

Chapter XII
JUDGMENTS OF MEN AND WORKS

This lengthy survey of Gildon as critic has already covered his central tenets, his analyses of the current English literary scene, and his proposals for bettering it. Now still another topic, his specific judgments, is necessary to round out the picture of Gildon as critic. No man to shirk the intellectual responsibility of the critic to translate his general tenets into particular judgments, Gildon boldly recorded his convictions on a wide range of men and works. Taken altogether these opinions amount to a considerable body of opinion ranging over Greek, Roman, Italian, French, and English writers and he best stated the unifying touchstone in his comment that "the applying of our early years to Poetry enlarges the Soul, and fills it with such great and noble Ideas as are fit to raise it to great actions. But this does not at all belong to the scribbling poetasters of this age, to the men of meer Versification; but to our true Poetry, such as we find in Homer, Pindar, Sophocles, Euripides, Virgil, Spencer, Milton, and the rest of these Great Men."¹

Significantly, Gildon places Homer at the head of the world: "leave the Sovereignty of Homer untouch'd, even by Milton himself; who, . . .

1. Miscellanea Aurea, pp. 244-45.

with all his vast Imagination and Strength of Genius, will come in for no more than the second Place."² The preceding chapters have already shown that he cited Homer as the model for all heroic poetry, especially in his repetitious insistence upon the fable as the prime excellence of great poetry, and he also frequently urged Homer's practices as his other criteria of excellence, as in the following typical pronouncement:

. . . But as the Episode must be native, and never far fetch'd, so it is to be handled with a certain Management and Dexterity, that it may not be in the Way to make a Confusion, nor burthen the Subject with too much Action. 'Tis in this that the Art of Homer particularly shines, who never confounds any thing in the Throng of the Objects which he represents. Never was Poem more charg'd with Matter, than the Iliad, yet never any appeared more simple and more natural, for every thing there is in its due Order. The most natural Episodes are most proper to circumstantiate the Principal Action best, that are the Causes, the Effects, the Beginnings, or the Consequences of it.³

Hence Gildon was outspoken in attacking such derogators of Homer as Scaliger and Sir Richard Blackmore. Caustically he attacked Scaliger's cavils upon Homer's language and with equal firmness but more respect, as for a worthier adversary, denied Sir Richard Blackmore's strictures.⁴ But Gildon's admiration was the reasoned product of fixed principles, not blind idolatry, and he freely disputed the argument that Homer was a great original genius who owed nothing to antecedent examples and materials.

In my opinion it is a very fallacious way of arguing, to pretend that because there is no such poem extant, that therefore there never was any such; since we have undoubted proof from history that there have perish'd of the antient Greek valuable authors above a hundred thousand volumes in the Library of Ptolomy Philadelphus, and perhaps half as many more, before that library was establish'd.⁵

2. Complete Art, p. 198.

3. Complete Art, p. 274.

4. Laws . . . Poetry, p. 12.

5. Laws . . . Poetry, p. 54-55.

He also admitted Homer's occasional lapses: "Homer himself has been observ'd by Horace sometimes to nod; and it is obvious to every judicious reader, that Virgil has not everywhere the same vivacity or force"6 and he willingly conceded that "Homer himself indeed cannot be own'd altogether so scrupulous and regular as Virgil, in his Contrivances, His Machines are less just, and all Measures he takes to salve the Probability are less exact."<7

Although Gildon's classical references are preponderantly concerned with Homer, he passed opinion upon several others. Characteristically, he preferred Apuleius to Lucian because the former "has heighten'd the Satyr, and improv'd the Design. . . so that his Book may be call'd a Satyr on the Vices of Men and Women"<8 He defended Ovid against another favorite, Dryden, who "has, without any proof or tolerable reason deny'd him nature and fineness in his sentiments of love"9 equally characteristic in his praise for Sophocles, who carefully excluded from the fable "all those incidents . . . which do not perfectly agree to the Probability,"10 in his Oedipus.

Gildon also left opinions upon Italian and French writers, chiefly as they affected their English counterparts. He wrote of English literature's debt to Italian, "For as we deriv'd the Polishing our Verification from Italy, so we deriv'd great Evils from the Same Country, which have almost spoil'd some of our most celebrated Authors. I mean the Romantic Vein of

6. Laws . . . Poetry, p. 21.

7. Complete Art, p. 277.

8. New Meta., preface.

9. Laws . . . Poetry, p. 284.

10. Complete Art, p. 253.

Ariosto, which corrupted Spenser; and this Itch of Points in all Manner of Subjects, and in all Sorts of Verse, by which Petrarch has debauch'd Cowley, Suckling, and too much of Waller himself."¹¹ He contended that "Monsieur Boileau has . . . in many . . . parts of his works made bold with Horace,"¹² but otherwise praised French translators, whose excellence "has been in their versions of prosaic authors; in which we have generally fail'd"¹³ Finally, Gildon maintained that "most of Moliere's Plays are the surest Standards to judge of Comedy."¹⁴

But the bulk of Gildon's judgments upon particular men and works concerned English writers, especially those of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Although he most concerned himself with dramatists, he also commented freely on the major and minor poets, prose writers, and critics of his time.

An earlier chapter of this study has presented Gildon's opinions of Shakespeare, and Gildon's judgments of Beaumont and Fletcher/^{also} consistently exemplified his central tenets. These dramatists fall miserably short in "the draught of the manners or the characters, and the passions and sentiments . . . as well as in . . . a conversation with, and perfect knowledge of mankind, with what is proper to every age, sex, degree, station, and country."¹⁵ "Massinger is a far better Poet than Beaumont and Fletcher . . . who are at most but Dialogists . . . since they never design'd a just

11. Complete Art, p. 149.

12. Complete Art, p. 216.

13. Laws . . . Poetry, pp. 287-88.

14. "Letter V," p. 8.

15. Laws . . . Poetry, pp. 228-29.

character in their Serious Plays; their Kings are all Foot-men, or of the Mob, and have nothing Royal; and their Women seldom Modesty . . .,"¹⁶ and "Beaumont and Fletcher . . . at best have only written two or three tolerable comedies."¹⁷ But for Ben Jonson Gildon had qualified praise. He cited Jonson to exemplify the precept that "comedy . . . imitates common Life in its actions and Humours, laughing at, and rendering Vice and Folly ridiculous, and recommending Virtue by the Success it always does or ought to give it,"¹⁸ and wrote that The Alchemist was "much more excellent than either Terence or Menander," although it suffered from "the Ridicule . . . since it is the nature of that to divert us from thinking seriously of Things; and is, by consequence, a great Enemy to Reason and just Thinking."¹⁹ But his final judgment of Jonson was high: "A man not only of compleat learning, but of the most consummate comick genius that ever appear'd in the world, ancient or modern."²⁰

Gildon also passed judgment, although briefly, upon several other dramatists. In 1699 he disputed Langbaine's preference for Shirley and Heywood over Dryden because " . . . the former have left us no Piece that bears any proportion to the latter; the All for Love of Mr. Dryden, were it not for the false Moral, wou'd be a masterpiece that few of the ancients or Moderns ever equal'd; and Mr. Shirley and Mr. Heywood have not left enough in

16. Post-man Robb'd (1719), p. 149.

17. Laws . . . Poetry, p. 33.

18. Complete Art, p. 263.

19. Miscellanea Aurea, pp. 98-99.

20. Laws . . . Poetry, p. 33.

all their Writings to compose one tolerable Play, according to the true Model and Design of a Play."²¹ But in 1721 he wrote that Dryden in his plays ". . . seldom or never touches the Passions, at least till he had left off in a great measure that uniformity of diction, that perpetual swelling, and continual tropological expression; and endeavour'd here and there, more nearly to imitate nature, in a just simplicity of the language."²² A comment which helps to explain his earlier remark that The Rehearsal was "the truest, as well as most entertaining Critic" of Dryden's shortcomings as a tragic dramatist.²³

