

A STUDY OF JOHN DRYDEN'S
CONCEPTION OF THE POET

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BY
SANDRA LAURINE WILLIAMS, B.A.

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We hereby recommend that the thesis prepared under
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Committee:

Constance L. Beach

Chairman

Audrey Nell Wiley

Accepted:

James Newcomer
Dean of Graduate Studies

AG 5 '65

PREFACE

When I first began my study of John Dryden, I could not realize the variety of his interests. This variety was represented in poetry, plays, operas, and prose. However, the more I began to read material both by and about him, the more I began to appreciate his contribution to each of these genres, particularly to literary criticism. His ability to write as a representative of the seventeenth century at the same time made him a literary pioneer of trends of future centuries.

The purpose of this study is to present a picture of the poet as conceived by John Dryden. This picture, or conception, includes a description of the poet as presented by Dryden, the responsibilities of the poet to his society and to his art, the wit of the poet as described and defined by Dryden, and, finally, Dryden's vogue and importance as a poet.

I am grateful to Dr. Autrey Nell Wiley, without whose aid this study of the poet would not have been possible. I extend especially my appreciation to Dr. Constance Beach, who kindly and patiently advised me, to Dr. Gladys Maddocks, who, as a member of my examination committee,

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I. THE POET DESCRIBED

John Dryden has been a "poets' poet" for over two hundred years. During those years his considerable influence has reached such literary figures as Pope, Dr. Johnson, the Romantic poets--especially, Byron, Keats, and Coleridge, and two contemporary poets, Mark Van Doren and T. S. Eliot. The two representatives of the modern movement which has renewed interest in Dryden, Van Doren and Eliot, have spoken and written about Dryden as a poet, a critic, and a dramatist.

As a matter of fact, Eliot's book about John Dryden is divided into these three areas of Dryden's genius: his genius as a poet, as a critic, and as a dramatist. Eliot praised Dryden for his ability to see in seventeenth-century poetry the qualities of timelessness, the qualities that would exist and always be important in poetry of any age, and his ability to discard the qualities that were not worthy of development. He called him in his role of critic the "defender of sanity,"¹ the writer who preached simplicity of style, of subject matter, and of language, in a period that needed simplification. Eliot, the poet, studied Dryden's

¹ T. S. Eliot, John Dryden: The Poet, The Dramatist, The Critic (New York: Terence & Elsa Holiday, 1932), p. 67.

critical notes because in these notes the poet Dryden passed on to the poet Eliot a commentary upon what he believed the poet's style should be.

Van Doren called Dryden a "great writer."² In his introduction to the critical book, John Dryden: A Study of His Poetry, he said that Dryden's prose was "the best English prose,"³ and he applauded Dryden's sense of harmony in the sound of poetry, his ear for language and music that was sensitive to any harshness or discordant sounds.

Eliot said the dramatic work of John Dryden was an integral part of his work because it strengthened his verse and enabled him to develop a worthy critical style.⁴ Van Doren also remarked on the value of the dramatic poetry to Dryden in his growth as a poet. "The dramas which Dryden wrote in verse," said Van Doren, "were of the first importance in his metrical development; for it was in them that he became fully aware of the energy which is latent in the heroic couplet, and it was in them that he cut the rhythmical pattern which was to serve him during the remainder of his career."⁵

² Mark Van Doren, John Dryden: A Study of His Poetry (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Howe, 1920), p. viii.

³ Ibid., p. x.

⁴ Eliot, p. 45.

⁵ Van Doren, p. 85.

Thus, in three specifically related areas, Dryden proved himself a master to poets of his own time and in generations following his; for, according to poets Van Doren and Eliot, Dryden passed along poetic theories of enduring value to poetry itself. In the Restoration, which was characterized by an interest in literary arts and theories, Dryden developed his image of the poet--the poet and his qualifications--in numerous prefaces, a major portion of his prose work. The principles that he insisted upon may be studied in his own work and in the background of his age.

Dryden lived in an age that was marked by intellectual development and mass confusion. When Charles II was brought back from exile in France and his monarchy was restored, there were outbursts of joy and enthusiasm from the leading figures of England. Writers noted the parallel of this occasion with the return of Augustus to the Roman throne in 31 B.C., and they noted still other parallels of the Rome of long ago and the England of 1660. Their neo-classical attitude was part of the prevalent interest in the "Roman classics, thought, and way of life." ⁶ From France, Charles had imported the Continental love of "wit, gallantry, elegance, and artistic deftness." ⁷ French elegance, French

⁶ A Literary History of England, ed. Albert C. Baugh (New York & London: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1948), p. 699. Thenceforth this will be referred to as Baugh.

⁷ Ibid., p. 700.

classicism, interest in Latin and Greek literature, interest in science--such social and intellectual pursuits as these impressed the Restoration leaders, who were aware of the intellectual growth and who watched it with keen interest. Old practices were dying slow and rebellious deaths while new practices were demanding their proper due. The scientific movement, a major new trend that was sweeping England, fell into three main trends--scepticism, experimentalism and observation, and the inductive method of reasoning:

The scientific movement comprised a few definite main principles: the demand for a sceptical mind, freed from all preconceptions, and maintaining a critical attitude toward all ideas presented to it; observation and experimentation were insisted upon as the only sufficient data; the inductive method of reasoning was to be employed on these data.⁸

The establishment in 1662 of the Royal Society advanced the cause of the new science; the most important work was being done by men in this organization. It gathered together scientific groups that had been meeting previously at Oxford or at other universities. Its achievements lay in the fields of mathematics, chemistry, and astronomy. The Society was composed of a group of men who were religious and who did not intend to disprove, or to discredit, orthodox religious beliefs.⁹ Experimentation was the basic principle of the

⁸ Richard Foster Jones, "Science and Criticism in the Neo-classical Age of English Literature," The Seventeenth Century, ed. Richard Foster Jones et al. (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1951), p. 42.

⁹ Baugh, p. 701.

Royal Society; no statement was approved until proper evidence was observed. The members believed in openmindedness, but they never disparaged religion. They spent a great deal of thought and time on unifying science and religion or, at least, keeping the two compatible.

The establishment of the Royal Society and the progress made therein alerted the men of letters to the admirable qualities which science possessed, qualities that they hoped to transmit successfully to writing. Thus, many literary men were inducted into the Society with the hope that a branch for the refinement of language might be started, following the example of the French Academy. Like the French Academy, this branch would improve the language and fix standards by which it would become more uniform. In 1664 a committee was appointed to work on the improvement of language; included in its membership were Dryden, Evelyn, Waller, and Sprat. Also attending the meeting were Cowley and George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham.¹⁰ Although the committee became disorganized because of interruptions caused by the death of Cowley and the plague of 1665 and finally disbanded, Bishop Sprat summarized the ideals agreed upon by the committee in his History of the Royal Society (1667):

They (the Society) have therefore been most rigorous in putting in execution the only Remedy that can be found for this extravagance, and that

¹⁰ Quoted in Baugh, p. 701.

has been a constant Resolution to reject all amplifications, digressions, and swellings of style; to return back to the primitive purity and shortness, when men deliver'd so many things almost in an equal number of words. They have exacted from all their members a close, naked, natural way of speaking, positive expressions, clear senses, a native easiness, bringing all things as near the Mathematical plainness as they can, and preferring the language of Artisans, Countrymen, and Merchants, before that of Wits or Scholars. ¹¹

These principles, combining the necessary plainness of scientific discourse and the elegance of French drawingroom conversation, constituted a revolt, a change from the florid and magnificent in discourse to a "clear and naked style, approaching mathematical plainness." ¹² Under the influence of the new science, a completely new attitude was developed in every branch of intellectual activity; the new attitude stressed the "useful and the plain" rather than "the ornate, the rich, the complex." ¹³ And this search for the simple and useful was extending as far afield as religion. The controversies between the Catholics and the Protestants, the Anglicans and the Puritans, the Quakers and the Catholics, and the reason of the Deists against everybody else did not contribute to peace, and many pathetically bewildered thinkers pleaded for some sort of order in religion. Also in politics battles were raging. The disagreements between legislature and monarchy became more frequent and more heated as the years passed.

¹¹ Baugh, p. 702.

¹² Martin S. Day (ed.), History of English Literature 1660-1837 (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1963), p. 9.

¹³ Baugh, p. 702.

All the activity in science brought a new vernacular to the lips of the upper classes, particularly to the gentlemen and the men of letters, and Dryden, ever interested in language, took note. As a member of the Royal Society and the committee for the improvement of language, he was aware of the developments of the age; he learned the scientific vernacular easily enough and adapted it to his work. "He was not a scientist. Yet he picked up the new language, and adopted the new airs; he established what Macaulay named the 'scientific vocabulary' in verse." ¹⁴ The literary movement was also affected by the neo-classical attitude, which preached imitation of nature and the moral purpose of art, ¹⁵ two qualities which Dryden emphasized in his discussions of the poet. Literary criticism was influenced by neo-classic dogma, with Aristotle, Horace, Cicero, and Quintilian setting the pattern for traditionalism and rationalism. ¹⁶ By following in the footsteps of their classical forbears, seventeenth-century critics employed methods either analytical or rhetorical. While the analytical method was used to lay down principles for the structure of certain types of poetry and the parts therein, the rhetorical method delved into the "creative processes and methods of affecting the mind of a reader." ¹⁷ From the classical tradition came three terms--invention, or the finding of material; disposition, or the arrangement of

¹⁴ Van Doren, p. 5.

¹⁵ Jones, p. 44.

¹⁶ Baugh, p. 710.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 711.

material; and eloquence, or the embodying of matter in fit style. The first term, invention, is important to us because it was a term used frequently by Dryden. To Dryden and to most English critics, the term was associated with the "creative imagination" of the poet. As far as criticism was concerned, the age was one that admired simplicity, reason, and propriety. ¹⁸

But there were other major principles that were widely accepted by Restoration critics and that affected Dryden's critical writing and his poetry. Horace had declared that poetry was meant to please, although it was better if pleasure and moral instruction were combined. Dryden held this opinion, although he conceded that pleasure came first. The accepted method of imitation was derived from Aristotle, who defined imitation or mimesis as the representation of the actions of men. The poet imitated "by means of a language alone, and that either in prose or verse." In his Poetics Aristotle said that imitation was one of man's earliest instincts, as it was by imitation that man learned. This imitation, which taught and which gave pleasure, united with an instinctive harmony and rhythm, were the two inherent qualities stemming from man's poetic nature. ¹⁹ In the

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Aristotle's Poetics, trans. S. H. Butcher (New York: Hill and Wang, 1961), pp. 50-55. Thenceforth this edition will be referred to as Butcher.

thinking of the Restoration critics, imitation referred to action--both the action itself and the principle of the action. Perhaps the theory of imitation was related to the idea of moral instruction, for much of the mimesis gave idealistic pictures of how men ought to act rather than realistic pictures of what they were. ²⁰

That these developments of the time influenced Dryden is evident in his prose writing. He said, in the Defence of an Essay on Dramatic Poesy (1668), "Is it not evident, in these last hundred years (when the study of philosophy has been the business of all the Virtuosi in Christendom) that almost a new Nature has been revealed to us?--that more errors of the school have been detected, more useful experiments in philosophy have been made, more noble secrets in optics, medicine, anatomy, astronomy, discovered, than in all those credulous and doting ages from Aristotle to us?" ²¹ Clearly Dryden had been keeping up with the discoveries and, like the rest of England, was in turn exhilarated, awed, and proud of his countrymen's achievements. After all, he was on a committee that hoped for progress in language, and even when the committee broke up, he individually continued his mission. He hoped un-

²⁰ Baugh, p. 712.

²¹ The Essays of John Dryden, ed. W. P. Ker (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926), I, 36-37. Thenceforth this will be referred to as Ker.

ceasingly that "if natural causes be more known now than in the time of Aristotle, because more studied, it follows that poesy and other arts may, with the same pains, arrive still nearer to perfection" (Defence of an Essay on Dramatic Poesy).²² In the Discourse of Satire (1693), twenty-five years after his Defence, he remarked that "something new in philosophy and the mechanics is discovered almost every year; and the science of former ages is improved by the succeeding."²³ The questioning attitude encouraged by the scientists of the Royal Society, that attitude often bordering on scepticism, was mentioned by Dryden in his Defence of the Epilogue (1672). His reference had a wistful, sad air as though he regretted the attitude that called for the proof of a statement, although the sceptical attitude must have been part of his makeup. He said, "For we live in an age so sceptical, that as it determines little, so it takes nothing from antiquity on trust."²⁴ With these statements Dryden portrayed his awareness of the fast-moving, ever-changing developments of the Restoration Age. Yet in his singular, critical fashion, he foreshadowed the principles of modern literature; and in his devotion to

²² Ibid., p. 44.

²³ Ibid., II, 34.

²⁴ Ibid., I, 163.

and agreement with the classicists, particularly the Roman, he represented the attitudes of classical times. Thus, Dryden was a man of the past, a man of his own time, and a man of the future.

An examination of Dryden's life also reveals the influence of his age upon him as a writer and as a critic. Like all other young gentlemen of the upper class in England, he had a strict grammar school and university education, with stiff drill in the classics and in science. He received his "first learning" ²⁵ at Tichmarsh and entered Westminster School, possibly in 1644. ²⁶ Although we know very little about his particular experiences at Westminster, we are able to glean from information about the grammar school curriculum of the Restoration a reasonably accurate picture of study at Westminster. The emphasis on Latin was a Restoration characteristic, for Latin was considered by the elite the noblest language, and an intense indoctrination in the Latin classics, particularly Virgil, was strictly adhered to. The students kept notebooks in which they collected Latin phrases, ²⁷ and

²⁵ Dictionary of National Biography (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1888), XV, 64.

