge from each of the interviews; thus despite experiencing benevolent emotion and sentimental refinement of sensibility, Antony dies without achieving greater self-realization; he remains the victim of a moral blindness which prevents him from ever fully working out where his real responsibilities lie.

The wording of the subtitle, 'The World Well Lost' is important in establishing from the outset the hopeless moral predicament in which Dryden's lovers are enmeshed, The outcome - death - is already certain when the curtain rises; Serapion

26. Eric Rothstein, in Restoration Tragedy, op.cit., observes that pathetic tragedy usually exalts what he calls the 'stupid hero' (see p.96). The naivety of Antony is an undoubted advantage in procuring sympathy from the audience. Even Ventidius, the rough old soldier, is severely shaken by the severity of Antony's self-martyrdom in Act I:

How sorrow shakes him!
So, now the tempest tears him up by th' roots,
And on the ground extends the noble ruin.

(v, 39)

speaks of 'portents and prodigies' so frequent that 'they have lost their name'. We presently see Antony prostrate in a gloomy fit of inertia, the physical symbol for his moral subjection to lascivious hours in Egypt. In terms of the action of the play, the 'World' - essentially the Roman one of strict personal honour, rigid codes of manly behaviour, and the conquest-ethic, - is already well lost, thrown away like a plaything by the moody Antony and now in the possession of a new 'boy-hero', the young Octavius Caesar. In all, the characters can do very little to avert a catastrophe which is morally irreversible - the commitment of Antony to the interests of Cleopatra is, even if he scarcely understands it himself, virtually a 'fait accompli' and constitutes the 'state of being' in which he lives and moves.

The play unfolds like an elaborately planned dramatised debate, with Antony epitomising what Richard Larson has called, 'the hero as listener'²⁷. All the characters - an operative grouping of six principals - are brought together to shed light on each other's motives, and ostensibly to 'save' the situation. Nearly everyone, save Antony, is convinced of his or her power to resolve the emotional ructions caused by a politically embarrassing turn of events, and all, by their efforts, gradually worsen matters. Their interference ultimately forces the world of the play to assert its predestined fatality. The overall pattern of exchange and interdependence between characters is thus ironic, and recalls Dryden's bitterly disillusioned vision of humanity in Aureng-Zebe. The introspection of the characters

²⁷. See R.L.Larson, Studies in Dryden's Dramatic Technique, op.cit., pp.220-53.

in All for Love is in part responsible for their failure to offer constructive solutions; their world of experience is 'cribb'd, cabin'd and confin'd' within their mental processes. What Dryden analyses most forcefully is the nature and workings of emotional blackmail. This is seen as much in the great manipulative strengths of Ventidius and Octavia, as in the actual content of the feelings which the characters claim to possess (often very much less than sentimental appeal can make it sound). The threat of heroic claustrophobia looms heavy over the play; Roman 'heroic' values are unsympathetically linked with archaic notions of honour and chivalry and with smug self-righteousness. Ventidius's bracing exhortations and Octavia's coolly persuasive sentiments are both symptomatic of the same inflated attentiveness to selfish integrity which is typical of Roman morality throughout. Antony, although imprisoned to a certain degree by sentimental introspection, is at least individually assertive in refusing to dedicate himself to a heroic life which appears repressive and hypocritical. He shuns Roman heroic prowess partly because it is associated with a largely forgotten part of his history, the 'golden age' of his youth (in this he is reminiscent of the decadent Old Emperor in Aureng-Zebe), and partly because Dryden does not now regard a merely physical, Almanzor-like prowess as totally admirable. The key to Dryden's changing attitudes to the ethics of heroic life is to be found in the pervading sentimentalism which distinguishes the characterization of Antony.

Although the concept of 'sentimental heroism' seems at first to embody an inherent contradiction (e.g. of 'active' versus 'contemplative' life), there can be little doubt that

in Antony, Dryden was treating the private virtues of self-examination and self-effacement with an ambivalently 'heroic' tone. The emphasis on 'feeling' in Dryden never overbalances the need for classical precision, order and form, but the heroic remains the distinctive and self-defining mode even in so tender a subject as Antony's 'affairs of the heart'. Like his moody precursor, Aureng-Zebe, Antony is predominantly melancholic and passive, enlivened less by action than by 'thought'. The famous quarrel scene in Act I, of which Dryden was so justly proud, shows Ventidius attempting to reawaken in Antony the memory of past exploits and to assert the heroic ethic of prowess in contradistinction to Antony's self-styled 'sentimental heroic'. While Ventidius relies upon clichéd exhortations and heroic bravado to achieve his purpose, Antony's heroism is expressed more indirectly. Antony's assertiveness takes the simple form of an access of feeling which dictates his response to normally conventional ties of love, duty and honour. In Antony's world the stock heroic clichés of love-and-honour take on a refined emotional colouring which sets them apart from mercenary considerations.

The first act juxtaposes the old and new heroism with considerable effectiveness. Ventidius comes onto the stage as the busy, even officiously 'active' man whose moral duty it is to reclaim his degenerate friend; the opening scene, which moves with great speed and compactness, is not dissimilar to that of King Lear, where Lear, like Ventidius, tries to control the action after his own whim and design, creating a tension within the play between the pre-set charade envisaged by the character, and the omniscient wit and humour of the

dramatist. In order to 'convert' Antony from his evil course of life, Ventidius employs a mixture of flattery, bludgeoning, sighing, and sobbing, to run the entire gamut of Antony's feelings. Ventidius uses his innate animal cunning to act the sentimentalist to perfection, and thus worm his way back into Antony's confidence. Antony soon becomes, like Shakespeare's Leontes, a 'feather for every wind that blows'. When Antony apologises to Ventidius for words spoken in a heated moment, Ventidius replies:

You thought me false;
Thought my old age betrayed you. Kill me, sir;
Pray, kill me. Yet you need not; your unkindness
Has left your sword no work.

(V, 47)

Ventidius veers with disarming speed between a tone of ostentatious sincerity and affected hypocrisy. He plays the opportunist with mood to bring him maximum emotional credit with Antony, who shortly afterwards embraces him as a token of amity and trust. There are warnings earlier in the play of Ventidius's chameleon-like capacities; especially noticeable is his mental habit of forming Antony in his own image. In the scene below, Ventidius wilfully distorts the evidence he hears from an Egyptian courtier and substitutes his own interpretation of Antony's behaviour:

GENTLEMAN: He eats not, drinks not, sleeps not, has no use
Of anything but thought; or, if he talks,
'Tis to himself, and then 'tis perfect raving.
Then he defies the world, and bids it pass;
Sometimes he gnaws his lip, and curses loud
The boy Octavius; then he draws his mouth
Into a scornful smile, and cries, "Take all,
The world's not worth my care".

VENTIDIUS: Just, just his nature.
Virtue's his path; but sometimes 'tis too narrow
For his vast soul, and then he starts out wide
And bounds into a vice that bears him far
From his first course, and plunges him in ills.

(V, 36)

Ventidius substitutes images of heroic action ('he starts out

wide/And bounds into a vice,') for the gentleman's more static description of Antony's gloomy defiance. It is amusing to see how abruptly Ventidius introduces the subject of 'virtue', which is/^aheroic ideal very far removed from the reality of the description of Antony which he has just heard. The stately norms of heroic self-discipline, against which Ventidius judges Antony's conduct, are far from sympathetic. It is Ventidius's stubborn refusal to take account of the change in Antony's nature which leads him, later in the play, to arrange further unsuccessful charades (e.g. the transportation of Octavia and Dolabella to Alexandria) and to complicate even further the nature of Antony's moral dilemma.

Throughout the 'conversion scene' of their quarrel Antony and Ventidius in fact both respond to a heroism which feeds off the affective stimulus of language; each uses words to assure the other of heroic identity, intention and status. Towards the end of Act I however it becomes increasingly clear that Ventidius is unaware of the ironies in Antony's 'return' to active heroic life; he fails to notice the subtle hints of feeling which reveal that Antony now habitually thinks of himself as a lover, not a soldier. The promises which Antony makes are in fact largely conditioned by the emotional warmth or 'transport' engendered by nostalgic reminiscence (the recollection of past events is a strong theme throughout the play). In the following extract I have italicized the words and phrases which seem to me to point up the affective bias of the heroic statements made; patterns of verbal repetition and an ear for musical cadence are often indications that the dramatist is manipulating words for their emotional value:

ANTONY: Thy praises were unjust, but I'll deserve 'em,
 And yet mend all. Do with me what thou wilt;
 Lead me to victory! Thou know'st the way.

VENTIDIUS: And --- will you leave this ---

ANTONY: Prithee, do not curse her,
And I will leave her; though, heav'n knows, I love
 Beyond life, conquest, empire, all but honor;
But I will leave her.

VENTIDIUS: That's my royal master.
 And --- shall we fight?

ANTONY: I warrant thee, old soldier,
 Thou shalt behold me once again in iron,
 And at the head of our old troops that beat
 The Parthians, cry aloud, "Come, follow me!"

VENTIDIUS: Oh, now I hear my emp'ror! In that word
 Octavius fell. Gods, let me see that day,
 And if I have ten years behind, take all;
 I'll thank you for th'exchange.

ANTONY: O Cleopatra!

VENTIDIUS: Again?

ANTONY: I've done. In that last sigh, she went.
 Caesar shall know what 'tis to force a lover
 From all he holds most dear.

VENTIDIUS: Methinks you breathe
 Another soul; your looks are more divine;
 You speak a hero, and you move a god.

ANTONY: Come on, my soldier!
 Our hearts and arms are still the same.
 (V, 48-9)

A brief glance at this passage should immediately illustrate how closely the sentimental and the heroic are juxtaposed. Generally speaking it is the sentiment which dictates Antony's vacillation, his more 'unheroic' statements (e.g. 'And I will leave her ... But I will leave her'). Even the high heroic tone itself however is subjected to sentimental attitudes; the lines which begin 'Thou shalt behold me once again in iron', convey the effect of heroism upon spectators, not something heroic in itself. The rhetorical bravado associated with the high heroic style at one point becomes the instrument of pure sentiment; Antony's heroism takes its origin from the image of the ferocity of the frustrated lover:

Caesar shall know what 'tis to force a lover
 From all he holds most dear.

Dryden here uses the heroic mode to dignify sentimental ideas;

what is intrinsically a statement of weakness begins to look more like a heroic threat. The inverse process of the sentimental 'infecting' the heroic can be seen in Ventidius's formal use of panegyric values in his address to the hero:

Methinks you breathe
Another soul; your looks are more divine;
You speak a hero, and you move a god.

Such heroism is virtually metaphysical, a heroism of 'ideas' which call forth the appropriate emotional response. Ventidius's tribute carries with it an ironic truth; in the context of the unfolding of the play Antony does 'move' (i.e. respond to 'feeling') like a god; his capacity to portray his own feelings and verbalize his moral dilemma become his most heroic attributes.

The economy with which Dryden mingles sentimental and heroic ideas is entirely characteristic of the spirit of classicism which pervades the whole atmosphere of All for Love. Irène Simon, in her discussion of 'imitation' in the Neo-classical period, talks of the necessity for the poet to express universal truths rather than individual feelings. She writes,

ideas or feelings should be
expressed in a way that was
recognisable as a poetic mode,
fitting into a tradition,
employing the same means as
poets of the past and adapting
them to the contemporary context.²⁸

This is very much what Dryden does in the case of his first 'pathetic' hero. Antony's sentimentalism rarely becomes mawkish, because his self-pity is expressed in a mode which sufficiently recalls the elegance and nobility of the heroic poem. Personal feeling can thus assume something of the authority of universal truth by juxtaposition with a respected and well-established tradition of heroic writing. Antony's

²⁸. I. Simon, Neo-Classical Criticism, 1660-1800, (1971), p.22.

special brand of heroism is also extremely expressive of Dryden's struggle to find a new poetic medium and integrate it with a more modern sensibility, but it nevertheless retains a strong link with epic precedent. Antony's short soliloquy in Act IV, after Octavia has finally left, is a model of clear-sightedness, in which the heroic and the expressive problem are both analysed and resolved into verse which suggests how the qualities of both may co-exist:

Why was I framed with this plain, honest heart,
Which knows not to disguise its griefs and weakness,
But bears its workings outward to the world?
I should have kept the mighty anguish in,
And forced a smile at Cleopatra's falsehood.
Octavia had believed it, and had stayed.
But I am made a shallow-forded stream,
Seen to the bottom; all my clearness scorned,
And all my faults exposed.

(V, 105)

The phrase which most strikingly suggests the moral emphasis of Antony's heroism is 'mighty anguish', in which the heroic and the sentimental meet again. The speech is the central expression of Antony's tragic predicament throughout the play; immediacy of response (the 'shallow-forded stream') makes his susceptibility to passion almost as tragic as Othello's. However the speech also includes hints of moral reservation; Dryden's attitude to Antony's 'clearness' is not without irony. The hero who bears 'his workings outward to the world' is subject to a fatal tendency to be swayed by the impulse of the moment²⁹. The deliberately unrealistic tableau in Act III

²⁹. Another speech which is similar to Antony's, and which throws more light on Dryden's attitudes to the sentimental hero, is to be found in Act III of The Duke of Guise (Dryden-Lee, 1682). King Henry, a somewhat insipid foil for the more volatile and aggressive Duke, exclaims:

Forgive the late disturbance of my soul!
I'm clear by nature, as a rockless stream;
But they dig through the gravel of my heart,
And raise the mud of passions up to cloud me.

(SS, VII, 63)

in which Antony invites his wife, children and friends to 'share me all', (V,82), is designed to highlight the emotional recklessness characteristic of sensibility. In that episode sentiment momentarily confounds the distinction between duty and love. Dryden sees the vulnerability resulting from tenderheartedness as alternately weakening and ennobling. The over-riding tragedy of Antony is to be found in the dissipation of will he suffers through hypersensitivity to the emotional demands of others:

Since I have heard of Cleopatra's death,
My reason bears no rule upon my tongue,
But lets my thoughts break all at random out.
(V,123)

It is no small measure of Dryden's achievement that sensibility - nearly always a morbid and oppressive condition - can attain tragic significance in a play which contravenes so much of the ethos of the earlier heroic plays. R.S. Crane, in his article, 'The Genealogy of the Man of Feeling'³⁰, has put forward the theory that the sermons of Anglican Latitudinarian divines, in particular Barrow, Tillotson, and Parker, may well have been responsible for the popularization between 1660 and 1685 of the notion of the 'duty of tenderheartedness'. Dryden's plays often recommend an essentially Christian moral code, and considering the use he made of Tillotson's sermons in Tyrannick Love³¹, it is not unlikely that a more general influence from charitable and enlightened religious works should also find its way into the later plays, notably Aureng-Zebe and All for Love. It should be clear however that Dryden

³⁰ R.S.Crane, 'Suggestions toward a Genealogy of the "Man of Feeling"', in Studies in the Literature of the Augustan Age, ed.R.C.Boys, Michigan (1952), pp.61-87.

³¹ For a full account of Dryden's dramatic use of Tillotson's ideas, see King, pp.55-8.

is by no means attempting to recommend his Antony as a 'pattern of piety' after the manner of his St Catherine. Antony is morally ambiguous, and is less self-righteous than Aureng-Zebe, who is much closer to the unbending severity of the female saint; but in the all-important question of Antony's 'manners' (his outward gestures as much as his inner promptings) it is obvious that Dryden was recommending an accessibility to feeling which has overtones of sentimentalized Christianity; pity, tears, and compassion are the earthly rewards and pleasurable sensations which meet the benevolent soul as he 'lays down his own life' of selfish desire in the service of his friends' emotional needs.

Dryden therefore grounds Antony's morality - and heroism - in his sentimental responses to the affections. Tears are the badge of the sentimentalist's tribe, so Antony's progress through the play is made accordingly lachrymose. A passage cited in Crane's article, and which is particularly appropriate here is part of a work by an anonymous essayist of the eighteenth century (circa 1755) in which the subject under discussion is 'moral weeping'; the writer claims that tears are -

a sign of so noble a passion, that it may be questioned whether those are properly men, who never weep upon any occasion. They may pretend to be as heroical as they please, and pride themselves in a stoical insensibility; but this will never pass for virtue with the true judges of human nature. What can be more nobly human than to have a tender sentimental feeling of our own and other's (sic) misfortunes?³²

³² R.S. Crane, 'Suggestions toward a Genealogy of the "Man of Feeling"', op.cit., p.62.

Here we have, in miniature, a summary of the character-types encountered in All for Love. When the essayist equates 'stoical insensibility' with 'virtue' he is giving an accurate description of the Roman characters in the play, and the whole passage sheds light on the kind of effect Dryden was hoping to achieve in the sentimentalized 'modern' heroics of Antony. Arthur C. Kirsch was one of the first critics to realize the importance of the doom-laden Melesinda in Aureng-Zebe as a precursor of the tender hero³³, and Antony in All for Love is already half-way towards the suavity of emotional nuance we find in Otway's Jaffeir. A last glance at Rapin helps confirm Dryden's attraction to the more emotionally luxuriant type of hero. Rapin's major complaint about contemporary tragedy in his Refléxions sur la Poétique was that it failed to speak any more the language of the heart:

On ne parle pas assez au coeur des spectateurs, qui est le seul art du théâtre, ou rien n'est capable de plaire, que ce qui remue les affections, et ce qui fait impression sur l'âme; on ne connaît point cette rhétorique, qui sait développer les passions par tous les degrés naturels de leur naissance et de leur progrès; on ne met point en usage cette morale, qui est propre à mêler des intérêts différens, des vœux opposés, des maximes qui s'entrechoquent, des raisons qui se détruisent les unes les autres, pour fonder ces incertitudes et ces irrésolutions qui font la beauté du théâtre.³⁴

Rapin's concern with the poet's ability to depict all the vicissitudes of passion in a manner which will communicate

³³ See A.C. Kirsch, Dryden's Heroic Drama, Princeton (1965), p. 119.

³⁴ Rapin, Les Refléxions sur la Poétique de ce Temps, op.cit. p. 106.

pleasure to the spectators is an important guide to the numerous states of irresolution which beset Antony, who is the most vacillating of Dryden's heroes (with only the possible exception of Almanzor, whose loyalties change approximately with each act). The use of tears was of obvious value in speaking to the hearts of the audience. Betterton's instructions to his actors on the 'art of Weeping' encourage what he calls a 'passionate tenderness' with which the spectators quickly become imbued, and he advises those who are to depict states of anguish or grief to have present to their imaginations some private affliction or injury which will promote a ready flow of tears³⁵. Much of the action of Dryden's play is devoted to the creation of an atmosphere conducive to receiving sentimental impressions from the characters, so that the audience may not be deprived of any of these most pleasurable 'agitations of soul'.

Bonamy Dobrée, in his discussion of 'artificial tragedy', has offered a helpful analysis of the kind of effect that a play such as All for Love aims to create. After examining some of the play's more formal characteristics, he concludes,

it must now be more emphatically stated that what finally is meant by structure is the sequence of emotions in the hearer; and that good structure is where the emotions are well woven, appropriately opposed, and conducted to some definite end.³⁶

By viewing Dryden's excursion into the 'sentimental heroic' as an alternative measure to his manipulation of the audience

³⁵. See Gildon, The Life of Mr. Thomas Betterton, Eighteenth-Century Shakespeare, No. 4, (1970), pp. 68-70.

³⁶. B. Dobrée, Restoration Tragedy, Oxford (1929), p. 97.

through Baroque wit, we can see more clearly what Dryden was trying to do in substituting 'concernment' for 'admiration'. The kind of 'satiric engagement' which was possible from the spectators of the heroic play was a species of literary pastime, a sharpening of critical focus. The use of sentiment makes All for Love unequivocal in its appeal to the serious emotions of the audience; the more they can empathize with the hero the more they can accept his self-regarding postures of grief and pain as symbols of universal suffering, and respond accordingly. Compassion was felt to have more benevolent effects upon the soul than admiration; admiration teaches only envy and emulation, compassion educates and disciplines the emotions.

Thus the difference which sentiment makes to Dryden's treatment of heroic themes in All for Love is considerable. In blank verse which favours a 'plain' style, the danger of satiric invasion becomes minimized; 'feeling' asserts its own validity as the paramount expression of heroic identity. Dryden even uses a variant of Hobbes' 'spaniel' image to dignify Antony with an idealized concept of the self³⁷. As a man who longs for spiritual and emotional integration, Antony is capable of seeing the fragmentedness of his personality in such terms as these:

Why dost thou drive me from myself, to search
For foreign aids? to hunt my memory,
And range all o'er a waste and barren place
To find a friend?

(V, 71)

Unlike allusions to Hobbes in earlier heroic plays this one

³⁷. For other, more celebrated uses of this image, see R. Selden, 'Hobbes, Dryden, and the Ranging Spaniel', N & Q, XX (1973), 388-90.

is used for emotional rather than witty or rhetorical effect. That which gives Antony's image of self-alienation a truly poetic quality is the fusion of affective and philosophical elements (e.g. 'memory', an abstract faculty, is designated and personalized by the words 'a waste and barren place'). This image of the alienated introspective self haunts Antony throughout the play, and his consciousness of being unable to rationalize or give order to his emotions brings him at times very near the psychological crisis of Kyd's Hieronimo:

Guilt witnesses for guilt. Hence, love and friendship!
 You have no longer place in human breasts;
 These two have driv'n you out. Avoid my sight!
 I would not kill the man whom I have loved,
 And cannot hurt the woman; but avoid me.
 I do not know how long I can be tame,
 For if I stay one minute more to think
 How I am wronged, my justice and revenge
 Will cry so loud within me that my pity
 Will not be heard for either.

(V, 109)

'Retirement', which is at first a self-imposed retreat from the shame of losing the battle of Actium, gradually becomes the refuge of the hunted animal. Antony shows signs of approaching disintegration when subjected to the pressure of emotional obligation:

'Tis too much,
 Too much, Octavia. I am pressed with sorrows
 Too heavy to be borne, and you add more.
 I would retire, and recollect what's left
 Of man within, to aid me.

(V, 104)

As these obligations pile up, and Antony is faced by the 'treachery' of Cleopatra and Dolabella, 'retirement' means a journey into the wilderness, an excommunicated state in which Antony masks his feelings with cynicism:

Th' original villain sure no god created;
 He was a bastard of the sun by Nile,
 Aped into man, with all his mother's mud
 Crusted about his soul.

(V, 117-18)

However, at crucial points in the action Antony's 'self-regarding heroic' can attain genuine tragic dignity, as, for example, in his realization of what the loss of Cleopatra must mean:

My torch is out, and the world stands before me
Like a black desert at th' approach of night.
I'll lay me down, and stray no farther on.
(V, 122)

In such moments Dryden achieves a unique harmony between feeling and tone, and the result is exquisitely modulated rhythmical verse. Antony's self-dramatization achieves genuine poignancy because his feelings lack ambiguity - he expresses purity of sentiment in a manner which is neither too sickly nor heroic.

However, vestiges of the old 'mixed style' remain, as I intend to show later on in this chapter. One passage in which the satirical atmosphere of heroic wit still hovers is Antony's ebullient celebration of Cleopatra in the 'Mars and Venus' episode which opens Act III. Here incongruity is used to highlight the reversal of conventional heroic values which is the governing theme of the play. Here Antony's extravagance helps us to see more clearly why he has given up 'all for love':

Receive me, goddess!
Let Caesar spread his subtle nets, like Vulcan;
In thy embraces I would be beheld
By heav'n and earth at once,
And make their envy what they meant their sport.
Let those who took us blush; I would love on
With awful state, regardless of their frowns,
As their superior god.

(V, 68-9)

D.W. Jefferson cites this passage as an example of what he³⁸ calls Dryden's 'comic gigantesque'; the inflated language of

³⁸ D.W. Jefferson, 'Aspects of Dryden's Imagery', EIC **IV**, (1954), 37.

the majestic close ('awful state', 'superior god'), deliberately recalls and perhaps gently parodies the extravagant diction of the heroic play. Jefferson notes elsewhere, however, that Dryden makes little attempt to control the subversive elements in the speech:

where Antony imagines himself making
love to Cleopatra in the face of the
most august publicity, splendour and
comedy are merged.³⁹

Certainly the emotional effect of the speech is complex. The incipient comedy underlines the crisis which has overtaken normal heroic values in All for Love; Antony consciously accepts the unheroic absurdity of Mars' embarrassing situation, yet is willing to identify himself with it. Antony converts a situation of potentially ignominious folly into an opportunity to assert the unconventional heroism of sexual love (Dryden seems here to have learned a characteristic trick of Rochester's). Antony dares out the débâcle and transforms it to its opposite ('And make their envy what they meant their sport'). This poetic process effectively mirrors what Antony does in the case of Dolabella, illustrating how easily Antony can channel emotional potential into paths which serve his desires. Dolabella arrives in Alexandria with the prime object of rebuking his friend for his 'dotage', but is seduced by Antony's description of Cleopatra on the Cydnus into betraying his own love for the queen. Antony's almost unconscious knack of probing the emotions eventually leads him to suicidal despair and confusion, unable to distinguish

³⁹ D.W. Jefferson, '"All, all of a piece throughout": Thoughts on Dryden's Dramatic Poetry', in Restoration Theatre, ed. J.R. Brown and B. Harris, Stratford-Upon-Avon Studies 6, (1965), p.169.

any more between truth and falsehood in love. However, in the 'Mars and Venus' speech we get a foretaste of some of the qualities which bring him ultimately to ruin. Antony stakes all upon the extravagant image, neglecting the sordid facts of the matter (e.g. that the gods look on and laugh at his love-making), concentrating emotional power into the immense resources of the quality of the relationship which he celebrates in this way - 'In thy embraces I would be beheld/ By heav'n and earth at once'. Satiric deflation does not get the upper hand; Antony follows up his mischievous myth-making with a moving tribute to Cleopatra - 'There's no satiety of love in thee', - which restores the tone to its customary norm of seriousness.