Otway, however, commanded his almost unbounded admiration. For Gildon he was "the best of Dramatic Poets . . . my Master, for so Mr. Otway must be own'd by all that have any Taste of Tragedy."²⁴ Although "the Envy of Bad Writers, and the Vanity of Worse Critics" condemn Otway's "Stile or Language because it is not so sonorous, and swelled, as that of some other Tragic Writers," this objection Gildon found invalid because "These Gentlemen . . . declare for a Pomp and Uniformity of Stile which the Judicious of all Ages cou'd never endure."²⁵ He quoted Horace and Boileau to the effect that the language of tragedy should vary to suit the character and passion and judged by that standard "Otway wou'd appear master of all the Excellence of Language, that is necessary to a perfect Tragedy."²⁶ As for ability to "touch the Heart, . . . Shakespeare that drew Othello so

21. Lives . . . Characters, preface.

22. Laws . . . Poetry, p. 211.

23. Love's Victim, preface.

24. Love's Victim, preface.

25. Love's Victim, preface.

26. Love's Victim, preface.

finely, has made but a scurvy piece of Rosdemona; and Otway alone seem'd to promise a Master in every kind"²⁷ and "Otway . . . was a perfect master of the tragic passions"²⁸

He had mixed praise for several other dramatists. John Dennis, he wrote, "has excell'd in Comedy in the Plot and no Plot."²⁹ Shadwell's "Comedies, at least some of them, shew him to understand Humour; and if he cou'd have drawn the character of a Man of Wit, as well as that of a Coxcomb, there wou'd have been nothing wanting to the Perfection of his Dramatick Fables." Etherege, "as great as his Reputation was, could not escape the Reproach of the Men of Judgment of his Time; one of whom says, That he writ three talking Plays without one Plot; and yet those three Plays are not altogether without Plot and Humour."³⁰ He singled out Farquhar for special censure in his attack upon trivia: "The first that I know, who collected the force of all their Tittle-tattle upon this head together, is one Farquhar . . ." But the bias behind this judgment is quickly evident, for Gildon continued that "having written some taking Comedies, as they call them, Farquhar vainly assum'd, from that success upon the stage, an authority to appear as an advocate for the poets of London, against those of Athens. But what wretched stuff has he produc'd upon this occasion? too scandalously mean indeed to need a serious and particular confutation."³¹

27. Love's Victim, preface.

28. Laws . . . Poetry, p. 211.

29. Post-Man Hobb'd (1719), p. 113.

30. Miscellanea Aurea, p. 291.

31. Laws . . . Poetry, p. 11.

Gildon said of "Bycherley that," we must do him the Justice to say, that he has Humour, and Plot, and all the other necessaries of just Comedy I confess Mr. Bycherley's Fools may pass for Men of Wit in some of our modern Plays; but Mr. Bycherley was no common Playwright."³²

Nicholas Rowe, whose plays enjoyed a success Gildon's never did, in 1715 became poet laureate; but Gildon neither respected popular success nor feared established position, and he lashed out at Rowe so severely that one is tempted to cry professional jealousy. Probably it was involved, but Gildon's specific strictures consistently stem from his critical premises, and as such are not to be written off hastily as mere ill-tempered jealousy. In A New Rehearsal Gildon made Truewit and Freeman condemn Rowe's The Ambitious Stepmother on the grounds that: "Ambition is not properly a Dramatick Passion" (p. 17); the action "does not move Terror or Compassion, or both" (p. 18); the plot "has no Moral, or none of any use"; Mirza's conduct is not suitable to the earlier description of his wisdom; his falling in love and attempting a rape "were without any manner of use to the catastrophe or the Design of the Play"; the poet could have followed more closely the story "without need of those monstrous characters of Mirza, etc." (p. 23); the play abounds in such odd expressions as "when Heroes knock their knotty heads together" (p. 31); many of the speeches are quite out of character; one is downright comical and hence has no place in tragedy; there is too much murdering on stage; and in general Rowe's plays resolve too much of the action by violent death, a weakness which "farther justifies the Reproach thrown on our Country by Rapin and some others, that we

32. Memoirs Bycherley, pp. 5-6.

Insularies are delighted with Blood in our Sports, and to our Shame, and our Tragic Poets every day confirm it; but none more so, than . . . Mr. Bays." (p. 35) In the second act Truewit and Freeman conclude "That Nature, Character, and Design, are wholly unknown to him; that a sort of sonorous numerous Verse, very empty of Sense and Poetry, is what has rais'd him a name, and that the justest criticism on this and others, wou'd be once more, a Sponge dip'd in Ink." (p. 47) In the third act they argue that Howe's Jane Shore does not raise pity because the heroine is brought to misery by her own crimes and really is not at all repentant; and they ridicule the style as being not at all proper to the period of the action. Gildon ended by having Bays reveal the indiscriminating, merely mechanical fashion in which he selected his heroines and ensured the successes of his plays by filling the theatre with influential friends and by pandering to the lowest current taste. This entire passage is a ludicrous, telling reductio ad absurdum, which, reaches its point as Freeman sadly concludes with Gildon's familiar theme: "Fame is dispens'd by the Ignorant."

For some inexplicable reason he apparently made virtually no direct comment on Addison as dramatist or poet. In view of Gildon's dramatic tenets, his share in the Addison-Tickell effort against Pope's Bower, and the fact that scholarship abounds in casual references to Gildon as Addison's creature, one would certainly expect frequent salvos in praise of Cato from Gildon. But the facts seem to be that although Cato was staged in 1713, in his remaining eleven active years Gildon apparently left only two bits of passing praise: In 1714 he wrote that "the best Style is that which arrives at the Perfection of the Language then in Being, such as that of Cato, which is the best Standard of Dramatic Diction which we have in our Tongue,"³³ and in 1718 he cited Cato to illustrate the simple fable in tragedy because

33. New Rehearsal, p. 77.

"from the Beginning Cato is in distress, and the play ends with his Death, without any change of Fortune at all."³⁴ But except for occasional even briefer casual repetitions of these two ideas, Gildon was strangely and uncharacteristically silent upon Cato and upon the entire subject of Addison as dramatist and poet. When one recalls his usual willingness to spring into print for or against a prominent name, his almost complete silence here remains puzzling. Perhaps having used him in his war against Pope's Iliad, Addison then disappointed Gildon's hopes for reward; and although Gildon was not usually one to go unrewarded in silence, Addison was until 1718 high in Whig office, and therefore still to be cultivated; and thereafter Gildon's blindness made survival his chief concern. Another possible explanation is that Gildon was caught between Addison and Dennis, whose Remarks upon Cato (1713) charged (1) that Addison's conduct of the plot was in many respects absurd and (2) that some of the main characters were unsuited to tragedy. If Dennis thus opposed plot and characters, Gildon's solution could have been to praise the style, which he did. That way he did not antagonize Dennis when he praised Addison. Yet this solution-- if it was his solution--left him scant grounds upon which to praise Cato.

