

SYMMETRY AS A CONCEPT IN THE THINKING AND WRITINGS OF JOHN DRYDEN

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Abstract: *The paper investigates the life, thinking and writing of John Dryden, the leading literary representative of the second half of the seventeenth century in England, as to the phenomenon of symmetry as a concept and mental attitude. This 'symmetrical' attitude is to be seen in his openmindedness, tolerance and scepticism, his way of rethinking and redefining important issues of literature and the theatre as well as recreating literary models in translations and dramatic adaptations by adapting them to the special needs of his own time and nation. This continuous qualifying, modifying, and balancing can be proved in his concept of poetry as a creative form of the imitation of nature, his striving for order and harmony in poetry, his attempt to formulate priorities for the creation of an interesting contemporary English theatre and drama, at the same time challenging the neoclassicist rules. It is also visible in his fighting against ancient and contemporary dogmas, his attitude towards dramatic models of the past and present, his ideas about the relationship between practice, theory and criticism, his concept of criticism and patronage and last but not least in his own characteristic position between tradition and innovation. Though Dryden in his works never completely submitted to rationalism, it cannot be denied that he was influenced by it also through his contacts with the Royal Society. One of the most fascinating examples that the paper refers to is his essay *Of Dramatick Poesy* (1668).*

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Along with the Restoration in England went a difficult, yet at the same time thrilling process of rethinking of poetics, literary and theatre practice and criticism. This was accompanied by a trend towards rationalism in the arts, that is to be seen in the context of the challenging development that the natural sciences took at that time.

John Dryden (1631-1700), the leading literary representative of the second half of the seventeenth century in England, was influenced by those new methods of thinking and discussing in the natural sciences. This appears to have been no sudden 'revelation' to him but the consequence of influences from his childhood, youth and education: Dryden's acquaintance with scientific ideas in fact goes back to his childhood. When he grew up in Titchmarsh, he had a friendly relationship with his uncle John Pickering who was a physician, belonging to a professional group that later formed a substantial part among the membership of the Royal Society. At Westminster School under the headmaster Richard Busby he had been learning astronomy. Also during his studies at Trinity College, Cambridge he was exposed to scientific ideas. Students were able for instance to read 'natural philosophy'. Trinity, by the way, used to be the home of Bacon who had inspired the Royal Society's methods. When coming to London, even before he himself joined the Society, Dryden had been meeting various men who then became the leaders of the Society (Sprat, Charlton, Samuel Tuke, Charles Howard of Greystoke). Later the activities of the Royal Society and his contacts with various members of it became yet more important for him. (Winn, 1987, pp. 129, 63).

The seventeenth century in general saw a pursuit of learning, of knowledge and the arts. The early origins of the Royal Society date back to 1646, when Robert Boyle wrote about an 'invisible college'. By 1649 John Wilkins of Wadham had arranged for a weekly meeting of an 'experimental philosophicall clubb' at Oxford. Later its activities were transferred to the Bull's Head Tavern in Cheapside, London and then to Gresham College. Fifty-five members belonged to this club already by the end of 1660 and on July 15 the Royal Society was given a charter of incorporation by King Charles II. The founding members to whom Christopher Wren belonged for instance were mostly scientists. At the beginning the Society was concerned above all about the advancement of experimental science. Yet, as there were no sharply drawn boundaries, intellectuals from various backgrounds of society and various faiths and confessions soon gathered in that association, which quickly comprised over two hundred members. (Winn, 1987, p. 123 and Foss, 1971, p. 27).

