

Chapter III

BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIRS

In addition to journalism and the editing of miscellanies, an alert hack could profit from other activities. No man to miss a chance, and already experienced in writing to a ready market, Gildon early saw possible profit in the timely appearance of biographical "memoirs" of well-known literary figures. In all, he wrote three of these flimsy biographies and perhaps projected a fourth. Carelessly conceived, rapidly composed, incomplete and inaccurate as they were, these memoirs have nevertheless attracted considerable attention. For over a century one was the only biography of Aphra Behn, and another remains even today an important document in the Pope-Addison quarrel.

The first of these memoirs, a sketch of the life of Mrs. Aphra Behn, appeared in 1696 in its first and briefest form as a five-paragraph "life" prefaced to Gildon's published version of her play, The Younger Brother, or the Amorous Jilt. Gildon claimed to have become one of Aphra's favorite proteges during the last three years of her life; and after her death he and one George Jenkins had come into possession of some of her unpublished novels and unacted plays. Apparently Jenkins dropped out of the picture, and Gildon did nothing with the papers until after 1695, when Thomas Southerne's highly successful stage adaptation of Oroonoko brought Mrs. Behn back into vogue. Probably in an attempt to capitalize upon this renewed

popularity, Gildon altered her unpublished comedy and got it produced at the Royal Theatre, where it failed badly because political faction opposed it. To atone and recoup, in 1696 he published the comedy together with the very short biographical sketch of the authoress; as anticipated, the edition sold quickly because of Mrs. Behn's name.¹

Despite its brevity (five paragraphs, two and a half pages) this little biographical notice is significant in scholarship dealing with Mrs. Behn for three reasons: it first presents the outlines of the controversial story of her service as Charles's secret agent in Antwerp; it is among the earliest attempts to rescue Mrs. Behn's character from Whig attacks; and it first states the familiar anecdote that she wrote Oroonoko in the midst of company and discourse. But except for these three points the sketch has little value. Its title, "An Account of the Life of the Incomparable Mrs. Behn," is preposterous, for the five paragraphs are nothing more than generalized comments which an experienced scribbler like Gildon could have turned off in a few hours. The sketch is interesting as commentary but negligible as biography.

In the same year of 1696 Gildon edited The Histories and Novels of the late Ingenious Mrs. Behn: in One Volume Together with the Life and Memoirs of Mrs. Behn. Written by one of the Fair Sex. The "Life and Memoirs" of this volume was Gildon's elaboration of his earlier sketch for the published version of The Younger Brother. Two years later he edited another edition of the Histories and Novels containing his signed dedication stating that this volume included "considerable additions to her Life." Unfortunately scholarship often fails to distinguish between the shorter, 1696 version of

1. Dottin, p. 15.

the memoir and the longer, fuller, more detailed life of the 1698 and subsequent editions. The two differ in five respects. First, the 1696 memoir has the shorter, less pretentious title of "Memoirs on the Life of Mrs. Behn: Written by a Gentlewoman of her Acquaintance." Second, there are no letters whatever within the 1696 memoir. Third, the account of the affair with Van Der Albert is very brief, with no mention of Aphra's warning that the Dutch fleet was about to attack; instead the episode dwells on her trick in disappointing Van der Albert's hopes with her. Fourth, at the end of the 1696 volume and after the novels come "Love Letters by Mrs. A. Behn," which are the same ones which appear within the 1698 and later forms of the "Life and Memoirs." Finally, the title of the life in the 1698 volume is more ambitious than that of 1696, for it becomes "The History of the Life and Memoirs of Mrs. Behn. By one of the Fair Sex. Intermixed with Pleasant Love-Letters that Pass'd betwixt her and Winheer Van Bruin, a Dutch merchant; with her character of the country and her Lover: and her Love Letters to a Gentleman in England."

Most controversy concerning this "life" of Mrs. Behn deals with the longer, fuller account found in The Histories and Novels of 1698 and thereafter. Despite Gildon's claim of "considerable additions to her life" the work remains a relatively brief (51 pages) biographical sketch which traces Mrs. Behn's career in only the broadest outlines. Devoting almost no space to her parentage or early years, Gildon really begins his narrative with her trip to Surinam as the daughter of the governor-elect. He races through her stay there, but dwells on her interest in the subject of Oroonoko and denies at some length the rumor that Aphra had an affair with the handsome black. Immediately thereafter, and with almost no transition, Gildon shifts history to her return to England, where, he says,

she met Charles II, told him her story, heard his request that she write Oroonoko, and undertook "a delicate mission" to Antwerp for Charles. There, relates Gildon, she learned via an amour the startling news of an intended Dutch surprise attack up the Thames itself. But her news was treated with shameful levity by the English court. Disgusted, she was persuaded by friends to divert them with "some pleasant adventures of Antwerp, either as to her lovers, or those of any other lady of her Acquaintance." This she did in a series of amusing, suggestive epistles between her and an old, fat, amorous Dutchman and in a second series of letters between the lovers Astrea and Lycidas. Thereafter, writes Gildon, she returned to England, but only after an adventurous voyage including both a view of a marvelous floating pavilion in the English Channel and a shipwreck. Gildon closes with an account of the grateful welcome she received from Charles. He concludes the memoir with the same judgment of the woman and tribute to her facility with which he had closed the short 1696 sketch attached to The Younger Brother:

She was of a generous and open temper, an easy and free Conversation, with abundance of Wit and nice Reasoning above most, if not all that I have ever observ'd in that Sex, which tho' often happy in a brisk Wit, and pleasant Repartee, yet are, for want of Education, Study, and application of Mind, generally to seek in the nicer Observations and Reflections of Judgment. The finer sort of reasoning is most commonly out of their way, and indeed not so agreeable as a genteel raillery, and at most a superficial Argumentation, built on the first appearances of things, which are too often a very false and unfaithful Foundation. But Mrs. Behn in the nicest Metaphysical points, would argue with Judgment, and extremely happy distinctions; she would, with engaging Air, enforce her notions, with all the Justness of the most able philosopher, though not with his Majestical Roughness; which made all she said more prevalent with her hearers. But this is not half her true praise, for her conversation was general, and never impertinent; her Vanity gave no Alloy to her Wit, and was no more than might justly spring from Conscious Virtue.

But this time he adds that only a woman can properly express Mrs. Behn's great service to her sex, a statement not found in the 1696 version.

But despite both this concluding comment and the sub-title, Gildon himself was clearly the author. Since he had signed the biographical notice accompanying The Younger Brother, his authorship of that document is established. The longer memoir attached to the Histories and Novels follows with remarkable fidelity the same general outlines of the shorter sketch; and both the sequence and parallelism of topics convince one that the sketch was both source and plan for the memoir. Furthermore, whenever the two treat the same topic, the wording is almost identical. For example, the sketch reads, "Her Maiden name was Johnson, her father was a gentleman of a good family in Coaterbury in Kent," and the same facts appear in the longer memoir as, "She was a Gentlewoman, by birth, of a good Family in the City of Canterbury, in Kent; her Paternal name was Johnson."² The passages dealing with her death are similarly parallel and close: the sketch reads, "lies now Bury'd in the Cloysters of Westminster Abbey, under a plain Marble Stone, with two wretched verses for her Epitaph, who had her self wrote so many good," and the memoir is, "was buried in the Cloysters of Westminster Abbey, cover'd only with a plain Marble Stone, with two wretched Verses on it, made, so I'm inform'd, by a very ingenious Gentleman, tho no Poet."³ Almost every sentence of the first sketch appears in the longer memoir, either verbatim or in paraphrase as close to the original as the two samples just cited. Therefore, since Gildon signed the

2. Aphra Behn, All the Histories and Novels of the Late Ingenious Mrs. Behn, Entire in one Volume . . . Together with the History of the Life and Memoirs of Mrs. Behn. By one of the Fair Sex. 5th ed. (London, R. Wellington, 1705), p. 1--hereafter cited as Life and Memoirs.

