23.2 JOHN DRYDEN : AN INTRODUCTION

John Dryden

Dryden began his poetic career during the civil war. His elegy on the death of the 'Protector', Oliver Cromwell, in 1658, is one of his earliest poems. His 'public' spirit gave his poetry public themes, and his greatest work is political satire. The shifting loyalties of his life as a person and poet have caused much critical confusion. He changed, as Dr. Johnson said, 'with the nation' at the time of the Restoration. His choice of blank verse in All for Love came in the wake of his weariness of his long-loved mistress Rhyme. His religious conversion to Romanism towards the end of his poetical career has been a controversial topic. It should not, however, be difficult for us to appreciate these changes–political, religious and in versification as signs of catholicity and a liberal spirit rather than of rnere opportunism. The Revolution of 1688 affected his poetic career somewhat as the Restoration of 1660 affected Milton's. The steadfastness of Milton's convictions and his devotion of the causes he espoused may be contrasted with Dryden's cavalier attitude to life and letters.

The expansion of British colonialism had emerged. The East India company brought wealth to England. Another significant fact of social life was the separation of religion and politics during Dryden's lifetime, the power of the British parliament had been rising. The Civil War, the regicide and the 'glorious' Revolution, are all symptoms of the rise of the common man. But the class cleavage also became more marked.

The heroic couplet or rhymed decasyllabic verse is Dryden's major contribution to English prosody. Pope said: 'I learned versification wholly from Dryden's works'. We know that Dryden and Pope are the greatest masters of the heroic couplet in the English poetic tradition. Blank verse, the most important verse form in English poetry, was nearly completely replaced by rhymed verse for more than half a century during 1680-1750.

Regarding the language or poetic diction of Dryden, there is no critical consensus, Dryden believed, and Dr. Johnson agreed, that the language of poetry was improved and refined by him. But Wordsworth and Arnold described the language of Dryden's and Pope's poetry as unpoetical or prosaic. T.S. Eliot described the difference that Dryden brought about in the language of poetry as due to a dissociation of sensibility

reflected in crude poetic feeling. The earlier complexity of vision and language was lost. The rise of science, the stress on the clarity and simplicity of expression, made the language of poetry in English less connotative.

Dryden's dramatic experiment helped him master the medium of the heroic couplet which was used to great poetic effect in his satire of the sixteen eighties. His criticism is at once that of the father of English criticism and of a growing poet groping for the discovery of the form of expression that would suit his experience and that of his age. His translations fostered in him and in his age an awareness of European and universal standards of poetry. The most striking development was from the 'heroic' to the mock heroic in his poetry.

23.3 A BRIEF BIO-DATA

Birth and The Family: John Dryden, the son of Erasmus Dryden, was born of puritan stock at Aldwinkle in Northamptonshire on August 9, 1631. John Locke was born one year later, and Isaac Newton in 1642. These three great Englishmen of the same age gave English poetry, British philosophy and modem science respectively a new direction. Dryden's pride in his family is expressed in To my Honoured Kinsman John Dryden (1700). The following lines describe Dryden's idea of a patriot which he believed was illustrated by many members of his family living and dead:

> A patriot both the king and country serves
> Prerogative and privilege preserves;
> Of each, our laws the certain limits show
> One must not ebb nor the other overflow.
> Betwixt the prince and Parliament we stand,
> The barriers of the state on either hand;
> May neither overflow, for then they drown the land.
> When both are full they feed our blessed abode,
> Like those that watered once the Paradise of God.

At School : He was taught by a famous scholar Dr. Busby at his Westminster school. Dryden was thoroughly trained in rhetoric by Busby. In a memoir of Richard Busby (1895), the writer quotes a mother proudly writing in 1688: They are bravely taught both to be scholars and orators at Doctor Busby's School at Westrninster, where my son is: In Dryden's poetry and drama, the poet and his characters plead a case or argue a cause. The influence of the school teacher is behind it,

Trinity College Cambridge: In 1650 Dryden entered Trinity college, Cambridge on a Westminster scholarship. His interest in learning developed there, but he did not get a fellowship in the College. Later in life, he wrote:

> Oxford to him a dearer name shall be
> Than his own mother-University:
> Thebes did his rude unknowing Youth engage;
> He chooses Athens in his riper age.
> (Prologue to the University of Oxford written 1676)

London: After four years at Cambridge, Dryden Came to London. He became secretary to Sir George Pickering, his maternal cousin, who enjoyed Cromwells's favour. In November 1662, Dryden became a member of the newly founded Royal Society.

Marriage: Dryden married Lady Elizabeth Howard the sister of Sir Robert Howard, in 1663. He had three sons, Charles, John and Henry. Charles and Henry chose the religious profession, John was an author. He wrote a comedy called The Husband His own Cuckold.

In the translation of Juvenal (1693), Dryden was assisted by his sons. He cursed marriage perhaps because he was not happy in his married life. Saintsbury mentioned a joke that the poet had at the cost of his wife. One day she said to him: 'I wish I were a book, and then perhaps you would pay me some attention.' He replied : 'Then, my dear, pray, be an almanac, that I may, change you at the end of the year.' Life and art were not far from each other in the case of Dryden. The following lines may be noticed:

> Minds are so hardly matched that en'n the first
> Though paired by heav'n in Paradise, were cursed;
> For Man and woman though in one they grow
> Yet, first or last, return again to two
> Not that my verse would blemish all the fair,
> But yet if some be bad 'tis wisdom to beware,
> And better shun the bait than struggle in the snare.