Earl Miner has pertinently called All for Love a 'drama of the will',⁴⁰. This description accurately describes the focal strength of the play - its mental sinew. The sequence of 'false relations' between the will and the emotions provide the affective harmonies and dissonances which distinguish the play from Dryden's other heroic dramas. We are brought to realize that even the less likeable characters are the same 'complexities of mire and blood' as the royal lovers themselves. As characters shift rhetorical position like pieces in a game of chess, the emotive pleasure induced is one of ironical contrast. The visual grouping of characters is often in contradistinction to their emotional needs - the appearance together of Ventidius and Octavia in Acts III and IV has slightly humorous overtones, and Antony, despite his basic

⁴⁰. See 'Drama of the Will: All for Love', in E. Miner, Dryden's Poetry, op.cit., pp.36-73.

need for Cleopatra, is more often seen in male company. The play is laid out rather like a formal garden in which decorous groupings of characters converse in its walks, and occasionally lose themselves in its mazes. The total effect, J.H.Hagstrum finds, is one of 'ut pictura poesis':

It is not a closely concatenated
action that unfolds moral justice.
It is a gallery of heroic poses
intended to arouse our sympathy
(because the characters remain
human beings and share our common
nature) and our admiration (because
they are larger than life, ideal
forms in heroic postures).⁴¹

Hagstrum's appreciation of Dryden's aesthetic is two-fold; while Dryden maintains a tautness of control which foreshadows the picture-gallery technique of Absalom and Achitophel (1681) with its epic strain and tendency towards 'admiration', he infuses life into his character-portraits by giving to each his 'proper character', i.e. the qualities most requisite for the raising of pity and compassion. Dryden's anxiety in the Preface that he had created too much sympathy for Octavia, is an indication of how much care he had taken over the individual passions of each character, perhaps, as he feared, to the detriment of the whole. Hagstrum's comparison with the Horatian dictum is a just one, and these lines from Oldham's paraphrase of the Art of Poetry (a translation of the mid-late 1670's) seem to sum up the best features of All for Love:

'Tis not enough to have your plays succeed,
That they be elegant; they must not need
Those warm and moving touches which impart
A kind concernment to each hearer's heart,
And ravish it which way they please with art.⁴²

⁴¹. J.H.Hagstrum, The Sister Arts, op.cit., p.196.

⁴². Oldham, Poems, introd.H.Dobr  e, (1960), p.149.

The static mood of the play is sometimes strikingly reflected in the thought processes of the characters, as well as in their physical arrangement into pleasing visual 'tableaux'. Stasis is the prevailing mental condition of the hero, despite the fact that his feelings are almost in a state of continual fluctuation. Antony seems to represent the sum of inaction forced upon Dryden's earlier heroes (e.g. Montezuma, Cortez, Porphyrius, Almanzor) by the rational demands of their mistresses, except that Antony's stasis is in-built rather than an external pressure brought to bear upon him to curb his heroic volatility. He is already 'tamed' by love, and has passed through the first stages of a domestic apathy that one could cheerfully prognosticate for several couples in Dryden's heroic plays (e.g. Cydaria and Cortez, Leonidas and Palmyra, Osmyn and Benzayda). Stasis in Antony is crystallized in the condition expressed by the word 'thought', which in the play has connotations of brooding introspection and sentimental abstraction rather than fanciful delight. It is clear that Antony uses it partially as an opiate, as an escape from his political responsibilities. Even his most sensuous apprehensions are coloured by an aesthetic nicety of form which gives a rationalized, rather remote gentility to his 'dotage'. In the masque-like interlude of Mars and Venus, 'thought' is still noticeably predominant over action, as Antony reveals that he was dependent upon sexual fantasy as an inducement not merely to begin the fight, but to finish the battle:

I thought how those white arms would fold me in,
And strain me close, and melt me into love;
So pleased with that sweet image, I sprung forwards,
And added all my strength to every blow.
(V, 68)

Dryden is quick to establish Antony as a connoisseur of language, one who enjoys words for the colouring they bring to an emotional situation. In his melancholy inertia he indulges in fanciful 'scene-painting' which anticipates the ornamental musings of Otway's heroines, substituting cultivated miseries for real griefs:

Stay, I fancy
 I'm now turned wild, a commoner of nature;
 Of all forsaken, and forsaking all,
 Live in a shady forest's sylvan scene,
 Stretched at my length beneath some blasted oak.

 The herd come jumping by me,
 And, fearless, quench their thirst while I look on,
 And take me for their fellow-citizen.
 More of this image, more; it lulls my thoughts.
(V, 40-41)

Antony here submerges himself in sentimental contemplation, leaving him at leisure to choose the poetic mode most apposite to his condition; the result is the escape-world of pastoral, reminiscent of Marvell's 'green thought in a green shade'. Antony's escapism is self-conscious, literary and aggressively poetic (the 'sylvan scene' and the 'blasted oak' foreshadow the respectable Augustan diction of nature poetry, especially that of Pope, Thomson, Dyer and Akenside). The static situation - the sentimentally heroic 'pose' of Antony by a stream in moody isolation - becomes expressive in itself of Antony's gift for self-dramatization. By opting for inactivity Antony allows himself maximum receptivity to the impulses of whim, fancy and feeling.

Refinement is the distinguishing quality of Antony's use of language; we encounter frequent glimpses of the dandified Restoration gentlemen (who perhaps resembles Sedley more than any other of the court wits) in the studied 'propriety' even of the Cydnus speech. Critics who compare

Dryden's version with Shakespeare's 'The barge she sat in', often miss the point that while the whole effect of Enobarbus's speech is to bring Cleopatra before the mind's eye, Antony's speech in All for Love celebrates greatness, greatness as a concept which can be enriched by the presence of such a creature as Cleopatra, and dignified by the use of the right word in the right place. Here, more than ever, we can observe how Dryden's hero uses words as a highly conscious 'dress of thought'. Antony relishes the opportunity of creating poetry out of the phenomenon of Cleopatra; there is something almost of the art-collector about the manner in which he portrays the universal response awakened by her beauty:

but if she smiled,
A darting glory seemed to blaze abroad,
That men's desiring eyes were never wearied,
But hung upon the object.

(V, 75)

As he works himself up, he recounts the occasion in a spirit of sublime aesthetic reverence rather than a mood of sensuous wish-fulfilment:

To soft flutes
The silver oars kept time; and while they played,
The hearing gave new pleasure to the sight,
And both to thought. 'Twas heaven, or somewhat more...

(V, 75)

By immortalizing it in the memory, creating a 'set piece', Antony fixes the experience in statuesque immobility as a crystallization of the senses - 'pleasure' and 'sight' - into 'thought', the sublime province of the artificer. Thus the Cydnus episode transcends erotic materialism by suggesting new modes of sentimental refinement, modes which curiously blend elements of worship, celebration, reverence and delight. Antony's 'kingdoms' are no less poetic than

Dryden's own. In writing a 'drama of the will', Dryden was again approaching the age-old problem of the nature of creativity. It is sentiment which confirms Antony's need to be taken seriously, and it is through Antony's poetical heroism (in which simple feeling can exalt ignominious motive) that Dryden demonstrates how the imagination may be made to serve the interests of classical decorum and aesthetic nicety. Dryden was never to take such immense pains over the creation of such a character again.

Platonic Love between Men

All for Love is a play distinguished by its sensitive portrayal of friendship. Although this is generally regarded as one of the play's strengths, at least one modern critic has found the implication of homo-erotic attachments unpalatable and cites the 'sanctioning of male homosexuality' as a major defect⁴³. It is certainly true that the perversity of imagination which animated the curious, exotic wit of the heroic rhymed plays had, after Aureng-Zebe, to take another course, and that Dryden found psychological stimulation in depicting relationships which were 'taboo' according to current social norms. Themes of intimate friendship and incest, whether suspected or actual, contribute to the sensationalism of Aureng-Zebe, All for Love, The Spanish Fryar, and Don Sebastian. However, after the excesses of Nourmahal in Aureng-Zebe (she seems to be modelled on the 'ranting style' of Lee's heroines), Dryden turned to the more subtle effects of moral nuance to be gained from an affective approach, creating sympathy for partners such as Antony and Cleopatra, Antony and Dolabella, Dorax and Sebastian, Sebastian and Almeyda.

⁴³. V, xxiv.

Of these relationships the more interesting and dramatically compelling are those between men. Homosexuality on the Restoration stage was at least implicit in the Frenchified 'manners' adopted by courtly gentlemen and satirized in comedy. Excessive affectation, the staple diet of the comedies, became the province of the virtuosic fop, such as a Sparkish, or a Sir Fopling, and although the charge of homosexuality was not directly raised by playwrights, the inference was clear that the effeminacy of French customs and manners had in no small measure contributed to forms of idiosyncratic, élitist behaviour, which when socially analyzed might well correspond to the twentieth-century vogue for a 'gay culture'. Bisexuality is often one of the more 'heroic' attributes of the libertine rake of Restoration comedy; when at a loss for women, what he does in the company of his male friends when in his cups is his own affair, but it adds lustre to his charm. Rochester's lyrics, as well as his grosser heroic parody King Sodom, give ample corroboration that a variety of styles was expected in the field of sexual athletics as much as in the art of letters. Punning, bawdy repartee, and the deliberate transvestism of the tragicomedies (e.g. Dryden's Rival Ladies) kept up a taste and fashion for a witty species of allusion to sexual foibles - and since mind was predominant over matter, their moral gravity was considerably toned down. Casual relationships of all kinds litter Restoration comedy, and, as Wycherley's Manly bitterly prognosticates, none of them signify very much in particular, except that witty men and women have healthy and active bodies which they like to lubricate and keep trim with sexual adventures. For the connoisseur, it was not the identity of the debauchers and

debauchees which counted; it was rather the quality of the debauch per se. Despite the fact that the pragmatism of comedy was a serious threat to the love-and-honour type of play, 'heroic friendship', beloved of Fletcher, Shirley and Davenant, continued to hold the stage from the Restoration until well into the 1680's by which time it had found a new home in the 'pathetic' sentimental tragedy. The exchange of endearments on stage became a stock device of the late heroic play, and as sexual taboos on less conventional expressions of carnal desire relaxed, even the passion of 'holy friendship' became the butt of inevitable innuendo. While The Rehearsal was primarily literary rather than sexual in its satire of male relationships⁴⁴, the critic John Dennis, in his Usefulness of the Stage, to the Happiness of Mankind, to Government, and to Religion (1702) was seriously enough alarmed to devote some time to issuing advice as to how to combat 'unnatural sins' and discourage their promotion by the stage.

Dennis was concerned to protect the reputation of the stage, and his pamphlet was written to counter-attack Collier's vitriolic Short View of the English Stage (1698). Although he mentions the 'love of women', 'drinking' and 'gaming' as other besetting sins of the theatre, Dennis was anxious to exonerate the stage from all charges of promoting sodomy:

As for that unnatural Sin, which is
another growing Vice of the Age, it

⁴⁴. The first entry of the 'two Kings of Brentford, hand in hand', is sexually explicit enough, but after the initial titillation Buckingham and his co-authors quickly settle down to more literary and stylistic parody. See The Rehearsal, ed. D.E.L. Crane, Durham (1976), pp. 18-19.

would be monstrous to urge, that
 it is, in the least, encourag'd
 by the Stage; for it is either
 never mentioned there, or mentioned
 with the last Detestation.⁴⁵

Despite the confidence of this assertion, many Restoration plays had portrayed ambiguous relations between men⁴⁶.

Ironically, Dennis's horror at the influx of the 'unnatural' sins into the British climate, allowed him to reverse the anti-Platonic judgments of other Restoration critics, especially Walter Charleton, who objected to the portrayal of Platonic relationships between members of the opposite sex because it constituted an incitement to lust⁴⁷. Dennis now justifies the 'precieux' codes of couples like Dryden's Berenice and Porphyrius by affirming that such relationships are positively elevating to the spectator, and very 'useful' in the restraining of the 'unnatural sin'. Thus by the end of the century the 'precieux' followers of the Neoplatonic fashion - at first mostly women - were gratified to see the high moral sentiments often held up to male chauvinist ridicule in the heroic plays re-established on a sounder

45. Dennis, Critical Works, 2 vols., ed. E.N. Hooker, Baltimore (1939), I, 156.

46. There are homosexual overtones in such well-known plays as The Man of Mode and The Relapse, as well as in lesser known works such as Otway's The Soldier's Fortune and Southerne's Sir Anthony Love. It is significant that this 'eccentricity' appears predominantly in comedy rather than tragedy. Dryden's plays are the only ones in the period in which more serious feelings are allowed to enter into the subject.

47. See Charleton, The Ephesian Matron, intro. A. Guibbory, Augustan Reprint Society Publication Nos. 172-73, Los Angeles (1975), pp. 50-68. Charleton interrupts his narrative to give a short account of the physiology of sex, setting out to prove that love and lust are ostensibly the same thing, and delivering a neat satire on the 'purity' of Platonic devotion.

basis in the timid fervency of the sentimental drama. All for Love is a play which was conceived in a time of transition, when a new seriousness of moral purpose began to be in the air, and the casual relationships of comedy began to be taken less lightly. Wycherley in The Plain Dealer (1676) and Dryden himself in Mr. Limberham (1677) began to explore the emotional cost of such relationships, and a re-thinking of serious relationships within the heroic play was inevitable. What has to be decided about All for Love is how far it goes in developing a theme which was socially taboo, and how far Dryden saw the relationship between Antony and Dolabella as a serious advance in the sentimental school of writing.

In his reading of Shakespeare, Dryden had been forcibly struck by the master's genius for portraying the more 'manly' passions, of which friendship was the most important. His own emulation of Shakespeare was the basis for his imitation of the quarrel-scene between Brutus and Cassius in the opening act of All for Love. By the time Dryden had 'corrected' Troilus and Cressida and added his own quarrel-scene between Troilus and Hector, he had clearly established in his mind that

Shakespeare writ better betwixt
man and man; Fletcher, betwixt man
and woman.

(W, I, 260)

Since Dryden had now largely abandoned Fletcherian comedy after The Assignation (more reminiscent in fact of one of Shakespeare's 'dark comedies'), he allowed himself free rein to develop the relationships in serious plays, especially in The State of Innocence, Aureng-Zebe and All for Love.

A gradual deepening of psychological interest in the heroes

of these plays takes place in the progression from Satan-Adam, Morat-Aureng-Zebe, to Antony. Antony mixes and confounds the pattern of dual heroism which Dryden had been accustomed to favour in the heroic plays - i.e. the contrast between 'slaves of duty' like Cortez, Porphyrius and Aureng-Zebe, and aggressive, primitive warriors like Montezuma, Almanzor and Morat. Although Dryden seemed to come down on the 'side' of the more courtly, refined heroes - Antony, Troilus, and Don Sebastian are all gentlemen by birth, and not committed on principle to violent aggression - his later studies in 'moral heroism' were more complex and more probing than in the heroic plays. The 'manly passions' are explored in greater detail in the quarrel-and-reconciliation scenes of All for Love, Troilus and Cressida, and Don Sebastian, which in each case provided focal points of sympathetic involvement, and work directly upon the passions of the spectators. One inevitable result of Dryden's imitation of Shakespeare was a marked advance in the humanity and depth of his characterization. Ventidius, Dolabella, Hector, Troilus, Dorax and Sebastian are vivid, memorable portrayals of men beset by internal conflicts; they are men whose emotional natures evoke respect and, usually, sympathy. They are less 'brilliant' than the brash, aggressive heroes, but they compensate for it in sensitivity to the emotional stresses of heroic life. Ventidius and Hector are possible exceptions to this last point, but as Dryden veered away during the 1670's from comedy and from the satiric opportunities of the rhymed play, he was less insistent on subjecting his 'imitation of Nature' to intellectual compromise, especially in what he expected and required of the characters of tragedy.

Another reason for the change of direction towards the portrayal of male relationships may have lain in the fact that the heterosexual couplings of the neo-Platonic convention had worn stale, and that audiences needed a new stimulus for admiration and emulation. The unreality of the love-and-honour codes expressed in the heroic plays served an intellectual and primarily witty purpose of design, reducing 'Platonick Lovers' to somewhat ridiculous, parrot-like individuals, versed in appropriate moral sententiae, and whose real emotions were continually at war with the dictates of 'set' or permissible feeling. Dryden was able to generate much sexual tension, hence exciting suspense, in his heroic plays by dramatising debates for and against unchastity, and placing them in the mouths of betrothed or potentially adulterous couples. The dictates of the Platonic 'mistress' (who was supposed to be a mistress only in name, not in the flesh) effectively castrated the male hero, who was now expected to find an outlet for his sexual urges in battle and selfless sacrifice to her best interests. Dryden exploited this situation again and again in the rhymed plays, and his wit and repartee were centred on such contests between flesh and spirit. During the 1670's however he gradually turned away from the blustering 'castrated' hero of his 'heroic operas', and replaced him by a figure naturally passive, but not denied sexual fulfilment or expression - the Antony of All for Love. The young Aureng-Zebe marks the transition between the two types; although subservient still to his Platonic mistress, his sexual temptations are strong and his feelings equally as violent, if not more so, than Almanzor's (e.g. his jealous behaviour with Indamora in Acts IV and V).

In the new 'tragic heroes' like Antony and Don Sebastian, Dryden at length foregoes the sexual tension, and releases them from the 'chastity' ethic of the Neoplatonic convention. However, as Dryden had believed in at least a nominal value attaching to the discipline of chastity in the earlier plays, he chose not to relinquish the idea entirely. His solution was to transfer Platonic love back to its true roots in the Symposium, and idealize the divinity of same-sex relationships.

The epic 'admiration' which Dryden hoped the heroic play would inspire, enters into the conception of the heroic friendships portrayed in the later tragedies; one hero perceives god-like affinities in his fellow-man, and both make a compact, or blood-brotherhood, to safeguard the other's reputation and further his good deeds. One seeks to emulate the other, and in the case of the tender-hearted, to respond equally to appeals for pity and compassion. An intrinsically Narcissistic passion is thus transformed under ideal circumstances into a transcendent and transforming influence. For Dryden to turn his attention quite seriously to the depiction of intimate friendships without overtones of cynicism or irony would have been 'out of character'. Despite the immense high seriousness of his 'quarrel-scenes', it is unlikely that Dryden did not intend certain homo-erotic inferences to be drawn from his sophisticated portraits of noble amicitia. For an audience which had been accustomed to treat the heterosexual Platonic love with witty scepticism, the enthusiasm of Dryden's 'manly' passions must have struck them either as equally funny or as sensationally engaging. Dryden was by no means aiming to be absurd; nevertheless his male characters address endearments

to each other with considerable freedom. Sometimes Dryden achieves the sense of intimacy by a process of rational inference, which is what happens in Don Sebastian. There, Dorax's quarrel with his master concerns Sebastian's affection for another, more compelling favourite, his 'man-mistress' Henriquez. Sebastian has added insult to injury by giving Dorax's betrothed, Violante, unwittingly to Henriquez. As the quarrel develops, two facts emerge which reverse the situation. Sebastian reveals that Henriquez (for an unspecified reason) never consummated his marriage with Violante, and indeed, is now dead. This leaves the path open for Dorax to prove that he loves Sebastian more than Henriquez did, and that the old score of revenge for Violante is cancelled. The two men are reconciled in the usual manner, and end up in a warm embrace. The scene is the most overtly homosexual one in Dryden, save that of the reunion between Antony and Dolabella in All for Love. His first experiment, however, in the kind of tender, affectionate sentiment produced by semi-erotic friendship was in the last act of the revenge-tragedy Amboyna, which he hastily dashed off as anti-Dutch propaganda in 1673. The farewell scene between the friends Towerson and Beaumont, before the former is led off to torture and execution, contains these lines:

TOWERSON: Last, there's my heart, I give it in this kiss:
(Kisses him)

(Kisses him)

Do not answer me; friendship's a tender thing,
And it would ill become me now to weep.

BEAUMONT: Adieu! if I would speak, I cannot - (Exit)
(SS,V,88-89)

By the time he wrote All for Love four years later, Dryden had also accustomed himself to the use of tears in Aureng-Zebe,

and thus the stage was set for an even more lush portrayal of sentimental friendship.

The theme occurs in another major play which appeared in 1677, Lee's The Rival Queens, which David M. Vieth cites as a major structural influence on All for Love. Lee's play contains two characters, Clytus and Hephestion, closely corresponding in age and temperament with Ventidius and Dolabella. Lee's play - also his first tragedy in blank verse - is one of his most opulent, and is swamped in richly indigestible imagery, revelling in the sensuous language of vividly-recalled sexual exploits. The claustrophobic atmosphere of courts, so sensuously captured in his earlier heroic plays, Nero, Gloriana, and Sophonisba, remains in the uneasy, qualmish atmosphere enveloping Alexander's coterie. Lee's hero, Alexander the Great, is a sexually aggressive and exploitive Herculean, quite the reverse of Antony; like Tamburlaine he is dependent on the unqualified adulation of his followers, and breathes a surfeit of praise. Most of the play is composed of a sequence of statuesque scenes, like a dumb-show with words, in which the godlike hero is gradually apotheosized, in ever more florid and Baroque terms. His favourite, Hephestion, exists principally to fulfil the function of 'living panegyric'; on being rebuked early in the play for being slack in embracing his master, he exclaims:

Not Love, my Lord? break not the Heart you fram'd
And moulded up to such an Excellence;
Then stamp'd on it your own Immortal Image.
Not love the King? Such is not Womans love,
So fond a friendship, such a sacred flame,⁴⁸
As I must doubt to find in Breasts above.

⁴⁸. Lee, Works, 2 vols., ed. T.B. Stroup and A.L. Cooke, Metuchen, New Jersey (1968), I, 240.

The self-congratulatory tone, the contempt for women, the conviction of godlike status - all these denote chronic heroic insularity and pride, the ego swamped in its own Narcissism. Alexander is duly gratified and placated by the speech. The homosexual theme in the play is, however, slight. Alexander's chief difficulty lies in deciding whose bed he prefers - Roxana's or Statira's, - and the play's title derives from the spirited jealousy and revenge which bring his two empresses together. The figure of Clytus, more hardened and cynical than Ventidius, is impressively drawn. He disguises his love for Alexander, and is not above speaking his true opinion. Having unguardedly provoked Alexander into homicidal fury, he is killed as a result of his dangerous outspokenness. Alexander repents, but it is too late; Clytus dies, as does Ventidius, the last victim of the 'grand old school' of dogged soldiership. It is the new, younger generation - figures like Hephestion and Dolabella, the more diplomatic types - who represent the new fashion at court, and recall the gentlemen rakehells of comedy. Their capacity to sympathise with the emotional needs of their masters helps to instruct the audience towards a just empathy, and their 'feminine understanding' creates opportunities for new subtleties of tone which ideally reflect the preoccupations of sentimental tragedy.

Apart from the celebrated Cydnus speech, Antony's most sensuous rhetoric in All for Love is his greeting of Dolabella. The latter's function in the emotional vortex is already an ambiguous one by the time he arrives on stage. Presumably primed by Ventidius, and sent with Caesar's approval, he is to some extent a political ambassador. His influence over Octavius Caesar is now as great as it once was with Antony (Antony reports Caesar as loving Dolabella 'beyond the love

of women', despite the Emperor's cold-blooded nature), and Ventidius brings him in as an emotive surrogate to his own assaults on Antony's morale. Dolabella's power to move the passions is an apt preparation for the intended reconciliation with Octavia. When Ventidius artfully paves the way for Dolabella's entrance, he is careful to respect the ritual elements of the relationship as Antony remembers it; he insists, through a suave sequence of repetitions, that Dolabella's previous conduct was always governed by the tender principle of love:

It argues that he loved you more than
her (Cleopatra), ... I know he loves
you ... Would you believe he loved you?
(V, 72)

This helps Antony's vein of warm nostalgia towards a climax of feeling when he catches sight of his long-lost companion:

'Tis he himself! himself, by holy
friendship!
(V, 73)

Prior to Dolabella's entrance Antony's speeches have characteristically toyed with remembered experience, as he strives to redefine the nature of feelings which have passed in all but their essence. The sense of transient, yet sublime incompleteness which his friendship with Dolabella possessed is finely caught in the poetic rejection of one image for another:

He loved me too;
I was his soul, he lived not but in me.
We were so closed within each other's breasts,
The rivets were not found that joined us first.
This does not reach us yet: we were so mixed
As meeting streams, both to ourselves were lost;
We were one mass; we could not give or take
But from the same; for he was I, I he.
(V, 71-2)

The sense of mutual communion in this speech is suggested by Lucretian imagery of mass and matter colliding or mingling,

in a union which seems more inseparable than the one between Antony and Cleopatra in the speech 'There's no satiety of love in thee', examined above. Although the 'satiety' speech has a compensating freshness, and a sense of the renewal of passion, it does not have the same unity of 'soul'.

