

IV. The Criticism of the New Rehearsal

Gildon's chief critical attack in the New Rehearsal is against the kind of tragedy that is represented by Howe's Jane Shore. Rowe's other plays get a good deal of attention, but if Gildon had been forced to select one play as the epitome of the evils of the age, he would have chosen Jane Shore. Gildon establishes, in a much more lively form than he has hitherto, his theory of tragedy and then ruthlessly dissects Jane Shore and several other plays of Rowe's. The theory had been expounded before and was to be expounded elaborately later (especially in the Complete Art of Poetry and the Laws of Poetry). Gildon is an unimaginative Aristotelian in his approach to criticism. Tragedy is the imitation of an action (Gildon spends no time in the New Rehearsal on the controversial nature of the word imitation).¹ It promotes fear and pity. No time is spent, either, on the nature of catharsis, but Gildon firmly believes that emotions improper to tragedy or emotions uttered by characters whose natures make them improper for tragedy will not promote fear and pity. The Lady Jane Gray in

1. See the Complete Art of Poetry, I, 51, 84.

Rowe's play is either innocent, in which case the audience would be indignant, or she is guilty of usurpation, a heinous crime, in which case we should feel no pity. With the partly guilty victim of circumstances Gildon has little patience. The production of fear and pity in Gildon's critical system depends on a most strict regard for character and action. The fable must be directed to nothing but furthering the catharsis, as this is the chief end of tragedy.

The ethical and religious importance of tragedy is naturally, in this short satiric dialogue, somewhat slighted, but Gildon everywhere assumes it. Aristotle's rules are nothing but "Nature methodis'd," to use the words of an arch-enemy of Gildon's, and are a necessary and God-given social corrective. Gildon follows Rapin and Dennis on this but with less tolerance of deviation and less aesthetic sensitivity. Of the seven uses of the word nature enumerated by Professor Lovejoy in his article "'Nature' as Aesthetic Norm"² two seem to be especially in Gildon's mind when he uses the term. Nature is universal and immutable and

2. MLN, XLII(1927), 445-447.

can hence be understood and enjoyed by anyone;³ the obviousness of this makes Gildon impatient with those who ignore the rules. Also, nature is the generic type, excluding the particular. In criticizing the character of Tamerlane in Rowe's play, Gildon makes the point that many of the plays of his age fail the way this one does by making the hero too particular, i.e., by selecting first the hero and then the plot the poet does not concentrate as he should on the moral and does not teach a general lesson. In his "Essay on the Art, Rise and Progress of the Stage" (1710) Gildon makes this an absolute rule.⁴ Lovejoy's other points, uniformity, economy, simplicity and "intuitively known principles or standards" Gildon would minimize, especially the last, which he would be suspicious of as he is of the word genius. What nature definitely is not is the unbridled fancy of an individual author. Dennis had bitterly attacked Pope's Essay on Criticism for his failure to define the term, and Gildon was aware of the looseness of current usage of the term. Bays says in the New Rehearsal (p.91), "The

3. This makes it valuable for those who are denied access to truth through lack of education or lack of reasoning ability. In the Complete Art of Poetry (I, 31) Gildon specifically recommends it for women.

4. "Art, Rise, and Progress of the Stage," p.lx; see also Complete Art of Poetry, I, 136.

Critics may talk of Art and Rules, and I know not what, but I am for Nature. I hate Art and Rules." This nature he defines as what the poet naturally thinks, that is, whatever comes into his head. This type of reasoning, unless the poet has a head as Aristotelian as Gildon's, rapidly leads to extravagance and a search for novelty. "Nature," in Dennis's words, "is nothing but that Rule and Order, and Harmony, which we find in the visible Creation."⁵ Professor Clarence C. Green, in citing this passage, says:

The implications..., it seems to me, are perfectly clear. Reason is the principle of order, the Platonic Idea of order--the universal that manifests itself imperfectly in particulars. It participates, as Socrates would have said, in the "visible," or physical, world, as well as in the "invisible," or mental, world. In the degree to which it does participate in these two worlds, physical and mental "nature" is rational, or orderly, and therefore worthy of imitation. In the degree to which it does not participate, the two worlds are unworthy of imitation. The exceptions to order, the oddities and queerness of "nature," taken, as Dennis might have said, in a "looser sense," are beyond the pale.⁶

In applying this principle, the difficulty lies in determining precisely what actions, manners and sentiments instigated by or emanating from the human species are in accord and what are

5. Advancement and Reformation of Poetry in Hooker, I, 202.

6. The Neo-Classical Theory of Tragedy in England during the Eighteenth Century, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1934, p.15.

"beyond the pale." Gildon's concept of what was irregular and not permissible was very narrow, narrower than Dennis's. Most of the characters in Rowe's plays are excluded on this basis; Rowe, to Gildon, was all "oddity" and "queerness."

That tragedy must instruct Gildon considers evident not only because Aristotle says so, but also because the origin of tragedy seems to indicate that from the beginning of time this was the purpose of poetry generally and of tragedy in particular. The success of this instruction relates to the delight which it gives.⁷ Rymer had laid the law down on this in his Tragedies of the Last Age: "...whoever writes a Tragedy cannot please but must also profit; 'tis the Physick of the mind that he makes palatable." Collier had attacked the tragedies of his own day along these lines: "...the Business of Plays is to recommend Virtue, and discountenance Vice; To Shew the Uncertainty of Humane Greatness, the suddain Turns of Fate, and the Unhappy Conclusions of Violence and Injustice: 'Tis to expose the Singularities of Pride and Fancy, to make Folly and Falsehood contemptible, and to bring every Thing that is

7. On the pleasure of tragedy see Laws of Poetry, pp.125-126.

Ill under Infamy, and Neglect."⁸ In answering Collier in the preface to Phaeton Gildon did not quarrel with this, of course, but objected only to Collier's desire to push all tragedy off the stage because of the deficiencies of a few plays. Both Dryden and Dennis had at various times tended to stress the pleasure over the instruction.⁹ Gildon clearly values the instruction higher, though he does not specifically minimize the pleasure. He believes that the general audience as well as himself will get pleasure from seeing the rules observed (the rules being from Nature).¹⁰

This function of tragedy in providing moral instruction makes it necessary that plot and characters be subordinated to the production of the moral. Aristotle's dictum that the characters be not too far above nor too far below the common run of humanity Gildon applies narrowly and literally. Professor Green indicates that the age was likely to apply this doctrine so badly that high rank was

8. A Short View of Tragedy; its original, excellency, and corruption, London, Printed... by Richard Baldwin, 1693
i.e. 1692, p.1.