But Gildon's views on English writers were not confined to dramatists, for he passed judgment upon major figures like Sidney, Johnson, Spenser, Milton, Dryden, Cowley, Addison, Pope, and Defoe as well as upon such lesser people as Suckling, Denham, Aphra Behn, Ambrose Philips, and Garth. Few won commanded Gildon's admiration, for he disdained "the scribbling Postasters of this age . . . , the Men of Meer Versification . . ." whom he

34. Complete Art, p. 239.

judged by the standards of "our true Poetry, such as we find in Homer, Pindar, Sophocles, Euripides, Virgil, Spenser, Milton, and the rest of these great Men."³⁵ Spenser he coupled with Shakespeare because they both "touch the Soul of any one who has a true Genius for Poetry, and by consequence enlarge that Imagination which is so very necessary for all Poetical Performances." and, because "Spenser, whose Eclogues are by some put on a foot with those of Theocritus and Virgil, gave this nation a wonderful proof of his excellent Genius in Poetry, in his Fairy Queen, and makes us wish that he had rather chosen Homer and Virgil with whom he was perfectly acquainted for his pattern, than Ariosto, whom he very much excell'd."³⁶

Gildon spoke up for Milton long before Addison's Spectator essays made it fashionable to praise him, for as early as 1694 Gildon included in his Miscellaneous Letters and Essays volume his letter, "To Mr. T. S. in Vindication of Mr. Milton's Paradise Lost," which highly praised the Puritan Poet's

entire Manage of every part of that charming Poem, in which upon every occasion he discovers himself a perfect unimitable Master of Language . . . as he makes God speak like that almighty, who by the Fiat of his Mouth made all things; [as he makes man speak] Submissively like a Creature who owes his Being to a better, wiser, and higher power . . . yet not abjectly; as an angel speaking with less knowledge than God, but more than man; as he makes woman speak as inferior to both, yet more ambitious, yet softer in manners.

35. Miscellanea Aurea, pp. 244-45.

36. Laws . . . Poetry, p. 33.

In that same letter Gildon very early made a now-familiar point that "The bountiful Powers above, did more than make him amends for their taking away his Sight, by so Illumining his Mind, as to enable him most completely to sing of Matchless Beings, Matchless Things" In 1713 he strongly asserted Milton's supremacy over the men of the moment and condemned a taste which neglected giants to pursue popular pigmies. "The Spectator will surprise one into a pretty sort of Whimsical Pleasure over a Dish of Coffee, and in the noise of a Coffee-house, when judgment is asleep, and Fancy only awake. But Milton in your sedate closet hours will transport both the judgment and Fancy. And yet Milton will not sell so well as the Spectator, which is no great Proof of the Fineness of our Taste."³⁷

In 1718 he argued that Milton "indeed has equall'd, if not excell'd the Greek and Latin Poets in many Things; and I must so far agree with the Gentleman, who in the Spectator made his remarks on his Poem of Paradise Lost, that if it fail in some particulars through the necessity of the Subject, our blind Bard has discover'd in other Things a Genius worthy of the Fraternity of Homer and Virgil."³⁸ By implication Gildon placed Milton above Virgil, yet still below his greatest admiration, Homer: "but leave the Sovereignty of Homer untouch'd, even by Milton himself; who, I am afraid, in justice with all his vast Imagination and Strength of Genius, will come in for no more than the second Place."³⁹ Thus Gildon, like Matthew Arnold, applied the Homeric touchstone as the true test of great poetry; and highly as he regarded Milton, he would not name him Homer's peer.

37. Les Soupirs, pp. 68-69.

38. Complete Art, p. 269.

39. Complete Art, p. 108.

Although most of his comments concern Dryden as dramatist, Gildon several times applauded Dryden the poet. Very early in his career (1694) he roundly asserted that "among our English Poets, none can compare with Mr. Dryden for numbers: his descriptions are all very perfect in all things; but his numbers contribute not a little to the force and life of the Representation, for they carry something in them distinct from the Expression and thought."⁴⁰ Perhaps in 1694 a pushing young man of letters might over-praise the grand old man of literature, but at the other end of his career Gildon in 1718 could gain nothing save the further enmity of Pope's influential circle by thus unreservedly praising Dryden's smoothness: ". . . the Fluency of his Waller's lines pleasing all that read him, and all who pretended to Wit and Poetry reading him, it spread wider and wider, till Mr. Dryden brought it to its last and greatest perfection."⁴¹ In 1721 Gildon stoutly asserted Dryden's supremacy in two fields in which Pope was then the popular preference: Dryden's Alexander's Feast "is the most harmonious in its numbers, of any thing in the English tongue,"⁴² and Dryden's translation of Virgil, "if we allow for the time he did it in, is better done than any poet in any other language has perform'd, and, we are to believe, better than any one will do in our own."⁴³ As for another popular translator, "who can believe that Mr. Dryden had the least cause to be apprehensive of Mr. Creech's

40. Miscellaneous Letters, p. 222.

41. Complete Art, p. 83.

42. Laws . . . Poetry, p. 84.

43. Laws . . . Poetry, p. 303.

growing applause, when he has given us his translation of several parts of that Latin Poet [Incretius] so much beyond what Mr. Creech has done."⁴⁴

But another restoration poet Gildon damned with faint praise. Although he had very early⁴⁵ defended Cowley against the charges of forced conceits, shining points, and far-fetched similes, thereafter his praises of Cowley were remarkable chiefly for their reservations. In 1718 he admitted that "Cowley may well be consulted by our English Reader, for he has excell'd himself in his Translations of that great Theban . . .," but he added that "'tis true, that Mr. Cowley . . . had not always the Happiness of showing Numbers."⁴⁶ In 1721 while asserting the superiority of content and "design" over mere fancy and point he added "that to take away these points, this flash of fancy from my Lord Rochester, from great part of Cowley's Verses, especially his Mistress, and even some of Waller's, would be to render them very insipid, at least in those parts where this is all their merit."⁴⁷ Later in the same work he wrote, "Tho' much of the beauty of Pindar's manner, especially in his wanderings and fine returns to his subject, may be discover'd by Mr. Cowley's fine translation . . .; yet methinks we do not find that enthusiasm and vehemence which . . . Horace in his Ode on the praise of Pindar, seems to attribute to him."⁴⁸

Like many unsuccessful men, Gildon blamed his own obscurity upon the false taste of an age which whipped its critics and rewarded those who beat

44. Laws . . . Poetry, p. 320.

45. "Essay at a Vindication of the Love Verses of Cowley and Waller," Miscellaneous Letters, 1694.

46. Complete Art, p. 180.

47. Laws . . . Poetry, p. 180.

48. Laws . . . Poetry, p. 115.

pandered to its degradation. For Gildon two successful writers, Pope and Rowe, epitomized the fallen state of English letters, and he therefore attacked them as the archetypes of dominant evil. No doubt jealousy was one motive, but his strictures also frequently rest on fact, good sense, or principle.

Gildon began his attack upon Pope in A New Rehearsal, which an earlier part of this study has shown to be an important document in the Addison-Tickell strategy of spoiling the market for Pope's promised translation of the Iliad. Its title was intended to suggest that like its forbear, The Rehearsal, it too found much to ridicule in the popular literary heroisms. What A New Rehearsal lacks in the perspicuity and wit of its model it supplies in the vehemence and venom of its attacks upon Pope's rise to reputation, his fitness for translating Homer, the suggestiveness of The Rape of the Lock, and his pretensions to knowledge of literary criticism. Gildon set up a dialogue situation in which he made Sir Indolent Easy, the Spokesman for contemporary ignorant and unthinking popular judgment, praise "honest Sawny Dapper, 'foregad, a very pretty young Fellow" who "writes very agreeably, and is much in Vogue with the Town." To which Freeman, the more discerning reader who together with Tracwit represents informed criticism, retorts, "Ah Dick! One of the most Empty and most Conceited of the whole Tribe."⁴⁹

Since Pope frequently taunted his critics with his own success, Gildon made Sawny thus explain his rise to reputation:

49. New Rehearsal, p. 8.

nor ever were the Arts of getting a Name Arriv'd to greater Perfection; why, Sir, I was fain to write a Copy of Verses in my own Praise, for none knew my merit better than myself; then I put the name of a Celebrated old Author to it, but the Evil of it was, tho' that Author was of an establish'd Reputation for Wit, yet he was remarkable for an ill Versification, so that my Stile discover'd me; and indeed, when I heard them prais'd, I cou'd not help owning to my Friends that I writ them myself."⁵⁰

This pointed passage neatly states the common gossip that Pope himself had written the complimentary verses with which Wycherley had smoothed Pope's introduction to London and also deftly reminds his readers of the vanity which sometimes made Pope vulnerable. Gildon also shrewdly exploited another common charge by making Dapper say:

You must know that there are two parties of Wits, and two or three men at the Head of them. Now I first fixt myself on the good Nature and easy Temper (by my application) of the Men of real Merit, they Cry'd me up, recommended me to the Town, and the Town took their Words, and so I set up for my self then I gave my approbation of the Works of the Heads of the other Party, that is, of those who have Vogue and no Merit; by this means I gain'd all their Friends, and bring those I approve, to a sort of Dependance upon me."⁵¹

This charge of ingratitude—that as soon as he could do so safely Pope had discarded the Whig circle at Buttons' for their Tory opposites then in power—was of course subsequently disproved by Pope's increasing fidelity to his Tory friends in the many years following their political demise in 1713. But early in 1714, with the Whigs exultant in their new power, this charge bore the double onus of ingratitude and political naivete.