²⁶ James M. Osborn, Some Biographical Facts and Problems Concerning Dryden (New York: Columbia University Press, 1940), pp. 4-6.

²⁷ Van Doren, p. 5.

they were encouraged to embellish their themes with the Latin terminology that they had learned. At Westminster Dryden's appreciation of the classics, an appreciation which he always urged on young poets, commenced; and at this early stage in his training such Latin characteristics as clarity and strength (which were to become notable qualities of his own work) appealed to his mind.²⁸ His Dedication of Troilus and Cressida, 1679, indicates that Dryden continued to be enchanted with the order and the precision of the linguistic structure of Latin:

I am often put to a stand in considering whether what I write be the idiom of the tongue, or false grammar, and nonsense couched beneath that specious name of Anglicism; and have no other way to clear my doubts, but by translating my English into Latin, and thereby trying what sense the words will bear in a more stable language.²⁹

Through his study and imitation of the ancients (a rule for beginning poets to remember and a thought which takes us back to Aristotle), Dryden learned stylistic and material qualities from Virgil, Persius, Lucretius, Ovid, Homer, and Theocritus, among others. "He had learned from Virgil that in sudden fright the knees tremble and the breath deserts the frame. He had learned from Lucretius the terminology of physical love."³⁰ Years later

²⁸ Osborn, p. 6.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 10.

he wrote of his respect for and gratitude to Sir Richard Busby, the most famous schoolmaster of his time. An incredible number of outstanding men were educated at Westminster during Busby's years there. Since the school stressed Latin, Busby stressed Latin, although he had written a Greek grammar, and Westminster was famous for its Greek studies.³¹ In his translation of Persius, which was published in 1693, Dryden dedicated the Fifth Satire to Busby, the man "to whom I am not only obliged myself for the best part of my own education, and that of my two sons, but have also received from the first and truest taste of Persius."³²

If at Westminster Dryden learned the Latin style that he preached to aspiring poets, at Trinity College, which he entered in 1650, he acquired broader tastes and more liberal thought concerning divergent matters. It was during his residence at Cambridge that he "proceeded to widen his acquaintances with the Latin poets, to store his mind with the old scholastic forms of speculation and discourse to become aware of new trends and processes, to dabble in natural science, to read Descartes and Hobbes."³³ At this time the Puritans were in control, and the whole of England was excited about the progress being made in

³¹ Van Doren, p. 5.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., p. 8.

science and philosophy. Of course, one would find the hub of such intellectual scurrying in an institution of higher learning; therefore Dryden was surrounded by the new philosophies and the new science. His curious, analytical mind probably became engrossed with the new thinking, for we know that he was by nature a student and a reader. A fellow student at Cambridge, Dr. Crichton, declared that Dryden had read and apparently digested all the Latin and Greek poets; but, he later remarked, that Dryden was too restless for college life and was eager to begin his career in London. ³⁴

In London, Dryden must have continued studying, perfecting, and examining the craft which he had adopted as his life work. He began to turn to the works of the established poets for inspiration and imitation. He admired Cowley, "The darling of my youth." ³⁵ Cowley was a man of the age, a man interested in everything. He dabbled in medicine, botany, philosophy; he delighted in verse and used it as an instrument for transmitting his varied interests. Dryden avidly copied his style.

Waller and Denham were models before Dryden was reckoned as a poet, or even reckoned at all. Waller possessed the enviable talent of writing with ease, and Den-

³⁴ Ibid., p. 17.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 20.

ham possessed a certain dignity, a loftiness of expression, which Dryden always admired. Waller's ease was an "ease of mind as well as of meter. He was cool and gracious at the same time." ³⁶ Dryden sought to acquire from Denham that "ratiocinative dignity which is secured by quiet rhetorical questions, restful aphorisms, and meditative enjambement." ³⁷ He listened to the schools of Hobbes and Davenant, who preached "adequacy" and "propriety" and who presented new philosophical and poetic laws. Davenant, whose concern lay in the field of the poet, stressed the poet's propriety of language used in characterization and in presentation; that which was adequate was enough, and too much was too much. ³⁸ Hobbes introduced a new philosophy which was a rival to the beliefs of the Royal Society. He dissected the imagination, a fact which was of great interest to Dryden: "Time and Education begets Experience, Experience begets Memory; Memory begets Judgment and Fancy." ³⁹

Even after he became the established man of letters, the Poet Laureate of England, Dryden was ever the student, a qualification which he encouraged in young poets. "Dryden had a generous conception of the learning

³⁶ Ibid., p. 21.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 23.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 24.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 25.

necessary to a poet and his intellectual interests, thus closely integrated to his calling." ⁴⁰ He was an avid reader, and he sought all information. In his Life of Plutarch, 1683, he remarked that he "never read anything but for pleasure." He was continuously perfecting his art, improving his work, never deeming anything of his worthy enough to stand untouched. His desire was to be remembered as a man who forever studied, who constantly read, drilled, and polished.

With his statements about the poet and the qualifications which a poet needs, Dryden made an important contribution to the literary criticism of the seventeenth century and of today, for that matter. He stressed many qualities which are still sought after, and he set many principles which were new in the history of literary criticism. Other critics have considered him the first critic, the father of practical literary criticism.

By looking at the poet through the eyes of John Dryden, we may view the various pictures of the poet that Dryden sketched. In several instances, he saw the poet as a builder, once with a blueprint of what he wanted to build, and once using his judgment as a builder of fine, reasonable work. In the first illustration, the reference being

⁴⁰ Louis I. Bredvold, The Intellectual Milieu of John Dryden (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1934), pp. 50-51.

found in Dryden's Preface to The Fables (1700), he stated that "'Tis with a Poet, as with a man who designs to build, and is very exact, as he supposes, in casting up the cost beforehand; but, generally speaking, he is mistaken in his account, and reckons short of the expense he first intended. He alters his mind as the work proceeds and will have this or that convenience more, of which he had not thought when he began." ⁴¹ Although Dryden stressed his opinion that it is important for the poet to have goals in his work, he granted that the poet changed his mind before the work was finished. Yet if the poet exhibited strong judgment, he would be able to stay on the good side of reason and emerge with his goals intact. It is the "employment of the judgment . . . as a master-builder," ⁴² which determines whether the work follows the pattern (Preface to Secret Love, 1667). This pattern, model, or play that Dryden mentioned refers to the Restoration theories of imitation.

The idea of the poet as imitator, or actually of man as imitator, goes back to Aristotle's Poetics, as we have already seen. His theory was that imitation is an instinct in all men and that it is by this imitation that

⁴¹ Ker, II, 246.

⁴² The Works of John Dryden, ed. Sir Walter Scott and George Saintsbury (Edinburgh, 1883), II, 418. Thenceforth this edition will be referred to as Scott-Saintsbury.

man learns. The extension of imitation into art--painting, music, and literature--was defined by Aristotle as the representation of man's actions. The seventeenth century literary man, who was reading Aristotle among other classicists, adopted this theory of mimesis and it became a popular goal. Dryden stated that "to imitate well is a poet's work" (Defence of an Essay of Dramatic Poesy, 1668). ⁴³ He also utilized imitation and stated that he accepted Aristotle's theory that the hero ought to be drawn better than he actually is, rather than portrayed realistically (A Parallel of Poetry and Painting, 1695). ⁴⁴

The foregoing suggestion of "drawing" the characters introduces Dryden's parallel of the poet to an artist. As an artist portrayed his model in a manner more flattering than realistic, also the poet portrayed his model in an idealistic manner, reaching above reality. In his essay A Parallel of Poetry and Painting, Dryden stated that poetry was like painting in that both were "so far mathematical as to have likeness and proportion." Dryden introduced his parallel by quoting the words of the artist Phil-

⁴³ Ker, I, 113.

⁴⁴ Ker, II, 146.

ostratus, who declared that "the art of painting has a wonderful affinity with that of poetry; and that there is betwixt them a certain common imagination. For as the poets introduce the gods and heroes, and all those things which are either majestical, honest, or delightful, in like manner the painters, by the virtue of their outlines, colours, lights, and shadows, represent the same things and persons in their pictures." ⁴⁵ From this introduction, Dryden listed the principal parts of painting and poetry, the first of which was invention, "the particular gift of Heaven." ⁴⁶ He defined the gift of invention as the ability "to put all things in a beautiful order and harmony, that the whole may be of a piece." ⁴⁷ The composition of the picture or poem was to be kept natural and proper without the obstruction of "trifling ornament" in painting or "tedious and unnecessary descriptions" in poetry. ⁴⁸ The poet and painter used skillful characterization in the placing of figures in their artistry. Principal figures occupied prime spots while lesser characters were placed in distant positions. And the skill of expression in a poem was compared to the coloring in a painting. "The colours well chosen in their proper places,

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 124.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 138.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 139.

together with the lights and shadows which belong to them, lighten the design, and make it pleasing to the eye. The words, the expressions, the tropes and figures, the versification, and all the other elegancies of sound, as cadences, turns of words upon the thought and many other things, which are all parts of expression, perform exactly the same office both in dramatic and epic poetry." ⁴⁹ As for subject matter, Dryden expressed his belief in the idealistic presentation of the good and the beautiful and not of the bad or filthy in both mediums of art. Thus, while a painter's tools were paints and brushes, the poet's tools were pens and ink; yet many of their ultimate goals were identical.

Elsewhere the poet was compared with a gunsmith or a watchmaker, both skilled craftsmen; it was the skill of these craftsmen which made their handiwork valuable, and, similarly, it was a poet's skill which made his work worthwhile. Dryden stated, "The employment of a poet is like that of a curious gunsmith or watchmaker; the iron or silver is not his own, but they are the least part of that which gives the value: the price lies wholly in the workmanship" (Preface to The Fables, 1700). ⁵⁰

From these parallels and images we gain an insight into Dryden's aspiration and his goals as a poet. The images

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 147.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 246.

of the poet as a builder, an imitator, an artist, and a skilled craftsman exemplify both the beauty and the imagination that distinguish Dryden's prose and Dryden's character as an individual poet. Through him we become acquainted with the poetic ideals of the Restoration Period and his relation to them. Unlike the neo-classical critics who went completely by the rules, ignoring the qualities of a poem that was written counter to rule, Dryden showed perception and sensitivity to poetry of merit. He also had the ability to see immediately the point or problem of a work. These two qualities made him the first great modern critic.

II. THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE POET

In most of his prose work, Dryden discussed, mentioned, or hinted at the function of the poet in the world. The responsibilities that he talked about are many and varied, but they can be organized into two main classifications, responsibility to society and responsibility to art.

The belief that the poet has a responsibility to society has a long tradition. Plato assigned to the poet the task of speaking for the gods; the poet was a mediator between the gods and man, as he said in his Ion: "Therefore God takes the mind out of the poets, and uses them as his servants, and so also those who chant oracles, and divine seers; because he wishes us to know that not those we hear, who have no mind in them, are those who say such precious things, but God himself is the speaker, and through them he shows his meaning to us." ¹ In The Republic, Plato set forth the responsibilities of the poet in the perfect society. The poet should imitate "men who are brave and temperate, pious, free and all things of that sort." ² For, Plato continued, "imitations settle into habits and

¹ Plato, Great Dialogues of Plato, trans. W. K. D. Rouse (New York: Mentor Books, 1956), p. 19.

² Ibid., p. 193.

become nature if they are continued from early youth in body and voice and mind." ³ Dryden examined this same problem, but he called it "instructions of morality." ⁴

Aristotle's theory of imitation, or mimesis, discussed in Chapter I, referred not to particular events or characters, but to universalities gained through the observation of real life. According to Aristotle in his Poetics, Part IV, people enjoyed observing drama, as well as all art, because there is pleasure in seeing an imitation of life which, in reality, would be painful. "The instinct of imitation is implanted in man from childhood, one difference between him and other animals being that he is the most imitative of living creatures, and through imitation learns his earliest lessons; and no less universal is the pleasure felt in things imitated . . . Objects which in themselves we view with pain, we delight to contemplate when reproduced with minute fidelity." ⁵ It was also Aristotle's theory that people learned something by observing art, and that learning gave pleasure: "to learn gives the liveliest pleasure, not only to philosophers, but to men in general." ⁶ Aristotle stated the poetic responsibility of pleasing the audience which Horace repeated.

³ Ibid., p. 194.

⁴ The Critical and Miscellaneous Prose Works of John Dryden, ed. Edmund Malone (London: H. Baldwin & Son, 1800), I, Pt. 2, 347. Thenceforth this edition will be referred to as Malone.

⁵ Butcher, p. 55.

⁶ Ibid.

Like Plato and Aristotle, Dryden considered the social responsibilities of the poet. As poet laureate, he was certainly in a position to recognize such responsibilities and to present them to prospective poets. As the leading poet and the poet most scrutinized, he felt keenly the responsibility placed on him to present his very best work for society's appraisal. In order to prepare himself to fulfill his obligation, he studied languages, read the classics and the established poets, and revised many of his plays and works. In the Dedication of The Spanish Friar (1681), he made this statement: "I have both so just a diffidence of myself and so great a reverence for my audience; that I dare venture nothing without a strict examination; and am as much ashamed to put a loose indigested play upon the publick, as I should be to offer brass money in a payment." ⁷

The poet had a responsibility, called by Dryden the "ancient right of poetry," ⁸ to praise and transmit public heroes to posterity and to record memorable or remarkable events. In the Dedication of All for Love (1678), he said that great men should "cherish the Chroniclers of their actions . . . for such records are their undoubted titles to the love and reverence of afterages." ⁹ Thoughtfully, he

⁷ Malone, II, 55.

