

Chapter VII

DRAMA

In the last decade of the seventeenth century any young writer who lived by his pen and aspired to literary reputation would almost necessarily consider writing for the stage. Hence it was natural that Gildon should eye dramatic writing as a possible road to fortune. Between 1696 and 1703 he wrote five plays, adapted another, and wrote two works of literary criticism in dramatic dialogue form. Thus dramatic writing must be considered as an important part of his total work.

Gildon's first attempt at drama was made chiefly because time and taste seemed propitious for materials he already had close at hand, the papers which he and George Jenkins had somehow acquired at the demise of Mrs. Aphra Behn. Among them was an unproduced, unpublished play called The Younger Brother: or the Amourous Jilt.¹ Also he hoped to continue the rescue of Mrs. Behn's literary reputation already begun by the recent great success of Thomas Southern's Greenock, a frankly acknowledged dramatic adaptation from Mrs. Behn's fiction. Thus he could at least partly repay the lady for

1. D. E. Baker, Isaac Reed, and Stephen Jones, Biographica Dramatica; or a Companion to the Playhouse (London, 1812), p. 428. George Woodcock, The Incomparable Aphra (London and New York), p. 211—hereafter cited as Woodcock. Robinson Crusoe Examined and Criticis'd . . . Together with an Essay on Gildon's Life, ed. Paul Hottin (London and Paris, 1923), p. 15.

her early kindnesses to an aspiring young writer but recently come to town. And of course he had another motive, the desire to capitalize upon the vogue of the moment.

But regardless of possible circumstances or motives, it is a matter of record that in December of 1696² Gildon managed to have the comedy, somewhat altered by himself, produced at the Theatre Royal in Drury Lane.³ Daniel Purcell provided the music for the songs⁴ and a prologue "by an unknown hand" attempted to predispose the audience to sympathy:

Oh! then be kind to a poor orphan-play,
Whose parent while she liv'd Obliged you all.
You prais'd her living, and you mourn'd her Fall.
Who could, like her, our Softer Passions move?
For poor Astrea's Infant we implore,
Let it then live, though she is now no more.

The cast included able and well known players: Powell, Verbruggen, Johnson, Pinkethman, Harden, Bullock, Mrs. Knight, Mrs. Verbruggen, Mrs. Temple, Mrs. Harris, Mrs. Powell, and Mrs. Willis.⁵ In order to propitiate an audience whose politics were not those of Mrs. Behn, Gildon made some alterations, chiefly in the first act, where he removed "that old bustle about Whigg and Tory and placed the Character of a Rake-Hell in its room."⁶

2. Giles Jacob, The Poetical Register: or, the Lives and Characters of the English Dramatick Poets (London, 1719), p. 116. Works . . . Behn, p. 311. Biographa Dramatica, p. 128. Alfred Harbage, Annals of English Drama (Philadelphia, 1940), pp. 152-53. Bottin, p. 15.

3. Bottin, p. 15. J. Genest, Some Account of the English Stage (Bath, 1832), vol. II, p. 77. Works . . . Behn, ed. C. Gildon, 1696, p. 315.

4. Songs from the Restoration Theatre, ed. Willard Thorpe (Princeton, 1934), p. 125.

5. Genest, vol. II, p. 77.

6. The "Epistle Dedicatory" of Gildon's printed version.

This change, incidentally, is for the better, as Gildon's fairly lively and perspicuous descriptions of this fashionable character seem less like topical asides than Mrs. Behn's "bustle about Whigg and Tory." Gildon also wisely shortened the play by cutting some of the slower action.⁷ To appeal to the rising demand for music in (or accompanying) plays he worked three songs into the context, one by Peter Motteux and two of his own. Perhaps the audience found the music pleasant diversion from dialogue, but as read Gildon's two songs indicate his inability to achieve the lightness and sureness of touch necessary for success in this difficult genre:

No, Delia, No! What man can range
 From such Seraphic Pleasure?
 'Tis want of Charms that make us change,
 To grasp the Fury Treasure.
 What man of sense would quit a certain Bliss,
 For hopes and empty Possibilities!

Vain Fools their sure Possessions spend,
 In hopes of Chymic Treasure,
 But for their fancy'd Riches find
 Both want of Gold and Pleasure.
 Rich in my Delia, I can wish no more;
 The Wand'rer, like the Chymist, must be poor.

Ah, Charmion! should those killing Eyes,
 That dart th' Extreames of Pleasure,
 Else Celadon, tho' favour'd, dies
 As well as him that you despise,
 Tho' with this diff'rent measure:
 While ling'ring Pains drag on his Fate,
 Dispatch is all th' Advantage of my State;
 For, oh! you kill with Love, as well as Hate!

Abate thy Luxury of Charms,
 And only Part discover;
 Your Tongue, as well as Eyes, had Arms
 To give a Thousand fatal harms
 To the poor list'ning Lover:
 Thy Beam's, Glory's Velled should be,
 And like the Front of Heav'n, unseen, pass by;
 For to behold 'em, in full force, we dye.

7. Ibid.

Despite all Gildon could do, the play was unsuccessful.⁸ Although Montague Summers thought it failed because "the actors did it scant justice"⁹ Gildon's dedicatory epistle reads: "It suffer'd not, I'm sure, in the action, not in Mr. Verbruggen's reading of some of his Part, since he lost nothing of the Force of Elocution, nor Gracefulness of Action." Instead he ascribes its failure to hostile faction: "I may reasonably impute its miscarriage to some Faction that was made against it, which indeed was very Evident on the First day, and more on the endeavours employed, to render the Profits of the Third, as small as could be."¹⁰ George Woodcock in his biography of Mrs. Behn explains that the "Faction" was composed of Whigs, anti-Catholics, and personal enemies of Gildon:

The reference to a particularly vicious attack on the third day makes it seem possible that the hostility was caused at least partly by the fact that Gildon was the sponsor. Presumably, as Aphra was dead, he himself received the cash normally allocated to the author for a third day's performance. Gildon was an unpopular individual, suspected of all kinds of fraudulent literary transactions and, what was perhaps worse at that period when even Dryden was hounded for his religion, born of a Roman Catholic family and therefore strongly suspect of Jacobite and Jesuitical sentiments. The play's public association with him may well have helped to secure its damnation, particularly as, even at this period, such plays as The Rover were still being performed regularly to enthusiastic audiences, including William and Mary themselves, the high ornaments of the Whig cause, who actually commanded this notoriously Cavalier play to be performed for them at court on the 5th November, 1690.¹¹

8. Gottin, p. 15. "Epistle Dedicatory," Works . . . Aphra Behn, vol. I, lviii. Woodcock, pp. 221-22.

9. Works . . . Behn, vol. I, lviii.

10. Gildon's "Epistle Dedicatory."

11. Woodcock, p. 222.

But despite our sympathy for Mrs. Behn and Gildon, the "Faction" cannot be explained away so patly. The opposition of the Whigs may have been potent enough to ruin the play, but the influence of anti-Catholicism and Gildon's personal unpopularity is over-stated. By 1696 Gildon had not only been publicly anti-Catholic himself for at least three years but had also edited and written sections of two widely-read works of deism, The Oracles of Reason in 1693 and The Miscellaneous Works of Charles Blount in 1695. No one so prominently associated with Charles Blount would be attacked for Catholicism in 1696! As for Gildon's unpopularity, by 1696 he was known chiefly as the writer of the very popular two volumes of The Post-boy rob'd of his Mail. He had not yet incurred Pope's damning infamy, which is really the chief authority for the much-repeated myth of Gildon's unpopularity, and Gildon's own later plays were not thus attacked. Throughout his career Gildon was prone to blame his failures on hostile "Faction", and to one familiar with the bulk of his work this particular complaint is an old story. The plain truth seems to be that the play, both as presented and as later published, is without merit. Instead of a "particularly vicious attack" on the third day more likely it suffered a deserved neglect.