3. Life and Memoirs, p. 51.

earlier sketch, and since the later, longer memoir bears such close relationship to it in outline, style, phrasing, and a convincingly large number of parallel verbatim passages, we may conclude on the grounds of internal evidence that Gildon wrote the longer memoir from his own shorter biographical sketch.

External evidence adds strong circumstantial corroboration to the internal evidence for Gildon's authorship. He had been both a personal and a literary admirer of Aphra; he had come into possession of her papers; he had capitalized upon the revival of interest in Aphra by altering and publishing her play, The Younger Brother; and he had signed the biographical sketch for the published version. But as an experienced hack writing for precarious bread Gildon had good reasons to make his work appear as the product of "one of the fair sex," "a gentlewoman of her [Aphra's] acquaintance." From his work with Dunton Gildon knew the value of anonymity, especially when it might suggest intimate revelation by a female confidante; and he also knew from the same source the ready audience of women readers eager to welcome something by "one of the fair sex." Had he acknowledged the work it would have been suspect on two scores: his relatively brief acquaintance with an aging Aphra during only the last three years of her life, and his own reputation as a literary hoaxer. But by one shrewd stroke he could free the memoir from the possible opprobrium of his own reputation and give it appeal to a wide, established audience of women readers. Finally, no student of Aphra Behn has challenged Gildon's authorship of the memoir; to the contrary, all assert it.⁴ Hence, on the strength of both

4. Ernest Bernbaum, "Mrs. Behn's Biography a Fiction," PMLA, XXVIII (1913), 432-453. H. G. Platt, Jr., "Astrea and Celadon," PMLA, XLIX (1934), 544-59. Victoria Sackville-West, The Incomparable Astrea (London, 1927) Montague Summers, ed., The Works of Aphra Behn (London, 1915, Vol. I. George Woodcock, The Incomparable Aphra (London and New York, 1948).

internal and external evidence we may attribute the memoir to Gildon.

But unfortunately for his reputation, we cannot also establish the reliability of his memoir. Although contemporaries who knew Crub Street practices probably regarded the memoir with considerable skepticism, scholarship has uncovered none of their doubts. Somehow the memoir passed as authentic⁵ until Edmund Gosse discovered in an old manuscript book belonging to the Countess of Winchelsea a marginal note indicating that Aphra had been born the daughter of a barber at Wye, near Canterbury; and upon examining the register of Sainte Gregory and Martin Church at Wye he discovered a baptism for July 10, 1640, of Ayfara Amis, daughter of John and Amy Amis.⁶ This fact of course contradicted Gildon's statement that she was born a Johnson, of good family.

Then in 1913 Professor Ernest Bernbaum attacked the entire memoir as "a tissue of inaccuracies, improbabilities, and falsehoods."⁷ He doubted if the "fair" author had close acquaintance with Mrs. Behn because: "although she elaborates with considerable fullness on those episodes which had already been briefly mentioned by Mrs. Behn herself or by Gildon in the earlier brief sketch of 1696, she gives no entirely new facts of importance"; "it is rather strange that she, a woman, should so decidedly underestimate Aphra's age"; and the memoir "insists that Aphra could not have been in love with Oroonoko because she was hardly more than a child at the time whereas the historical allusions in Oroonoko are to the years 1665 and 1666, when

5. George Sherburn, The Restoration and Eighteenth Century (New York, 1948), p. 804.

6. Robert Phelps, Selected Writings of the Ingenious Mrs. Aphra Behn (New York, 1950), p. ii.

7. Bernbaum, "Mrs. Behn's Biog." pp. 432-453.

Aphra was between 25 and 26."⁸ He believed that the entire trip to Surinam is sheer fiction and that whatever background information Aphra used in Groenoko she obtained from George Warren's An Impartial Description of Surinam, published in 1667. Professor Bernbaum also detected chronological discrepancies within the memoir: if Gildon's events and dates are accurate, Aphra's career must have been so speedy that "in the interval between December 1665, and the latter end of 1666 Aphra is supposed to have returned from Surinam to London, married Mr. Behn, become a widow, and commenced her secret service."⁹ He also argued with convincing fact and logic¹⁰ the impossibility of Gildon's story regarding Mrs. Behn's warning of the secret Dutch plan to sail up the Thames. Furthermore, from seventeen letters written by Aphra and her correspondent, William Scot, (found within the calendar of State Papers of Charles II) he proves that her career in Antwerp was considerably less exciting than Gildon's version of it. These letters show that actually she was sent by the English government to establish contact with and inform upon disaffected Englishmen in Holland who were aiding the Dutch and corresponding with disloyal subjects in England. In this role she wrote to and in behalf of William Scot, who sent her not secret intelligence of impending attack, but prosaic demands for money and pardon in return for information. But when his possible usefulness to England ended by his being clapped into a Dutch debtor's prison, poor Aphra not only went unpaid but

8. Bernbaum, "Mrs. Behn's Biog." 436-437.

9. Bernbaum, "Mrs. Behn's Biog." p. 437.

10. Bernbaum, "Mrs. Behn's Biog." p. 439.

even had to arrange a loan to return to England.¹¹ Professor Bernbaum also challenged Gildon's story that on her voyage from Antwerp Mrs. Behn saw a magnificent floating pavilion in the English Channel but was soon shipwrecked by the same great storm which beset Sir Bernard Gascoigne's fleet and wrecked his ship. Professor Bernbaum cited other state papers¹² proving that Gascoigne's ship was not wrecked at all and therefore concluded that "the account of Mrs. Behn's homeward journey is incredible." He further argued that the two parts of Gildon's story, the discovery of the Dutch project and the return trip and shipwreck, are incompatible, for state papers¹³ prove that Gascoigne reached Dover May 1 (O.S.), 1667, whereas the Dutch did not begin even to plan their attack until the peace negotiations at Breda had proceeded for some time; and since they began during the same May of 1667, "it is obvious that if Mrs. Behn advised her government of the coming danger, she would not have returned home at the same time as did Sir Bernard Gascoigne. If, on the other hand, she did return with him, she could not have sent the warning."¹⁴ As for the letters within the memoir, Professor Bernbaum contended that "To eke out the slender materials, amorous letters and episodes were fabricated" whose "pronounced resemblance to the usual French and English love letters and stories of the time becomes of decided significance, and leads us to recognize them too as fictitious."¹⁵ He declared that the signatures were utilitarian rather

11. Bernbaum, "Mrs. Behn's Biog." p. 443.

12. Bernbaum, "Mrs. Behn's Biog." p. 443.

13. Bernbaum, "Mrs. Behn's Biog." p. 436.

14. Bernbaum, "Mrs. Behn's Biog." p. 438.

15. Bernbaum, "Mrs. Behn's Biog." p. 446.

than literary because the state papers already mentioned show Scot writing as "Celadon" from Rotterdam to "Astrea" in Antwerp, who in turn forwarded his news and request for pardon to London.¹⁶ Whereas Gildon declared that upon her return from Surinam Charles II had urged Aphra to write Oroonoko, Professor Bernbaum maintained "that if he had asked her to publish the story, she would eagerly have done so at once, and dedicated it to him." He also doubted Gildon's story that Aphra wrote Oroonoko while taking her turn at discoursing in company, but he does not document his reasons. Therefore, having detected errors in Gildon's chronology and having uncovered strong evidence to upset Gildon's romanticized version of Aphra's mission in Antwerp, Professor Bernbaum adopts a general attitude of willing disbelief towards the entire memoir: "In the absence of confirmatory evidence, such interesting glimpses of Mrs. Behn's life and character as shown by Gildon, repeated in most modern biographies, can unfortunately no longer be believed true."

Other scholars have followed Professor Bernbaum in recognizing the fictitious nature of parts of the memoir, but they allow Gildon considerably more credit. Montague Summers admits that "a romance full as amorous and sensational as any novel of the day has been woven about her sojourn at Antwerp", whereas actually she did her work there in dire poverty, unrelieved and unrewarded by her government; that she had to arrange a private loan of £ 150 to get home; that she was imprisoned for failure to pay the sum; and that in some unknown fashion the debt was paid. He believes the letters from Mrs. Behn and "a couple of ridiculous effusions purporting to be Van Bruin's" are "pure fiction, the sweepings of Aphra's desk . . .