9. Dryden, Defense of an Essay on Dramatic Poesy in Essays, ed. W. P. Ker, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926, I, 113; Dennis, The Usefulness of the Stage, Hooker, I, 146-156.

10. Cf. Complete Art of Poetry, I, 51.

considered sufficient to qualify a hero for tragedy.¹¹ Rowe, if he had thought about it, would probably have agreed with this. Gildon is much more strict and hence more Aristotelian. He does require high rank (Jane Shore will not do because she is a shopkeeper's daughter). But high rank alone is by no means sufficient. Both Racine¹² and Dryden¹³ had argued before Gildon that the hero's character should be something of a mean between good and evil (but not that he should be ordinary). What Gildon would prefer, though he does not say so, is a perfect character with one tragic fault. Hence he places great emphasis on decorum, following Rapin and Boileau. Rapin sees decorum as the foundation of probability:

Besides all the Rules taken from Aristotle, there remains one mention'd by Horace, to which all the other Rules must be subject, as to the most essen-
tial, which is the decorum. Without which the other Rules of Poetry are false: it being the most solid foundation of that probability so essen-
tial to this Art. Because it is only by the decorum

11. Green, op.cit., p.33.

12. Preface to Andromache, in European Theories of the Drama, ed. Clark, cited by Green, p.33.

13. Heads of an Answer, in Works, ed. Scott-Saintsbury, XV, 387, cited by Green, op.cit., p.34.

that this probability gains its effect; all becomes probable, where the decorum is strictly preserv'd in all circumstances.¹⁴

Rymer carries this extremely restrictive idea of decorum to its fullest extent in the Tragedies of the Last Age:

If I mistake not, in Poetry no woman is to kill a man, except her quality gives her the advantage above him, nor is a Servant to kill the Master, nor a Private Man, much less a Subject to kill a King, nor on the contrary. Poetical decency will not suffer death to be dealt to each other by such persons, whom the Laws of Duel allow not to enter the lists together.¹⁵

Rowe's Tamerlane is too perfect a character, certainly, and scandalously wicked characters like Jane Shore are surely unsuited for tragedy.¹⁶ Dennis voices similar sentiments in his Remarks upon Cato (1713): "...such scandalous Villanies are brought upon our Stage as are fitter for the Hangman's Correction than that of the Muses."¹⁷ Bajazet in Tamerlane is "all along a sort of a Mad Man, and seems to have been brought up at Billingsgate."¹⁸ Rymer, whom Gildon by now was beginning to admire more than he did in his early years, condemned Iago for purposeless evil and said that a "wicked"

14. Rapin, Reflections on Aristotles Treatise of Poesie, London, Printed by T. W. for Herringram, 1674, p.65.

Also quoted by Green, op.cit., p.35.

15. Rymer, op.cit., p.117. Also quoted by Green, op.cit., p.36.

16. New Rehearsal, pp.10-11, below.

17. Hooker, II, 53.

18. New Rehearsal, p.68.

character is unfit for tragedy.¹⁹ Dryden in the preface to Troilus and Cressida (1679) says, "To produce a villain, without other reason than a natural inclination to villany, is, in Poetry, to produce an effect without a cause; and to make him more a villain than he has just reason to be, is to make an effect which is stronger than the cause."²⁰ Aristotle specifically lays down the law on this point. Gildon does not concern himself with the difference between the main characters, who must excite our sympathies, and minor ones. Orchanes, the Captain of the Guard in the Ambitious Stepmother, commits what to Gildon is a senseless villainy in dragging his dying master over to stab the heroine, a move not sound politically in Persia at that particular moment.²¹ A villain will not act without some motive of profit to himself, or if such a villain existed, he would be against nature (p.44). Generally speaking, it is not the sum total of the actions of the hero's life that determines whether he is honorable enough for tragedy. Certain vices are immediately disqualifying, such as cowardice in a man or unchastity in a woman (p.79). "No bright

19. Rymer, op.cit., p.98

20. Essays, op.cit., I, 214.

21. Act IV, Scene ii.

Quality can balance a Vice that is Scandalous, as Incontinence in a Woman, and Cowardice in a Man" (p.81). Gildon has little opportunity to say much on cowardice, but Rowe's plays give him plenty of material to talk on incontinence. "A Whore profess'd, is no Tragic Character," says Freeman to Sawny Dapper (p.79). Jane Shore has led an immoral life and is not properly repentant. She talks warmly of her lost Edward and discourses nostalgically on the decline of her beauty, expressing resentment that women are judged by more strict standards than are men (pp.82-84). This is an unchaste attitude for a woman, and even if she were entirely and humbly repentant her past would make her an unfit character for tragedy. Sawny, who displays more knowledge of the classics than Gildon would have given him if he had thought about it, argues that the foundation of ancient tragedy is crime: "Rapes, Murders, Incests, Parricides, and such Crimes, which give a shocking Idea to the Soul" (p.79). Freeman denies that there is one ancient play that has such a foundation, and the troublesome Phaedra is disposed of by the assertion that her crime was a punishment on her inflicted by the gods (Euripides' play Gildon approves, but in Seneca's and Edmund Smith's the character

is "abominably debas'd" [p.80]). Helen of Troy is likewise defended--it is the virtuous Helen who was left behind at Pharos who is in Euripides' play. The unchaste character of Jane Shore makes it virtually useless for the critic to go on to the other defects of the play; she is below the level of tragic characters and hence cannot teach us the lesson that the tragic character should. The heroine in the Fair Penitent likewise is an unchaste woman; Rowe has here further blackened the unpardonable character of the heroine in Massinger's Fatal Dowry (pp.71-72).