But authors are the last to know, and Gildon persisted in his attempt to give Mrs. Behn's play to the world. In the same year as its production he had it printed, complete with a fawning dedicatory epistle to Colonel Codrington, a five-paragraph "Account of the Life of the Incomparable Mrs. Behn", the restored bits of plot which he had cut from the acted version, his own section on the rake-hell in place of the "Bustle about Whigg and Tory", and his own and Mottoux's songs. In spite of M. Dottin's idea that "The edition sold quickly because of Mrs. Behn's name"¹² there is no

12. Dottin, p. 15.

evidence that a penitent world rushed to correct its injustice. M. Dottin seems not to have known that Gildon practiced Dunton's trick of labelling even the early copies of a work second (or third, or fourth) editions to create the illusion of popularity.

Despite this failure of his first attempt at drama, Gildon soon returned to it with a work more nearly his own. Like The Younger Brother, this one was played, failed, and then was published. Since it is Gildon's first full play and was written in his early maturity, it is interesting as a gauge of his native ability as well as of his capacity for work, for it was written and given to the players within a month.¹³

This work, The Roman Bride's Revenge, was acted in 1697 at the Theatre Royal in Drury Lane.¹⁴ There seems to be no record of the cast, the number of days which it ran, or any particular reason (such as the hostile "Faction" of The Younger Brother) for its failure. But again Gildon or the bookseller thought it worth printing, for in the same year bookseller John Sturton printed it as a quarto volume. Apparently Gildon still feared "Faction" or the possibility of being associated with failure, for the published play contains a dedication signed by Sturton but smacking of Gildon in which the bookseller declares he is acting for the anonymous author. However, the work has correctly been generally attributed to Gildon,¹⁵ and the dedication to

13. Dottin, p. 15. Biographica Dramatica, p. 217.

14. Dottin, p. 15. Biographica Dramatica, p. 217. "The Stage" Cyclopaedia, compiled by Reginald Clarence (London, 1909), p. 387. Allardyce Nicoll, A History of Restoration Drama (Cambridge, 1923), p. 148. Poetical Register, p. 116.

15. Many more modern authors have accepted these five attributions, and no one has challenged them. One could also argue Gildon's authorship from convincing internal evidence.

William Gregory is appropriate to the moral of the play itself in that it praises a judge for courageous devotion to principle and public good. Here Gildon's tone is less servile than in earlier dedications. In addition to the play itself the volume also contains the prologue and epilogue spoken at its performance. The former is a strange mixture of a plea for sympathy and a veiled threat to the critics; it is either good-natured ribbing of his audience or straightforward, deliberate insult and reflects Gildon's unhappy experience with Mrs. Behn's comedy:

Our Author brings you here his Virgin Muse,
 A Virgin you shou'd gently, gently use.
 And if she's auker'd now, at the beginning,
 Consider this is her first time of sinning.
 Like your kep't Misses, more experienc'd grown,
 She hopes to give Content to all the Town.
 Ladies, I'm sure you will be pleas'd today,
 For he has two constant women in his play
 And if he's not deceiv'd, a pretty Tale,
 But yet he has this Refuge, if that fail,
 When Poet's Flots in Plays are dammed for Spight,
 They Critics turn, and damn the rest that write.
 So the State Plotter on the Like Pretence,
 Missing his Aim, becomes an Evidence.

He cools his Fancy to oblige your Taste:
 He underwrites to please, and frames his Wit,
 Exactly to the level of the Pit.
 Knowing what stuff will pass, 'tis his Intention
 Never to soar above your apprehension.
 Therefore he writes to you, and Mod'rate Wits,
 True Country Squires, conceited Fops and Cits,
 Pimps, Pandars, Parasites, Prigs, Beaux & Sullies,
 And Shores with all their equipage of Cullies.

The last section of this study shows that Gildon deplored the ignorance of those whose judgment often determined the success of plays and that these lines express his true sentiments. But he lacked the ability of a Congreve to make insult witty enough to be gracious; like much of Gildon's attempted wit, it never quite comes off, and in this case it probably predisposed an audience to carp. But the epilogue "spoken by Miss Allison" is refreshing in its pleasantly satirical twist upon the customary epilogue and upon the ladies of the theatre:

No matter what I say,
 It need have no Relation to the Play.
 The Poet fancies that I'll plead his Cause;
 Tell you of Passions, and Dramatic Laws:
 Or lash the growing Pollicies of the Town,
 But I have other Business of my own,
 Tho' you may think my Rose not yet full blown.
 I, who must make my Fortune o' the Stage,
 Will ne'er expose the Vices of the Age,
 Which I expect to make my chief support,
 And thrive by them, as flatterers do at Court.

but because neither prologue nor epilogue seems appropriate to the tone and content of the play they would add little to its performance.

The plot concerns Martian, prefect of the Praetorian Cohorts and Generalissimo of the Roman Army, who is being married to Portia, sister of Aurelian, Martian's closest friend. But Perennius, a villain and the favorite of the Emperor Galienus, wants Portia for himself, and on the advice of his wily friend and creature Laetus allows him to accuse Martian of conspiracy to overthrow the Emperor. The latter, a pleasure-loving tyrant who has allowed his court to sink into slothful license and corruption, is unmindful of the dangers threatening his Rome from without but is well aware of public preference for Martian; hence he readily believes the charge. Furthermore, the sight of Portia has inflamed him, and when Martian is dragged away he advises her to accept because only by appearing to follow the Emperor's wishes can he still be of service to Martian and Portia. She is forcibly borne to the Emperor's apartments, where his attempts are interrupted by the Empress's moving protestation of her great devotion. Torn between rising pity for his wife and desire for Portia, the Emperor leaves the room. Meanwhile Martian, disguised as his slave Cleander, visits Portia and approves of the Empress's plan (fostered by Laetus for Perennius) to commit Portia to the care of a priestess of Vesta's temple, where he arranges to find her. But the priestess is Laetus disguised, whom Perennius stabs to eradicate possible evidence. He then turns Portia over to the Emperor's men. When Laetus's body is revealed, Portia mistakenly accuses Valeria, the Empress, of treachery. Thereupon the Emperor resolves to subdue his pity, divorce Valeria, and marry Portia at dawn; meanwhile he commits her to Perennius's care. He pretends to pity her, offers to help her escape, and plans to lead her to a secure grotto where he can enjoy her. Suspecting his motives,

Portia attempts flight but is captured. The Emperor accuses Perennius, who manfully draws upon him but is killed by the guards. Again Martian appears, but in drawing upon the King he is seized and sentenced to be cast from the Tarpeian Rock. To gain respite Portia pretends that she can learn to love the Emperor if only given a little time, whereupon Caligula divorces Valeria, sets the wedding within the hour, and dispatches the maids to prepare Portia. but she persuades one to get her a vial of poison and under the guise of offering him a love-potion she gets Caligula to share the poisoned marriage bowl. Meanwhile Aurelian's forces have entered the city and freed Martian, who witnesses the marriage ceremony and, deceived by appearances, accuses Portia of baseness. He is barely saved from death by Aurelian's entrance and seizure of the Emperor. Then the poison takes effect, Portia explains her trick, and dies, leaving Martian in an agony of grief; but she revives ^a for/long moment to comfort him with a vision of perfect love. But Caligula, also stricken, sees a vision of Hell and dies crying that he burns. Before his final breath, however, he avows his love and pity for Valeria, who had interrupted the marriage ceremony with her suicide. Martian stabs himself but prevails on Aurelian to live to serve his country.

