

CHATTERTON LECTURE ON AN ENGLISH POET

## THE FABRIC OF DRYDEN'S VERSE

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THE modern and the seventeenth-century meanings of 'fabric' have common elements, disparate emphases. When Dr Johnson wrote of Pope that 'he used almost always the same fabrick of verse' he meant that he wrote almost exclusively in the heroic couplet.<sup>1</sup> Johnson's sense is the modern sense, the manufactured material of which an object, most usually a building or a dress, is made. I shall have something to say about that aspect of Dryden's verse, but my aim is to try to go beyond it, to suggest its relation to what I believe to be the principal seventeenth-century sense of fabric: that is, the building itself, the sum of the parts. The seventeenth-century sense and the modern sense are not obviously exclusive; it is precisely their interrelation that is useful for my argument.

I shall begin with prophecy, a device about which Dryden was certainly as dubious as you may be, but which, once he had hedged his bets, he never hesitated to use. As he wrote in his *To Sir Robert Howard*, of 1660:

Yet let me take your Mantle up, and I  
Will venture in your right to prophesy.  
'This Work, by merit first of Fame secure,  
'Is likewise happy in its Geniture:  
'For since 'tis born when *Charls* ascends the Throne,  
'It shares at once his Fortune and its own.'

I shall hedge my own bets by modifying the word to 'prediction'. I anticipate, if only because of the inadequacies of the available editions, that in the field of Dryden scholarship more and more evidence will come to light of his borrowings of words, of phrases, images, and procedures, but particularly the first two, from his immediate predecessors, and from his contemporaries amongst the English poets. I think, that is to say, that the convenient and

<sup>1</sup> Samuel Johnson *Lives of the English Poets*, int. Arthur Waugh, 2 vols., London, 1906 (1952), ii. 305. Johnson's *Life* also provides another relevant usage; of the *Essay on Man* he observes that it 'plainly appears the fabrick of a poet' (ibid., p. 274).

prevalent notion of 'common stock', which is in itself testimony to the situation that I am about to outline, will disappear, and that scholars will find increasing numbers of sources for Dryden in which it seems probable that he has drawn directly on particular poems because they had a relation to his immediate concern in composition—in other words, an exploration of what Eliot was describing when he said, with a sufficiency which is in itself a critical challenge: 'The capacity of assimilation, and the consequent extent of range, are conspicuous qualities of Dryden.'<sup>1</sup> In fact, this process is already under way, and it is its bearing on criticism that to an extent I want to anticipate.

The kind of thing I have in mind can best be illustrated by attempting a reconstruction of the way Dryden may have worked in writing one of his most famous odes. I cannot demonstrate that he did work in quite the sequence I propose; I think also that one obvious question—was he consciously or unconsciously proceeding in such a manner?<sup>2</sup>—does not answer to the circumstances of the kind of process of creation that I hope will emerge from this account. But that is something I must endeavour to substantiate in the description.

When Dryden accepted the commission to write an ode for the 1687 feast of the Gentlemen Lovers of Musick he was dealing with a genre established as recently as 1683, and having for its exemplars a contemptible piece by Christopher Fishbourn, an even more contemptible piece by Nahum Tate (which has the distinction, remarkable in criticism, of being described as 'sugary, simpering, and mincing with almost incredibly bad taste' by so latitudinarian a commentator as Montague Summers), and a workmanlike poem, which Dryden would certainly have known, by John Oldham.<sup>2</sup> What is at once evident in these poems, even in the Oldham, is a lack of structure. That the need for an appropriate structure for a Cecilian Ode concerned Dryden we know from his copy (now in the library of Trinity College, Cambridge) of Spenser. Stanza 12 of the second of the *Mutabilitie Cantos* contains a reference to how, at the marriage of Peleus and Thetis:

. . . *Phoebus* self, that god of Poets hight,  
 They say did sing the spousall hymne full cleere,  
 That all the Gods were ravisht with delight  
 Of his celestiall song, and Musicks wondrous might.

<sup>1</sup> T. S. Eliot, *Selected Essays* (London, 1951), p. 312.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Shadwell, *Complete Works*, ed. Montague Summers, 5 vols. (London, 1927), i, p. ccxi.