Dryden wrote these lines in the last year of his life.

He had started writing poems while still at school. He started writing plays in the year of his marriage, 1663. For about ten years, he wrote poems, plays, prefaces to plays and poems, and critical essays. He became popular and famous as the writer of heroic plays in which he chose to use the decasyllabic couplet. But in 1671, a burlesque, The Rehearsal, was staged. It satirised Dryden as Bayes. Dryden had been made poet Laureate in place of Sir William Davenant. He was also made HistoriographerRoyal soon after, in 1670. He was already a member of the Royal Society. Thus, he was well-known, and the travesty of his talent not only hurt him deeply but also affected his reputation. It exaggerated the artificiality and unreason of his heroic drama—the rant and bombast, the mechanical plots and the grandiose speeches, and the constant harping on the conflict between honour and love. The running commentary of Bayes reveals the weakness of Dryden's critical attitude in respect of heroic drama. He glories in the worthless character of Drawcansir. Dryden's defence of heroic plays and his satirical portrait of Zimri in Absalom and Achitophel (1681) were his revenge. But between 1671 and 1681, he had smarted.

Dryden's interest in poetry, poetic drama and literature was more than personal. He guided the younger writers and distributed poetical fame. He was highly influential as a poet and man of letters from the beginning, and his influence was greater after his death. During the Augustan Age, or the first half of the eighteenth century, his influence on English poetry was most powerful and dominant but the Dryden whose influence was so great emerged not before his fiftieth year 1681.

Dryden's interest in public life and affairs was great. It inspired his creative imagination better than anything else. Absalom and Achitophel (1681) happens to be the greatest political poem in English not by chance. The popish plot was disclosed by Titus Oates in 1678. Qates, the son of an Anabaptist preacher, had first been an Anglican clergyman, then he switched to the Catholic faith, but was expelled from Jesuit College where he was undergoing training for a religious profession in the new order. He claimed that he was present at a Jesuit conference held in London in April 1678. A plot to kill the king and usurp the British throne was hatched by the Catholics in that conference.

The revelation of what came to be called the Popish plot led to the passing of the Exclusion Bill by the House of Commons in opinion turned in favour of the king who wanted his catholic brother, the Duke of York, to succeed him to the British throne. He summoned a meeting of the parliament at Oxford in March, and soon dissolved it. In July, the principal leader of the opposition, the Whig Earl of Shaftesbury was arrested and imprisoned in the Tower on a charge of high treason. His trial was to be held in November, and Dryden brought out his Absalom and Achitophel on the 17th

of that month, a week before the commencement of that trial. The king described Shaftesbury as the weakest and wickedest of men, and Dryden's portrait of Shaftesbury as Achitophel has become one of the most famous satirical portraits in English. Interestingly, John Locke had hailed him as a brave defender of civil, religious and philosophical liberty. Dryden's portrait is of course mixed. Part II of Absalom and Achitophel was published in 1682. Both the parts had appeared anonymously, and in the second part, written mainly by Nahum Tate, Dryden's contribution was short portraits of Doeg and Og. But Shaftesbury had been released and a medal was struck in his honour. However, soon after that, Shaftesbury accepted defeat and fled to Holland. The Medall, A Satire Against Sedition, was published by Dryden in 1682. It pursued Shaftesbury, the whig medalist, with relentless vigour. One of the replies, The Medal of John Bayes, was attributed to Shadwell, his former associate. Dryden replied with Mac Flecknoe, or a satyr upon the True-Blue-Protestant Poet, T.S in 1682.

But Dryden's literary opponents who had concocted the Rehearsal in 1671 were active, and Elkanah Settle wrote an amusing parody of Absalom and Achitophel. Its title was Absalom Senior, or Achitophel Transposed. But it was ineffective, whereas Shadwell's The Medal of John Bayes was a brutal and repulsive attack. Dryden's reply was of course great poetry and satire.

The philosophical poetry of Dryden expounds theological and political controversies of the time and certainly demonstrates his awareness of fideism, modern science, scepticism and deism. T.S. Eliot described his mind as 'commonplace', and Aurobindo regarded him as merely intellectual. But T.S. Eliot was a creature of the age of specialisation and a student of philosophy. Moreover, in comparing Dante and Shakespeare, and in his 'Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca' he had convincingly argued that a poet was different from a philosopher, even when his poetry was philosophical, Dryden's poetry is a criticism of life. Which was at once social and spiritual in his Time. His Religio Laici (1682) states a Layman's Faith. Its opening lines assert how 'reason grows pale at religion's sight'. Another important point made in the poem is that traditions 'make not truth but probability'. His conclusion is:

> Faith is not built on disquisitions vain;
> The things we must believe are few and plain.
> But since men will believe more than they need
> And every man will make himself a creed,
> In doubtful questions 'tis the safest way
> To learn what unsuspected ancients say.