⁸ Ibid., p. 47.

⁹ Ibid., pp. 2-3.

added that the poet and the hero had something in common, for both participated in the heroic act. "There is something of a tie in nature betwixt those who are born for worthy actions, and those who can transmit them to posterity and though ours be much the inferior part, it comes at least within the verge of alliance." ¹⁰ Dryden exemplified this theory in his own poetic life, for two-thirds of his poetry consists of occasional poems, or poems celebrating famous persons. His very first poem, written when he was still at Westminster in 1649, was a memorial to the young Henry, Lord Hastings, who died of smallpox at the age of nineteen. Other poems celebrating public figures are the following: "Heroique Stanzas to the Glorious Memory of Cromwell" (1659), a memorial poem written at Cromwell's death in September, 1658, when Dryden was twenty-eight years old and coming into his own in poetry; his poem Astraea Redux (1660), written on the occasion of the restoration of Charles II to the throne; "To His Sacred Majesty" (1661), written for the coronation of Charles II; "To My Lord Chancellor" (1662), a tribute to Edward Hyde, created Lord Clarendon at the coronation; Threnodia Augustalis (1685), a tribute to Charles II at his death, and praise of James as the next King of England. His most successful occasional poem, one which he called historical in scope, was Annus

¹⁰ Ibid.

Mirabilis (1666). This poem recounted the heroisms of James, the Royal Admiral, Prince Rupert, and Prince Albemarle in the sea victory of the Dutch War. Also described in the poem was the Great Fire, which swept London for nearly a week. Dryden lauded Charles for his actions during the crisis and praised The Town itself for its endurance. Dryden stated in the Dedication of Troilus and Cressida (1678-79) that it was the poet's right to "point out and prophecy the man who was born for no less an undertaking, and whom posterity shall bless for its accomplishment."¹¹ As poet laureate, it was part of his duty to publicize the political and social figures to the contemporary audience and to future audiences as well.

While thus instructing his readers, the poet had also to accept the responsibility to please or entertain. Dryden discussed this responsibility in many of his prose works, particularly the prefaces to his plays. In fact, for him the responsibility to please carried with it a great deal of weight, and Dryden appeared to worry considerably about the problems involved in pleasing the contemporary audience. He insisted that a poet avoid going to extremes in attempting to please the many. In the Preface to The Husband His Own Cuckold (1695), the play written by his son,

¹¹

Ibid., p. 47.

he was scornful of the fact that some bad plays pleased audiences, and he fretted over the possibility that the success of poor plays could encourage his son to "endeavor to please by writing worse, and by accommodating himself to the wretched capacity and liking of the audience." Dryden added firmly that a poet had to "live by the many; but a good poet will make it his business to please the few." ¹² His denunciations of the common dramatic taste which reduced "delight" or "pleasure" to the level of degradation were scathing and bitter. Seemingly he was at war with the public. He said in his Defence of the Essay on Dramatic Poesy (1668) that "to write unnatural things, is the most probable way of pleasing them, who understand not nature; and a true poet often misses of applause, because he cannot debase himself to write so ill as to please his audience." ¹³

We can only wonder whether Dryden was not denounce himself, too, for he was accused of catering to the whims of his audience to the exclusion of his art. A man so conscientious and sensitive as Dryden could not keep from being aware of inferior work. Often he appeared to be on the defensive concerning his plays. In the Dedication of Love Triumphant (1694), for instance, he declared that "we love variety more than any other nation; and so long as

¹² Scott-Saintsbury, XV (1892), 411.

¹³ Malone, I, Pt. 2, 178.

the audience will not be pleased without it, the poet is obliged to humour them. On condition they were cured of this publick vice, I could be content to change my method, and gladly give them a more reasonable pleasure." ¹⁴ And in the Defence of the Essay on Dramatic Poesy (1668), he said that the poet's goal was to please his audience; and if his audience desired low comedy, then the poet must present comedies. "To please the people ought to be the poet's aim, because plays are made for their delight; but it does not follow that they are always pleased with good plays, or that the plays which please them are always good. The humor of the people is now for comedy; therefore, in hope to please them, I write comedies." ¹⁵ Thus, the poet wished to entertain his audience, but he was to use compunction in doing so. Often the poet was forced to make a choice between fame and his art.

In the Conquest of Granada (1672), Dryden submitted this quotation by Rapin: "The chief aim of the poet is to please; for his immediate reputation depends on it. The great end of the poet is to instruct, which is performed by making pleasure the vehicle of that instruction." ¹⁶ In his attempt to instruct, the poet needed to excite pleasure through his work, for a combination of pleasure and instruc-

¹⁴ Ibid., II, 240.

¹⁵ Ibid., I, Pt. 2, 169.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 218.

tion was the surest way of keeping an audience. In his essay On the Origin and Progress of Satire (1693), Dryden said that "pleasure is one of the chief aims of poetry, but that it is only a means of compassing the only end, which is instruction . . . but . . . without the means of pleasure the instruction is but a bare and dry philosophy: a crude preparation of morals." ¹⁷

One may surmise that a poet had to acknowledge the inevitable fact that an audience or a reader wanted to be entertained; therefore any moralizing had to be subtly presented and couched in humor or in beauty or in whatever else the poet had at hand. Dryden meant for the poet to give moral instruction. He said in the Dedication of The Conquest of Granada (1672) that "that kind of poesy which excites to virtue the greatest men, is of greatest use to human kind." ¹⁸ In the essay On the Origin and Progress of Satire (1693), he stated that "a poet is bound to give his reader some one precept of moral virtue, and to caution him against some one particular vice or folly." ¹⁹

The poet's responsibility to give moral instruction extended to all poetic endeavors. In satire the poet

¹⁷ Ibid., III, 220.

¹⁸ Ibid., I, Pt. 2, 224.

¹⁹ Ibid., II, 205.

was to use his pointed humor to criticize weaknesses.

"It is an action of virtue to make examples of vicious men. They may and ought to be upbraided with their crimes and follies," ²⁰ Dryden asserted. In tragedy, a poet is to use the characters as examples of the vices of sin. In the Preface to The Mock Astrologer (1671), he said that "tragedy fulfills one great part of its institution; which is by example to instruct." ²¹ The downfall of a tragic hero is to be used as a pattern for the audience to behold and avoid. "To raise, and afterwards to calm the passions--to purge the soul from pride, by the examples of human miseries, which befall the greatest" (Dedication of the Aeneis, 1697) ²² is the effect desired by the poet. In comedy the writer is to ridicule humorously the follies and weaknesses of man. The audience is "moved to laugh by the representation of deformity; and the shame of that laughter teaches us to amend what is ridiculous in our manner" (Preface to The Mock Astrologer, 1671). ²³ All poetic works, in short, should, without sacrificing delight, instruct men or regulate the manners of men.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 172.

²¹ Malone, II, 200.

²² Ker, II, 154.

²³ Malone, I, Pt. 2, 201.

According to Dryden, one of the main areas of social responsibility was satire. Several of his written critical rebukes were in the form of satire, particularly Absalom and Achitophel and The Hind and the Panther. He appreciated the subtlety and the grace of satire and admired such skill as was necessary to employ artful satire. In defining this field of writing, Dryden reverted to his beloved classicists for aid. In his Discourse Concerning the Original and Progress of Satire (1693), he relied on Heinsius' definition: "Satire is a kind of poetry, without a series of action, invented for the purging of our minds; in which human vices, ignorance, and errors, and all things besides, which are produced from them . . . are severely reprehended; partly dramatically, partly simply, and sometimes in both kinds . . . but, for the most part, figuratively, and occultly; consisting in a low, familiar way, chiefly in a sharp and pungent manner of speech; but partly, also, in a facetious and civil way of jesting; by which either hatred, or laughter, or indignation is moved." ²⁴ Hence, we may visualize two goals materializing from this definition. The one end is to "purge the passions" ²⁵ and the other end, what Dryden called "the true

²⁴ Ker, II, 54.

²⁵ Ibid.

end," is the "amendment of vices by correction" (Preface to Absalom and Achitophel, 1681). ²⁶

In his Discourse Concerning the Original and Progress of Satire (1693), Dryden presented the origin of the term satire and its meaning. He said that satire was derived from the Roman word satura, "which signifies full and abundant, and full also of variety, in which nothing is wanting to its due perfection." ²⁷ He then proceeded to give the history of satire, placing its origin in the hands of the Romans. ²⁸ However, he admitted that the Greeks had satirical poetry, although it differed from the satire of the Romans. He pointed out that the Romans were using farces, "which were the rudiments of their poetry," ²⁹ before they began communicating with the Greeks. Having established that satire began with the Romans and that the Greeks did not influence their rivals, Dryden proceeded, in his Discourse, to state that the first use of satire was in "extemporary reproaches; the next was farce, which was brought from Tuscany; to that succeeded the plays of Andronicus, from the Old Comedy of the Grecians; and out of all these sprung two several branches of new Roman satire, like different scions from the same root." ³⁰

²⁶ Scott-Saintsbury, IX (1884), 214.

²⁷ Ker, II, 54.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 53.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 45.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 59.

In describing the constitution of a satire, Dryden praised Persius for being "the first who has discovered to us this important secret, in the designing of a perfect satire" (A Discourse Concerning the Original and Progress of Satire).³¹ The principles are pertinent to many forms of writing. He said that "it [satire] ought only to treat of one subject; to be confined to one particular theme; or at least, to one principally. If other vices occur in the management of the chief, they should only be transiently lashed, and not be insisted on, so as to make the design double."³² That unity of subject was essential for clarity and emphasis; and if any variety was used, it needed to be subordinate and related to the chief subject. This one subject could be illustrated with examples or precepts; yet the poet had to apply such variety to the principal subject. Also, Persius mentioned the poet's duty to treat one vice or folly. Similar to the chief subject, the one vice was to be the principal thought; and any other vice or sin was to be subordinate to it. The same theory was true of virtue. Dryden said in his Discourse on Satire, "Under this unity of theme, or subject, is comprehended another rule . . . The poet is bound . . . to give his reader some one precept of moral virtue, and to caution him against some one partic-

³¹ Ibid., p. 102.

³² Ibid.

ular vice or folly. Other virtues, subordinate to the first, may be recommended under that chief head; and other vices or follies may be scourged." ³³

This duty of satire, which was to praise virtue and to blame sin and which was one of the two ends of satire as presented by Heinsius, was the duty to society that Dryden maintained in all forms of writing. He recommended purity in poetry, in drama, in opera, and in prose. The statements that he made about moral instruction in satire could be made--and generally speaking, were made--in these other areas. He said, "In general, all virtues are everywhere to be praised and recommended to practice; and all vices to be reprehended, and made either odious or ridiculous; or else there is a fundamental error in the whole design" (Discourse on the Original and Progress of Satire). ³⁴ Unlike the other areas of writing to which Dryden also applied this theory, satire was to attack some particular person or type of person. Dryden preferred the latter direction, for he was hesitant about aiming personal lampoon at a man. He called the lampoon, that type of personal satire which England was adapting, a "dangerous sort of weapon, and for the most part unlawful" (Discourse

³³ Ibid., p. 104.

³⁴ Ibid.

of Satire).³⁵ He further declared, "We have no moral right on the reputation of other men. 'Tis taking from them what we cannot restore to them."³⁶ He admitted in the Preface to Absalom and Achitophel (1681) that he had rebated "the satire . . . from carrying too sharp an edge."³⁷ He acknowledged that there were perhaps two motives which justified personal satire, or lampoon: to seek revenge and to attack corruption. However, he amended, the first reason was not particularly justifiable, as "in Christian charity, all offences are to be forgiven" (Discourse of Satire).³⁸ The second instance, exposure of a corrupt person to society, was more forgivable. He said, "'Tis an action of virtue to make examples of vicious men. They may and ought to be upbraided. . . both for their own amendment, if they are not yet incorrigible, and for the terror of others" (Discourse of Satire).³⁹

It required considerable ability on the poet's part to write good satire. Dryden mourned the lack of good satirists, stating how few there were at his time who were capable of what he termed the duty of satire (Discourse on Satire).⁴⁰ It took an inborn talent to produce the "delicate touches of satire."⁴¹ Dryden loved satire because

³⁵ Ibid., p. 79.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Scott-Saintsbury, IX (1884), 212.

³⁸ Ker, II, 80.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 81.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 92.

it made its strongest effect when it was used in the gentlest manner. The soft raillery of satire appealed to the refined sense of humor in Dryden, who enjoyed deft employment of wit in any form. Again, he appreciated the cunning of satire, and he enjoyed the knowledge that satire pointed at a wise man was admired, however reluctantly, by the victim. But satire pointed at a dull-witted man was either misunderstood or unnoticed. He said in his Discourse that the satirist was a man to be admired, for his art required special ability:

How easy it is to call rogue and villain, and that wittily! But how hard to make a man appear a fool, a blockhead, or a knave, without using any of those approbrious terms! To spare the grossness of the names, and to do the thing yet more severely, is to draw a full face, and to make the nose and cheeks stand out, and yet not to employ any depth of shadowing. This is the mystery of that noble trade Neither is it true, that this fineness of raillery is offensive. A witty man is tickled when he is hurt in this manner, and a fool feels it not. ⁴²

Thus, the true talent of satire for Dryden and his contemporaries lay in the dexterous application of wit at the expense of the subject--application which was artistically fine and subtle. On discussing Zimri in Absalom and Achitophel, Dryden illustrated the goal of satire. He said, "If I had railed, I might have suffered for it justly; but I managed my own work more happily, perhaps more dexterously.