This play has received scant critical attention, and most of that sounds like parroting of the early brief notices in compendia.¹⁶ No doubt it is better closet drama than stage production, but it deserves fuller and more favorable comment than it has received. Its plot—clear, reasonable, and strongly illustrative of the author's moral without resort to undue preaching—

16. Biographica Dramatica, p. 217. Poetical Register, p. 116. Genest, vol. II, p. 112. Bottin, p. 15.

moves fairly well despite its heavy weight of frequently philosophical dialogue. Its characters are convincing. Except for occasional touches of the heroic play it carefully follows the models of Greek tragedy: in tone it attempts a restrained, dignified elevation; its plot, carefully kept within the unities of time, place, and action, is rigidly "one and entire" with no distraction of sub-plot; its complete catastrophe arises from Martian's tragic flaw of subordination of public duty to private love; and the catastrophe concludes with a powerful confession of error, realization of fate's justice, and exhortation to virtue. The play also has several other characteristics of Greek tragedy: it opens in the midst of things; its characters early experience an ominous foreboding of impending evil; they both invoke and rail against the gods; omens of nature warn them of forthcoming tragedy; and thunder, lightning, and upsets of nature sympathetically mark the turmoil among men.

Gildon strives to capture a noble tone appropriate to great actions and powerful passions. In many of Martian's and Valerian's speeches he succeeds admirably, but elsewhere his lines are sometimes strained rhetoric. His blank verse varies from excessive regularity to occasional hasty looseness. Commentators¹⁷ have seen in this uneven striving for elevation evidence that Gildon was consciously imitating the style of Lee, whom Gildon admired. But it is more likely that Gildon, the staunch classicist, was simply following the patterns of classical tragedy and that when he succeeded he achieved some of Lee's results.

A few miscellaneous items warrant passing comment. Gildon as critic was strongly against portraying vicious women in tragedy; hence his women

17. Poetical Register, pp. 116-17. Dottin, p. 15. Many compendia repeat Gildon's Jacob, and later writers have apparently accepted Dottin's repetition. Having read all of Gildon's known works, I cannot agree. See the succeeding footnote.

characters here are all virtuous. Another favorite idea appears in his portrait of the soldier as the conglomerate of noble virtues as opposed to the scheming, selfish politician:

His Country's Glory is the Soldier's Idol!
 For 'tis for her he toyls in Forreign Camps;
 She cools his Heats, and warms his frizing Limbs;
 Fills his large Soul with that Immortal Fury,
 That with undaunted Ardor hunts her Foes
 Through all the bloody Tempest of the Field.
 The Gods select us Soldiers from Mankind,
 To give our Country's Safety to our Care;
 Shall we betray that Trust then, Who shou'd guard it,
 And while her harass'd Armies starve abroad,
 Here see her rifl'd by Domestic Spoilers
 The pointed Dagger levell'd at her Heart,
 And loose the Sense of it in unmanly Pleasures?

Numerous passages were probably intended as topical slants, such as this description of mistrust at court:

. . . this is the Seat of Ruffians,
 Informers, Sycophants. Here the Brother
 Trusts not the Brother, nor the Son the Father.
 Or if they do, they're certainly deceiv'd.
 All types of Trust and Confidence are ceas'd.

and such as this comment on the city:

Mount up the Roman's just avenging God.
 And purge their City from the filthy Herd
 Of Fimps, Bawds, Flatterers, Informers, Ruffians,
 Usurers, and betrayers of the public Good,
 Exert the Soldier in this noble Cause,
 And fix their Freedom, and restore the Laws.

Taken as a whole the play is fairly successful tragedy. Lacking the sustained nobility of Cato and far below it in finish of verse, it is nevertheless somewhat more moving in a few scenes. Possibly its stage failure might be explained by the fact that in 1697 serious tragedy extolling the hard patrician virtue of unselfish public service was hardly popular fare in

whig London. Nevertheless, it remains a promising first play for a writer unwise enough to lecture rather than amuse an audience with which he had little sympathy.

Gildon's second play, Phaeton: or The Fatal Divorce, was more successful. This tragedy relieved by musical and operatic effects ran for several days at the Theatre Royal in the latter part of April, 1698.¹⁸ With music by Daniel Purcell,¹⁹ costumes and scenery brought over from France especially for the occasion,²⁰ and a cast which included Mr. Powell, Mrs. Knight, and Mrs. Powell,²¹ the play had enough success for Gildon to write in the preface to the printed play: "I have no reason to complain of the Success it had on the Stage, which was more than I had assurance to hope" But as he acknowledged in the same preface, the preparatory efforts of his friend Thomas Cheek accounted for some of its good reception:

I am proud of being reckon'd among his Friends, and equally pleased with, and Vain of his particular approbation of this Play, and the extraordinary Zeal he had shew'd for its success. 'Twas under his Protection, and the security of his name, that it ascended the Stage, and got a Reputation before it was acted, and by that I am satisfied it met with a more favourable hearing on its first appearance.

The printed play contains a dedication to Charles Montagu, Earl of Halifax and currently Chancellor of the Exchequer, a preface, and an appended untitled three-page comment headed "Since the Conclusion of the foregoing Preface, I have met with a Book, call'd a Short View of the Immorality,

18. Poetical Register, p. 116. Biographica Dramatica, p. 141. Annals . . . Drama, pp. 154-55. "The Stage" Cyclopaedia, p. 353. E. C. Gosse, Life of William Congreve (London, 1924), p. 100. Dutton, p. 16.

19. Songs . . . Restoration Theatre, p. 125.

20. The Prologue.

21. "The Stage" Cyclopaedia, p. 353.

and Profaneness of the English Stage, by Jeremy Collier, A. M." In the preface Gildon admits his debt to Euripides' Medea and Quinault's Phaeton, comments on differences between the stage of the ancients and that of the present, and acknowledges Thomas Cheek's advice and other aid with the play. In the appended comment he sharply attacks Collier's fitness to judge the drama and scolds him in vigorous, contemptuous terms for his attack upon eminent dramatists and for straining the sense of lines to make them appear indecent. Both parts of this preface are of some importance in the history of literary criticism, the first because of its strong defense of the ancients and the second because Gildon was the first to answer Collier. However, both are better understood in the different context of a later chapter.

For the play itself Gildon freely admits his sources, Euripides' Medea and Quinault's opera of Phaeton (1683):

Before it was my good Fortune to meet with the Medea of Euripides, I drew the Plot of an opera according to this my propos'd model, from some hints of the French opera of Phaeton; but after I had drawn the out-lines of the whole, and proceeded to the very turns, and business, nay, almost the expressions of the first two acts; the Medea of Euripides, accidentally fell into my Hands and not only gave an extraordinary pleasure in the perusal, but made me resolve, since my plot came very near it, to make use of those advantages the Imitation of so excellent an Author might afford me. But the Third Act was finish'd before I could prevail with myself to quit my design'd catastrophe of the Fall of Phaeton for that which it now has, which was one of the reasons of my preserving the names of Phaeton and the rest (preface)

He altered Euripides' two chief characters "in consideration of the different Temper and Sentiments of our several audience" because he feared that his audience would not understand a Medea who appeared "contrary to all the Dictates of Humanity and Motherhood" and a Jason who was "too harsh, rough, and ungentlemanlike, to a Lady on our Stage." Hence he changed the names. He also placed Phaeton in love with two women at once because "a Generous and amorous man, when he passes from his first Love, to a New affair, does not

immediately loose all his former ties; but doubts a great while, which he loves best, his old Mistress or his New" Thomas Cheek gave considerable friendly help:

From his Judicious and friendly correction, and Hints, it was secur'd from injuring his justly establish'd Reputation of Wit and Poetry It would be needless to repeat the particular hints he gave me, the corrections he made in several parts of the play upon its perusal. But I must own that the Catastrophe owes most of its Beauty to his advice. For tyr'd with writing the rest of the Play, I had hurry'd the madness of Althea, with too much Precipitation, and without an apparent cause. Which at first hearing he condemned and oblig'd me to write it over again, and alter it until it pleas'd him in the form you now find it.