The story of Dryden's religious conversion has been a topic of debate among his biographers. We might satisfy ourselves with one late view. The Hind and the Panther (1687), an allegory, states Dryden's personal drama, the state of his spirit in his mid-fifties:

> What weight of ancient witness can prevail
> If private reason hold the public scale?
> Rut gracious God, how well dost thou provide
> For erring judgment, an unerring Guide?
> Thy throne is darkness in th' abyss of light,
> A Blaze of glory that forbids the sight;
> O teach me to believe thee thus concealed,
> And search no farther than thy self revealed:
> But her alone for my director take
> Whom thou hast promis'd never to forsake!
> My thoughtless youth was wing'd with vain desires
> My manhood, long misled by wandering fires,
> Followed false lights; and when their glimpse was gone

My pride struck out new sparkles of her own.
Such was I, such by nature still I am
Be thine the glory, and be mine the shame.
Good life be now my task: my doubts are done.

T.H. Fujimura (1972) said in an essay that both the panther and the Hind 'are personae representing Dryden' and that the poem dramatises the crisis in the poet's mind and spirit. This crisis was suspected to be merely mean opportunism. The poet universalises autobiographical material and dramatises confession. The Anglican foes like Edward Stillingfleet had attacked the poet. Fujimura's biographical approach is helpful. The Hind and the Panther, the two beasts, represent ' a variety of people' positions and postures' as well as' the conflicting tendencies in Dryden himself. The intensely personal dilemma of the vengeful poet committed to charily replying to charges (i) that he had no religion, (2) that he had changed his religion for bread concludes with his reflection on fame and honour in part 111 (lines 279-305). Consider, particularly, the following lines.

1. The poet is bidding a long farewell to worldly fame.
Then welcome infamy and public shame,
And, last, a long farewell to worldly fame.

But he feels the sharp convulsive pangs of agonising pride.

2. The poet prays to God to teach him.
Instruct him better, Gracious God, to know,
As thine is vengeance, so forgiveness too.
That suffring from ill tongues he bears no more
Than what his Soverign bears, and what his saviour bore

Attacks on the poet had continued. The Hind and the Panther, transvers'd to the story of the country mouse and the city mouse' had appeared in the same year as the Hind and the Panther. The vitriolic lampoon by Robert Gould entitled the Laureat was difficult for Dryden to ignore. In Britannia Rediviva (1688), he wrote.

Our manners, as Religion were a dream,
Are such as teach the Nations to blaspheme,
In Lusts we wallow, and with pride we swell
And Injuries, with Injuries repell;
Prompt to revenge, not daring to forgive,
Our lives unteach the Doctrine we believe.

The struggle to achieve genuine humility is endless for mast of us. Dryden was a poet, not a saint. Charity and compassion were not easy for him to achieve.

Dryden's ambition to write an English epic remained unrealiscd. But if he could not write an epic, he could translate one of the two greatest European epics, Virgil's Latin epic, Aeneid. Dryden's Virgil and Pope's Homer did not achieve the poetic success of Milton's Paradise Lost, but they fall just short of that.

In the last decade of his life, Dryden translated, together with Virgil's Aeneid, satires and 'fables' from Ovid, Juvenal and Boccaccio.

Thus, during the sixties and seventies, Dryden experimented with the art of drama, and wrote excellent drama criticism. During the eighties, his satires were written, which made him immortal as a great English poet. The nineties were the decade of translations.

After the Revolution of 1688, Shadwell was made the Poet Laureate, replacing Dryden.

The Mind of John Dryden

The intellectual milieu of Dryden has been studied in detail. Dryden had an open and thinking mind. He said: Thoughts, such as they are, come crowding in so fast upon me, that my only difficulty is to choose or to reject, to run them into verse, or to give them the other harmony of prose.

The energy of his mind has impressed his readers, scholars and critics, but he was also believed to be more imitative than original. He himself believed that a poet should have comprehensive learning and experience. About his own learning. Critics like Dr. Johnson complain of carelessness. Johnson remarked: 'His scholastic acquisitions seem not'proportionate to his opportunities and abilities. He could not, like Milton or Cowley, have made his name illustrious merely by his learning.' But Johnson admired the mind of Dryden as follows: "His works abound with knowledge, and sparkle with illustrations....A mind like Dryden's (was) always curious, always active, ... (but) his studies were rather desultory and fortuitous than constant and systematical. What Dryden said of his king and master, Charles II", is true more of himself: 'his knowledge more, his reading only less'.

The character of Dryden was described most sympathetically by his friend William Congreve. Congreve said that Dryden was very friendly and easy of access, but diffident in his advances to others. His communication was perhaps better than his knowledge. A rapidity of conception characterised his mind. T.B. Macaulay (1828) said 'By trampling on laws, he acquired the authority of a legislator'. He began as a rebel in poetic technique, an experimenter, and ended as the authority of a new poetic technique discovered by him. His mind 'fond of splendeur, was indifferent to neatness'. It had not decayed till his death (May 1, 1700). One thing peculiar to Dryden was that, in the words of Congreve, 'his parts did not decline with his years'. He kept improving till the end in 'fire and imagination, as well as in Judgement'.