⁴² Ibid., pp. 92-93.

I avoided the mention of great crimes, and applied myself to the representing of blindsides, and little extravagancies." ⁴³ Satire, when applied skillfully, had a "sharp, well-mannered way of laughing a folly out of countenance." ⁴⁴ Perhaps the word well-mannered describes John Dryden as a writer. Perhaps it also explains his interest in satire instead of the more robust types of humor.

According to Dryden, another one of the poet's responsibilities is to inspire in his audience beauty of thought and goodness of soul. With his poetry, he should produce a kind of intellectual or pure happiness. Presentation of any material that could be termed "barefaced bawdry" (from the Preface to Sylvae: or The Second Miscellany, 1683) ⁴⁵ is beneath contempt. Dryden stated that comedy should not be the "low" variety, which he described as "much of conversation with the vulgar" ⁴⁶ (from the Preface to The Mock Astrologer).

The poet had also a certain religious responsibility, according to Dryden. He said that "pleasure was not the only end of poesy, and that even the instructions of morality were not so wholly the business of a poet as that the

⁴³ Ibid., p. 94.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 105.

⁴⁵ Ker, I, 263.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 135.

precepts and examples of piety were to be omitted" (Preface to Tyrannick Love, 1670).⁴⁷ He added that "religion was first taught in verse" and that "patterns of piety, decently represented, and equally removed from the extremes of superstition and prophaneness, may be of excellent use to second the precepts of our religion."⁴⁸ The virtues maintained by religion were, generally speaking, the same virtues that Dryden maintained as moral responsibility in his writing and in his life, which was open to the public. Through the beauty of language, the poet is able to elevate the mind of the audience to "a sense of devotion . . . and by the lively images of piety, adorned by action, through the senses allure the soul; which, while it is charmed in a silent joy of what it sees and hears, is struck at the same time with a secret veneration of things celestial."⁴⁹ Dryden admired morality and uprightness of life; in this respect, the poet, whose duty it is to uphold beauty and purity of morality, was an oracle of God.

In addition to the poet's responsibility to society is his responsibility to the art of poetry. Since a major portion of Dryden's poetic work was written for the stage, he concentrated his criticism on the need of skillful handling

⁴⁷ Malone, I, Pt. 2, 347.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

of characterization as the poet's artistic responsibility. Dryden defined character as "that which distinguishes one man from another" (Preface to Troilus and Cressida, 1679).⁵⁰ Therefore, it was the dramatist's artistic responsibility to portray characters well, making them appear natural but preferably better than in reality and using them to complement each other. In this portrayal of characters Dryden stated that the writers needed to rely upon methods and theories comparable to those of the portrait painter. The painter, after studying the subject, proceeds to draw the subject in a more idealistic manner, emphasizing the flattering points and diminishing the not-so-flattering points. Yet if the painter left out every defect, no matter how small, the result would be a pleasant picture bearing no resemblance to the subject. The idea was to strike a happy medium; every person had blemishes, but the portrait painter was allowed to shadow the outstanding ones. This compromise was applied to both poetry and painting by Dryden in his Parallel of Poetry and Painting (1695): "For an ingenious flattery is to be allowed to the professors of both arts, so long as the likeness is not destroyed."⁵¹

⁵⁰ Ker, I, 215.

⁵¹ Ibid., II, 125.

The poet's characters needed to comprise the traits of good and bad that are found in people, to contribute to the actions and reactions of the stage character, and thus to move the plot. "Yet," Dryden added, "it is still to be observed that one virtue, vice, and passion, ought to be shown in every man, as predominant over all the rest" (Preface to Troilus and Cressida).⁵² The idea of perfection in a portrait and in comedy or tragedy was equally unrealistic, in that there was no relationship to life. Therefore, the characters were "never to be made perfect, but always to be drawn with some specks of frailty and deficiency" (A Parallel of Poetry and Painting).⁵³ In tragedy, the poet was to use the best image for his main character that he could possibly conjure up or that he could find in descriptions if the character happened to be taken from a historical figure, for the idea in tragedy was to present a superior man who happened to have one tragic flaw which eventually led to his misfortune and final downfall. To Dryden, tragedy "represents the figures of the highest form amongst mankind" (Parallel of Poetry and Painting).⁵⁴ If the poet presented a character who was completely virtuous and saintly and who was dogged by misfortune despite his goodness, the audience would perhaps consider morality worth-

⁵² Ibid., I, 215.

⁵³ Ibid., II, 125.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

less. On the other hand, the poet cannot portray a leading character who does not gain the sympathetic interest of the audience because of his perfect example of wickedness. "We can never be grieved for their miseries who are thoroughly wicked, and have thereby justly called their calamities on themselves If, on the other side, their characters were wholly perfect . . . , his or her misfortunes would produce impious thoughts in the beholders" (Parallel of Poetry and Painting).⁵⁵ In passing on suggestions of responsibilities to prospective poets, Dryden praised tragedy for the moral instruction, emotional catharsis, and spiritual uplifting that it gave to the audience; he seemed to have his doubts about comedy, having very little to say about characterization in that genre. The truth of the matter is that Dryden worried about the impact of the comedy of the day; he feared that comedy was low and had much in common with the vulgar. In 1671 he stated in the Preface to An Evening's Love or The Mock Astrologer that he did not "value a reputation gained from Comedy . . . for I think it, in its own nature, inferior to all sorts of dramatic writing. Low comedy especially requires . . . much of conversation with the vulgar, and much of ill nature in the observation of their follies."⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 126.

⁵⁶ Ibid., I, 134-135.

And in the Essay of Dramatic Poesy, 1668, Dryden speaking as Neander said, "Comedy . . . is the imitation of common persons and ordinary speaking."⁵⁷ Our critic did grudgingly bestow upon comedy superiority over farce, which he said "entertains us with what is monstrous and chimerical" (Preface to An Evening's Love, 1671).⁵⁸ On the matter of characterization our critic said that while tragedy ought to use the highest of traits, comedy uses the lowest, "the worst likeness" (Parallel of Poetry and Painting).⁵⁹

Besides the main character, who must "outshine the rest of all the characters,"⁶⁰ lesser characters are inserted into the background by the poet. These characters are "parts of the piece, and seem to carry on the same design in a more inferior manner" (Parallel of Poetry and Painting).⁶¹ All of these characters, the main ones and the lesser ones, make up the play the same way that central figures and figures placed in the background make up a painting. And, as in a painting, the "persons of a play, whatsoever is said or done by any of them must be

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 100.

⁵⁸ Ibid., II, 126.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 143.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

consistent with the manners which the poet has given them distinctly; and even the habits must be proper to the degrees and humors of the persons, as well as in a picture." ⁶² Thus the poet must employ a talent for making his characters natural-acting and natural-looking in accordance with their stations in the play.

Another responsibility of the poet to his art was refinement of language. It was Dryden's hope that use of the choicest, most elegant words by the poet could enrich vocabulary and improve the English tongue. He said, "'Tis all we can do to give sufficient sweetness to our language: we must not only choose our words for elegance, but for sound" (Dedication of The Aeneis, 1697). ⁶³ He said in the Dedication of Troilus and Cressida: "I am desirous . . . that we might all write with the same certainty of words and purity of phrase . . . at least that we might advance so far as our tongue is capable of such a standard." ⁶⁴ In the Dedication of The Rival Ladies (1664), he added, "I have endeavored to write English as near as I could distinguish it . . . only I am sorry, that, speaking so noble a language as we do we have not a more certain measure of it, as they have in France." ⁶⁵

⁶² Ibid., p. 142.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 233.

⁶⁴ Ibid., I, 202-203.

⁶⁵ Ibid., I, 5.

Dryden urged writers to borrow words from other countries, yet to avoid immoderate use of borrowed words or coined terms for fear of displaying affectation. He also worried about order in the language to the point of displaying a desire for an academy, which would be similar to the French Academy, to help attain order. "We are full of monosyllables, and those clogged with consonants; and our pronunciation is effeminate To supply our poverty we have trafficked with our neighboring nations, by which means we abound as much in words To order them and make them useful is the difficulty" (Dedication of Troilus and Cressida).⁶⁶ In order to refine language, Dryden asserted that the poet must reject improper words and phrases and any impropriety of language. The poet must be diligent in his choice of words; and if he is diligent, he can clothe ordinary things in it as decently as the Latin" (Essay on Dramatic Poesy, 1668).⁶⁷

A third responsibility of the poet to his art was the development of suitable verse. Dryden thought that verse, along with numbers, was the "greatest pleasure of poetry" and that if the verse had discordant sounds or awkwardness in numbers, the reader was apt to be "uneasy

⁶⁶ Scott-Saintsbury, VI (1883), 251.

⁶⁷ Ker, I, 104.

and unsatisfied; he wants something of his complement, desires somewhat which he finds not" (Discourse of the Original and Progress of Satire, 1693).⁶⁸ The poet has failed the reader in this instance, and the reader's appetite for beauty remains unwhetted. In order to maintain skill over numbers, a term used by Dryden to denote the number of syllables in a line of poetry, Dryden exhorted poets to study to refine numbers. "I have long had by me the materials of an English Prosodia, containing all the mechanical rules of versification wherein I have treated, with some exactness, of the feet, the quantities, and the pauses" (Dedication of the Aeneis, 1697).⁶⁹ It was essential that the poet have these rules in his mind; yet Neander as the voice of Dryden in the Essay of Dramatic Poesy (1668) said, "No man is tied in modern poesy to observe any farther rule in the feet of his verse, but that they be dissyllables; whether spondee, trochee, or iambic, it matters not; only he is obliged to rhyme."⁷⁰ He spoke of this particular poetic license in his Preface to Tyrannic Love (1670), in which he explained that he had made use of that freedom allowed to poets in that particular play, Tyrannic Love. He wrote, "I have not everywhere ob-

⁶⁸ Ibid., II, 86.

⁶⁹ Ibid., pp. 216-217.

⁷⁰ Ibid., I, 97.

served the equality of numbers, in my verse; partly by reason of my haste; but more especially, because I would not have my sense a slave to syllables." ⁷¹ In Dryden's opinion, a true poet had to master the rules of numbers in verse in order to make use skillfully of that artistic allowance which required great knowledge.

Accordingly, Dryden worked hard with the music of words, and he has been acclaimed as a poet extremely sensitive to the music of poetry. His goal was to place words so artfully as to produce a pleasing effect to the ears of the audience. He admired the effect that Virgil produced with the hexameter. He declared that Virgil "is everywhere elegant, sweet, and flowing in his hexameters. His words are not only chosen, but the places in which he ranks them for the sound I cannot boast that I have been thus exact in my verses; but I have endeavoured to follow the example of my master, and am the first Englishman, perhaps, who made it his design to copy him in his numbers, his choice of words, and his placing them for the sweetness of the sound" (Dedication of the Aeneis, 1697). ⁷² Dryden saw in Virgil a master worth studying and following, a master whose "elegant, sweet, and flowing" verse was worth being copied by the student poet.

⁷¹ Scott-Saintsbury, III (1883), 379.

⁷² Ker, II, 215.

This concern of Dryden about the English language, notable in many facets of his public and literary life, is noticeable in many references to language in his discussion of verse. He encouraged poets to know their language for sound as well as for meaning: "'Tis all we can do to give sufficient sweetness to our language: we must not only choose our words for elegance, but for sound; to perform which, a mastery in the language is required; the poet must have a magazine of words, and have the art to manage his few vowels to the best advantage, that they may go further" (Dedication of the Aeneis). ⁷³ We may note in his reference to the "few vowels," Dryden's tart expression of his belief that the English poet had a linguistic tool inferior to that of the Latin classicists. Yet, Dryden felt that the English language was a strong, melodic instrument, one which with improvement could eventually be as effective as the classical Latin in its own way. He praised the Pindaric Ode as employed by the English, stating in a letter to John Dennis, dated March, 1694, that the English use of the Pindaric equalled the classical use of it. "There is another part of Poetry in which the English stand almost in equal foot with the Ancients; and 'tis that which we call Pindarique." ⁷⁴

⁷³ Ibid., p. 216.

⁷⁴ Charles E. Ward, The Letters of John Dryden (Durham: Duke University, 1942), No. 31, p. 72.

Dryden described the Pindaric Ode as a "noble sort of poetry" (Preface to Sylvae, 1685)⁷⁵ and declared that its verse "allows more latitude than any other."⁷⁶ Restored in the seventeenth century by Cowley, the Pindaric Ode was hastily adapted by the poets of the day who, in Dryden's opinion, did not do its attributes justice. It was "happily restored by one man, and . . . grossly copied by almost all the rest. A musical ear, and a great genius, if another Mr. Cowley could arise in another age, may bring it to perfection,"⁷⁷ he said, seeing in this new type of verse a need for many improvements. "The seeming easiness of it has made it spread; but it has not been considered enough, to be so well cultivated" (Preface to Sylvae).⁷⁸ Again that insatiable curiosity compelled him to accept the challenge of experimenting, examining, and adapting the Pindaric Ode, until eventually contributing in no small way to the improvement of the Pindaric Ode for poets in succeeding years.

Dryden's principal verse was the heroic couplet, and he contributed a great deal to its popularity with

⁷⁵ Ker, I, 267.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 268.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 269.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 267.

later poets such as Pope. He used it in all of his plays except All for Love, 1678. The heroic couplet was similar to the verse of the classics with its balance and his habitual practice of placing the important words in the closing sentences. Dryden wrote approximately thirty thousand heroic couplets; and during the probable fifty years of his use of the heroic couplet, he learned to say anything that he wanted to with that instrument.