This second common charge against Pope, that he was unfit to translate Homer, Gildon sincerely believed and therefore labored without mercy. To him Pope was an upstart pandoring to a degraded public taste, a pretender who

50. New Rehearsal, p. 15.

51. New Rehearsal, p. 41.

would prophane the touchstone of poetic excellence. Actually Gildon probably reflected the general attitude of university men schooled in the classical languages and hence suspicious of self-taught Pope when he made even Sir Indolent (usually Sawney's docile admirer) exclaim in amazement, "Foregod, Sawney, I did not know that you understood Greek; say, I must say, thou art a pretty industrious young Fellow." To which Sawney answered with all the brassiness of ignorance, "Why, Sir Indolent, if I did not understand Greek, what of that; I hope a man may Translate a Greek Author without understanding Greek . . . ah! Sir Indolent, you don't know half the arts of getting a Reputation in this Town for Learning and Poetry."⁵²

Gildon's third attack was on Pope's The Rape of the Lock, which he scored upon the grounds of mere novelty, triviality, and calculated indecency.

Sawney himself confessed his or do:

Why, Sir, you must know, for getting a Reputation for Poetry, there are some Qualifications absolutely necessary, as a happy knack at Rhime, and a flowing Versification; but that is so common now that very few do want it; then you must chuse some odd out of the way Subject, some Trifle or other that wou'd surprize the common Reader that anything could be written upon it, as a Fan, a Lock of Hair, or the like Boileau and Garth have treated of little things with magnificence of Verse . . . but that is now old, we must have something New; Heroic Doggerel is but lately found out, where the Verse and the Subject agree If a man would distinguish himself, it must be by something New and Particular we therefore found out the Heroic-Comical way of Writing, that no man ever thought of before But, Sir, that is not enough, besides the Sawness of the Verse, you must have a new manner of address, you must make the Ladies speak Sawdy, no matter whether they are Women of Honour or not; and then you must dedicate your Poem to the Ladies themselves. Thus a Friend of mine has lately, with admirable address, made Arabella F---m---r prefer the Locks of her Foll, to her Locks of another more sacred and secret part.

52. New Rehearsal, p. 42.

Oh! hadst thou Cruel! Been content
to seize
Hairs less in Sight—or any Hairs but these.⁵³

And a few pages later Truewit remarked that "Now the Poets of antiquity founded their Poems on their Machinery; but I find it is the new way of writing to invent the Machinery, after the Poem is not only written but publish'd."⁵⁴

Gildon's fourth point of attack, Pope's pretensions to the knowledge necessary for a critic, probably arises from An Essay on Criticism, wherein Pope had cleverly reversed the usual roles by criticizing the critics. Gildon certainly, and probably Addison as well, would have taken offense at Pope's contemptuous gibes at critics heavy with learning. Hence he returned the blow by making Sawney, Freeman, and Truewit discuss tragedy, which is the subject of much of An Essay on Criticism. Here Sawney appeared so completely confused about the essence of tragedy that he was reduced to the absurdity of arguing "that crime and its punishment in drama cannot reach home to the conscience of the hearer."⁵⁵ But more to the point, Sawney revealed his own lack of clear critical principles by baldly admitting, "the less merit an author has that applies for our Commendation, the more we think ourselves oblig'd to cry him up; for that multiplies the Votes against the critics, who would tear us all to Pieces if they cou'd. But telling Moses is now the Standard of Wit, and the Most Voices carry it, as in the Members of Parliament."⁵⁶

54. New Rehearsal, p. 58.

55. New Rehearsal, p. 47.

56. New Rehearsal, p. 47.

In May of 1716 there appeared "a furious tract"⁵⁷ entitled A True Character of Mr. Pope, and His Writings, which has been variously ascribed to Gildon, to John Dennis, and to both. Although this first edition and a second in 1717 were anonymous, Pope associated both their names with the work. But Dennis much later denied any such joint authorship. "As Mr. Pope has been pleased in several places of his wonderful Rhapsody to declare that I wrote such and such things in concert with the late Mr. Gildon, I here solemnly declare upon the Word and Honour of a Gentleman, that I never wrote so much as one Line that was afterwards printed, in Concert with any one Man whatsoever."⁵⁸ Dennis included as proof two letters "which I received formerly from Mr. Gildon, by which it will plainly appear . . . that we are not writers in concert with each other."⁵⁹ But the letters were dated 1721, five years after A True Character, and concern other matters; furthermore, Gildon's pitiful condition—blind but still drudging for Curll with a helper—probably accounts for the obsequious tone of the letters. The Gildon of 1716 was a more reputable associate for Dennis than the blind drudge of 1721, and Dennis did not deny their association until after Gildon's death in 1724, at least eight years later than A True Character. Literally Dennis's protest is true, but its spirit is dubious. E. N. Hooker has established⁶⁰

57. H. G. Paul, John Dennis: His Life and Criticism (New York, 1911), p. 89—hereafter cited as John Dennis.

58. John Dennis, Remarks upon Several passages in the Preliminaries to the Dunciad (London, 1729), pp. 50-51—hereafter cited as Remarks . . . Dunciad.

59. Remarks . . . Dunciad, pp. 50-51.

60. Critical works . . . Dennis, II, ix. E. N. Hooker, "Pope and Dennis," E. L. H., VII (1940), 195—hereafter cited as "Pope and Dennis."

Dennis's authorship of the pamphlet and has also noted the obvious but hitherto overlooked point that Dennis's longer work included a brief "Character of Pope" "from another hand." Since quotation does not amount to collaboration, Dennis could deny the association.⁶¹ The style of the enclosed "character" suggests Gildon's pen, and Professor Hooker elsewhere⁶² indicates that Gildon wrote it. This "character" exemplifies the ad hominem criticism which Pope so frequently suffered from his enemies in that it barely touches upon his writing but abounds with personal references to his physique and religion. Yet "it is . . . often acute, especially in puncturing Pope's mock humility and in exposing his vanity, all with a brutal frankness that probably cut him deeper because he recognized the truth in the analysis."⁶³

But Gildon's cruelest attack upon Pope came in his Memoirs of the Life of William Wycherley (1718). This attack, which has been discussed earlier in another context, too often has been given undue importance as Gildon's only and complete view of Pope; whereas properly it should be viewed as only one of several, some of which are far more reasonable and restrained. Nonetheless, Gildon's attack was inexcusably vicious; and coming as it did shortly after the death of Pope's beloved father, its snide reference to his "rustick parent" was indefensible. However that same year in the much better work which Gildon took far more seriously, The Complete Art of Poetry, his remarks upon Pope are more restrained. In discussing translation of Homer Gildon noted that

(1. "Pope and Dennis," p. 195.