'The chill of a sceptical atmosphere' is said to have turned Dryden's mind and imagination self-conscious, In his Defence of Essay of Dramatic Poesy (1668). Dryden described his discourse in the Essay as 'sceptical' according to that way of reasoning which was used by Socrates, Plato, and all the academics of old, which Tully and the best of the Ancients followed, and which is imitated, by the modest inquisitions of the Royal Society. He wrote of his 'natural diffidence and scepticism' in the Preface to Sylvae (1685). Earlier, in the Preface to Religio Laici (1682), he said that he was 'naturally inclined to scepticism in philosophy.' His criticism shows a spirit of free inquiry, a modest and tentative style and tone. He regarded his views and opinions as 'probable' rather than certain.

Dr. Johnson criticised his moral character. According to him, Dryden was aware of his dignity of character and importance as a poet. His modesty was by no means inconsistent with ostentatiousness. He is diligent enough to remind the world of his merit. He is accused of envy and insidiousness...He abetted vice and vanity only with his pen; Johnson regretted or rued that Dryden degraded his genius and spread the contagion of corruption in society.

Johnson judged the 'life' of Dryden as a man of letters, as a poet. His controversies with Settle, Collier, Blackmore, Milborne, Stillingfleet etc. are part not only of his 'biography' but of his life as a critic, poet and satirist.

Life and art are not separable in the case of Dryden, though, as Johnson said, Dryden who refined the language, improved the sentiments and tuned the number of English poetry, was an 'occasional' poet who had both learning and facility of composition. Religio Laici (1682) is 'a composition of great excellence,' almost the only work of Dryden which can' be considered as a voluntary effusion', but it is more argumentative than poetical. As a reflective or philosophical poem, it is distinctively

Dryden's–mixing the grave with the humorous', serio-comic, in a word. The Hind and the Panther (1687), the longest of all Dryden's original poems, is allegorical in design and 'an example of poetical ratiocination.'

The last decade of Dryden's life was devoted to the translation of Latin classics, to writing some of his best criticism e.g. the criticism of Chaucer and The Discourse on Satire, and some of his best poems. The Song for St. Cecilia's Day, Alexander's Feast and The Secular Masque were published during this period. His creative and critical power did not decline with his age. In the last year of his life he wrote the Secular Masque. It is a characteristic poem, and a befitting epilogue to a century, The seventeenth century in english literature is perhaps the greatest, because it produced the great plays of Shakespeare, the Metaphysical poets, Milton and Drydcn. Dryden's description of the end of the century focuses on its decadence rather than its glory. The concluding chorus of the masque is:

> All, all of a piece throughout;
> Thy chase had a beast in view;
> Thy wars brought nothing about;
> Thy lovers were all untrue.
> 'Tis well an old age is out;
> And time to begin a new.

The new age that followed owed no less to Dryden than to Milton in poetry, and Shakespeare was inimitable.

23.4 THE DRAMATIST

23.4.1 Comedies : Principle and Practice

The story of Dryden's preoccupation with drama for more than three decades is the sad story of the compromise of his genius with the fashion of the day He said For I confess my chief endeavours are to delight the Age in which I live. "And the Age liked comedy. The Restoration Comedy entertained it. Though Dryden forced his genius to write comedy, he thought he was not 'so fitted by nature to write comedy' He regarded comedy as 'inferior to all sorts of dramatic writing', but he admitted that his disgust' with 'low' comedy was not so much from my judgement as from my temper'. We spoke of the sulleness of my humour.' A saturnine and reserved temperament.' Moreover, comedy was low because the persons in comedy are of a lower quality (than in tragedy) the action in little, and the faults and vices are but the sallies of youth, and the frailties of human nature, and not premediated crimes' but while Comedy presents the imperfection of human nature, farce entertains us with what is monstrous and chimerical. We approved the mixed way of comedy, that which is neither all wit, nor all humour, but the result of both'. Repartee, the soul of conversation, was the greatest grace of comedy.' The first end of comedy is delight, and instruction only the second.

The following list of his comedies shows that (1) he was prolific, but (2) not first rate. George Etherage, William Wycherley and William Congreve were greater masters of the Restoration comedy. Dryden's Whig opponent, Thomas Shadwell is known for his Jonsonian Comedy of humour

1. The Wild Gallant (1663) is a comedy in prose. It did not succeed in the theatre.
2. Sir Martin Marall (1667) is also a comedy in prose, Its subtitle is 'Feigned Innocence'. It is influenced by Moliere's comedy.
3. An Evening's Love or the Mock Astrologer (1671).
4. Marriage a la Mode used both blank verse and prose. It was successfully staged in 1673 and was popular.
5. The Assignation or Love in a Nunnery (1672) is a comedy in prose.

6. Amboyne (1673) mingled verse and prose and was written at the time of the second Dutch war Dryden's patriotic and political sentiment was reflected.
7. Limberham, or The Kind Keeper (1678), a comedy in prose, was prohibited as too indecent for the stage.
8. Amphitryon (1690) mixes verse and prose.

We mention three important points of critical interest.