As a man who used a certain type of rhyme required in the heroic couplet, Dryden defended rhyme against blank verse. He stated that the outstanding argument against rhyme--and he was speaking of rhyme in plays--was its unnaturalness; but he argued that a talented poet made rhyme seem natural. He said "when the words were so judiciously ordered, that the first word in the verse seems to beget the second, and that the next, till that becomes the last word in the line, which, in the negligence of prose, would be so; it must then be granted, rhyme has all the advantages of prose, besides its own" (Dedication of The Rival Ladies, 1664). ⁷⁹

Dryden's argument in defense of rhyme was primarily its use in control of wit. He listed the advantages of

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 7.

rhyme in the Dedication of The Rival Ladies, stressing its use as a curb:

The advantages which rhyme has over blank verse are so many, that it were lost time to name them. Sir Philip Sidney, in his Defence of Poesy, gives us one, which in my opinion, is not the least considerable; I mean the help it brings to memory . . . Then, in the quickness of reparties . . . it has so particular a grace, and is so aptly suited to them, that the sudden smartness of the answer, and the sweetness of the rhyme, set off the beauty of each other. But that benefit which I consider most in it . . . is, that it bounds and circumscribes the fancy. For imagination in a poet is a faculty so wild and lawless, that like an high-ranging spaniel, it must have clogs tied to it, lest it outrun the judgment. The great easiness of blank verse renders the poet too luxuriant, but when the difficulty of artful rhyming is interposed, where the poet commonly confines his sense to the couplet . . . the fancy then gives leisure to the judgment to come in⁸⁰

It was naturalness of verse that Dryden sought, a goal typical of his ideals. Again speaking with the voice of Neander in An Essay of Dramatic Poesy (1668), he said, "What other conditions are required to make rhyme natural in itself, besides an election of apt words, and a right disposing of them? For the due choice of your words expresses your sense naturally, and the due placing them adapts the rhyme to it."⁸¹ He added that a great deal of "care and art are required to write in verse,"⁸²

⁸⁰ Ibid., pp. 7-8.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 95.

⁸² Ibid.

for the poet must employ greater talent to write natural, unaffected verse than he needs to write artificial, heavily decorated verse. If such naturalness becomes the general rule of the poet, the end result is a refreshing treat for society.

III. THE POET'S WIT

The seventeenth century was an age of extravagantly coined conversation, a period of perfection in style and elegance in phrase. The court delighted in swift repartee. The young intellectuals, who engaged in this new game of bandying clever retorts swiftly back and forth like a tennis ball, were known as "wits," and the type of humor that they used was known as "wit." Thus, an important term was born and an exciting entertainment became the talk of The Town (London).

The wits of London prided themselves on their verbal abilities, and one who was unfortunate enough to lack wit was considered handicapped, if considered at all. The comic drama of the age reflected the attitudes of its audience. The hero possessed wit of the highest degree; and it would seem because of such a blessing, he was also a perfect courtier in every other respect. The heroine owned a lively wit that placed her on a par intellectually with her lover. She could at all times give as good as she got; she was expert in the grace of exchanging sharp retorts with her male counterpart, and oftentimes with servants who were unrealistically versed in the classics in order to keep up with the young master. The fop

reached for wit and invariably made a fool of himself, and the dull husband did not even know what wit was. The prologues and epilogues of such plays were fairly abloom with wit which eager audiences embraced gleefully and inserted into charmingly brilliant social conversation. ¹

In the latter part of the seventeenth century, all wit came under attack by the righteous, although the censorship was aimed particularly at wit which played with sex or wit which trifled with religion. ² The hostility of the religious and moral leaders was unleashed because of the unrealistic quality of wit, because of the emphasis on deception rather than truth, and because of the immorality of wit. ³ The prejudice against wit was illustrated by Ferrand Spence, who "viewed it as nothing but the froth and ferment of the soul, beclouding reason and sinking rational pursuits into the miasma of fantasy" (Preface to the translation of St. Evremond, Miscellanea, 1686); ⁴ and by Malebranche, who denounced wit as the cause of "blindness of the Mind and the corruption of the Heart" (A Treatise of Morality, translated by James Ship-

¹ Autrey Nell Wiley (ed.), Rare Prologues and Epilogues (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1940), p. xxxix.

² Edward Niles Hooker, "Pope on Wit: The Essay on Criticism," The Seventeenth Century, ed. Richard F. Jones et al. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1951), p. 227.

³ Ibid., p. 228.

⁴ Ibid.

ton, 1699).⁵ Wit, particularly wit written for the stage, presented a serious moral threat, according to many good men, who declared that wit was too often used to make light of religion.

The objections were not aimed so much at wit itself, but at the misuse of it. The defenders of wit, the literary men who used it, discredited false wit as vehemently as did the objectors. Dryden denounced the low, vulgar wit and insisted upon propriety and decency. In his Preface to All for Love (1678), he stated that "broad obscenities in words ought in good manners to be avoided."⁶ And speaking more specifically of wit, he said, "'Tis most certain, that barefaced bawdry is the poorest pretence to wit imaginable" (Preface to Sylvae, 1685).⁷ In the Preface to the Fables (1700), he defended his own stage career against the scathing denouncement of Jeremy Collier, who was a leader of the religious objectors to the immoral material on the stage. Dryden protested against Collier's condemnation, saying that "in many places he had perverted my words into blasphemy and bawdry, of which they were not guilty."⁸ He added, "In general I will only say, that I have written nothing which savours of immorality or pro-

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ker, I, 193.

⁷ Ibid., II, 250.

⁸ Ibid., I, 263.

faneness; at least, I am not conscious to myself of any such intention On the other side, I have endeavoured to choose such fables, both ancient and modern, as contain in each of them some instructive moral." ⁹ Thus, the agitation concerning wit continued, becoming intensified after Dryden's death and necessitating the defense of wit by such men as Pope, Dr. Johnson, and Addison in the eighteenth century.

Pope defined wit as

. . . . nature to advantage dressed,
What oft was thought but ne'er so well expressed. ¹⁰

Dr. Johnson was another defender of wit's good qualities, although he disagreed with Pope's definition, stating that "'what oft was thought' is all the worse for being often thought, because to be wit, it ought to be newly thought." ¹¹ Johnson altered Pope's definition by saying that wit is both "natural and new, something not obvious, but, once expressed, acknowledged to be just." ¹² A third member of the group of defenders was Addison, who gave his definition of wit in the Spectator number 62: "For Wit lying most in the Assemblage of Ideas, and putting

⁹ Ibid., II, 250.

¹⁰ David Daiches, Critical Approaches to Literature (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1956), p. 259.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., p. 260.

those together with Quickness and Variety, wherein can be found any Resemblance or Congruity, thereby to make up pleasant pictures and agreeable Visions in the Fancy." ¹³

Underlying the definitions and the discussion was the necessary defense of true wit which required differentiation from false wit.

As poet laureate, Dryden made it a point to keep in touch with the interests of his audience. He became interested in wit through Hobbes and Davenant, two of his mentors. Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) ¹⁴ was a moralist and political philosopher. His theories, known familiarly as "Hobbism," were considered sceptical and immoral by a shocked London; and the Royal Society, which was frantically attempting to arrive at some common ground between the scientific upheavals and religion, chastised Hobbes and publicly denounced his materialistic and slightly atheistic notions. However, one must pause to consider that Hobbes contributed to the philosophy of the period through sheer "negative influence." ¹⁵ His extreme views spurred his aroused dissenters on to serious thought.

Hobbes channeled the earlier definition of wit (it had previously been coupled with such meanings as

¹³ Ibid., p. 254.

¹⁴ "Thomas Hobbes," World Book Encyclopedia, VIII, 3439.

¹⁵ Baugh, p. 715.

"ingenuity, swiftness, and subtlety of thought" ¹⁶) into contemporary emphasis on propriety. He stated that the poet's fancy, if not controlled by judgment, was a hindrance to the mental processes, clouding what should be a clear picture and giving a fuzzy, deceptive image. Like his contemporaries, he delighted in wit and approved the liveliness of the mind which it demanded. He used such phrases as "celerity of imagining" and "agility of spirits" ¹⁷ in his definitions: "Wit consists of Celerity of Imagining, (that is, swift succession of one thought to another;) and stedly direction to some approved end." He added, however, that "without Steddiness and Direction to some End, a great Fancy is one kind of Madnesse." ¹⁸ Probably one of the chief contributions of Hobbes to the period, and more specifically to Dryden, was his belief that wit had to be controlled by judgment and that extreme heights of fancy were to be checked by caution.

Sir William Davenant (1606-1668) preceded Dryden as England's poet laureate; he also schooled Dryden in the ways of wit. Davenant defined wit as "the laborious and the lucky resultances of thought It is a web consisting of the subtlest threads; and like that of the

¹⁶ Kenneth Young, John Dryden (London: Sylvan Press Ltd., 1954), p. 10.

¹⁷ Hooker, p. 239.

¹⁸ Baugh, p. 716.

spider is considerably woven out of our selves

Wit is not only the luck and labour, but also the dexterity of thought, rounding the world, like the Sun, with unimaginable motion, and bringing swiftly home to the memory universal surveys." ¹⁹ Actually, Hobbes and Davenant appeared to be collaborating on the formulation of wit. Hobbes' theories joining wit to judgment and defining wit as propriety were put into practice in Davenant's Gondibert (1650), ²⁰ a poem noted by Edmund Waller as characterized by a new realism. In his Preface to the poem Davenant explained his attempts, stating that the wit of Gondibert was to bring "Truth, too often absent, home to mens bosoms through unfrequented and new ways, and from the most remote shades, by representing nature, though not in an affected way yet in an unusual dress." ²¹ Hobbes and Davenant described wit as "sprightly and fair." ²²

Hobbes said, "When she seemeth to fly from one Indies to the other, and from Heaven to Earth, and to penetrate into the hardest matter and obscurest places, into the future and into herself, and all this in a point of time, the voyage is not very great, herself being all she seeks, and her won-

¹⁹ Preface to Gondibert, cited by Van Doren, p. 32.

²⁰ Young, p. 10.

²¹ Alfred Harbage, Sir William Davenant (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1935), p. 198.

²² Young, p. 11.

derful celerity consisteth not so much in motion as in copious Imagery discreetly ordered and perfectly registered in the memory." ²³ It was such alluring descriptions as Hobbes and Davenant produced that captivated Dryden. The two instructors also suggested the kind of language in wit. Hobbes claimed that one must "know much" in order to write with wit. ²⁴ "Novelty of expression," which pleases by "excitation of the mind; for novelty is a delightful appetite of knowledge" ²⁵ was another thought. Possibly young Dryden was influenced by the definitions of Hobbes and Davenant when he wrote his definition of wit in the Preface to Annus Mirabilis (1666):

The composition of all poems is, or ought to be, of wit, and wit in the poet, or Wit writing (if you will give me leave to use a school-distinction), is no other than the faculty of imagination in the writer, which, like a nimble spaniel, beats over and ranges through the field of memory, till it springs the quarry it hunted after; or, without metaphor, which searches over all the memory for the species or ideas of those things which it designs to represent. Wit written is that which is well defined, the happy result of thought, or product of imagination. ²⁶

Dryden had a scientific curiosity about anything new, and

²³ Van Doren, p. 32.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ker, I, 14.

his scientific curiosity compelled him to investigate and experiment with wit. Unfortunately his ability to employ wit in his poetry did not quite measure up to his goals, according to Mark Van Doren in his book John Dryden: A Study of His Poetry. It is not that Dryden could not employ wit; it is only that he had to labor over his work, for wit was not a natural endowment. Van Doren stated that Dryden's spaniel did not frisk or range; it had to be driven.²⁷ An adjective that Davenant used, "laborious," described Dryden's attempts. He was fairly successful when he relied upon the classics for his images; but when he relied upon his own faculties, he was at a loss.²⁸ Van Doren also observed that whenever Dryden forgot about wit and spoke effortlessly, his poetry resounded with the "purely metrical rush and emphasis which were eventually to win him his position in English verse."²⁹

Scientific curiosity and inclination to experiment, both characteristic of Dryden, drove him to make use of

²⁷ Van Doren, p. 34.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 35.

the novel or the different. One might add that his strained attempts to employ wit exemplify his conscientiousness about his work and his awareness of not only his position as poet laureate, but, as such, his duty to society. Society was interested in wit; Dryden would give society what it demanded.

Perhaps it was Dryden's recognition of his deficiency in wit-writing that led to his admiration of Davenant. Seemingly, Davenant possessed a knowledge of wit that Dryden did not possess, and Dryden discussed his enchantment with Davenant's attributes in the Preface to The Tempest (1669). He described Davenant, who had helped him in the writing of the play, as "a man of quick and piercing imagination."³⁰ "In the time I writ with him," he said, "I had the opportunity to observe somewhat more nearly of him, than I had formerly done I found him then of so quick a fancy, that nothing was proposed to him, on which he could not suddenly produce a thought extremely pleasant and surprising And as his fancy was quick, so likewise were the products of it remote and new . . . his imaginations were such as could not easily enter into any other man."³¹ Van Doren noted

³⁰ Scott-Saintsbury, III (1883), 106.

³¹ Ibid., p. 107.

that the words "quick," "piercing," and "surprising" were notable, since they were complimentary descriptions of the Restoration Age. "Shadwell, when he was still friendly, even used them to describe Dryden." ³²

In the Preface to Annus Mirabilis Dryden discussed the type of wit which should be found in heroic or historical poetry: "I judge it [wit] chiefly to consist in the delightful imagining of persons, actions, passions, or things it is some lively and apt description, dressed in such colours of speech, that it sets before your eyes the absent object, as perfect, and more delightfully than nature." ³³ Thus a good poet would not want to ply the world with ill-suited verse; he would try to pleasure his audience with language and thought that heighten nature. Possessing true wit, he would have the ability to transform material which was sluggish and dull before he touched it.

