Chapter IX

CRUXES OF CONTEMPORARY CRITICISM

In addition to championing the rules Gildon also declared himself upon most of the current cruxes of literary theory: ancients versus moderns, the proper judgment of Shakespeare, the Collier controversy, art versus genius, opera, the use of native materials for English writers, imitation and originality, translation, the relative value of different forms of literature, fable versus fine language and wit, imagination and fancy versus judgment, and versification and rhyme.

On the first of these, the ancients-moderns dispute, the record badly needs to be set straight, for scholarship abounds with conflicting references. A complete reading of Gildon shows that as a very young man he courted publicity with a semi-fashionable defense of English moderns but that with experience and reading he turned to the ancients. His first identified critical pieces in his widely cited Miscellaneous Letters and Essays of 1694 loudly defended the moderns, for in the dedication he

> aims at a Vindication of our known Right and Honour, which are impiously invaded, and as weakly, as ignobly betray'd to a Foreign People, by a bigotted Veneration for a former age. But Poetry, Sir, will appear from the following Essays, to be a Prize we ought no more to surrender to Foreign Nations than our courage or Liberty. For Greece and Rome, who have given us the noblest Examples of the Latter have been the most famous for the Former and as we are not inferior to either of those commonwealths, in the Honor of Arms, or the Wisdom of our Laws, so I can never yield them the precedence in Poetry.

And in the preface he goes so far as to claim that

> Courage, Virtue and Wisdom, Greece and Rome will never be out-Rival'd in, but I'm apt to think they have both been outdone in Poetry by the English . . . . For notwithstanding all those Encouragements Poets met with there, and the want of 'em here in England, we have the Honor to have more and better Poets than ever Greece or Rome Saw.

Within the miscellany came three Gildon pieces. "An Essay at a Vindication of the Love-Verses of Cowley and Waller" answers the objection that the occasions for Cowley's and Waller's verses are not such as would meet every man in love by arguing that different occasions occur to different men and that the ancients would be vulnerable to the same charge: "Corinna's Parrot dy'd, and Ovid writes its Funeral Elegy; but sure none will contend that this is an accident common to all Ladies who have Lovers, and those Poets too."[1] To the objection that "the moderns fill their verses with Thoughts surprising and glittering, but not natural for ev'ry Man in Love to think" Gildon replies: a true and lively representation of the pains of love may justly contain drawn-out figures, for Locke and Le Clerc agree that in a state of pain the train of ideas moves more slowly and hence elaborate figures are permissible; men in love are naturally extravagant and therefore there is no "necessity of a Lover's saying nothing that exceeds the Bounds of Possibility"; finally, a poetizing lover's verses are not presumed to be extemporary and he is expected to study and consider his expression. More important, Gildon directly attacks the idea that modern writing must be judged by the ancients' standards:

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1. Miscellaneous Letters, p. 209.

I shall never deny the ancients their just Praise of the Invention of Arts and Sciences; but I cannot without contradicting my own Reason, allow them and Perfectors of 'em so far that they must be our uncontroverted Patterns the Standard: For our Physicians have found the prescripts of Hippocrates very defective: and as in Physic, so in Poetry, there must be a regard had to the clime, Nature, and Customs of the People."[2]

In another short piece, "To My Honoured and Ingenious Friend Mr. Harrington, for the Modern Poets against the Ancients," Gildon is agressively anti-ancients in such comments as these:

Judgment I think is apparently the due of the Moderns, who I'm confident would ne'er have been guilty of those Absurdities the Ancients abound with. They seem to have been Masters of but little Reason, when they made their Gods such limited and criminal Beings. Homer often digresses from the Hero, that is the Subject of his Poem, to entertain us with other Objects too remote from Achilles. You may, Sir, easily perceive that I press not so hard as I might on the Ancients, that I omit abundance of Improprieties, and Absurdities, ridiculous even to Childishness, because I wou'd not be thought to rob the Fathers of Poetry of their just Value and Esteem; tho I confess I am of Mr. St. Evremond's Opinion, that no Name can Privilege Nonsense or ill Conduct.[3]

The Plays Mr. Dryden has bless'd the Age with . . . compar'd with those of Sophocles and Euripides, either for the Plot, thought, or Expression, will gain him the Poet's Garland from those two Hero's of Old Greece.[4]

But this early extreme enthusiasm for the moderns fast waned, for by 1698 in the preface to his Phaeton Gildon was praising the ancients. "The Moderns on the contrary generally spin out theirs to an unreasonable Extent, by adding under-plots, and several Persons, no way necessary to their Design, which was admirably avoided by the ancients, by introducing no more characters than were indispensably necessary to one Compleat Design."

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2. Miscellaneous Letters, p. 210.

3. Miscellaneous Letters, p. 223.

4. Miscellaneous Letters, p. 224.

Next the antients differ'd from the Moderns, in the choice of their Subject. We are for making the Scene of our Plays the Field of Battle, a Siege, Camp, etc. We are sure to keep the audience awake with our Drums and Trumpets, and make them laugh with our Battles and Rencounters on the Stage, when they ought to be more concern'd. The Ancients never, as I can remember, chose such noisy opportunities of perverting the End they propos'd in their Tragedies, viz. the moving Terror and Compassion, which can never be touch'd, where such tumultuous objects come in view . . . .

Then in the dedicatory epistle to his Ovidius Brittanicus (1703) he again reversed his 1694 judgment for the moderns by declaring that "The Verses of the Moderns are fill'd with thoughts, that are indeed surprising and glittering, but not tender and passionate, or natural for a man in Love to think" and refers to "the common Road of error, in imitation of Cowley, Suckling, etc." In the preface to his The New Metamorphosis (1709) he strongly preferred the ancients because "their designs were masterly, and they always had Nature in their Eye, in their Draughts of Man in his Passions or Manners, to which most of our celebrated modern Poets have had but little Regard; those at least who have found the best Success, have been those who deviate the most from the valuable Paths of Nature, true Rhetorick, or even common Sense." And in 1710 he confidently affirmed the supremacy of the ancient dramatists over Shakespeare and the moderns:

Having gone over the celebrated Author with so much care, an author asserted by the number of his admirers (whom to oppose is counted little less than Heresie in Poetry) to be the greatest Genius of modern Times, especially of this Nation, I find myself confirm'd in the opinion I have long had of the Antients in the Drama, I mean in Tragedy; for having been so long conversant with the confusions of want of art in this Poet, tho' supported with all the advantages of a great Genius, the Beauty of Order, Uniformity, and Harmony of Design appears infinitely more charming, and that is only to be found in the Greek Poets . . . .[5]

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5. Works . . . Shakespear, VII, 424-25.

Since Gildon's considered opinions are usually stated most carefully in The Complete Art of Poetry (1718), it is highly significant to note that its complete purpose was nothing less than to bring before modern readers the criteria of the ancients in order to improve modern poetry.