(2. Critical Works . . . Dennis, II, ix.

(3. John Dennis, p. 89.

there is now contention between two Gentlemen, who contend for the Mastery in the translating of him. One of them has only (to the Regret of good Judges) given us the first Book of the Iliads; the other, the first four Books of the Odyssey, with the first four Books of the Æneid. If the latter has not done the blind more subscrib'd to him for the Translation, than we can discover the Author ever got by the Original.⁶⁴

He gave his own judgment in these restrained, tempered terms:

I must say this of Mr. Tickel's, that he seems to have enter'd into the Soul of Homer: You are sure, at least, of having some Taste of the Genius and Manner of the Poet, when you read his Version; for there seems to me to be a Masculine Strength, both in his Expression and Numbers, and the Native Simplicity of that Old Father of Verse, is not embarrass'd with any Modern Turns and Embellishing Softnesses. Mr. Pope has indeed all the Softness and Harmony of the Lydian Measures, as I may call them; but whether he comes up to the Majesty, and Variety of his Author, I dare not determine.⁶⁵

This judgment makes good sense, for a respectable body of subsequent opinion has steadily held Pope's translation to be better Pope than Homer, whose "Masculine Strength" and "Native Simplicity" Pope did indeed miss.

In the 1719 version of The Post-man Rob'd of his Mail Gildon placed a letter "On little Sawney the Poet" signed by "Indolent Easy," the same Spokesman for the unthinking, popular viewpoint in A New Rehearsal. Addressed "To Mr. Spleenall" the letter suggests with some good humor and charity that Pope be left to the judgment of time, for by now even Sir Indolent is aware of his shortcomings. Despite its gentler, tentative tone the letter nevertheless manages to repeat most of Gildon's objections to Pope's work.⁶⁶ In The Laws of Poetry (1721), his last work of criticism, Gildon remarked the paucity of good English translations of Ovid but

64. Complete Art, xii.

65. Complete Art, xii.

66. Post-man Robb'd (1719), pp. 270-72.

praised Pope's Sapho to Phaon; then he added, "And I could heartily wish, for the sake of the English readers, that Mr. Pope would be prevail'd upon to give us the rest by his hand."⁶⁷ Thus Gildon ended his references to Pope in a far more charitable manner than the latter, who continued his gibes at a dead critic for almost nineteen years.

The other currently popular writer to feel Gildon's sting was Daniel Defoe, whose instantaneously popular Robinson Crusoe suffered its first critical setback at Gildon's hands. When four editions of the story had appeared in four months and Defoe was preparing to follow it with a sequel, Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, Gildon attacked with The Life and Strange Surprizing Adventures of Mr. D. . . De F . . . of London, Hosier, who Has Liv'd Above fifty years by himself in the Kingdoms of North and South Britain. The Various Shapes he has appear'd in, and the Discoveries he has made for the Benefit of his Country. In a Dialogue between Him, Robinson Crusoe, and his Man Friday. With Remarks serious and comical upon the Life of Crusoe. This obvious parody upon Defoe's title is in itself the opening blow, for it is intended to suggest both Defoe's several enforced disappearances from the public eye and his slippery roles as political pamphleteer for both parties. Dated Sept. 28, 1719, the pamphlet consists of "A Dialogue betwixt D. . . F. . . e, Robinson Crusoe, and his Man Friday," "an Epistle to D. . . D'F. . . e, The Reputed Author of Robinson Crusoe," and a postscript concerning Defoe's Farther Adventures of Robinson

67. Laws . . . Poetry, pp. 97-98.

Crusoe.⁶⁸ In a preface to the dialogue Gildon with heavy irony continued the parody of the title when he too asserted of his hero, "If ever the Story of any Private Man's adventures in the World were worth making publick, . . . the Editor of this Account thinks this will be so. The Wonders of this Man's Life exceed all that (he thinks) is to be found Extant; the Life of one Man being scarce capable of greater Variety." (pp. 65-66) Mocking the alleged modesty of his original, Gildon asserted that "The Story is told with greater Modesty than perhaps some men may think necessary to the Subject, the Hero of our Dialogue not being very conspicuous for that Virtue, a more than common assurance carrying him thro' all those various Shapes and changes which he has pass'd without the least Blush." (pp. 65-66) As for matching the varied adventures of Crusoe,

68. No doubt Gildon recognized Defoe's Robinson Crusoe for what it really was, a swiftly written tale deliberately fashioned to catch the current popular interest in travel books—the same interest upon which Swift also relied for the initial appeal of Gulliver's Travels. Perhaps, therefore, Gildon originated the attack, but there is also the possibility that Curll suggested it. A shrewd operator in the rough and tumble pamphleteering and bookselling of his day, Curll kept his ear close to the ground and may have known or guessed that Further Adventures was about to appear. Both he and Gildon were experienced enough to know that next to the best seller itself a violent attack upon it gets the most publicity. To hit the market with an attack upon the amazingly popular Robinson Crusoe almost simultaneously with the publication of its sequel could be a typical and profitable Curll cup des letters. Blind Gildon—a veteran pamphleteer who had ably served in the 1711 attacks upon Pope—was skilful, rapid, and available, just the man for such a job. The "Printed for J. Roberts" of the title page is no real contrary argument, for Roberts served as a mask for other Curll-inspired works. At the moment the best guess seems to be that Curll got wind of the forthcoming Further Adventures and set Gildon to work on an attack into which he entered with a zest of his own.

The Fabulous Proteus of the Ancient Mythologist was but a very faint Type of our Hero, whose changes are much more numerous, and he far more difficult to be constrain'd to his own Shape. If his works should happen to live to the next age, there would in all probability be a greater Strife among the several Parties, whose he really was, than among the seven Graecian Cities, to which of them Homer belong'd: The Dissenters first would claim him as theirs, the Whigs in general as theirs, the Tories as theirs, the Nonjurors as theirs, the Papists as theirs, the Atheists as theirs, and so on to what sub-divisions there may be among us (pp. 55-56)

After these broadsides against Defoe's chameleon loyalties came the dialogue "Betwixt D. . . F. . . e, Robinson Crusoe, and his Man Friday," There D. . . F. . . is confronted by two "great tall Gigantick Rogues, with strange High-Crown'd caps, and Flaps hanging upon their Shoulders and two Muskets a piece, one with a Cutlass, and the other with a Hatchet." They seize him and cry, "Yes, it is Crusoe and his Man Friday, who are now come to punish thee, for making us such Scoundrels in the writing (p. 69)

Crusoe charges that

. . . you have made me a strange whimsical, inconsistent Being, in three Weeks losing all the Religion of a Pious Education; and when you bring me again to a sense of the Want of Religion, you make me quit that upon every Whimsy; you make me extravagantly Zealous, and as extravagantly Remiss; you make me an Enemy to all English Sailors, and a Panegyrist upon all other Sailors that come in your way: . . . you make me a Protestant in London, and a Papist in Brasil; and then again, a Protestant in my own Island . . . But tho' you keep me thus by Force a Sort of Protestant, yet, you all along make me very fond of Popish Priests and Popish Religion; nor can I forgive you the making me such a Whimsical Dog, to ramble over three parts of the World after I was sixty five. (pp. 70-71)

Then Crusoe's man Friday charges that D . . . l.

Have injure me, to make me such Blockhead, so much contradiction, as to be able to speak English tolerably well in a Month or two, and not to speak it better in twelve Years after; to make me go out to be kill'd by the Savages, only to be a Spokesman to them, tho' I did not know, whether they understood one Word of any Language; for you must know, Father D. . . n, that almost ev'ry Nation of us Indians speak a different Language.