The importance of the proper character is not that character is the most important thing in tragedy but that it provides the means for unfolding the essential element of tragedy, the plot or fable. On unity of action Aristotle is detailed enough to permit the Neo-Classical critic less latitude in interpreting him than he usually gives. The fable must have a beginning, middle and end, i.e., be a complete action.²² It cannot depend on the events of the hero's entire life for its unity²³ (epic structure with its

22. Poetics, VII, 2-3 (Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art, London: Macmillan, 1923, p.31).

23. Ibid., VIII, 1 (p.33).

episodic plot will not do).²⁴ Any play defective in fable is "detestable" (p.38). Historical tragedy, because tied to history, is apt to err most on the business of unity of action. Julius Caesar has defects of unity ("Remarks," p.7), presumably caused by an undue regard for history on the playwright's part. The plot of the Ambitious Stepmother is "a strange kind of Medley"; it is not directed to a single end but apparently to defeat all ends (pp.42-44). Tamerlane spends most of his time talking and there is little action in the play; part of the plot may be removed, and the play is as good as before (pp.67-68). On the unity of time and place Gildon spends little time in the New Rehearsal. He realizes the logical implications in allowing some leeway on these matters, saying that in Ulysses Rowe makes his scene all Ithaca, "which, by as good a Reason, might have been extended to all Greece, and so to all Europe, nay, indeed, to the whole Earth" (p.70). The exact duration of time that is permissible is uncertain even to Dacier,²⁵

24. Ibid., XVIII, 4 (p.67); see "Remarks", New Rehearsal, p.6 below.

25. La Poetique d'aristote, Amsterdam, 1692, pp.67-69, cited by Green, op.cit., p.38.

whom Gildon regarded as one of the foremost modern authorities. The test to which Ulysses puts Penelope, Gildon says, interferes with the plot (p.70). That Gildon does not discourse at length on the plot of Jane Shore or Lady Jane Gray means simply that he is not being exhaustive here and that he sees the faults which he exposes as damning the plays utterly. In the Complete Art of Poetry Gildon provides a basis for the fable as the important part of tragedy and epic by equating it with the Biblical parable as the ideal way to reach most of mankind: "...as it reaches all Capacities, so it touches all Tempers and Constitutions" (I, 31, 35). Only by means of the fable are "Order, Harmony and Design" created in the tragedy (p.140). Without a proper fable the best that can be obtained is a fine scene or two, but no play (Gildon would put Shakespeare among those who create an occasionally good scene). Gildon interprets Aristotle literally on unity of action, place and time (pp.228 ff.). Dennis, in the preface to Iphigenia (1700), says, "...the Writing of good Verses may make a man a good Versifyer, but 'tis the forming a Fable alone, that can make a Poet."²⁶ Elsewhere Dennis says that a fable has

26. Hooker, II, 389.

action for a body and moral for a soul,²⁷ a statement with which Gildon would have agreed wholeheartedly. Rymer says, "The Fable is always accounted the Soul of Tragedy. And it is the Fable which is properly the Poets part. Because the other three parts of Tragedy, to wit, the Characters are taken from the Moral Philosopher; the thoughts, or scene, from them that teach Rhetorick: And in the last part, which is the expression, we learn from the Grammarians."²⁸ In the Causes of the Decay and Defects of Dramatick Poetry (1725?) Dennis defends Aristotle's rules and deplores Shakespeare's faulty fables.²⁹

Since the chief value of tragedy is in its moral instruction, the good must not be punished nor the evil allowed to escape punishment, and the moral must be one suitable for a general audience ("Remarks," p.9). Rowe, Gildon implies, does not, as has been noted, seem to know whether Jane Gray was guilty of usurpation, in which case she should be punished, or not, in which case she is most harshly treated. Orphanes, certainly a villain--if a minor one, gets off scot-free in the Ambitious Stepmother (p.44). The punishment

27. Remarks upon Pope's Homer, Hooker, II, 138.

28. Rymer, op.cit., p.38

29. Hooker, II, 286.

of two of the characters, Mirza and Magas, give us satisfaction, but the three innocents who die would provoke our indignation. The result is that we feel horror and satisfaction instead of being moved by fear and pity (p.53). Tamerlane errs in not having a general character; it is the imitation of a man rather than of an action that is "Great and Grave" (p.66). Moneses and Arpasia, in this play, are virtuous characters who by no means deserve their fate (p.68). In the Complete Art of Poetry Gildon, using Cato for proof, argues that the misfortunes of the virtuous can only produce indignation in us (I, 192). Elsewhere he says that tragedy (true tragedy!) never presents a vice without its proper punishment (p.39). And in the elaborate defense of poetry which begins the Complete Art of Poetry the doctrine of poetic justice is everywhere implied. The Collier controversy precipitated a debate on the matter of poetic justice. Undesirable matters were permitted on the stage, it was argued, because they existed in life and the poet could show the true consequences of vice by punishing the evil character at the end of the play. Mere exposure of evil was to Collier not enough, however; the good must be rewarded and the evil

punished.³⁰ Among others who espoused this view were Oldmixon, Drake, Filmer and Farquhar as well as the author (not Gildon) of A Comparison between the Two Stages.³¹

Addison attacked the doctrine in Spectator No. 40. In his essay On Poetic Justice (1711), which he wrote as a reply to Addison, Dennis did not disagree with Addison over fundamentals so much as has been thought, as Professor Hooker points out.³² The religious character of Dennis's

belief in poetic justice must have appealed to Gildon, however, by 1714 and certainly by the time of the Complete Art of Poetry.³³ Dryden introduces the idea into his Essay of

Dramatic Poesy.³⁴ Gildon would have found support for it

in Rymer, whom he had more and more begun to admire. In

his Tragedies of the Last Age Rymer couples in a simple fashion "vertues and rewards, ...vices and punishments."³⁵

Gildon was inclined to apply the doctrine in a heavy-handed and absolute way, and Addison, in the Spectator, was trying

30. A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage, London, 1698, pp.148-157.

31. See Hooker, I, 477.

32. II, 436.

33. See Hooker, II, 437.

34. Essays, I, 50.

35. Joel E. Spingarn, ed. Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century, Oxford: Clarendon Press, II, 206.

to restore the "poetic" to poetic justice.

Thus anything that interferes with the fable is necessarily detrimental to a tragedy, and the proper subordination of characters, manners, sentiments and language to the design is the poet's task. Characters like Jane Shore are obviously unfit for tragedy. Consistency or propriety of character is also desirable. Certain vices and even certain virtues are not proper for certain types of characters. A woman presumably would show cowardice just as a hero under any circumstances would not. Kings and nobles should not talk like porters, as Rowe has them do in Ulysses (p.70) and in the Ambitious Stepmother (p.51). A shopkeeper's daughter like Jane Shore is by virtue of her lowly birth excluded from being a tragic heroine (p.81). Consistency of character and manners gives rise to consistency in sentiments (p.39).