> For I had long seen with Regret the Assurance of Pretenders to it, and the Abuses that from almost a total Ignorance of it, had brought it into a neglect with most, and into a Contempt with Many, while the English World, that knew little of the Antients, judged of the Excellence of Poetry by the rude Draughts of the general Scriblers of the Age, and finding nothing great, nothing wonderful in these, unjustly conclude that the Art itself is but a meer Trifle below a serious Thought.[6]

And within the work itself Gildon is strongly on the side of the ancients.[7]

After the ancients-moderns controversy the question of Shakespeare's merits and faults most engrossed the critics of Gildon's day. In 1692 Thomas Rymer in A Short View of Tragedy had severely criticized Shakespeare and had especially condemned Othello. Gildon early entered the lists, first hotly defending Shakespeare, later balancing virtues against faults, and finally somewhat reluctantly concluding that the ancient tragedians surpassed the great English playwright. In 1693 John Dennis answered Rymer in The Impartial Critick and in 1694 Gildon's Miscellaneous Letters and Essays included[8] "Some Reflections on Mr. Rymer's Short View of Tragedy, and an Attempt at a Vindication of Shakespear, in an Essay directed to John Dryden Esq." and "An Essay at a Vindication of Love in Tragedies, against Rapin and Mr.

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6. Complete Art, p. 4.

7. Complete Art, p. 158, 129.

8. There is a possibility that Gildon early reviewed Rymer's Short View, for it was anonymously reviewed in Peter Motteux's Gentleman's Journal for December, 1692 (p. 15), and the Compleat Library of the same month (pp. 58-66) contains a long summary of it but omits the whole section on Othello

Rymer. Directed to Mr. Dennis."

In the first of these Gildon explains that "as soon as Mr. Rymer's Book came to my Hands, I resolved to make some Reflections upon it, tho' more to show my Will than my abilities. But finding Mr. Dennis had almost promis'd the World a Vindication of the Incomparable Shakespear, I quitted the Design, since he had got a champion more equal to his Worth . . . ."[9] But when Dennis did not do so, Gildon decided to "bestow two or three days on an Essay to prove the contrary." This answer is divided roughly into two parts: the first ridicules miscellaneous points made by Rymer, and the second concentrates on objections to Othello. Gildon's tone is contemptuous as he restricts himself to "some Animadversions on those absurdities they contain; for to examine all would swell my Letter into a Volume, and be five hundred times as big as the text." He thus explains Rymer's lack of sympathy for Shakespeare: "being his opposite, 'tis no wonder his mind's not capacious enough to comprehend, nor his taste Poetical enough to relish the Noble Thoughts which the Ingenious have admir'd in Shakespear . . . ." As critic

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(The Restoration and Eighteenth Century, p. 719, n. 14). I have suggested in the first chapter of this study that Gildon may have worked on these journals. Perhaps he wrote the answer to Rymer for publication in one of these; and when it was not printed he could have put it aside for later use, as he did elsewhere with other material. Certainly his answer would have been more timely in 1692; and in later controversies—the Collier question and Pope's Rape of the Lock—Gildon was the first to comment. Also the deliberate omission of the Othello section from the summary printed in the Compleat Library and the fact that Gildon devotes the second section of his "Some Reflections upon . . . . Mr. Rymer's Short View . . . " to a point-by-point rebuttal of Rymer's attack upon Othello suggests that compiler Gildon seized the opportunity to print in his Miscellaneous Letters and Essays an answer which he had written for earlier publication. However, this tentative attribution is at present only conjecture based upon probability.)

9. Miscellaneous Essays, p. 64. This statement may also suggest that Gildon had written the review in the Gentleman's Journal and the summary in The Compleat Library. But of course Gildon's comment could be only casual reference to personal reading.

Rymer "has scarce produced one criticism, that is not borrowed from Rapin, Dacier, or Bossu, and mis-apply'd to Shakespear" and as poet he "discovers not the least Genius, nor Taste of it; and therefore must be granted a very incompetent Judge of such a Poet as Shakespeare is." Hence, "to examine all that's unintelligible, false English, and absurd in Rymer would be an Herculean Labor, and extend my consideration to every line."[10] Gildon argues that Shakespeare's faults arose from the age and audience for which he wrote because

> what Fruit he was to expect of his Labors, was from the applause of the audience; so that his chief aim was to please them . . . who would not be pleased without some extravagances mingled in (tho' contrary to) the characters such and such a Player was to act. This is the reason that his Tragedies have a mixture of something comical . . . the clown and the Valet jesting with their Betters, if he resolved not to disoblige the Auditors.[11]

Gildon believes this necessity also inspired "all those Quibbles, and playing upon words, so frequent in some part of him, as well as that Language that may seem too rough and forc'd to the ear."[12] Despite his breaking the rules Shakespeare "has in most if not all, of his Plays attain'd the full End of Poetry, Delight and Profit, by moving Terror and Pity for the changes of Fortune, which Humane Life is subject to by giving us a lively and just Image of them."[13] In the second part of the essay Gildon opposes Rymer's

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10. Miscellaneous Letters, p. 68.
11. Miscellaneous Letters, p. 88.
12. Miscellaneous Letters, p. 88.
13. Miscellaneous Letters, p. 91.

charge that the plot of Othello is improbable by arguing: that the plot is good because it is "composed of incidents that happen not every day"; that it was entirely probable that a foreigner and a Moor should be a soldier in Venice, for Venetian custom was to hire foreigners to fight her wars and Christian Othello was not suspect of partiality to the Mohammedan Turks; that Desdemona could quite probably love the Moor because nature offers no barrier to love between sexes of different color; that any warm-hearted young woman would be moved to admiration by the recital of the Moor's courage; that Othello was of noble blood and a Christian; and that even if his arguments do not entirely clear Othello of Rymer's charge, "yet ought not that to rob Shakespeare of his due character of a Poet, and a great Genius; unless he [Rymer] will for the same reason deny those prerogatives to Homer and Sophocles," because their improbabilities are even greater. To Rymer's attack on the characterization of Iago Gildon replies that Iago is Italian and therefore "naturally Selfish, Jealous, Reserv'd, Revengeful and Proud"; and that since Iago suspects Othello and his wife and because he wishes Cassio's place, Iago's actions are still appropriate for a soldier's character. He defends Shakespeare's expressions and declares that "Shakespeare's numbers carry such an Harmonious Majesty, that what Rapin and some other Critics say of Homer, is justly his due; they give a noble Beauty to the meanest things"; however, Gildon admits that time has given Shakespeare's words an

> Obsoleteness which renders some of his Expressions a little dark, but . . . examine well the sense of his words, you'll seldom find him guilty of Bombast, that is Words and Thoughts ill match'd. On the contrary, they are generally so well sorted, that they present us with so lively and sensible an image of what they impart, that it fixes itself in our Minds with an extream satisfaction; and the more we view it, the more it gains upon us.