Dryden contributed, together with Sir Robert Howard, and signed prefatory poems to the scientist and antiquary Walter Charlton's *Chorea Gigantum* (1662). Charlton was an active member of the Royal Society; in his book, he elaborated the theory that Stonehenge used to be a site for the coronation of Danish kings in contrast to Inigo Jones's theory of Stonehenge as a Roman temple. Dryden's poem gave praise to the Royal Society and may have led to the fact that Charlton proposed him as a Fellow. Dryden joined the Society in 1662. Pepys, Evelyn and Aubrey fitted in as well as other

more strict scientists. Other poets such as Denham, Waller, and Cowley were also members, yet not very active ones. Yet after his becoming a member there is no evidence that Dryden attended the meetings. In 1664 he became involved in the Committee for improving the English language, but the project came to nothing. In 1666 he was expelled with other members in arrears of dues. Nonetheless he inserted a kind *Apostrophe to the Royal Society* into his *Annus Mirabilis*. At least it is evident that he needed the Society no more to make important social and professional contacts. Parts of the Society's reform program might even have seemed inimical to poetry because they were directed against rhetoric and metaphor. (Winn, 1987, pp. 123, 128-31).

Despite some criticism of the institution it was generally well-approved of, which can also be seen in the fact that its method were imitated in other fields of interest and knowledge. For Dryden, who seems not to have been interested in attending the meetings on a regular basis, the Society, its methods and aims were obviously appealing for other reasons: It was its Baconian open-mindedness as contrasting with Aristotelian dogma and the political and religious dogmatism of the Civil War and Interregnum that were fascinating for him. The society united men of a wide political and religious range. This is what might have inspired Dryden because he had undergone a very peculiar development: He was reared by conservative representatives of the Puritan gentry of Titchmarsh. The county was characterized by close contacts between catholics and protestants, an influence that became significant for Dryden's later development in political but also aesthetic and stylistic terms: Reared by Puritans he at first represented the Restoration Anglican Settlement before converting to Catholicism in 1685. His education at Westminster School under the royalist headmaster Richard Busby became important for his turning to Royalism as a style and political view after the Cromwell era. (Bimberg, 1995, pp. 4 ff.)

As he was used to be exposed to diverse and even contradicting influences, the scientific idea might have been particularly appealing to Dryden because it meant a discussion of opposing or contradicting opinions on certain subjects, displaying a fundamentally sceptical, i.e. questioning approach to things. Consequently, symmetry in Dryden is to be seen primarily as a concept and mental attitude that he brought and applied to quite a number of issues. It mainly crystallized in his open-mindedness, tolerance, well-balancedness, but also in his rationalism and scepticism, his way of rethinking and redefining important issues of literature and the theatre as well as recreating literary models in translations and dramatic adaptations by adapting them to the special needs of his own time and nation. This continuous qualifying, modifying, and balancing can best be seen in his artistic achievements and aesthetic judgements.

1. DRYDEN'S CONCEPT OF POETRY AS A CREATIVE FORM OF THE IMITATION OF NATURE

The full impact of Dryden's contribution to literary history and theory becomes visible in his concept of poetry as a creative form of the imitation of nature, which is at the core of his creative writing and which he also put into more theoretical reflections in various prefaces and essays. His challenging position between tradition and innovation is based not on a simple neoclassicist exegesis of long-standing poetic authorities, but on a special rereading and reworking of creative as well as poetological works transmitted from antiquity through the medieval age and the Renaissance to his own age. Judging from the late seventeenth century and an incredibly profound knowledge in ancient and modern literature, Dryden surveyed, scrutinized and checked what was available, letting his findings result in a modification of traditional literary theory that takes into consideration the context of his own time and nation (Bimberg, 1990).

The mimetic concept of poetry used to be the dominating literary theory since Aristotle and the revival of his elaborations after the rediscovery of his *Poetics* in the sixteenth century. The symmetrical attitude of Dryden becomes visible in the fine balance of his own theoretical approach: He did not simply throw the ancient authority on poetic questions aside, but he studied Aristotle and his succeeding commentators closely, seriously questioning the rigidity of interpretations of the master's positions and finally giving the central category 'imitation of nature' quite a different turn of definition. He applied it to a creative form of imitation of the material and spiritual reality. The knowledge of nature, which for Dryden is unlimited and invariable in the sense that it will always be an object of literary reflection, as well as of the way the best poets strove to imitate it fittingly and effectively, becomes for him the supreme premise, the basic aesthetic principle and strategy of poetic effects in his literary theory. Imitation of nature and its practical realization in creative writing according to Dryden decides whether a work of literature is able to realize its potential of effects, whether it is able to appeal to the readers or spectators, to reach and influence them and to establish - expressed with a modern term - literary communication with the recipient. But Dryden declares only those forms of imitation as legitimate ones that are creative and ingenious, forms of imitation that orientate themselves in a stimulating way on the merits of literary masterpieces. Copies of copies is his pejorative term for new literary products that imitate already existing models in a slavish and servile way, without enriching the work by contributions of its own.