1. His ambition was as much to be read as to please his audience. The purity of phrase, the clearness of conception and the significancy and sound of words, not strained into bombast, but justy elevated, in short those very words and thoughts, which cannot be changed, but for the worse, must of necessity escape our transient view upon the theatre; and yet without all this a play may take: Language, it seems, was 'all this' to Dryden. So the non-verbal aspect of the art of Drama was beyond him as it did not inspire his imagination.

2. The conversation of the age impressed and inspired his imagination.

   Wit's now arrived to a more high degree
   Our native language more refined and free.
   Our ladies and our men now speak more wit
   In conversation than those poets writ.
   Epilogue to the Conquest of Granada II (1672)

It was not merely flattery and sycophancy on the part of the poet to praise his age particularly its refinement of wit and language. It was recording an important historical change. Early modem English was becoming simpler, clearer, less fantastic, less complex and less barbarous.

3. The decline of the drama after the Age of Shakespeare is also to be noted. The glory of English drama is the Elizabethan and Jacobean. Later ages have failed to reach that height. Perhaps the Civil War caused the loss.

23.4.2 Tragi-Comedies : Principle and Practice

Tragi-comedies suited Dryden's genius better than comedies. About the use of comic relief in the tragedy of the last age, Dryden said: A continued gravity keeps the spirit too much bent and 'why should we imagine the soul of man more heavy than his sense? He was defending the native drama against the contemporary French and the Ancient Greek and Latin, in his Essay of Dramatic Poesy meant for an audience which had grown 'weary of continued melancholy scenes'. Whoever cannot perform both serious and comic parts, is, Dryden said but half a writer of the stage.

1. The Rival Ladies (1664). Rhymed verse was used for the serious part and prose for the less serious.

2. Secret Love, or the Maiden Queen (1667).

3. The Spanish Friar (1680), or the Double Discovery. The comic effect predominates in the play. The friar remindes of Chaucer's friar. It is a satire against the papists. Dryden was soon to become a papist himself.

4. Love Triumphant (1694), or Nature will prevail. Compare this with the adaptation of Shakespeare's Love tragedy Antony and Cleopatra which Dryden called All for Love, or the World Well Lost. Transcendent and Triumphant Love in Dryden's drama is viewed both comically and tragically. Contrast Dryden with Shelley as poets of Love. Shelley is said to have loved the idea of Love, to be in Love with Love. Dryden's love poetry is-also based

in his literary experience. It does not seem to derive from life, as that of the metaphysical poets (whom Dryden had mocked) did.

Later in life, he had come to the final judgement that mirth and gravity destroy each other and are no more to be allowed for decent than a gay widow laughing in a mourning habit.

23.4.3 Heroic Drama : Principle and Practice

The English heroic play adopted the technique of musical and recitative spectacle. An amalgam of passion drama, melodrama, romance and opera, it was at its most glorious in Dryden's experiment: It urged the themes of love, honour and civic virtue, in high places, and with furious confusion and rivalry before an exotic and pseudo historical setting, to the continuous fanfare of trumpets and clash'of arms on nearby plains. Dryden defended the romance as 'Nature wrought up to a higher pitch' But magniloquence of the speeches of the 'out size, superhuman' heroes' is excessively exaggerated and was burlesqued in. The Rehearsal (1672) His 'poetic licence' like Marlowe's was over reaching. Besides, he made passion more important than action. The following list of his heroic plays does not include his operatic and dramatic adaptations of Shakespeare and Milton.

1. The Indian Emperor (1665) deals with conquest of Mexico by Cortcz. It used rhymed verse and was popular.

2. Tyrannic Love, or the Virgin Martyr (1668) has Maximin as its hero who defied gods.

3. The Conquest of Granada, Parts I and II (1669-70) deals with incredible love and impossible valour. The romantic heat of the wildest flights of imagination made the astonishing ridiculous.

4. ***Aureng*** Zebe (1676) in the most important of the heroic tragedies of Dryden, particularly to the Indian student. The contemporary Indian Mughal emperor, Aurang Zebe, is the hero. Dr. Johnson remarked: His country is at such a distance, that the manners might be safely falsifed, and the incidents feigned. His comment that if Aurang Zebe had disliked his portrait in Dryden's play, 'our trade was not in those-times secure from his resentment reveals how profitable trade with India was held to be.

The play is interesting for another reason. Dryden said in the prologue that hc grew 'weary of his long-lived mistress, rhyme'. He complained of the indifference of the audience or people to drama. He described himself as betwixt two ages cast, The first of this, and hindmost of the last. The poor income from his plays saddened him. And he feared more 'their votes who cannot judge, than theirs who can' because he boasted.

> Our poet writes a hundred years too soon.
> This age comes on too slow, or he too fast;
> And early springs are subject to a blast.

The audience liked songs and dances, spectacle and violence but the poet offered French civility, courtly wit and civilized manners.

The famous speech in which Aureng Zebe reflects on life (Act IV) has clear and fluent style and movement. Its meaning is thin yet it strikes an attitude, gives itself unwarranted airs.

The serio-cormic temper of the age was reflected through prologues and epilogues to his heroic drama by Dryden. Consider the following speech of the actress (Mrs.

Ellen) (who played Valeria in Tyrannic love or The Royal Martyr (1670) who committed suicide at the end of the tragedy) as the epilogue to the play

> I come, Kind gentlemen, strange news to tellye,
> I am the ghost of poor departed Nelly.
> Sweet ladies, be not frighted, I'll be civil,
> I am what was, a little harmless devil.