Gildon's second defense of Shakespeare, "an Essay at a Vindication of Love in Tragedies, against Rapin and Mr. Rymer. Directed to Mr. Dennis,"

rebuts Rymer's contention that love effeminates the majesty of tragedy and urges these justifications for allowing love in tragedy: by leaving off the ancient chorus and using love, modern tragedy has become "a more perfect image of Humane Life, in taking in that which has so great a share in it; the idea of love in tragedy came from the epic poems, which possess more majesty than tragedy; love "has much the Preheminence above Terror and Pity, for it is a stronger passion," and thus tender scenes of love may contain elevation of thought and expression such as those in Virgil's fourth book and Dryden's All for Love; love "dilates the soul, pushes a Generous Mind on to Great Actions . . . whereas Grief and Fear are opposites to all that's Great and Noble"; love is "agreeable to the majesty of tragedy by its Effects or Actions that depend upon it"; if the object of tragedy be "rectifying the Passions by the Passions themselves," tragedy should include "the most predominant and violent of Passions"; and to combat Rapin's argument that love causes the decay of a tragedy's reputation within a year, Gildon cites Dryden's All for Love and Otway's The Orphan and Venice Preserved, a judgment which time has corroborated.

But after this early enthusiastic defense of Shakespeare—which was perhaps one method for an ambitious, pushing young man to attract attention—Gildon's judgments of Shakespeare grew calmer and considerably more judicious. In 1702 in the preface to his The Patriot he opposed the extremists in this fashion: "There is no man so absurd and blind an admirer of that great poet, as not to know, and own that among his great Beauties, he has very considerable Faults . . . ." In 1710 in "An Essay on the Art, Rise, and Progress of the Stage, in Greece, Rome, and England" he proposed to

lay down such rules of Art, as that the Reader may be able to distinguish his Errors from his Perfections, now too much and too unjustly confounded by the foolish Bigotry of his blind and partial adorers . . . . For tho I must always think our Author a Miracle, for the Age he liv'd in, yet I am oblig'd, in justice to Reason and Art, to confess that he does not come up to the Antients, in all the Beauties of the Drama; yet it is no small Honour to him, that he has surpas'd them in the Topicks or Common Places.[14]

In 1710 Gildon nevertheless rather unwillingly found much to admire in Shakespeare,

For, in spite of his known and visible Errors, when I read Shakespeare, even in some of his most irregular Plays, I am surpriz'd into a Pleasure so great, that my judgment is no longer free to see the Faults, tho they are ever so gross and evident. There is such a Witchery in him, that all the Rules of Art, which he does not observe . . . vanish away in the Transports of those that he does observe, as if I had never known anything of the matter. The Pleasure, I confess, is as peculiar as strong; for it comes from the admirable Draughts of the Manners, visible in the Distinction of his Characters, and his surprising Reflections and Topicks, which are often extremely heightened by the Expression and Harmony of Numbers: for in these no Man ever excell'd him, and very few ever came up to his Merit. Nor is his nice touching the Passion of Joy, the least Source of his Satisfaction; for he frequently moves this, in some of the most indifferent of his Plays, so strongly, that it is impossible to quell the Emotion.[15]

He also acknowledged that Shakespeare "always draws men and women so perfectly, that when we read we can scarce persuade ourselves, but that the Discourse is real and no Fiction"[16] and held that "There is no man has had more of this Vis Comica than our Shakespeare, in particular characters."[17] Even in his last major work of criticism, The Laws of Poetry (1721), Gildon remained an admirer of Shakespeare's dialogue and its contribution to successful characterization.

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14. Works . . . Shakespear, VII, ii.
15. Works . . . Shakespear, VII, iv.
16. Works . . . Shakespear, VII, 306.
17. Works . . . Shakespear, VII, xlvi.

In this I think there is no one excels Shakespear, for we may without difficulty know whether it be Brutus, or Cassius, whom we hear, tho' the reader take no notice of their names. We every where find a hot impatience, and choleric eagerness in all that Cassius says; but the anger of Brutus, as it proceeds from the highest sentiments of honour and honesty, so it always discovers a sort of unwillingness to exert itself. . . . Nor is there any thing in what either says, but what is the natural and close consequence of these two states of anger . . . . but each says what a man possess'd with the same passions, and in the same degree, would naturally utter.[18]

But Gildon's censures of Shakespeare cannot be ignored. In 1710 he doubted Shakespeare's alleged ignorance of the ancients but asserted his need for more knowledge of them: "For if the Knowledge of the Antients would have made him correct it would have given him the only Perfection he wanted."[19] As for the fear that this correctness "might have restrain'd some of that Fire, Impetuosity, and even Beautiful Extravagance, we do not find, that Correctness in Homer, Virgil, Sophocles, Euripides restrain'd any Fire that was truly celestial: and why we should think, that it would have a worse effect on Shakespear, I cannot imagine."[20] He also noted that Shakespeare placed "his Scene in a warm climate where the Manners of the People are very different from ours, and yet he has made them talk and act generally like Men of a colder Country,"[21] that "Shakespeare drew Men better than Women,"[22] and that "his Versification . . . is very unequal; sometimes flowing smoothly but gravely like the Thames, at other times down right Prose."[23] In brief, "Shakespeare is indeed stor'd with a great many Beauties, but they are in a

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18. Laws of Poetry, pp. 233-34.

19. Works . . . Shakespear, VII, v.

20. Works . . . Shakespear, VII, v.

21. Works . . . Shakespear, VII, 304.

22. Works . . . Shakespear, VII, 411.

23. Works . . . Shakespear, VII, 444.

heap of Rubbish . . . ."[24] Somewhat reluctantly yet nevertheless firmly Gildon in 1710 concluded:

Having gone over the celebrated author with so much care . . . I find myself confirm'd in the opinion I have long had of the antients in . . . . Tragedy; for having so long been conversant with the confusions of the want of art [failure to observe the rules] in this Poet, tho' supported with all the advantages of a great Genius; the Beauty of Order, Uniformity, and Harmony of Design appears infinitely more charming, and that is only to be found in the Greek Poets.[25]

Several years later in what Gildon considered to be his most mature critical work, The Complete Art of Poetry (1718), his comments on Shakespeare became more severe. He believes of modern tragedy that

The most excellent of our English Poets in that, which seems something of this Kind, is Shakespear; but how far short does he fall of the true Dignity and Excellence of Tragedy? The Highest he rises, is to the Painting of the Manners, in which he is truly admirable sometimes, tho' he often errs. And he seems the more inexcusable in his neglect of the Fable, or Design . (pp. 63-64)

Gildon further berated him for hasty scrambling for popular success and profit.