Consequently, Dryden approaches other fundamental issues of poetics and creative writing: the relationship between historical truth and poetic fiction, the extent of poetic invention, the role and extent of poetic licence in general. It is in this special case that he displays a truly symmetrical, i.e. well-balanced attitude: Dryden pleads in a pointed way for poetic licence, simultaneously giving the premise of the imitation of nature its due: Poetry is essentially characterized by fictionality, which implies the right to poetic licence. It is particularly the part of the poet's imagination and poetic invention during

the process of imitation that according to Dryden's poetics makes all the difference between a dull copy that is completely true to nature, and a creative new production. In other words: A creative production is legitimized by poetic invention only (Dryden, Pref. All V, 326; Pref. Ev. Love III, 252-3; Pref. Troil. VI, 256).

Simultaneously, the legitimate boundaries of poetic licence are determined for Dryden by the principle of imitation. The extent of poetic licence depends for him on the object of imitation, the subject that a poet is writing about, the demands made by the genre in which he is writing and the special effects that the poet intends to work upon the recipients. Poetic licence for him represents a right of the poets by birth, handed down by the great literary models of the past to contemporary poets and modified always by the language and the age that an author lives and works in. His symmetrical compromise between 'truth' and 'fiction' is embodied in the term that he coined to express the conflict between poet and critic in his own person as to the concept of the imitation of nature: the oxymoron 'probable fiction' or 'probability in fiction', and in another place when defining the aims and effects of poetry, 'reasonable' or 'sincere pleasure' (Dryden, Pref. Troil. VI, 283; Ded. Love Triumph. VIII, 376; Ded. Aen. XIV, 139; Pref. Troil. VI, 262 and Bimberg, 1995, 16-22).

It is the more remarkable that Dryden did not just formulate positions and attitudes like that but that he also tried to put them into practice as consistently as he only could: in his free translations of famous ancient and medieval poets (Vergil, Homer, Ovid, Theocritus, Lucretius, Horace, Juvenal, Persius, Chaucer, Boccaccio) or his free adaptations of dramatic models such as Shakespeare. As a matter of fact Dryden regarded already the translation of poetic works as a creative imitation of nature in the sense of imitating mental products of other poets or spiritual reality, which for him belonged to nature, too. He put poetic translation on an equal standing with productions of one's own and saw it as a legitimate part of a poet's activities. Consequently, in his view the dramatic adaptation of historical sources or poetic and dramatic models by other authors figured as a legitimate and creative process in the sense of a creative and not at all servile concept of the central term 'imitation'. Adaptation for him forms a significant part of his poetic self-image: As poetry is characterized by fictionality, which includes the claim to poetic licence, for Dryden an adaptation presents rather a special challenge for the adaptor competing with the original author and his work. He does not at all regard it as a plagiarism due to a lack of ideas of one's own:

"It is true, that wherever I have liked any story in a romance, novel, or foreign play, I have made no difficulty, nor ever shall, to take the foundation of it, to build it up, and to make it proper for the English stage. And I will be so vain to say, it has lost nothing in my hands: But it always cost me so much trouble to heighten it for our theatre (which is incomparably more curious in all the ornaments of dramatic poesy than the French or Spanish), that when I had finished my play, it was like the hulk of Sir Francis Drake, so strangely altered, that there scarcely remained any plank of the timber which first built it."