Against this, Dryden wrote: 'groundwork for a song on St. Cecilia's Day.' He never used it, though the 'Power of Musick' is of course the theme of *Alexander's Feast*. But what is suggestive is the subject of the Canto as a whole: Dame Mutabilitie's plea to

This great Grandmother of all creatures bred  
Great *Nature*, ever young yet full of eld,  
Still mooving, yet unmoved from her sted

and Spenser's extraordinary extended exploration of, and meditation upon, change, time, immortality, eternity, and the universe, which raises so many of the questions that were to preoccupy philosophers and theologians (and, of course, poets) for the next century. It is no great jump from the Mutabilitie Cantos to Sir John Davies's discussion in *Nosce Teipsum* of the proposal 'That the Soule cannot be destroyed':

*Perhaps* her *cause* may cease and she may die;  
God is her *cause*, his *word* her maker was,  
Which shall stand fixt for all eternitie,  
When heaven and earth shall like a shadow passe.

*Perhaps* some thing repugnant to her kind  
By strong *Antipathy* the *Soule* may kill;  
But what can be *contrarie* to the mind,  
Which holds all *contraries* in concord still?

She lodgeth heate, and cold, and moist and drye,  
And life, and death, and peace, and warre, together.

Which brings us to the actual language of the *Song*:

Then cold, and hot, and moist, and dry,  
In order to their stations leap,  
And MUSICK'S pow'r obey . . .

as well as back to that paradox of uncreation to which Spenser had alluded with: 'And *Natur*'s selfe did vanish, whither no man wist.' We are in contact with both the actual language of the *Song* and with its form when we turn to Cowley's Pindarick on 'The Resurrection', which would unavoidably have come to Dryden's mind since its second stanza was drawn on quite directly by John Oldham in his *Ode* for 1684, 'Begin the Song'. Oldham, however, used only the opening of the stanza, which tells how the years

All hand in hand do decently advance,  
And to my *Song* with smooth and equal measures *dance*.

It was the continuation of Cowley's stanza which stirred Dryden's imagination:

Whilst the *dance lasts*, how long so e're it be,  
 My *Musicks* voice shall bear it companie,  
 Till all *gentle Notes* be drown'd  
 In the *last Trumpets* dreadful sound;  
 That to the *Spheres* themselves shall *silence* bring,  
 Untune the *Universal String*.  
 Then all the wide extended *Skie*  
 And all th'*harmonious Worlds* on high  
 And *Virgil's* sacred *work* shall dy . . .

We are also in contact with the essential dramatic device of the *Song*, a point that can be made more explicit by turning to another Pindarick on 'Nature's great solemn Funeral', John Norris's *The Consummation*. Norris was a friend of Dryden's, and his ode was published shortly before the composition of *A Song*. It is an ambitious, not very successful, piece. It draws, as it could scarcely avoid doing, on the Cowley. And so there are good ideas in it. Norris gets Cowley's 'untun'd' into his last line, the position that it occupies in Dryden's poem, thus terminating his creation with uncreation:

And now the World's *untun'd*, let down thy *high-set* string.

It also introduces one important new device: Time, by means of a somewhat drastic pun, becomes an actor, 'The Antient Stager of the Day', and the image of the theatre stays in Norris's mind:

See how the Elements resign  
 Their numerous charge, the scatter'd Atoms home repair . . .  
 They know the great Alarm,  
 And in confus'd mixt numbers swarm,  
 Till rang'd, and sever'd by the *Chymistry* divine,  
 The Father of Mankind's amaz'd to see  
 The Globe too narrow for his Progeny.  
 But 'tis the *closing* of the Age  
 And *all the Actors* now at once must grace the *Stage*.

The theatre evidently stayed in Dryden's mind also, and I do not think it fanciful to suggest that Norris's 'globe' may have triggered a recollection of a passage which he had once had occasion to excise from *The Tempest*—the pageant becoming not 'insubstantial' but 'crumbling', the transformations ultimate, the ending of the revels final, the Globe, the theatre, itself the operative image. For the essential dramatic device of *A Song* is functional,