Dryden proceeded to divide the composition and construction of wit into three parts in his Preface to Annus Mirabilis (1666)--invention, fancy, and elocution:

So then the first happiness of the poet's imagination is properly invention, or finding

³² Van Doren, p. 33.

³³ Ker, I, 14-15.

of the thought; the second is fancy, or the variation, deriving, or moulding, of that thought, as the judgment represents it proper to the subject; the third is elocution, or the art of clothing and adorning that thought, so found and varied, in apt, significant, and sounding words: the quickness of the imagination is seen in the invention, the fertility in the fancy, and the accuracy in the expression. ³⁴

These three stages in the creative process were discussed at various opportunities by Dryden. Invention, finding the thought, was "absolutely necessary; . . . yet no rule ever was or ever can be given, how to compass it" (Parallel of Poetry and Painting, 1695). ³⁵ Genius in a man is born, not developed, Dryden remarked, and it is genius which enables him to invent poetic subjects. "A happy genius is the gift of nature: it depends on the influence of the stars, say the astrologers; on the organs of the body, say the naturalists; it is the particular gift of Heaven, say the divines, both Christians and heathens. How to improve it, many books can teach us; how to obtain it, none; that nothing can be done without it, all agree" (Parallel of Poetry and Painting). ³⁶ Thus, the true poet possesses genius; genius enables him to observe nature and people and imitate the actions of both.

³⁴ Ker, I, 15.

³⁵ Ibid., II, 138.

³⁶ Ibid.

Dryden's habit of using classical images rather than his own caused a considerable amount of vindictive criticism, notable in the Duke of Buckingham's farce The Rehearsal.³⁷ Dryden's idea of wit was sharply satirized in this play, which was first aimed at Davenant, then adapted to Dryden when Davenant died. The most obvious slur of Dryden occurs in the scene in which Bayes (Dryden) presents his Drama Commonplaces,³⁸ a book which contains "help for wit," in the form of rules:

BAYES: Why, Sir, my first rule is the rule of transversion, or regula duplex: changing verse into prose, or prose into verse, alternative as you please.

SMITH: Well; but how is this done by a rule, Sir?

BAYES: Why, thus, Sir; nothing so easy when understood. I take a book in my hand, either at home or elsewhere, for that's all one--if there be any wit in it, as there is no book but has some, I transverse it: that is, if it be prose, put it into verse (but that takes up some time), and if it be verse, put it into prose.

The third rule in the little book is a rule concerning the poet's invention:

BAYES: Why, Sir, when I have anything to invent, I never trouble my head about it, as other men do; but presently turn over this book, and there I have, at one view, all that Perseus, Montaigne, Seneca's tragedies, Horace, Juvenal, Claudian, Pliny, Plutarch's Lives, and the rest, have ever thought upon this subject; and so, in a trice, by leaving out a few words or putting in others of my own, the business is done. ³⁹

³⁷ George Villiers, "The Rehearsal," Plays of the Restoration and Eighteenth Century, ed. Dougald MacMillan and Howard Mumford Jones (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1931), pp. 53-55.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

In this manner, Dryden was satirized for his tendency to borrow phrases from established masterpieces. He retorted to the Duke that "the poet who borrows nothing from others is yet to be born" (Dedication of the Aeneid, 1697).⁴⁰ "Is Versailles the less a new building, because the architect . . . hath imitated others . . . built before it?" he asked in the same Dedication. "Walls, doors, and windows . . . are in all great houses. So descriptions, figures, fables, and the rest, must be in all heroic poems; they are the common materials of poetry, furnished from the magazine of nature; every poet hath as much right to them, as every man hath to air or water." But, he concluded, there are ways of "distinguishing copies from originals"⁴¹--the personal touches which a poet inevitably gives to his work result in a product similar to, yet different from, the original. Van Doren observed that Dryden produced better effects when he did fall upon his classical masters for wit.

Fancy, or the shaping of the thought, is the "principal quality required" in the poet, according to Dryden's words in the Preface to An Evening's Love or The Mock Astrologer (1671).⁴² He compared fancy to fire, heat,

⁴⁰ Ker, I, 198.

⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 197-198.

⁴² Ibid., p. 146.

and warmth, popularly descriptive parallels in the Restoration Period. He observed that both Virgil and Horace, and all poets as well, early in their careers wrote "with a certain heat of genius which inspired them, yet that heat was not perfectly digested. There is required a continuance of warmth, to ripen the best and noblest fruits" (Dedication of the Georgics, 1697). ⁴³

The comparison of fancy with fire was a strong one, for it was the result of a strong opinion: "Men that are given over to fancy only, are little better than madmen.

What people say of fire, viz. that it is a good servant, but an ill master, may not unaptly be applied to fancy; which, when it is too active, rages, but when cooled and allayed by the judgment, produces admirable effects"

(Preface to Troilus and Cressida, 1679). ⁴⁴ The idea that fancy is more effective when tempered by reason and judgment was prevalent in Dryden's philosophy; he expressed this idea many times. "Fanciful poetry and music, used with moderation, are good; but men who are wholly given over to either of them, are commonly as full of whimsies as diseased and splenetic men can be. Their heads are continually hot, and they have the same elevation of

⁴³ Scott-Saintsbury, XIV (1891), 2.

⁴⁴ Ker, I, 220.

fancy sober, which men of sense have when they drink
 so, mere poets and mere musicians are as sottish as mere
 drunkards are, who live in a continual mist, without see-
 ing or judging any thing clearly" (Postscript to Notes
and Observations on the Empress of Morocco, 1674). ⁴⁵

And again, "No man should pretend to write, who cannot
 temper his fancy with his judgment: nothing is more danger-
 ous to a raw horseman, than a hot-mouthed jade without a
 curb" (Preface to Troilus and Cressida, 1679). ⁴⁶ Dryden
 warned that few artistic attempts are successful when
 dashed off in a rush of inspiration without a more rational
 appraisal: "Few good pictures have been finished at one
 sitting; neither can a true just play, which is to bear
 the test of ages be produced at a heat, or by the force
 of fancy, without the maturity of judgment" (Dedication of
 the Spanish Friar, 1681). ⁴⁷

Elocution, or the expression of the thought, is
 the third part of creative process. In the Parallel of
Poetry and Painting (1695), Dryden compared expression to
 the colors in a painting: "Expression, and all that belongs
 to words, is that in a poem which colouring is in a picture.

⁴⁵ Scott-Saintsbury, XV. (1892), 405-406.

⁴⁶ Ker, I, 222.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 245.

The colours well chosen in their proper places, together with the lights and shadows which belong to them, lighten the design, and make it pleasing to the eye. The words, the expressions, the tropes and figures, the versification, and all the other elegancies of sound, as cadences, turns of words upon the thought, and many other things, which are all parts of expression, perform exactly the same office." Continuing the parallel, Dryden stated that coloring "dresses up" the design, "she makes her appear more lovely than naturally she is; expression in poetry charms the reader, and beautifies the design."⁴⁸ In this same vein, Dryden noted that the poet must know when he has completed his work; that is, often an extra word, phrase, or sentence is enough to spoil the effect: "As the words, &c., are evidently shown to be the clothing of the thought, in the same sense as colours are the clothing of the design, so the painter and the poet ought to judge exactly, when the colouring and expressions are perfect, and then to think their work is truly finished" (Parallel of Poetry and Painting).⁴⁹ Therefore, judgment is required in all the elements of wit and the result is beautiful but reasonable--true wit rather than false wit.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 148.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 152.

Dryden's attitude was definite and final in his analysis of the three parts of wit. He knew that the poet could not please an audience or a reader without the use of wit. A work produced without wit was dead, according to the taste of the seventeenth-century audience. And the poet who wrote correctly but without wit faced an audience neither cold nor hot, merely lukewarm; it was wit that added the life-touches and spark to literature and life.⁵⁰ Yet Dryden said that there had to be control in flights of wit, else the result would be confusion. He asked for propriety, which Hobbes and Davenant had recommended (in the Preface to Gondibert), but he picked it up and introduced it anew to London. He said, "The definition of Wit (which had been so often attempted, and ever unsuccessfully by many poets) is only this: that it is a propriety of thoughts and words elegantly adapted to the subject" (Author's Apology, 1777).⁵¹ He used the term to mean a knowledge of order and good taste, necessary to curtail overly lofty or overly flighty fits of fancy. Under the influence of propriety, the poet effected naturalness of expression and ease of style. These two words, ease and naturalness, were keys to Dryden's

⁵⁰ Hooker, p. 226.

⁵¹ Ker, I, 190.

idea of true poetry. His definition was interesting to the principal literary figures of the eighteenth century. An article in the Tatler began, "This even was spent at our table in discourse of propriety of words and thoughts, which is Mr. Dryden's definition of wit." ⁵² Pope, who had been thrilled as a boy upon first seeing the then poet laureate at Will's, puzzled over Dryden's definition at great length. He approved the idea and adapted it to his own work. It is interesting to note that in a letter dated November 19, 1707, Pope defined wit as propriety. ⁵³ The term as Dryden used it and as Pope adapted it suggested a three-fold relationship among thoughts, words, and subject, put together in such a way that the three entities belonged together. The theory was that the suggested object produced in the poet certain thoughts which would be garnered into language appropriate to the object. In his previously quoted definition of wit, "what oft was thought, but ne'er so well express'd," Pope was suggesting that the writer, beginning with "a common and universal experience, sees it in a new light; and his sensitive spirit, endowing it with life and fresh meaning, provides it with form, image, language, and harmony appropriate to it. It

⁵² Hooker, p. 245.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 244.

presupposes the liveliness and insight of the creative mind; and it demands propriety, the perfect agreement of words, thoughts (as reshaped by the artist), and subject. The result is nature, and it is wit." ⁵⁴ While genius produces that creative impulse which emerges as wit, it also produces the adequate expression to convey it.

In 1685, Dryden added that the definition of wit as propriety would extend to all types of poetry, and he further defined wit as propriety of thought and propriety of words. "Propriety of thought," he said, "is that fancy which arises naturally from the subject, or which the poet adapts to it. Propriety of words is the clothing of those thoughts with such expressions as are naturally proper to them; and from both these, if they are judiciously performed, the delight of poetry results" (Preface to Albion and Albanus, 1685). ⁵⁵ Two important issues arise from this statement.

The first issue deals with the "proper expressions." Dryden was a strong defender of the simple yet uplifted expression. He himself was on his most effective poetic

⁵⁴ Hooker, p. 246.

⁵⁵ Ker, I, 270.

toes when he couched his thoughts in plain, exact words. He made the statement that wit, or imagination, "is most to be admir'd when a great thought comes drest in words so commonly receiv'd that it is understood by the meanest apprehensions, as the best meat is the most easily digested" (The Essay of Dramatic Poesy, 1668).⁵⁶ In the Preface to Religio Laici, 1682, he applauded plainness and naturalness of expression. He said that if there is majesty of thought, simplicity of expression is the most effective way to adorn it. He added that the poet should save the "florid, elevated, and figurative way" for outbursts of passion. If there is no majesty of thought, bombasting certainly will not add majesty. In the Dedication of the Spanish Friar, Dryden said that a poet who aims at loftiness when there is none runs easily "into the swelling, puffy style, because it looks like greatness."

The second issue deals with the phrase, "judiciously performed." Judgment was a part of Dryden's interpretation of proper wit. He deeply disliked the flagrant wit of the early part of the Restoration period. Ben Jonson, for example, had his points, he said, but showed unfortunate taste in his conceits.⁵⁷ In the Defence of the Epilogue

⁵⁶ Cited in Young, p. 56.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. lvii.

(1672), Dryden said, "In these low characters of vice and folly, lay the excellency of that inimitable writer; who, when at any time he aimed at wit in the stricter sense, that is, sharpness of conceit, was forced either to borrow from the Ancients, . . . or, when he trusted himself alone, often fell into meanness of expression. Nay, he was not free from the lowest, and most grovelling kind of wit." 58

As a critic he applied his definition and theory of wit to the dramas of Ben Jonson and William Shakespeare. He admired Jonson for his correctness, and for "many excellencies," and stated that he "can be taxed with fewer failings than any English poet. I know I have been accused as an enemy of his writings; but without any other reason, than that I do not admire him blindly" (Preface to An Evening's Love or The Mock Astrologer, 1671). 59 The fact was, however, that he admired Shakespeare more. Shakespeare was "the man who of all modern, and perhaps Ancient poets, had the largest and most comprehensive soul. All the images of Nature were still present to him, and he drew them, not laboriously, but luckily" (An Essay of Dramatic Poesy). 60 Concerning Shakespeare's wit, however,

58 Ker, I, 172-173.

59 Ibid., p. 138.

60 Ibid., p. 179.

he said, "He is many times flat, insipid; his comic wit degenerating into clenches, his serious swelling into bombast." ⁶¹ Dryden never lost his objectivity, even with those writers that he particularly admired. He said, "Shakespeare, who many times has written better than any poet, in any language, is yet so far from writing wit always, or expressing that wit according to the dignity of the subject, that he writes, in many places below the dullest writer of ours, or any precedent age. Never did any author precipitate himself from such height of thought to such low expressions, as he often does" (The Defence of the Epilogue, 1672). ⁶² In the Essay of Dramatic Poesy, he compared his admiration of Jonson with his admiration of Shakespeare: "If I would compare him with Shakespeare I must acknowledge him the more correct poet, but Shakespeare the greater wit. Shakespeare was the Homer, or father of our dramatic poets; Jonson was the Virgil, the pattern of elaborate writing; I admire him, but I love Shakespeare." ⁶³ Dryden's appreciation for Shakespeare's greatness was above that of the popular taste of his time. His criticism of Jonson encountered heated rebuttal from Shadwell, who was an ardent admirer of Jonson, and who observed, in his Preface to The

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ker, I, 172.