(Dryden, Pref. Ev. Love, III, p. 250)

2. DRYDEN'S CONCEPT OF A WELL-BALANCED KIND OF POETRY

Dryden's rationalism becomes visible in his conviction that it was necessary to write "according to nature and reason" This could be achieved by a fair balance of imagination and reason or fancy and judgement in the poet and his poetry, i.e. the application of rational and emotional faculties. Dryden warns as a poet to rely on inspiration only, then answers his own counter-argument that poetry is not to be reduced to the exactness of mathematics either, with a comparison with painting:

"... it [poetry] ought to be so far mathematical as to have likeness and proportion, since they will all confess that it is a kind of painting." (Dryden, Pref. Notes (P. S.), XV, p. 407; omission - C. B.)

Rules for writing according to Dryden are only meant as a help "to reduce nature into method"(Dryden, Pref. Troil. VI, p. 283). This makes his theory come close to the Renaissance claim to a consciously mastered nature in an aesthetically harmonious form and at the same time testifies to the striving of his age for a systematic elucidation of the world in its material and spiritual aspects. Dryden does not simply want a poetry rich in fancy, bombast and sound without meaning, but a meaningful poetry that is instructive for the recipient (Dryden, Pref. Notes (P. S.) XV, pp. 405/06). His ideal was a kind of poetry that is rich in contents and interesting in form, an ambitious, sophisticated and demanding kind of poetry. In detail this means: measure, proportion, propriety, and effectivity - aesthetically mastered variety and diversity that is characterized by harmony and order. He defined the central category 'wit' as the appropriate (in relation to the aims and effects of poetry) relationship between words and thoughts in literary presentation that has to be managed in a discriminating way in verse and prose and may, if it is mastered thus, cause pleasure of the recipient in poetry (Dryden, Ep. Kneller XI, p. 85; Prol. Oed. VI, p. 135; Pref. Albion VII, p. 228). Yet though the influence of the natural sciences and the Royal Society can be traced in these rational components, Dryden never went so far to proclaim an artless, mathematically clear and sober style - even his prose has been acclaimed for its lyrical character.

3. FORMULATION OF PRIORITIES FOR THE CREATION OF AN INTERESTING CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH DRAMA AND THEATRE

In a well-balanced and sceptical way Dryden was able to formulate priorities for the creation of an interesting contemporary English drama and theatre through his critical reworking and creative rewriting of plays, i.e. dramatic adaptation. In a survey of Dryden's twenty-seven plays and dramatic adaptations of other authors the wealth of international theatrical relationships with France, Spain and Italy becomes clearly visible. Dryden also made use of Greek and Roman traditions and of historiography.

Equally recognizable is that he managed to deal with his sources freely and boldly in an ever increasing manner. Scholarship in the field has rightfully emphasized how important the reliance on dramatic traditions was especially during the early phase of the Restoration. After the reopening of the theatres (which were closed from 1642 to 1660 under Puritan influence) it took some time before the new contemporary English productions could be run on the stage. (Bimberg, 1995, ch. 4)

Dryden saw his adaptations in the light of some broader, more important issues: He aimed at formulating a timely concept of drama that would appeal to the contemporary English audience. The conclusions that Dryden drew from his analysis of old and contemporary plays and through adaptation resulted in the formulation of the following priorities for the creation of an effective contemporary English drama:

- There should be a main action that could be supported by minor actions which should contribute to the main one though and be dependent on it. This includes the possibility of a minor action contrasting with the tragic or comic character of the main one. There should not be any unnecessary, i.e. decorative persons or events (Dryden, *A Parallel XVII*, 317, 318; Pref. *Don VII*, 315).
- The drama should be characterized by a certain inner order, compactness, harmony and logic. The causal relationship between the events is important, particularly as to the raising and calming of the passions (Dryden, Pref. *Troil. VI*, 265; Ded. *Rival II*, 130; *A Parallel XVII*, 316; Pref. *Don VII*, 315; Pref. Ev. *Love III*, 252).
- The credibility or probability should be maintained in the presentation without necessarily following the dramatic unities of time, place, and action or just sticking to what is existing in reality or to historical truth (Dryden, Pref. *Don VII*, 309-13; Pref. *Albion VII*, 228/29).
- Decency is to be taken into consideration in the process of creating the action, the characters and the expression (Dryden, Pref. *All V*, 328-31).
- There should be appropriateness between actions, thoughts and words throughout the creation of the characters (Dryden, Pref. *Albion VII*, 229; Pref. Ev. *Love III*, 252).
- The way the characters are described and created should be a discriminating and consistent, not a monotonous, one-sided or schematic one that extends through the words, deeds, characteristics and manners of the persons (Dryden, *A Parallel XVII*, 320, 321).
- The particular importance of wit and plot for a lively impact of English drama is stressed all the time (Dryden, Prol. *Secret II*, 422; Prol. *Wild First II*, 30; Epil. *Ind. Queen II*, 281; Pref. Ev. *Love III*, 240, 244, 245; Epil. *Henrietta X*, 333). Dryden regards the fable or story only as a foundation or ground work for the drama. Above it the figures and episodes are built, adding to the bare subject-matter the variety and liveliness wished for (Dryden, Pref. Ev. *Love III*, 252).

4. DRYDEN'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS DRAMATIC MODELS OF THE PAST AND PRESENT

As indicated above Dryden arrived at these conclusions by a systematic scrutiny of ancient and modern dramatic models. The experimental phase of the early part of the Restoration resulted in a critical discussion about drama in the past and present. Dryden's famous essay *Of Dramatick Poesie* (1668) is just one example of it. The creative standing out against existing models contributed to the varied dramatic practice of the period and inspired various innovations on the English stage such as the heroic drama.

The plays of Shakespeare and the Shakespeare adaptations of the Restoration became a real touchstone for the reception of the dramatic traditions of the Elizabethan-Jacobean age, because the linguistic, stylistic, aesthetic, cultural and political conditions had changed since Shakespeare's time. Here Dryden's symmetrical attitude of thinking becomes visible in his comments on the dramatic merits of the Elizabethan-Jacobean age, which were quite contradictory. Generally speaking he favoured modern English Restoration drama above ancient Greek and Latin as well as modern French, Spanish and Italian drama. Nonetheless he had to admit that in some special regards some of the playwrights from the 'former age' (Shakespeare, Beaumont, Fletcher, Jonson) or 'the giant race before the flood' succeeded his own contemporaries though they were supposedly living in an age which was less refined. Thus his concern about adapting Shakespeare for instance to the needs of the Restoration age, stage and audience becomes quite obvious: Knowing about the changed conditions for the reception of Shakespeare's plays in regard to language, style, theatre and politics, he aimed at a reestablishment of literary and theatrical communication on the one hand with Shakespeare, on the other with the audience of his own time, for whom the original Shakespeare was not modern and thrilling and sophisticated enough, under the new conditions prevailing - if necessary by sacrificing certain elements and aspects that his contemporaries were not receptive to, yet always contributing ideas and poetic skills of his own (Bimberg, 1995, ch. 4).

5. FIGHTING AGAINST ANCIENT AND CONTEMPORARY DOGMAS: THE ISSUE OF THE NEOCLASSICIST RULES

This whole process of Dryden's systematic search and weighing and balancing did not go on without challenging old and new dogmas. Dryden did not liberate himself from the Aristotelian dogma to fall a prey to Shakespeare uncritically. What he had to fight above all was the neoclassicist cult of rules, though Dryden is paradoxically enough even today still labelled a neoclassicist in many historical surveys of English literature of the 17th century.