Conversely, the above speech lacks a vitalizing element.

This is deliberate, for the completion of the recollected experience bursts upon audience and characters alike in the scene which follows:

ANTONY: Art thou returned at last, my better half?
 Come, give me all myself! - Let me not live,
 If the young bridegroom, longing for his night,
 Was ever half so fond.

DOLABELLA: I must be silent, for my soul is busy
 About a nobler work: she's new come home,
 Like a long-absent man, and wanders o'er
 Each room, a stranger to her own, to look
 If all be safe.

ANTONY: Thou hast what's left of me;
 For I am now so sunk from what I was,
 Thou find'st me at my lowest watermark.
 The rivers that ran in and raised my fortunes
 Are all dried up, or take another course.
 What I have left is from my native spring;
 I've still a heart that swells in scorn of fate,
 And lifts me to my banks.

DOLABELLA: Still you are lord of all the world to me.

ANTONY: Why, then I am yet so; for thou art all.

(V, 73)

These lines convey in imagistic terms the transmigration or interpenetration of soul which Antony recalled so vividly earlier in the scene. Dryden controls the emotional weight of the scene by concentrating upon metaphoric qualities - again it is the poetic search for the comprehensive image, the words which combine the right proportion of statement with expressiveness, which is paramount. The reunion scene is divided into three sections, not unlike the exposition, development and recapitulation sections of classical sonata-form. The first comprises Antony's need for fullness of expression and a ready response to it - the words ending,

'Come, give me all myself'. This is followed by Dolabella's expression of wonder and rediscovery (the speech, 'I must be silent') essentially a new idea, but a development of the emotional texture introduced by Antony. The movement of the little scene draws to a close in Antony's admission of material poverty but spiritual riches - the speech, 'Thou hast what's left of me', which forms a re-statement and partial resolution of the expository problem - 'Come, give me all myself'. Dolabella accepts the sincerity of the sentiment, 'What I have left is from my native spring', and the coda to the reunion is couched in two lines of eloquent simplicity:

DOLABELLA: Still you are lord of all the world to me.

ANTONY: Why, then I am yet so; for thou art all.

The progression of images in even so compact an extract of verse, reveals deliberation and strategic subtlety. The general movement is an outward one, towards images suggesting extent and space, moving away from personal attributes and possessions (images such as 'bridegroom', 'soul', 'room') towards images suggesting a journey into the universal and illimitable, (e.g. 'watermark', 'rivers', 'fortunes', 'banks'). The language still retains the heroic apprehension of life as a vital and valid concept - it often recalls the epic simile - but the sentiments are working towards an inverse concept of humility and self-effacement: Antony is really admitting he is not grand, not heroic, not good, only loving - 'I've still a heart that swells in scorn of fate,/And lifts me to my banks'. Antony in effect admits that his heroic stature is dependent largely upon his capacity for tenderness. The scene is one of Dryden's most beautifully composed; emotions reveal themselves at the moment of their inception, almost too spontaneously to be

completely formulated. Dryden's transparent or 'translucent' imagery is therefore ideally suited to the blend of rational control and impulsive generosity which this type of scene brings out.

Although the Dolabella episode starts out primarily as a catalyst, an emotional counter in Ventidius's attempt to win control over Antony, Dryden devotes most of Act IV to exploring its implications for the theme of 'false-seeming' in love. In Act III we have seen how Dolabella is able to command Antony's most intimate reflections (neither of the women in the play receive emotional confidences from the hero), and to manipulate sympathetic response to gain the greatest influence over his general. It is Dolabella who makes the appeal for pity which the haughty Octavia is too proud and reserved to make:

For shame, my lord, if not for love, receive 'em
With kinder eyes. If you confess a man,
Meet 'em, embrace 'em, bid 'em welcome to you.
Your arms should open, ev'n without your knowledge,
To clasp them in; your feet should turn to wings
To bear you to 'em; and your eyes dart out
And aim a kiss ere you could reach the lips.
(V, 78)

He strikes quite the wrong tone however in the cloying sentiments in praise of familial piety (with visually ridiculous images which are a vestige of the 'Baroque' Dryden), and the reunion with Octavia is an anticlimax after the meeting between the two men. Octavia even uses the image of 'stranger', which Dolabella used to Antony, but now with realistic irony:

DOLABELLA: Yet are you cold?

OCTAVIA: Thus long I have attended for my welcome,
Which, as a stranger, sure I might expect.
Who am I?

ANTONY: Caesar's sister.

OCTAVIA: That's unkind.
(V, 78)

However by the end of the act Antony has capitulated to the 'altruism' of Octavia's frigid materialism and the exhortation of his 'friends'. It is at this point that Dolabella begins to find himself in deeper water than he had anticipated.

Antony wilfully entrusts his last farewell to Cleopatra to his friend, almost spelling out for him the inevitable temptation it presents:

Think thyself me,
And when thou speak'st (but let it first be long),
Take off the edge from every sharper sound,
And let our parting be as gently made
As other loves begin.

(V,88)

The action of the fourth act ironically witnesses the beginning of these 'other loves', as Cleopatra and Dolabella try somewhat ineffectually to deceive the man they both love. The ironies multiply as Antony mis-identifies the serpent in his Eden, and ignores the true devil Alexas. Instead it is Dolabella who has 'profaned the sacred name of friend,/And worn it into vileness!' (V,105). Dolabella's soft-naturedness leads him to make a last appeal to Antony for forgiveness; the speech recalls the type of abstract intellectual reasoning employed by Platonic 'mistresses' in the heroic plays, and is intended to have the same kind of modifying effect upon the hearer. It is equally characteristic of the sentimental drama that one man should play the role of Platonic mistress to another, and make^a/bid for gentleness and compassion:

Heav'n has but
Our sorrow for our sins, and then delights
To pardon erring man. Sweet mercy seems
Its darling attribute, which limits justice,
As if there were degrees in infinite,
And infinite would rather want perfection,
Than punish to extent.

(V,109)

This looks forward to the clarity of intellectual exposition which Dryden mastered in Religio Laici (1682), and is a curious interpolation in All for Love. However, it is the last of Dolabella's important speeches before he leaves the stage and its cool rationalism enables the spectators to view the recent events of the plot with more detachment. Dolabella has proved, by the simple act of coming to Alexandria and becoming involved in the relationships there, that Antony and Cleopatra's belief in their capacity for transcendent passion is largely illusory; he is the rock on which it founders and splits. Also, through the emotive language of friendship, Dryden introduces a real threat to the stability of heterosexual love in the play. Antony's failure to establish a truly central relationship with any of the characters in the play, contributes to a diffuseness which the introduction of homo-erotic traits merely intensifies. The question is less one of establishing clearly how specific is the homosexual attachment between Antony and Dolabella (which can never be accurately ascertained from the text), than one of accepting the presence of discrepant elements deliberately woven into the overall fabric of the play, and determining their ultimate effect on the power of the tragedy. The Dolabella episode is instrumental primarily in creating heightened sympathy for Antony, and for increasing the degree of emotional pressure upon him. It gives Dryden an opportunity for showing his assimilation of Shakespeare in the depiction of the 'manly' passions, but these are carefully softened to a pitch desirable for the requirements of affective tragedy. I feel it is wiser to regard the third and fourth acts of All for Love as a singular artistic achievement, in many ways the chief triumph

of the play, and not to quibble over the dubiety of the subject-matter⁴⁹. It was the kind of writing from which Otway could well have learnt much, and which may have inspired the friendship of Pierre and Jaffeir in Venice Preserved. It marks Dryden's most original contribution to the tragic drama, and shows that intimate subjects could be treated with sensitivity, taste and propriety, even at the Restoration. Its relevance to final judgments on the play will be considered in the next, and concluding section.

The Survival of Mixed Wit in the Denouement

With many of Dryden's plays, the major artistic defects become most discernable in the fifth act. In the case of All for Love any imperfections here must be taken more seriously, since the play's reputation as a tragedy is largely dependent upon the strength of its denouement. It is in the last act that the persistence of heroic wit is brought to the reader's

49. It was interesting to observe, in Frank Hauser's recent revival of All for Love for the Prospect Theatre Company (1977) that substantial cuts were made in the reunion scene between Antony and Dolabella. The effect of this was to direct the emotional focus of the play back to the relationship between Antony and Cleopatra, thus making it conform more readily with Shakespeare. However, both this and a singularly weak interpretation of Dolabella, robbed the play of some of its best complexity, and thrust too great a responsibility upon the actors in the denouement, especially Antony and Cleopatra themselves. I feel that Dryden was probably sure of his motives for placing the reunion of the two men at the centre of the play's 'rising action', and that to ignore the bisexual element is to miss the point of Dryden's sensitive portrayal of intimate relationships. Despite his Aristotelian austerity in the Preface, Dryden displays throughout the play a liberal attitude to sexuality and its expression, which makes All for Love one of the most enlightened plays of its time - in an entirely unradical way. Hauser seemed to have missed this element of quiet, almost unobtrusive 'permissiveness'.

attention by certain unexpected fluctuations of tone. The deaths of the royal lovers are anti-climactic and dangerously close to the absurd. Whereas Shakespeare in Antony and Cleopatra is able to transcend human imperfection by sublimity of expression, Dryden's verse seems scarcely equal to the challenge and appears at times dangerously prosaic. While it seems fairly certain that he encouraged satiric humour in his rhymed plays, it is considerably more difficult to assess how far he was willing to permit the 'laugh of approbation' into ostensibly serious tragedy. The single action of All for Love suggests that its high seriousness was a foregone conclusion; therefore, the moments of astonishing comic irony which deflate high sentiment in the fifth act must be largely 'accidental' effusions in Dryden's old manner, a habit which he found difficult to drop. The major culprits in the denouement are Alexas and Ventidius, especially the latter, whose expostulations and 'asides' seem often tasteless and damaging to the sense of imminent tragedy. These 'asides' are given to Ventidius throughout the play to emphasize both his role as spectator-interpreter (he is the character who seeks most to identify himself - rightly or wrongly - with the audience), and to highlight his 'bluntness', the 'roughness' which leads Antony to entrust his final parting from Cleopatra to the sensitive Dolabella rather than the chiding old soldier. In Act Five, Ventidius's schoolboy notions of heroism reach new heights of impropriety and absurdity, while the selfishness of his motives is barely concealed:

By my few hours of life,
I am so pleased with this brave Roman fate
That I would not be Caesar, to outlive you.
When we put off this flesh and mount together,
I shall be shown to all th'ethereal crowd:
"Lo, this is he who died with Antony!"

(V, 119)

By contrast Antony appears suddenly more mature and dignified, but the satiric incipience in the environment weakens the power of the final scenes so as to suggest travesty rather than tragedy.

As we saw in the case of Maximin in Tyrannick Love, Dryden, once obsessed by a particular character could allow him to dominate the stage until the whole equilibrium of the play was seriously compromised. Although the discrepancies in the final act of All for Love are on nothing like the same scale as those in the earlier play, a certain over-emphasis on the role of the subsidiary characters - Ventidius, Iras and Alexas - leaves the impression that Antony and Cleopatra themselves are mere puppets in their hands, snatching piece-meal dignity from a calamity brought about largely by others' advice. Antony's dying words to Cleopatra sum up the total effect in one of Dryden's uncannily effective domestic images:

'Tis as with a man
 Removing in a hurry, all packed up
 But one dear jewel that his haste forgot,
 And he, for that, returns upon the spur.
 (V, 125)

As with Shakespeare, Dryden's best poetry occurs at the death of Antony - e.g. the beautiful cadences of the 'But grieve not, while thou stay'st/My last disastrous times:' speech - but such moments are sporadic. The last act of All for Love is not as well-organized as the others (the 'joins' between episodes are too clearly visible) nor as poetically consistent in standard. It is divided into several episodes which seem inexpertly juxtaposed; first Cleopatra with her women being advised by Alexas and hearing the news of Egypt's political doom from Serapion; then Ventidius and Antony contemplating Roman suicide, and the interruption of Alexas' false message;

next a long scene of farewell between Antony and Ventidius, culminating in the latter's suicide and Antony's attempt on his own life; then the entrance of Cleopatra to witness Antony's death; lastly the scene of the asps and Serapion's epilogue. Ventidius and Alexas have prominent roles and effectually overshadow or at least diminish the stature of the lovers. The progression of tragic misunderstanding, so subtly conveyed in the attitudes of the characters in the early parts of the play now gives place to a rather bald action, which is potentially farcical and which allows Dryden little time for describing the characters' mental conflicts. After the supreme psychological achievements of the fourth act, the death-scenes seem unnecessarily hurried and telescoped, forced by ironic coincidence and the necessity of getting the play finished. It is significant that Dryden did not make the same mistake with his later tragedy, Don Sebastian, where the play's excessive length seriously affects its success (the denouement in fact contains the finest and best-written scene in the play). But the final act of All for Love is not convincing tragedy; it is adequate writing, enough to convince us that Dryden was representing a 'sad story' in elegant verse. But it ceases any more to be 'psychological' drama and turns into situation comedy with Alexas and Ventidius as unintentional buffoons.

Dryden's relaxation of control over tone plunges him nearest disaster in the scene in which Alexas comes to relate to Antony the false news of Cleopatra's death. Alexas and Ventidius have earlier in the play established an antipathy which has been partially comic, and this sets up dangerous tensions now. Alexas' account of the death is sufficiently literary for it to seem suspect - the reference to 'dying

Lucrece' smacks of affectation, as do the sighs and gestures he supplies for the dying queen, too like an approximation in words of some routine Baroque canvas depicting the sensuously pleasing agonies of a courtly death scene. Antony has not only Alexas' language to contend with, but also the modification it receives at Ventidius's hands - his 'asides' alter the perspective before the 'truth' of the situation actually dawns on Antony, whose anguished lament becomes an isolated, and rather complex reaction. The scene reads as follows, and is cited at length:

ALEXAS: She could not bear
 To be accused by you, but shut herself
 Within her monument; looked down and sighed,
 While from her unchanged face the silent tears
 Dropped, as they had not leave, but stole their parting.
 Some undistinguished words she inly murmured;
 At last she raised her eyes, and with such looks
 As dying Lucrece cast -

ANTONY: My heart forbodes -

VENTIDIUS: All for the best: - Go on.

ALEXAS: She snatched her poniard,
 And, ere we could prevent the fatal blow,
 Plunged it within her breast, then turned to me:
 "Go bear my lord," said she, "my last farewell,
 And ask him if he yet suspect my faith".
 More she was saying, but death rushed betwixt.
 She half pronounced your name with her last breath,
 And buried half within her.

VENTIDIUS: Heav'n be praised!

ANTONY: Then art thou innocent, my poor dear love,
 And art thou dead?
 O those two words! their sound should be divided:
 Hadst thou been false, and died; or hadst thou lived,
 And hadst been true - But innocence and death!
 This shows not well above. Then what am I,
 The murderer of this truth, this innocence!
 Thoughts cannot form themselves in words so horrid
 As can express my guilt!

VENTIDIUS: Is't come to this? The gods have been too gracious,
 And thus you thank 'em for't!

ANTONY: (to ALEXAS) Why stay'st thou here?
 Is it for thee to spy upon my soul
 And see its inward mourning? Get thee hence!
 Thou art not worthy to behold what now
 Becomes a Roman emp'ror to perform.

ALEXAS: (aside) He loves her still:
 His grief betrays it. Good! the joy to find
 She's yet alive, completes the reconciliation.

(V, 120-21)

In preserving the 'vraisemblance' of the action at this point, and keeping to each man his 'proper character', Dryden provokes startling contrasts of tone in a very small extent of text. Alexas's account of the death is straightforward enough, but absurd makeshifts hint that it may be specious - particularly the point where he nearly 'dries up' for want of imaginative steam - 'More she was saying...'etc.. Alexas works for pathos with all the accepted conventions, interspersing such diction as 'sighed', 'silent tears', 'fatal blow', 'plunged' (all in very standard tragic repertory) with ornamentations and embellishments such as 'dropped, as they had not leave, but stole their parting', - small touches of art which persuade the listeners, as much as Antony, that the death-scene has some semblance of reality. The ambiguous, tortuous narrative is in some respects treated with the contempt it deserves by Ventidius, whose heartless expressions of glee recall the extremism of Morat in Aureng-Zebe and provoke the same brand of astonished laughter. His complete insensitivity to Antony's lyrical outpourings, which have established a new mode of feeling in the scene - a truly tragic consciousness - is difficult to understand; Dryden takes considerable risks with the tone. The truth is that the richness of this passage - which is not poetically striking - lies in the mixture of tones and inflections, which means that its effect was almost totally in the actors' hands and is difficult to assess with much accuracy in the context of modern scholarship. However, one can see how Dryden's care over the details of characterisation - Antony is still obsessed by 'thought', which he cannot convert into 'words' he can bear to utter - may have momentarily blinded him to how well the habitual linguistic modes of an Alexas, a Ventidius and an Antony

could mingle, unless certain modifications and controls were set in motion. The sharp contrasts evoked by the juxtaposition of mood (e.g. the abrupt swings from grief to glee), suggest perversity rather than artifice, and the play becomes 'artificial' in the worst sense, exhibiting careless dramatic technique.

Comparison of Alexas's techniques of raising concernment in his hearers with an earlier speech of Ventidius is helpful in trying to establish where exaggerations and distortions are present. When Ventidius tries to whip up Antony's jealousy in Act IV by relating an incident he has just witnessed between Cleopatra and Dolabella, the techniques he uses are very similar - especially the ut pictura poesis device of word-painting:

She smiled,
And then he grew familiar with her hand,
Squeezed it, and worried it with ravenous kisses.
She blushed, and sighed, and smiled, and blushed again.
At last she took occasion to talk softly,
And brought her cheek up close, and leaned on his;
At which, he whispered kisses back on hers,
And then she cried aloud that "constancy
Should be rewarded."

(V, 99-100)

This speech is more coarsely emotive than Alexas's quite sophisticated selection of telling details. Ventidius has Cleopatra blushing like a neon-light, and whispering conspiratorially, while Alexas, who has the grandeur of a death-scene to relate, concentrates more upon the languishing looks, silent tears and 'unchanged' face of a woman in a position closely resembling Dido's. The effect of both 'fictitious' Cleopatras (both accounts are false in that they highlight only what the speaker wishes to emphasize) is in fact stronger upon Antony than the effect of her actual presence. His poetic susceptibility responds more imaginatively to the appeal of pathos

than to the appeal of physical love. Ventidius's account of course appeals to Antony's jealousy and rage, only encouraging even more his propensity for self-dramatization and sense of injury.

The kind of dissonances which beset All for Love are not glaring ones, but their existence creates a distinct restlessness. Unconscious humour invades the final pages of the play, for example in the lack of co-operation Cleopatra receives from her women. The less intelligent people in the play - Ventidius, Octavia, Iras and Charmion - all appear at crucial points in the action and provoke laughter by being too realistically-minded for poetry, or simply too 'thick-skinned'. Note how in these passages from Act V the heroic, dignified tone is exposed to a potentially satiric clash of styles; Dryden is unable to harmonize antithetical Platonic and materialistic images without leaving too great a margin of discrepancy:

(a) CLEOPATRA: My lord, my lord! Speak, if you yet have being.
Sigh to me, if you cannot speak, or cast
One look! Do anything that shows you live.
IRAS: He's gone too far to hear you,
And this you see, a lump of senseless clay,
The leavings of a soul.
(V, 127)

(b) CLEOPATRA: You, Charmion, bring my crown and richest jewels
With 'em, the wreath of victory I made
(Vain augury!) for him, who now lies dead.
You, Iras, bring the cure of all our ills.
IRAS: The aspicks, madam?
CLEOPATRA: Must I bid you twice?
(V, 128)

(c) CHARMION: What must be done?
CLEOPATRA: Short ceremony, friends,
But yet it must be decent. First this laurel
Shall crown my hero's head: he fell not basely,
Nor left his shield behind him. - Only thou
Couldst triumph o'er thyself, and thou alone
Wert worthy so to triumph.
CHARMION: To what end
These ensigns of your pomp and royalty?

CLEOPATRA: Dull that thou art! Why, 'tis to meet my love
 As when I saw him first, on Cydnos' bank.
 (V, 128-29)

In these passages Dryden gets entangled in the 'stage business' of the denouement and is unable to sustain the lofty tone sufficient for tragedy. The organization of Cleopatra's suicide is conducted too much like a tea-party to be convincing (Shakespeare was less embarrassed by domestics), and consequently her final utterances are at best pathetic and girlish, but by no means heroic:

... my eyelids fall,
 And my dear love is vanquished in a mist.
 Where shall I find him, where? O turn me to him,
 And lay me on his breast! - Caesar, thy worst.
 Now part us, if thou canst. [Dies]
 (V, 130-31)

Because no emotional development of any significance occurs in the fifth act, Dryden's characters lose most of their essential and promising complexity, lapsing into the common stereotypes of Restoration theatre. Perhaps Dryden failed to keep in mind the fact that the focus of a true love-tragedy must be its consummation, whether of a physical or spiritual nature. Where the play disappoints, and is worsted by comparison with Shakespeare's, is in its failure to suggest transcendent spiritual values. Dryden's poetic gifts were not of the kind which could sustain such a vision through the petty inconveniences of plot, circumstance and diction. That is why the superficial meaning of 'manners' (viz. almost 'affectation') comes to the fore in his denouement. Having explored the inner motivations of soul which have inspired a static situation for four acts, Dryden is unable to create a language which will effectively carry him forward, beyond the elegiac strain of reminiscence which dominates the play. To search for comic aspects in the play may seem

perverse; but, as so often with Dryden, the appreciation of a seemingly eccentric viewpoint may lead us much closer to a just evaluation of true merit.

Interpreted as comedy, All for Love emerges as a curiously heartless piece, in which people, for all their professions of sincerity, seem to spend most of their time trying to outwit each other and prescribe each other's happiness. Questions of degree and greed are always implicit in the ideas which All for Love throws out about passion. But thanks to Dryden's unusually musical ear - his later works begin to display a much more profound respect for the art, and begin to imitate musical effects - the perfection of a neo-Shakespearian blank-verse, backed up by the authoritative precedent of Elizabethan theatre, converts the comedy in the initial situation into a refined and approachable species of humorous tragic irony. Again, Dryden writes in a mixed form when trying to achieve a single effect ('concernment'), just as he had done when he had wanted to create 'admiration'. However, the mixed style in All for Love is not overtly intended; by removing the heightened sexual tensions of Restoration comedy and the heroic play, Dryden did much to ensure that a modicum of restraint was always present to preserve a fundamental tranquillity. But despite the sexual anaesthesia, the play still glances back wistfully at the excitement of Baroque wit and its opportunities for virtuosic display. Dryden has to eschew poetic 'beauties' and 'set pieces' and substitute a generally higher level of rhetoric. The images of lethargy, dreams, and melancholy give the poetic timbre a stability which is at one with the general stasis of the action, suggesting impotence, satiety, and a general submission to

the Lethean influence of Egyptian enchantment. But for the 'life-touches' and that which 'moves' the drama, Dryden without his wit is put severely to the test. As I have suggested before, it is through heightened clashes of personality that he achieves dramatic excitement and evokes a wry humour from the spectators. The benevolent feelings of 'concernment' had to be allayed at certain points by the relief of a smile, and Dryden, with his excellent observation of manners, knew this well. As a 'tragedy of manners', All for Love combines ironic sidelighting with an empathetic stirring of the passions.