16. Bernbaum, "Mrs. Behn's Biog." pp. 444-445.

intended by her to have been worked up into a novel; both letters and narrative are too good to be the unaided composition of Gildon himself, but possibly Mrs. Behn in her after life may have elaborated and told him these exotic episodes to conceal the squalor and misery of the real facts of her early Dutch mission.¹⁷ But he accepts Gildon's version of her trip to Surinam and quotes with evident approval his general appraisal of Aphra's temperament and character.¹⁸

Miss Victoria Sackville-West takes sharp issue with Professor Bernbaum.¹⁹ She argues that although Mrs. Behn did perhaps make use of Warren's book when she wrote Oroonoko in 1688, many years after her trip to Surinam, nevertheless she had gone to Surinam in much the same circumstances as Gildon describes. He states that Aphra was a Johnson, of good family, and that she went to Surinam as the daughter of the governor-elect; Miss Sackville-West identifies Johnson as a relative of Lord Francis Willoughby, who appointed him to serve as deputy-governor of his extensive holdings in Surinam. She quotes James Rodway's Chronological History of the Discovery and Settlement of Guiana (1688) to show that Johnson sailed for Surinam in 1665 "taking with him his wife and children, and also an adopted daughter, Afra or Aphra Johnson. He did not, however, live to reach his government, but fell sick and died on the voyage. His widow and the children proceeded to Surinam, where they remained for two to three years, living in one of Lord Willoughby's plantations."²⁰ Thus she explains that although Aphra may

17. Summers, Works . . . Behn I, xvi.

18. Summers, Works . . . Behn I, liii.

19. Sackville-West, Incomparable Astrea pp. 21-54.

20. Sackville-West, Incomparable Astrea p. 169.

indeed have been born an Amis—perhaps the daughter of a barber—she was adopted by the Johnsons and therefore Gildon's description of her family and status was just; and Miss West reminds us that Aphra's own statement in Oroonoko corroborates Gildon's version of the trip to Surinam: "My stay was to be short in that country; because my father died at sea . . . though we were oblig'd to continue our voyage, we did not intend to stay upon the place . . . as soon as I came into the country, the best house in it was presented to me, called St. John's Hill." Miss West also reminds us that not one of Aphra's friends, relatives, or contemporaries ever contradicted her statement that she had been to Surinam, nor had anyone questioned her reference in the dedication of The Young King (1679) to the "three thousand leagues of ocean she has measured, visited many and distant shores" and her consequent fear that her first poetry might suffer "the reproach of being the work of an American, whose country rarely produces beauties of this kind." Miss West further reminds us that in his issue of The Younger Brother Gildon writes that Mrs. Behn took an incident from the life of the brother of Colonel Henry Martin, whom Miss West identifies as the Harry Martin Aphra knew in Surinam. Miss West also recalls Southerne's remark (in the dedicatory epistle of his tragedy Oroonoko) that he had heard from friends how Aphra always told the story of Oroonoko with far more feeling than she wrote it; hence Miss West infers that Aphra had talked much of her travels, and without challenge. Miss West also differs from Professor Bernbaum on the subject of the love letters, as she is convinced that they are genuine. "So personal and poignant are they that one reads them almost with a sense of indiscretion . . . convincing not only by their passion but by their incidental verisimilitude . . . a woman scribbling a midnight letter to a lover in a style completely different from even Astrea's literary style, colloquial

though that habitually was." But Miss West reluctantly agrees with Professor Bernbaum on the improbability of Charles's request that Aphra write Oroonoko, on the impossibility of her advance warning of the Dutch attack, and on the sheer fiction of Gildon's story of Aphra's return journey from Antwerp.

H. G. Platt, Jr., uses Colonizing Expeditions to the West Indies and Guiana, 1623-1667 (Hakluyt Society, Second Series, LVII 1924) to attack Professor Bernbaum's contention that Aphra never went to Surinam and to offer a new explanation of her role in both Surinam and Antwerp.²¹ He argues that Aphra went to Surinam as the mistress of William Scot, son of the regicide Thomas Scot and himself a political radical who fled to Surinam because of a warrant issued for his arrest, and that in Surinam Scot was an active leader in the republican party's attempt to unseat Governor Byam. Mr. Platt refers to a letter of Surinam political gossip in which Scot's regular pseudonym, "Celadon," is coupled with Mrs. Behn's "Astrea" in such a context as to make the amorous relationship between the two quite clear. He also cites Governor Byam's letter of 1668 holding Scot responsible for dispatching a Dutch fleet to Surinam. He makes the point that Aphra, although a decided Tory in all her other works, in Oroonoko attacks the Tory rule of Governor Byam; and since Byam enjoys an excellent reputation in the political literature of the period, Mr. Platt believes that Aphra's knowledge of Surinam politics came from Scot. He agrees with Professor Bernbaum that her descriptions of nature in Oroonoko are sketchy at best; but he insists that in all her works she always focuses on people and plot,

21. Platt, "Astrea and Celadon" pp. 544-449.

not on place, and that since her settings are never more than mere generalized background Professor Bernbaum's point is negligible. On the controversial matter of Aphra's career as spy he surmises that Scot and Aphra fled from Surinam to Holland, for in 1665 he was receiving a salary as a Dutch agent working among disaffected English. He further surmises that when on April 21, 1666, the English government ordered Scot home to stand trial for serving with the enemy, he sent Aphra to England with an offer to spy for the English in return for a pardon; for she appeared in London in the summer of 1666 and got herself appointed as secret agent instructed to win Scot over to the English cause. Shortly thereafter from Antwerp she wrote dispatches announcing Scot's willingness to serve and requesting a pardon for him and money for herself. But when he was imprisoned in Holland (probably for debt), he lost his possible usefulness to the English government, which thereupon left Aphra to borrow in order to get back to England. This abandonment would suggest that she was valuable only as a link with Scot. Finally, Mr. Platt speculates upon the probability that the Van Bruin and Vander Albert of the letters "may have their roots in Thomas Corney, an English agent in Antwerp who laid siege to her, and in William Scot."²²

Mr. George Woodcock, the most recent biographer of Mrs. Behn,²³ believes that Aphra did go to Surinam but rejects Gildon's stories of her intrigues with the Dutchman and her warning of the surprise Dutch attack. He considers the story of the floating pavilion in the English Channel a fiction and maintains that it "seems to confirm more than ever the theory that the

22. Platt, "Astrea and Celadon" p. 559.

23. George Woodcock, The Incomparable Aphra (London, 1948), p. 33.

strange incidents . . . attributed to Aphra's career as a spy were in fact intended by the latter to be worked into a romance and were later found by Gildon among her papers."²⁴ He agrees with Montague Summers that both the description of the pavilion and the letters involving Vander Albert are beyond Gildon's capacity.²⁵

Professor Bernbaum, Father Summers, Miss West, Mr. Platt, and Mr. Woodcock here present diverging, often contradictory opinions regarding Gildon's accuracy as biographer. Their disagreements concern the following topics: Aphra's name, her trip to Surinam and the circumstances under which she made the trip, her route from Surinam to Antwerp, the nature of her activities in Antwerp, her relationship with William Scot, her alleged advance warning of the Dutch attack, the floating pavilion in the English Chamel, the date of her return to England, Charles's request that she write Greenoko, her composition of that work in the midst of company, and the letters within the memoir. Thus the honesty of the major portion of the memoir has been so suspect that any modern judgment must begin with the question of its accuracy.

The evidence and argument which have been reviewed in the previous paragraphs seem to warrant the following judgments of Gildon's accuracy. On the first of these disputed points, Aphra's name and family, Gildon apparently wrote in good faith and with reasonable accuracy. As for the second question, the trip to Surinam, Professor Bernbaum's denial is adequately refuted by other arguments, and Gildon is accurate. On the third issue, the circumstances of her trip to Surinam, there are good grounds for Gildon's statement that she went as the daughter of the governor-elect.