The poet praised his age and flattered his audience in the well-known Epilogue to the second part of the Conquest of Granada.

> If love and honour now are highter raised,
> Tis not the poet but the age is praised
> Wit's now arrived to a more high degree;
> Our native language more refined and free.
> Our ladies and our men now speak more wit.
> In conversation than those poets writ.

In the Prologue to Don Sebastian (1690), Dryden speaks of his loss of pension and that 'a play's of no religion'. The new English King (William III) was a protestant, and Dryden was a Roman Catholic. A law forbidding Roman Catholics to keep a horse of more than 5 in value had been passed. Dryden refer to it in the following lines.

> Horses by papists are not to be ridden;
> But sure the muses' horse was ne'er forbidden.
> For in no rate-book it was ever found
> That Pegasus was valued at five pound.

In the prologue to the Assignation, (1672) Dryden compared prologues to church bells and poets with priests.

> Yon damn the poet but the priest damns you

In the prologue to The Spanish Friar (1680) Dryden Compared of the fickle taste of his audience, 'fickle Sovereigns' who dub today and hang a man tomorrow'. He thought the French.taste changed for better, while the English for worse:

> The French and we still change, but here's the curse.
> They change for better and we change for worse

The song Farewell ungrateful Traitor from the Spanish Friar is sweet. The sad reflection of a woman who loved and was betrayed is presented. Consider:

> Your love by ours we measure
> Till we have lost our treasure
> But dying is a pleasure
> When living is a pain.

He thought his age surpassed the last. 'But what we gain' d in skill we lost in strength'. Notice also the sentimental strain appearing. It was to mature in the plays of Goldsmith and Sheridan.

If Dryden is not a great English dramatist in spite of all art. It is because, as Dr. Johnson said, he was not much acquainted with simple and elemental human passions like love. 'Love of the golden Age was too Soft and subtle to put his faculties in motion. 'Ironically, he himself had found Johnson wanting similarly, Love 'which is the foundation of all comedies in other languages is scarcely mentioned in any of his plays' interestingly, he believed in the triumph of love because he thought it was

natural. Both in 'tragedy, All for Love, an adaptation, significantly, of Shakespeare's tragedy of love, Antony and Cleopatra, and in comedy; Love Trumphant or Nature will Prevail, he gave this idea a dramatic form. But the warmth of feeling is wanting, and the power of rhetoric in poetry. The transcendent love for which the world was well lost was inrealised poetically. In the preface to All for Love. Dryden attacked the imitation of French decorum in the English theatre.

He was bored with composing rant and bombast. The roaring rhetoric and the romantic gallantry of the Heroic play was excessive. The Elegance of high society, its external graces, its good manners provided the theme. Comedy and Tragedy alike were experimental and exploratory. Dryden discovered his serio-comic tone, mastered the mock-heroic form in heroic couplets which helped him write his famous satires. The dramatic work of Dryden continued for more than two decades, but his verso-satire and literary criticism is more important. He perfected his verse–the heroic couplet in the theatre, and discovered his creative bent. Indignation w :s to be better realised in poetry by him than love. The romantic turned burlesque in Dryden's mature poetry of the eighties. Besides the comedies, tragicomedies and tragedies mentioned above, Dryden wrote some more plays in collaboration with Lee and others. His adaptations of (1) Shakespeare's The Tempest for which his subtitle was the Enchanted Island, (2) Shakespeare's Troilus and Cresida which was inspired by Chaucer's great romance of the same name, (3) Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra and (4) Milton's Paradise Lost, which he transfonned into an opera entitled The State of Innocence and Fall of Man, do all show his literary preoccupation. He loved the literature of the past. His other opera or musical drama Albain and Albanius (1685) and King Arthur or The British Worthy (1691) reflect his political and patriotic interest. The former is against the Republicans and bad art. The latter is better art.

23.5 THE CRITIC

The function of criticism in Dryden's time was social, and not merely academic or professional as now. D.H. Lawrence required a critic to be 'einotionally alive in every fibre, intellectually capable and skillful in essential logic, and then morally very honest. Dryden seems to have met only the intellectual requirement. However, he is the fountain head of neo-classical criticism in English and of Augustan verse-satire.

Dr. Johnson described Dryden as 'the father of English criticism, as the writer who: first taught us to determine upon principles the merit of composition: At the right moment in the history of English literature, Dryden asserted the value and importance of the native element in the national heritage, particularly drama. In his essay of Dramatic Poesy (1168), an early english classic of criticism, Dryden showed an open mind, a keen judgement, a lively style and great learning. The method of dialogue helped him present conflicting views. His purpose was to debate, not dogmatize. The four debaters in the Essay are: (1) Crites (Sir Robert Howard), Lisideius (Sir Charles Sedley) Eugenius (Lord Buckhurst) and Neander (Dryden). The Main theme is the vindication of English plays. The essay was dedicated to Sir Charles Sackville, Lord Buckhurst (1638-1707). Sir Robert Howard (1626-98) was Dryden's brother - in-law and a dramatist. Sir Charles Sedley (1639-1701) was a poet and dramatist. Neander means 'new man, parvenu'. This name is used by Dryden for himself to denote the difference in social rank between Dryden and the three persons of quality. They discuss the respective merits of ancient drama in Greek and Latin, the English Drama of the Last age; and the modern in French drama which influenced Restoration English drama. The question of the verse-form proper for drama is discussed at the end. The three unities were observed in contemporary French Drama, but the English dramatists had not cared for them. The English drama had more of action and tumult or melodrama than was considered desirable. Narration should replace action. Death scenes in English tragedies were most comic. The English mingling of tragic and comic elements is, however, defended.