Although the play is often compared with Shakespeare's and suffers because of it, Frank J. Kearful points out that a conscious reference to Shakespeare's play is an integral part of the pleasure All for Love gives as 'imitation'. The spectators are drawn into a 'triangular rhetorical relationship ... involving author, play and reader',⁵⁰. The Prologue gives the basic clue as to what is involved in the re-moulding of Antony to suit Restoration taste. He is at one with the 'keeping tonies' of the pit, except that he is not a lecher. He is, however, an emotional bankrupt - a 'thrifless debtor to your loves' he tells Octavia. He is neither admirable nor contemptible, and evokes the same type of ironic pity which Dryden was to lavish on David in the opening lines of Absalom and Achitophel. Both David and Antony are compelled by circumstances which they have partially helped to create, to pass from lenient passivity into rhetorical assertion, in heroic vindication of their essentially unheroic

⁵⁰. F.J. Kearful, "'Tis Past Recovery": Tragic Consciousness in All for Love', MLQ, XXXIV (1973), p.235.

temperaments. David, of course, combines the unique qualities of wit and authority, self-parody and might, the resolution of Dryden's problems over wit in the drama. Antony as a precursor of David is like a prophet in the wilderness, betokening a second fall (Dolabella is Adam, Cleopatra, Eve), and the loss of immortal values like trust and friendship. Antony's final speeches are informed by a nostalgic, rather desperate attempt to redress the mistakes of an imperfect past:

Ten years' love,
And not a moment lost, but all improved
To th'utmost joys - what ages have we lived! ⁵¹
(V, 126)

The distinctive qualities of All for Love are to be found in its elegant, clean and finely sculpted verse - the 'notes of dying swans' tuned to musical perfection, giving the play a vocal element which exalts it to the rank of 'spoken opera'.⁵² Effects of language are simply-wrought and Dryden places careful emphasis throughout on the pleasure of the listener. He appreciated how important it was for the auditor to capture the mental processes of the poet in his listening and to contribute, by his own participation, to the miraculous concatenation of thought, imaging and expression which brings the poet nearer to the divine. The accessibility of the poetry of All for Love is a testimony to Dryden's precision of judgement as a living, working poet. As tragedy, the play comments on human failure to accommodate to the limitations of time and will, and the need to possess and be possessed in love; as

⁵¹. In these lines we encounter the crucial question about the effectiveness of the whole play:-can we substantiate Antony's transcendent claim by our own experience of witnessing All for Love, a play in which not just a 'moment' but a 'world' is shown to have been lost, and in which passion, deceit, and jealousy put pay at every turn to 'th'utmost joys'? It is typical of Dryden that such beautiful lines should still embody a paradox.

⁵². See N. Suckling, 'Dryden in Egypt: Reflexions on All for Love', *DUJ*, XLV (1952), 2-7.

comedy (i.e. in its most optimistic sense) it points to the unimportance of public values compared with the harmonious acceptance of transience through establishing the right relationships between individuals. Dryden abandons his hero and heroine to a death in which they move towards a new faith in the possibility (distant on earth) of poetic transcendence. The small close-knit society which assembles at the court of Alexandria is neither broad enough to bear the satiric rebuffs of comedy or sturdy enough to tolerate the crushing isolation of tragedy, and if All for Love misses greatness for any reason, it is on account of this reduction of scope rather than any weakness on Dryden's part⁵³. He certainly cannot be faulted for his manipulation of audience response, despite the return of old temptations towards the final stages. Whatever remains unresolved in the final pages of the play cannot destroy the impression of serenity, a tranquillity born of assimilated experience. The effect is of water-colours, not oil-painting. The deaths of Antony and Cleopatra symbolize a completion of recollected experience through the anticipation of eternity; Serapion's final speech is redolent, like Pope's coda to The Rape of the Lock, with 'fame', the fame which has brought these lovers to the tragic stage, and will continue to bring them to after-ages. In this way the poet resolves his own involvement in the story, and releases himself from imprisonment in the play. In the minds of the spectators however, there are always questions to be asked, riddles to be solved - the mark of a truly suggestive work, capable of catalyzing the emotions it presents and giving voice to the most shadowy and elusive gradations of human feeling. All for Love triumphantly repudiates the claim that refinement and

⁵³. For some of the typical complaints made over Dryden's failure to satisfy in this play, see King, pp. 145-46.

decorum are inimical to expressiveness.⁵⁴

54. James Sutherland makes this claim in A Preface to Eighteenth Century Poetry, (1970), p.83.

Chapter 7

The Decline of Madness on the RestorationStage

Dr Johnson discovered in Dryden's plays a distinctive yet elusive quality which he designated 'illustrious depravity and majestic madness',¹. The phrase does justice both to the complex morality of the heroic plays and to their broad range of total accomplishments. In recent years certain critics have recalled Dr Johnson's phrase and used it constructively in an attempt to come to terms with the appeal of these plays and as an aid to interpreting their highly personalized style. Thomas H. Fujimara in his stimulating article 'The Temper of John Dryden' argues that Dryden's own personality was far from remote, placid or conservative and that the heroes of his heroic drama may well be the self-projections of an often aggressive and frustrated temperament². Michael W. Alssid also persuasively suggests that madness, or the idea of madness, was a quality which attached itself to Dryden comparatively early in his dramatic career; critical controversy surrounded Dryden's elastic and often over-embellished use of descriptive language, and The Rehearsal depicted Bayes himself 'as a sort of proud madman'³. The arrogance of the super-ego and the brash over-confidence of

¹ Johnson's Lives of the Poets: A Selection, ed. J. P. Hardy, (1971), p. 125.

² T. H. Fujimara, 'The Temper of John Dryden', SP, LXXII (1975), 348-66.

³ M. W. Alssid, Dryden's Rhymed Heroic Tragedies, 2 vols., Salzburg (1974), I, 1.

heroic personality may have suggested to some of Dryden's contemporaries that his 'obsession' with epic themes amounted to little more than fustian, the 'Anarch' of reason and sense. The problems Dryden encountered in trying to defend himself from the charges of perpetrating nonsense and immorality on the stage required the activity of a shrewd mind and a bold, impetuous imagination. Although his plays exhibit few formal scenes of madness and do not elevate character to the passionate extremes favoured by Nat Lee, they are representative of a highly individual approach to the nature of dramatic impact. By dispersing the ecstasy of the madman more liberally amongst tyrants, lovers and ruthless adventuresses Dryden makes passion the hallmark of irrationality in his plays, while demythologising some of the demonic taboos traditionally associated with witchcraft and madness. His work thus represents an important and often overlooked landmark in the development of madness on the English stage.

In general the Restoration stage is not renowned for its madness. Compared with the plays of the Elizabethan and Jacobean period the heroic plays have no madmen of similar stature to Lear or Timon. However this very fact should alert us to the presence of change and prevent too summary a dismissal of the rhymed plays. The failure of most critics even to acknowledge or explore the madness in Restoration plays⁴ is due simply to the fact that the formal

⁴ Bonamy Dobrée touches on the rhetoric of heroic madness in his chapter on Lee in Restoration Tragedy, Oxford (1929), pp.110-31. Critics like A.C.Kirsch (Dryden's Heroic Drama, Princeton (1965)), and E.M.Waith (The Herculean Hero, 1962), usually interpret the madness of the Baroque hero as an extension of Cornélian 'gloire'.

rhetorical madness of the Elizabethan period, with its mythic perspective and straining after the humanist sublime, had largely disappeared by the 1660's. The more scientific, cerebral approach which is typical of the Restoration distrust of violent emotion enfeebles the dramatic impact of chaos and disorder, and the analytic perspective of writers such as Dryden, Otway and even Lee renders their portrayals of madness inevitably more mechanical by contrast. The Augustan view of psychological dislocation was more intellectualized and better supported by medical and physiological evidence than the folk-belief and superstition which still prevailed in Shakespeare's day. Augustanism interpreted madness after the manner of the old 'humours' of Jonsonian comedy, as a deviation from the norm, a norm comprised largely of moral maxim and the social doctrines of prudence and decorum. The tragic pleasure, indeed the revelling in madness so characteristic of the Elizabethan period, gave way to the disparagement of all extreme (and hence sublime) emotion since it constituted a fatal breach with the powers of reason. Passion became a phenomenon which ought, as far as possible, to be corrected.

For the Augustans irrationality implied questions of moral choice; they placed a much greater emphasis on man's inborn (and godlike) capacity to discipline and martial his passions as a bulwark against his own self-destructiveness. Through such a discipline he could reassert 'right reason'. The old holy madness of divine inspiration and the dissident melancholia of the Jacobean satirist became diffused and disseminated through the infinite number of mechanical disorders registered in the 'passions-psychology' of the

Restoration period. Audiences no longer reacted with delight and terror to the profound depths of the human soul in its darkest moments - the agony of Lear must now engage through effects not causes. Instead of a madness exalted, accorded a high and influential position amongst the constituents of tragedy, the Restoration audience relished a debased or 'low-style' madness in which the grotesque overtones of the Jonsonian 'school of folly' mingled imperceptibly with many of the ethical assumptions made explicit in the psychology of Hobbes. In the following chapter I should like to trace more fully the development of this important shift in sensibility, indicating in particular how the scientific enquiry into the function of the imagination contributed to certain fundamental changes in the conception of madness as presented on the stage.

By concentrating upon some of the liveliest scenes from the heroic drama I hope to be able to vindicate its claim to some share of the credit for perpetuating a vital native tradition which had first flourished with the Elizabethan dramatists. I have reluctantly called this shift in sensibility a 'decline' rather than a development, but without wishing to invoke many of the pejorative connotations associated with the word. The gradual decline in the quality of theatrical madness throughout the seventeenth-century has to be seen as a positive rather than a merely reactionary development; it marks a progression towards greater emotional sensitivity, and an improvement upon shades of 'mental feeling' which will compensate the artist for any loss of rhetorical authority. Although the heroic play does represent a decline, or 'growing-away-from', the kind of dramatic

impetus which fired the Elizabethan poets, it is also an advance into a new, more philosophically-based approach to questions of character and identity.

We associate the madness of the Elizabethan stage primarily with techniques for giving depth to character and for giving literary sophistication to the drama. The first Elizabethan stage-madness grew up largely as a rhetorical embellishment of the passion of revenge; Hieronimo's hysterica passio in The Spanish Tragedie (1585-7) is a variant on the Senecan treatment of the Hercules furens myth⁵. A Senecan style permitted a certain brio in the dramatist's attitude to madness, and often helped him towards both a literary and pictorial synthesis of violent emotion. Hamlet (1604) combines both decorative and purposive madness in the characters of Ophelia and the Prince. Decorative madness transforms Ophelia⁶ from a stereotype into a pathetic victim of circumstances, while Hamlet uses his 'antic disposition' as a mask for the responsibilities inherent in his adopted role as revenger. For Hamlet this 'purposive' madness throws up crucial intellectual questions concerning the nature and ethics of revenge, and the possibility of escape and suicide.

A more dynamic and overtly Herculean form of madness is to be found in Titus Andronicus (1594). Titus's madness, unlike Hieronimo's or Hamlet's, is not one of procrastination; instead it energizes his heroic prowess, intensifies his vocation as

⁵ See on this subject an excellent and informative article by R. Soellner, 'The Madness of Hercules and the Elizabethans', CL, X, (1958), 309-24. There is also a useful summary of the dramatic madness of the period by J. T. McCullen, Jr., 'Madness and the Isolation of Characters in Elizabethan and Early Stuart Drama', SP, XLVIII (1951), 206-18.

⁶ C. Camden, in 'On Ophelia's Madness', SQ, XV (1964), 247-55, gives some important information on the prestige of erotic melancholy in the early seventeenth century.

tragic butcher, and lends a festive air to the play's final pageant of dismemberment. Madness is equated with frenzy, 'ecstasy', and violence; deranged, Titus shoots arrows of revenge up to the court of the gods. In its most Senecan form, Elizabethan stage-madness was intended to be a sensational asset, a means of extending the range of gesture and tone available to dramatist and actor. The gratuitous madness of Isabella in The Spanish Tragedie, and Zabina in Tamburlaine the Great, Part One demonstrates the enormous appeal which scenes of spectacular lunacy had for the groundlings. As Hamlet had observed while watching one of the Players bewail the loss of Hecuba, madness had become associated with the overt melodrama and theatricality of the passionate stage-character.

Against this prevailing trend of decorative, rhetorical madness, and the more 'methodical' madness of the malcontent revenger, the depth of psychological penetration achieved in King Lear (1608) comes as something of a surprise. The answer to Lear's insistent quest for his identity - 'Who is it that can tell me who I am? - lies in the storm, wind and rain, which are the external symbols for spiritual desolation and turmoil. As Lear begins to 'see better', madness becomes the focal revelatory experience, the means whereby he is able to grasp the harrowing paradox which yokes man's aspiration to his bestial nature. Using this ability to see things as they really are, Lear becomes a holy prophet declaring a vision of awe-inspiring proportions, inducing in his hearers the inevitable self-questioning of moral disorientation⁷.

⁷ One of the best accounts of Lear's madness is to be found in G.Wilson Knight's The Wheel of Fire (1960) in the two chapters, 'King Lear and the Comedy of the Grotesque', pp.160-76, and 'The Lear Universe', pp.177-206. See also J.W.Bennet, 'The Storm Within: the Madness of Lear', SQ, XIII (1962), 137-55.

The contrast between Shakespeare's play and Nahum Tate's Restoration adaptation, The History of King Lear (1680), is striking. While the main emphasis falls on the quality of benevolent sentiment experienced by the heroic lovers Edgar and Cordelia, Lear's madness becomes a decorative and largely incidental incitement to pity, serving almost no organic function in the refashioned play. Tate also introduces Lear's choleric temperament and 'lewd passion' into the early scenes to give greater naturalism to the king's sudden capitulation to madness. In Tate's version Lear's insanity reverts to the decorative formal madness of the early Elizabethan stage, framed by decorous expressions of compassion from Edgar, Kent and Cordelia. The effect of this is to belittle the content of the mad speeches and to sentimentalize them; they suggest only the pleasing fancies of an overstretched sensibility and not the tragic visionary bitterness of the Jacobean Lear. Even 'Poor Tom's' outbursts are lacking in poetic weight; the mythic and superstitious allusiveness of *Modo and Mahu* has been drained out of the text⁸.

The Jacobean dramatists took up the theme of the dumb, frightened innocence of madmen and to some extent paved the way for the excesses of Restoration sentiment. Dramatists like Tourneur and Webster challenged their audiences to take some form of social responsibility towards the demented, comparing the corrupt world of Italian and Mediterranean courts with the cynical affluence of their own citizen world. Blood and death were interpreted with austere moralism as the wages of ambition, sin and luxury. Tourneur in The Revenger's

⁸. For the contrast in ideologies between Shakespeare's play and Tate's revision, see J. Black, 'The Influence of Hobbes on Nahum Tate's King Lear', SEL, VII (1967), 377-85.

Tragedy insisted that,

Surely we are all mad people, and they
Whom we think are, are not; we mistake those:⁹
'Tis we are mad in sense, they but in clothes.

a reflection which was to be taken up again much later in the century by an obscure medical practitioner, Thomas Tryon.

In A Discourse of the Causes, Natures and Cures of Phrensie, Madness and Distraction, published in A Treatise of Dreams and Visions (1689), Tryon echoes Tourneur's words after examining the social conditions under which madmen were expected to live, listing in particular the indignities suffered by the confined at the hands of the visiting public in the New Bethlehem hospital:

To speak Truth, the world is but a
great Bedlam where those that are more
mad, lock up those that are loss(sic),
the first presumptuously, and knowingly,
committing Evils both against God their
Neighbours and themselves; but the last,
not knowing what they do, are as it
were next door to innocency, especially
when the Evil Properties were not
awakened, nor predominant in the
Complexion in the time of their senses.¹⁰

Tryon's theories about madness are strongly influenced by the Hobbesian interpretation of human behaviour, and the distinction Tryon makes between the sane and the mad is based loosely on Hobbes' discussion of drunkenness or sudden 'laughing madness'.¹¹ The sane are those who confine their erring fancies within the imagination; the mad are those who do not. Tryon here approaches some notion of the subconscious which goes far beyond the vision of the Jacobean dramatists. Yet the intensity of poetic thought achieved by those writers

⁹. Tourneur, The Revenger's Tragedy, ed. R.A. Foakes (1966), p. 72.

¹⁰. Tryon, A Discourse of ... Phrensie, Madness and Distraction, Augustan Reprint Society Publication No. 160, ed. M.V. DePorte, Los Angeles (1973), pp. 266-67.

¹¹. See Hobbes, Leviathan, ed. M. Oakshott, Oxford (1946), p. 48.

does more to suggest the inward workings of the soul upon the mind of man than do Dryden's precise, analytical couplets. The reason for this perhaps lies in the fact that while Dryden was interested by the moral idea of madness, the Jacobean dramatists still understood madness as a terrifying revelation of man's interior spiritual poverty, not simply as a general index of the varying traits in human personality. In the Jacobean drama the demonic power of madness begins to be seen less as an inexplicably selective force visited from without upon a helpless individual (e.g. Lear, Leontes), than as a collective force, a spirit of dissociation at work within the very fabric of society, a mass-mania which in George Rosen's view is tantamount to a cosmic force of dissolution heralding the Last Judgement¹². The Jacobean stage kept in balance the madness of the individual and its effect upon the community; the kinetic energy of the madman-revenger unleashed the latent madness of the sober, repressed and bourgeois citizenry who lived around him. The image of Bedlam came to be used as a synonym for the world, a world whose irrationality was reflected upon the stage in plays which stressed the hypocrisy of the assumption that madness and rationality could be truly defined or divided.

Middleton's The Changeling (1622) marks an interesting point of departure. The 'madness' plot, usually attributed to Rowley, is the comic one, a variant on the age-old theme of the jealous husband. Isabella, the pretty young wife of the madhouse-keeper, is besieged by admirers who dress up as madmen to gain access to her and who are allowed at intervals to sport with her like children at play; under cover of this

¹². See G. Rosen, Madness and Society, (1968), esp. pp. 154-56.

'innocence' they naturally make their advances. This lightness of touch contrasts grimly with the progress of the main action; the comic innocence of the feigned madmen highlights the moral deformity of the seemingly virtuous Beatrice-Joanna. Once she associates herself with De Flores in crime she symbolizes all the depravity of which bourgeois respectability is capable, and although the innocent 'madmen' practise deceit, their crime is negligible by comparison and not morally vicious. This often ironic awareness of a discrepancy in attitude between the upper and lower echelons of society helps to develop the image of Bedlam as a comprehensive metaphor for the commercial world; the madmen and other 'unclassifiabiles' possess the spiritual resources of wit and good humour which are denied to middle-class characters whose emotions are often dictated by greed. In the hands of Shakespeare, Webster, Tourneur and Middleton, such a situation can be profitably exploited to produce a more satirically incisive theatre¹³.

Like the Jacobean revenge-play, the heroic play was both a specialized yet a popular type of drama. It had at its disposal a greater sophistication and allusiveness, and a higher level of escapism into the world of exotic French romance and Fletcherian tragi-comedy. As total theatre its variety incorporated elements of the theatre of madness, especially in its concentration upon effects of the absurd and grotesque; however, few characters actually 'run lunatic' in the stage directions of the period and although rant and

¹³. On Webster's evocative masque of madmen in The Duchess of Malfi, see M.C. Bradbrook, Themes and Conventions of Elizabethan Tragedy (1966), pp. 206-07; for further discussion of the subplot in The Changeling, see ibid., pp. 221-24.

excessive passion is permitted, it seems to have been against the tenets of classical decorum to revive wholeheartedly the formal rhetorical madness of the Elizabethan era. However, Bruce King's reading of Dryden's plays as destructive satires on the diseases of the imagination¹⁴ points to the compromise achieved by a theatre which deliberately eschewed mythic madness; the passional volatility of the heroic plays, with their almost antithetical see-sawing of emotions, quickly established an atmosphere in which dreams, fantasy, memory, obsession and hysteria became the sustaining idiom which gave the plays their dramatic power.

Scenes of almost hallucogenic spectacle symbolise in sheer physical audacity the voluptuous confidence of the heroic drama. In Dryden such grandiose effects are circumscribed by parody and wit, exposing the delusions which encourage all superhuman aspiration and endeavour. Thanks largely to the insights afforded by Hobbesian psychology, the heroic drama is able to extend the scope of its social reference, to include amongst the deranged the variety of characters we noticed above in the subplot of The Changeling (Isabella, Lollio, Alibius, Franciscus and Antonio range from the imbecile to the cunning and even intellectual). A concept of irrationality (the 'humours' of comedy) rather than the mythic perspective of madness predominates, and therefore abnormal behaviour is disseminated much more widely and is seen to inform most if not all human conduct. The cosmic significance of madness is contained in the nutshell of a rational 'methodized' universe and its manifestation consequently becomes a matter

¹⁴. See King, pp.119-122, and also D.F.Bond, 'The Neoclassical Psychology of the Imagination', ELH, LV (1937), 245-64.

for corrective ridicule, intellectual brain-teasing and decreasing emotional involvement.

The seventeenth-century enquiry into the nature, causes and effects of the imagination is influential in accounting for the reasons for this shift¹⁵. From the 1620's onwards there was a steady influx of treatises from the continent on the subject of the philosophical composition of man on the nature of his passions¹⁶. The passions psychology gradually replaced

15. See 'The Restoration Revolt against Enthusiasm', in G. Williamson, Seventeenth-Century Contexts (1960), pp. 202-39. Also D. F. Bond, '"Distrust" of Imagination in English Neo-Classicism', PQ, XIV (1935), 54-69.

16. The range of material available on the subject of the passions may be briefly indicated by listing the major treatises translated from the French, circa 1620-80: viz., 1621: A Table of Humane Passions, tr. English by E. Grimeston, based on N. Coeffeteau, Tableau des Passions Humaines, Paris, 1620. 1649: The Use of Passions, written in French by J. F. Senault and put into English by Henry, Earl of Monmouth (2nd ed. 1671), based on J. F. Senault, De l'Usage des Passions, Paris, 1641. 1650: Les Passions de l'ame, tr. English, based on R. Descartes, Des Passions de l'ame, Paris, 1641. In addition to these works, Englishmen started to provide textbooks of their own, notably, 1640: A Treatise of the Passions and Faculties of the Soule of Man, by E. Reynolds, (2nd ed. 1658). 1674: A Natural History of the Passions by W. Charleton, based loosely on De l'usage des Passions, by J. F. Senault. It is clear that from the time of Charles I there existed a fairly steady interchange of intellectual ideas between England and the Continent, and the important thing to establish, for its bearing upon Dryden, is that by 1675, certain Englishmen must have known about the passions theories of Descartes and Senault, in addition to those who were already familiar with the new dramatic techniques of Corneille and Racine.

the old 'humours' theories and gave moral weight to the motivation of human conduct; many treatises illustrated the various ways in which imagination, by conjuring up the evil passions, could pervert and distort the 'rational soul'. Imagination was no longer primarily a poetic phenomenon but became a matter of social concern. Quirks of habit and other idiosyncracies (e.g. gesture, manner of speech) could be explained by citing the passions most likely to produce them, and from there it was a short step to an interpretation which portrayed the imagination as an implacable tyrant over the faculties of body and soul. In his A treatise of the inward disquietments of distressed spirits, with comfortable remedies to establish them published in 1635, Richard Sibbs called it 'the soule's conflict with it selfe', and warned that 'imagination, though it bee an empty windy thing, yet it hath reall effects',¹⁷. As case-histories of the deranged and possessed began to be recorded with increasing diligence after such celebrated examples as the North Berwick witches, a crucial interdependence of body and spirit came to be medically acknowledged; it was understood that the faculties of a soul perverted by the passions would produce physical symptoms and other indications in the body, while conversely a distempered body would cause equal distress to the affections of the soul. The imagination was securely linked to a moral universe in which its immense powers for good and evil were viewed with reverent caution. Sibbs, for example, holds that

¹⁷. Three Hundred Years of Psychiatry, 1535-1860, ed. R. Hunter and I. MacAlpine, (1963), p. 112.

... the reason why imagination
workes so upon the soule, is,
because it stirres up the affections
answerable to the good or ill which
it apprehends, and our affections
stirre the humors of the body, so
that oftentimes both our soules¹⁸
and bodies are troubled hereby.

The familiar antipathy between reason and passion is soon extended to the even nicer distinctions between the fancy and the judgment. It is well known that Hobbes considered an unbounded fancy the equivalent of madness and championed the repressive activity of the judgment in many of his works¹⁹. Tryon, writing in 1683, laid important stress on the dangers of the imagination especially when in conjunction with the passions. The soul which is under the influence of these 'extream inclinations' loses its distinguishing property - 'and then the Imaginative Property and Soul's Power becomes rampant, unbounded, or as it were without a Guide...'²⁰. Tryon's treatise ends with a heartfelt admonition to

turn the Eye of thy Understanding
inward; observe thy own Center,
and learn with David, That thou
art Fearfully and Wonderfully made...²¹

Henry More in Enthusiasmus Triumphatus (1659) lends support to the Hobbesian view of imagination as the 'first internall beginning of all Voluntary Motion' by admitting that it is chiefly beyond man's control:

¹⁸. ibid.

¹⁹. See esp. Hobbes, Leviathan, op.cit., pp.43-4, and Spingarn, II, 67.