24. Woodcock, Incomparable Astrea, pp. 37-38.

25. Woodcock, Incomparable Astrea, pp. 37-38.

Evidence indicates only that Scot and Aphra were in Surinam at the same time and that their names were coupled in local gossip; it does not prove that they had met in England and sailed to Surinam together. A possible explanation is that Gildon's version of her trip and its circumstances is substantially true, but that after her arrival in Surinam Aphra found her position as an adopted daughter in the family of a widow far from home an awkward one. Since she was twenty-five or twenty-six (Gildon is very wrong regarding her age in Surinam) and probably not without experience, Aphra may have contracted an alliance with William Scot after her arrival in Surinam. Such an affair would have caused local gossip; and since Scot was anti-*Hyam* whereas Aphra had arrived in semi-official circumstances, the affair would be a juicy bit of talk certain to fascinate a close colonial community and thus account for references to it in official correspondence. But on the fourth point of dispute, Aphra's itinerary after Surinam, Gildon seems remiss in his statement that from Surinam she returned directly to London, married Mr. Behn, and was soon sent to Antwerp as Charles's confidential agent. More likely she left Surinam as Scot's mistress, went straight to Holland with him, journeyed from Holland to London in his interest, and in London somehow contrived to get herself appointed a confidential agent at Antwerp, where she served as liaison between Scot and the English government until his imprisonment for debt ended his possible usefulness to the English government, which therefore abandoned her. The fifth disputed point, Aphra's alleged warning of the Dutch attack, is sheer fiction, as are also Gildon's stories of the floating pavilion in the English Channel and of Aphra's subsequent shipwreck. And although no proof controverts Gildon's statement on the sixth point, Charles's asking Aphra to write Oroonoko and its composition in the midst of company, circumstantial evidence

makes both stories highly dubious. As for the final question, the genuineness of the letters within the memoir, even if Gildon did not write them himself and if they actually were Mrs. Behn's own, the context into which he put them is certainly not their true one. Therefore, these seven conclusions indicate that although the memoir contains considerable fact, it certainly is not reliable biography if judged by modern standards of factual accuracy.

Another question implicit in any judgment of the work concerns Gildon's sources and the extent of his own contribution to the memoir. Students²⁶ of Mrs. Behn's works have argued convincingly that Gildon's memoir is "full just where Mrs. Behn furnishes information in her novels" but "very vague just where Mrs. Behn fails to supply any data" and that it "adds little to the material furnished in Mrs. Behn's own works"; therefore they conclude that "it is built up almost entirely on the autobiographical information so obligingly furnished by Mrs. Behn in her own works."²⁷ The point is well taken and cannot be refuted; for Gildon adds to the autobiographical references readily available in Aphra's novels only the following: Charles's request that she write Oroonoko, her own advance warning of the Dutch attack, the letters, the story of the floating pavilion in the English Channel, and the statement that she wrote Oroonoko in the midst of company. Since all but one of these additions have been discredited in previous paragraphs, only the letters remain as a possible Gildon contribution to our knowledge of Aphra Behn.

26. Bernbaum, Platt, Summers, Woodcock.

27. Platt, "Astrea and Celadon" p. 544.

But the letters themselves bring up this question: to what extent are they Gildon's own compositions? The majority opinion²⁸ holds that the letters are substantially Aphra's own writing which Gildon acquired following her death. This group also agrees that large chunks of the narrative—unspecified and conveniently vague save for the spy episodes and the description of the floating pavilion—are lifted bodily from some of Aphra's papers which she had intended to weave into a later romance. The same group further argues that in all of these places, and especially in the letters and the description of the pavilion, the writing "bears the stamp [again a conveniently vague term] of Aphra's style and is certainly beyond Gildon's powers." Among this group Mr. Woodcock makes the best case, but he admits that neither he nor Father Sumners has seen the originals of the letters²⁹ and therefore cannot prove that they are Aphra's; also both appear to have read only a minor portion of Gildon's total works and are therefore not the best judges of his powers. Hence the evidence supporting the majority view, that the letters are authentic bits of Aphra's own writing, is unconvincing; for essentially that evidence is only assertion and undocumented talk of undefined stylistic echoes.

Professor Bernbaum's idea, that the letters were fabricated by Gildon to eke out otherwise slender materials and that they bear a pronounced resemblance to contemporary French and English literary love letters,³⁰ seems more plausible. Perhaps one who has read only Gildon's later and

28. Platt, Sumners, Sackville-West, Woodcock.

29. In reply to my query Mr. Woodcock writes, "I have never seen the originals of the letters in the Memoir, nor had Montagu Sumners, whom I consulted some time before his death, and I can hardly believe that these exist, as they have certainly left no trace."

30. Bernbaum, "Mrs. Behn's Biog."

heavier critical utterances might believe that parts of the memoir are beyond him, but a wider reading of Gildon, especially his The Post-boy rob'd of his Mail (1692, 1693 volumes), demonstrates that he was entirely capable of the lighter touch and also possessed a good sense of the ludicrous. The first volume of The Post-boy rob'd of his Mail (1692) was popular enough to warrant later editions and is still pleasant light reading. The Van Bruin letters of the memoir especially resemble the tone of the 1692 volume; and the ideas and prejudices concerning Dutchmen in the letters--their heaviness of manner, their love of gold, their lack of skill in the nicer matters preparatory to love--occur in decided fashion in the volumes of The Post-boy rob'd as well as in Gildon's miscellanies. The letters to Lycidas in the memoir utilize the same devices for continuity found in The Post-boy rob'd volumes: connecting tags, the same connective references to "come tomorrow," and the same connective references to intervening action. Furthermore, although the reader sees only the letters of Astrea and none of Lycidas' answers, he nevertheless gets a remarkably complete account of the progress of the love affair. Had they been genuine love letters written by Aphra, it is highly probable they would have left some blank spots or incomplete episodes in the mind of a reader who sees only one side of the exchange, the letters of Astrea. But these letters leave no blanks, no gaps, because they are very carefully written to present in chronological and excellent order a complete account of the entire affair through the letters of only one of the participants. In other words, they utilize the very same devices for continuity and completeness which Gildon had already used effectively in The Post-boy rob'd volumes; and they thereby present such a full and careful account of the affair as would come only from deliberate art intended to present an entire narrative through the letters of only one

participant in the love affair.

Therefore, since no one has proved by producing the originals that these letters were Aphra's; since Gildon had already used the same techniques of the letters in his The Post-boy rob'd volumes; and since the writing is not beyond Gildon but, on the contrary, reads like his style in The Post-boy rob'd and several others of his works, the letters may more logically be ascribed to Gildon than to Aphra.³¹ Such ascription, of course, lessens the biographical value of the memoir.

But if the memoir is thus discredited on the scores of accuracy and contribution to our knowledge of Aphra, what worth remains? Bad as it may be, it was the only contemporary biography; and inaccurate though it was, parts are indisputably true. It attempted to present a more sympathetic picture of Aphra's career than did the gossips and her Whig detractors. And in the sense that for almost two centuries it was the only biography of Aphra it was inevitably a starting point for considerable scholarship. But all this is at best only faint praise; Professor Bernbaum is probably right in asserting that the real value of the memoir is its contribution to the development of English fiction in its anticipation of the method of Defoe.³² His statement should be qualified somewhat, and Professor Bernbaum might have added that Gildon's manipulation of the letters in The Post-boy rob'd volumes and in this memoir represent considerable progress towards the epistolary fiction of the next century. But however disputable the worth of the memoir as biography or fiction, Gildon's general evaluation of Mrs.

31. In the letter previously cited Mr. Woodcock suggests that these letters were really Aphra's but had been reworked by Gildon. If so, the reworking and additions are so extensive as to make them more Gildon's than Mrs. Behn's.