Thus the plot derives from Quinault and Euripides, modified by Gildon with a hint or two from Cheek.

In this plot Althea, niece to Artus, daughter to the King of Samos, and wife to Phaeton, had saved him from death when her father ordered the destruction of Phaeton and his shipwrecked countrymen. Forsaking father, country, and friends she had fled to Asia and her beloved Phaeton, where again she saved him from death. By the opening of the play she is happy with her two young sons and her husband, whom she loves with all her being. But Phaeton, Son of the Sun by Clymene, has seen Lybia, daughter of Merops (by a former wife) and heiress to Egypt and the Indies. Lybia loves Phaeton, and if he so chooses he can have her and an empire. Caught between dutiful yet real love for his wife and passion heightened by ambition for Lybia, he almost concludes to remain faithful to Althea. But his mother, Clymene, second wife to Merops, comes with his friend Epaphus, who reproaches him with forgetting his destined glory for soft love. His mother tells Phaeton that Lybia loves him and that the throne of Egypt may be his. Swayed by ambition and passion he divorces Althea, whom Merops promptly banishes lest Phaeton

weaken. But after she pleads the cause of her children she is given a day to prepare. In a most moving scene she loses control of her grief when Phaston protests he is acting for her and their children, because otherwise their position promised nothing. She appears to accede to the plan, but Juno and Hymen give her a magic poisoned crown and robe. These she sends by her children to Lybia under the subterfuge of pleading that the boys be allowed to remain in Egypt with their father. In the midst of the marriage ceremony the poisoned robe and crown burn Lybia to death. Phaston, overcome, falls senseless. In reporting all this to Althea Epaphus reveals that the people have torn her children to bits and now demand her. She prevents them by scratching herself with a poisoned dagger but goes mad from the thought of her children's fate. At death she has a vision in which Phaston, attempting to usurp his father's place, is cast flaming down, falls upon her, and burns her to death. Epaphus then closes the play with an elevated speech asserting man's helplessness to alter the order decreed by the gods.

Although Gildon probably did start out with a rather close adaptation of Quinault's admired French opera of the same name, his plot finally became considerably closer to Euripides' Medea: in it the heroine has also fled her native land after having made great sacrifices for her husband; he is also torn from her by passion and ambition; he too arranges to marry the daughter of the king, who also for fear of the divorced wife orders her and her two children banished immediately; and she too by dissimulation obtains a day's respite and contrives the death of her rival. But in Medea she kills her own children for pity of their future and revenge upon their father, and then after taunting her husband escapes to Athens. Gildon (or Cheek) has contrived a different catastrophe, has altered the character of

Jason by attributing more concern for his family to Phaeton, and in Althea has greatly softened both the character of Medea and the power of the catastrophe. Gildon's Althea becomes an unfortunate woman striving to hold her beloved husband and give their children a father, whereas Medea is the completely vengeful woman bent only upon the absolute destruction of him who had cast her aside. A reader sympathizes with Althea; he is horrified by the awful passion of Medea. Because of his love of Greek tragedy probably Gildon first wrote his catastrophe fairly close to that of the Medea but later softened it on Cheek's advice.

Despite this amelioration of tragic characters and tragic effects, the play remains more like Greek tragedy than the "opera" which Gildon calls it in his preface. First, its theme is the heroic struggle between love and ambition:

Love and Ambition bear such equal sway,
 And have such blended power o'er my soul
 That 'tis with difficulty they're distinguished.
 It must be so, ambition pleads for Lybia,
 But for Althea Love.

Second, in dealing with setting, time, and action Gildon is careful to preserve the unities and to follow the classical dictum that tragedy must concern itself primarily with the passions of the characters. Here they are the basic, powerful ones of love between man and wife, a mother's love for her children, and man's desire for power. Third, Gildon has well portrayed the racking conflicts which arise from such basic passions working at cross purposes; and many of the speeches genuinely move the reader to pity for the people involved and terror for their ultimate fate. The scene in which Phaeton takes leave of his children is truly moving; and although somewhat marred by false heroics and rather mechanical rhetoric, Althea's reproach

of her husband is also powerful. Finally, the reader is so affected by the awful death of the innocent children that only Althea's frantic grief and the subsequent catastrophe can complete the catharsis. Fourth, Gildon has deliberately included "the chief characters only, and the violent Emotions of their Passions" because "the multiplicity of great characters under the specious name of Variety divided their [ancients'] concern, and by consequence, rendered it of less force." Fifth, Gildon constantly attempts and frequently reaches an elevation of tone for which he "industriously affected a roughness to avoid that Satiety I find in many of our best Modern Plays, which proceeds from a ^petpetual Identity of Cadence." Other classical features are the intervention of the gods in human affairs, the use of a chorus for recapitulation and for emphasis of the basic conflict, and the ultimate destruction of Althea and Phaeton because of their separate tragic flaws.

The play also has operatic features, although critics seem to have magnified them. Apparently the costumes and scenery alleged to have been brought from France²² were well advertised and figured considerably in the stage presentation, but the published play makes little mention of costume and scenery. It does, however, contain a great many songs, musical dialogues, and songs for a chorus, which serves about the same function as in Greek tragedy. Of this incidental music the brief songs are best: in content, spirit, and execution they follow the Restoration tradition and were good enough to be separately published by Neptinstall the same year. Light, gay,

22. Scholarship keeps repeating this information, but I have seen no corroboration. Gildon and the playhouse people were capable of exaggerated claims.

and clover, they strike a note of sophisticated insouciance that Gildon does not elsewhere achieve and one wonders if Cheek wrote them. If they are really Gildon's, his otherwise very minor talent for songs certainly rises to an unsuspected height. But songs, musical dialogues, and choruses are only respites from the action, incidental and usually unrelated entertainments rather than the integral dialogue of real opera. It would be more accurate to call Phaeton tragedy deliberately lightened by musical entertainments in order to attract an audience with the promise of fashionable French opera.

Taken as a whole the play deserved whatever success it had, for it offered most of the form and some of the power of classical tragedy, some competent blank verse, some rather good songs, and considerable musical entertainment. And what is more, apparently Gildon unified these elements enough to please his audience.