²⁰. T. Tryon, A Discourse of...Phrensie, Madness and Distraction, op.cit., p.252.

²¹. ibid., p.299.

though it be in some sort in
our power, as Respiration is,
yet it will work without our
leave ... and hence men become
mad and fanaticall whether
they will or no.²²

More virtually equates imagination with disease when he later
characterizes it as

yet the soul's weakness or
unwieldinesse whereby she so
far sinks into Phantasms, that
she cannot recover her self
into the use of her more free
faculties of Reason and
Understanding.²³

According to those descriptions imagination could easily
reduce a man to a fatal subjection to his passions and to
the complete decay of his judgment and will. If he was subject
to pride and the irascible passions he could easily arrive
at that enthusiastic state which More glosses as 'misconceit
of being inspired',²⁴. This opinion encourages one to take
the pejorative or cynical view of the heroic mode which
certain of Dryden's contemporaries did (e.g. Clifford,
Butler, Shadwell).

But it was Hobbes who did most, in various works, to
bring imagination and madness together. In Of Human Nature
(1640) he defined madness as

nothing else but some
imagination of such
predominancy above the rest,
that we have no passion but
from it.²⁵

an idea which is further developed in Leviathan, Book I.

22. H. More, Enthusiasmus Triumphatus; A Short Discourse of
Enthusiasm, 2nd ed. (1656), p.6.

23. ibid., p.5.

24. ibid., p.2.

25. Hobbes, The English Works, 11 vols., ed. W. Molesworth (1839-45), IV,
57.

Here passions are taken to be the outward tokens of the inner madness of the mind -

to have stronger and more
vehement passions for any
thing, than is ordinarily
seen in others, is that²⁶
which men call Madness.

Hobbes appeals as ever to an unstated but tacitly agreed social norm ('than is ordinarily seen in others'), leaving the precise degree of normality to be determined by the individual thinker.

For the dramatist the consequence of such theories was that a new analytical slant on passion became possible as a means of entertaining a coterie audience. Characters in plays could chart the appearance of their own symptoms and monitor the development of their own passions while inviting the spectators to assist in the diagnosis. Many of Dryden's characters display a keen responsiveness to the idea of passion and its actual onset. This rationalizing influence upon the depiction or 'painting' of the passions acted as a challenge to what had before been unashamedly theatrical, i.e. merely extrinsic passion full of sound and fury. The self-consciousness of the Restoration hero and his minute attention to body temperature, pulse and heart-beat provides comic undertones which enliven the formal protestations and rhetorical assumptions of his heroism. If a dramatist like

²⁶. Hobbes, Leviathan, op.cit., p.46.

Dryden sought to give verisimilitude to his characters by incorporating selected elements of passions psychology he was not aiming to compensate for imaginative poverty; he portrays very well many characters suffering from the effects of tragic passion and the distressing confusion wrought by the imagination. However his response to tragic flaws in character was essentially realistic and sought rational corroboration; hence the distancing effect of his analytical stance militates against the affective impact of violent emotion, although the rhodomontade sustains an inevitable magnetism. The force of passion in Dryden never really enters the realm of the madness however - no character ever encounters himself with the same spirit of primal confrontation which is so characteristic of Timon or Lear. The high number of suicides in Dryden's heroic plays (seven in four plays) is not dictated by madness or even by the fear of it; they are rather assertive continuations of the ego into the next world, and take the form either of stoic resignation (Acacis, Valeria, Arimant) or passionate journeys into mythological realms (Zempoalla, Almeria, Nourmahal). Dryden's personal response to madness was therefore not a strongly localised one; he saw it rather as an hallucinatory quality which could be manifested in varying degrees of passion which would in turn provoke urgent questions of necessity and moral choice. The increased opportunities for self-definition and precision have been excellently summed up by Hugh M. Richmond, who writes,

In the work of later post-Shakespearian writers, we have moved from the medieval behaviorist view of personality, as defined

by cosmology, social pressures, and psychosomatic factors, to a purely volitional approach in which men and women are essentially only what they choose to be.²⁷

Although the actual process of change was much more gradual than this statement or even some of my arguments above might suggest, it is important to have grasped how useful the mechanical, 'volitional' approach was to the Restoration dramatists who sought to create new and individual tragedy on the English stage.

The volitional approach of many Restoration dramatists, concentrating their emotional attention upon problems of will and judgment (Tyrannick Love is a striking example) means basic changes in character occur infrequently in heroic plays. Reversals of will, decisions, and maxims come two-a-penny but rarely is there any organic growth of character towards convincing self-knowledge as there is in Shakespeare. The reason for this lies in the difference of outlook. Restoration man is reduced to an empirical formula; he is conceived of as a machine. Deviations are part of his aberrant nature and exist to be corrected or cancelled out by his conflicting passions. His moral conscience is assumed to be operative, but it is almost always optional. The reason why Restoration passion does not express depth of personality is that it is treated as if symptomatic of transience, the passing of feeling; the writer knows that it will soon be succeeded by other passions. The decline of madness on the Restoration stage arises because madness no longer offers the individual the challenge of entry into his own subconscious, it is no

²⁷ H.M. Richmond, 'Personal Identity and Literary Personae; A Study in Historical Psychology', PMLA, XC(1975), 209-21.

longer an adventurous journey, but merely an alternative to other warring passions or a retreat from 'feeling' altogether, more of a negative state of alienation and non-being. The 'opting-out' of characters who go mad on the Restoration stage has been noticed by Eric Rothstein who observes that the formal language of pastoral is chosen for Otways's *Belvidera*²⁸. The familiar convention of luxuriating in soothing images of country retirement is reintroduced to heighten pathos and to reassert the changeless values of a static Golden World, embedded in classical mythology. Dryden's characters come close to positive madness only when they are caught in moral panics owing to the ceaseless activity of their desires; then even the tranquillity of death usually eludes them since death is often accompanied by even grosser mental distortions (e.g. *Lyndaraxa*, *Maximin*). But each character is responsible for his or her choice of life - so even madness is an escape whose 'effects' have to be carefully weighed up.

A passage from Lee's *The Rival Queens* (1677) will neatly illustrate the new demythologised status of madness. In the opening scene Statira, Alexander's queen, is tortured by rage and jealousy because Alexander has returned to Roxana's embraces. Having worked herself up throughout a long scene into an extremity of passion she considers madness both as an escape and as a death-like cure for all ills:

²⁸. For an excellent analysis of *Venice Preserved* see E. Rothstein, *Restoration Tragedy*, Wisconsin (1967), pp. 103-08, and for observations upon Restoration uses of pastoral, *ibid.*, p. 115.

By Heav'n I cannot bear it, 'tis too much;
 I'll dye, or rid me of the burning torture.
 I will have remedy, I will, I will,
 Or go distracted; Madness may throw off
 The mighty Load, and drown the flaming Passion.²⁹

Here Statira recognises the power of madness as a moral alternative to suffering; it is not something sinister, dark or terrifying. For Lee madness is the natural concomitant of the passions exhibited by his greatest characters; their souls are wound up into tortuous states of ecstasy and demonstrate an affinity with the analysis of behaviour put forward by passions theorists. Statira's lines above, for example, recall the governing principle of Edward Reynolds' A treatise of the passions and faculties of the soule of man (1640):

Thus is it in the Passions of
 the Mind; when any of them are
 excessive, the way to remit
 them, is by admitting of some
 further perturbation from
 others, and so distracting the
 forces of the former.³⁰

Statira's concept of 'perfect madness' is a fancied condition of non-being, a remoteness which will enable her to transcend the ravages of other more deadly passions. The combined effects of rage, jealousy and despair upon her become sufficiently marked by the opening of Act III for her mother to exclaim 'O my Statira, how has passion chang'd thee!'³¹. Madness for Statira is less a sublime state than a useful mechanism which will tranquilize her emotional response to

²⁹. Lee, Works, 2 vols., ed. T.B. Stroup and A.L. Cooke, Metuchen, New Jersey (1968), I, 236.

³⁰. Three Hundred Years of Psychiatry, op.cit., p.120.

³¹. Lee, Works, op.cit., I, 251.

pain and neutralize moral value-judgments. Lee's 'madness' speeches are notoriously similar to his speeches of 'high passion'.

The two major types of madness encountered in Restoration plays are power-madness, and erotomania. Since these two types pervade the majority of passions exhibited by the dramatis personae, I have judged it wiser to divide the portrayal of madness into two classes loosely following the distinctions between frenzy, mania and melancholy set out by Tryon in his Discourse of Phrensie, Madness and Distraction. Elements of power-madness and erotomania will be found in both classes, which comprise (a) Dementia, Mania and Heroic Frenzy, and (b) Melancholia and Stoic Passivity. I have here simplified Tryon's tripartite distinction, merging 'phrenzy' (raging with fever) and mania (raving without fever) in contrast with melancholy (morbid delirium without fever). The majority of Dryden's heroes and villains at some stage exhibit traits of heroic frenzy (the 'hot thoughts of distempered blood') while his opportunists frequently reveal a cool, calculating streak which may be described as mania because built on inverted ethical principles. Dryden's melancholics are perhaps most interesting of all; characters like Valeria and Melesinda display a self-effacing sacrificial tendency which provokes interesting speculation as to the existence of a stable concept of identity in the period, and as to whether the self-willed alienation of such characters (St Catherine also, by willing her own martyrdom, becomes morally suicidal) may suggest greater areas of social

unease than might at first appear. We shall look first, however, at

Dementia, Mania and Heroic Frenzy.

In Dryden's heroic plays all characters who epitomize the dynamism of heroic energy and with it the wild ranging of thought and free association of ideas which constitute Baroque wit, exhibit various degrees of dementia, mania and frenzy. This strain is of greatest relevance to the Baroque hero who practises 'virtu' and the glorification of the ego. Hence the life of pride is the subject of both Dryden's admiration and condemnation. When it incites the irascible passions to insurrection and blasphemy it converts to heroic villainy, as in creations like Maximin and Morat; when it simply magnifies, by eloquence, the lustre and charm of heroic personality, as in Almanzor and Antony, it retains a hint of genuine sublimity. Dryden did not believe that power-mania was aesthetically incompatible with a genuinely heroic ethos, however strong his political reservations. In the Preface to The Conquest of Granada, he said that he had created a hero 'I confess not absolutely perfect, but of an excessive and over-boiling courage'. Almanzor's 'roughness' of character, 'a confidence of himself, almost approaching to an arrogance' (¹⁶SS, IV) is clearly meant to be an attribute. That is why heroic villainy in Dryden is not always unquestionably vicious and why heroic 'gloire' and self-celebration are not always alluring. The complexity of Dryden's response to the heroic is governed by the emotion uppermost at any given moment; what is permissible in Almanzor may be reprehensible in Aureng-Zebe; what is worthy in Acacis becomes little short of futile in Arimant.

Dryden's heroes, and their satellites, chart the shifting sands of their creator's involvement with hero-worship, and his fear of the superman³². Because the madness that is kin to great wits is never made explicit, its shadow is even more deeply felt; indeed it overcasts the entire political arena of Absalom and Achitophel, where Monmouth, Shaftesbury, Buckingham, Titus Oates and Slingsby Bethel represent different species of madmen, let loose in a bedlam of plot and revolt. Dryden's somewhat contrived formulation of the character of 'an eccentric virtue' and his justification of such a character in the prefaces to the heroic plays is the brittle attempt of a nervous sensibility to redress the moral degeneracy of Hobbesian man. Dryden fails in the attempt because his imagination is engaged more deeply by Hobbes than by the moral ideal. The masculinity of the madness which is expressed in the hyperbolic gesticulation of heroic personality makes a much stronger appeal to the emotions than the often flimsy and decorative sententiousness of Baroque 'ideas' about greatness.

The madness of ruthless opportunism links characters as varied and passionate as Montezuma, Zempoalla, Almeria, Almanzor, Lyndaraxa, the Old Emperor, and Nourmahal. Most of these characters possess choleric dispositions (with the exception of Lyndaraxa) and accordingly display different sorts of heroic frenzy - an activity of mind characterized

³². For a striking exposition of Dryden's dual attitude to the superhero, see M. West, 'Dryden and the Disintegration of Renaissance Heroic Ideals', Costerus, VII (1973), 193-222.

by sudden flights of fancy, whims, oddities of expression and an oppressive sense of self-importance. In the case of characters such as Maximin, Lyndaraxa and Morat, Dryden makes it obvious that the basis of their heroic distemper is an impotence or distortion of will; they assume that they can control the wills of others, and dictate accordingly whether an action will be good or bad. Although these characters are passionate enough I prefer to attribute to them the 'mania' or delirium without fever, which seems more appropriate to their disease of the will and impairment of the moral faculties. In the case of the other characters a fever of imagination sets in combining with their tendency to indulge heroic frenzy, a condition sympathetic to the sudden metamorphoses of wit and repartee. It is this vein of heroic frenzy which is Dryden's most characteristic contribution to the heroic ethos, and what Dr Johnson intended by his phrase 'majestic madness and illustrious depravity'.

A word or two should perhaps be said here about the difference between the Elizabethan and Restoration heroic modes. The dynamism of the Elizabethan hero is typically rhetorical, an evocation of heroic intention in 'high-astounding terms' which are still able to convert fustian into fully realised poetic activity. Marlowe's Tamburlaine is a notable example not only of one who is 'climbing after knowledge infinite' but who uses his military experience in a poetically creative way; thus even his rant is capable of attaining a transcendent reality through his capacity

to swing from conscious bluster into sudden imaginative insight. The range of texture embodied in Elizabethan heroic can be quickly appreciated in these extracts from his speech over the hearse of Zenocrate:

Proud furie and intollerable fit,
 That dares torment the body of my Love,
 And scourge the Scourge of the immortall God:
 Now are those Spheares where Cupid used to sit,
 Wounding the world with woonder and with love,
 Sadly supplied with pale and ghastly death,
 Whose darts do pierce the Center of my soule:
 Her sacred beauty hath enchanted heaven,
 And had she liv'd before the siege of Troy,
Hellen, whose beauty sommond Greece to armes,
 And drew a thousand ships to Tenedos,
 Had not bene nam'd in Homers Iliads:
 Her name had bene in every line he wrote:

Casane and Theridamas to armes:
 Raise Cavalieros higher than the cloudes,
 And with the cannon breake the frame of heaven,
 Batter the shining pallace of the Sun,
 And shiver all the starry firmament:
 For amorous Jove hath snatcht my love from hence,
 Meaning to make her stately Queene of heaven,
 What God so ever holds thee in his armes,
 Giving thee Nectar and Ambrosia,
 Behold me here divine Zenocrate,
 Raving, impatient, desperate and mad, ...³³

Here the insistent power of the diction supplies the fulfilment of Tamburlaine's ego, transforming statement into an activating power of language. The fustian alone is not allowed to do all the work. The imagery, solid and precise, is expanded at a length which Restoration dramatists would find tedious but in a manner which allows Tamburlaine to express his brutality in comprehensively poetic terms; the poetry is indispensable to his character. However, in the

case of Almanzor and Maximin ('Tamerlane's successors'), poetry is the vehicle for prosaic thought, not the natural and transcendent expression of a poetically-conceived personality. Dryden's heroic is an heroic of uncompromising, and often practical, assertion:

I am, but while I please, a private man,
I have that soul which empires first began.
From the dull crowd, which every king does lead,
I will pick out whom I will choose to head:
The best and bravest souls I can select,
And on their conquered necks my throne erect.
(SS, IV, 97)

This is the kind of rhetoric which serves merely as an adjunct to heroic personality and which delimits through its decorous modesty (e.g. the polite diction of the last couplet, 'select', and 'erect'). Similarly Maximin's famous vaunts from Tyrannick Love look like cheap heroism in comparison with Marlowe's; the inert spirit of materialism overshadows the poetic timbre of this speech and foists a humorous, bathetic image of commerce upon the bargain Maximin makes with his gods:

Henceforth I and my World
Hostility with you and yours declare:
Look to it, Gods; for you th'Aggressors are.
Keep you your Rain and Sun-shine in your Skies,
And I'll keep back my flame and Sacrifice.
Your Trade of Heav'n shall soon be at a stand,
And all your Goods lie dead upon your hand.
(CD, X, 187-88).³⁴

³⁴. Anne Richter, in 'Heroic Tragedy', (see Restoration Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon Studies, 6, ed. J.R. Brown and B. Harris, 1965, pp. 135-57) argues persuasively that in this speech even parody 'retreats' when it recognises it can do no more (see p. 148). Although she quickly grasps the deliberate bathos, Miss Richter fails to recognise it as part of the carefully delineated megalomania of Maximin in the final act. She overlooks the fact that even parody may be used dramatically to reveal further dimensions of character; if parody seems to be 'redundant' in the face of this speech, then Dryden is surely telling us something crucial about Maximin's galloping eccentricity. The 'great wit' of Maximin's final speeches allies him to the 'madness' of unscrupulous statesmen; Dryden makes Maximin's unfitness to rule a major feature of his tragic-comic disintegration.

two
 The/types of heroic mode are attempting very different things. Marlowe attempts aural magnificence and fullness of texture, Dryden attempts brutal clarity of thought and odd, ear-catching snatches of imagery. Tamburlaine's 'madness' was to the Elizabethans no madness at all, but a heightened inspirational style; its equivalent in Restoration heroics is only to be found in the often jejune self-apotheoses of Baroque heroes. Nathaniel Lee, for example, makes moral naïvety an heroic trait in his first tragedy Nero (1674): the Emperor's vein of constant self-advertisement amounts to a variation on Herculean heroic frenzy:

Swift, as quick thought, through every art I range:
 Who but a GOD, like me, could Sexes change?
 Sporus be witness of my Mighty art;
 Sporus, now Lady, once Lord of my heart.
 At my command, the fragrant Winds do blow;
 The willing floods in waves of balsom flow:
 This hand does all the sweets of nature sow.
 I ransack(sic) Nature; all its treasures view;
 Beings annihilate, and make a new:
 All this can I, your God-like Nero do.³⁵

This speech epitomises the often comic posturizing of the Baroque hero, and makes the connection between Dryden's Almanzor and the Drawcansir of Buckingham's The Rehearsal more explicit. Although Lee adorns his rhetoric with a vein of conscious lyricism which is not so evident in the work of Dryden or his other contemporaries, the fact remains that Lee's emperor commands attention largely by titillating effects, and gimmicks of language. To make statements such as 'I ransack nature' and 'beings annihilate' into heroic ones, is openly preposterous, and yet Lee does so to gain a moral point over his creation. The reason why so many Restoration heroes lack even the awareness of their own

³⁵ Lee, Works, op.cit., I, 32.

madness or perversion of the will is that they are not in themselves poetic creations; Dryden and Lee portray soldiers, tyrants and kings whose chief aim is to outdo in splendour, magnificence or tyranny all other images previously suggested by their stereotypes. The poet controls them vigorously, and does not, like Marlowe, pour something of his own soul into the created hero. Marlowe, significantly, has almost no interest whatever in the moral development of his over-reachers, while Dryden and Lee subject their extremists to the critique of Platonic decorum and the retorts of Stoic philosophy.

The only echoes of Marlovian tone and authority occur in the very few formal mad-scenes to be found in Restoration tragedies. Here Restoration poets could let fly and 'bid their muse run mad' in the indulgence of those 'divine raptures' of poetry which had been so severely compromised by the ill repute of the imagination. Usually the only course open to the Restoration dramatist who wished to represent someone in a deranged state was that of heightening the passions to an almost surrealistic degree, risking the unseemly jests of his audience. Dryden has one notable essay in this genre, when the poisoned empress Nourmahal comes to take her last farewell of her husband in the final act of Aureng-Zebe (1675). Death by poison is an appropriate manner in which to express her fatal fieriness of soul, and the visions she sees in her rhapsody are centred on the image of a burning lake, symbolic of the hell on earth which she has already endured through the unrelenting heat of her passions. Dryden prepares his audience for flights

of fancy by making the Empress's confidante prelude the distress with a moral which anticipates the portrait of Achitophel:

The envenomed body does the soul attack;
The envenomed soul works its own poison back.

However this neat, succinct antithesis does not really prepare us for the conflagratory shambles which follows:

I burn! I more than burn; I am all fire!
See how my mouth and nostrils flame expire!
I'll not come near myself -
Now I'm a burning lake; it rolls and flows;
I'll rush and pour it all upon my foes.
Pull, pull that reverend piece of timber near;
Throw't on - 'tis dry - 'twill burn.
Ha, ha! How my old husband crackles there!
Keep him down, keep him down, turn him about;
I know him; he'll but whiz and straight go out.
(L, 117)

The sensational effect of this scene is not helped by the presence of 'that reverend piece of timber' (the Old Emperor) on the stage. Dryden seems only to have been half-serious in his attempt to recreate the melodramatic mood of the Elizabethan 'mad scene'.

Much of the inspiration for Nourmahal's extraordinary speech could have come from Lee's Nero, acted the previous year. In Act Five of Lee's play, Britannicus, already out of his wits for the loss of a sister and mistress, enters raving even more distractedly from the effects of a poison. His speech, apart from the pastoral interpolations, is similar in effect:

Fire, fire, I'm all one flame, fly, my friends fly,
Or I shall blast you; O my breath is Brimstone,
My lungs are Sulphur, my hot brains boil over;
Or you that needs will stay, let your eyes run,
If you did ever love this wretched Prince,
Now mourn, now weep; O, I will catch your tears
And drink the precious drops: I burn, I burn,
Fall, fall, you gentle Rills, you melting show'rs³⁶
Call all the winds to fan my furious fires;...

³⁶. ibid., I, 61.

The affective appeal of this speech is concentrated upon its musicality; the use of cadence and of intensifying repetition of words like 'fire' and 'fall' are stock devices in procuring the pathetic response. Nahum Tate uses similar techniques in The History of King Lear, when he softens Lear's outbursts against the storm on the heath to heighten the pitiable condition of the speaker:

Blow, winds, and burst your cheeks; rage louder yet.
 Fantastic lightning singe, singe my white head.

 Hide, thou bloody hand,
 Thou perjured villain, holy, holy hypocrite,
 That drink'st the widow's tears, sigh now and cry
 These dreadful summoners grace.³⁷

Both Tate and Lee rely much more on the purely visual associations of images of storm, tempest and hell. The immediacy of madness - that which makes it almost indistinguishable from any other extreme passion - is felt in the straightforwardly literal use of images. Lee's imagery of sulphur, brimstone and boiling brains reverts to the sensationalism of the Jacobean theatre, while at the same time it is capable of suggesting the type of moral association which these images might have in a work, say, like Paradise Lost. Tate's *Lear* also inhabits an intensely moral universe, in which the king's madness is interpreted not so much as a crisis of soul but as the righteous man's complaint against the injustices of a power-hungry social system.

Lee's passionate, and often rather turgid rhetoric, was a great theatrical asset and it is in his plays rather

³⁷ Tate, The History of King Lear, ed. J. Black (1976), pp. 38-9.

than Dryden's that a high level of heroic frenzy is maintained. Alexander in The Rival Queens epitomises this kind of self-propelled image of greatness, a Narcissistic pampering of the ego which can quickly degenerate into megalomania or erotic lunacy. The erotomania of many Baroque heroes has its roots in the libertine traditions which grew up around the rakehells of Restoration comedy, and it provided a virile counterpart to the hero's magniloquent self-panegyric. In its extremest form erotic melancholia or mania (the condition can be either contemplative and brooding, or fierce and imaginatively active) tended to produce irascible passions and to conjure up vivid imaginations of uninhibited sexual licence. Robert Burton, writing of 'Heroical Love' in his Anatomy of Melancholy, warned that,

if it rage, it is no more Love but
burning Lust, a Disease, Phrensy,
Madness, Hell. 'Tis death, 'tis an
immedicable calamity, 'tis a raging
madness; 'tis no vertuous habit
this, but a vehement perturbation
of the mind, a monster of nature,
wit and art.³⁸

If carried to perverse extremes such imaginations no longer represent the reality of human relationships but only the depraved fiction imposed upon reality by the speaker. For instance, Lee's Alexander contemplates his estranged queen, Statira, so intensely that he conjures her visibly into his arms:

³⁸ Burton, The Anatomy of Melancholy, ed. F. Dell and P. Jordan-Smith, New York (1951), p. 651.

No, she shall stay with me in spite of Vows,
 My soul, and body both are twisted with her:
 The God of Love empties his golden Quiver,
 Shoots every Grain of her into my heart;
 She is all mine, by Heaven I feel her here
 Panting, and warm, the dearest, O Statira! ³⁹

The mingling of the heroic with erotic 'purple passage' is a favourite device in Lee's plays, to give titillating lustre to the charisma of the hero. Dryden takes a more humorous attitude in general towards love-melancholy and makes his portrayals of it reflect back cynically upon heroic pretensions.