32. Bernbaum, "Mrs. Behn's Biog.," p. 453.

Behn's character and literary ability has been approved by each serious student of her work.³³

After a lapse of several years Gildon produced a second biographical memoir in The Life of Mr. Thomas Betterton, The late Eminent Tragedian, wherein The Action and Utterance of the Stage, Bar, and Pulpit, are distinctly consider'd. With the Judgment of the late Ingenious Monsieur de St. Evremont, upon the Italian and French Music and Operas; in a Letter to the Duke of Buckingham. To which is added, The amorous Widow, or the Wanton Wife. A Comedy. Written by Mr. Betterton. Now first printed from the Original Copy. Published by Curll on September 16, 1710, the volume was apparently put together hastily to capitalize upon the recent death of Betterton; very likely it was assembled from materials already on hand, for the comedy is separately paged; and strictly speaking, this was not its first printing, for the words were retained from the title-page of its first edition in 1706.³⁴ Gildon would have us believe that "the Amorous Widow from a surreptitious Copy visited the World after it had been acted almost 20 years; but a true copy will be added to this Book."³⁵ Although Gildon's name does not appear on the title-page, Curll's records show Gildon as editor³⁶ and the dedicatory epistle in which the writer states his authorship

33. Platt, Sackville-West, Summers, Woodcock.

34. Ralph Straus, The Unspeakable Curll (London, 1927), p. 213.

35. Charles Gildon, The Life of Mr. Thomas Betterton (London, 1710).

36. Straus, Unspeakable Curll p. 213.

of all the volume except the attached comedy is signed by him.³⁷

In a marked reversal of former policy he dedicated the volume to Richard Steele (who soon returned the compliment by writing a humorous preface for Gildon's A Grammar of the English Tongue) with the acid comment that

among the Ancients, the name of a learned Friend was of greater Consideration with the Writer, than the dignity of a Man of Power; and that the Greatness of any Man in the Political State, according to them, did not raise his authority in the common-wealth of Letters, above his real merits in the Arts and Sciences, unless he ennobl'd it, by giving such Encouragement to them, as they very rarely in our Days meet with from the Great ones.

Then he proudly announced that the ensuing opinions upon acting are his own.³⁸ This is a rather strange statement considering the attempt in the "life" itself to make these pronouncements appear to be Betterton's.

I flatter myself that I am . . . the first, who in English has attempted this Subject, in the Extent of the Discourse before you, so I am apt to believe, that I have pretty well exhausted the Matter; and laid down such General and Particular Rules, as may raise the Stage from the present Neglect it lies under, to that Esteem, which it drew from the most polite Nation, that ever was in the World, and that, which it will always deserve from Men of Sense, when under a just Regulation, and Adorn'd, as it ought to be, with Good Actors and Good Plays.

Never especially modest, Gildon fondly hopes that his precepts and Steele's plays will give authors and actors "the Knowledge of Nature, and the Art of

37. S. B. Wells, "An Eighteenth Century Attribution," JEP, XXVIII (1939), 212, n. 38. "There can be no doubt that this book is Gildon's. One of the British Museum's three copies, it is true, gives no indication of the author. But in every other copy I have seen the Epistle Dedicatory to Steele is signed 'Charles Gildon'." The copy at Harvard also bears Gildon's signature. CBEL (II, 418) lists Gildon as author.

38. Although I have no proof, I suspect that Curll at one time intended to publish Gildon's dissertation upon acting, that the dedicatory epistle and preface were intended for that volume, and that either Gildon or Curll seized the occasion of Betterton's death to get out a timely volume purporting to offer a life of the player, his opinions on acting, and one of his plays.

keeping her always in View, adorn'd with that Harmony, Decorum, and order, which ought perpetually to shine in such Public Representations." Following the dedication is a preface written to prevent any charge that he has been "a Plagiary, and deliver'd Rules for my own which are taken out of other Authors." He admits he has "borrow'd many of them from the French" but asserts they in turn "drew most of them from Quintilian and other authors" but have "improv'd the ancients in this particular, by supplying what was lost by the Attraction of Custom, with observations more peculiar to the present age." Thereafter a copy of the epilogue spoken by Mrs. Barry at a benefit for Betterton on April 7, 1709, completes the introductory material. The volume proper consists of the "life" of Betterton and his comedy, "The Amorous Widow, or the Wanton Wife." "The Judgment of the Later Ingenious Monsieur de St. Evremont, upon the Italian and French Music and Operas; in a Letter to the Duke of Buckingham" promised on the title page does not appear, unless we are to assume that Gildon is paraphrasing it in several sections of the "life" itself.

This "life" of Betterton is a strange document. As biography it is meagre, for biographical information occupies only eleven pages presenting a painfully bare review of Betterton's career. In less than a page Gildon recounts a visit to Betterton during which, says Gildon, the actor laid down precepts for his art. Thereafter the memoir becomes a dissertation upon acting which for one hundred and sixty-three tedious pages details in systematic fashion Gildon's views on the defects of players, the requisites for a good player, proper stage bearing and presence, the necessity of motion on stage, gestures, voice, and the present taste for opera. But the story of the visit is clearly bogus, since it occupies less than a page at the beginning of the dissertation upon acting and a six-line paragraph at

the end of the entire "life"; since Gildon makes the supposed comments of Betterton go on for one hundred and sixty-three pages without a break and without mention of Betterton as speaker; and since the ideas, illustrations, and oft-repeated examples were voiced by Gildon many times elsewhere, the framework deceives no one. The speaker is Gildon, not Betterton.

In this thinly disguised dissertation Gildon offers a thorough critique of contemporary stage practice. He ascribes the present low repute of the theatre to the immorality and general incompetence of the actors and actresses, whose lack of preparation makes the stage "at the very best indeed . . . but a very cold Representation supported by loud prompting, to the eternal Disgust of the Audience, and spoiling ^{the} and Decorum of the Representation" (p. 38) To correct this degradation of a high art Gildon sets forth an extremely thorough and systematic guide to acting. His own summary exemplifies his exhaustive prescriptions:

I have thus run through the whole art of Acting and Speaking, or rather, as Shakespear calls it, of Action and Utterance, in which I have had a just Regard to the Pulpit and the Bar, as well as to the stage; in complaisance to which, I have chosen to give Examples rather oftentimes from oratory than from the Drama, since the Actor may learn his just Lessons from that former, as from the latter. I have, in short laid down such rules, as if thoroughly consider'd, and reduc'd judiciously to Practice, will form the Gesture with that Beauty, as to strike the Eye with Wonder and Pleasure; and teach the Tongue to utter with that Grace and Harmony, that the Ear will be equally ravish'd, and both convey so sensible a Delight to the Mind, that the Success will be much more glorious in the Pulpit and on the Stage, than is at present found from the Endeavours of either I have given you a collection of the natural Significations of several Gestures, and shown how Nature expresses herself in the several Emotions, which she feels; I have shewn you how art improves these Gestures, and on what occasion they are proper, and how to make them graceful; I have likewise shown you how you are to model your Voice to make your Utterance harmonious, shewn the Defects of Voice or Tone, and its Beauties and Varieties, and laid down Rules how you may avoid that idifatigable Vice of Monotony, or always sounding the same Note on all occasions, without any or with very little Variation. Thus I have run through the Passions, the Figures of Diction, Sentences, nay, and even Words I shall therefore now conclude with these Qualities and Qualifications of a complete actor, which however difficult to attain they may seem, are yet sufficiently, from what I have said, proved to be necessary. (pp. 137-38)

Unfortunately, he soon bores his reader with such exhaustingly detailed descriptions of the obvious as this: "I shall therefore begin with the Government, order, and Balance, as I may say, of the whole Body; and thence I shall proceed to the Regiment and proper Motions of the Head, the Eyes, the Eye-brown, and indeed the whole Face; and I shall conclude with the Actions of the Hands, more copious and various, than all the other parts of the Body." This plan is carried out ad nauseam with such minutiae as these directions:

That the head has various Gestures and Signs, Intimations and Hints by which it is capable of expressing Consent, Refusal, Confirmation, and Admiration, and Anger, is what everyone knows, who has ever thought at all. . . . But this rule ¹ must lay down on the Head in general, first that it ought not to be lifted up too high, and stretched out extravagantly, which is the mark of arrogance and Haughtiness; but an exception to this Rule will come in for the Player who is to act a Person of that Character. Nor on the other side should it be hung down clumsy and dull; and would prove extremely prejudicial to the Voice, depriving it of clearness, Distinction, and that Intelligibility, which it ought to have: Nor should the Head always lean towards the Shoulders, which is equally rustic and affected, or a great work of Indifference, Languidness, and a faint inclination. But the Head, in all the calmer speeches at least, ought to be kept in its just Natural State and Upright Position. (p. 57)

But despite this morass of detail, the thesis of the dissertation is sound: bearing, gestures, and voice are all important, and the good player is he who, having wit and education enough to grasp the real nature of the situation and character, studies to make his movements, gestures, voice, and appearance all serve a central purpose. Essentially Gildon here urges the doctrine of propriety, and he makes his case despite the tedious detail. Because of the limitations of the players in his day such a detailed and precise treatment might have been salutary had it been read by the principal offenders. But as a whole the volume is a monstrous imposition upon Betterton's name: for as commentary upon acting it is Gildon, not Betterton; and as biography it is nothing more than another attempt by Gildon and/or

Curll to capitalize upon the recent death of a literary figure. As such it does no credit to Gildon, Curll, or Betterton.