⁶³ Ibid., pp. 82-83.

Sullen Lovers, that Dryden had been "so insolent as to say that Ben Jonson wrote his best plays without wit, imagining that all the plays of wit consisted in bringing two persons upon the stage to break jest and to bob one another." ⁶⁴ It was not popular in the Restoration for anyone to prefer Shakespeare to Jonson; yet time has shown Dryden to have been a man of keen discernment and the possessor of a sharp sense of literary excellence. The critic in him accepted even Shakespeare's handicaps, and he once remarked that Fletcher had that unfortunate English habit of not knowing when to stop: "Neither is the luxuriance of Fletcher . . . a less fault than the carelessness of Shakespeare. He does not well always; and, when he does, he is a true Englishman; he knows not when to give over. If he wakes in one scene, he commonly slumbers in another" (Defence of the Epilogue, 1672). ⁶⁵ Thus, he disapproved of that which was not held together by discernment.

Finally, in the Epistle Dedicatory to The Rival Ladies (1668), Dryden linked fancy, memory, and judgment, "all of them reaching with their utmost stress at nature." ⁶⁶ According to Dryden, and later to Pope, judgment was a

⁶⁴ Young, p. 75.

⁶⁵ Ker, I, 172.

⁶⁶ Malone, I, Pt. 2, 6.

gift comparable to wit. As a most necessary gift, it needed to be sharpened and developed into a trusted instinct that would automatically prefer the universal and the lasting to the local and temporary.⁶⁷ To Dryden, wit and judgment were united, working together. No matter how superfluous the gift of wit, wit not intermingled with judgment in the poet did not live up to its purpose. This judgment, acquired by study of the rules of poetry and intensive study of the classics, ultimately would develop into a sure art, a guide to proper language and form. The marriage of wit and judgment would result in a vivacity of thought, a pure, strong wit of an artistic depth and an extraordinary force.

Dryden's lofty conceptions of wit were discussed at the coffee-houses by his learned contemporaries; these conceptions inspired considerable contemplation on the part of the major thinkers of his time and of succeeding centuries. Whenever and wherever wit was discussed, Dryden's theories were rediscovered. In this manner, his concept of the poet's wit was--and is--an area worthy of study.

⁶⁷ Hooker, p. 236.

IV. DRYDEN AS A POET

John Dryden's vogue from the seventeenth century to date has been remarkably consistent. He was the literary dictator of his time; he was poet laureate of England from 1668 until 1688. He presided over the coffee-house wits as Charles II presided over England. His high position among the poets of his time was unmistakable; he was known, respected, and sometimes feared as a formidable critic of verse. His every utterance was listened to by beginning poets as he addressed them in a major portion of his prose work. His poetry came to be known as the voice of his nation and of his time; his style and verse were thoroughly representative of the ideals and theories of the Restoration Period. "Not only did the immense majority of men of letters in his later days directly imitate him, but both then and earlier most literary Englishmen, even when they did not imitate him, worked on the same lines and pursued the same objects." ¹ One is able to determine most of the literary characteristics and goals of the seventeenth century by reading the pages of Dryden's works. Possibly of all the literary figures in history, he was the most

¹ G. Saintsbury, Dryden (New York and London: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1902), p. 185.

"clearly recognized . . . as the Emperor of his age." ²
 He was a man who possessed such qualities as were needed for his time, such qualities as enabled him to recognize the atmosphere of his age and to transcribe that atmosphere for all times. ³ "He was a public servant, at once custodian and interpreter of traditional values--the conscience of his time." ⁴

Because he was a poet whose vogue was strong both during his lifetime and afterwards, Dryden had many loyal friends and ardent admirers. Once in a rare moment of sincerity, unadorned by the extravaganzas of language, Congreve declared simply, "I loved Mr. Dryden." ⁵ The friendship between Dryden and Congreve was a remarkable one. According to Kathleen M. Lynch in her book A Congreve Gallery, Dryden "welcomed Congreve as his spiritual son." ⁶ The older poet was as proud of Congreve as he was of his own sons; he observed with satisfaction the rise of his young protege. In 1693 he wrote to Jacob Tonson: "I am Mr. Congreve's true Lover, & desire you to tell him, how kindly I take his often Remembrances of me: I wish him

² Christopher Hollis, Dryden (London: Duckworth, 1933), p. 202.

³ Bernard N. Schilling, Dryden (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963), p. 4.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Van Doren, p. 32.

⁶ (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1951), p. 1.

all prosperity, & hope I shall never loose his affection." ⁷ Addison stated that Congreve was, in his opinion, the successor of Dryden, a rank which would have delighted the latter poet, who believed that Congreve and Shakespeare possessed an equal amount of ability. ⁸ Congreve portrayed his mentor as a man of rare qualities:

He was of a sincere reconciliation with those that had offended him As his reading had been very extensive, so was he very happy in a memory tenacious of every thing that he had read. He was not more possessed of knowledge than he was communicative of it; but then his communication was by no means pedantick, or imposed upon the conversation, but just such, and went so far as, but the natural turn of the conversation in which he was engaged, it was necessarily promoted or required. He was extremely ready, and gentle in his correction of the errors of any writer who thought fit to consult him, and full as ready and patient to admit the reprehensions of others, in respect of his own oversights or mistakes. ⁹

In the eighteenth century Pope paid tribute to Dryden in his Essay on Criticism, in which he described Dryden's hero Timotheus in Alexander's Feast, and then compared him with Dryden:

Soft is the strain when zephyr gently blown,
And the smooth stream in smoother num-
bers flows;
But when loud surges lash the sounding
shore,

⁷ The Letters of John Dryden, ed. Charles E. Ward (Durham: Duke University, 1942), p. 76.

⁸ Lynch, p. 11.

⁹ Samuel Johnson, The Works of the English Poets (London: John Nichols, 1790), II, 201-202.

The hoarse rough verse should like the tor-
 rent roar.
 When Ajax strives some rock's vast weight
 to throw,
 The line, too, labours, and the words move
 slow:
 Not so when swift Camilla scours the plain,
 Flies o'er th' unbending corn, and skims
 along the main.
 Hear how Timotheus' varied lays surprise,
 And bid alternate passions fall and rise.
 While at each change the son of Libyan
 Jove
 Now burns with glory, and then melts with
 love;
 Now his fierce eyes with sparkling fury
 glow,
 Now sighs steal out, and tears begin to
 flow:
 Persians and Greeks like turns of nature
 found,
 And the world's Victor stood subdued by
 sound.
 The power of music all our hearts allow,
 And what Timotheus was is Dryden now.
 (ll. 365-383) 10

And in the same poem, Pope considered the shortness of
 fame:

Now length of fame (our second life) is
 lost,
 And bare threescore is all ev'n that can
 boast:
 Our sons their fathers' failing language see,
 And such as Chaucer is shall Dryden be.
 (ll. 480-483) 11

Dr. Samuel Johnson deemed him the father of criticism.
 He stated that "Dryden may be properly considered as the
 father of English criticism, as the writer who first taught

¹⁰ The Complete Poetical Works of Pope (Boston: Hough-
 ton, Mifflin and Co., 1903), p. 72.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 73.

us to determine upon principles the merit of composition. Of our former poets, the greatest dramatist wrote without rules, conducted through life and nature by a genius that rarely misled, and rarely deserted him." ¹² And, Johnson added, Dryden's criticism stemmed from a poetic nature and was never dull, never heavy with theories. Instead it was witty and swift-paced, a "gay and vigorous dissertation." ¹³ Johnson praised Dryden's studious background which equipped him with facts and notions, leading to useful experiences necessary for a critic of poetic art. In his poem The Progress of Poesy, Thomas Gray imagined that Dryden was following Milton into the sublime of poetic greatness:

Behold, where Dryden's less presumptuous car,
Wide o'er the fields of glory bear
Two coursers of ethereal race,
With necks cloath'd, and long'resounding
pace.
(ll. 103-106) ¹⁴

Thus, the major figures in literature were reading and studying Dryden during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Nineteenth and twentieth century poets in both England and America continued this appreciation of the

¹² Malone, I, Pt. 1, x.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ The Poems of Gray and Collins, ed. Austin Lane Poole (London: Oxford University Press, 1919), p. 51.

poet of the past, John Dryden, and proved thereby the practicality of Dryden's theory that the poet should study other poets (past and present) to perfect his art.

By 1808, Scott had gathered Dryden's works together in a labor of love that comprised eighteen volumes. In the preface to his edition, he stated that Dryden had left to literature "a name second only to those of Shakespeare and Milton."¹⁵ Another Scotsman, Robert Louis Stevenson, praised Dryden's odes for their "sustained eloquence and harmony of English."¹⁶ Also in the nineteenth century, Hazlitt, in his essay "On Familiar Style," referred to Dryden's prose as an **example of** "the familiar style,"¹⁷ and he quoted many of the poet's verses in his essays, three among them being "On the Pleasure of Painting," in which he quoted from Dryden's Spanish Friar;¹⁸ "The Fight," in which he quoted from the Indian Emperor;¹⁹ and "On Going A Journey," in which he quoted a letter from Dryden to a kinsman.²⁰ Although the Romanticism of the

¹⁵ Hollis, p. 201.

¹⁶ Van Doren, p. 245.

¹⁷ Dryden: Poetry, Prose and Plays, ed. Douglas Grant (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1952), p. 12.

¹⁸ Hazlitt: Selected Essays, ed. Douglas Grant (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1952), p. 12.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 237.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 249.

nineteenth century was primarily a revolt against the Age of Reason, Byron concluded that the "very principles of the revolt had to be stated in the English which Dryden had made." ²¹ Byron was influenced by the satire of Dryden, and he alluded to the seventeenth-century poet in his Don Juan:

Thou shalt believe in Milton, Dryden, Pope;
 Thou shalt not set up Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey;
 Because the first is crazed beyond all hope,
 The second drunk, the third so quaint and mouthy.
 (Canto I) ²²

In reply, Coleridge made the rather saturnine statement that "if Pope was a poet, as Lord Byron swears, then Dryden . . . was a very great poet." ²³ Another of his tart remarks was that "Dryden's genius was of that sort which catches fire by its own motion; his chariot wheels get hot by driving fast." ²⁴ Yet, he recommended the prose works "as models of pure and native English." ²⁵ Here again, as in the case of Byron, we may observe admiration, if rather grudging, for the way that Dryden used the English language. Although decidedly hostile in his attitude

²¹ Hollis, p. 201.

²² Paul Graham Trueblood, The Flowering of Byron's Genius (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1945), p. 19.

²³ Van Doren, p. 253.

²⁴ Coleridge on the Seventeenth Century, ed. Roberta Florence Brinkley (Durham: Duke University, 1955), p. 630.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 631.

toward him, Wordsworth admitted that Dryden possessed "a certain ardour and impetuosity of mind, with an excellent ear." ²⁶

In America, Lowell declared thoughtfully that Dryden had been given a rather singular credit for what he could have been instead of for what he was, and that the whole of his work seemed more worthy than any one piece. ²⁷ And Emerson regarded his poetry as "polite verse." ²⁸

Matthew Arnold, famous literary critic of the Victorian Age, made the remark that Dryden's poetry had all the qualities of good prose, ²⁹ and he gave Dryden and Pope credit for being important creators of the Age of Reason; but he declared that they were hardly poets at all. Yet, Arnold expressed appreciation of Dryden. "My admiration for Dryden's genius is warm," he said in 1857. ³⁰

The twentieth century poets, Mark Van Doren and T. S. Eliot, admired Dryden respectively for his reading.

²⁶ Van Doren, p. 253.

²⁷ James Russell Lowell, Among My Books (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1870), p. 5.

²⁸ Van Doren, p. 256.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 245.

³⁰ Matthew Arnold, On the Classical Tradition, ed. R. H. Super (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1960), p. 84.

Van Doren described him as "above all things a literary man." ³¹ Both admired him also for his influence, which was considerable in his own day as well as in Eliot's. ³²

In one way or another, Dryden has been discussed through the ages. He has been more than discussed; he has been maligned, bemoaned, beloved, respected, and sometimes consciously ignored. However, as we have noted by quoting the opinions of contemporary and later poets, he was truly a "poets' poet," a man who was studied by poets.

Also exemplifying Dryden's vogue are the publications of his books from the seventeenth century to the twentieth. Numerous editions of Dryden's complete works were published during his lifetime. In 1691, sets of his works were collected by the binding together of quartos of different dates (1691, 1693, 1694, 1695) and the addition of general title pages. His works appeared in another edition of 1695, also composed of quartos bound together. The composition of the sets varied slightly, but each set comprised four volumes containing prose, plays, and poetry.

In 1701, the year after his death, two volumes of Dryden's works appeared under the title, The Comedies, Tragedies, and Operas Written by John Dryden. They were

³¹ Van Doren, p. 68.

³² Eliot, p. 9.

advertised as being collected together for the first time and corrected from the originals. In that same year, the third volume of The Works of Mr. John Dryden appeared, consisting of the "Author's Original Poems and Translations, Now first Publish'd together."