His original, and inferior Business of a Player sunk the more excellent Duties of his assum'd Character of a Poet. Money seems to have been his Aim more than Reputation, and therefore he was always in a Hurry, and gave not himself Time to weigh the Justness of a Design, but only consider'd how to satisfy the most unjudging Audience that ever was in the World . . . . He was by his Draught of the Manners grown popular with his Audience, and he thought it time thrown away, to study Regularity and Order, when any confus'd Stuff that came into his Head, wou'd do his Business, and fill his House. (p. 64)

With equal firmness he blamed Shakespeare for violating the rules,

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24. Works . . . Shakespear, VII, 425.

25. Works . . . Shakespear, VII, 424.

and where his Ignorance of them is not supply'd by his Genius, Men of Judgment and good Sense see such monstrous Absurdities in almost every Part of his Works, that nothing but his uncommon Excellencies in the other, cou'd ever prevail with us to suffer, and what he wou'd never have been guilty of, had his Judgment been but well inform'd by Art. (p. 99)

Therefore he argues that Shakespeare's failure to observe the rules excludes his tragedies "from the Right of being call'd Tragedies, which are indeed but so many Dialogues wretchedly tack'd together, without aim and Design; so that the highest Praise we can justly give our Magnified Shakespear, is only, that he was a great Master of Dialogues, but not that of a Tragic Poet." (p. 222)

In 1720 Gildon flatly declared that Shakespeare "was entirely ignorant of Rules of the Drama, and . . . all his Plays were but so many Pieces of History, which by consequence would have no Moral, and were of little use or Importance."[26] And in his last major critical work, The Laws of Poetry (1724), Gildon clearly remained unconvinced of Shakespeare's supremacy.

Among the moderns, indeed, we have had men appear, and meet with applause, only by the force of a strong imagination, as Ariosto in Italy, and Shakespear in England; but then they fall much short in the judgment of the learned and knowing, who can only decide upon this head, of Homer, Sophocles, Euripides, Virgil, and Horace. (pp. 22-23)

Again he insisted that Shakespeare's serious plays were not tragedies but merely poor historical plays, "for tho' they are not all the entire lives of particular persons, yet they contain, generally speaking the historical transactions of several years, as the Julius Caesar for example, in which we find not only the conspiracy against him, but all that happen'd afterwards in the Roman state to the death of Brutus and Cassius . . . ." (pp. 157-58)

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26. Miscellanea Aurea, pp. 96-97.

Nor did Gildon admire the now-prized soliloquies: "To go through all the soliloquies of Shakespear, would be to make a volume on this single head. But this I can say in general, that there is not one in all his works that can be excus'd by nature of reason," (pp. 206-07). In thus asserting Shakespeare's faults Gildon knew he was writing against current taste, yet he firmly insisted that the ignorance of the age allowed Shakespeare undue reputation.

Gildon applied his criteria to specific Shakespearian titles so consistently that, given a knowledge of his principles and of the work in question, one can easily anticipate the specific judgments. Thus he said of The Merchant of Venice that

> The Ignorance that Shakespeare had of the Greek Drama threw him on such odd stories, as the Novels and Romances of his Time cou'd afford, and which were so far from being natural, that they wanted that Probability and Verisimilitude, which is absolutely necessary to all the Representations of the Stage. The Plot of this play is of that number. But the Errors of the Fable and the conduct are too visible to need Discovery.[27]

The Comedy of Errors "Is exactly regular, as any one may see who will examine it by the Rules. The Place is part of one Town, the Time within the artificial Day; and the action the finding the lost Brother . . . . the Incidents are wonderfully pleasant, and the Catastrophe very happy and strongly moving."[28] The Midsummer's Night's Dream, "tho' this cannot be called either Comedy or Tragedy as wanting the Fable requir'd to either, yet it contains abundance of Beautiful Reflections, Descriptions, Similes, and Topics."[29]

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27. Works . . . Shakespear, VII, 321.

28. Works . . . Shakespear, VII, 299.

29. Works . . . Shakespear, VII, 299.

In All's Well that Ends Well "The Irregularity of the Plot is visible enough when we are in one Part of a Scene in France, in another in Italy, etc. The Story itself is out of a Possibility almost, at least so far out of the way of Custom and Experience that it can be call'd natural."30 The Winter's Tale "needs no Critick, its Errors are visible enough. Shakespeare himself was sensible of this Grossness of making the Play above sixteen years, and therefore brings in Time as a chorus to the Fourth act, to excuse the absurdity to which I refer you."31 He believed that in Titus Andronicus the crimes and murders are "so contrary to nature and art, that all the Crimes are monstrously beyond the very name of Scandalous."32 Of Romeo and Juliet, "Tho' this Fable is far from Dramatic perfection, yet it undeniably raises Compassion in the later Scenes. There are in it many Beauties of the Manners and Sentiments and Diction."33 The plot of Timon of Athens "is not regular as to Time or Place, but the action may be look'd on as pretty uniform, unless we would make the Banishment and Return of Alcibiades an under-Plot, which yet seems to be born of the main Design."34 And in Cymbeline "Tho the usual absurdity of irregular plots abound in this, yet there is something in the Discovery that is very touching."35 Clearly, Gildon did not shrink

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30. Works . . . Shakespear, VII, 330.

31. Works . . . Shakespear, VII, 335.

32. Works . . . Shakespear, VII, 362.

33. Works . . . Shakespear, VII, 362.

34. Works . . . Shakespear, VII, 418.

35. Works . . . Shakespear, VII, 418.

from the logical application of his principles.

This review of Gildon's pronouncements clearly establishes three points regarding his opinions on Shakespeare. First, he reversed his ideas almost completely between 1694 and 1724. Second, except for his youthful jingoistic defense of Shakespeare in 1694 Gildon throughout his career insisted upon judicious appraisal (chiefly by Aristotelian precepts) rather than popular idolatry of Shakespeare. Third, although he granted Shakespeare abundant genius, great wit, mastery of characterization and dialogue, distinguished excellence in lyric poetry and absolute supremacy in comedy, he nevertheless rated him a poor second to the Greek tragic authors because of obtrusive soliloquies, lack of "design," and disregard for the rules. These three points need reiteration because scholarship concerned with Shakespearian criticism has often made too much of Gildon's youthful opinions and ignored or minimized the firm convictions of his mature judgment.