The treatment of love in The Conquest of Granada is reminiscent of another passage in Burton,

... this love of ours is immoderate,
 inordinate, and not to be comprehended
 in any bounds. It will not contain
 itself within the union of marriage,
 or apply to one object, but is a
 wandering, extravagant, a domineering,
 a boundless, an irrefragible, a
 destructive passion. ⁴⁰

The comic subplot of Lyndaraxa's lovers outlines the destructive promiscuity which Burton denounces here, and in Almanzor Dryden concentrates with particular vigour and success upon the 'diseased' condition of the lover. Ideas of cure, and being restored to one's right wits predominate, and it is in this play that Dryden makes his most detailed references to madness, frenzy and Bedlam. Almanzor's moral heroism is complicated, if not entirely compromised, by his sexual feelings for Almahide (if we can accept furthermore that his first appearance amongst the Moors is a morally elevating one and not merely a radical outburst). Love

³⁹ Lee, Works, op.cit., I, 246.

⁴⁰ Burton, The Anatomy of Melancholy, op.cit., p.655.

unmans Almanzor's rage, which up to now has been his dominant heroic credential. The speech in which he catalogues the onslaught of love is cast in the form of an inventory of symptoms, an amusing account of the disordering of the nervous system induced by the malady of Eros.

I'm pleased and pained, since first her eyes I saw,
 As I were stung with some tarantula.
 Arms, and the dusty field, I less admire,
 And soften strangely in some new desire;
 Honour burns in me not so fiercely bright,
 But pale as fires when mastered by the light:
 Even while I speak and look, I change yet more,
 And now am nothing that I was before.
 I'm numbed, and fixed, and scarce my eyeballs move:
 I fear it is the lethargy of love!
 'Tis he; I feel him now in every part:
 Like a new lord he vaunts about my heart;
 Surveys, in state, each corner of my breast,
 While poor fierce I, that was, am dispossessed.
 I'm bound; but I will rouse my rage again;
 And, though no hope of liberty remain,
 I'll fright my keeper when I shake my chain.
 (SS, IV, 71)

There are contemporary references to the tarantula in both the treatises by Tryon and More mentioned above, and the whole of this speech is composed around the witty antithesis between the 'lethargy of love' and the active, skipping-like reaction which the tarantula's sting invites. The convulsive rhythmic jerkings and dance-like state induced in the victim of this 'love' is reflected in Almanzor's words by the controlled use of the caesura, which intensifies the impression of his comic helplessness. Again the image of madness - 'I'll fright my keeper when I shake my chain' - is a superficial and grotesque one, with comic overtones. Madness is equivalent to the imprisonment of being in love, and the only way out of the prison is to act the mad antic in the hope of rousing the mind to action by substituting rage for lethargy. As the play proceeds we soon see that Almanzor's

attempts to control his love-madness are often less than successful. He soon falls victim to 'love's calenture', the fever which promotes voluptuous visions and aggressive carnal longings. When he even imagines he can enjoy his mistress in the shape of a ghost - 'When in your lover's arms you sleep at night,/ I'll glide in cold betwixt, and seize my right:' (SS, IV, 96) - it is scarcely surprising to find Lyndaraxa, a shrewd observer of character, reproaching him thus:

You must be brought like madmen to their cure,
And darkness first, and next new bonds endure:
(SS, IV, 173)

The suggestion of sadism in Lyndaraxa's proffered love is unmistakable and Almanzor politely resists her charms. However the case of Almanzor is typical of Restoration satiric wit. He is brought to the recognition of the age-old truism that 'Love is that madness which all lovers have'. That madness is traditionally speaking, a socially accepted joke; ridicule more often takes the place of pity; the whining lover is mocked for his symptoms, yet what he suffers is real enough - a lesson straight out of Sibbs' warnings about the effects of the imagination. Almanzor's 'calenture' is not 'cured'; his frustrated sexuality is only re-channelled into the optimistic Christian conquest-ethic which takes over as the new regime at the end of the play. Even then, Almanzor, like Berowne in Love's Labours Lost, has to wait a year before he can claim his mistress. Both plays share the problem of establishing a norm of correct language; what is the nature of the language of true love and how is it best expressed? The stylised conceits of Shakespearean comedy find their counterpart in the sophisticated wit of

Almanzor's erotic meanderings, and in both plays the hero falls unwillingly in love and has to submit to the schooling process implicit in the rituals of courtship.

Perhaps the most scandalous outburst of erotic love in all Dryden occurs in Aureng-Zebe. In the prison scene (IV.i) Aureng-Zebe, beset by sick fancies, throws caution to the winds and upbraids his mistress with a saucy speech in which he envisages in some detail the pleasures of the flesh. ('O, I could stifle you with eager haste!', L, 92). Rather like a fulsome aria from the heroic opera seria, this speech is both hyperbolic and witty, and Dryden enjoys here some of the more explicit delights of Restoration fantasizing. Scott C. Osborn in his valuable article on 'Heroical love' in the seventeenth century, has pointed out how calmly Indamora, Aureng-Zebe's morally upright mistress, takes this outburst, and finds it indicative of the tolerance shown by most of Dryden's heroines towards their besotted lovers. Osborn is quick to associate this mildness of censure with the diseased condition of the lover, giving support to the idea that erotomania was the most powerful and widespread form of madness depicted by Restoration dramatists; he writes,

Since the erotic lover has lost
his reason, and is hence not
responsible, immoral acts due to
love are forgiven with remarkable
readiness.⁴¹

Lee's erotic heroes (Nero, Massinissa, Alexander) seem to be the natural successors of Dryden's long line of supermen,

⁴¹ See S.C. Osborn, 'Heroical Love in Dryden's Heroic Drama', PMLA, LXIII (1958), p. 482. A useful background to this article can be found in L. Babb, 'The Physiological Conception of Love in the Elizabethan and early Stuart Drama', PMLA, LVI (1941), 1020-035.

and give substance to this argument through the heightened sensuality they adopt as their characteristic idiom.

Similarly Dryden's most heroic conception of character often coincides with situations in which some illicit or unnatural love-passion is involved; the incest-theme, for example, exalts the heroic proportions of Zempoalla, Nourmahal, and finally the great lovers Don Sebastian and Almeyda. Excess of passion was able to suggest many interesting dramatic readings of the possible causes of madness or distraction.

Before leaving the theme of heroic frenzy it will be helpful, by way of summary, to look at a Restoration set-piece of formal madness. It is in Crowne's spectacular drama The Destruction of Jerusalem (1677) that we find a mad-scene which combines elements of both Elizabethan and Restoration heroic and which restores Marlovian eloquence to the stage, by association with the mythic Herculean concept of madness. At the conclusion of Part II, Phraartes the Parthian King suffers a momentary loss of reason after witnessing the death of his beloved, Clarona. Crowne's mad scene tastefully combines themes of revenge, grief and compassion, while allowing the characteristic erotomania of the period full play. Phraartes' passion has long been restrained by the religious convictions of the heroine, and his madness reveals the dark side of his sexual temptation as well as reasserting the heroic mythos of the classical period. Although the speech is consummately ordered, and progresses from despair to madness, then out of madness into order again, Crowne's ultra-rational presentation does not detract from the variety of effect produced by the alternating

passions expressed:

Charms! - conqu'ring charms in death! - hence with
her hence!
For I begin to wander from my sense! -
Where are those lying Priests, that hang the Graves
With Maps of future Worlds? - shew me, you Slaves,
These Lands of Ghosts! - where is Clarona gone?
(grows mad)
Aloft! - I see her mounting to the Sun! -
The flaming Satyr towards her does roul, [sic.]
His scorching Lust makes Summer at the Pole.
Let the hot Planet touch her if he dares! -
Touch her, and I will cut him into Stars,
And the bright chips into the Ocean throw! -
- Oh! my sick brain! - where is Phraartes now?
Gone from himself! - who shall his sense restore?
None, none, for his Clarona is no more! 42

Crowne tactfully preserves the self-diagnosis of the Restoration victim as a modifying influence upon the excesses (e.g. 'bright chips') of the heroic style. Consequently his attempt at the sublime is set in a firm context of irrationality and does not degenerate into mock-heroic. The mixture of defiance and pathos, although not distinguished by brilliant verse, works surprisingly well. The limitations of this type of madness remain obvious; its superficiality and its treatment as an 'episode' rather than as an organic development of character, make it at best a sensuous pleasure rather than an experience in which we can participate deeply. The decorative theatrical madness of the Elizabethan theatre survives well into the Restoration period, but without ever integrating itself with the cosmopolitan atmosphere of the plays or the self-advertising grandeur of Restoration heroics. Heroic frenzy became a symptom of greatness, not greatness itself.

42. In Five Heroic Plays, ed. B. Dobree, (1960), p.236.

Melancholia and Stoic Passivity

Perhaps the most interesting contribution of the Restoration drama to seventeenth-century psychology was the creation of melancholy, depressive character types who exemplified the state defined by Hobbes as 'sudden dejection' of mind⁴³. This more affecting form of madness worked strongly on the pity and compassion of the audience and reasserted the essential innocence of the deranged. The melancholia which besets numerous Restoration heroines is conceived in terms which entirely oppose the theatrical necessities of heroic frenzy. The incoherent thoughts, explosive gestures and loud ranting peculiar to the heroic mode are now absent; instead there is a continual vibration of sensibility which causes females to fade away in front of our very eyes, overborne with tender conscience and hypersensitivity. The volatile madness of aggressive, passionate heroines such as Zempoalla and Nourmahal, a madness which could well be interpreted as a moral scourge for a life dedicated to perverse passion, gives way to the passive contemplative delusions of Melesinda, and Otway's heroines Belvidera and Monimia. The victimized quality of these tender heroines is their most engaging feature; they interest the spectator immediately by appearing in tears, sporting wan smiles and uttering martyr-like sentiments. The retreat into pastoral links the new sentimental madness with the decorative formalism of the Elizabethan mad-scene; the emotional appeal of Hieronimos's famous line 'Made

⁴³. See Hobbes, Leviathan, op.cit., p.36.

mountains marsh with flood-tides of my tears' is translated into a purely sensuous combination of affecting sighs or 'sospiri' -

Murmuring streams, soft shades, and springing flowers,
Lutes, Laurells, Seas of Milk, and ships of Amber.⁴⁴

Melancholy-madness thus provides the dramatist with an opportunity for lyrical outpouring rarely permitted in the depiction of Herculean frenzy.

Otway's cultivation of a somewhat cloying type of female sensibility may seem rather nauseous to modern taste. His heroines are adept at inflicting mental self-torture, imagining themselves in all the dire straits of poverty, rapine and oppression, circumstances which in fact have very little to do with reality. This morbid sensibility is Belvidera's characteristic employment in conversation with her husband; despite comparative security she insists on acting the role of Job's comforter:

Oh, lead me to some Desart wide and wild,
Barren as our Misfortunes ...
Though the bare Earth be all our Resting-place,
Its Roots our Food, some Clift our Habitation
I'll make this Arm a Pillow for thy Head.⁴⁵

Misery, poverty and want provide the imaginative canvas of the play, just as they provide the backcloth for Tate's interpretation of the heath in The History of King Lear; ideas of 'horror' and 'despair' are encouraged as aids to tragic pleasure and the experience of the sentimental virtue of tears. Otway's heroines also subscribe to the more passive

⁴⁴ ⁴ Otway, Works, 2 vols., ed. J.C. Ghosh, (1968), II, 281.

⁴⁵ ibid., II, 214-15.

and retiring of the passions - shame, grief, anguish, pity and fear - thereby asserting their identification with the shadowy world of dreams and fancies. The 'waking dream' or fantasy is a favourite emotional game of the tender heroine, comprising the incitement of an imaginary distress far more enervating than the experience of any real adversity. This reliance on the imagination in its most morbid aspect is the female equivalent of the heroic delirium or grandeur of will asserted by figures like Almanzor and Maximin. While males, and even aggressive, militaristic women, assert an energizing intention to act heroically, retiring females choose a vicarious existence by imagining themselves in some situation which will call forth the serener virtues of Stoic resignation and endurance. Thomas Tryon, in his treatise on madness, offers the interesting speculation that

Madness is nothing but an Erring
Sleepifying Power, because every
Madman dreameth waking ...⁴⁶

This exactly describes the predominant feature of Otway's heroines, who exist principally to be pitied. The image of the 'helpless female' already put forward by the heroic play (which itself appealed to women because the males are chivalrous) is taken in Otway to almost bathetic extremes; Belvidera and Monimia almost rejoice in their own incapacity to shield themselves from misery.

In Dryden's earlier heroic plays we find antecedents of this essentially feminine Stoic passivity, especially in

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T. Tryon, A Discourse of...Phrensie, Madness and
Distraction, op.cit., p.288.

the suicide scenes. Both Acacis in The Indian Queen and Valeria in Tyrannick Love commit suicide, but less from an imbalance of their mental faculties than from a sense of moral guilt for sins which are not their own. Neither of them display melancholia to a significant degree, although Acacis is given to meditative habits and possesses, like his successor Aureng-Zebe, many of the qualities associated with female, passive heroism. Dryden disposes of both Acacis and Valeria because the poetic justice of each play demands some moral sacrifice and reparation. Acacis' suicide is really a plea for attention, and he dies gratified by the response his self-destruction evokes:

Orazia weeps, and my parch't soul appears
Refresh'd by that kinde shower of pittyng tears;
(CD, VIII, 226)

Acacis also dies in expiation of his mother's guilt, a point Dryden was anxious to establish. The theme of the sins of the fathers being visited upon the children applies even more to Valeria, whose self-sacrifice is motivated as much by shame as by misfortune in love:

How I have lov'd Heav'n knows; but there's a Fate,
Which hinders me from being fortunate.
My Father's Crimes hang heavy on my head,
And like a gloomy Cloud about me spread;
I would in vain be pious, that's a grace
Which Heav'n permits not to a Tyrant's race.
(CD, X, 186)

Valeria's sudden dejection of mind is hinted at only in the image of the 'gloomy cloud' which oppresses her, and it is symbolic not of diseased imagination but of the element of deliberate moral choice involved in the Stoic's approach to death. A. Alvarez in his book The Savage God has written

of this type of suicide,

... it was an act of self-conscious nobility proceeding from a philosophy of life which judged what was bearable and what was not ... there was always a hint of self-dramatization about it.⁴⁷

Dryden's Stoics idealize the dignified, Roman death-without-dishonour because it represents for them a triumph of the will over the passions. It seems clear however from the austerity of his Stoics (St Catherine is most formidable of all) that Dryden saw only a partial solution to the extremes of heroic conduct in Stoicism⁴⁸. Stoicism without some 'spark of heavenly fire' soon produces sterility in the personality, which is perhaps why Dryden's most self-conscious Stoics choose to eliminate themselves. The suicides of Acacis and Valeria contain no tragic inevitability; they represent moral choices quite as arbitrarily made as the worst passional excesses of Zempoalla or Maximin. The action of suicide, considered in isolation, is not engaging; the

⁴⁷. A. Alvarez, The Savage God, Harmondsworth (1974), p. 179.

⁴⁸. J. A. Winterbottom's article, 'Stoicism in Dryden's Tragedies', JEGP, LXI (1962), 868-83, gives a useful and balanced account of Dryden's attraction to the ideal of self-abandonment to fate. His plays usually combine Stoicism with Christian Humanism, and his 'benevolent ladies' often become moral symbols for 'right' and virtuous conduct. Although St Catherine in Tyrannick Love is scarcely heart-warming, ladies who are unfortunate in love, e.g. the Queen in Secret Love, Amalthea in Marriage a la Mode, and Celidea in Love Triumphant, are often eloquent petitioners who combine Stoic resignation with a refreshing susceptibility to passion and complex feeling. In Dryden's later plays this mood of tranquil resignation provides a moral alternative to the suicides of the early heroic plays. Octavia and Almeyda reject suicide, and seek the dignity which results from the tranquil acceptance of the self.

deaths of Acacis and Valeria, being largely removed from the psychology of mood, are not only futile, but fail to elevate the imagination.

In *Melesinda*, however, Dryden progresses to a new type of characterisation in which cause and effect, mood and moral, are much more closely integrated. Before she even appears on the tragic stage of Aureng-Zebe, *Melesinda* is described as

bathed in tears,
And tossed alternately with hopes and fears,
(L, 55)

which indicates her basic instability of mood. She is unquestionably melancholic, although to suggest that she is a manic depressive would be to overstate the case. She is clearly meant to be made attractive by her cowed submissiveness both to fate and to her contemptuous husband; she is intolerable to live with largely because of her sullen, doom-laden face (the occasion of some comedy between her and Morat). She is a curiously accurate foreshadowing of the Otway heroine, save that the discipline of the couplet just prevents her from spilling over into mawkish excess. Her largely decorative function in the play also underlines flaws in the larger concepts of heroism recommended by the Old Emperor and Morat. Her melancholy is similar to the disenchantment of the passive, contemplative hero, Aureng-Zebe, who allows himself to be inculcated with the feminine principles of virtuous conduct, embodied in the moralism of the prudent Indamora. While Aureng-Zebe's depression is more the dignified philosophic gloom associated with the Stoic interpretation of life, *Melesinda's* is more physiological, more dependent upon the interaction of passions and humours.

The aura of fragility she creates around herself is part-comic, part-pathetic, and her vague prognostications of calamity provoke a certain degree of social embarrassment.

I have no taste, methinks, of coming joy,
For black presages all my hopes destroy.
"Die," something whispers, "Melesinda, die;
Fulfil, fulfil thy mournful destiny."
Mine is a gleam of bliss too hot to last;
Wat'ry it shines, and will be soon o'ercast.
(L, 58)

Melesinda's involuntary misuse of the imagination consists of her parasitic need to feed off adversity; she feels sympathy for Indamora quite as crushingly as her own misfortunes. If no disaster is pending, it becomes necessary to fabricate a 'mournful destiny' which will provide the identity of the speaker with a role to fulfil. Melesinda's self-conscious misery is not without its ironies, but it is indicative of the power of melancholic suggestion over the mind, and illustrates one of Michel Foucault's ideas concerning Neo-classical madness. He writes,

... madness in the classical period ceased to be the sign of another world ... it became the paradoxical manifestation of non-being. Ultimately, confinement did seek to suppress madness, to eliminate from the social order a figure which did not find its place within it; the essence of confinement was not the exorcism of a danger. Confinement merely manifested what madness, in its essence, was: a manifestation of non-being.⁴⁹

It is this state of alienated 'non-being' which dogs the sensibilities of heroines like Melesinda, Belvidera and Monimia. Essentially escapist, it proclaims too keen

⁴⁹ M. Foucault, Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason, (1967), p. 115.

a sense of identification with the 'tragic' in human experience, and effectively bars its victim from contributing positively to any given situation. Melesinda, for example, in conversation with Indamora, exclaims,

I can no more -
Can no more arguments, for comfort find,
Your boding words have quite o'erwhelmed my mind.
(L, 101-2)

Melesinda's final assertion of her elected mode of non-being takes the form of the ritual suttee she performs after the death of her unfaithful husband; the onlookers remind her that her death is unnecessary, but she chooses the illusion of 'glorious spousals' in the after-life, rather than exist in wretchedness. The inescapable pessimism of 'sad Melesinda' (except in death) prevails also over the moral fibre of Otway's leading-ladies. Here once again the self-created mood of ritual anguish enfeebles the heroine, until she is of little use to man or beast and justifies her existence merely as a 'spectacle' or tragic exemplum. In one late reference to Bedlam in Otway's The Orphan (1680) Monimia, recounting the effects of a quarrel with her husband, is driven to dwell on the images of isolation, loneliness and despair most appropriate to her mental 'feeling' for distress. Thus the picture of outcast madness and penury envisaged by the heroine exists purely as a fiction forced by her own 'conceit' for the intensification of the hearer's pity. It is a far cry from the antics of heroic bedlam satirized by Buckingham in the spoof heroics of The Rehearsal. The speech is addressed to the heroine's brother Chamont:

Oh shouldst thou know the cause of my lamenting,
 I am satisfy'd, Chamont, that thou wouldst scorn me;
 Thou would'st despise the abject lost Monimia,
 No more would'st praise this Beauty: but
 When in some Cell distracted, as I shall be,
 Thou seest me lye; these unregarded Locks,
 Matted like Furies Tresses; my poor Limbs
 Chain'd to the Ground, and 'stead of the delights
 Which happy Lovers taste, my Keeper's stripes,
 A Bed of Straw, and a course wooden dish
 Of wretched sustenance; when thus thou see'st me,
 Prithce have Charity and pity for me.
 Let me enjoy this thought.⁵⁰

Here the speaker confines herself voluntarily within the prison of her own imagination; although the scene she recounts may have been real enough to Otway, whose own poverty was almost proverbial, it strikes the false note of sentimental hypocrisy. Because it is hypothetical and suppositious, it procures the desired response by artificial means, encouraging a similar falsity in the hearer. In such a speech the concept of dramatic madness reaches its nadir - the image of Bedlam is hauled in as an illustration (and not a very apt one) of a trivial incident, and to manufacture emotions which the author could not muster by more direct means. Although the appeal to pity and compassion is a legitimate form of evoking the pleasures of tragedy, the means employed in doing so had to have sole relevance to the dramatic action to be considered genuinely tragic. The cult of 'non-being' eventually took the life out of tragic personality and paved the way for the milky affections of the stilted sentimental drama. Dryden alone, by balancing descriptive melancholia with stoic notions of heroism,

⁵⁰ Otway, Works, op.cit., II, 58-9.

retained control over the enfeebling tendencies of pathos and virtue.

There can be little doubt that in general terms madness in the Restoration theatre loses contact with a creatively original poetic source. At its best heroic frenzy is a pale imitation of Elizabethan rhetoric. Dryden's unique blend of the rough and the sophisticated (action in his plays is always hasty and over-violent, while thought is much weighed and considered) encouraged the collapse of frontiers between genres so that the mythic integrity of madness became easily undermined. The potency of madness fails in the Restoration period because it is made to conform to a naturalistic presentation of human behaviour. I have argued throughout this chapter that some of the scientific data provided by seventeenth-century doctors, philosophers and moralists about the human condition, found its way into the drama, to the extent that Dryden assimilated into his characters ideas which he would have regarded as lending an even closer approximation to 'nature' and dramatic verisimilitude. But Dryden's irrepressible wit also transforms the heroic play into a volatile playground in which the power- and sex-obsessed disport themselves in a manner which is equally productive of sneaking admiration or laughter. The mock-heroic pastiche once more defuses the cosmic potential of the unleashing of madness. Restoration madness, which is the Anarch of manners, is merely a cover for the indulgence of instinctual needs and occasionally depraved appetites. Dryden himself may have been aware that he was not a dramatist of the calibre of

Marlowe or Shakespeare; certainly he was aware that his own age called for techniques which were often quite different from the ones they had used. If Dryden had no quasi-religious belief in the transforming power of madness, he had at least a mechanical conception of opposing passions and dilemmas - an idea which enriches his structural but not his emotional technique. An observation he lets drop during his tragic-comedy The Spanish Fryar indicates the degree to which he is incontrovertibly committed to the principles of order, decorum and safety:

There is a pleasure, sure,
In being mad, which none but madmen know!
(SS, VI, 440)

Despite the opinions of some contemporaries, Dryden himself was not a madman. His treatment of heroic themes is too complex for us to envisage him as some happy, would-be Maximin. Dryden's use of passions-psychology enabled him to contract the proportions of madness, and place it, like the 'humour' of Jonsonian comedy, within society rather than beyond it. Madness was belittled into eccentricity, an eccentricity which Dryden even saw as healthy, enabling heroic power-mania to be channelled into some system for moral welfare, and enabling the poet to tinker less timidly with the imagination and other accessories to the sublime. But Dryden's underlying criterion for true heroism was always moral, however extravagant it might appear on the surface; obedience and self-control were the qualities he admired most. What Restoration madness lacks is a sublime confidence in its own ability to create new poetic environments, a confidence which was an integral part of the success of the Elizabethan drama. The Augustan poet

always had his hand firmly placed on the handle of the madhouse door. Although Herculean madness had now become vestigial, a device light-heartedly revived for sensational theatrical effect, the analytical techniques of Restoration drama extended the scope of a psychological reading of the institutions of society⁵¹, and helped prepare the way for Fielding's burlesque plays and the penetrating irony of Jane Austen's novels, with their suppressed female neurasthenia. The analytical approach was, however, inimical to the rhetorical requirements of drama; expressiveness for its own sake, as in Otway, failed to invoke the pleasurable sense of panic and confrontation with the dark^{which} is still so vital an ingredient of the shared madness of King Lear. Where madness failed, the passions benefitted. But this was to lead to the cultivation of a psychological acumen far more suited to the extended canvas of the novel than to the concentrated power of the drama.