D. . . I defends himself against these charges, but in Gildon's loaded language the defense becomes damnation, for Defoe is made to assure Crusoe that "you are the true allegorick Image of thy tender Father D. . . I; I drew thee from the consideration of my own mind; I have been all my life that Rambling, Inconsistent Creature, which I have made thee." (p. 72). Thereafter D. . . I is made to state in their baldest terms all the vagaries of Defoe's not unsullied career. Thereupon Crusoe and Friday seize him and as just punishment force him to swallow both volumes of Robinson Crusoe as a purge. To make sure it works they toss him unmercifully in a blanket and leave him, "convinced that our Business is done; for by the unsavory Stench which assaults my nostrils, I find the Dose is past thro' him, and so good morrow, Father D. . . n."

This broad "Dialogue . . ." is but introductory, however, to the stronger "Epistle to D. . . D'P. . . e, The Reputed author of Robinson Crusoe" which Gildon protested he would not have written if the faults of Robinson Crusoe "had extended no farther than the frequent Solecisms, Looseness and Incorrectness of Stile, Improbabilities, and sometimes Impossibilities . . ."; but since Defoe "seem'd to discover a Design, which proves as bad an Englishman as a Christian" he must "take notice in this Publick Manner of what you had written; especially when you threaten'd us with more of the same Nature if this meet with that success which you hop'd for . . ." Thereafter, the remarks upon the first volume and the postscript dealing with the second accuse Defoe of inconsistency, improbability, absurdities of fact and judgment, trifling with religion, false religious teachings, false moral teachings, downright Popery, falsification of fact, plain ignorance, bad grammar, loose wording, and deliberately repetitious padding. Such attacks upon Defoe's inconsistencies, improbabilities, and absurdities as the following illustrate

Gildon's methods and tone.

I shall not take Notice of his stripping himself to swim on Board, and then filling his Pockets with Bisket, because that is already taken Notice of in Publick; and in the last Edition, at least, of page 96 the Book, you have endeavour'd to solve this Difficulty, by making him keep his Breeches on; tho' he did so so, I don't find how the Pocket of a Seaman's Breeches could receive any Biskets, that being generally no bigger than to contain a Tobacco Pouch, or the like, I cannot pretend to swell upon all the Absurdities of this Part of your Book, I shall only touch upon some few: And first, on his stated Account of the Good and Evil of his present Condition in Page 77, where he says, on the dark side of his Account, I have no Cloaths to cover me, But this is a downright Lie, according to his own Account, by which he brought a considerable Quantity of Linen and Woollen from on Board the Ship: and then the next Head on the same side is, I am without any Defence, or Means to resist any Violence of Man or Beast. This is likewise another plain Contradiction of what he told us before, when he let us know, that he had brought on Shore two or three Barrels of Gunpowder, six or seven Guns, and several Pistols, with Shot and Bullets, besides Swords, Axes, Hatchets, etc. Next, I must observe, that Robinson, like other great Wits, has but a very short Memory; for in Page 66, he tells us, that the Storm had carried the Wreck or Ship quite out of sight; or, as he expresses it, It blew very hard all that Night, and in the Morning when I look'd out, behold no more Ship was to be seen; and yet six months after, he tells us, that looking towards the Wreck, it lay higher out of the Water than it us'd to do. I think the Contradiction is pretty plain, if seeing a Thing and not seeing it be Contradiction. (pp. 95-97)

. . . He agrees with the Spaniard and Friday's Father, that they should bring a Contract in Writing, under the Hands of the other Spaniards, tho' he knew they had neither, Pen, Ink, nor Paper; nay, he had done well if he had inform'd us, how he could give them instructions in Writing, when his Ink was gone so many Years before.

But it is observable that Crusoe, after all the Zeal of the Popish Priest against the Pirates living with their Indian Wives without Marriage, sends from Brasil several Women for the use of the Spaniards, who were not before married; and that without sending any Priest with them to marry them. (p. 124)

Gildon attacked what he alleged to be Defoe's falseness and hidden purposes in matters religious in passages like these:

Tho' I have a great deal to say upon his Reflections, and their frequent repetition almost in the same Words; yet for brevity Sake, I shall say of them all, that they seem brought in only to encrease the Bulk of your Book; they are seldom Just or truly Religious; but they have this terrible

Circumstance, that they demonstrate that the Author has not the Fear of God before his Eyes . . . As if he esteem'd it no Crime to set off his Fable with the Words of the Holy Scripture; nay, he makes a Kind of Sortes Virgilianae of the Bible, by making Crusoe dip into it for Sentences to his Purpose. (pp. 104-05)

To see the Impiety of this Part of the Book in making the Truths of the Bible of a Piece with the fictitious Story of Robinson Crusoe, is so horribly shocking that I dare not dwell upon it; but must say, that they make me think that this Book ought to be printed with Vaninus, the Free-thinker, and some other Atheistical Tracts, which are condemn'd and held in abhorrence by all good Christians. (pp. 104-105)

The Christian Religion and the Doctrines of Providence are too Sacred to be deliver'd in Fictions and Lies, nor was this Method ever Propos'd or follow'd by any true Sons of the Gospel; it is what has been, indeed, made use of by the Papists in the Legends of their Saints, the Lying Wonders of which are by Length of Time grown into such Authority with that wretched People, that they are at last substituted in the Place of the Holy Scriptures themselves. For the Evil Consequences of allowing Lies to mingle with the Holy Truths of Religion, is the certain Seed of Atheism and utter Irreligion; whether, therefore, you ought to make a publick recantation of your Conduct in this Particular, I leave to yourself. (p. 128)

Gildon also found many other points on which to cavil. Robinson Crusoe was filled with "false Grammar, which is to be found almost in every Page . . ." (p. 103) and weakened "by the excessive Sterility of your Expression, being forc'd perpetually to say the same Things in the very self same Words four or five times over in one Page . . ." (p. 111)

As to the Variety of the Subject, it will be a hard Matter to make that good, since it's spread out into at least five and twenty Sheets, clog'd with Moral Reflections, as you are pleas'd to call them, every where insipid and awkward, and in many Places of no manner of Relation to the Occasion on which they are deliver'd, besides being much larger than necessary, and frequently impious and prophane (p. 110)

. . . You say, indeed, The just Application of every Incident, the religious and useful Inferences drawn from every Part, are so many Testimonies to the good Design of making it Publick, and must legitimate all the Part that may be called Invention or Parable in the Story. But when it is plain that there are no true, useful or just Inferences drawn from any of the Incidents; when Religion has so little to do in any Part of these Inferences; when it is evident that what you call Religion, is only to mislead the Minds of Men to reject the Dictates of Reason, and embrace in its Room a meer superstitious Fear of I know not what Instinct from unbodied Spirits; when you impiously

prophane the very Name of Providence, by allotting to it either contradictory Offices, or an unjust Partiality: I think we may justly say, that the Design of the Publication of this Book was not sufficient to justify and make Truth of what you allow to be Fiction and Fable. (p. 113)

Finally, Gildon continually challenged Defoe's facts and knowledge in such passages as the following typical one.