turning, just as Shakespeare does, the occasion, the gathering in Stationers' Hall, into a part of the poem's imagery. The last trumpet becomes a real trumpet, the assembly of the Gentlemen Lovers of Music becomes 'This crumbling pageant', and a synecdoche of the Last Judgement. The literalism is stark; the equation, 'trumpet' 'last trumpet', almost naïvely obvious, if not brazen; the effect is totally shocking. Dr Johnson thought the use of the image of the Day of Judgement 'so awful in itself, that it can owe little to poetry'; but the Cowley and Norris Odes by their comparative insignificance (though Johnson admired part of the Cowley) show that it owes everything to poetry.<sup>1</sup> Dryden even manages to extend what we might normally presume to be the scope of the art itself; and yet: 'owes everything to poetry'? Norris, Oldham, Cowley, Davies, are all drawn upon directly; from a distance, Spenser and Shakespeare make their contributions. But what is so striking is the unlikeness of Dryden's material, animated in his poem, as compared to what we might think of as its inert form in his sources—the radical reformation that it has undergone. Dryden has contrived simultaneously to find in the occasion itself his principal image, to use this image of the creation and uncreation of the world as his plot, to introduce as the logical subplot the history of music—Jubal, Orpheus, and Cecilia are each progressively more gifted exponents of the art—and then within this double frame to create a series of character parts which comes, again with an irresistible logic, directly out of an account of the invention of the first musical instrument, and ends its passage from the profane to the sacred with a further movement, where no further movement had seemed possible, into the most awful dimension of the sublime. The affects of the viol (Jubal's chorded shell, the *testudo*), the trumpet and drum, flute, lute, violin, and organ, provide a conspectus of the primary human emotions. In perceiving this Dryden not only found but fixed the form of the Cecilian Ode in perpetuity, and it is as much a musical as a literary innovation, a feat of design which, if it does not impress as such, only fails to do so because it appears so obvious; a kind of 'Try sparrowhawks, Ma'am', which makes a perfect order in a field where disorder doubly prevailed, should we allow Pushkin's opinion that 'Ecstasy does not require any intellectual power capable of relating the parts to the whole. . . . Homer is immeasurably greater than Pindar, the ode . . . stands on the lowest rungs of poetry . . .'<sup>2</sup> and take in addition Dryden's own view of English

<sup>1</sup> Johnson, *op. cit.* i. 311.

Tatiana Wolff (ed.), *Pushkin on Literature* (London, 1971), p. 170.

Pindaricks. These he appears to have recognized for what they were: an invention of the 'happy genius of Mr. Cowley', which gave an apparent classical license for something wholly unclassical, a poem 'like a vast tract of land newly discovered. The soil wonderfully fruitful . . . overstocked with inhabitants, but almost all salvages, without laws or policy.'<sup>1</sup>

I believe that similar accounts could be given of the creation of many of Dryden's poems: of *To the Pious Memory of Mistress Anne Killigrew*, for example, of which Jonson's *To the Immortall Memory . . . of Sir Lucius Cary and Sir H. Morison* is an obvious source, contributing a strategy (in that both poems are not about the historical characters of their subjects, but about the virtues that those characters could be taken to illustrate), a fundamental structural device (the introduction of the poet's person into the poem), and verbal echoes. Less anticipatable as a source is Anne Killigrew's own verse, which Dryden had evidently read with attention and which gave him the basis for:

Mean time her Warlike Brother on the Seas  
His waving Streamers to the Winds displays,  
And vows for his Return, with vain Devotion, pays.  
Ah, Generous Youth, that Wish forbear,  
The Winds too soon will waft thee here!  
Slack all thy Sailes, and fear to come,  
Alas, thou know'st not, Thou art wreck'd at home!

The *Dies Irae* in Roscommon's translation, Nathaniel Lee's *Theodosius* (where the Dioscuri also appear), which provided the image of

'Twas *Cupid* bathing in *Diana's* Stream,

besides two poems by Cowley on the matchless Orinda, together with some others of the poems prefaced to Katherine Philips's works—a connection obvious enough, but topically strengthened because both Katherine Philips and Anne Killigrew died of smallpox—also play their part. Nor does Dryden hesitate to borrow from himself, making extensive use of motifs (the comparison of poetry and painting, the Last Judgement), and details from his earlier work—indeed, even from his earliest work, his *Upon the Death of the Lord Hastings* of 1649. These things all come together in what Johnson called, with reason, 'undoubtedly the noblest ode that our language has ever produced', and are united and transformed by Dryden's development of

<sup>1</sup> *Letters upon Several Occasions* (London, 1696), pp. 55–6.

a dominant theme: an attempt to answer the question 'How shall the poet be saved?' which Anne Killigrew's life, death, and innocence are all made insistently to demand.<sup>1</sup> Jonson's strategy is carried a stage further, and the problem of writing an acceptably panegyric elegy on a young lady who practised, with at best a modest talent, the 'two Sister-Arts of Poësie, and Painting' is resolved by writing a poem overtly introducing Dryden himself, as practitioner of the arts of poetry and playwriting, and the reflections prompted by the idealization of Anne Killigrew that her death has made incumbent upon him. But this very issue is explicit in the first stanza of James Tyrell's *To the Memory of the excellent Orinda* which, like Dryden's canonization of Anne Killigrew, sees Katherine Phillips as a saint, yet in the order of the poets, and which suggests the problem of the pure tribute from the impure vessel. Moreover, in a manner almost alarming in the context of my argument, the second stanza of Tyrell's poem raises abruptly the whole question of design, of scheme, in the Pindarick. What Dryden has done is to implement the notion structurally, and this is the aspect of his poetic gift that I am now concerned to urge.