The third important literary controversy in which Gildon figured was the great argument stirred up by Jeremy Collier's well-known A Short View of the Immorality, and Profaneness of the English Stage (March 5, 1698). Although Congreve, Vanbrugh, D'Urfey, Dennis, Motteux, Edward Filmer, and the anonymous authors of A Vindication of the Stage, A Defense of Dramatick Poetry, and A Further Defense all retorted vigorously, Gildon was in fact the first to answer Collier. To do so required some moral courage, for Collier's tract drew such a following that Congreve and D'Urfey were prosecuted by Middlesex magistrates and fines were imposed upon Betterton and Mrs. Bracegirdle. But Gildon minced no words. When he published his tragedy of Phaeton in late April or early May of 1698 he added a three-page appendix to his preface headed, "Since the Conclusion of the foregoing Preface, I have met with a Book,

call'd a Short View of the Immorality, and Profaneness of the English Stage, by Jeremy Collier, A.M." Despite its brevity Gildon's vigorous commentary first states most of the points which better known men later developed. In contemptuous terms he roundly berated Collier for his attacks on eminent writers and for his straining the sense of plays to make them appear indecent.

> If he had been the Good Christian, or that Honest man he would be thought, he shou'd have shewn more Candor and Charity, than to put the worst, and most Scandalous construction on any Gentleman of Honour and Probity's meaning; for I dare in Mr. Congreve's name, assert that the impious design which this author has coin'd out of his own head, was far from his thoughts and where there is any way to think well of a Man, that way ought certainly to be taken, both by a Christian and an honest man. Collier is guilty of greater Immorality, Profaneness, and Blasphemy, than, from his Quotations, all or at least the greater part of the Authors, he has arraigned, can be convicted of. If the publick Defamation of several Men of Reputation be Immorality, he is guilty of it. If to make half Quotations, put false and forc'd as well as Guilty Constructions on innocent Words, be dishonest and Immoral, he is notoriously so. If (as shall be made evident) the great part of the Blasphemy he has charg'd on the Stage, be but the child of his own Malicious Invention, it must unavoidably follow that a great share of the Blasphemy in his Book is his own, and not the Poets.

Although Gildon too wishes to see indecencies driven from the English stage, "that desire ought not to influence me or any other man to conjure up ten thousand Devils of our own, and then lay 'em at the Expence of the Theatre. And yet this is the conduct of this Younger Histrio-Mastix." He promised to answer Collier more fully in

> a work I have long design'd, and which I resolve to conclude some time this summer in vindication of the Stage . . . . in which I question not, but I shall make evident that the Wit of Man can invent no way so efficacious, as Drammatick Poetry, to advance Virtue and Wisdom, and the Supream duty of an English man (next the Love of God which is always Supream) the Love of our Country, a Lesson I shall particularly Recommend the Stage for to Mr. Collier.

This promise of a later "vindication of the Stage" has led to conjecture that he wrote the later anonymous A Vindication of the Stage, but conclusive proof is lacking.

In 1704 Gilden's anonymous farce, The Stage-Beaux Toss'd in a Blanket; or Hypocrisie Alamode; Expos'd in a True Picture of Jerry - - -/ A Pretending Scourge to the English Stage, was really a prolonged dialogue rigged to knock down straw man Collier by such speeches as these:

Sir Jerry. And are you a Defender of the Stage:
Dor. Certainly, Sir Jerry.
Lord. Gemme, I'll take care to inform the poor Rogues of their Advocate. Hay! Hay! He, he, he.
Clem. Sh! let me dey, Mr. Dorimant, this is furiously incongrous to your Reputation!—for Mr. Collier has prov'd the Poets a Company of strange debauch'd Fellows who are furiously my Aversion.
Dor. Mr. Collier does by the Poets, what he says Aristophanes did by Socrates, he puts them on an odious Dress, and then Rails at 'em for their Habit. But what say you if I am persuaded to be for the Stage, even by your beloved Mr. Collier? (p. 11)

Dor. Authorities! Against what, Sir Jerry? Against the most efficacious Means the Wit of Man can invent for the Promoting Vertue, and Discouraging Vice? What signifies Authorities against Reason! But he has omitted some things which our Stage does of equal Value with what is mentioned—It ridicules Hypocrisie and Avarice; the first ruining Religion, the latter the state; so that the Stage is the Champion of the Church and State, against the Invasions of Two of their most formidable Enemies; and this is what renders it odious to those who cry out against it. It is not that it is Lewd, Prophane, or Immoral; but because it exposes the Vices and Follies of a too prevailing Part, the Hypocrites, and Misers. (p. 12)
Ura. That seems to me to be like the rest of his Arguments and Answers He is charg'd with perverting and misconstruing every thing, or at least every thing, ~~or at least every thing~~ that he Quotes; He has Answered nothing to this but a plain denial, and meerly says, that since the Poets Crimes are too black to name, they pretend Innocence; never reflecting that these general Charges, and unprov'd Assertions, will hold for and against every one, the most Innocent, as well as the most Guilty, and can be therefore of no Force. (p. 26)

Ura. He shou'd first fairly have quoted the whole and full sayings of each Author, have fix'd an undoubted Standard of Obscenity, Prophaneness, and Blasphemy, and then have evidently demonstrated that the Passages he Censur'd fell immediately under those Heads: for Crimes of that deep Dye shou'd not be charg'd lightly on any Man, and much less on Men of unquestionable Reputation: 'Tis the greatest Murder that can be committed, and a Calumny that, without Repentance, in my Opinion, calls as heavy Judgments on the Offender as any. (p. 28)

Dor. Thus you see, Sir Jerry, that I have made out that the Stage is the School of Vertue, where Vice and Folly are expos'd, and Vertue promoted; or to put it into Mr. Collier's own Words, which are more prevalent with you, I have made it appear that the Business of the Stage is to Recommend Vertue, and Discountenance Vice, to shew the Uncertainty of Humane Great ness, the sudden Turns of Fate, and the unhappy Conclusions of Violence

and Injustice, to expose the Singularity of Pride and Fancy, to make Folly and Falsehood Contemptible, and to bring every thing that is ill under Infamy and Neglect.

Sir Jerry. Go on, Sir—

Dor. Now, Sir Jerry, from this Maxim of Mr. Collier's it follows that these Vices, and these Follies, must be drawn, or else they cou'd not be expos'd. Is it not therefore an Argument of an Inveterate Hypocrite that makes your Reformers such Enemies to the Stage? If you are such Zealots for Morality, first Reform yourselves—Next, pray why are you less severe on Tayerns, Brandy-Shops and other Tippling-houses, on Gaming-Tables, Usurers, Oppressors of the Poor, Betrayers of the Publick, Libellers of the State and Church, and the like?

Sir Jerry. We must do all things by degrees.

Dor. You begin therefore with your Endeavours to suppress that which from your own Confession is useful to the promoting the End you pretend to, and let those things alone which all the World with one Voice condemn pernicious to Vertue and to Mankind. And let me tell you, Sir Jerry, if the Stage did not make its Business to expose Knaves and Hippocrites, you wou'd say nothing to it; 'tis because it declares against you that you are so Clamorous against that. (p. 49)

This thread of serious argument—really the raison d'être of the piece—

frequently gains point from such broad burlesque as the following exchange.