. . . I shall pass, therefore, on to Crusoe's Learned Discourse with the French Popish Priest in Page 146, etc. which has, indeed, as gross Marks of Falshood and inartificial Fiction, as any thing in your Book: you make the Priest call the Living of the four Englishmen with their Indian Wives (because unmarried according to the Laws and Customs of any Christian Country) Adultery. Had Crusoe Call'd it so it might have been tolerable, and have pass'd for the Ignorance of a Seafaring Man; but to make a Priest talk so, whose trade it is to Know the distinct Names of every Sin, is a plain Proof that all this came out of the inventive Noodle. For you must know, Friend Da—., that all Carnal Commerce between two single Persons is called Fornication, and not Adultery; Adultery is when a married Woman or a married Man has this criminal Commerce with any other but her Husband, or his Wife: Now, therefore, a Romish Priest should tell Crusoe, that his Englishmen without Marriage would live in continual Adultery, is what you would do well to make out; for I am satisfy'd, no Priest in Christendom would call it by any other Name but Fornication. (pp. 119-120)

Undoubtedly Gildon's entire attack is malicious and opportunistic in spirit; certainly it sometimes overstates Defoe's offenses and frequently magnifies their importance; but taken altogether it nevertheless constitutes a formidable argument against the inflated reputation then enjoyed by Robinson Crusoe. Gildon's attacks upon its inconsistencies and absurdities must have scored, for in later editions Defoe eliminated or corrected most of the passages in question.⁶⁹ But even more searching, and potentially more dangerous, was Gildon's attack upon the so-called "moral reflections" and "moral lessons" in Robinson Crusoe. As one biographer says, "as a Puritan

69. Thomas Wright, Life of Defoe (London, 1894), pp. 248-49—hereafter cited as Wright.

Defoe seems always to have felt compelled to apologize for writing 'mere fictions'. His favorite defence was, of course, that his stories conveyed a moral lesson"⁷⁰ Since fiction per se was not yet quite respectable in 1719 and the body of Defoe's middle class readers had to justify it otherwise, Gildon's attack upon his only possible other ground, the moral reflection or the moral allegory, was indeed potent strategy to alienate Defoe from the great body of his readers. But in calling public attention to the moral aspect Gildon unwittingly gave the nimbler Defoe an escape from an increasingly serious problem.

He had palmed off Robinson Crusoe as an existing person and his island as an existing place. Sharps were beginning to sell bogus relics of both the man and his non-existent domicile; whilst the general public, zealous members of Defoe's own sect especially, were waxing suspicious and asking for more definite information. The pretence could not be kept up much longer.⁷¹

Therefore in his Serious Reflections during the Life of Robinson Crusoe (1720) Defoe found an escape by asserting that Crusoe's story was really an allegory of his own life, for "If he could persuade the public to believe that Robinson Crusoe was a sort of moral allegory he would lose no readers who were looking for a good story and might gain several who wanted only a good moral."⁷² Gildon's attack therefore turned out to be an unintended favor, for scholars generally agree that it suggested to Defoe the very neat

70. James Sutherland, Defoe (London, 1937), p. 233—hereafter cited as Sutherland.

71. E. A. Baker, History of the English Novel (New York, 1929), III, 172—hereafter cited as Baker.

72. Sutherland, p. 233.

dodge of allegorical explanation of Robinson Crusoe.⁷³ Hence Gildon's pamphlet is not negligible, and scholars whose own loyalties lie with Defoe nevertheless acknowledge that it "is a not ineffective piece of rough fooling,"⁷⁴ that its title "is a delightful parody of Defoe's title,"⁷⁵ that "in spite of the malevolence of the author, or, perhaps, by virtue of it, this pamphlet is very delightful to read side by side with Crusoe, at the end of which it might, not inappropriately, be bound."⁷⁶ In short, it is able, sharp, often incisive, quite effective literary pamphleteering whose sting could hurt. And as a matter of literary history, it provoked the allegorical explanation of Robinson Crusoe.

Several of Gildon's shorter opinions on lesser men or slighter genres perhaps merit passing notice, if only to round out this picture of Gildon's judgments. He held that of all elegiac literature "there is nothing to be found in all the prophane poets comparable to that elegy sung, or spoken by David, on the death of Saul and Jonathan"⁷⁷ He called Sir John Suckling "a very gallant writer" and Sir John Denham "A very good one in one or two pieces."⁷⁸ His comment on Aphra Behn, "Her Muse was never subject to the Curse of bringing forth with Pain; for she always Writ with the

73. Sutherland, p. 233. Baker, III, 171. Wright, p. 250.

74. Baker, III, 172.

75. Paul Dottin, Daniel Defoe (New York, 1929), p. 202.

76. Wright, p. 250.

77. Laws . . . Poetry, p. 103.

78. Laws . . . Poetry, p. 34.

greatest ease in the world"⁷⁹ has become an accepted commonplace of criticism. Sir Samuel Garth's place in "the Kingdom of Poetry . . . is very considerable."⁸⁰ Composer Henry Purcell

seemed to have the Genius of Greek Musick; he touch'd the Soul; he made his way to the Heart, and by that Means left a Satisfaction in the Pleasure, when past. He had the Art of Painting in Musick, which Aristotle mentions of the Greek Musicians; witness his Frost Scene, where, by the admirable conjunction of Flats and Sharps, he makes you almost shiver both with his Instrumental and Vocal Musick.⁸¹

Gildon dismissed John Philips with the curt comment that "except for The Splendid Shilling he never did anything else worth looking on"⁸² but highly praised Ambrose Philips, Pope's rival in the pastoral and one of Addison's Whig group at Buttons'.

No Ambrose Philips is beyond Controversy the third at least in this kind of Poesy. In him you will find the true and genuine Simplicity of the Pastoral both in the Diction and in the Sentiments, that is, in the Language, and in the Thoughts.

This sort of Poem has been the Now, in which most of our young Dablers in Rhime have try'd their Strength; but alas! not one besides Mr. Philips has hit the Mark; and if you compare him with the very best of France or Italy, you will easily perceive how much he has excelled them all. I dare not set him on a foot with Virgil, it would look too much like Flattery, in an Age when Envy will not allow Justice to the living Author; but I am very much deceiv'd if Posterity do not afford him a far greater Esteem than he at present enjoys, though I think all tolerable Judges give him the first Place among the Moderns.⁸³

79. Charles Gildon, The Younger Brother (London, 1696), prefatory biographical note.

80. Miscellanea Aurea, p. 2.

81. Complete Art, p. 103.

82. Laws . . . Poetry, p. 321.

83. Complete Art, p. 157.

All this seems like very high praise indeed for "nanby-Panby" Philips, and perhaps Gildon was at once grinding his own axe and indulging a pique. His favorite target, Pope, was serious about pastorals, for only a year earlier his Discourse on Pastoral Poetry had appeared, and Pope's jealousy of Philips is common knowledge. By 1718 Gildon was blind and needed help; the Whigs were firmly in power; hence this extravagant praise for Philips may have been part animus towards Pope, part admiration for Philips, and part anxiety for place. Certainly Pope would have regarded it as one more blow from the same Buttons' group which had imperiled the success of his Iliad.

This survey of Gildon as critic has now extended over five lengthy chapters. But out of the morass of detail there have emerged both a clear body of principle and consistent applications of it to issues, men, and works. For the sake of clarity these need restatement here if we are to see Gildon's criticism whole. His fundamental tenets were the rules, which he vigorously asserted and defended on the following grounds; all art must set standards whereby success may be reached and judged; over the centuries these rules have improved literature and established good taste; the rules and nature agree; the rules and reason agree; the rules aid, they do not restrict genius; the rules do not preclude legitimate variety; the rules are never outmoded, because humankind does not change; the rules lead to rather than prevent pleasure; and all opposition to the rules stems from ignorance.

From those tenets arose his attitudes on the current controversies of literature, which may be briefly stated as follows. First, he became a steadily more determined champion of the ancients against the moderns, and consequently his early unrestrained admiration for Shakespeare modified until in the end he firmly asserted the superiority of the Greek tragedians over the best of Shakespeare. Second, he hotly opposed Collier and asserted the high

moral and patriotic function of the stage in the wisely directed state. He insisted upon judgment and art as necessary complements to even great genius. Fourth, he insisted that "design" is the distinguishing mark of poetic art and that such "fine things" as figurative language, fancy, diction, wittiness, smooth versification, and rhyme were only minor ornaments. Fifth, he held that verity to sense but liberty of language is the ideal of translation. Finally, he maintained that epic, tragedy, and Roman satire are in that order the most valuable forms of literature.