The nineteenth century produced The Works of John Dryden, "Illustrated with Notes historical, critical, and explanatory and a Life of the Author, by Sir Walter Scott." All of Dryden's works, as gathered into eighteen volumes by Scott in 1808, were revised by George Saintsbury from 1882 to 1892. Also the twentieth century produced two editions of miscellaneous works--Dryden: Poetry and Prose, edited by D. Nichol Smith in 1925, and The Best of Dryden, edited by L. I. Bredvold in 1933. Thus selections of Dryden's poetry, prose, plays, and even letters have made his work available to students.

There were, however, other publications of Dryden's works, collections of specific genres. His poems, for instance, have always been in vogue, evidenced by publications from 1688 to the 1930's. In 1688 Annus Mirabilis was published, including with it several other occasional poems. Dryden's three satirical poems, MacFlecknoe, Absalom and Achitophel, and The Medal, were published in 1692. Publications in the eighteenth century included Fables Ancient and Modern, the translations which Dryden made from

Homer, Ovid, Boccaccio, and Chaucer, and the original poems (1700, republished in 1713, 1721, 1734, and 1745); Poems on Various Occasions and Translations from several Authors by Mr. John Dryden (1701); Original Poems and Translations, by John Dryden, Esq., two volumes (1743); The Miscellaneous Works of John Dryden, Esq. containing all his Original Poems, Tales, and Translations, four volumes (1760 and again in 1767).

The nineteenth century produced numerous editions of his poetry, beginning in 1806 with T. Parks' three-volume edition of The Poetical Works (1806). A revised edition of The Poetical Works appeared in 1811 and 1851, this time edited by H. J. Todd and with notes by Joseph Warton and John Warton, among others. In 1832, 1852, 1865, 1866, 1891, respectively five new volumes of The Poetical Works appeared, edited by J. Mitford. The publication in 1865 contained new biographical details by R. Hooper. The 1870 edition of Dryden's Poetical Works had fifteen reprints. The editor, W. D. Christie, also edited Select Poems (1871, 1873).

The twentieth century saw such editions as the one by J. Churton Collins, The Satires in 1905, which was the first published representative of Dryden's poetry in the twentieth century, according to The Cambridge Bibliography

of English Literature. The poet's Poetical Works, this time edited by G. R. Noyes, reappeared in 1908. In 1910 and 1935 a collection called The Poems was edited by J. Sargeaunt. W. D. Christie and Sir C. H. Firth's The Poems was published in 1911; and two editions appeared in the 1930's--The Songs of John Dryden, edited by C. L. Day (1932), and Poems Selected, by Bonamy Dobree (1934).

Dryden's prose works, like his poetic works, have been collected in editions. The first collection of his prose works did not appear until the turn of the nineteenth century, when Edmund Malone's collection of three volumes in four books, entitled The Critical and Miscellaneous Prose Works of John Dryden, appeared in 1800. It included notes, illustrations, a biography written by Malone, and letters and documents. Three more editions were published in the latter part of the century--An English Garner (1877), edited by E. Arber; Essays (1882), edited by C. D. Yonge; and Essays on the Drama (1898), edited by W. Strunk. The revival of interest in John Dryden's prose in the twentieth century was probably led by Mark Van Doren and T. S. Eliot, who both wrote critical books about him, but the modern movement began in 1900 with W. P. Ker's important two-volume selection of Dryden's Essays. Another selection, An English Garner: Critical Essays and Literary Fragments (1903), was edited by J. Churton Collins. Dryden's Dramatic Essays

was edited by W. H. Hudson in 1912, and an edition entitled Dryden and Howard, 1664-1668, edited by D. D. Arundell, came out in 1929. It is rather evident that, while the prose works alone had a slow start, they became increasingly important from year to year, culminating in the numerous editions of the twentieth century.

Just as the works of Dryden were popular, so were books about him. The first biography of the poet was published eighty-one years after his death. The biography was included in Dr. Samuel Johnson's ambitious undertaking entitled The Lives of the Poets. George Saintsbury's biography John Dryden was written one hundred years later (1881); excluding the introductory biographies in Edmund Malone's and Sir Walter Scott's editions, Saintsbury's life of Dryden was the second biography published, and after a great lapse of time. Among the biographies appearing in the twentieth century are the following: C. Hollis' Dryden, 1933; J. M. Osborn's Some Biographical Facts and Problems, 1940; and most recently, Charles E. Ward's The Life of John Dryden, 1961. Possibly the scarcity of biographies may be explained by the many mysteries and unanswered questions in Dryden's life.

Contrasted with the biography, criticisms and appraisals of Dryden the writer have been published in quantity. An essay about Dryden was included in Gerard Lang-

blaine's An Account of the English Dramatic Poets in 1691. John Dennis, a friend and student of Dryden's, wrote The Impartial Critick in 1693 and addressed letters and essays to Dryden in 1694. An Historical Review of the Stage (1708), by John Downes, included a sketch about him. And a critical effort by Joseph Weston was entitled An Essay on the Superiority of Dryden's Versification over that of Pope and the Moderns (1789).

Percival Stockdale's Lectures on the Truly Eminent English Poets (1807) mentioned John Dryden, William Hazlitt discussed him in his Lectures on the English Poets (1818), and John Genest discussed his dramatic contributions in Some Account of the English Stage, Volume I (1832). The publications of the latter part of the century included James Russell Lowell's Among My Books (1870), G. S. Bowen's A Study of the Prologue and Epilogue in English Literature from Shakespeare to Dryden (1884), M. Sherwood's Dryden's Dramatic Theory and Practice (1898), and Sir A. W. Ward's A History of English Dramatic Literature to the Death of Queen Anne, Volume III, (1899).

The twentieth century produced a rash of critical analyses of the seventeenth century in general and John Dryden in particular, beginning with two books--The English Heroic Play (1903) by L. N. Chase, and A History of English

Poetry (1903), by W. J. Courthope--which discussed the importance of Dryden. A. W. Verrall's Lectures on Dryden was published in 1913, and A. Gaw's critical evaluation of his "Spanish plot" was published in 1917. The 1920's produced ten books about Dryden, among them Mark Van Doren's John Dryden: A Study of His Poetry (1920) and T. S. Eliot's Homage to John Dryden (1924). The emphasis on criticism continued in the 30's, with publications of seven books, including Louis I. Bredvold's The Intellectual Milieu of John Dryden (1934), M. E. Hartsock's Dryden's Plays: A Study in Ideas (1938), and C. S. Lewis's Shelley, Dryden, and Mr. Eliot (1939). The latest publications about Dryden are analytical, and they are focused on the desire to achieve a thorough understanding of the poetry and prose of the seventeenth-century poet laureate. Such works as F. W. Russell's Voltaire, Dryden and Heroic Tragedy (1946), E. M. W. Tillyard's A Note on Dryden's Criticism (1951), and F. L. Huntley's On Dryden's Essay of Dramatic Poesy (1951) illustrate the desire of modern critics to understand and appreciate more fully the how and why of poetry and prose. Most recent of all is John M. Aden's helpful dictionary, The Critical Opinions of John Dryden, compiled and edited for the benefit of students and published at the close of 1963. I have made use of this work since June, 1964, when I received my copy from the Vanderbilt University Press.

From my survey of books by and about Dryden, a survey based largely upon The Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature, Volumes II and V, I summarize certain observations regarding his vogue. The editions of his poetical and miscellaneous works were published from the late seventeenth century until the early twentieth century; such editions appeared in quantities in the 1690's, 1700's, and mid-1800's, but became less frequent from the mid-1800's until the 1930's. In 1930-33 the London edition of The Epilogue, Writ by Mr. Dreyden, Spoke before His Majesty at Oxford, March 19, 1680, was rediscovered in the Bodleian Library by R. G. Ham, who reprinted it in the London Mercury, March, 1930, and by Autrey Nell Wiley, who subsequently included it, with its history, in her Rare Prologues and Epilogues, 1642-1700.³³ The prose works did not appear at all in collected form until 1800; and, according to the Cambridge Bibliography, eight different editions were published between that time and 1929, demonstrating the wakening interest in what lay behind Dryden's poetry. The published biographies were very few and, until the recent biography by Ward, were unsatisfactory in many ways. Criticisms of Dryden and critical surveys of either the seventeenth-century or the English poets are numerous, and the criticisms have delved into every facet of Dryden as a writer, with perhaps the modern trend stressing him as a poet and as a critic of poetry.

³³ (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1940), pp. 33-39.

Because Dryden's poetry and prose are so closely related to each other, it is extremely difficult to separate them. His poetry has the quality of good prose--clear, reasonable thoughts couched in simple, direct language. And in his prose may be found beautiful images that most writers reserve for poetry. In his most popular and perhaps most important piece of literary criticism, The Essay of Dramatic Poesy, a reader may note particularly interesting comparisons. These comparisons may be classified according to their sources, nature, the arts, science, and metallurgy. He occasionally referred also to mythology.

His use of nature images may be exemplified in the comparison of emotion with a flood: "Grief and passion are like floods raised in little brooks by a sudden rain; they are quickly up; and if the concenterment be poured unexpectedly in upon us it overflows us: but a long sober shower gives them leisure to run out as they came in, without troubling the ordinary current."³⁴ Elsewhere, he discussed variety in meter and compared meter with a stream. He said, "'Tis like the murmuring of a stream, which not varying in the fall, causes at first attention, at last drowsiness."³⁵ In a discussion of repartee, Dryden stated that while "we attend to the other beauties of the matter [the wit and the sweetness of rhyme], the care and labour

³⁴ Ker, I, 72.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 96.

of the rhyme is carried from us, or at least drowned in its own sweetness, as bees are sometimes buried in their honey." ³⁶

In the area of art, he used comparisons of architecture frequently. In stating that the Ancients were to be condemned because they did not consistently employ a certain number of acts in their plays, Dryden compared their inconsistency with "building a house without a model." ³⁷ And in his discussion of judgment he said, "Judgment is indeed the master-workman in a play; but he requires many subordinate hands, many tools to his assistance. And verse I affirm to be one of these; 'tis a rule and line by which he keeps his building compact and even, which otherwise lawless imagination would raise either irregularly or loosely." ³⁸ Dryden used the image of the statue several times. He compared French poetry to a statue, declaring that the French possessed the ability to "raise perfection higher where it is," but, he added, they "are not sufficient to give it where it is not: they 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." ³⁹ Again using the statue image, he declared that

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 103-104.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 46.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 107.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 68.

"a play, . . . 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." ⁴⁰

The poets in the seventeenth century were deriving images also from science and metallurgy, following the example of their classical masters. Dryden was no exception. He compared plots and underplots of plays with the planets: "Just as they say the orb of the fixed stars, and those of the planets, though they have motions of their own, are whirled about by the Primum Mobile, in which they are contained." ⁴¹ And he employed a mythological image when he described restriction of a poet's poetic license: "You would have him follow Nature, but he must follow her on foot: you have dismounted him from his Pegasus." ⁴² Although we have merely examined one essay, it is representative of his devices and his language in all his essays.

Though on the one hand Dryden exemplified such Restoration interests as Neo-classicism, science, and reason and order, on the other hand he maintained individuality as a discerning critic and poet at a time when one piece of literature merely served to remind the reader of

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 102.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 70.

⁴² Ibid., p. 103.

another. W. P. Ker said, "His virtue is that in a time when literature was pestered and cramped with formulas, he found it impossible to write otherwise than freely. He is sceptical, tentative, disengaged, where most of his contemporaries, and most of his successors for a hundred years, are pledged to write certain dogmas and principles." ⁴³ As one of the Restoration's greatest thinkers, Dryden has been thought of as a poet who was far ahead of his contemporaries in his concepts in almost every branch of literature. It was this farsightedness that resulted in the remarkable influence which he had for the next three hundred years, from the latter part of the Restoration until the present time.

It could never be stated that men like Alexander Pope and T. S. Eliot, Keats and Van Doren shared the same precepts in poetry; yet all read John Dryden and were influenced by him. His significance in English verse has dominated ever since his poet laureateship. His school was devoted to control as an essential in verse, in expression, and in subject matter of art. ⁴⁴ His intentions were definite: he wanted to improve literature, especially poetry, and refine language from normal seventeenth-century standards. ⁴⁵ His appearance in the Restoration Period was

⁴³ Ibid., p. xv.

⁴⁴ Baugh, p. 722.

⁴⁵ A. W. Verrall, Lectures on Dryden, ed. Margaret De G. Verrall (New York: Russell & Russell, Inc., 1963), p. 6.

fortunate, for experimentation was taking place. He accomplished his goals in various poetic types with the exception of the epic, which he always considered the very height of poetry. However, he put out a wealth of material which included lyric poetry, dramatic poetry, translations, biographies, critical essays, political essays, satires, pamphlets, and artistic essays. It took eighteen volumes to hold his work. In the forty years that he spent in literary work, Dryden revealed his aspirations, his dreams, his responsibilities, his beliefs, and his efforts to perfect his art. He always strove to find better words, stronger expression, and more controlled verse--in short, more artistic effects. ⁴⁶

When Dr. Johnson declared that Dryden's criticism was the criticism of a poet, he compressed into one sentence an aspect of Dryden that has been impressing Dryden's followers through the years. W. P. Ker admired his prose power: "He is at his best when he has set himself to try the value of dogmatic rules and principles His critical writings have been less damaged by the lapse of time and have kept their original freshness better than

any literary discourses which can be compared with them." ⁴⁷
With his prose he established theories pertaining to his
beliefs about poetry, and with his poetry he illustrated
those theories: a study of Dryden's conception of the
poet is invaluable to the student of poetry.

⁴⁷ Ker, I, xiii-xiv.

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