Clem. O! Swearing is furiously my Aversion, I can't endure the sound of an Oath, it makes me start! Let me dey, Madam, if an Oath does not dismantle all the Fortifications of my Understanding, and leaves my Mind for the time a heap of Confusion. Why a Soldier's Oath is as frightful to me as the Report of his Pistol.

Dor. Ah! Madam! What have you said? What Shock our Ears with so smutty an Expression? Modesty is the Character of your Sex, and to talk out of that is to talk out of Character. A Soldier's Pistol! (p. 19)

Gildon's epilogue closes the farce with a serious reminder that wise and

genuine reformers could better exert themselves elsewhere.

> Examine all the Town, each Quarter view,
> And we shall find what Butler said is true;
> We all are proud for Sins we are inclin'd to,
> By damning those we never have a mind to.
> Thus Reformation has discharg'd its Rage
> Upon the Vices of the Sinking Stage.
> As Ships
> When fraught with Foreign Luxury they sail,
> As soon as ever they descry a Whale
> Throw out a Tub to find the Monster play,
> Lest the rich Cargo shou'd become its Prey.

So some to turn our furious Zealot's Rage
From Lov'd high Crimes have overthrown the Stage.
Gentlemen, briefly this has been our Fault,
We more for others than our selves have Thought.
Each Man wou'd piously reform his Neighbour;
To save himself he thinks not worth his Labour.
With Zeal and Sin at once we're strangely warm'd,
And grow more Wicked as we grow Reform'd.
Ch! 'tis a blessed Age, and blessed Nation,
When Vice walks cheek by Jowl with Reformation.
In short, let each Man's Thoughts first look at home,
And then to Foreign Reformations roam.
If all the Fools and Knaves met here to Day,
Wou'd their own Faults and Follies First Survey,
We need not fear their Censures of the Play.

These three hotly contested issues—ancients versus moderns, judgment of Shakespeare, and the Collier controversy—were among the major cruxes of late Seventeenth and early eighteenth century literary criticism. But there were others: genius versus art; knowledge and judgment versus fancy and imagination; the importance of fable; "design" as opposed to figurative language and witty expression ("fine things"); diction; rhyme; the nature and value of imitation; theories of translation; the relative value of different literary forms; and the true function of the critic. Gildon firmly declared himself on each of these.

On the first, the issue of genius versus art, Gildon thus maintained the primacy of genius: "'Tis true, the greatest Genius is to be regulated, and improv'd by art; but all the Art in the World cannot make him a poet whom Nature has not furnished with a Genius."[36] Nor did he shirk the difficult problem of definition:

. . . as far as it relates to poetry, I shall venture to mention some particulars which compose it; as, a strong and clear imagination, or fancy, by which the poet is furnish'd with the lively images of all things, and . . . .

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36. Complete Art, p. 48.

There is, besides this, requir'd to a poetic genius certain warmth and vigour, which by some is call'd enthusiasm, and which gives that force and transport to the images that are found in a great Poet, and proves . . . that a genius is the soul of poetry.37

But he seems almost to contradict himself when he urges the necessity of art and brodens its definition:

For Art entirely includes Nature, that being no more than Nature reduc'd to form . . . . For without Art, there can be no Order, and without Order, Harmony is sought in vain, where nothing but shocking Confusion can be found. Those scatter'd Sparks of a great Genius, which shou'd shine with united Glory, are in the huddle of Ignorance or want of Art, so dissipated, and divided, and so blended with Contraries, that they are extreamly obscur'd, if not entirely extinguish'd.38

Another crux of criticism was the question of how much knowledge the critic needs. Gildon wisely distinguished between learning and pedantry and then wrote,

I do not see, that all this Depth of Learning, the Knowledge of all the Sciences, and the like, are absolutely necessary to the forming a very good Critic, that is a Judge in Poetry, in any one, or in all its Parts: Good Sense, a Knowledge of the Rules, and a Taste or Gusto in Art and Nature; and a Conversation with the best Authors he can understand, are Qualifications sufficient to make a good Judge of him who understands not one Word of Latin or Greek, of Homer or Virgil, in their own original Dress.39

His idea gained force from the good sense of his illustration:

But to answer all these Difficulties by an Example against which there will be no Exception, let us look over the Examen or Criticism of the brightest Person concern'd in the Tatler's and Spectators, in his Observations on Milton's Paradise Lost, and see if there be any need of Greek or

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37. Laws of Poetry, p. 75.

38. Complete Art, pp. 94-95.

39. Complete Art, pp. 144-45.

Latin, or the understanding of so many Arts and Sciences, to apprehend what he says on this Subject. No, it is all plain and easy to an English reader; he had else miss'd his Aim, the Praise of that exalted Author, which he has made out with a great deal of Clearness and Ease.[40]

Yet another crux was the question of judgment as opposed to imagination and fancy. Gildon insisted upon "the sovereignty of judgment and reason in poetry, without which there can be no certain criterion of excellence."[41] But he also held that "a true poet must be inspir'd by nature, must have a great imagination, or a pregnant fancy which to be truly beautiful must be regulated by judgment or learning."[42] The true poet needs both: "Fancy and judgment must join in every great poet, as courage and conduct in every great general; for where either is wanting, the other is useless, or of little value. . . ; the union of which two, in one Man, makes a compleat poet."[43]

On another crux, the issue of "design" versus "fine things," Gildon had much to say on the primacy of the former over such poetic embellishments as figurative language, diction, rhyme, and witty expression. His opinions on this subject appeared early and continued late. In 1698 in the preface to Phaeton he wrote that "We are fond of Fine Things (as the Ladies call 'em) which commonplace-Books will supply to any moderately industrious dull Fellow, on all occasions. Nay, Seneca has store enough of them to set up half a score Modern Authors." He objected to them because "no Man or Woman agitated by violent Passions can naturally speak, what they call Fine Things . . . ." In 1700 in the preface to his New Metamorphosis he contemptuously dismissed writers who weaken their sense by excessive attention to "select Flowers

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40. Complete Art, p. 146.

41. Laws . . . Poetry, p. 79.

42. Laws . . . Poetry, p. 224.

43. Laws . . . Poetry, p. 283.

which are generally only Words. The happy turn of an . . . Expression, a Phrase full and surprizing, commands their adoration. These are meer Grammaticasters . . . busying themselves with empty Words, while they pass over Excellencies much greater and more charming." In the preface to his Love's Victim (1701) Gildon wrote, "if a Tragic Poet wou'd touch the heart of the hearer . . . he must divest his unfortunate characters of that magnificent Stile . . . in which Grief, and the Distress'd declaim in all the Luxury and Wantonness of Expression the authors are masters of." In the preface to The Patriot (1702) he claimed that he had "ev'ry where cut out many extravagant Thoughts and Expressions" and wished he "had root'd 'em all entirely out" but confessed he "left some in the action in compliment to the Town, which has generally declar'd itself for Rant and Bustian against Nature." In the dedication to Ovidius Brittanicus (1703) he contended that love poetry "has been most lyable to abuse, and that not only from poetasters, but even from Men of the foremost Name, . . . in which those Poets have only been fond of shewing the Wantonness of a luxuriant and easie Fancy, in far fetched Similies, and Conceits dragg'd from the poor, miserable province of Epigram."