Probably encouraged by his success with Phaeton (and also quick to sense a vogue and exploit it) Gildon very soon adapted another play to catch the mode, Shakespeare's Measure for Measure. Although it appeared and was later published anonymously, it was at the time generally known to be Gildon's work, and subsequent attribution to him is correct.²³ In it he appealed to two current interests, adaptations or "improvements" of Shakespeare and

23. D. R. Boran, Annals of the English Stage from Thomas Betterton to Edmund Kean (London, 1888), vol. I, pp. 220-21, 156-57. George C. Odell, Shakespeare from Betterton to Irving. (New York), 1920, vol. I, p. 72. Hazelton Spencer, Shakespeare Improved (Cambridge, 1927) pp. 120, 329. Biographica Dramatica, p. 32. Genest, Vol. II, pp. 221-23. "The Stage" Cyclopaedia, p. 287. The Plays and Poems of William Shakespeare, ed. Edmund Malone (London, 1790), Vol. VI, p. 236. The Critical and Miscellaneous Prose Works of John Dryden, ed. Edmund Malone (London, 1800), Vol. I, part I, p. 329. Götting, p. 16. A. W. Ward, A History of English Dramatic Literature to the Death of Queen Anne (London and New York, 1899), vol. I, p. 514. Genest, volume II, p. 221.

dramatic representations with operatic elements. As early as 1673 Sir William Davenant had written an adaptation of Shakespeare's Measure for Measure entitled The Law against Lovers; other "Improvers" of Shakespeare had followed, and by 1699 Shakespearean adaptation was well under way. Between 1696 and 1703 A Midsummer Night's Dream (titled The Fairy Queen), Measure for Measure, The Merchant of Venice (titled The Comical Gallant), and Twelfth Night were adapted and "operatized".²⁴ Perhaps Betterton's considerable success as Falstaff in a revival of the first part of King Henry The Fourth acted the same season²⁵ was the immediate stimulus for Gildon's work. The other current mode affecting his work here, the popular demand for musical embellishments to drama, was likewise established by 1699.²⁶ Gildon's play was acted at Little Lincoln's Inn Fields during the 1699-1700 season, sometime in February.²⁷ With music by Daniel Purcell and a cast including Betterton, Derbruggen, and Mrs. Bracegirdle²⁸ the production certainly had the advantages of current talent. The prologue (now available only in the 1700 published version) "By Mr. Oldmixon. Spoken by Betterton"

24. Odell, p. 87.

25. Critical and Miscellaneous Works . . . Bryden, vol. I, part 1, p. 329.

26. Odell, pp. 87, 195. Shakespeare Improved, pp. 121-22. Malcolm Elwin, The Playgoer's Handbook to Restoration Drama (London, 1928), p. 160.

27. A History . . . Drama, p. 332. Annals of English Drama, pp. 156-57. Shakespeare Improved, pp. 220, 121, 122. Ward, p. 514.

is rather puzzling. Since it dwells upon the poor attendance at the play, either it was written sometime after the opening performance, or in the published play Gildon substituted his own prologue in order to lecture the unappreciative town. In view of the following lines the latter seems more likely:

But that next year, we may with them, be ev'n,
 We these Instruction to our Bards have giv'n.
 First bid Defiance to all sense and Rules:
 We live not by the Criticks, but the Fools.
 Let noise for Wit, and whim for humour pass,
 And rise an actor from some new Grimace.
 No more let Labour'd Scenes, with Pain, be Brought,
 That least is wanting in a Play, is Thought.
 Let neither Dance, nor Musick be forgot,
 Nor Scenes, no matter for the Sense, or Plot.
 Such things we own in Shakespear's days might do;
 But then his Audience did not Judge like you.
 Good Sense was well receiv'd from Honest Ben;
 While none would suffer Flecknoe's Irish pen.

Although attributed to Oldmixon,²⁹ the epilogue in the printed copy also sounds like Gildon in its ideas and execution. If he used the prologue to lecture his age, he may have done the same in "The Epilogue. Shakespear's Ghost, Spoken by Mr. Verbruggen." In it Shakespear's ghost protests the misfortunes suffered by his plays:

My Ghost can bear no more; but comes to Rage.
 My Plays, by Scribblers, mangl'd I have seen;
 By Lifeless actors, murder'd on the Scene.

.....
 But when on yonder Stage, the Knave was shewn [Falstaff]
 Ev'n by my Self, the Picture scarce was known.
 Themselves, and not the Man I drew, they Play'd;

29. Notes from Sotheby's, compiled by Frank Karstlake (London, 1909), p. 154.
 I know nothing of the reliability of this source.

And Five Bull Sets, of One Poor Coxcomb, made.
 Hell! that on you such Tricks as these shou'd pass,
 Or I be made the Burden of an Ass.

.....
 Let me no more endure such mighty Wrongs.

However, it is pleased with Betterton's playing of Falstaff:

Fat Falstaff here, with Pleasure, I behold,
 Toss off his bottle, and his Truncheon Weild:
 Such as I meant him, such the Knight appear'd,
 He bragg'd like Falstaff, and like Falstaff, fear'd.

Then in a passage full of Gildon's own ideas³⁰ he wishes the English stage a bright future:

So, late may Betterton forsake the Stage,
 And long may Barry Live to Charm the Age.
 May a New Otway Rise, and Lear to move
 The Men with Terror, and the Fair with Love!
 Again, may Congreve try the Comic Strain,
 And Wycherly Revive his Ancient Vein.
 Else may your Pleasure prove your greatest Curse,
 And those who now Write dully, still Write worse.

Thus both prologue and epilogue sound like Gildon's own attempts to scold the false tastes of an unapplauding audience and were likely not the ones written by Oldmixon for the play as acted, especially since Gildon elsewhere several times put his own sentiments into others' mouths.

Gildon's play was printed in quarto in 1700. Titled Measure for Measure, or Beauty The Best Advocate. With Additions of Several Entertainments of Musick, it was printed for D. Brown and R. Parker in 1700. In addition to the prologue and epilogue just described the volume contains a dedication to Nicholas Battersby of the Inner Temple. It dwells upon the miserable

30. See chapters on criticism.

treatment authors often receive when they dedicate to men of mean spirit in high places and therefore is addressed to one Gildon knows and admires, a humbler man who has the "heart to Wisingage himself . . . from the troubles of Marry'd life and a Family; and, to appear as Gay, in the midst of Disappointments, as if you were the Master of your Vows and Fortune." The entire dedication is simple, straightforward, and notable both for its straight language on the subject of patrons and Gildon's genuine admiration for a man whose troubled personal life may have been like his own.

The play itself is a combination of Shakespeare, Gildon's modifications from Shakespeare, and his modifications from *Ravenant*. Its plot shows the Duke of Savoy temporarily leaving his city and power in the hands of Angelo, his trusted deputy and a man of great reputation for coldness and virtue. The Duke has not enforced the old statutes against illegal love, but he leaves Angelo to revive and enforce them. Claudio, a young nobleman "of an ancient Family, but decay'd Fortune; one that Behav'd himself well in the War, privately marry'd to Julietta," is charged with breaking the law when Julietta begins to show her pregnancy. Angelo determines to make him an example. In vain Escalus, Angelo's chief minister, pleads Claudio's case. But Claudio's sister, Isabella, arouses Angelo's desire and he proposes that she submit herself to him in return for Claudio's freedom. She refuses, visits Claudio in prison, and tells him the proposal, which he also rejects. However, disguised as a friar the supposedly absent Duke overhears all in the prison and suggests that Isabella pretend to make an assignation with Angelo. When she does, he promises to free her brother. But Isabella arranges for Marianne, Angelo's discarded wife, to meet him; in complete darkness he enjoys her and leaves under the impression that Isabella has capitulated. But before this tryst he has sent a special order

to execute Claudio which, unknown to Angelo, the Duke stays by revealing his identity to the prison provost. Then the Duke writes Angelo to announce his arrival and to bid all who have grievances against Angelo's administration to appear at the meeting of the two. Isabella appears, accuses Angelo, and produces Marianna, who unveils and testifies that she was the one enjoyed. Truth is out, and Isabella is allowed to sentence mercy or death for Angelo. When Marianna pleads for him, Isabella decrees mercy because Angelo's life-long rigid virtue has been marred only by his sudden lust for Isabella, ^{and} consequent desertion of Marianna.