This is not just a way of looking at Dryden: it is an identification of a method of composition to which he himself admits, and which attracted comment (albeit in an oblique and sometimes disparaging form) from his contemporaries, the most notable, since it cannot disguise a qualified admiration despite its disapproval, being Gerard Langbaine's description of Dryden as the 'skilful Lapidary'. Dryden was fascinated by the process of creation, to the extent that the *Epistle Dedicatory of the Rival Ladies* is sometimes cited, a little implausibly (since it neglects Hobbes, and, of course, Shakespeare) as the first account in English of the psychology of composition:

This worthless present was designed you, long before it was a play; when it was only a confused mass of thoughts, tumbling over one another in the dark; when the fancy was yet in its first work, moving the sleeping images of things towards the light, there to be distinguished, and then either chosen or rejected by the judgment. . . . And, I confess, in that first tumult of my thoughts, there appeared a disorderly kind of beauty in some of them, which gave me hope, something worthy my Lord of Orrery might be drawn from them.

'Judgment' is the operative faculty, 'distinguishing' the instrumental process, 'order' (and here I think we should recollect the

<sup>1</sup> Johnson, *op. cit.* i. 310.

French *ordonnance*) the principle of Beauty. Or we can turn to the first prologue to *Secret Love*:

He who writ this, not without pains and thought  
From *French* and *English* Theaters has brought  
Th' exactest Rules by which a play is wrought.

The Unities of Action, Place, and Time;  
The Scenes unbroken; and a mingled chime  
Of *Johnsons* humour, with *Corneilles* rhyme.

But while dead colours he with care did lay,  
He fears his Wit, or Plot he did not weigh,  
Which are the living Beauties of a Play . . .

to *To my Dear Friend Mr. Congreve, On His Comedy, call'd The Double-Dealer*, where a sustained architectural analogy with a precise allusion to what was contemporaneously happening at the top of Ludgate Hill introduces a listing of the excellencies of Congreve's predecessors which concludes with his subsumation of their virtues, to the *Essay on Dramatic Poesy*, and Crites on Ben Jonson, the 'greatest man of the last age', who was willing 'to give way' to the Ancients 'in all things':

he was not only a professt Imitator of *Horace*, but a learned Plagiary of all the others; you track him every where in their Snow: if *Horace*, *Lucan*, *Petronius Arbitr*, *Seneca*, and *Juvenal* had their own from him, there are few serious Thoughts which are new in him; you will pardon me, therefore, if I presume he lov'd their fashion, when he wore their Cloaths.

Tracking Dryden, but in the snow of his contemporaries, is precisely the tendency in Dryden scholarship that I am predicting and that I have endeavoured, in a particular instance, to demonstrate; and it is an activity for which I now wish to suggest a perspective, a perspective in perhaps a distressingly literal sense, since it has to do with the architectural proclivity of the Restoration, with which I am anxious to associate the underlying processes that seem to me the common factors in the fabrication of Dryden's verse. These processes have it in common that they are structural; and this I take to be an element in English poetry that is both uncommon and, to a certain extent, unpopular. It is certainly untypical.

The architectural proclivity of the Restoration is neatly summed up by Evelyn, who in his diary entry for 4 February 1685, which is, in effect, an obituary for the King, wrote that Charles II loved 'Planting, building, & brought in a politer way of living, which passed to Luxurie & intollerable expense'. Did Evelyn then reflect that on 28 October 1664 he had recorded a con-



versation with Charles, occasioned by his presentation to the King of his *Sylvae* and his translation of Roland de Fréart's *Parallèle de l'Architecture*? My point is not that Evelyn might have done more than a little to whet that appetite the effects of which he subsequently deplored, but that the irony reveals the way in which the two concerns, which have as their common factor the necessity of design, imbued the culture of the Restoration, a culture with which Dryden quite consciously identified himself, of which he was, to an extraordinary degree, the deliberate emissary, a culture which had to it a quiddity, a sense of its own particularity, perhaps unique in English history. 'All, all, of a piece throughout': Dryden's summary in *The Secular Masque* from *The Pilgrim* reveals his absolute awareness of the way he had come to adumbrate a period; and in a sense this is what his poems do too.<sup>1</sup> My account of *A Song for St. Cecilia's Day* may have suggested the manner in which that poem made a number of other poems redundant. 'Who now reads Cowley?' Few people, since what Cowley did was better done by Dryden. Why should Pope have tried to suppress his *Ode on St. Cecilia's Day*? One reason must be that he had come to see that there was nothing in it that had not been better done by Dryden. But *The Secular Masque* is not, as it happens, merely inspired hindsight. It was the Restoration itself that enabled Dryden to speak as a poet. At that time, by which he was twenty-eight, he had, so far as we know, written only four poems. From 1660 onwards until his death in 1701 there is not a year in which he fails to publish. And here I must return to my beginning and bring the poem *To Sir Robert Howard* back into play: his prophecy is in fact far apter for his own career than for Howard's, and the poem tells us why:

this is a piece too fair  
 To be the child of Chance, and not of Care.  
 No Atoms casually together hurl'd  
 Could e're produce so beautifull a world.  
 Nor dare I such a doctrine here admit,  
 As would destroy the providence of wit.

No event in English history was ever more witty than the providential Restoration, and when that Restoration was jeopardized Dryden used the model of wit-writing established by Davenant in *Gondibert* to indicate why. *Annus Mirabilis*, which follows *Gondibert* not only in its stanzas and manner, but also in its latent five-act organization (I cannot at all assent to Ker's description of it as

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Rymer makes the necessary point quite explicitly when he writes, in his *Tragedies of the Last Age* (1678): 'I have thought our Poetry of te last Age as rude as our Architecture . . .'.

a 'series of fragments, with no more than an accidental unity'), confounds prophecy with wit.<sup>1</sup> The Republicans had claimed that God was with them, and saw in the course of history their justification of that claim. The year 1660 had turned their proposition to dead sea fruit, and was, consummately, a witty providence. But 1666, when England suffered the aftermath of plague, the Dutch in the Medway, and the Great Fire, threatened to be, and was represented by adherents of the Old Cause as being, its reversal. In *Annus Mirabilis* Dryden propounded a possible way of seeing the events of that year, a year of darkness, or, if you consented to his vision, of wonders, interpreting it on the same principle, in a poem which was a triumph of design.

The poet as architect is sufficiently familiar as both a topos of debate with which Plato and Quintilian made play, and as a subject of debate which no reader of Ben Jonson could ignore. I am not now concerned with the metaphor, but the particular status of architecture in the Restoration, a status demonstrated, in its poetic context, by John Webb's complaint when John Denham was appointed Surveyor General of the King's Works in 1660: 'Though Mr Denham may, as most gentry, have some knowledge of the theory of architecture, he can have none of the practice, but must employ another.'<sup>2</sup> It is as gentleman, not as poet, that Denham has some knowledge of the theory of architecture, and it is to this aspect of Webb's assumption, the assumption equally attested to by Sir Roger Pratt's observation: 'if you be not able to handsomely contrive it yourself, get some ingenious gentleman who has seen much of that kind abroad . . . to do it for you', that I want to draw attention.<sup>3</sup> The tardiness of Sir Christopher Wren's discovery of his avocation as architect is as striking as the tardiness of Dryden's discovery of his avocation as poet. What is more, Wren had himself, in his translation of Horace's *Epistle to Lollius*, essayed poetry, and in 1663 in conversation expressed views on wit sufficiently striking for his friend Thomas Sprat to write them down, develop them, and then report them back to their originator: the Wit of Discourse

uses the best and easiest Words, is not the first that takes up new ones, nor the last that lays down old ones. But above all, its chiefest Dominion is in forming new Significations, and Images of Things and Persons. And this may be so suddenly practised, that I have known in one

<sup>1</sup> John Dryden, *Essays*, ed. W. P. Ker, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1900), i, p. xxxiii.

<sup>2</sup> Howard Colvin, *A Biographical Dictionary of British Architects and Craftsmen* (London, 1978), p. 258.

<sup>3</sup> Sir Roger Pratt, *The Architecture*, ed. R. T. Gunther (Oxford, 1928), p. 60.

Afternoon, new Stamps, and Proverbs, and Fashions of Speech raised, which were never thought of before, and yet gave Occasion to most delightful Imaginations . . . Wit consists in a right ordering of Things and Words for Delight.