However, as literary history the volume offers an interesting aside on publishing and the practice of hackery in the eighteenth century. In 1741, seventeen years after Gildon's death, Curll published The History of the English Stage. From the Restoration to the Present Time. Including The Lives, Characters, and Amours, of the Most Eminent Actors and Actresses. With Instructions for Public Speaking; Wherein The Action and Utterance of the Bar, Stage, and Pulpit are Distinctly considered. By Mr. Thomas Betterton. Although CBEL (II, 418) describes this volume as a "compilation by Oldys and others, partly based upon Betterton's papers" the work is clearly another attempt to use Gildon's life of Betterton. Editor Oldys has used neat chunks of unacknowledged Gildon material but enlivened it with his own interspersed "Lives, Characters, and Amours of the most Eminent Actors and Actresses." Parts of the sub-titles are parallel: Gildon's life of Betterton is set up as "Wherein/ The Action and Utterance of the Stage,/Bar, and Pulpit, are distinctly consider'd." and the Oldys volume reads, "Wherein/The Action and Utterance of the Bar,/Stage, and Pulpit are Distinctly considered." But the contents of the two volumes present better proof of pilfering from Gildon. Pages five and six of The History of the English Stage are fact-by-fact, paragraph-by-paragraph paraphrases of page five of Gildon's life of Betterton. Then the following paragraphs and pages are reprints (the typographical errors and variant or wrong spellings are exactly the same) of Gildon's volume:

The History of the English Stage

The Life of Mr. Thomas Betterton

first paragraph, p. 7	.....	p. 6
second " , p. 7	.....	p. 6
first " , p. 9	.....	p. 7
second " , p. 9	.....	p. 7
first " , p.12	.....	p.10
first " , p.27	.....	p.13
first " , p.27	.....	p.14
last " , p.27	.....	p.14
first " , p.28	.....	p.14
last " , p.28	.....	p.15
all of p. 29, first 2 lines of p. 30	.....	pp. 15-16
first paragraph, p. 30	.....	p.16
second " , p.38	.....	p.25
first " , p.39	.....	p.25
second " , p.39	.....	p.25
third " , p.39	.....	p.26
pp. 40-54	.....	pp. 26-40, one unbroken block
Middle of second paragraph, p. 62-middle of p. 76	.....	pp. 41-55, one unbroken block
middle of p. 82-p. 89	.....	pp. 57-65, one unbroken block
second paragraph of p. 94-110	.....	pp. 65-84, one unbroken block

Since Curll had published Gildon's volume, since just before his death Gildon was drudging for Curll, and since Curll also published Oldys's volume, we may assume that Curll made Gildon's work available to Oldys. And in a nice bit of poetic justice Gildon's work in such nameless form even crossed the Atlantic in 1814 when publishers William and Henry Spear of Boston in turn pirated³⁹ the Oldys volume.⁴⁰

Sometime in 1714 Gildon seems to have projected another "life" for Curll to print. In The Unspeakable Curll Ralph Straus quotes Curll's preface to the 1725 edition of Mrs. Mary Delariviere Manley's history of her own life and times:

In the year 1714 Mr. Gildon, upon a pique, the cause of which I cannot assign, wrote some account of Mrs. Manley's life, under the Title of The History of Rivella, Author of the Atlantis. Of this piece, Two Sheets only were printed, when Mrs. Manley learning that it was in the Press and suspecting it to be what it really was, a severe Invective upon some part of her conduct, who sent me the following Letter . . . requesting an appointment, which Curll

39. In 1814 American copyright law gave English publishers no protection.

40. This volume, "Revised, with Additional Notes by Charles L. Coles," is in the Harvard library.

granted. Mrs. Manley, and her Sister, came to my House in Fleet Street . . . and requested a sight of Mr. Gildon's papers. Such a request, I told her, I could not, by any means, grant without asking Mr. Gildon's consent; but, upon hearing her own Story, which no Pen, but her own, can relate in the agreeable Manner wherein she delivered it, I promised to write to Mr. Gildon the next Day; and not only obtained his consent to let Mrs. Manley see what Sheets were printed, but also brought them to an interview, by which means all Resentments between them were thoroughly reconciled. Mr. Gildon was, likewise, so generous, as to order a Total Suppression of all his papers; and Mrs. Manley as generously resolved to write The History of her own Life and Times, under the same Title which Mr. Gildon had made Choice of.⁴¹

Mr. Straus also presents another version of the affair by quoting Iscariot Hackney, whom he identifies as Gildon, the central character of Richard Savage's An Author to Let.

I was employed by Curll, to write a merry tale, the wit of which was its obscenity. This we agreed to palm off upon the world for a posthumous piece by Mr. Prior. However, a certain lady, celebrated for certain liberties, had a curiosity to see the real author. Curll, on my promise that if I had a present, he should go snacks, sent me to her. I was admitted while her ladyship was shifting; and on my admittance, Mrs. Abigail was ordered to withdraw. What passed between us a point of gallantry obliges me to conceal; but after some extraordinary civilities, I was dismissed with a purse of guineas, and a command to write a sequel to my tale. Upon this I turned out smart in dress, bit Curll of his share, and run out most of my money in printing my works at my own cost.⁴²

Both accounts agree on Gildon's willingness to call off the work; and regardless of which version one accepts,⁴³ there seems to be no record of its completion.

Gildon next attempted a "life" four years later when he assembled a pot boiler called Memoirs of the Life of William Wycherley, Esq; With a Character of his Writings. By the Right Honourable George, Lord Landsdowne.

⁴¹. Straus, Unspeakable Curll, pp. 45-46.

⁴². Straus, Unspeakable Curll, p. 44.

⁴³. Paul Euphan Anderson in both his unpublished Harvard dissertation and "Mistress Manley's Biography" (Modern Philology, XXXIII, 1936, 276) accepts Curll's version of the facts.

The volume also contains "Some Familiar Letters, Written by Mr. Wycherley, and a True Copy of his Last Will and Testament." The title page is misleading in that it makes Lord Landsdowne appear to be the author of the life of Wycherley, whereas the text makes clear that his only contribution is the four-page "character of his writings," a vigorous, incisive appraisal of Wycherley's literary work. Following Wycherley's will and four unimportant letters from him to John Dennis (dated 1694 and 1695) comes Gildon's "life" of Wycherley. The volume was printed for Curll, and although Gildon's name does not appear on the title-page, the Evening Post for May 1, 2, 3, 6, 10, and 15, 1718, advertised "The Life of William Wycherley, Esq.; by Charles Gildon Gent."⁴⁴ and modern scholars have accepted Gildon's authorship.⁴⁵ Early scholarship on the Addison-Pope relationship denied the very existence of this work,⁴⁶ but Professor Sherburn found a copy in the New York Public Library and H. Dottin saw one in the British Museum.⁴⁷ Other copies of the volume are now at the Huntington Library, the University of Michigan library, and the Folger Shakespeare Library.