The judicial criticism of Dryden is very sound. Shakespeare is hailed as the largest and most comprehensive soul of all modem, and perhaps ancient, poets' Jonson, Beaumount and Fletcher are also duly appreciated. The practical or applied criticism of Johnson's. The silent Woman is one of the earlist specimens of the type.

Dryden had experimented with rhymed verse in The Indian Emperor, and was going to repeat the experiment in his other heroic tragedies. His argument in favour of rhyme in drama has this bias. 'In serious plays rhyme is more natural and more effectual than blank verse'. Blank verse was 'too low' and unsuitable for heroic drama.

Heroic couplets, 'the noblest kind of modem verse', were more appropriate for heroic tragedy. Secondly, Shakespeare and his successors had exhausted the possibilities of blank verse in drama. So rhyming verse was the only verse form for tragedy. Rhyme is a help to memory, and gives point to repartee. Above all, it curbs the poet's fancy, 'that lawless faculty that like a high ranging spaniel must have clogs tied to it lest if outrun the judgement'. Notice how Dryden related imagination to reason in the following passage. Fiction may go beyond reason and realism, he seems to argue, but it should be controlled. But he abandoned his attempt at innovation in All For Love (1678), the adaptation of Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra, in which he used blank verse.

Dryden had upheld the unities for their verisimilitude, and rhyme for its transcendence of verisimilitude. In both the views he expressed the desire to maintain the formalities and to achieve form and beauty in the art of drama.

A serious play is no doubt the representation of Nature, but it is 'nature wrought up to a higher pitch'. In fact, in Dryden's view, the epic and tragedy were of the same genus. Imagination is allowed in fiction to mislead reason and even blind it. But this willing suspension of disbelief does not make reason a slave to imagination. Reason willingly contributes its assent, 'as far as it sees convenient, but will not be forced' (Defence of an essay, 1668). If imagination rises higher than life in a heroic play as in a heroic poem, Dryden's argument, in his essay of Heroic Plays (1672), was : A heroic play ought to be an imitation, in little, of an heroic poem. A heroic poet may let himself loose to visionary objects and may give his imagination 'a freer scope'. This anti-realistic stance is noticeable. In another essay, Apology for Heroic Poetry and Poetic Licence (1677), he defended his use of rhetoric, imaging, tropes and figures.

The criticism of Dryden is the criticism of a growing poet, exploratory, 'sailing in a vast ocean without other help than the-pole star of the ancients and the rules of the French stage'. His advocacy for rhyme in the theatre did not succeed, but his long practice of writing rhyming speeches in the plays proved to be the ground where the medium of his satires was being perfected. The non-dramatic heroic couplet of Dryden (and Pope) is more valuable than the dramatic rhymed verse of Dryden's heroic plays. In the prologue to Aureng Zebe (1676), he said that he grew weary of his long-loved mistress rhyme. From 1665 to 1676 he used rhyme in his plays. From 1681, he used it in his satires with much greater success.

About the language of Shakespeare and his age. Dryden held a view which has the characteristic limitation of the Age of Reason. In an Essay on the Dramatic Poetry of the Last Age (1672), 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 of any precedent age. Never did any author precipitate himself from such heights of thought to so low expressions as he often does. He is the very Janus of poet; he wears almost everywhere two faces; and you have scarce begun to admire the one, ere you despise the other"; Similarly about Ben Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher.

Dryden flattered his age, admired its gallantry, civility and conversation. He ascribed the refinement of the conversation of the upper classes to the court of Charles II: The fire of the English wit, which was before stifled under a constrained, melancholy way of breeding, began first to display its force, by mixing the solidity of our nation with the air and gaiety of our neighbours, 'Notice the contrast of the English with the French:' the solidity of our nation with the air and gaiety of our neighbours. Notice also that the 'mixing' was due to the French influence on English language.

During the last quarter of the seventeenth century Dryden was assimilating the French influence From Rapin and Dacier, he derived a closer acquaintance with Aristotic, From Boileau a shrewd idea of Longinus's illuminating doctrine, and from St. Evermond a sense of the need for an active and open mind in all critical inquiries. The earlier influence of Corneille was enriched and modified by these later ones.

Dryden's critical work of the period consists of prefaces and dedications mainly to translations. The heroic poem was the ideal for Dryden. Milton's Paradise Lost appeared in 1667. Dryden's epic ambition could not be realised so he imitated the classics. In his preface to his Ovid, he distinguished theres types of translation : (1) Metaphrase or literal translation, (2) paraphrase or free translator, and (3) Imitation where 'the translator (if now he has not lost that name) assumes the liberty, not only to vary from the words and sense, but to forsake them both as he sees occasions; and taking only some general hints from the original, to run division on the groundwork, as he pleeses.'