All these clearly show Gildon's preference for design as the real criterion of poetic merit. But his comments during the latter years of his life, when literary criticism was his primary interest, are even stronger. In the preface of The Apparition (1718) he declared that poetic merit consists in

> the Formation of some Noble Whole, consisting of Beauteous and Wonderful Parts, directed and conducted to the same useful End [but current English poets] are supinely and meanly contented with a few smooth Lines which have no further Aim than a Point or Jingle, which signifies nothing to the Good of Mankind, or to the Manly Pleasure of a Soul inform'd by Reason. Without a Design there can be no Propriety, and absurdities must every minute fill an author, who pursues nothing but an unguided Fancy. Therefore, Design or Fable in Poetry is of the highest Importance, and . . . those Gentlemen who have neglected it are meer versifiers and no Poets. (p. viii)

in his major work of criticism, The Complete Art of Poetry (1718), Gildon thus put himself firmly on record:

To praise a Poem for a fine Line, or a happy Turn of Expression, is like praising a most horrible and distorted Creature for a Beauty, because she happens to have a handsome Hand, or Foot. (p. 168)

We have had some Attempts made at Criticism in the Spectators, Guardians, & c. but they have proceeded no farther than Words, and the subservient Parts to Poetry, but never durst advance to the Disposition of the Parts, and an Oeconomy of an entire Poem, except in the excellent Examination of Milton, which is every where directed by the Rules of Aristotle, and the receiv'd Critics. (p. 129)

Finally, in his last major piece of criticism, The Laws of Poetry (1721), Gildon again belabored his age's penchant for "fine things" at the expense of "design."

This lust of fine language, as they call it, has, like an ignis fatus, misled our authors, wand'ring in the night of ignorance, into strange and monstrous absurdities . . . . The consideration of such important things . . . as the fable, the characters, and the passions, is what these authors are wholly incapable of. A simile, a metaphor, an epithet, some common-place relections, and at most an idle description, are their principal aim, the highest ambition of their muse, and the utmost they can perform. (p. 221)

Gildon scorned those who confused skill in rhyme and smoothness of versification with genuine poetic merit. In the preface to Examen Miscellaneum (1702) he wrote,

The casting off Rhime . . . is something necessary in order to reform our vitiated Taste of Poetry, which often Palates wretch'd Stuff dress'd up in Rhime, that it would nauseate if depriv'd of the jingle; which once laid aside, the true Beauties of Poetry would be more our Study, and applause not so partial . . . . rhyme is no necessary adjunct, or true ornament of a Poem, or good Verse, but the Invention of a Barbarous age to set off Wretched Matter and Lame Metre.

In a Grammar of the English Tongue (1711) he wrote that "the Learner must not fancy, that to write a Verse, or conclude a Rhyme, gives the title of Poet" (p. 163) and in The Complete Art of Poetry (1718) he declared that

Smoothness of Verse is now become so common that it loses the name of a distinguishing Perfection . . . . yet this is a quality that gives the glorious name of Poets to follows without warmth, without judgment, without imagination. (ix) For 'tis not the verse, but the Framing admirable images of Virtues, Vices, or whatever else affords that delightful instruction, which distinguishes, and gives a Right to the Name of Poet. (p. 53)

In Miscellanea Aurea (1720) he scorned "the Versifiers of the Times, who are more despicable Fellows than the very Ballad mongers of the Age." (p. 294). In The Laws of Poetry (1721) he "would not be suppos'd to condemn numbers and good versification . . . nor deny that some of our own Poets have carry'd the excellence of numbers almost as far as the nature of our tongue will bear; I only contend that versification is not the principal part of poetry." (p. 8) ". . . for wherever there is force and genius exprest in numbers and harmony, we shall find there is not the least occasion for rhime." (p. 65) "Number and rhime are but vulgar arts, mean and low accomplishments, and mere superficial parts, that have no share in the essence of poetry . . . ."

Gildon has thus decisively recorded his conviction that figurative language, witty phrases, beauties of diction, and rhyme—the "fine things" widely praised in his day—were at best mere embellishments, always to be strictly subordinated to his sine qua non of poetic excellence, "design." Nor did he fail to express himself upon such other currently bruited cruxes as imitation, translation, the relative value of the several forms of literature, and that bete noire of the critics, opera.

On the first of these, imitation, Gildon wrote, "Poetry . . . is an art of Imitating . . ."; [44] "the very Nature of Poetry itself is Imitation". [45] "Poetry in all its Parts is an Imitation"; [46] "Tho number and Harmony have

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44. Complete Art, p. 51.

45. Examen Miscellaneum, p. 157.

46. Complete Art, p. 157.

been allow'd likewise one of the causes of Poetry, yet Imitation is the most valuable Part."[47] Poets should "borrow not any thing of what is, has been, or shall be, but delineate what may, or should be. These indeed are Prophets or Poets, in the original Sense of the Name, as making only to imitate, and imitating, only to instruct and delight to move Men's Inclinations to assume that Goodness to which they are mov'd."[48]

The second, translation, was another oft-mooted question of Gildon's day. He held that "a Poet is a much more excellent Thing, than any Translator can be; for he that deserves that Name, must discover a supream Judgment and Genius, and such great Qualities, as have given Life to Homer, Sophocles, Euripides, Virgil for so many Hundred years."[49] As early as 1680 Dryden had reduced the various modes of translation to three heads: metaphrase, or literal translation; paraphrase, in which the sense rather than the words of the original is followed; and imitation, in which both sense and words are altered at will . . . ."[50] Like Dryden,[51] Gildon argued for paraphrase because

> Every Language has its Peculiar Beauty that is not Communicable with another Tongue; besides some Idioms which cannot be translated without absurdity. The Translator ought therefore chiefly to mind the Sense of the author, and endeavour to express that with Beauty and Energy in the Speech he translates into; which he cannot miss if he be master of his Subject, and of both the Languages, and use a Just application. And he is but a very superficial Hypercritic, who will cavil at the Interpretation of a Word, as not fully Express'd, provided the Sense of the Author be so. For a Verbatim Translation must always be a Wretched Performance."[52]

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47. Complete Art, p. 88.

48. Complete Art, p. 52.

49. Complete Art, p. xv. But in 1718 perhaps this was a pointed effort to belittle Pope's financially successful translation of Homer.