This plot represents several changes from both Shakespeare and Davenant. In 1673 Davenant had combined Measure for Measure and Much Ado about Nothing as The Law against Lovers.³¹ Gildon cut out almost all the sections from Much Ado about Nothing but without acknowledgment retained a few segments of Davenant's own scenes and many of his lines.³² But his changes from Shakespeare are more remarkable, as he has eliminated all the comic elements and subplots as well as most of the low characters. Thus Gildon's play becomes a classical tragedy observing the unities and focusing on the representation of the passions. Various details also differ. Shakespeare's setting is Vienna whereas Gildon's is Turin. Shakespeare's early speeches build up the character of Angelo, but Gildon presents him ready formed. Shakespeare's Juliet is on the point of giving birth; Gildon's Isabella has just been forced to acknowledge her pregnancy. Shakespeare shows little

31. Shakespeare Improved, p. 80.

32. Shakespeare Improved, pp. 329-30, 333.

sense of guilt in Angelo and makes him press his offers to Isabella much more than does Gildon's temporarily straying character. Shakespeare has the Duke tell Claudio that Angelo is only trying Isabella's virtue, that he must prepare to die, and Claudio then begs his sister to sacrifice her honour, whereupon in disgust she leaves him. Shakespeare's Angelo and Marianna are only betrothed, not wed. Shakespeare's Duke does not reveal himself to the provost, but simply shows seal and letters to prove the Duke will return in two days, and Shakespeare's final scene is in the public square. Although he completely altered the spirit of the play by these omissions and changes, Gildon nevertheless followed most of Shakespeare's main plot and honestly admitted in the dedication that "'tis much more Shakespear's than mine." He might have added that of the approximately 1920 lines in the play (excluding the masque) about 337 are Shakespeare verbatim.

In addition to trying to capitalize on the current vogue for Shakespeare Gildon was also trying to suit the present taste for spectacle and music in dramatic productions. Because of that taste his Phaeton had been a fair success, and in his Measure for Measure the "Additions of Several Entertainments of Musick" are ambitious. He followed closely an operatic version of Midsummer Night's Dream called The Fairy Queen, "an opera in the sense of play, with a grand entry at the end of each act, employing elaborately allegorical and mythological stories enrolled to the accompaniment of rich music, vocal and instrumental, and magnificent scenery and machines, involving increasingly surprising transformations."³³ Gildon presents his as

33. Odell, pp. 72-74.

a masque in four parts, one at the end of each of the first four acts. It takes the form of four sets of songs, with characters and chorus, showing the loves of Dido and Aeneas and representing Aeneas having to choose between love and fame. This masque is worked loosely into the context of the play by having Escalus present it before Angelo in an attempt to soften his severity, by having the songs and the episodes roughly parallel the development of the acts which they follow, and by attempting to show the relevance of Aeneas's inner conflict to that in Angelo's mind. In addition to this fairly serious strain within the masque there are also several rather good, light he-she song dialogues which, however, have only the loosest bearing upon either masque or play.

Information regarding the success of Gildon's play is conflicting and apparently unreliable. Paul Dottin believes it "had fair success in Lincoln's Inn Fields."³⁴ Hazolton Spencer writes that it was a "a comparative failure"³⁵ but adds the somewhat contradictory statement that "Mrs. Millis and Mrs. Porter thought enough of it to choose it for their joint benefit at the Haymarket on April 26, 1706." Miss Elizabeth Handasyde, commenting on the failure of a masque in one of Granville's plays, speaks of "an audience which a year earlier had applauded the four-part Masque of Dido and Aeneas in Gildon's version of Measure for Measure."³⁶ Allardyce Nicoll records two performances of the masque alone at Lincoln's Inn in 1704.

34. Dottin. p. 16

35. Shakespeare Improved, pp. 121-22.

36. Granville the Polite, p. 60.

But at present there seems no way to decide among these conflicting opinions.³⁷ Judgments of the piece are likewise divergent. Genest calls it "a very bad alteration,"³⁸ Biographica Dramatica refers to it as "an indifferent alteration of Shakespeare,"³⁹ and The Playgoer's Handbook to Restoration Drama speculates that all its "Paraphernalia of comic opera . . . must have achieved a cumulative effect like the interior of the most fantastic cabaret in Montmartre."⁴⁰ George Odell holds that "Gildon . . . dims Shakespeare's verse, and makes it appear like the moon in eclipse" but calls the masque "a delectable show."⁴¹ Hazelton Spencer damns it: "The plot is reduced to its lowest terms In comparison with The Fairy Queen Gildon's version of Measure for Measure fails to thrill. The piece has the sole merit of being less violently altered from Shakespeare's comedy than was D'avenant's version."⁴² But D. R. Goran argues that "by omitting all the comic characters, introducing music and dancing, transposing incidents, adding much nonsense of his own to that of Davenant, and sprinkling all with an assortment of blunders, he has made the play amusing enough to make some compensation for the absence of the comic characters in the original play."⁴³

Probably a reasonable judgment will allow Gildon credit for his ambitious attempt to reconcile opera and Shakespeare, yet also admit that even though

37. Even A. R. Scouten's recent lists miss this title (and others of Gildon's plays).

38. Genest, pp. 222-23.

39. Biographica Dramatica, p. 32.

40. Playgoer's Handbook, p. 160.

41. Odell, p. 74.

42. Shakespeare Improved, p. 334.

43. Annals . . . Stage, vol. I, pp. 220-21.

his adaptation does seem superior to Davenant's this marriage of convenience now seems not a happy one. But taken separately, the play is a fair tragedy, and the "Additions of Several Entertainments of Musick" properly staged and presented could be good show. Professor Odell's comment is still just:

Before we utterly condemn it [Gildon's play] for taking liberties with Shakespeare and adding the masque we should transport ourselves to the year 1700, when play-goers had not learned to venerate (mechanically at least) the name of Shakespeare, and when spectacle and song and dance were the chief means of attracting the thoughtless. Irving induced people to enter his theatre by magnificent scenery and costumes; he differed from Betterton only in the determination to make everything fitting to the play he was dealing with. But neither Betterton nor Irving depended entirely on Shakespeare's play; that is an ideal to which we are only gradually approaching."⁴⁴

Whatever the success and merit of Measure for Measure, Gildon was soon back on the stage and in print with another play, Love's Victims: Or, The Queen of Wales. A Tragedy. Although the play appeared anonymously, in printed form it bore Gildon's name and has been generally recognized as his work.⁴⁵ It was acted at Lincoln's Inn Fields sometime in April of 1701⁴⁶ by a cast which included Betterton, Mrs. Bracegirdle, and Mrs. Barry in the chief roles.⁴⁷ The prologue, "Written by a Friend, and spoke by Mr. Betterton," is full of Gildon's own ideas about literature: the impudent thrive while sensible men starve; this play is a rare thing these days, a play with a plot

⁴⁴. Odell, pp. 196-97

⁴⁵. Genest, vol. II, p. 274. Biographica Dramatica, p. 397. "The Stage" Cyclopaedia, p. 244. Dutton, p. 17.

⁴⁶. The title-page of the 1701 printed version. The Tern Catalogues, III, 244. Also all the references in the previous footnote.