Like Gildon's earlier "lives" this memoir merely sketches the obvious phases of Wycherley's life: his parentage, his family's modest but solid situation, his university education (but Gildon does not name the university),

44. G. W. Sherburn, "The Thing about Wycherley," TLS, May 11, 1922, 308. Dottin, p. 32.

45. "The Thing about Wycherley," p. 308. Dottin, op. cit. p. 32. D. A. Stauffer, The Art of Biography in 18th Century England (Princeton, 1941), p. 102. Ralph Straus, The Unspeakable Curll, p. 86. G. W. Sherburn, The Early Career of Alexander Pope (Oxford, 1934), p. 147.

46. The jurist Blackstone, Leslie Stephen, and Elwin and Courthope ("The Thing about Wycherley," p. 308).

47. "The Thing about Wycherley," p. 308. Dottin, op. cit. p. 32.

his residence in the Inns of Court, his entrance into the world of wit, his friendship with Dryden, his marriage to the Countess of Drogheda, the loss of her estate to her relatives, suits with them, seven years' confinement for debt in Newgate and the Fleet, his release after James II applauded The Plain Dealer, James's pension of two hundred pounds a year, Wycherley's subsequent Jacobitism, his attempt to persuade the Duke of Buckingham to aid Butler, the neglect he suffered from the great wits who had once fawned upon him, his return to the country under the guardianship of his father's appointee, his legacy held in trust by the terms of his father's will, and his marriage at eighty—just eleven days before his death—in order to settle his debts by using a particular clause of his father's will. Gildon closes the account with a generous and perceptive appreciation of Wycherley's modesty, wit, and sweetness of character.

The volume would have sunk into its deserved obscurity had it not contained the now-familiar description of the young Alexander Pope. Coming shortly after the death of his beloved father, the account stung Pope with double venom.

About this time there came to Town, and to Will's, one Pope, a little diminutive Creature, who had got a sort of Knack in smooth Versification, and with it was for setting up for a Wit and a Poet. But unknown as he was, furnish'd with a very good Assurance, and a Plausible, at least Cringing Way of Insimulation, he first got acquainted with that Ingenious Gentleman and excellent Critick Mr. Walsh, who was pleas'd to bear with his Impertinence, and suffer his Company sometimes to divert himself either with his Figure or forward Ignorance. For a Man of Wit may find an agreeable Diversion in the Company of a pretending Fool sometimes, provided that the Interviews are short and seldome. But this gave this young Poetaster an Opinion of himself, and that he must have something extraordinary in him to be admitted to such a Conversation, not considering that Men of establish'd Reputation, and Men of Establish'd Fortune and Power, are always haunted by those who have neither themselves, in hope to gain them by their Assiduity and Address. From this Acquaintance he advances to that of Mr. Wycherley, then disgusted with the Wits; him he follows, attends and cringes to in all places, and at

all Times, and makes his Courtly Reflections on such as he found not very much in his good Graces.

I remember I was once to wait on Mr. Wycherley, and found in his Chamber this little Aesopic sort of Animal in his own cropt Hair, and Dress agreeable to the Forest he came from. I confess the Gentleman was very silent all my stay there, and scarce utter'd three Words on any Subject we talk'd of, nor cou'd I guess at what sort of Creature he was, and shou'd indeed have guess'd all the Pretences of Mankind round before I shou'd have imagin'd him a Wit and Poet. I thought indeed he might be some Tenant's Son of his, who might make his Court for continuance in his Lease on the Decease of his Rustick Parent, but was sufficiently surpriz'd, when Mr. Wycherley afterwards told me he was Poetically inclin'd, and writ tolerably smooth Verses.

Not long after this I found a Copy of Verses of Mr. Wycherley's to him, on his Pastorals, which happening to please some of the Town, this young Gentleman's Vanity of being Author of them destroy'd his other Vanity of being perused by so considerable a Person, for he was pleas'd to own, that he writ them himself tho' in his own Praise.

Tho' Mr. Wycherley's Picque at that Time, to greater Men, had made way for his admitting such a Wretch as this into his Conversation and Intimacy, yet he was all his Life besides more cautious of his Friendships, the Brightest and most Excellent always esteem'd him, and he reciprocally them, having all along a Contempt for pretending Coxcombs.⁴⁸

This attack has been so frequently quoted in scholarship concerning the controversial Addison-Pope relationship that it deserves more discussion here than it otherwise merits. To be understood in its full and proper context it must be linked with three separate but related quarrels: Addison's "little Senate" opposition to Pope's translation of the Iliad, Edmund Curll's war with Pope, and Gildon's own antagonism to Pope. For many years readers followed Spence⁴⁹ in believing that this venomous description of the young Pope was written at Addison's instigation, that he paid Gildon ten guineas for it, and that it was the provocation for the famous Atticus portrait as well as for Pope's many scornful comments on Gildon. But recent

48. Charles Gildon, Memoirs of the Life of William Wycherley, Esq.; With a Character of his Writings . . . (London, 1718), pp. 15-17.

49. Joseph Spence, Observations, Anecdotes, and Characters, of Books and Men (London, 1820), pp. 9-11.

scholarship has shown Spence's own uncertainty,⁵⁰ has explained the Atticus portrait as the result of Addison's support of Tickell's translation to compete with Pope's Iliad,⁵¹ and has shown that the Atticus portrait "was first sketched in the summer of 1715 and sent to Addison not later than May, 1716,"⁵² some two years before the appearance of Gildon's life of Wycherley in May, 1718. Thus the animus for Gildon's description of young Pope cannot be attributed to Addison alone.

Professor Sherburn has traced in careful detail the battle between Pope and Edmund Curll, the bookseller.⁵³ It began in 1714 with Curll's unauthorized printing of several private Pope squibs, continued during 1714 and 1715 with Curll's printing of several attacks upon Pope, and reached its climax in late March, 1716, when Pope gave Curll the emetic publicized in the poet's A Full and true Account of a Horrid and Barbarous Revenge by Poison on the Body of Mr. Edmund Curll. To this Curll replied with "two of the most virulent attacks upon Pope that Curll ever procured,"⁵⁴ the anonymous The Catholic Poet and A True Character of Mr. Pope and his Writings.⁵⁵ Thereafter Curll continued to aid, to sponsor, or to print attacks upon

50. A. E. Case, "Pope, Addison, and the 'Atticus' Lines," MP, XXXIII (1935-36), p. 189.

51. The Early Career, pp. 114-119. Norman Ault, "Pope and Addison," BES, XVII (1911), pp. 432-33. Norman Ault, New Light on Pope (London, 1949), pp. 103-05.

52. Early Career, p. 117. "Pope and Addison," p. 439. New Light on Pope, p. 115.

53. Early Career, pp. 149-186.

54. Early Career, p. 177.

55. Early Career, pp. 149-185.

Pope.⁵⁶ By 1718 Gildon was working for Curll,⁵⁷ one of whose current projects was printing a series of "lives" of eminent personages. These "lives," quipped Arbuthnot, "added a new terror to death"⁵⁸ and are the ones to which Swift (On the Death of Dr. Swift) thus referred:

He'll treat me as he does my betters
Publish my will, my life, my letters
Revive the libels born to die
Which Pope must bear, as well as I.⁵⁹

Since Gildon's life of Wycherley was one of this series, any thrusts at Pope in it would please Curll. Thus one plausible explanation of Gildon's attack upon Pope is that it was written either to please Curll or at his direction.