50. Seventeenth Century Critical Essays, I, lvi.

51. John Dryden, The Life of Lucian (v. I of The Works of Lucian, London, 1711), p. 61.

52. The Works of Lucian (London, 1711), II, preface.

Gildon's contempt for the sort of translation which leans upon accompanying notes was intensified by the appearance of Pope's Homer; and like Addison, Tickell, and others he doubted Pope's learning: "I can't help observing, that some of the zealous Partizans of the subscrib'd Translation, express a mighty Astonishment at the Notes it is set out with; but alas! That is only the Labour of the Hand, a meer Transcript from Authors who have gone before, and give not the least Addition to the Merit of the Translation."53

On yet another crux, the relative value of the several genres of poetry, Gildon declared that poetry to be most excellent from which "mankind derives the greatest benefit . . . in the regulation of their passions, refining their manners, and the discovery and correction of their follies and vices."54 He cited Vossius, Rapin, and the Duke of Buckingham to the effect that "The Epic is the greatest and most noble in Poesy,"55 but he elsewhere spoke of "Tragedy, which is the most noble Imitation; in which all the Parts of an Heroic Poem are compris'd."56 and later wrote that poetry is the most valuable which moves the most; and this will evidently give the preference to Tragedy above all other kinds of poetry."57

Although satire was dominant in his age, Gildon not only asserted its inferiority to tragedy and epic but also contrasted it unfavorably to its Roman model. Very early in his career in the dedicatory epistle to his Miscellany Poems upon Several Occasions (1692) he questioned the efficacy of satire.

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53. Complete Art, xiii.
54. Laws of Poetry, p. 126.
55. Complete Art, p. 270.
56. Complete Art, p. 132.
57. Laws of Poetry, p. 8.

The greatest Patrons of Satyr, I am sure, cannot prove that it answers the End, they pretend it was design'd for, viz. the REFORMATION of VICE . . . . For instead of Reforming Vice it only gratifies the ill-nature of most, and that criminal delight they have in hearing another abus'd . . . . Panegyric paints Vertue, in its most taking colours, and shews the more beautiful parts of mankind, whilst Satyr is continually raking in the Augean Stable of its Follies and Vices. Panegyric gives a noble and taking Prospect of Virtue, stirring up Emulation in others, and a caution in him that is Prais'd, not to be guilty of anything contrary to the character the World has of him, that he may be thought really to deserve it . . . . But in Epic poesie and Panegyric all goes in the clear, and evident affirmative, presenting so exact a portraiture of Vertue, that you can't mistake, or not know it at first sight . . . . Panegyric is like a lawful and mild Prince, that wins obedience by Love: Whilst Satyr like a Tyrant would force it by threats and servile fear.[58]

He further argued that

The name of Satire in Latin is not less proper for discourses that recommend virtue, than to those that are design'd against vice . . . . but Satire with us is taken to be something very malicious, sharp, and biting, something that consists wholly of invectives, and railing at particular persons . . . . and this misunderstanding . . . has with us made lampoons or copies of verses stuft with scurrillity and scandal . . . pass so currently for Satire, that the general readers have no other idea of that poem.[59]

Gildon also left several bits of decided opinion on the worth of other genres. Although he believed that "of all the works in Verse which the ancients have left us, the Epigram is of much the least consideration . . . I am yet for retaining it as a separate Body; that the lovers of pert Turns, quaint Thoughts, and Point may have some way of venting themselves, so as not to corrupt the other parts of poetry with it."[60] He valued "the true and genuine Simplicity of the Pastoral, both in the Diction and in the Sentiments."[61] Although "our songs are the lowest sort of poetry . . . they are capable of

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58. Miscellany Poems upon Several Occasions, ed. Charles Gildon (London, 1692), dedication—hereafter cited as Miscellany Poems . . . Occasions.

59. Laws . . . Poetry, pp. 135-37.

60. Complete Art, pp. 148-49.

61. Complete Art, p. 157.

affording something very agreeable but they do not deserve to be join'd to the great ode of the ancients because our songs are all made and design'd for musick, and for that end are confin'd to a very few verses."[62] Although he admired the Pindaric ode because it celebrates great subjects he cautioned that "it always treats in the most sublime and lofty manner, with the highest warmth, and so great an extravagance of fancy that it is apt to hurry the writer away beyond all the bounds of reason and judgment, and sometimes makes him deviate into the borders of nonsense, under the specious name of a heated imagination and poetic enthusiasm."[63]

Although in his earlier years Gildon had added music and operatic effects to some of his own plays, by 1710 he feared that music and show were usurping the place of more legitimate dramatic concerns. "Music . . . ought still, as originally it was, to be mingled with the Drama, where it is subservient to Poetry, and comes into the Relief of the Mind, when that has been long intense on some noble Scene of Passion, but ought never to be a separate Entertainment of any Length."[64] As for songs or dialogues in song, "tho' we allow the Vocal the Preheminance of all other sorts of Music, yet we cannot without the greatest absurdities receive even that on Subjects improper for it, or in a manner unnatural, that is, as it appear'd to us in our opera's."[65]

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62. Laws . . . Poetry, p. 83.

63. Laws . . . Poetry, p. 105.

64. Life . . . Betterton, p. 158.

65. Life . . . Betterton, p. 158.

He reserved his special spleen for operas, with which "the Town . . . has been perfectly intoxicated, and in that drunken Fit has thrown away more thousands of Pounds for their Support, than would have furnished us with the best Poetry, and the best Music in the World, without declaring against common Sense;"[66] and this public taste convinced him that "the Degeneracy of the Age is but too apparent, in the setting up and encouraging so paltry a Diversion, that has nothing in it either manly or noble."[67]

This review of Gildon's opinions has shown that he took decided stands upon the chief cruxes of contemporary literary criticism. After a brief youthful enthusiasm for the moderns he grew ever more displeased with them until eventually he became a determined champion of the ancients, and in similar fashion he began as an extreme Shakespeare defender, soon modified his attitude to admiring but judicious appraisal, and concluded by somewhat reluctantly admitting that the Greek tragedians surpassed Shakespeare. Throughout his career he opposed the Collier arguments and vehemently urged the stage's potential for the encouragement of virtue and the improvement of public morality. Although he admitted genius to be the prime requisite of great writing, he valued judgment and art as necessary complements. He considered fancy less important than imagination and "design" to be far superior to such mere "fine things" as figurative language, diction, wittiness, smooth versification, and rhyme. Like Aristotle he asserted the paramount place of imitation, and in translation he followed Dryden's middle

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66. Life . . . Betterton, p. 158.

67. Life . . . Betterton, p. 169.

road of verity to sense but liberty of language. He believed that of all genres tragedy, epic, and satire were in that order most valuable. Finally, he quarreled with the contemporary notion of satire, and he abominated opera.