On diction in tragedy Gildon has much to say in the New Rehearsal because Rowe's plays were famous for their fine lines in their day and are likely to appeal to us now, if at all, for their language. The language of tragedy Gildon says elsewhere, borrowing exactly from Rapin,³⁶ had to be apt, clear, natural, lofty and splendid,

36. Rapin, op.cit., pp.41-44.

and numerous. It is unnecessary here to discuss each one of these qualities. For Gildon good language was primarily language suitable to the specific occasion in the play for which it was used. It must be language suitable, of course, for noble characters (few contemporaries would have argued against this in theory), but also it must be the kind of language that would be uttered naturally by a noble character in a proper tragic situation. Rowe's plays are severely handled by Gildon on this point. The diction is the least important part of tragedy, but fine language is the only thing that will recommend a play or any other poetic work to the town (p.39). This has resulted in fustian and rant passing for the sublime (p.30) and falsely put great stress on "the Chiming faculty of a Language" (p.29), "a happy knack at Rhime, and a flowing Versification" (p.59).

Gildon sneers at Rowe's poetical descriptions and especially his similes upon surprises (pp.87-88). We get a picture of Rowe building his play around a few select descriptions which he reads aloud to anyone who will listen and so makes the play popular even before it appears (p.94). Gildon largely ignores diction in his "Essay on the Art, Rise and Progress of the Stage" except to say that it is important

in modern plays because it is the only thing the modern play has which might be of value (p.lvi). In the Complete Art Gildon stresses the subordination of the diction to the action. It is ridiculous to have the language everywhere the same (p.290) for there is a different diction for anger, grief, etc., as Horace indicates (p.261). The language should be clear, without a florid style or unnatural expressions, and should avoid the vulgar (p.288). The modern tragic writer, instead of sticking to the simple, smothers a passion in "half a dozen pompous Verses, if not a Simile." Dennis, in one of the Letters to Steele and Booth, compares the simple style of Shakespeare with that demanded by the modern audience: "Instead of that noble and natural Dialogue, they are for a flatulant Style, in which the Poet puts the Change upon himself, and speaks almost always himself, instead of making his Characters speak."³⁷ In Remarks on Prince Arthur Dennis would have the writer of epic keep his descriptions brief and use them to assist the narrative³⁸ and the epic form permits more freedom than the tragedy. In the preface to the Court of Death (1695) Dennis indicates that he has restricted the description to

37. Hooker, II, 168.

38. Ibid., I, 141-142.

only narration.³⁹ Both Rapin and Le Bossu preceded Dennis with his attitude. The argument over the simile raged at the end of the seventeenth century. Dryden defended the simile, arguing that it should be brief, but allowed it to epic only, not to tragedy, "which is all violent, and where the passions are in a perpetual ferment; for there they deaden what they should animate."⁴⁰ On appropriateness of language Rymer is very severe on Othello, but he and a number of others, including Gildon (in the anthology attached to the Complete Art), were not immune to the beauties of description but objected to it largely as interfering with the action of a play.⁴¹ Rowe was a master in his way of the pathetic description, and Gildon's ire is directed chiefly at him but the problem is a quarter of a century old by the time of the New Rehearsal.

In applying his relatively unmodified Aristotelianism to Rowe's plays, Gildon naturally gives first importance to the moral (or theme) of the play and its expression in the fable. The manners, sentiments and diction must wait, being minor matters. Freeman sums up Aristotle's Poetics on these

39. Ibid., I, 45.

40. "Dedication of the Aeneis," Ker, II, 202.

41. See Hooker, I, 465.

various parts of a tragedy before he begins a lengthy analysis of the Ambitious Stepmother.⁴² The very name (and hence the theme or moral) of the Ambitious Stepmother is wrong "for Ambition is not a properly Dramatic Passion, it has too much of Sedateness, 'tis too particular, it extends not to the general Life, as Anger, Curiosity, Rashness, Obstinacy, and the like, which render, by Indulgence, the Common or General Life of Man uneasy, and often very Unhappy." Freeman is willing to abandon immediately a discussion of this fault to move on to Rowe's more considerable ones. Perhaps Gildon realized that the title was not, in his time, any more an index to the theme of a play than a motion picture title is today, but certainly ambition "has too much of Sedateness," to put it awkwardly. It is not positively or necessarily bad, like envy, and would straddle the definition Dennis gives of natural (or pleasing--man having been created happy) emotions and of accidental or displeasing emotions.⁴³

Rowe's play is about the efforts of Artemisa, wife of the dying king of Persia, to pave the way, with the aid of a

⁴². Pp.16-17, below (Poetics, VI, 7ff Butcher, op.cit., p.25ff).

⁴³. Advancement and Reformation of Poetry, Hooker, I, 258.

crafty prime minister, Mirza, for her son to inherit the throne instead of the king's older son by another wife. The younger son is not wholly villainous in this enterprise (i.e., is a "mixed" character), which Gildon would not have liked but he spends little time on him, preferring to concentrate on the behavior of the queen and the evil prime minister. The criticism is largely upon two heads: the fable is poor, even ridiculous, not only in its failure to be directed toward an adequate moral but because it is frequently improbable, and poetic justice is violated in that the good (Cleone and Amestris, two pure ladies enamoured of Artaban, the younger son, and Artaxerxes, the older one, respectively,) are punished along with the bad. The action as Gildon defines it is that of bringing Artaban to the throne, the point at which the play ends. And--both Freeman and Truewit concur on all major points--some of the most spectacular scenes of the play are inherently improbable and do nothing to forward the action. Mirza, the prime minister, spends considerable time trying to rape Amestris but neglects to tell her as a prelude to his courtship that he has not murdered her father, which, Gildon rightly suggests, might have softened the heroine somewhat.⁴⁴ That

⁴⁴. Act IV, Scene 11 (pp.43, 51, below).