Sprat ends by lamenting, in verse wittily symptomatic of the disease he describes, the fact that 'All the World are at present Poets', and by asking 'What is to be done with this furious Generation of Wits and Writers?'<sup>1</sup>

I think this offers a clue as to Dryden's discovery of himself as a poet, and his practice as a writer. It is debatable whether Sir John Denham was ever the architect of a building, but there has never been any question that he was the architect of a poem in which the two senses of fabric coinhere. The achievement of *Cooper's Hill*, which opens with an allusion, by means of Waller's poem on the occasion, to Inigo Jones's beautifying and regularizing of Old St. Paul's, is the stance of the poet, independent of Royal Windsor and rebellious Runnymede, who equates himself with the river upon which both places stand:

O could I flow like thee, and make thy stream  
My great example, as it is my theme!  
Though deep, yet clear, though gentle, yet not dull,  
Strong without rage, without o'erflowing full;

lines which Dryden both commended in his criticism, and, in his poem to *Sir Robert Howard*, imitated:

Yet as when mighty Rivers gently creep,  
Their even calmnesse does suppose them deep,  
Such is your Muse: no Metaphor swell'd high  
With dangerous boldnesse lifts her to the sky . . .  
So firm a strength, and yet withall so sweet,  
Did never but in *Sampson's* Riddle meet.

It is Dryden's prompt perception of the importance of this, rather than his imitation, that signifies. This is not to deny that he responded to the fabric of the heroic couplet as it was employed by Denham: he manifestly did so, to the extent of writing blank verse which is really disguised couplets, and using broken couplets, as the normative and restraining form, in his Pindarick Odes. But what I think him to have found far more compelling was Denham's equation of viewpoint and Archimedean point; the balance of the couplet inherent in the balance of the composition.

In his *Declaration of the Aeneis* to the Marquess of Normanby Dryden recounts that he

<sup>1</sup> Stephen Wren, *Parentalia* (London, 1750), pp. 258-9.

had also studied *Virgil's* Design, his disposition of it, his Manners, his judicious management of the Figures, the sober retrenchments of his Sense, which always leaves somewhat to gratifie our imagination, on which it may enlarge at pleasure; but above all, the Elegance of his Expressions, and the harmony of his Numbers. For . . . the words are in Poetry, what the Colours are in Painting. If the Design be good, and the Draught be true, the Colouring is the first Beauty that strikes the Eye.<sup>1</sup>

'If the Design be good, and the Draught be true'; it is the essential precondition, and the metaphor runs throughout Dryden's criticism: 'But in a room contrived for state, the height of the roof should bear a proportion to the area: so in the heightenings of poetry, the strength and vehemence of figures should be suited to the occasion, the subject, and the persons.' Dryden's admission in his dedication to *Troilus and Cressida* (1679) that he was 'often put to a stand, in considering whether what I write be the Idiom of the Tongue . . . And have no other way to clear my Doubts, but by translating my English into Latine, and thereby trying what sense the words will beare in a more stable Language', is interesting not so much for what it may or may not have to tell us about the state of English, or Dryden's Latinity, as for what it reveals about Dryden's reflex of thought, his capacity for an immediate shift into another mode of conceptualizing the matter. Dryden's translations also signify here, first in their quantity, the extent to which they are his preferred mode (over half his published verse, it has been estimated, is translation), secondly in their customary procedures—the use of a multiplicity of texts, commentaries, and existing English versions. There is, in this process, an assumption of an underlying recoverable form, which is equally the assumption that could cause him, in the *Fables*, to make a passage of Chaucer comprehend a passage of Lucretius—and the effect is not of anything applied, not of superimposition, but of something derived from the essence of the concerns which Aristotle, Lucretius, Chaucer, Robert Burton, and Dryden had in common. And I must emphasize that I consider this as much a matter of the ectomorph as of the endomorph, of the perception of the space created by a structure as of the scaffolding itself, the space implied by Dryden when he said of 'piety' in its Virgilian application to Aeneas, that 'the word in Latin is more full than it can possibly be expressed in any modern language' and which he himself consistently exploited, as when, in *To the Pious Memory* he described Anne Killigrew as '. . . yet a young Probationer, / And Candidate of Heav'n'.

This radical cast of mind in Dryden emerges in many different

ways: in the way he takes over existing mythologies or devices and inverts them: the prophecies of doom (and the title of the poem itself) in *Annus Mirabilis*, Shadwell's claim to the Jonsonian inheritance in *Mac Flecknoe*, Marvell's sardonic glimpse of Charles as Saul in *Absalom and Achitophel*, the Whigs' emblematic token in *The Medall*, the title of Lord Herbert's deistical tract in *Religio Laici*, the fable out of a low church pamphlet in *The Hind and the Panther*, in the mordant critique of empire ('Here let my sorrow give my satyr place') in the same poem.<sup>1</sup> It finds expression in his recurrent concern with origins—of painting in *To Sir Godfrey Kneller*, of poetry in *To the Earl of Roscommon*, of music (as we have seen) in *A Song for St. Cecilia's Day*—a concern that is as naturally extended to scriptural text as to Stonehenge. This same radicalism has a clear relation to the aspect of Dryden which must have some bearing on the psychology of his conceptual brilliance: that is, his taking of risks.