From these tenets and these positions Gildon viewed contemporary English letters and found them badly wanting. He thought that the stage was debauched by a mean private spirit, by ignorance, and by the licentious, low characters of the players. Its tragedy lacked fable, aggrandized characters at the expense of moral, and strove only for the flashy ephemera of "fine things". It had completely deserted its moral and patriotic functions to degenerate into a mere spectacle which painfully symbolized England's intellectual and moral vacuity. Non-dramatic literature, he held, also lacked "design" and ran a-whoring after epigram, point, rhyme, smoothness, sonority, novelty, and often lewdness. He argued that the English audience applauded these fashionable trifles but discouraged men of learning and sense, and that criticism, which should be the stronghold of knowledge and sense, had degenerated to uninformed, uncritical echo of the latest cant. Hence, argued Gildon, only a new total milieu could save English letters. To create this the leaders of state must assume a responsible patronage to encourage men of learning and genius by placing control of the theatre in their hands; these patrons must found and generously support an academy for the improvement of English learning and literature; and they must throw the resources of the state behind such an academy in order to make it the authoritarian spokesman for the best informed critical judgment. Only then might

English literature assume its proper moral and patriotic place in a wise system of high statecraft.

Gildon's particular opinions were the logical application of those settled principles to specific cases. Homer, Sophocles, Euripides, and Virgil were his touchstones, and he praised or damned accordingly. Hence he attacked Scaliger and Blackmore and challenged Pope's ability to do justice to his original. He preferred Apuleius to Lucian, and Greek and Roman satire to what he called its debased English counterpart. He valued Horace as a transmitter of the ancient rules and quarreled with Boileau for "Having made bold with him." English dramatists he judged as they followed the ancients' practices. Hence despite his admiration for Shakespeare's poetry and undeniable genius, Gildon denied him the greatness of the Greeks and praised or censured his individual plays by Aristotle's standards. Beaumont and Fletcher fell short on the Aristotelian scores of imitation, manners, passions, characters, and sentiments, and Gildon found Massinger a far better dramatic poet. For the same reason he rated Dryden's All for Love far above Shirley and Heywood as well as superior to Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra, but he objected to Dryden's heroic dramas and applauded The Rehearsal. For Osway he had the highest praise because he successfully worked upon the passions. Dennis and Shadwell he praised for their comedies, Etherege he gently reproached for his lack of fable, Farquhar he damned utterly because of his complete lack of plot, and Wycherley he praised for his humor and plot. Cato he praised highly but briefly for the propriety of its diction. Among English non-dramatic writers he prized Milton, Shakespeare, and Spenser, in that order; but Defoe and Pope were for him the clearest proof of the debased popular taste. To the extent that poets like Pope, dramatists like Rowe, and men like Defoe commanded public applause, so far did Gildon consider

the literary values of his age false and badly in need of the hard correctives of tested ancients, discriminating patrons, true critics, and an influential academy supported by the great men of the realm. Only then could he hope for the future of English letters.

Where do these opinions place Gildon in relation to better known critics of his age? Where did he agree and where did he disagree with fairly recent predecessors and with his contemporaries? He shared Davenant's idea that "heroic" poets have equal responsibility with divines, generals, and statesmen for forming public morality and that epic poetry therefore does not yield precedence to "any other humane work." With Hobbes he agreed that poetry is a powerful means of directing national opinion, that judgment should severely check fancy, and that design is more important than ornament; but he rejected Hobbes's notion that epic poetry should "never take us into Heaven and Hell . . . where nature never comes." He fully agreed with Le Bossu's thesis that the epic poet must shape his subordinate fable to illustrate the primary instructive principle. He shared Dryden's high respect for the epic and his view that the ancients are good teachers for the moderns; but he opposed Dryden's statement that "Delight is the chief, if not the only end of poesy," his justification of tragicomedy, his advocacy of "Masculine fancy," his concession that the rules could sometimes restrict genius, his rant in heroic dramas, his use and defense of rhyme, his attempt to excuse the "lowness" of Elizabethan dramatists, his faith in modernity, and his attack upon the formalism of the French critics. Moreover, in fundamental attitudes there was a basic difference: Dryden's urbane, skeptical tentativeness was the opposite pole from Gildon's vehement, rigid, systematic dogmatism.

Gildon also both agreed and disagreed with contemporary critics. Despite

his early attacks upon Rymer, he eventually agreed with the latter upon much of his Shakespearian criticism, his low opinion of Beaumont and Fletcher, his insistence upon moral instruction in the higher sorts of poetry, his devotion to the ancients and their rules, his concern with the importance of design in epic and tragedy, his strong sense of decorum, and his devotion to Aristotle. Gildon also shared Sir William Temple's views expressed in the Essay upon the Ancient and Modern Learning, but Temple's later attack upon the French critics, his elegant amateurism, and his mannered assertion that the end of poetry is to amuse clashed with Gildon's major premises. He agreed with the third Earl of Shaftesbury in condemning tragicomedy and with his statement that "a legitimate and just taste can neither be begotten, made, conceived or produced without the antecedent labour and pains of criticism." He also agreed with Addison's admiration of Milton (in 1694 Gildon had spoken of Milton's "divine" poem) but opposed Addison's suggestion that Milton might be greater than Homer; and he accepted Addison's condemnation of tragicomedy, his preference of judgment over imagination, and his attack upon opera. But he differed with Addison's occasional condemnation of poetic justice as unnatural and with his dual conception of natural and cultivated genius; and Addison's statement that "a few general rules extracted out of the French authors, with a certain cant of words, has sometimes set up an illiterate heavy writer for a most judicious and formidable critic" was sacrilege to Gildon. Perhaps he came closer to Dennis than to any other critic; for he agreed with him in his ranking of poetic genres, in his insistence that poetry must move the passions if it is to instruct, that the theatre despite its current vulgarity is nevertheless a defensible instrument for public instruction, in his notion of the present depravity of popular taste, his contempt for opera, his qualified admiration for Shakespeare,

and his respect for Milton. But he would not praise Milton for rising above the rules, as Dennis did, nor would he echo Dennis in blaming Addison for following them slavishly in Cato. And Gildon disagreed of course with both Pope's unwillingness to judge Shakespeare by Aristotle's precepts and his affected remark that poetry and criticism "are only the affair of idle men who write in their closets, and of idle men who read there."

Finally, what should be said in final judgment of Gildon as critic? First, although he contributed nothing original to the criticism of his day, neither was he any man's servile echo, for the preceding paragraphs have shown his willingness to differ with the greater names of his day—even with Dennis, with whom he honestly agreed on most points. Second, he was intellectually honest enough to press his Aristotelian precepts to their logical conclusions—even to the great English names of Shakespeare and Milton. Third, convinced of the validity of these precepts, he became increasingly devoted to them and boldly challenged an age which seemed to be deserting them: as his generation leaned toward the moderns, Gildon argued for the ancients; as Shakespeare's reputation rose, he pressed the issue of his irregularity; as popular judgment assumed more power, he urged the standard of the qualified few; and as "taste" found exponents, Gildon wrote more of judgment and the rules. Fourth, he possessed considerable ability to assess the final literary value of contemporary and other works: succeeding ages have agreed with his opinion of the state of contemporary serious drama; many English-speaking people still prefer Homer to Milton and prefer Milton to Virgil; Shakespearian criticism now freely admits that Shakespeare sometimes erred despite his poetic and dramatic greatness; even modern taste finds Restoration comedy sometimes too trivial and too bawdy;

succeeding centuries have shared Gildon's doubts about rhyme in epic or tragic poetry; and his argument that Restoration and Augustan poets concerned themselves too much with ridicule and personal abuse is also close to the judgment of time. Finally, as critic Gildon did frequently lack sensitiveness, perception, and flexibility; but he also had perspective, logic, and judgment which he did not fear to exercise against an increasingly hostile milieu.