Mirza assaults Amestris without the assistance of his body-guard at a most inconvenient moment in the pursuit of his political fortunes is perhaps excusable in the name of passion, but Mirza is elsewhere pictured as crafty and calculating, and Gildon here also seems to have the point on his side. Amestris stabs Mirza with a nearby dagger, "the dagger being at hand to help out every Bungler" (p.53). We need not quibble as Gildon does about how the dagger got there, but that assistance was available in subduing Amestris had Mirza wished to call for it is evident at the next moment. Orchanes, the Captain of the Guards, drags the dying Mirza over to Amestris so that he can stab her and be avenged. Gildon argues rightly that this is unreasonable in the state of affairs of Persia at that moment; Orchanes had nothing to gain by this senseless villainy but apparently does not suffer later because of it. The scene of Mirza attempting to rape Amestris Gildon calls comedy, like Volpone in The Fox with the wife of Corvino (p.52). Rowe has a predilection, Gildon suggests, for scenes like this (there is one between Hastings and Jane Shore) and for scenes in which supposedly virtuous ladies give vent to "luscious" emotions. Amestris and Artaxerxes

have been married by the beginning of Act III (a matter which Gildon neglects to mention) and discuss the sensual pleasures of marriage in a fashion which could only be considered genteel by twentieth century standards but this "lusciousness" Gildon will not permit in tragedy. "She tells him...", says Truewit, "that she is ready to dissolve, where she stands, with Pleasure. Oh the Luscious Rogue Bays!" (p.51). The modern reader must concede Gildon's points on both the rape episode and on the amours of Amestris and her princely suitor. Rowe does not capitalize either on the first episode, where the sadism of a man wanting to rape a woman who thinks that he has just killed her father and husband might give the poet sensational material, or on the second, where either a noble or spiritual love or a passionate, youthful one might come to their proper tragic desserts. Rowe ignores the first after setting up the situation and tries to blow first hot and then noble with the second. To be as severe as possible, Rowe's desire seems to be to titillate the audience. The plot, as Gildon says, is most unsatisfactory; the good seem to suffer about as bad a fate as the evil doers. The characters are mixed

or inconsistent almost as much to the modern reader as to Gildon. But the queen, a character to whom Gildon objects strenuously, seems almost adequate. In the very first scene of the play she soliloquizes:

Be fixt, my Soul, fixt on thy own firm Basis!
Be constant to thy self; nor know the Weakness,
The poor Irresolution of my Sex:
Disdain those shews of Danger, that would bar
My way to Glory. Ye Diviner Pow'rs!
By whom 'tis said we are, from whose bright Beings
Those active Sparks were struct, which moves our Clay;
I feel, and I confess the Etherial Energy,
That busie restless Principle, whose Appetite
Is only pleas'd with Greatness like your own:
Why have you clogg'd it then with this dull Mass,
And shut it up in Woman? Why debas'd it
To an Inferiour part of the Creation?
Since your own heavenly Hands mistook my Lot,
'Tis you have err'd, not I. Could Fate e'er mean
Me, for a Wife, a Slave to Tiribasus!
To such a thing as he! a Wretch! a Husband!
Therefore in just Assertion of my self,
I shook him off, and past those narrow Limits,
Which Laws contrive in vain for Souls born great.
There is not, must not be a Bound for Greatness;
Power gives a Sanction, and makes all things just. 45

This speech Truewit says is "Monstrous, out of Nature, out of Character, fond of her Adultery in a long calm Soliloquy" (p.50). One is inclined to accept the "out of Nature" here more easily than the "out of Character."
Such ambitious villainies Gildon will not accept from a

woman; it is contrary to the nature of the sex to be ambitious and too monstrous to be allowed to have unchaste women characters in a play. It is consistent with the nature of Rowe's queen for him to indulge in name calling in Act II, Scene 2:

Qu. Audacious Rebel!

Artax. Infamous Adultr⁴⁶ess!

Stain of my Father's Bed and of his Throne!

Artab. Villain! thou ly'st!

But for Gildon it is not proper for personages of high station to indulge in name calling.

If Gildon is just in most of his criticisms of the Ambitious Stepmother, what are the merits of the play and what made the Rowe vogue? There are relatively few performances of the Ambitious Stepmother in comparison to the enormous (and somewhat special) success of Tamerlane and the continuing popularity of Jane Shore, the Fair Penitent and Jane Gray in the 18th century, but certain qualities in the Ambitious Stepmother represent adequately enough Rowe's particular genius. The play is as bad as Gildon says it is, but it is often saved by a high-flown and moving emotional description. Rowe blends carefully the highly sensual and the pseudo-spiritual; the victories and

⁴⁶. Act II, Scene 11.

defeats of his heroes are conventional, but the mixed and all-too-human feelings of his heroines are given attractive poetic attention. The play provides an emotional orgy couched in fairly respectable language. Perhaps we have in Rowe's plays an effective compromise between the censorable Restoration treatment of sex and the refined later 18th century drama. On a strictly moral basis, a reformer with any knowledge of human nature would object that Rowe's "luscious" descriptions were much more likely to corrupt morals than the outrageous bawdy of the Country Wife, but this objection was not likely to be raised by the theatre audience or the reader. Rowe was providing a drama at which the respectable could be seen, and Gildon argues that they should not be seen at it. This blend of the sensual and the spiritual, which frequently arouses pathos in the reader but not much more, is the important quality in Jane Shore and Jane Gray, especially in the former. Rowe's descriptions in the Ambitious Stepmother, it seems to me, are not unattractive today, but the defects of the plot are apparent even on first reading. After analysis, the plot seems woefully inadequate.

The Ambitious Stepmother, says Freeman, first got

Mr. Bays a name and Tamerlane fixed his reputation (p.65). Gildon's initial criticism of Tamerlane, that Bays is ridiculous in promising to sing his hero as Virgil sang Aeneas because Virgil wrote epic not tragedy, is not fair. Rowe's reference is most casual; Rowe does not promise that he is going to imitate Virgil. Gildon's next criticism, however, is fundamental. Rowe has not selected a moral and found characters and actions suitable to it but has started with character:

...it is but an Error too common in our Modern Tragic Poets, to propose some one great Character or Hero of the Poem, to Celebrate and Aggrandize about Humanity. On the contrary, the Ancients proposed a Moral, and regarded the chief Character or Hero, no farther than the giving such Qualities and Frailties to him, as were necessary to produce that Moral.

.....
Our Poets only raise a great and accomplish'd Character beyond Imitation (p.66).