As discussed at the beginning, according to Dryden the realization of the potential of effects of a work of literature is dependent on the right imitation of nature on the basis of a certain kind of relationship between subject, means and aims that are specific in each genre. The merit of "rules" is seen by Dryden primarily as a sort of tool for the poetic process, a sort of guidance and help for orientation for the poet. Nonetheless they are not to be followed servilely or regarded as a law or instruction. They are to be made use of only so far as the poet wants to and to be used creatively. The "rules" are there to help him to grasp the complexity of life aesthetically and reflect the truly characteristic features of nature. Dryden's symmetrical attitude lets him formulate a well-balanced concept of poetry: a poetry that is oriented towards reality and near to reality, yet not naturalistic. "Rules" consequently to him are just optional means to achieve certain effects, no purposes in themselves. They are to protect the poetic invention of the poet from excesses and thus take on a similarly correcting function as the critical faculties or judgment in a poet. Dryden regards the "rules" as historically determined norms and values, which have been deduced by common sense from the particular poetic practice during various flourishing periods of the arts. Thus they can have no claim to an absolute or unlimited validity (Bimberg, 1990, ch. 3).

Besides, as to drama, he cannot even see that a strict observation of the "rules", i.e. the dramatic unities, enhances the probability of the theatrical presentation. Thus, similarly to the way that Aristotle's scientific superiority was challenged by the natural sciences in the seventeenth century, Dryden paved the way for throwing the idol Aristotle off its column in poetics:

"They (the rules - C. B.) are founded upon good sense, and sound reason, rather than on authority; for though Aristotle and Horace are produced, yet no man must argue, that what they write is true, because they writ it; ..."

(Dryden, Pref. Troil. VI, p. 283)

"It is not enough that Aristotle has said so, for Aristotle drew his models of tragedy from Sophocles and Euripides; and if he had seen ours, might have changed his mind."

(Dryden, Heads XV, 390; cf. also Ded. Love Triumph. VIII, 374)

6. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LITERARY PRACTICE, CRITICISM AND THEORY

Dryden was in a special situation for being a writer, adapter, critic and theoretician. This synthesis of literary activities enabled him to achieve what he did: He wrote poetry and drama, analyzed his own writing and that of other authors, translated and adapted them, deduced criticism and theory from it (formulating a theory of translation and adaptation for example) and tried to reapply this to his own creative writing and adapting. In the context of analyzing rules he answered the issue of priority in favour of production over theory and criticism: He preferred variety and diversity in practice over following the rules, i.e. theory, without neglecting the merits of theory. Dryden, the

poet-critic, who contributed so much to criticism through his insight and experience as a poet, was able to modify the importance of theory and criticism for the poetic practice. Theory and criticism appear as deduced observations from practice, as poetic disciplines that make sense in certain fields and to a certain extent, but should not be seen as self-sufficient.

Dryden symmetrically and sceptically aimed at something that can perhaps never be attained perfectly: a complete circle between production, reception, criticism, theory and reapplication to production/rewriting. His achievement as a critic consists in having contributed in a decisive way to creating out of a huge variety of contemporary opinions and judgments on ancient, medieval and modern authors (major and minor ones), including blind admiration, opinions with claims to authority, inclinations as to taste, rational and emotional judgments etc., the beginnings of the scholarly discipline of criticism in the sense of a judgment on finished literary products. Passing judgments was a long practice since antiquity, but Dryden did not rest satisfied with that state of things: Firstly he doubted the validity of quite a number of judgments by colleagues, critics and poets, and secondly he did not just want to put works into certain categories after their completion (for example judgments on the basis of genre classifications). He wanted the criteria and standards of judgment that had been deduced from practice, to be applied by the poet to a work that was still under way, being produced or only conceived and planned, in order to give the poetic strategy of effects its optimal due. The crucial observation made by Dryden is that he wanted no fundamentally different criteria for the reception and critical assessment of a work of literature than those that were valid and important for and during its production. Only then a fair judgment on an author and his product could be achieved as he thought. This is why Dryden also took pains to spread his views in prefaces and essays - in order to instruct the recipients in the standards of judgment and forming opinions. It also explains why he as a poet regarded himself as a critic in a particularly suitable position: He was involved in the creative process. He strove to have at least theoretically a certain kind of uniform, homogeneous measurement in literary production and literary criticism.