Such a taking of risks can assume many forms. A fascination with the subject is in any case implicit in the recurrent images of gambling and trade as in the superficially unlikely contest of *Threnodia Augustalis*, where we find both the assertion that

Never was losing game with better conduct plaid . . .

and the equivocal

The vain *Insurancers* of Life,  
And He who most perform'd and promis'd less,  
Even *Short* himself forsook th' unequal strife.

Money is a constant topic in Dryden, but it is never far removed from the question of chance. In *Annus Mirabilis* we have the possibility that 1667 will reverse 1666, the King's prayers be denied, the Dutch enter the Thames, the plague break out anew. In *Absalom and Achitophel* the risk is that the mockery of Charles would not, by its subject, be regarded as worth the end that it achieves (after all, what would James have said had Dryden chosen to treat him in such terms?). In *Religio Laici* the risk is that the acceptance of the critique of scriptural texts will lead to an entire dependence on embodied tradition, and here, of course, for Dryden, it ultimately did. Dryden's Catholicism, in *The Hind and the Panther*, and the position of political absolutism (however humane and qualified) set out in the postscript to the translation of *The History of the League*, are both in a sense compensatory, symptomatic of a desire for certainty impelled by

<sup>1</sup> For *The Hind and the Panther*, cf. Paul Hammond, *Notes and Queries*, 29, no. 1 (February 1982), pp. 55-7.

that almost involuntary clarity of vision that could make Dryden in his first play, *The Wild Gallant*, anticipate virtually every argument for the rights of women that would be advanced in the next three centuries, and in his penultimate, *Amphitryon*, present as bleak a view of the human condition and the nature of human happiness as the context of comedy has ever allowed. It is this vision, too, that informs Dryden's conditionality, his tendency to say, in criticism, 'on the one hand there is this, on the other that', and to plump for neither, just as the opening stanzas of the *Anne Killigrew* Ode begin by postulating two opposing notions of the history of the soul after death, and two opposing notions of the origins of poetic inspiration, resolve neither of these conundrums and, for all that, proceed unembarrassed, Dryden having from these contradictory hypotheses, to which he in no way commits himself, derived a wealth of rich and effective imagery. Hence also, I suspect, the appeal for Dryden of *The Knightes Tale*, that fable in which, so notably, events occur, but in which the moral questions seem deliberately unresolved, are indeed challenged as the kind of questions that we might assume them to be, and which has, as Dryden handles it, that acutely uncomfortable emphasis, so disconsolatory, on the fact of tragedy as, in fact, tragedy. And who, in the seventeenth century, but Dryden would think to compare Virgil to a tightrope walker, even though the image has its precedent in Horace?

Some kind of insight into this state of mind is to be obtained from a reading of Joseph Glanvill, whose sermons, particularly that on 'Catholic Charity', so aided and influenced Dryden in the composition of *Religio Laici*:

He that is extreme in his Principles, must needs be narrow in his Affections: whereas he that stands on the middle path, may extend the arms of his Charity to those both sides: It is indeed very natural to most, to run into extremes: and when men are faln Out with a Practice, or Opinion, they think they can never remove to too great a distance from it, being frighted by the steep before them, they run so far back, till they fall into a precipice behind them. *Every Truth is near an Errour*: for it lies between two Falshoods.<sup>1</sup>

This awareness of not at all an easy or comfortable middle way (the emphasis is Glanvill's) seems to touch a particular chord in Dryden, and Glanvill continues:

The Apostle tells us, that we *know but in part*, and makes Confidence

<sup>1</sup> Joseph Glanvill, *Some Discourses, Sermons and Remains*, ed. Anthony Horneck (London, 1681), p. 119.

an Argument of Ignorance. If any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet, as he ought to know. And *Solomon* reckons it as an argument of Folly; *The Fool rageth and is confident*: and there is nothing that discovers it more.

So we have in Dryden this architectonic tendency, his faculty for strong design, and at the same time a characteristic which might seem to point in quite another direction, though it is repeatedly an essential part of the plotting of his poems: the instant of absolute seriousness that is most frequently achieved by introducing the poet in his proper person, but is also often an apartness, an abstraction, as in the recurrent songs for aerial spirits, or the pellucidity of

Hark, hark, the Waters fall, fall, fall;  
And with a Murmuring sound  
Dash, dash upon the ground,  
To gentle slumbers call.