The rebuttal to this is furnished by Sir Indolent Easie, who asserts warmly that the purpose of the play was to praise King William, a very worthy ambition. Gildon thus quite cleverly indicates that his argument is unanswerable, but he himself, as we have seen, was not above resorting to patriotism in critical discussions. Rowe's Tamerlane is a curious character, not exactly "a mere Speculative

philosopher" (p.67), but certainly greatly at variance with the traditional one "scourging kingdoms with his conquering sword." Gildon is conscious, though he does not explicate the point clearly anywhere and had erred himself in this manner, that a historical or semi-historical character in a play may well war with the facts of history in the audience's mind. Rowe is to blame for not altering more the Bible story which forms the basis for the Ambitious Stepmother. Since he had changed the scene from Jerusalem to Persepolis, he had destroyed the historical appeal (which is not worth saving anyhow, Gildon implies) and there is no reason why he should not further alter characters and incidents to fit them better to the rules of tragedy (p.49). Again, the attack is on the fable. Many incidents do not contribute to the action, and characters can be removed without altering the play. Even Tamerlane himself, says Freeman, can be omitted without hurting the play (p.67). And Monezes and Arpasia, the Greek Christian prince and the Christian girl whom Tamerlane protects, are not essential (p.68). Since Gildon does not define what he thinks is the action of the play, it is difficult to judge the validity of these criticisms. Certainly the plot of

Rowe's play is improbable, especially the conspiracy of Omar (pp.68-69). Again, though the evil doers are punished, some of the virtuous characters perish along with them.

The Royal Convert and the Biter Gildon is content to pass over (p.70) (the Biter alone was not reprinted to capitalize on Rowe's new popularity). Ulysses Gildon calls the best of Rowe's plays: it "has a sort of a Face of Tragedy" (p.70). Then Gildon goes on to destroy it utterly: it has no moral, Semanthe is mistreated by fate though not deserving of this, the scene is all of Ithaca (and might as well be all of Europe), the manners are improper, yet it has the "weak Appearance of a Tragedy." One suspects that Gildon here is more sympathetic because the play is on a strictly classical subject. The Fair Penitent, like Jane Shore, has an unchaste woman as a character (p.71). The rather crude mock prologue that Gildon writes for the play (pp.72-74) attacks Rowe for cheap novelty and for preferring prostitutes and low characters generally for heroes and heroines. Gildon is to make this point very emphatically in connection with Jane Shore.

A number of the criticisms Gildon makes of Jane Shore we have already touched on or can anticipate. She

is an unchaste woman and hence unsuitable for tragedy (p.80). In her supposed period of reformation she keeps up her intimacy with Alicia, the mistress of Hastings. She seems not to be so much repentant as sorry that her days of youth and pleasure are over (p.83). Her station in life-- a shopkeeper's daughter--is too low for tragedy (p.81). The plot of the play evolves so that she is punished not for evil doing but for not doing more evil: "Mr. Bays makes Jane Shore's virtue produce her Misery, and not her Vice. Whereas the ancient Tragic Poets made Hero's Vices produce their Misfortunes" (p.81). Dapper's defense consists largely in attempting to show how moderate Jane's sins are:

True. Mr. Bays has sinn'd against the Likeness in this Character, and given her a Virtue, which History does not warrant. She is a Whore to three upon Record; and how many more Gallants she might have had in private and of lower Degree we can't tell.

Dap. But as she is represented by the Poet in this Play, she had but one, and that a Monarch. --She resists Hastings a Man of great Quality and Power (p.85).

Truewit later sums up: "It is really a very merry Tragedy, there are but six Men and two Women in it; the two Women are Whores, and three of the Men Villains, One a Cuckold, and another a Debocher of young Ladies, only Bellmour is nothing at all" (p.85). Gildon spends a good deal of time on the

heroine and little on the fable here, presumably because the fable in a historical play is at best suspicious. The criticism would be better if he had remarked on the action. Mr. Bays himself explains to Freeman and Truewit how he thinks up his great scenes. Bays had noticed an old derelict crone of the town named Granny being pestered by the mob and this has touched his heart. He has reasoned that if this aged wreck, who has had several bastard children, could move the hearts of the respectable ladies of the town with her plight, Jane Shore, who, so far as history records, had not even one bastard, could move them more. Bays has descended in the characters of his heroines from a woman of quality in the Fair Penitent to Jane Shore, a "mere Cit," and plans to do Betty Sands, apparently a common prostitute, and finally, Granny herself. But he then rejects Granny as a character because she is too innocent, being not really mentally responsible for her crimes (p.90).

By quoting copiously Gildon manages to show clearly the nature of Rowe's most successful scenes and his language. Novelty and fine descriptions are the way to please the town and Rowe has this down to a formula. He expounds at some

length on the theory of playwriting. Plot is not important. Scenes are included only to find a place for descriptions of other parts of the action (p.93). Bays' pocketbook, not the critics, tells him that he has succeeded (p.93). An application of the principles satirized in the Rehearsal will make a play successful before a British audience (p.93). A play can succeed, suggests Bays, if it has a good scene which is first passed around for criticism and read aloud to friends to provide a claque on opening night (p.94). Once a certain part of the audience is convinced that the similes and descriptions are fine, the rest does not matter. Finally, it is important to flatter the ladies and to make them think that they too are immoral. "I told them formerly," says Bays, "that they were all like my Fair Penitent, and Jane Shore tells them they are all now like her, and therefore ought to pity her Case" (p.95). Gildon selects for ridicule the descriptions and scenes most likely to appeal to readers. Jane, in a repentant mood and swearing that she would not live over an hour of her past, yet says of the dead Edward:

'Tis true, the Royal Edward was a Wonder,
The goodly Pride of all our English Youth;
He was the very Joy of all that saw him,

Form'd to delight, to love, and to persuade.
Impassive Spirits, and angelick Natures
Might have been charm'd, like yielding human Weakness,
Stoop'd from their Heav'n, and listen'd to his talking.
.....
Name him no more:
He was the Bane and Ruin of my Peace. 47

and later of her own fate:

My Form, alas! has long forgot to please;
The Scene of Beauty and Delight is chang'd,
No Roses bloom upon my fading Cheek,
Nor laughing Graces wanton in my Eyes;
But haggard Grief, lean-looking sallow care
And pining Discontent, a rueful Train, 48
Dwell on my Brow all hideous and forlorn.