Dryden's aesthetic of imitation merged with that of parody and burlesque. The poet related the contemporary world to the literary past by discovering analogies and parallels.

His criticism is not systematised into a theory. It is concerned with his own creative work and that of his contemporaries. He was experimenting as late as 1685. His adaptation of two of Shakespeare's tragedies and a romantic comedy of Milton's epic into an opera and his modernisation of Chauer's tales show that the great tradition of English poetry and drama was being renewed by him for his age.

A Discourse concerning the original and progress of Satire (1693) appeared as the preface to his Juvenal. It is an erudite, if somewhat tedious, discourse on satire, mainly ancient Satire, in which Perseus Horace and Juvenal are compared, and some interesting remarks on modern satire and epic poetry are added. Varronian Satire was meant more to divert than to teach, said Dryden, while Menippean satire is parody, buffonery and facetiousness.

In parallel of Poetry and painting (1695). Dryden said that poetry and painting were in different degrees representations of the ideal and brought out the general, common and specific features of both arts.

Regarding the relative importance of epic and tragedy which he discussed in his Dedication of the Aeneis (1697), his preference for the epic is unmistakable. While Aristotle awarded the first place to tragedy the Renaissance critics preferred the epic. Dryden hesitated to decide, and according to Austin Warren (1942) gave them joint possession of the prime category. But Dryden's preference for the epic is clear and emphatic. He asserted that the heroic poem had always been and would always be esteemed the greatest work of human nature. He opened his Dedication to the Translation of Virgil with the sentence: A HEROIC POEM truly such', is undoubtedly the greatest work which the soul of man is capable to perform'.

His preface to the Fables (1700), prefixed to a volume of translation from Homer, Ovid, Boccaccio and Chaucer is his last critical work, Its main feature is a masterly appreciation of Chaucer. Here is an extract:

In the first place, as he is the Father of English poetry, so I hold him in the same degree of veneration as the Grecians held Homer, or the Romans Virgil. He is a perpetual fountain of good sense; learned is all sciences; and therefore, speaks properly on all subjects.

Dryden was neither pedantic nor systematic as a critic. His love of form and order was not rigid but pragmatic realism and romance were both approved by him. Imitation acquired a new critical meaning in his criticism. 'It was rather a process of the spirit which aimed at recapturing something of that vital force' which had gone to the making of Shakespeare's Troilus and Cressida. Dryden said in his preface (1679): "we who ape his sounding words have nothing of his thought, but are all outside; there is not so much as a dwarf within our giant's clothes. Therefore, let not Shakespeare suffer for our sakes; 'tis our fault, who succeed him in an age which is more refined, if we imitate him so ill that we copy his failings only, and make a virtue of that in our writings which in his was an imperfection. This awareness of the difference between the language of Shakespeare and his own shows that Dryden's critical judgement was keen and sound, fair even at his own cost. The decline of poetry was felt acutely by Dryden. Skill had supplanted strength, external grace had replaced the inner fire of imagination.

Dryden's critical insight was greater than his creative imagination. He defended poetic licence, but he could not go beyond rhetoric in his own poetry. His epic ambition was thwarted, his experiment with the heroic form of drama did not outlive his age. What survived is his verse satire as in the heightenings of poetry, he said, the strength and velemence of figures should be suited to the occasion, the subject and the persons, Figures should also bc suited to the chosen level of style, the grand, the middle, or the plain, Low style was fit for satire, odes occupy a middle ground, tragic, heroic and sacred poetry demanded the loftiest style. Dryden's critical principles bear the stamp of Roman rhetorical theory.

His practical experience of creative writing led him to emphasise the importance of the art of characterisation. Round characters are better than flat. A round character consists of a blend of qualities which are not incompatible. Thus a man cannot be a miser and extravagant at once, but he can be generous and valiant.

In his Discourse On Satire, his views on the Latin Satire of Horace and Juvenal were elaborately presented. Fine raillery is nicest and most delicate.' Horace excels in this. Dryden himself imitated the manner of Horace in Abslom and Achitophel. He regarded satire as a species of heroic poetry. A Satirical poem, he stated, should in general treat of one main theme, with one particular moral, a rule observed by Persius and later on by Boileau; otherwise the most effective method was that of Horace, the sharp well mannered way of laughing a folly out of countenance.

He had a sense of tradition which T.S. Eliot seemed to have imitated, it was a creative poet's awareness. He pointed out that spenser insinuated that the soul of Chaucer was tranfused into his body. Milton, Dryden said,' has acknowledged to me that Spenser was his original. 'About Shakespeare, he said:

> Shakespeare's magic could not copied be,
> Within that circle none durst walk but he

But Chaucer's and Shakespeare's art of characterisation in particular, and Milton's great epic inspired him. Chaucer's blending of the particular with the universal, the evanescent with the permanent in the portrait gallery of the general prologue to the . Canterbusy Tales may be seen in the portrait gallery of Absalom and Achitophel.

Besides these great English poets Dryden discussed Spenser, Donne, Cowley and the Latin poet Virgil and the Roman Satirists.