⁴⁷. Dramatis Personae in printed 1701 copy. Genest, 246.

or fable; poets unwisely write of all the places in the world but neglect their own country; and, a dramatic poet can render national service by cultivating the themes of virtue and beauty in his own land. Hence this prologue is very likely Gildon's own work. The epilogue, "Spoken by Mrs. Porter and Written by Mr. Burnaby," is a heavy piece of attempted railery on the false taste of audiences and on the paradox that men hate chastity in actresses but demand it of their wives. In the preface to the printed play Gildon states that it was "generally approved," that it had "Success with the Town" and "the applause of the greater Part of the Town" as well as "the Distaste of some of the Critics." But there seems to be no factual record of its run.⁴⁸ Later sources range in opinion from "without success"⁴⁹ to M. Dottin's unsupported "the play brought financial success and the protection of Lord Halifax, to whom it was dedicated."⁵⁰ Its later publication in quarto on May 20, 1701,⁵¹ by Richard Parker and George Strahan signifies neither success nor failure, for Gildon customarily had his plays printed.

The printed play opens with a dedication to Charles Montague, Lord Halifax, in which Gildon refers to the praise the town had accorded his

48. Allardyce Nicoll, A History of Early Eighteenth Century Drama (Cambridge, Mass., 1925), p. 332.

49. Biographica Dramatica, p. 397.

50. Dottin, p. 17.

51. The Tern Catalogues, vol. III, p. 244. "The Stage" Cyclopaedia, p. 265. Early Eighteenth Century Drama, p. 332. Biographica Dramatica, p. 397.

play but scorns public approbation because all too often false taste and ignorance have approved the unworthy. But he cherishes praise from such informed and discriminating men as Halifax, who, like Augustus and Richelieu, recognizes that great leaders must protect and encourage the arts. This favorite Gildon theme is here urged with more vigor than usual; and although the praise of Halifax is fulsome, it is not fawning. Following the dedication is a preface in which Gildon undertakes a defense of Otway's language, which had been criticized for lacking sonority and high style. He quotes Horace and Boileau to the effect that style must vary to suit the passion represented and therefore argues that grief should be presented in "the most vulgar dress imaginable." The remainder of the preface defends his own play, which "avoids sinning against the manners" by choosing an English setting in order that the audience may therefore grasp the lesson more easily. He acknowledges that he has borrowed characteristics and incidents from the Andromache, Helena, and Alcestis of Euripides and that the fable is partly fiction, partly built upon the eighth book of Caesar's Commentaries. After asserting that poets should celebrate their own national heroes, he explains that he has tried to reconcile in some measure "the regularity of the foreigners [Greek, French, Italian] with English variety" in all but place, and there he has but shifted from grove to adjoining temple. He justifies the death of Guinoenda by arguing that Aristotle had ruled that a poet is not bound to consider poetic justice to the detriment of his main object, which is to move pity and terror. After owing an obligation to Betterton for several hints in the fable and to Mrs. Bracegirdle for her splendid acting, he explains that through oversight he allowed the printer to print the names Guinoenda and Morganus for the Albina and Pelagius used in the stage presentation.

The play is written in a mixture of blank verse and heroic couplets. Guinecanda, Queen of Wales, is seized by an Irish chief because of his love for her. Rhesus, her husband, pursues. A storm drives the fleeing Irish ship upon the coast of Bayonne, where all perish except Guinecanda and her two children, who are taken in by the Queen of Bayonne. But the King of Bayonne, fired by lust for Guinecanda, drives her to the temple of the Druids for protection against his desire and his queen's jealousy. There, while the King is repelling a Roman attack against his protection of Dumnacus (king of conquered Ardes in Gaul and father of his queen) the latter seizes Guinecanda's children while his daughter, the Queen, confronts her with a tragic choice—her own death or that of her children. Guinecanda makes a mother's decision of life for her children, but when she is tricked out of her refuge in the temple both she and her children are saved from sacrifice only by the timely appearance of the chief Druid. But the King returns and threatens the lives of his queen and Dumnacus. Then Rhesus appears, fresh from the wreck of one of his ships; he and Guinecanda plan to escape by a ruse, but two of his own men unwittingly betray his identity. The King seizes Rhesus and gloatingly promises that he must witness his wife's marriage and ravishment before he dies. But meanwhile the Queen has conceived a love for Rhesus and Dumnacus has incited an uprising against the King. During the fighting Rhesus escapes, swims out to his newly arrived fleet, leads his men ashore, and drives back the King, who has meanwhile easily subdued the cowardly rabble. The fighting rolls back towards the temple, where again the Queen has given Guinecanda a choice: drink poison as the price of Rhesus' life, or see him die. Despite the Queen's tormenting visions of enjoying Rhesus, Guinecanda drinks the poison, serenely sure of her husband's love. Meanwhile he has slain the King of Bayonne in single combat. When he arrives

the Queen proffers her love and the throne, but Rhesus scorns her. Failing to stab him, she stabs herself. In a highly moving scene Rhesus and her children urge Guineonda to live; however, she dies, but only after Rhesus has promised not to kill himself. When he faints away his young son puts himself at the head of the English army to meet the King's main forces, who are expected momentarily. The play then closes with the chief Druid moralizing that in vain we seek happiness on earth because chance is too powerful and only above can we find happiness.

This play has several weaknesses. Gildon added—perhaps on the advice of Betterton—a great deal of show and pageantry attending the Druid processions in an effort to catch the current vogue for operatic elements. The play was also staged with magnificent scenery, heightened at times by thunderstorm effects.⁵² Although they seem to have caught the audience, these added operatic elements weaken the impact of the tragedy. Second, the Queen of Bayonne's sudden passion for Rhesus is thrust upon the reader with no motivation or preparation whatever; it is clearly hasty improvisation, and as such mars what otherwise is not bad plotting. A third weakness is the occasional degeneration of Gildon's intended nobility of sentiment and elevation of tone into sentimentality and rant; however these spots are relatively few. The last and perhaps most glaring weakness is Gildon's all-too-obvious desire to please his audience by several long, jingoistic speeches on English superiority over all things Gallic, anti-priesthood tirades, and a decidedly Tory attack on the cowardice of the rebellious rabble.

But aside from these weaknesses Gildon achieves what he intended. The situation is movingly tragic: a beautiful and most virtuous woman through no fault of her own is torn by violence from the husband she loves devotedly,

52. Pottin, p. 17.

and in a foreign land not only is beset by threats of rape but also twice subjected to the awful ultimata of paying, with her own death, first for the lives of her children, and second for the life of her husband. The passions involved are basic—the mutual love of husband and wife and the self-sacrificing love of mother for children—and their representation in this play certainly moves pity, if not always terror. And although the duel between the King of Mayome and Sbesus occurs on stage, the mass battles and actions take place offstage in good Greek fashion. Many of the speeches approach the dignified elevation of good classical tragedy, and the play concludes with a stately speech proclaiming that man's destiny lies in the hands of the gods, that he cannot expect happiness in this world. Thus, except for a few minor weaknesses and the major flaw of the trumpery attendant upon the druids, the play achieves many of the Greek tragic effects.

Gildon's last produced play, The Patriot, or The Italian Conspiracy, was an adaptation from Lee's Lucius Junius Brutus. Although it too appeared anonymously, it has long been correctly attributed to Gildon.⁵³ Staged at Drury Lane in 1703 as the last offering of the season,⁵⁴ with music by Daniel Purcell,⁵⁵ it was acted by a less capable group than its predecessor, as the cast could boast only Mr. Mills, Mr. Wilks, Mrs. Rogers, and Mrs. Kent in the leading roles.⁵⁶ But its prologue and epilogue added the stature of

53. Staring B. Wells, "An Eighteenth Century Attribution," JEGP, XXXVIII, (1939), 240, n. 34. "The Stage" Cyclopaedia, pp. 347, 221. Genest, vol. II, pp. 275-76. Early Eighteenth Century Drama, p. 333. Biographica Dramatica, p. 131. Dottin, p. 18. OBBL, vol. II, p. 575.