In a soliloquy at the end of the scene in which these laments
take place Jane says:

Why should I think that Man will do for me,
What yet he never did for Wretches like me?
Mark by what partial Justice we are judg'd;
Such is the Fate unhappy Women find,
And such the Curse intail'd upon our kind,
That Man, the lawless Libertine, may rove,
Free and unquestion'd through the Wilds of Love;
While Woman, Sense and Nature's easy Fool,
If poor weak Woman swerve from Virtue's Rule,
If strongly charm'd, she leave the thorny way,
And in the softer Paths of Pleasure stray;
Ruin ensues, Reproach and endless Shame,
And one false Step entirely damns her Fame.
In vain with Tears the Loss she may deplore,
In vain look back to what she was before, 49
She sets, like Stars that fall, to rise no more.

47. Ibid.

48. Ibid.

49. Ibid.

Against these speeches Gildon argues that Jane is not truly repentant, which we may, I suppose, concede without much argument. Of the first speech Truewit says: "What cou'd she have said more warmly and more wantonly, had she been just yielding to his Lust? To lessen her own Frailty, she tells her sister Whore, that Edward's Tongue was enough to corrupt the Angels themselves to be Carnaliter'd by him. A rare Penitent indeed, and much deserves our Pity" (p.83). Of the second speech, Freeman says: "Is this the Language of a Penitent? As such she shou'd rather have describ'd the Beauty of the Mind, the satisfaction of a converted state, and the Charms of a heavenly Spouse: Whereas all that she says seems to place her Pain in that her Pleasures are past Recall" (p.83). Finally, of Jane's lament on the lot of womankind Truewit says: "Jane's last speech in the first Act is another proof that she repents not her Adultery; for she complains of the hard Fate of Womankind, that they can't Whore with the same safety to their Reputations, as Mankind can" (p.83).

In singling out these particular passages to attack Gildon has struck right at the heart of Rowe's special genius. This is what Rowe is good at and what his audience

admired. Passion and sex served up attractively is his forte. At the same time it must be admitted that Jane Shore's problem is one with which life is familiar even though Gildon would rule it out of tragedy. The audience recognized the lifelike qualities of these mixed emotions, and no appeal to the rules was likely to do much good, as Gildon himself reluctantly realizes. Gildon, we recall, in adapting Lee's Lucius Junius Brutus, was torn on the matter of attractive unnecessary descriptions versus only descriptions which move forward the action. The passage describing Jane being led through the streets which Bays reads until he cannot go on through excess of emotion must have wrung like tears from the audience (p.89). Gildon recognizes this kind of description as the chief appeal of this degenerate new kind of tragedy. Another passage that Gildon seizes on is the description of the retreat to which Dumont urges Jane to flee (p.85). The anonymous Review of Jane Shore, to which Gildon may be referring when he mentions a review that Sawny wrote of the work, quotes this passage as illustrative of the beauty of the language of the play (p.13), and Pope, on first reading it, was much affected. 50

With the reductio ad absurdum of the Rowe heroine (pp.89-91) we need not concern ourselves further except to note that Gildon regards the tendency to "unnatural" characters symptomatic of the age. Part of the success of both heroines like Jane Shore and language like Rowe's is in the appeal to the ladies of the audience. Rowe treats them to "luscious" language which is, on the surface, at least in comparison with Restoration plays, respectable but which nevertheless is immoral (pp.82, 86, 95). Gildon finds this same kind of immorality in the Rape of the Lock, as we shall see.

The "Remarks on the Tragedy of the Lady Jane Gray" appended to the 1715 edition of the New Rehearsal does not add much to what has been already said about Rowe's plays. Again the heroine being the partly innocent victim of a historical situation has everything against her as a heroine of tragedy. The play has no moral of universal application (p.9). There are things in the plot which neither advance the fable nor anything else that Rowe might have in mind (pp.8-10). In short, the play is a vehicle, though Gildon does not say it, for Rowe's powers of description ("strange out-of-the-way Thoughts and Expressions").

It is filled with similes on surprises and in the heat of passion. It needs--Gildon uses the expression several times in the New Rehearsal--Ben Jonson's sponge dipped in ink (p.10).

The revised version of the Rape of the Lock and Pope himself are treated with a lightness that brings Gildon's satire as close as he ever comes to perfection. Gildon intends to paint Pope as a trifler, "a small Dabber in Helicon" as Dapper modestly admits, and succeeds here where ordinarily his pedantry and generally humorless treatment would fail. A number of significant thrusts are made at Pope and at his poem, while Gildon maintains better than he does in the discussion of Rowe that the whole thing is preposterous. Sawny himself explicates the Rape of the Lock: thus Pope as a character discusses Pope the writer as if they were different people. We have before us the figure of the man and also the representative of the type of would-be critic who would defend a poem like the Rape of the Lock. The tone is everywhere light, even in the discussion of morals. Sawny is first presented as a usurper of the character of both critic and poet, a fop who keeps company with gentlemen "of the Covent Garden air," a

frequenter of Button's or Will's, and a translator from the Greek who does not know the language (pp.56-68). Though rhyme was dead in English tragedy in the 18th century,⁵¹ a "happy knack at rime" may still be the chief stock-in-trade of a poet who writes in the minor forms of verse. Gildon is everywhere suspicious of rhyme. Roscommon, whom he admired greatly, had said:

Of many faults, Rhyme is (perhaps) the Cause
Too strict to Rhyme We slight more useful Laws.⁵²

Gildon would have applied this to the Rape of the Lock as well as to more serious poetry. A happy knack at rhyme and a flowing versification, Sawny says, are the first qualifications for being a poet. But these are common; much more difficult is the thinking up of some unusual subject matter, "as a Fan, a Lock of Hair, or the like" (p.59). Gildon is here attacking novelty; part of the appeal of Rowe's plays is in the novelty of his heroines and inconsistent plot situations, and the Rape of the Lock is pure novelty. "Novelty, Sir," says Sawny, "is Wit" (p.57). Boileau's Le Lutrin and Garth's Dispensary Gildon admired and here

51. Nicoll says that there are only six rhymed plays extant for the period after 1700 (Restoration Drama, Cambridge: University Press, 1928, p.90.)
52. Essay on Translated Verse, London, 1684, p.23.