The moment itself can be illustrated by the King's prayer in *Annus Mirabilis*, when any notion of wit-writing is abruptly damped down, or by the elegy for the Earl of Ossery in *Absalom and Achitophel*; or by the introduction of the poet through the way in which *Annus Mirabilis* is submitted as the offering of a non-combatant who nevertheless, as a gentleman, should have been in the war—'a due expiation for my not serving my King and Country in it. All gentlemen are almost oblig'd to it . . .'. In *Mac Flecknoe* he uses his own creation of Maximin (from *Tyrannick Love*) against himself, just as in the same poem he sardonically inverts his own triumphant naming of London as Augusta, which has been the apogee of *Annus Mirabilis*. In *Religio Laici* the repudiation of Dryden's own poetic gift which is the climax—or rather the climactic humility—of the poem, is clinched in terms of the invocation of 'Tom Shadwell's Rhimes', the shabbiness of which it has been one of the major achievements of the exercise of that gift to establish. In the Oldham elegy he attaches to his criticism of his subject's poems a criticism of his own, the two in conjunction substantiating each other in a manner that confirms the seriousness of feeling, precision of sentiment and absence of hyperbole in the poem. In *To the Pious Memory of . . . Anne Killigrew* he assesses the moral worth of his dramatic writings in terms that go beyond anything that Jeremy Collier was to suggest. In the Prologue and Epilogue to *All for Love* he makes as devastating a self-criticism in terms of craftsmanship. In *The Cock and the Fox* he introduces a disrespectful reference to *Alexander's Feast*. His radical

eye was always turned upon himself (some of the self-criticisms in the prose are quite as remarkable); that it could be so was in large measure a consequence of his adoption of, proclivity for, underlying designs independent of the patterns of human volition and of emotional fulfilment in the sense of the gratification of appetite. When he perceives the 'groundwork' of a *Song for St. Cecilia's Day* it is significant that he sees it as that, as a foundation, as the artist's draught: such a scheme is the necessary armature of his imagination. Indeed, in the *Dedication of the Aeneis* we can discover Dryden discerning his own manner of composition in another poet:

I have already told your Lordship my Opinion of *Virgil*; that he was no Arbitrary Man. Oblig'd he was to his Master for his Bounty, and he repays him with good Counsel. . . . From this Consideration it is, that he chose, for the ground-work of his Poem, one Empire destroy'd, and another rais'd from the Ruins of it. This was just the Parallel.

Saintsbury attributed 'the frantic rage which Dryden's satire provoked in his opponents' to 'a coolness always to be discovered at the centre of his scorn'—an opinion which is quoted where one might least expect to find Saintsbury approved, in the first of Wyndham Lewis's Enemy Pamphlets, *Satire and Fiction*. Yet it is a context that I find revealing. Lewis, in his practice of two arts, aimed for a similar coolness (and it is worth pointing out that the word is Dryden's own: he refers, in the Preface to *The Fall of Man*, to 'the Coolness and Discretion which is necessary to a Poet'). In literature, at least, Lewis seldom achieved this. But when he did it was because of a perception of a form, a structure, the allegedly 'abstract' form upon the necessity of which post-Impressionist theory (not at all, ultimately, a theory of abstraction) so forcefully insisted.

I want to end by postulating two further parallels. Picasso's saddle and handlebars of a racing bicycle that have become a bull seems to me to have been inadequately discussed in the available criticism. There is a way in which the object speaks rather than looks. It is a statement about Picasso's mixed allegiances, to Paris and the north (the land where the bicycle race is a predominant passion) and to the South and Tauromachy. It is also a political statement, since it was made in 1943 in a France divided politically along just such a line as the device, in its construction, premisses, and denies. My second parallel is quite simply Handel's setting of *A Song for St. Cecilia's Day 1687* where Handel drew on a recently published volume of keyboard music by Gottlieb Muffat, the *Componimenti . . . per il cembalo*, to an extent breath-



taking even for the hardened student of Handel as a borrower. Yet the work is magnificent, no part more so than the elaborate fugato of the final chorus, which Handel has constructed simply by orchestrating a conjunction of Muffat's (unaltered) music, and Dryden's words. As with the poems, the act of composition is the perception of this conjunction, the fabrication a transformation. Matthew Arnold, who of course claimed Dryden for prose, nevertheless said something, if unwittingly, for the other side, when he reminded readers of the Preface to the 1853 edition of his *Poems* that:

What distinguishes the artist from the mere amateur, says Goethe, is *Architectonicè* in the highest sense; that power of execution, which creates, forms, and constitutes: not the profoundness of single thoughts, not the richness of imagery, not the abundance of illustration.

In just such a way Dryden created—and often with an economy comparable to that of Picasso and Handel—from fabric, a fabric.