54. Annals . . . Stage, vol. I, pp. 285-86. Biographica Dramatica, p. 131. "The Stage" Cyclopaedia, pp. 221, 347.

55. Songs . . . Restoration Theatre, p. 126.

56. Annals . . . Stage, vol. I, pp. 285-86.

better names. The prologue, "Wrote by Mr. Dennis, and spoken by Mr. Wills," explains that "the following piece by fiery Lee was wrought" but adds that this author has wisely aimed

To Temperate the Bards unruly Fire:
His well-proportion'd Raptures he retains,
But from his wild and frantick starts refrains,
And his false whining Passion he disdains.

The epilogue, spoken by Mrs. Wills and written "by a Friend, Mr. Farquhar" is a pleasant bit of light raillery on the influence the town beaux exert in making a play a success or failure. Apparently there is no record of the play's run, and scholarship differs on its success: Paul Dottin writes it "was relatively successful"⁵⁷ whereas D. R. Doran believes that "the public consigned it to oblivion"⁵⁸ but neither documents his opinion.

The play was published in quarto in 1703 by William Davis and George Strahan but that same year it was reissued with the title altered to The Italian Patriot; or, The Florentine Conspiracy.⁵⁹ In "The Epistle Dedicatory to the Queen's Most Sacred Majesty" Gildon hopes that because of the new Queen's (Anne) proved goodness and wisdom the muses will not continue to suffer the contempt they have hitherto endured; he trusts she will recognize that learning should have equal place of honor with arms and that she will especially aid drama because it promotes virtue, a country's only real strength. This dedication is complimentary but far from grovelling; Gildon addresses his queen like a sturdy citizen urging a good cause. Then the

57. Dottin, p. 18.

58. Annals . . . Stage, vol. I, pp. 285-86.

59. Early Eighteenth Century Drama, p. 333. "The Stage" Cyclopaedia, p. 221.

preface explains his reasons for having altered Lee's Lucius Junius Brutus. Although he believes it has the greatest beauties and the greatest faults of all Lee's plays, he objects to its confusion and irregularity. Gildon has tried to shorten Lee's play because it had two distinct actions, one of which also offended because it destroyed Lucretia's character for modesty and at first presented Brutus as a "Bawdy Buffoon," ridiculous rather than heroic. He has also cut down the "strange, long, and tedious orations of Brutus," changed the "order of some scenes in the interest of probability," attempted to "trace the Nature of the Passion [love] more justly," altered whenever he could "enforce or heighten the Passions," and cut out "extravagant thoughts and expressions." Finally, he has changed both name and scene of the play because the Master of the Revels would not otherwise license it even though he had removed the anti-monarchical sections.

As thus altered Gildon's version again deals with one of his favorite themes, best expressed here by the concluding lines of the play:

All private Passions, and all ties of Blood.
We ought to offer to the Publick Good.

The setting is Florence, where plebeians and nobles are struggling. Cosmo di Medici, leader of the plebeian faction, has two sons. Lorenzo is headstrong and will not be ruled: by love he is tricked into embracing the cause of the nobles, led by banished Rinaldo and represented *in* Florence by Rimini, father of his beloved. The other son, Julio, is the acme of filial respect and obedience in all things except his love for Teraminta, daughter to Rinaldo, whom he has just married despite Cosmo's wishes. He is confident that after the marriage his father will relent, but the latter so urges duty that he gives up Teraminta, who is sent away, supposedly to her father.

Hacked by grief and regret for his action, Julio is met by Lorenzo and a friar, who propose that he join their plot to open the city to Rinaldo's faction. Julio first refuses but agrees when Teraminta (whom banished Rimini has sent back) reveals that she will be stabbed by the friar in his presence if she fails to persuade him; however she so admires her husband's steadfastness that she offers to be stabbed if he so wishes. He refuses her sacrifice, writes out his willingness to share in the plot, and is then left to enjoy his dearly bought love. But later he storms into a secret meeting of the conspirators to demand his freedom from the plot because his sense of guilt has so worked upon him that he remained cold with Teraminta. But guards break in, seize all, and inform Cosmo, who condemns his sons and all the conspirators to the lash and the axe. When Teraminta tells him the painful nature of Julio's choice, Cosmo forgives but persuades him that he must die to make justice absolute in order to put an end to the strife that has long weakened Florence. After suffering the public dishonor of the lashing Julio wants only quick death and will have none of the hopes for life held out by Alberto and his mother, Nonoria. But his plight becomes more pitiful when Teraminta reveals how his father's sense of justice and punishment has caused her to be shaven and exposed to the mob, by whom she has been dishonored and wounded. Then Teraminta and Nonoria plead the cause of fatherly love until even the Senate is willing to stop Julio's punishment at the lash. But Cosmo, torn by the strongest of all private passions, is nevertheless inflexible; and amid the awed praise of the Senate commands that the execution be carried out. Lorenzo falls by the axe of dishonor, but Alberto stabs Julio at his own request. Teraminta stabs herself in order to follow her love, father and son forgive one another, and Julio acknowledges that justice has been done. Cosmo closes the play in

fitting tone:

What I have done to them, do you to me,
 When I like them shall dare offend my Country.
 All private Passions, and all ties of Blood,
 We ought to offer to the Publick Good.

Gildon's numerous changes from Lee all bring the play closer to Greek tragedy. Lee's play was intended to be topical and its central point is conflict between people and throne, whereas Gildon emphasizes the passions of his characters. He has eliminated most of Lee's bombast, name-calling, vulgarity and looseness of dialogue, the speeches inciting action and the answering shouts of the aroused mob, the many topical political speeches, and most of what he calls "Lee's rant and fustian." He has also considerably reduced the number of characters, with the result that the chief ones are much more clearly formed than Lee's. In short, he has made a better play.

This is the best of Gildon's tragedies. The action is kept strictly in the background and the stress is always upon the passions of noble characters torn by conflicting emotions. Their dilemma is tragic in that there is no possible happy solution, only honorable action, honorable suffering, and honorable death. Pity-for characters caught between private love and moral or public duty-and terror-at the inflexible course of hard justice-culminate in catharsis. Many of the latter scenes of the play are powerfully moving, with elevated speeches showing little of theawkishness which occasionally mars Gildon's other tragedies. The plot begins in medias res, observes the unities, is strict and economical, and convincingly builds up both characters and passions. Except for the unnecessary songs the play is bare and awful in true Greek fashion. However, although the Duke of Leeds presented the play to the Queen and urged reward for its author, she turned

over the matter to the Duchess of Marlborough⁶⁰ and Gildon went unrewarded.

Two other works somewhat dramatic in nature and associated with Gildon's name are The Stage Beaux Toss'd In a Blanket (1704), and A New Rehearsal or Hays the Younger (1714). But since these are in reality only extended dialogues whose real purpose is discussion of literary topics or personalities, they are better treated in their proper context of literary criticism in a later chapter.

This review of Gildon as dramatist has shown him to be a dramatic poet firmly committed to classic tragedy but temporizing with a passing taste for extraneous musical show. As a dramatist Gildon deserves some respect. First, by successfully dwelling upon the passions he sometimes attains the awful stresses of Greek tragedy; and although his consequent intensity occasionally declines, it is nevertheless on the whole remarkably sustained. Second, many of the speeches of his central characters are noble and powerful, and most maintain an elevation suitable to powerful passion or great events. Finally, Gildon can occasionally move his reader to genuine pity and terror culminating in catastrophes which are complete and unrelieved. Thus, as dramatist he was a writer of promising abilities and some achievement, but unfortunately he turned his energies to other forms of literature and never realized the promise of his best plays.

60. Tottin, p. 18.