Yet Dryden was too much a man of practice and the everyday theatre business to believe that he could really standardize the opinions of the readers and spectators. The Restoration was an age of endless satires, controversies, libels, attacks and counter-attacks to an hitherto unusual extent. Dryden himself was involved in quite a number of controversies over literary issues such as rhyme in drama and others. Often he reflects about those polemics in the context of pessimistic observations on his age. He draws the picture of an overcritical, sceptical, inveterate, restless age, that hardly has any artistic taste and in which human values invert or reverse. He calls it 'age of reason' or 'ensorious age'. Often Dryden draws comparisons in his peculiar metaphoric way between poetry/literary criticism and politics: He parallels the politically changeable times with the movements in literary history and the critical debate of opinions and vice versa: At times he even senses that the literary dispute is a sort of civil war (Dryden,

Prol. Albion VII, 242; Ded. Aen. XIV, 62; Ded. Third Misc. XII, 60/61, 65; Almanzor (Epil. Sec. Part) IV, 224; Defence Epil. IV, 226; Ded. Essay XV, 280/81; Prol. Don VII, 320; Prol. Loy. Gen. X, 349/50; Prol. Loy. Brother X, 374/75; Epil. King's House X, 360-63; Ded. Eleon. XI, 126; Eleonora XI, 130, 139; Ded. Duke VII, 15, 16; Ep. Motteux XI, 67; Memory Anne XI, 107; Epit. Winchester XI, 156; Ded. Life Plutarch XVII, 8; Pref. Innoc. V, 112).

7. DRYDEN ON PATRONAGE AND THE ART OF DEDICATION

Dryden's view of the correlation between patronage and dedication displays a symmetrical attitude, too. In his many dedications he addressed noblemen who were often poets and playwrights themselves or at least strove to be so. On the one hand he praised the poetic achievements and critical faculties in some of his patrons or addressees, on the other you see a hardly concealed anger in Dryden about their dilettantism, their ambition to interfere in the serious professional business of poetry without having the existential need to do so. The little formal pieces reveal a subtle tightrope walk of the author - between chumming up to the patron on the one hand, and pride, *self-confidence and an awareness of his own achievements on the other*. Thus the dedications testify to Dryden's subjective consciousness of the changeful times, the literary history of the day and his own position in it. They are fascinating documents as to the paradox inherent in them: the claim to literary eternity on the one hand, and his rootedness in the time and place dimensions of the poetic, dramatic and critical business of the day; the characteristic conflict between his mission as artist and his material dependence, between ideal and reality. They present a sort of wrestling with himself, the artistic tasks and the circumstances prevailing then. Highly aware of the double-edged character of patronage and dedication, of the balancing act between eulogy and demand, adjustment and obstinacy, Dryden's answer to the dilemma was a sort of symbiosis between poet and patron, an agreement on the basis of mutual entanglement and obligations mutually profitable.

8. DRYDEN'S POSITION BETWEEN TRADITION AND INNOVATION IN LITERARY HISTORY

Once again Dryden displays a fine balance and symmetrical attitude: He saw himself as an inheritor of great literary models of the past, but he also showed admiration as well as criticism for his own age. He researched the past and present literary history, denied the validity of eternal literary values, insisted on the right of independent literary creations in the England of his own time and made suggestions for an interesting contemporary English literature. He tried to slip through Scylla and Charybdis, to avoid the rigidity of standards set in different ways by Aristotle, Shakespeare and neoclassicism. Neither did he want to dispense with foreign experiences and insights

nor did he want to subject to them slavishly. He aimed at selection and assimilation through a sceptical approach:

“[I] am too much an Englishman to lose what my ancestors have gained for me.”
(Dryden, *Ded. Aen. XIV*, p. 221)

Consequently, Dryden formulates his belief in the independence of the development of national literatures based on his insight into the ability and necessity and right of national literatures to develop, change and renew:

“Peace be to the venerable shades of Shakespeare and Ben Jonson! none of the living will presume to have any competition with them; as they were our predecessors, so they were our masters. We trail our plays under them; but as at the funerals of a Turkish emperor, our ensigns are furled or dragged upon the ground, in honour to the dead, so we may lawfully advance our own afterwards, to show that we succeed; if less in dignity, yet on the same foot and title, which we think too we can maintain against the insolence of our own janizaries.”