⁵¹. Sandy Cunningham, in 'Bedlam and Parnassus: Eighteenth-Century Reflections', Essays and Studies, New Series, XXIV (1971), remarks on 'the kinetic vigour, and the complexity of the Augustan response to human behaviour'. (p.41). He examines the relationship shared by heroic and grotesque modes, concluding that 'the jokes and cynicism about modern heroics occur in a context where Parnassus apes classical epic but is at the same time quick to declare all heroes mad, all heroism lies and murder'. (p.50). If Dryden's plays do not quite suggest this in the way that Pope's Dunciad does, Dryden is at least half-way towards this position in the dual attitude he consistently takes towards the social and a-social values implicit in heroism. Dryden knows that certain forms of heroism can lead to madness; by exhibiting the inherent eccentricity which characterises all heroic behaviour he is attempting to purge the heroic ideal of its dark side. Dryden was well aware that heroism could only become sublimely moral when purged of the dross of selfish ambition; his presentation of heroism subsequently accords with average human ability to come to terms with this situation.

Chapter 8

The Question of the Denouement and The
Prevailing Tone of the Heroic Plays

Dryden's denouements would cause acute embarrassment to a modern spectator. On the whole they are artistic failures, exhibiting a flagging narrative interest and a casual attitude to tone and style. The patterns of surprise and elevation which are predictably introduced into the numerous 'change-of-heart' or 'conversion' scenes with which his plays conclude, cease to be surprising on further acquaintance, and Dryden seems almost too blatant in handing out concessions to the tastes of his 'heroic' audience. The general instability of the Restoration denouement, in which both tragic and comic elements are allowed to participate, habitually results in anticlimax as the ironic use of raillery and repartee collapses before the inexorable moralising of the final speeches. It is here that the iconoclastic hero and heroic singer of the plays is made to cast in his lot with the civilised and eternally tedious norms of a repressive patriarchal society. The lionizing of Herculean heroes such as Montezuma and Almanzor is suddenly abandoned for the polite exchange of courtesies and conversational skills more appropriate to the salon than to the heroic arena of the epic drama.

Dryden's denouements are also unashamedly operative in nature. They subsist on the introduction of suitable or novel deus machina, as e.g. the discovery of some long-lost parent, or of one thought dead (The Spanish Fryar), the unexpected

repentance of tyrannical fathers (The Assignation, Love Triumphant), or the intervention of the supernatural (Amariel in Tyrannick Love, and the ghost of Almanzor's mother in The Conquest of Granada, Part Two). The moral absolutes with which Dryden has entertained his audience through the debates of his most virtuous and 'exemplary' characters are now permitted to sway the taste for propriety, discretion and 'poetic justice'.¹ A Dryden play normally ends with a firework-display of stereotypes, stock devices and conventions which set up in competition with the discrepant use of irony, wit and repartee - elements which have been constant throughout. For instance, the traditional lieto fine of the opera seria is foreshadowed in Dryden's early tragicomedy The Rival Ladies, in which a cast of six principals work towards a situation in which they can marry (although Dryden forbids union to one brother-sister relationship); disguise, mistaken identity, duels and jealousies are the stock ingredients of this operatic resolution. In the rhymed heroic plays, where Dryden's taste for the sensational is more apparent, the denouement may also serve as a safety-valve for the excesses of mock-heroic characterisation (e.g. Zemboalla, Maximin) and moral absolutes are here enriched by the presence of

¹ The phrase 'poetic justice' originates in Rymer's Tragedies of the Last Age (1677) and is a concept which is not entirely applicable to Dryden's earlier heroic plays. However, the denouements of such plays as The Rival Ladies, The Indian Emperour, and Secret Love, do promote the moral pattern of 'virtue triumphant' which was to become the hallmark of mature Restoration tragedy. In most of Dryden's early heroic plays, however, the 'excellency of the moral' has not yet come to prominence and there is little of the grandiose austerity designed to exalt the 'moral' denouements of All for Love and Don Sebastian.

ritual violence and occasionally sadistic wit. Dryden deliberately adds sensationalism such as Maximin repeatedly stabbing the body of Placidius, or Montezuma's doctrinal and physical agonies on the torture-wheel, as visual correlatives to the moral naïvety of his denouements. In these extreme cases, it is the image of the violence which is retained, while the reassumption of moral order passes as a mere formality.

Dryden was sufficiently skilled as a craftsman to know well enough how to tidy up a play. In Troilus and Cressida (1679) he proved that he could produce a better-constructed play than Shakespeare, although he could not improve on its content. However, the idiosyncratic structure of many of Dryden's denouements - in particular the intrusion of satiric episodes, and the unprepared character of the moral 'conversions' - indicates that a denouement had to do more for a Restoration audience than suggest fluency and competence. In fact Dryden's denouements reveal not only the anxieties of the writer about uniting the polyphonic texture of the heroic play but also provide a fascinating glimpse of the manner in which a subtle dramatist can exploit the moral expectations of his audience. There can be little doubt that the denouement was used, technically speaking, to channel the already mixed response of the audience towards good-humoured and ennobling 'ideas of greatness'. At the same time Dryden was mentally preparing them for the intimacy of the 'epilogue', in which the reserved and formal elevation of tragedy gave way to the confidential 'address to the house', with the starkly naturalistic atmosphere of stage-celebrities, actresses, firing-house and pit. If we accept

that the flaccid denouement is a recognisable convention - perhaps a deliberate one - of the heroic play, then we can begin to see how its surface conventionality might have been amusing to a sophisticated audience, whose response to it could have been similar to the nineteenth-century traditions of audience participation in pantomime.

If part of the pleasure of watching an heroic play lay in detecting the palpable unreality of the denouement then we can see some reason for the emergence of 'irregular' or 'eccentric' techniques in Dryden's dramaturgy. Questions of 'poetic justice', ambivalent nuance, lack of spiritual content or tragic transcendence, too great a dependence on the sensational - all these take on a more cohesive aspect when considered as part of a poetic strategy designed to baffle the expectation of the audience by playing on their assumptions about decorum and 'happy endings'. There can be little doubt that Dryden's denouements, taken at face value, constitute what Peter Brook has described as 'deadly' theatre². Sudden changes of fortune, revolutions in the state, - no theatrical trick is omitted to serve the interests of respectability. The middle-class citizens who took Dryden's heroic drama more seriously (especially the ladies) may well

² Peter Brook's definition of 'Deadly Theatre' in The Empty Space, Harmondsworth (1972), associates it immediately with 'the despised, much-attacked commercial theatre', (p.11), and with aesthetic standards which rarely surpass mediocrity. Brook's notion of 'deadliness' also involves the assumption that we approach the classics from the viewpoint that 'somewhere, someone has found out and defined how the play should be done'. (p.17). Dryden's often somewhat mechanical reliance on stereotyped convention tends to render his plays 'deadly' in this specifically modern sense. It is worth pointing out however that despite its predictability, the 'deadly' theatre can still be visually and aurally exhilarating and produce what the majority of an audience would consider to be good 'entertainment'.

have been oblivious to any consciousness of ridicule; as for the court, who were adept at balancing the mythic and realistic elements in their own lives, the moralising of the heroic drama may well have looked like a contemptuous attack on the deficiencies of vulgar taste.

Dryden clearly took a great deal of pleasure in satisfying the heroic credentials of the 'precieux' in the formal arrangement of his denouements. It seems to have become such a habit in fact that he was tempted in his translation of Juvenal: Satyr X (1693) to poke fun at the convention in his account of Hannibal's decline in heroic fame and fortune:

Now what's his End, O Charming Glory, say
What rare fifth Act, to Crown this huffing Play?
(CD, IV, 223)

However, Dryden's own fifth-act sympathies were often directed towards his heroic villains, individual characters who were driven to suicide rather than accept a plainly unsatisfactory 'coupling-off' into respectable pairs. Zempoalla is perhaps the most striking early example of a character who is contemptuous of the charity of society. When Montezuma, who ought to have been her lover, offers her filial piety and respect, she tells him,

All that cou'd render life desir'd is gone,
Orazia has my love, and you my Throne:
And death, Acacis - yet I need not dye,
You leave me Mistriss(sic) of my destiny;
In spite of dreams how am I pleas'd to see,
Heavens truth, or falshood shou'd depend on me;
But I will help the Gods,
The greatest proof of courage we can give,
Is then to dye when we have power to live.
(CD, VIII, 230)

Zempoalla rejects as insincere the benevolent providence which graces the political and moral union of Montezuma and Orazia. By doing so Zempoalla becomes a genuinely tragic figure who would appeal to the passions of the discerning.

She flouts the decorum of the happy ending, by refusing the option of 'settling down'. Although she is one of a long line of 'opportunists' or 'destiny-makers' in Dryden, her behaviour in the final act of The Indian Queen is emblematic of Dryden's ambivalent response to theatrical vogue.

The same distrust of theatrical fashion seems to lie behind the lukewarm sentimentality of many of Dryden's elaborate 'conversion' denouements. Dryden returns obsessively in his plays to the theme of restoration (The Queen in Secret Love, for example, symbolically 're-instates' herself into her 'glory') and he includes many characters who demonstrate the pious virtues which can result from possessing a kingly nature. In Dryden 'natural' as opposed to inherited kingship, consists of the accumulation of those virtues which exalt one to the status of a Davidic king, indulgently paternal and reliably compassionate. The reclamation of unnatural fathers becomes a favourite theme of the plays of his middle period. Figures such as Abenamar, the Duke Senior (The Assignation), Polydamas, the Old Emperor, and Veramond represent those who lack charity and do not live up to their aristocratic calling; largely through the experience of conversion, prompted by the sacrificial generosity of some eloquent petitioner (often a son, or daughter) these men are transformed from heroic villains into beneficent and responsible people - as unlikely a change as any in Shakespearian romance (e.g. Oliver in As You Like It). Dryden understands the moral impetus behind such 'conversions' as part of the redemptive plan of monarchical society; through forgiveness and contrition society is prepared to recognise the claims of the 'eccentric' hero or partially sinning ruler (both of whom have been,

up to now, outside the 'charmed circle' by reason either of their radicalism or tyranny); his full acceptance into the institutions and civilising customs of that society is signalized in the symbolic nature of the filial embrace. Both Duke Frederick and Aureng-Zebe embrace their sinning parents; while Almanzor discovers a double parenthood in the claims of his natural father, Arcos, and those of his paternal monarch, Ferdinand. Only occasional touches of realism still persist in these scenes; at least the old Duke and old Emperor are honest enough to admit to their offspring that they are still in love with the ladies they surrender, and that 'duty' does not cancel everything. But Dryden's real intentions in these politically symbolic but dramatically rather inept scenes, are inevitably confused by a mixed attitude towards the 'virtue' he feels obliged to recommend.

The presence not only of deliberate satiric undercurrents but of a latent contempt for his audience in Dryden's denouements is partially the result of the 'mixed style' upon the stock responses of the spectators. In the Essay of Dramatic Poesy Dryden had given much attention to the psychology of mixed response in his discussion of the propriety of tragi-comedy. Lisideius complains that the tradition of mingling mirth with serious matter merely confuses the spectator - "in two hours and a half we run through all the fits of Bedlam" (W.I.45), - and that while civility is offended, neither 'admiration' nor 'concernment' are possible. Neander's rejoinder not only vindicates the use of the double plot, which Dryden could manipulate with such skill (especially in the later plays, e.g. The Spanish Fryar, Don Sebastian), but hints at the kind of effect Dryden wanted his heroic plays to have. He intended a juxtaposition of contrasting

scenes which would create a ready fluctuation of mood, encouraging the kind of audience receptivity which is favourable to an uniquely poised relationship between engagement and detachment;

A continued gravity keeps the
spirit too much bent; we must
refresh it sometimes ... A scene
of mirth, mixed with tragedy,
has the same effect upon us
which our music has betwixt
the acts. (W.I.58)

Dryden understood that the mixed style was invigorating to the mind and that tragicomic techniques were the most direct means of procuring variety through delight and instruction³. It was predominantly through the witty employment of tragicomic effects that Dryden was able to stave off the fatigue of 'ungrateful drudgery', of which he complains so frequently in his prologues and epilogues. The use of the bizarre and the grotesque in wit kept the vitality and pace of his plays alert, and gave him a position of ironic superiority with respect to his audience. The introduction of conscious satire into the denouement was Dryden's way of ensuring that his audience was still intellectually engaged; he used satirical effect here to bolster their flagging powers of discernment and to ridicule their homely expectations of naive morality.

Other playwrights had also experimented with the denouement as a means of controlling or shaping the sensibility

³. Edward Phillips, in his Preface to Theatrum Poetarum (1675), complains vigorously of the indecorum in Tragedy of a 'Linsie-woolsie intermixture of Comic mirth with Tragic seriousness'. (Spingarn, II, 270). The topic remained a controversial one throughout the entire Restoration period, and was never satisfactorily resolved by the men of Dryden's generation.

of the audience. Sir John Suckling in Aglaura (1638) and Sir Robert Howard in The Vestal Virgin (1665) both devised plays which could end either happily or tragically. Both plays started life as grand heroic tragedies full of noble, Platonic sentiment and elaborate blood-revenge. However, Suckling's epilogue to the performance at court (the first occasion on which the alternative 'happy ending' was used) contains the lines

Playes are like Feasts, and everie Act should bee
Another Course, and still varietie.⁴

This high aesthetic demand seemed to imply that to keep the dramatis personae alive at the conclusion of a serious play required much more finesse and ingenuity than to kill them off. Suckling jests that his heroine is only 'reprieved' by special intercession of the court in the improved version. The basic importance of the alternative ending lies not in the respective merits of the tragic or comic versions (although Aglaura works better as revenge tragedy) but in the curiously nonchalant attitude to the audience which the poet displays. Sir Robert Howard, closely imitating Suckling, transformed his own bloodthirsty tragedy (which vies in mutilations with Titus Andronicus), into a decorous tragic-comedy of mistaken motive and misunderstanding. Suckling and Howard both chose to reprieve their actors, establishing a closer connection between the 'living' dramatis personae and the wits in the audience. Tragedy habitually distances, because a simulated death steps between actor and spectator,

⁴ Suckling, The Plays, ed. L.A. Beaurline (1971), p. 114.

and as Dryden well knew, death-scenes could be inimical to the serious attention of an audience⁵. Many of Dryden's own death-scenes incorporate sensational and inherently satirical values (e.g. Lyndaraxa, Nourmahal), or are brutally violent and Hobbesian (e.g. Odmar, Zulema) so that the 'pathetic' death (Acacis, Valeria, Melesinda) has less opportunity to invite unmitigated ridicule. The curious experiments of Suckling and Howard, however, indicate a deepening need to bridge the gulf between the poetic preference of the dramatist and the assumed social standards of the audience. When Dryden commenced writing his heroic plays, he strove for a greater adaptability and flexibility in handling generic assumptions, paving the way for a much broader and less encumbered tragic sense, which found its natural expression in the 'mixed style'. This explains why Dryden eventually considered All for Love such an irrevocable break with the traditions of the heroic play. When he thought of writing a 'pure' tragedy, modelled upon that of the Ancients, he was forced to reject a genre which he had built up largely on the grounds of reducing generic distinctions and providing a purely theatrical amalgam of delight, laughter, wit and emotion. When Dryden turned his attention to blank-verse tragedy in 1677 he was in fact depriving himself of the liberating plurality of voices which the heroic play afforded. While the heroic play was neither exclusively epic, historical, tragic or comic,

⁵ The famous passage in An Essay of Dramatic Poesy runs: 'I have observed that, in all our tragedies, the audience cannot forbear laughing when the actors are to die; 'tis the most comic part of the whole play ... there are many actions which can never be imitated to a just height: dying especially...' (W.I.51).

tragedy was still an essentially conservative, inward-looking genre, taking its lead from the Ancients. In effect the variety of techniques encouraged by the more cosmopolitan outlook of the heroic play must have made it seem quite 'modern' by comparison.

If we compare the freewheeling vivacity of the denouements of plays like The Indian Emperour and Tyrannick Love with Rymer's formulae for the promotion of 'poetic justice' in tragedy, we can quickly grasp the innovative strengths (and weaknesses) of the heroic play. In his least doctrinaire treatise, The Tragedies of the Last Age (1677) Rymer sedulously asserts the necessity for a sound fable upon which to construct epic tragedy. He complains of insufficient motivation and inconsistent characterisation in the tragedies of Beaumont and Fletcher and then turns his attention to the crucial question of the denouement:

We blunder along without the least streak of light, till in the last act we stumble on the Plot, lying all in a lump together; neither any tolerable direction to guide us thither; nor ought ingenious, just or reasonable, that carries us from thence.⁶

Rymer's conception of pleasing an audience is uncompromisingly moral; an audience can receive pleasure only by seeing justice 'exactly' administered. What Rymer most wanted to avoid was the piling-up of incident and passion in the fifth act which so often tended to obscure the morality which it behoved tragedy to embrace. Dryden agreed with him only in so far

⁶ T. Rymer, Critical Works, ed. C. A. Zimansky, Connecticut (1971), p. 42.

as he recognised the importance of 'virtue triumphant and vice punished' for the raising of pity and terror in pure tragedy. Dryden was able to share a little of Rymer's obsession with formality, in which it was felt that the denouement ought to be as carefully laid out as a landscaped garden. However if we compare Rymer's aims with the actual effect of the denouements in Dryden's rhymed 'tragedies' then Dryden's denouements appear indeed like a 'chaos and wild heap of wit'. Rymer's stipulations are all based on the exaltation of providential design and rigid stylistic discipline:

And besides the purgings of the
passions; something must stick
 by observing that constant
 order, that harmony and beauty
 of Providence, that necessary
 reaction and chain, whereby the
 causes and the effects, the
 vertues and rewards, the vices
 and their punishments, are
 proportion'd and link'd together;
 how deep and dark soever are
 laid the Springs, and however
 intricate and involved are their
 operations.⁷

Dryden enjoyed unravelling complications, and especially the art of integrating the double plot in tragicomedy (as, for example, in The Spanish Fryar and Love Triumphant). But despite these formal satisfactions Dryden's concern was much less with the suitability of the 'poetic justice' which was meted out at the end of his plays. He preferred to focus his critical acumen upon the 'springs' or motives of individual action, so that 'punishments' and 'rewards' seem altogether

⁷. ibid., p.75.

subordinate to the spiritual and emotional action of his plays. Far from being rigid in their Aristotelianism, Dryden's denouements often exhibit unsteadiness and a tendency to explore secondary material. The notorious perversity which so often creeps into Dryden's scenes of heroic death is symptomatic of the unease Dryden felt about the nature of the purely tragic experience. Since few audiences can forbear laughing 'when the actors are to die' (W, I., 51) Dryden makes the death-scene a theatrical extension of the hero's (or anti-hero's) affirmative power, habitually treating it without tragic reverence or any awareness of suffering. The amusing result conveys the basic impulse of actor and playwright to communicate visual pleasure to the spectator. The heroic play has little or no room for the hallowed response which greets the transcendent deaths of high tragedy.

As I suggested in my earlier discussions of Tyrannick Love and All for Love, Dryden's handling of the denouement often misfired. In Tyrannick Love tragedy degenerates into farce simply because Dryden pushes the stylistic divide between the Platonic and materialistic images too far. Imbalance is the chief defect (and strength) of Dryden's early denouements, in which wit plays an important and significant part. In the case of All for Love, where the mixed style mysteriously survives⁸, Dryden fails to appreciate that latent irony is inappropriate to sentiment. In his Life of the poet, Dr. Johnson makes an interesting observation about Dryden's failure to standardize the tone of his plays.

⁸. See above, pp. 423 - 36.

He writes,

I am not certain whether it was not rather the difficulty which he found in exhibiting the genuine operations of the heart than a servile submission to an injudicious audience, that filled his plays with false magnificence.⁹

Although Dr. Johnson here complains of Dryden's failure to engage the emotions (a critical view which is happily declining) he does attribute the imbalance of style both to poet and spectator. If Dryden was seeking in his heroic plays to 'educate' or 'improve' his audience by manipulating their tastes to suit his own ideals of formal art, then it seems likely that he had not entered into a fully confidential relationship with his audience. The reserved 'persona' which many critics have noticed in the heroic plays, decreases in his tragedies (especially All for Love and Don Sebastian), where his attention is focussed upon the appeal to pity and fear. What is so disturbing about the 'false magnificence' of the heroic plays is that Dryden seems to use falsity as the norm and to expect his audience to respond with ease to the fundamental wit of such a technique.

Broadly speaking the content of the heroic play would be enough to satisfy the expectation of an average Restoration theatregoer, as one whose familiarity with the classics was slight, and whose reading-matter may have included a few French romances and perhaps some Spanish or French plays. By creating a drama for cognoscenti, Dryden was relying

⁹ Johnson's Lives of the Poets: A Selection, ed. J. P. Hardy (1971) p.193.

specifically upon the assiduous playgoer's knowledge of previous plays. However the reduced intellectual demands of a primarily social and non-learned tradition meant that Dryden had to turn elsewhere for the literary appeal of his plays. That is why the structure of his heroic plays does not pander to the expectations of his audience and why tone and style, the key-notes for passion and the sublime, become the chief vehicles for wit, irony, spectacle, dissonance and bathos. Thus the mixed or ambivalent tone of the heroic plays reflects, not some inner failing in the emotional composition of the dramatist, but a semi-conscious desire to control the social context of the heroic play, and to open out new possibilities of response between actors, spectators and playwright.

How far Dryden felt himself to have failed in his objectives can be assessed from the vehemence of his recantations. His rejection of rhyme and his denunciation of the excesses of Almanzor and Maximin are both extreme gestures which suit the spicy, rather truculent nature of the dramatic persona which Dryden adopts in the prologues and epilogues. Although Dryden cannot have entirely lost sympathy with the heroic play in his later years, he was severely affected by the lack of cultural prestige it attracted. The fashion for heroic plays seemed to vitiate rather than refine the nation's taste, and in the Epilogue to Oedipus (1678) Dryden laments that it should have degenerated to the level of 'Charm! song! and show! a murder and a ghost!' (SS, VI, 237). Occasionally the intellectual pretensions of the heroic play are revealed in the prologues and epilogues Dryden wrote during the late sixties and early seventies.

The obsessive harping on 'wit' and its status on the English stage seems to reflect some of the ambivalence towards heroic drama expressed by the court. Some earls were content enough to become patrons of the heroic drama and to provide limited sums of money to finance it, while remaining aloof from its morality and stereotyped conventions. Mulgrave, the great patron of Dryden's Aureng-Zebe in 1675, made his own views on the deficiencies of heroic drama quite plain in his perceptive Essay upon Poetry (1682), while Dryden's dedication of Marriage à la Mode to Rochester made little difference to the adverse criticism he received in An Allusion to Horace (1676). However, at the time when Dryden's heroic drama was at its peak and he produced what Robert Hume has called his 'heroic dinosaur'¹⁰, The Conquest of Granada, Dryden's inner convictions as to the cultural value of his enterprise could not help but rise to the surface:

If love and honour now are higher raised,
 'Tis not the poet, but the age is praised.
 Wit's now arrived to a more high degree;
 Our native language more refined, and free.
 Our ladies and our men now speak more wit
 In conversation than those poets writ.
(SS, IV, 224)

'Those poets' whom Dryden so confidently rebukes are Ben Jonson with his 'mechanic humours', and Beaumont and Fletcher. Although Dryden talks here primarily about wit as 'correctness' (the standardization of usage and of manners in language) there is an implied appeal for higher overall standards in cultural sensibility. Dryden's faith in 'love-and-honour' had not yet deserted him and he still felt justified in recommending to his patrons the study of such noble sentiments

¹⁰. See R.D.Hume, The Development of English Drama in the Late Seventeenth Century, (1976), p.285.

and moral ideals as it called forth. Dryden appreciated that French refinement could have important consequences for the raising^{of}/the nation's tastes, provided that British dramatists kept well clear of the stiffness and strained formality of the 'tragédie lyrique'.

However such optimism was short-lived. Dryden's period of sustained success was quickly eclipsed by Settle's flamboyant Empress of Morocco, a play in which all Dryden's hopes for aesthetic refinement were subjected to vulgarization. Dryden's contempt for his audience then grew throughout the seventies, exploding in several bitter prologues and epilogues and inspiring the satirical venom which makes Mr Limberham the most pungent Restoration comedy after any of Wycherley's. To whatever extent Dryden conceded to popular taste in his heroic plays by admitting song, dance, spectacle, anti-platonism and libertine wit, his audience seems to have misunderstood the innocent naïvety of his plots and taken them still at face value. In his epilogue to Lee's Mithridates (1678), Dryden acidly exposes the incapacity of contemporary audiences to respond either to an allusive texture or even to the most fundamental requirements of affective tragedy:

Yo've seen a Pair of faithful Lovers die:
And much you care; for, most of you will cry,
'Twas a just Judgment on their constancy.
For, Heav'n be thank'd, we live in such an Age
When no man dies for Love, but on the Stage:
And ev'n those Martyrs are but rare in Plays;
A cursed sign how much true Faith decays.
(CD, I, 158)

Dryden came to feel that theatre audiences did not need the stage to teach them how to behave. He knew that with the typical arrogance of true cognoscenti they blandly assumed

they could do better themselves¹¹.