he defends them as the type of thing Homer did in the Batrachomyomachia. Gildon does not discuss why Pope's poem is not in the tradition with Boileau's and Garth's but the implication is that Pope's manner is at fault, not his subject (p.59). As an example of the new style which Dapper calls "heroic doggrel" he quotes:

-----My Lord, why, what the Devil?
Z---ds! damn the Lock! 'fore Gad, you must be civil!
Plague on't! 'tis past a Jest---nay prithee, Pox!
Give her the Hair----53

The "heroic doggrel" is new, says Sawny, as is the "heroic-comical." The "heroic-comical" gives Truewit a chance to make a passing reference to the "preposterous and unnatural mixture" known as tragi-comedy. Rymer is most outspoken on the subject of tragi-comedy and likely reinforced Gildon's rejection of it on Aristotelian grounds.⁵⁴

Besides novelty--no one would have thought to write a poem on a lock of hair any more than anyone would have thought to use Jane Shore or Granny as a heroine--bawdiness is an essential ingredient for a successful poem. The bawdiness Gildon finds in the Race of the Lock is somewhat the same as that in Rowe's play, though Pope is less subtle.

53. Canto IV, 11.127-130 (Twickenham Ed., II, 191).

54. A Short View of Tragedy, London, Printed by Richard Baldwin, 1693 [i.e. 1692], pp.157-158.

It is designed, again, to titillate the ladies. Professor Brooks has analyzed the bawdy lines in the Rape of the Lock in his essay "The Case of Miss Arabella Fermor."⁵⁵ It is not necessary to accept all his suggestions to agree that Pope employs these lines to make the relationship between the nymph, her admirer and the society in which they travel sophisticated and unsentimental. Professor Brooks seems to feel that there might possibly be doubt about "to die" as a euphemism for sexual intercourse;⁵⁶ there seemed to be no doubt for Gildon. Then Gildon goes on to say:

"...the Machinery of this Poem is admirably contriv'd to convey a luscious Hint to the Ladies, by letting them know, that their Nocturnal Pollutions are a Reward of their Chastity, and that when they Dream of the Raptures of Love, they are immortalizing a Silph as that Ingenious and Facetious Author sweetly intimates in his Epistle Dedicatory" (p.61). This is, of course, true but would scarcely seem important to the average early 18th century reader. But a Christian with puritanical leanings might well object to this, and such is Gildon's position. Finally, Gildon

55. The Well-Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry, New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, [1947], pp.86, 88, 93-94.

56. Ibid., p. 93.

voices astonishment at the poet putting the machinery into the poem after it had been completed. Dapper's answer to this is typical: the new authors do not "care a farthing" (p.61) what the ancients thought. Gildon spends just enough time on the Rape of the Lock to attack it without emphasizing it as worth a major effort.

No estimate of the literary criticism in the New Rehearsal would be complete without some attention being paid to the methodology of reaching the heights of literary success, as revealed by Dapper and Bays. The coffee house clique we have discussed in connection with the politics of the age. The non-political aspects we can touch on briefly. Sawny has written verses in praise of himself and signed them with an older poet's name (p.61). This undoubtedly refers to Pope and Wycherley. The chief function of both Button's and Will's is to provide literary support for their members, to "talk up" a work, even before it appears, to insure its success. By flattering reviews one may do favors to the great and render them incapable of attacking your works (pp.61-63). Both Bays and Dapper spend a considerable amount of effort in "selling" their literary works before publication or before their appearance on the stage, though

Gildon does not seem to have felt that Rowe arranged for the spate of books on Jane Shore which appeared about the time of his play.

To assess the critical importance of the New Rehearsal in its own time is fairly easy. The age which might have respected Gildon's rigid application of Aristotle was long since past. Addison and Steele represented the future, Dennis the past, and Rymer the long dead. While there were a good many heroic plays which a liberal advocate of the rules might have tolerated in Rymer's day, there were none in Gildon's, and, ironically, there had developed by 1714 a great many obvious abuses on the stage which could have been corrected by applications of Gildon's and Aristotle's rules. Gildon's estimate of Rowe is just on matters of character and structure; Rowe's plays would have been immeasurably improved if he had not relied so much on his descriptions. Yet the tendency was for the drama to grow still further away from the rules. The Neo-Classical drama, by Gildon's time, had run a course of decline sufficient that, if he believed in cycles, the critic might have hoped that reformation and return were right around the corner. The English drama was bleeding to death,

and Gildon was applying severe but necessary first aid in the New Rehearsal. Gildon regards both Pope and Rowe as innovators, "modernists" rather than moderns, who pervert the true spirit of poetry by emphasizing the diction, the least important aspect of poetic art according to Aristotle and Reason, at the expense of all else. At the time of the writing of the New Rehearsal the fight for a literal interpretation of the rules was still worth fighting, but just about. Dennis, who lived on past the date of Gildon's death, found himself obsolete long before the end, and Gildon must have, too. Also, in 1714, the attack on Pope at least must have been welcomed by the enemies of Pope at Button's. In literature, as in politics, Gildon's New Rehearsal is an independent Whig effort.

The significance of the attack on Pope in the New Rehearsal is that Gildon was sensitive enough to see Pope as potentially a writer as successful as Rowe. Pope had published little before 1714; the attack on the Iliad (the conspiracy at Button's) was an attack on something that Pope had not yet written. Gildon is among the few to give the Rape of the Lock credit for being what it is, a menace to such principles as Gildon had. It marks a change in English poetic taste from the high seriousness and occasional

roughness of an earlier age to the finish and elegance and learned sophistication of the mid-18th century. All of the classical apparatus is in the Rape of the Lock; Gildon as much as anyone must have been aware of the elaborate construction of the poem and its classical understructure. But Pope was not learned; he had not attended a university; he was said to not know Greek; he was using a dilettante's learning to create a pseudo-classical type of poem that was essentially trivial in both form and content. Moreover it was a popular poem, the kind of thing that would more than ever keep the public from appreciating true poetry because it was superficially very classical. The Rape of the Lock is, in a way, a parody of the classical approach to poetry; but it adds to the parody, parody being largely destructive, a study of the manners of the age done with great finesse and charm. It is to Gildon's credit that he recognized the merits of Pope's poem enough as we recognize them to single it out as a new threat to his own ideas. Rowe was at the height of his fame; with him, the matter was easy, but Pope was much more of a beginner.