(Dryden, *Ded. Third Misc. XII*, p. 58)

All this is contained as in a nut-shell in the essay *Of Dramatick Poesie* (1668). It reveals par excellence Dryden's ability to question things, to modify and mediate between contrasting or contradicting elements. The essay was put by Dryden in the form of a dialogue, a critical debate between four participants with differing, even opposing points of views on the issue of the priority of ancient or modern dramas. Dryden himself revealed that he adopted the “sceptical” method, taken from the model of ancient philosophical discussions and the Royal Society, because it appeared to him to be particularly adequate for the theoretical issue in question (Dryden, *Ind. Emp. (A Defence)*, II, pp. 307/08). Dryden expressed his own opinion in the part of Neander, defending the contemporary English drama against the ancient as well as the neoclassicist French drama. The essay attempted to formulate general principles of drama criticism and showed the influence of modes of analysis used in the natural sciences. It is not only characterized by a detailed technique of analysis but also by a very elegant style. Today it is actually regarded as the first important document of modern drama criticism and theory.

Apart from this more general influence of scientific analysis on Dryden's outlook in aesthetics and theory, it is remarkable to see that even now and then a particular detail from the world of science has been caught by Dryden in similes: In the Preface to *Secret Love* he speaks of his preference for variety over the symmetry of parts in a play:

“For what else concerns this play, I would tell the reader, that it is regular, according to the strictest of dramatic laws; but that it is a commendation which many of our poets now despise, and a beauty which our common audiences do not easily discern. Neither indeed do I value myself upon it; because, with all that *symmetry* of parts, it may want an air and spirit (which consists in the writing) to set it off.”

(Dryden, *Pref. Secret II*, 418; italics - C. B.)

When speaking about the preventive function of the theatre in the sense that theatre anticipates and embodies foreign experiences that could be dangerous or harmful for the spectators in reality in an exemplary way, Dryden highlights this potential of the theatre in a comparison with putting theories to practice in mechanic experiments:

“Here, free yourselves from envy, care, and strife,
 You view the various turns of human life;
 Safe in our scene, through dangerous courts you go,
 And, undebauched, the vice of cities know.
Your theories are here to practice brought,
As in mechanic operations wrought;
And man, the little world, before you set,
As once the sphere of crystal showed the great.
 Blest sure are you above all mortal kind,
 If to your fortunes you can suit your mind;
 Content to see, and shun, those ills we show,
 And crimes on theatres alone to know.”

(Dryden, Prol. Univ. Oxford, 1674,
 Spoken by Mr. Hart) X, 323/24; italics - C. B.)

The comparison enabled him to demonstrate that through the presentation of human frailties on the stage - comparable with the Shakespearean/Elizabethan view of the stage as microcosm and mirror of the world - theatre may contribute to an ethical and moral improvement of the spectators despite the attacks on its supposed immorality.

A final example for how details from the natural sciences crept into Dryden's writings is to be found in his important Preface to *Troilus and Cressida*, where he elaborates his theory of tragedy. Dryden illustrates the necessity of building a well-balanced plot in a play in order to work the effect of pity and terror in the recipients, which also depends on a sound treatment and natural raising of the passions, by referring to the cause-effect-correlation and Archimedes's engines:

“The beauties of it (the plot - C. B.) must therefore lie either in the lively touches of the passions; or we must conclude, as I think we may, that even in imperfect Plots, there are less degrees of Nature, by which some faint emotions of pity and terror are rais'd in us: as a less *Engine* will raise a less proportion of weight, though not so much as one of *Archimedes* making; for nothing can move our nature, but by some natural reason, which works upon passions. And since we acknowledge the *effect*, there must be something in the *cause*.”

(Dryden, Pref. Troil. VI, pp. 265/66, italics - C. B.)

This demonstrates once more in how lively a way Dryden's mind was receptive to inspirations from completely different fields of interest such as politics or science, and infused them into his poetry, poetics and aestheticism.

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