So whatever Dryden was trying to do in each of his denouements often reflects his current position in relation to his audience. The criticism he received for the untimely repartee of Celadon and Florimel in the final scene of Secret Love¹² indicates that audiences prided themselves on being critical and hoped to have their desires fulfilled. Similarly in the Dedication to Aureng-Zebe, Dryden defends himself against the ladies whose desires were not gratified by the unheroic behaviour of the Princess Indamora in that play. The chief irony seems to have been that Dryden furnished the coterie who attended the heroic drama with one or two borrowed stipulations about the 'correctness' of formal art which were then taken up with great gusto by an audience who knew very little about the craft of writing. After The Conquest of Granada Dryden radically toned down the allusive scope of the heroic play, restricting its appeal mostly to sentimental moralising and the intimate social atmosphere of domestic comedy. The grandiose eloquence of 'old Corneille's rhyme' had failed to provide a sufficient focus for the diffuse themes and modulations of the heroic play.

The relationship between the wish-fulfilment of the audience and the arbitrary nature of the denouement still poses serious problems even in the later Dryden. Although

11. For a comprehensive social analysis of the clientèle of the Restoration playhouse, see Robert Gould's The Playhouse: A Satyr (1685), in M. Summers, The Restoration Theatre, (1934) pp.297-321.

12. According to Dryden's preface to Secret Love even Charles II thought he was at fault here. (See W, I, 107).

his last 'titanic' heroes, Cleomenes and Don Sebastian, encounter their fates realistically in Stoic resignation to death and exile, the protagonists of The Spanish Fryar and Love Triumphant are less fortunate. In these final tragicomedies Dryden exploits a ruthlessly mechanistic pattern of coincidence to achieve the standard tableau celebrating 'restoration' - a concept by now endowed with a strong morally symbolic value, no longer valid politically. Dryden's undisguised contentment over the weak denouement of Love Triumphant is disconcerting. The entire plot hangs on the fluctuating temper of an ageing despot, and Dryden even makes Veramond, the offender in question, expatiate on the necessity of satisfying the spectators' desires. In one of Dryden's least prepared denouements the question of what the denouement should really be hoping to achieve is suggestively, but dangerously, aired:

Just like the winding up of some design,
Well formed, upon the crowded theatre;
Where all concerned surprisingly are pleased,
And what they wish see done.

(SS, VIII, 474)

In Love Triumphant it is this very willingness to please the spectator which perversely undermines the dramatic integrity of the whole. Veramond's eleventh-hour repentance is so inconsistent as to invalidate the earlier presentation of his character, and the play suffers, like Shakespeare's Measure for Measure, from a sudden and largely unexplained change of direction.

This kind of situation does not often arise in the rhymed heroic plays where inconsistent motive is the native element of the rhetorical hero, and where Dryden's festive approach to the use of the imagination allows inconsistency

free play in the livelier denouements. When Dryden portrays civilisations in a semi-barbarous state, motivated by a Hobbesian lust for power and greed for empire, his denouements become unmistakably tougher, more odd and fantastic, but much stronger theatrically. Dryden's best denouements are those which are most overtly operatic, involving hyperbolic clashes of personality, a quick succession of incident, sensational deaths and a hint of the supernatural. Robert D. Hume strikes the right note when he draws attention to the fact that Dryden's moral design is usually subordinate in interest to psychological aspects of personality and confrontation. He writes,

Dryden's political, social, and moral attitudes are readily deducible from the plays, but the quasi-allegorical 'design' is embedded in a totality in which language, character and spectacle figure predominantly. In this context, the design seems less an overt disquisition than an expression of outlook and an intuitive exploration of the heroic ethos.¹³

The keyword here is 'intuitive' - it exactly describes Dryden's constant recurrence to the heroic sublime, even when he satirizes heroic portentousness. The moral 'message' of plays as diverse as Secret Love, Marriage à la Mode, Aureng-Zebe and Love Triumphant is always less vital than the wit, irony and humour with which it is expressed. Dryden's attraction to moralising was essentially rhetorical, not prescriptive¹⁴, and he left it to his audiences to discern

¹³ R.D.Hume, The Development of English Drama, op.cit., pp.197-98.

¹⁴ See especially Dryden's manipulation of his audience in the Epilogue to Marriage à la Mode, SS, IV, 364.

for themselves the kind of social values he was condoning or satirizing.

A great variety of response was therefore possible. If we compare Martin Clifford's contemptuous critical analysis of The Conquest of Granada¹⁵ with Mrs Evelyn's romantic, but equally narrow interpretation of the play, then it becomes obvious that Dryden's plays could take on a meaning appropriate to the intellectual level of the individual. While Clifford's pedantic quibbles over the idiosyncracies of language indicate that Dryden's plays could justly engage the town with wit and learning, Mrs Evelyn's account shows us that they could also act as a catalysing force upon the heady imaginations of the novel-reading élite. She wrote:

... I have seen 'The Siege of Grenada',
a play so full of ideas that the most
refined romance I ever read is not to
compare with it; love is made so pure,
and valour so nice, that one would
imagine it designed for an Utopia
rather than our stage. I do not
quarrel with the poet, but admire
one born in the decline of morality
should be able to feign such exact
virtue; and as poetic fiction has
been instructive in former ages, I¹⁶
wish this the same event in ours...

Obviously Mrs Evelyn accepted the Cavalier-orientated reenactments of medieval chivalry and the polite refinements of the love-and-honour debate as^a/totally serious matter. She thought them elevating and admired the 'artifice' of the play - virtue exactly 'feigned'. However she passes over

¹⁵. See J. and H. Kinsley (ed.), Dryden: The Critical Heritage, (1971), pp. 175-86.

¹⁶. The London Stage 1660-1800, 5 parts (11 vols.), ed. W. Van Lennep, et al., Carbondale (1960-8), Part I, 177.

the politics and wit, apparently oblivious to the fact that Dryden's obsessive concern here is with the accurate depiction of 'eccentric' or over-bearing virtue. However her astonishment at Dryden's ability to write well up to French standards does indicate that 'admiration', one of the prime objects of the heroic play, could certainly be aroused. It is interesting that Mrs Evelyn makes no reference to Almanzor, whose robust metaphysical conceits are the most obvious source of 'admiration' in the play. Her designation of The Conquest as a 'play of ideas'¹⁷ is also significant; she neglects to tell us whether she was entertained, or whether she laughed (Pepys relied much more upon pure gratification of the senses in according success or failure to the plays he witnessed). What is beyond question is that Dryden's plays could transcend the voluptuary's taste for song and show and be intellectually admired (or condemned) in their own right. Thus what the heroic play encouraged most was a multiplicity of response whereby the court, the wits, the merchant classes and 'nouveaux riches' could express its relevance (or non-relevance) to their situation in society. The formal art of the heroic play, dependent upon the affective appeal of its Baroque polyphony, thus became enriched by the powerful and discrepant feelings it

¹⁷. One modern critic, Anne T. Barbeau, in The Intellectual Design of John Dryden's Heroic Plays, New Haven and London (1970), argues in similar vein that Dryden's are plays of ideas. However, while Mrs Evelyn clearly appreciates 'ideas' for the fanciful and lively touches they impart to the pleasure of the spectator, Miss Barbeau takes an altogether more cerebral line with Dryden; she writes, 'his art is a rational construct, derived from complex mental processes rather than from observation of actual experience'. (p.142). The difference between this kind of approach and that of Mrs Evelyn indicates the extent to which academic tradition can occasionally distort the true nature and purpose of theatre.

could evoke in its beholders. Dryden foresaw that by undermining decorum and flouting any sense of realism in the heroic plays he would be creating an ideological vacuum in which opinion and controversy could flourish. For those whose intellects were not to be so engaged there was entertainment enough in the opulence and spectacle which were the acknowledged paraphernalia of the heroic mode. Davenant's confidence in 'Heroick Poesy' was prophetic of Dryden's; in the Preface to Gondibert he wrote:

In my despair of reducing the mindes
of Common men, I have not confest
any weaknesse of Poesy in the generall
Science, but rather inferr'd the
particular strength of the Heroick,
which hath a force that overmatches
the infancy of such mindes as are not
enabled by degrees of Education.¹⁸

Dryden's heroic plays are written on the assumption that they can be readily accessible at some level to the tastes and aspirations of the Restoration clientèle.

In the content of his heroic plays Dryden can habitually be found humouring his audience and pandering to their assumed norms of social competence. His plays abound in what John A. Winterbottom has called 'stringent disciplines' - e.g. 'personal honor, formalized love, filial duty, political allegiance and the Christian religion'¹⁹ - disciplines which support the preservation of social institutions and which make the brevity and brutishness of Hobbesian existence tolerable. In his conservative moral vision Dryden enables

¹⁸. Singarn, II, 45.

¹⁹. J.A. Winterbottom, 'The Development of the Hero in Dryden's Tragedies', JEGP, LII (1953), pp. 171-72.

the audience to identify easily with stage characters whose ability to cope with life is subject to stringent demands upon their obedience and self-control. Dryden's attitude to iconoclasm in the plays is clearly to show it as something concealed and subversive, essentially amoral in its expression, yet ironically more life-giving and inspiring than 'strict virtue'. Dryden adopts a dual attitude in keeping with the dissimulative habits which are second nature to his audience. Their presumed knowledge of French romance and their stereotyped inferences about noble or tragic behaviour are given lofty, figurative expression and realisation in the moral determinism of the heroic play. To the spectator who bases his knowledge of life on experience, the heroic play may well seem to contradict all naturalism, but Dryden requires this in order to make his spectator participate in the underlying questions of the function and purpose of drama. He employs the sense of moral obligation as a curb upon the charismatic attractions of iconoclasm, and plays off two distinct species of 'admiration' against each other - the popular adulation of the virtuoso or 'heroic' individual, versus the moral approbation of socially accepted norms (e.g. kingship, marriage, financial success, essentially 'public' qualities). Dryden is careful to make style the invigorating principle of heroic individuality; his heroes surprise and delight by threatening the formal boundaries of couplet wit. Patterns of social integration are conversely reflected in the austere inflexibility of love-and-honour

conventions (debates are always circular and rarely emerge from their labyrinthine complications) against which some degree of iconoclasm seems almost called for, purely as a matter of self defence.

In the complexity of Dryden's manipulation of the audience we can see him making an embryonic attempt to offer them a self-integrating experience. Although the heroic play can be uncompromisingly direct in its moral outlook - villainy is made blatantly Hobbesian or libertine - there are areas of permitted and actively encouraged ambivalence. Dryden's formulation of the kind of mixed heroism which produces *Almanzor* is an indication that he did not always see human achievement in terms of a straight conflict between good and evil. What I have called Dryden's 'festivity', that which makes his overall attitude in the heroic play similar to the essentially benevolent and corrective impulses of comedy, often takes over where pure moralism would become too heavy-handed. It is the recognition of such an element in Dryden that has led several critics to claim that the heroic play owes more to the 'comédie héroïque' than to tragedy²⁰. For Dryden, seriousness could never remain unleavened by irony, and that irony itself often took the form of a piquant raillery rather than incisive satire. Even if we review the social accommodation of the hero from the early heroic plays

²⁰. The critics who argue this point most persuasively are R.D.Hume, *The Development of English Drama*, op.cit., p.270, A.C.Kirsch, 'Dryden, Corneille, and the Heroic Play', *MP*, LIX(1962), 248-64, and F.H.Moore, *The Nobler Pleasure*, Chapel Hill(1963), pp.122-25.

to All for Love, we have to acknowledge that the docile hero of Dryden's later works is representative of a different sort of social ideal from that advocated by the military paragons of The Indian Emperour or The Conquest of Granada. Norms fluctuate dangerously because even stereotyping within the formal conventions of drama will not assure their legitimacy within society at large. Restoration comedy has its own completely individual scheme of behavioural norms, and in making the heroic play capable of reference to these Dryden was making a fairly fundamental statement about the dangers of standardization by too formal an art. The heroic play does make a fetish of 'love-and-honour', just as Wycherley's *Lady Fidget* makes a fetish of 'china', but the distortion is deliberate. It suggests that the society which will countenance, or indeed encourage, these protective devices is a society in a state of moral transition, uncertain of the kind of roles which are best suited to its institutions. The heroic play does not offer a solution to the problem of the self-integrating experience, but by indicating the chasm which exists between such concepts as 'love' and 'sex', 'glory' and 'power', it points to the need to establish a relationship between the 'real' and the 'heroic' which is based on a compromise between honesty and commitment. In artistic terms, in terms of its tone, style, and structure, the heroic play is as indicting a critique of Restoration society as the comedy of manners.

Robert D. Hume has made a recent bid for a just discrimination of what the techniques of the heroic play are really concerned with. He writes,

... we cannot possibly call the heroic plays dead serious and humourless. To say this by no means implies that the plays are frivolous, or predominantly satiric. Their use of ironic exaggeration shows up their lack of "tragic intensity", which is disconcerting²¹ - but that is quite another matter.

This view can be taken as a useful corrective to Anne Richter's rather bald assumption that "the whole form is built upon the idea of excess"²². If we concentrate less upon the scale of Dryden's work (and nobody would deny that his heroic obsession is of Atlas-like proportions), and return again to the less alluring but more formal considerations of technique which transform theatre into Mr Gordon Craig's 'masterpiece of mechanism', then we are being truer to Dryden's sensibility. However, technique, and experimentation with technique, must form the basis for the intellectual justification of the plays.

In his The Art of the Theatre, Craig makes one vital assumption which is so obvious as to be often overlooked; he recognises the fact that taste improves with a higher standard of technical accomplishment. Conversely, by raising the tastes of the audience one is indirectly pursuing the vision of ideal form in art; to raise taste requires discrimination, imagination and expertise. As Dryden's technical mastery improved, and he produced plays like Aureng-Zebe and All for Love, which display greater homogeneity of

²¹ R.D.Hume, The Development of English Drama, op.cit., p.192.

²² A.Richter, 'Heroic Tragedy', in Restoration Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon Studies, 6 ed.J.R.Brown & B.Harris, (1965), p.145.

tone, there can be little doubt that the tastes he aimed to please were subtly different from those who revelled in The Conquest of Granada²³. If Dryden doubted inwardly that the tragic 'elevation' of his early heroic plays had really caught on (granting that he was committed in his theory of literature to the dissemination of an epic ideal), then the refinement of early techniques paid off in the more carefully calculated responses evoked by the tone of his mature heroic plays. In Aureng-Zebe and All for Love Dryden had deliberately sought non-sensational modes of pleasing, and had written with an increased conviction of the purity of genre. That he could make his talent for the mixed style serve such ends with success is no small measure of his achievement. Craig's definition of a 'perfect' theatre is significantly that of a theatre which offers the maximum pleasure to the spectator and is thus highly applicable to Restoration drama:

A perfect theatre would neither
tighten nor loosen the muscles
of the face, and would neither
contract the cells of the brain
nor the heart-strings. All would
be set at ease, and to produce
this mental and physical ease in
the people is the duty of the
Theatre and its Art.²⁴

²³. George Granville, Lord Lansdowne, in An Essay upon the Unnatural Flights in Poetry, (1701), following the lead offered by Dryden himself in the Dedicatory Epistle to The Spanish Fryar (1681), took upon himself the office of 'excusing' Dryden's 'Bedlam Heroes' in a manner which deftly laid the blame on the vitiated tastes of the 'cits' and fops:

Dryden himself, to please a frantick Age,
Was forc'd to let his judgment stoop to Rage;
To a wild Audience he conform'd his voice,
Comply'd to Custom, but not err'd thro' Choice.
Deem then the Peoples, not the Writer's Sin,
Almanzor's Rage, and Rants of Maximin;

²⁴. E.G. Craig, On the Art of the Theatre, (1957), p.253. (Spingård, III, 294).

Ultimately Dryden's rhetorical strategy in his heroic plays rests on the most direct means he can employ to satisfy the emotional and intellectual tastes of his audience; the predominant characteristics of a given play (e.g. the wit in Tyrannick Love, or the debate-form in The Conquest of Granada) may thus be seen as specific responses he made to a living and often disturbingly ephemeral demand. Although Dryden believes in entertaining an audience, and therefore in providing them willy-nilly with what they want (even their 'depraved' taste for farce), he uses their taste as an ironic yardstick against which to measure the pretensions of 'heroic' and 'noble' conduct, whether in the world of political satire or the fantasy-escapism of the heroic drama. Dryden's theatre sets his spectators seemingly at ease; but that very ease is satirized for its naïve receptivity to moral absolutes which are often beyond the rationale of flesh and blood.

Dryden's theatre holds in balance the benevolent providence of the poet, the apparently omniscient wish-fulfilment of the spectators, and the sublime mock-transcendence of the Restoration actor. It is a theatre of stance, gesture, and posturizing, a theatre which prides itself on the outlandishness, sometimes even the vulgarity of its effects. The degree of balance achieved lives only by its precariousness. It is obvious that Dryden enjoyed the risk of writing the finale to Tyrannick Love, and despite his recantation, would have done it over again.

Dryden's development of the mixed style is the determining factor in the creation of a close interdependence between audience and actors. By allowing a technique of plurality to

inform the text of his heroic plays, by tolerating excess because it paved the way for a multiplicity of tonal effects, Dryden was condoning the prerogative of language to explore conventions of meaning in a socially stimulating environment. His general 'festivity' of approach - his willingness to blend the passions, wit, the grotesque and bizarre - makes the heroic play an open-ended genre, capable of receiving and assimilating influences from diametrically opposed traditions. What Dr Johnson describes as the poet's delight in treading the 'brink of meaning' is really Dryden's refusal to limit the engaging plurality of the heroic form. Dr Johnson's words elaborate on the kinds of semantic no-man's-land which Dryden habitually frequents in his moments of heroic ambiguity:

He delighted to tread upon the brink
of meaning, where light and darkness
begin to mingle, to approach the
precipice of absurdity, and hover²⁵
over the abyss of unideal vacancy.

Johnson interprets this process of exploration from the strict Neoclassicism of the Augustan position (hence the characteristically Miltonic diction), in which Dryden's verbal extravagances in the plays reveal him as a 'daring Pilot in Extremity'. However, a twentieth-century approach, which refuses to accord fixed or coherent significance to meaning, would interpret Dryden's intuitive freedoms very differently. Peter Brook, for example, argues that:

²⁵ Johnson's Lives of the Poets, op.cit., p.194.

A word does not start as a word - it is an end product which begins as an impulse, stimulated by attitude and behaviour which dictates the need for expression. The process occurs inside the dramatist; it is repeated inside the actor. Both may only be conscious of the words, but both for the author and then for the actor the word is a small visible portion of a gigantic unseen formation.²⁶

While Dr Johnson's viewpoint exalts meaning as occupying a central position in the universe, drawing all things to it, (hence able to exert an absolute prerogative over such concepts as 'truth' or 'nature'), Brook sees meaning rather as an outward expansion or journeying towards a variety of significations, each a very small fraction of the total picture. Seen from Brook's perspective Dryden emerges as an astonishingly enlightened practitioner of the drama, admitting a plurality of epic and satiric voices in relationships which constantly juxtapose order with indecorum. This fundamental linguistic ambivalence is reflected in the dual significance of characters. Those Drydenian characters who attract us most are those whose volatility enables them to reject the comforts of an earthly materialism in which marriage, the Christian religion, and monarchy are prime values, and the absolutism of the 'word' - be it 'love', 'honour', 'vertue', or 'glory', with all the received ideas each suggests - is invoked to prop the quaking social order. Mock-visionaries such as Zempoalla, Lyndaraxa, Morat and Maximin, who recognise the hypocritical basis upon which society operates, pursue an even deeper materialism in the nirvanah of the gods or in the exile of

²⁶ P. Brook, The Empty Space, op.cit., p.15.

some neoclassical Hades. Their defiance encapsulates an imaginative principle which vindicates their egocentric claim to be destiny-forgers. The tensions set up by their malice and wit make Dryden's world richly human and richly comic, also a world in which the power of the 'word' is seen to take some perverse forms. These characters exert a festive impropriety which is irrepressible and which attracts to it all the best qualities in dramatic writing.

In the retrospective King Arthur (1692) the outgoing and restraining qualities of Dryden's imagination are embodied in the wizards or 'opera-makers', Osmond and Merlin. In Osmond's Baroque 'Prospect of Winter in Frozen Countries' (Act III,) and Merlin's prophetic vision of Britain's commercial future (Act V,) Dryden's fondness for heroic metamorphosis and apotheosis reaches its climax. Osmond's art, symbolizing the dark chaotic forces, reaches towards the grotesque and bizarre, seducing the virtuous (and blind) Emmeline with the blatant allegory of a rape, the powers of Cupid melting the freezing spells of the Cold Genius. By contrast, Merlin's art involves an equally Baroque balletic masque, replete with deities and rustic panegyric. Merlin selects the most appropriate scenes for an optimistic denouement, and is congratulated by Arthur;

Wisely you have, whate'er will please, revealed:
What would displease, as wisely have concealed.
(SS, VIII, 199)

Merlin's invocation to St George, with its appeal to all kingly and saintly virtues, moves us back into the myth of the Restoration with all its traditions of harmonious concord and an integrated humanity. Osmond's art, fascinating because

of its decadence, charts the failure of humanity to throw off its slavery to passion and self, and establishes the vitality of the demonic or dark side of the Restoration mythos. Both these aspects are present in Dryden's views on society. The heroic plays celebrate society as a charitable, even a redemptive environment, provided its laws and civilities are observed. But the plays also condemn society as barbaric, backward, aggressively materialistic and interpret it as the sparring-ground of faction and self-aggrandizement. Dryden rarely reconciles these views, even by dismissing the barbaric view as primitivism. What he puts forward is a reflective sequence of tableaux designed to indicate the complex nature of the relationship between private and public responsibility. Dryden takes the confident assumption of Restoration mythologizing, with its implicit Christian humanism and emphasis on 'order', and sees that it dramatically pleases; the piety of his sentimental denouements is unashamedly exemplary and unrealistic. On the other hand Dryden fully comprehends that there are more paths than one to delight; the bold, vicious and fanciful Dryden looks to the irreverent, parodic wit of his heroic 'boobies' to assert the redemptive qualities of art per se. In all his work there is a distinctive and stimulating tension between the formal necessities Dryden believed in almost as doctrine, and the aesthetic freedoms he practised naturally as a spontaneous creator of theatre. In this duality he is alone, and remains the pioneer of an art-form which could acknowledge its own potential vacuousness and yet still entertain for entertainment's

sake. Whether we like or dislike the heroic plays, the evidence remains that they were for a significant period of history good and effective theatre. As Dr Johnson wrote in his life of Dryden,

To judge rightly of an author we must transport ourselves to his time and examine what were the wants of his contemporaries and what were his means of supplying them.²⁷

Without a ready appreciation of Dryden's 'trial-and-error' experimentation, his innovative delight in the theatrical potential of incongruity and his prevailing habit of benevolent scepticism, one will never begin to experience a true imaginative participation in the work of his theatre or begin to see its importance for Dryden's contemporaries. Dryden's technique may falter and it is unquestionably faulty; but it is also uncommonly expressive of the questing spirit of the Restoration and of its exuberant desire for new styles, new forms and new life.

²⁷ Johnson's Lives of the Poets, op.cit., p.161.

List of Abbreviations used for Journals

<u>Anglia</u>	: Anglia: Zeitschrift für englische Philologie.
<u>CL</u>	: Comparative Literature.
<u>Costerus</u>	: Costerus.
<u>DUJ</u>	: Durham University Journal.
<u>EIC</u>	: Essays in Criticism.
<u>ELH</u>	: Journal of English Literary History.
<u>Essays and Studies</u>	: Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association.
<u>HLQ</u>	: Huntingdon Library Quarterly.
<u>Isis</u>	: Isis.
<u>JEGP</u>	: Journal of English and Germanic Philology.
<u>JHI</u>	: Journal of the History of Ideas.
<u>JWCI</u>	: Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institute.
<u>MLN</u>	: Modern Language Notes.
<u>MLQ</u>	: Modern Language Quarterly.
<u>MP</u>	: Modern Philology.
<u>MQ</u>	: Musical Quarterly.
<u>NQ</u>	: Notes and Queries.
<u>PLL</u>	: Papers on Language and Literature.
<u>PLPLS</u>	: Proceedings of the Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society.
<u>PMLA</u>	: Publications of the Modern Language Association of America.
<u>PQ</u>	: Philological Quarterly.
<u>Ren. and Mod. Stud.</u>	: Renaissance and Modern Studies.
<u>RES</u>	: Review of English Studies.
<u>Scrutiny</u>	: Scrutiny.
<u>SEL</u>	: Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900.
<u>SLI</u>	: Studies in the Literary Imagination.
<u>SP</u>	: Studies in Philology.
<u>SQ</u>	: Shakespeare Quarterly.
<u>SR</u>	: Sewanee Review.

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