But Gildon also had his own reasons for attacking Pope. Henry Crosswell and Curll both thought Gildon had caused trouble between Pope and Wycherley,⁶⁰ and on October 19, 1709, Pope had written to Crosswell that

there has not been wanting one (who is every way a scoundrel but that has the luck to be born a gentleman), that has more than once insinuated malicious untruths of me to Mr. Wycherley, which I fear may have had some effect upon him. If so, he will have a greater punishment for his credulity than I could wish him, in that fellow's acquaintance.⁶¹

There is also the charge that Gildon lost the Duke of Buckingham's patronage "on account of his obstinacy in refusing to take the oaths to P--pe's supremacy";⁶² and as late as 1730, six years after Gildon's death, Pope felt

56. Early Career, pp. 170-185.

57. Dottin, op. cit., p. 37.

58. The Correspondence of Jonathan Swift, ed. F. K. Ball (London, 1911), IV, 378.

59. Early Career, p. 162.

60. Early Career, p. 53.

61. The Works of Alexander Pope, ed. W. Elwin and W. J. Courthope (London, 1882), VI, pp. 86-87.

62. The Poems of Alexander Pope, ed. James Sutherland (London, 1943), V, pp. 440-441.

it necessary to write in the twentieth number of the Grub Street Journal an anonymous rebuttal to the charge that the Duke of Buckingham had stopped payment of a pension to Gildon on his advice.⁶³

Furthermore, Gildon took himself seriously as a literary critic, and as such he honestly considered Pope the prototype of the "little wits" who were prospering because an indiscriminating age neglected its men of sound learning and judgment. Therefore he would be quick to encourage solid ~~learning and judgment. Therefore he would be quick to encourage solid~~ learning when at the same time he could damage Pope. Such an opportunity occurred when The Rape of the Lock appeared in March, 1714, and on March 23, 1714, when Pope and Bernard Lintot signed their agreement for the translation of Homer's Iliad. On April 6 Gildon's anonymous A New Rehearsal, or Says the Younger dealt Pope a double thrust and also struck the opening blow in the Pope-Addison quarrel.⁶⁴ This "play," a dialogue attacking The Rape of the Lock for indecency⁶⁵ and virulently ridiculing Pope's translation project, caricatures Pope as an absurdly pretentious little "Sawney Dapper" who is ignorant of Greek, innocent of learning, and totally incapable of anything but profanation of Homer.⁶⁶ In the play "Sawney" (a well-known diminutive of Alexander) confesses that he had himself written Wycherley's panegyric,

63. J. T. Millhouse, The Grub-Street Journal (Durham, N.C., 1928), pp. 57-59.

64. Early Career, pp. 125, 163-64. Professor Sherburn comments (p. 125), "It is worth noting that this work by Gildon is apparently the first to represent Addison as hostile to Pope." New Light on Pope, pp. 103-104.

65. This view probably represented Gildon's sincere conviction, for by 1714 he held strong notions regarding sexually suggestive material in poetry.

66. Readers unacquainted with Gildon can better understand his intense animus here when they learn that by 1714 Aristotle and Homer were the foundations of Gildon's critical system, such as it was, and that Gildon thought Pope would cheapen Homer. On the other hand, Gildon would approve Tickell's fitness because of the Oxford don's reputation for learning. Mistaken as Gildon may have been, he was in this case true to his principles. And there still persists a body of opinion which holds Pope's translation to be better Pope than Homer.

To my Friend, Mr. Pope, on his Pastorals. There are also passing slaps at Pope's friends John Gay and Nicholas Rowe. Later, when in the critical summer of 1715 the fate of Pope's translation was yet uncertain,⁶⁷ Gildon's work was twice reissued as a part of the campaign by Addison's group to discredit Pope's translation. In A Full and true account of a Horrid and Barbarous Revenge by Poison on the Body of Edmund Curll Pope considered Gildon's "play" a part of Curll's campaign and stated that the bookseller gave him extra payment for his abuse of Pope.⁶⁸ Then on May 31, 1716, appeared one of Curll's answers, A True Character of Mr. Pope and His Writings. It was among the cruelest and most vicious attacks Pope ever suffered; and although we now consider it to be Dennis's work, Pope thought that Gildon or Gildon and Dennis had written it.⁶⁹ Sometime in June of 1716 Pope brought out A Further Account of the Most Deplorable Condition of Mr. Edmund Curll, Bookseller, in which among Curll's despicable creatures he described Gildon as "the purblind poet at the alley over against St. Andrew's Holborn."⁷⁰ Apparently Pope had complained about Gildon to Swift, for on August 30, 1716, he wrote Pope, "And who are all these enemies you hint at? I can only think of Curll, Gildon, 'Squire' Burnet, Blackmore, and a few others whose name I have forgot."⁷¹ Swift's advice to ignore such enemies

67. "Pope and Addison," p. 140. New Light on Pope, p. 105.

68. "Pope and Addison," pp. 141-42.

69. "Pope, Addison, and the 'Atticus' Lines," p. 189. New Light on Pope, p. 114.

70. The Unspeakable Curll, p. 61.

71. The Works of Jonathan Swift, ed. Sir Walter Scott (Edinburgh, 1824) XVI, 225.

was good; but after Gildon again attacked him in The Complete Art of Poetry in 1718 and The Laws of Poetry in 1721, Pope was unable to leave him to the scorn of silence, not even after Gildon's death in 1724. Instead Pope hit him again and again. In 1724 he published the fragment of a satire in which he attacked Dennis and Gildon; this reappeared with revisions in Curll's Miscellanea of 1727, opening with the quatrain later used in the Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot.⁷²

If Dennis writes, and rails with furious Pet.
I'll answer Dennis, when I am in Debt;
If meaner Gildon draws the venal Quill
I wish the Wretch a Dinner, and sit still.

But Pope did not sit still. On October 15, 1725, he complained in a letter to Swift, "My name is as bad a one as yours, and hated by all bad people from Hopkins and Sternhold to Gildon and Cibber."⁷³ Swift sagely repeated his advice that to answer these men "is as much as wise as it was in your countryman, when the people imputed a stink to him, to prove the contrary by showing his backside" and urged "So let Gildon and Philips rest in peace."⁷⁴ But again in 1728 when Pope threw out his Peri Bathos "to serve as a sort of ground-bait for the subsequent sport of the Dunciad"⁷⁵ Gildon was twice included even though he had been dead four years. Among the examples of

72. The Critical Works of John Dennis, ed. E. N. Hooker (Baltimore, 1913), II, 511.

73. Works . . . Swift, XVII, 10.

74. Correspondence . . . Swift, p. 294.

75. The Poems of Alexander Pope, ed. John Butt (London, 1939), IV, xvi.

bathos drawn from numerous authors ludicrously characterized as birds, fish, reptiles, etc. and identified by their initials, Gildon is one of the four authors (of the total of twenty) to be twice ridiculed. "C. G." appears as one of the flying Fishes⁷⁶ and as one of the Porpoises.⁷⁷ Still not content, Pope ridiculed Gildon's dullness and poverty in the first book of the Dunciad⁷⁸ and mocked him and Dennis in book three.⁷⁹ And even in the anonymous Verses sent to Mrs. T. B. With his Works. By an Author Pope observes that because of its gaudy binding the lady will keep the book even though it be "sillier than G—ld—n."⁸⁰

Thus the venomous description of young Pope in Gildon's life of Wycherley is properly understood only in the context of these three animosities: Addison's "little Senate" group's attempt to discredit Pope's Iliad translation, Edmund Curll's battle with Pope, and Gildon's own personal and literary hostility to Pope. As Swift prophesied, only the attack upon Pope has given this life of Wycherley any value; for as a life it is negligible, and as evaluation of literary work it is decidedly inferior to Gildon's earlier "lives." Its only significance is that of a minor document in the history of these three quarrels.

These four so-called "lives"—of Mrs. Behn, of Thomas Betterton, of Mrs. Manley, and of William Wycherley—do not enhance Gildon's reputation. As biography they are little more than brief character sketches, with the

76. Works . . . Pope, VI, 361.

77. Works . . . Pope, VI, 362.

78. Poems . . . Pope, V, 92.

79. Poems . . . Pope, V, 167.

80. New Light on Pope, p. 165.

possible exception of the work on Mrs. Behn. As sources of accurate fact for later studies they are certainly open to question. As contemporary judgments passed upon literary figures they show occasional insight, but even that is usually marred by prejudice. They remain for us only what they were then intended to be—quick jobs to catch a passing flurry of interest. But in justice to Gildon we must remember that the art of biography was then in its infancy.