



UNIT 22 THE AGE OF DRYDEN

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22.0 OBJECTIVES

The objective of these units is to introduce you to the age of John Dryden (1631-1700) the most important man of letters of Restoration England (1660-1700), and Alexander Pope (1688-1744). Dryden is said to have exercised a greater influence on the neo-classic age of English literature than any other poet and critic, and his own age exercised a greater influence on him than on any other poet of the time. It is, therefore, helpful to know the **Age of Dryden**. And the influence of Dryden on Pope was great.

This introduction will enable you to know and understand the context of the texts that you are expected to study. As poets, both Dryden and Pope are more social than other English poets. Moreover, British culture during their time was more literary than ever before. We shall describe, in the following pages, the social, intellectual, literary, and religious aspects of the background of their poetry. On reading these units carefully, you should be able to:

1. Describe the society of the poets in outline, particularly the literary scene.
2. Explain terms like The Age of Reason, The Neo-classical Age, The Augustan Age of Peace and Prosperity, The Age of Balance, Compromise and Complacency.
3. Appreciate the emergence of the Common Reader

4. Appreciate the secularisation of English literature and the relation of religion, science and poetry during the age
5. Appreciate how the age is that of the transition from traditional to modern English literature.

22.1 INTRODUCTION

Edward Said, the writer of the famous book, *Orientalism* (1978), said that the sense of being between cultures had been very, very strong for him, and that fields of learning were circumscribed by worldly circumstance. He was expressing the feeling of the contemporary Asians and Africans who study English or some other European literature. The graduate student of English literature in India is a member of this group. This is a group assimilating, and in the process, transforming its cultural heritage from various sources. National and ethnic biases conflict, and cooperate with cosmopolitan tendencies in humanistic studies. There is no doubt that universal poetry, and poetics, must manifest itself in some national, or international language, and English happens to enjoy the privilege of being more equal among the languages of the world.

During the second half of this passing century, literary critics have been particularly exercised over the relation between extrinsic and intrinsic approaches to literature, between form and history, form and meaning, history and theory, mythology and ideology, change of taste etc. There seems to be a general awareness that there are hardly any absolutes in criticism, that perspectivism is desirable, and unavoidable, and that cultural activity is contingent rather than essential for the individual and his society.

The pleasure of reading, and writing, poetry is rooted in a sense of social and historical reality. Poems now-a-days are no more read and enjoyed but studied in the academy. A literate community which enjoys poetry, oral as well as written, is becoming obsolete. However, in this jubilee year of our independence, our study of English poetry should be 'freer' than before. We form an educated elite whose social role should at once be egalitarian and avant-garde.

Humanism, religious or secular, aims, among other things, to familiarise the unfamiliar. Mass media serve this function in their own way, as do literary studies. The growing popularity of English in India shows that people aspire to reach beyond provincial limits. Literature is to language what flesh and blood is to the human body. So English literature is studied.

On the threshold of a new century when Indians seem to be particularly conscious of the dawn of a second freedom, our study of the British poetry of the Augustan Age known as the Age of Reason, Balance, Peace and Prosperity should be relevant to our appreciation of the new ingredients of our composite culture. The modern conflict of religion, science and poetry had emerged in Dryden's England and Europe.

Interestingly, the East India Company which contributed to the prosperity of eighteenth century England was also the beginning of Indo-British relations. What is more interesting is the parallel of the present-day ferment in Indian politics caused by communal and secular forces with the conflict of religion and politics in the England of Dryden and Pope. Of course there are differences, for example, the urge for social and economic justice is greater in modern India than in Augustan England. The most interesting parallel is literary. Literature in modern Indian languages is being influenced by English literature somewhat like English literature being influenced by Roman in the time of Dryden and Pope. What Sanskrit was to traditional India, Latin was to Restoration England.

22.2 THE SOCIAL BACKGROUND OF RESTORATION AND EARLY 18TH CENTURY ENGLAND

The restoration of king, parliament and Law in place of the military dictatorship of the Puritans was the political aspect of the Restoration of 1660 in British history. The Bishops and the Prayer Book were restored to the Anglican church. The nobles and the gentry were restored to their hereditary place as the acknowledged leaders of local and national life. The Emergency which had lasted full twenty years was over. The Englishman's proverbial love of a lord, his admiring interest in the squire and his relations again was as it had always been.

The upper class, however, got soon divided into Whig and Tory. A secularisation of society and politics was evidently taking place. It was no mere coincidence that experimental science and the scientific attitude to the affairs of life emerged in England at this time. The Royal Society was founded under the patronage of King Charles II in 1662. Sir Isaac Newton (1642-1727) lived and died a Christian, but his laws of gravitation, his optics and calculus spread the spirit of scientific enquiry. Superstitions began to be exposed and discarded. Poetry or verse yielded pride of place to prose in literature. Sceptical rationalism tended to prevail in the intellectual and spiritual life. Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) offended the clergy by describing the church as something like a spiritual police force. The 'new philosophy' raised great hopes of progress. A comparative view of the respective attitudes of John Donne (1571-1631), John Dryden, Alexander Pope and William Blake (1757-1827) towards the new philosophy of science and reason is illuminating. John Donne, an early seventeenth century poet, had said:

And New philosophy calls all in doubt:
The Element of fire is quite put out;
The Sun is lost, and the earth and no man's wit.
Can well direct him where to look for it

Donne was regretting the loss of the earlier certainty of mythical vision. Dryden described Reason 'Dim, as the borrowed beams of moon and stars:

To lonely, weary, wandering travellers
Is Reason to the soul; But he affirmed that Reason's glimmering ray
Was lent, not to assure our doubtful way.
But guide us upward to a better day.

Dryden's analogy of moonlight and starlight for reason (as contrasted with sunlight) is suggestive. Compare it with Coleridge's use of these lights in *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, by the way, Pope gave the laurel to Newton in his famous epitaph:

Nature and Nature's laws lay hid in Night;
God said, let Newton be! and all was light.

But Blake rejected the scientific vision, He prayed

May god us keep
From single vision and Newton's sleep

What was 'awakening' to Pope had become 'sleep' to Blake. The dogmatism and mysticism of religion were, however, discarded during the Augustan Age in English literature and society. Blake's mysticism was spiritual rather than religious.

Daniel Defoe's *Tour Through Great Britain* (1724), his verse satire called *The True-Born Englishman* (1701) directed against those who jeered at the foreign birth of William III, the King of England during 1689-1702, his ironic tract, *The Shortest Way with the Dissenters* (1702) attacking the 'high flying Tory', his *journal of the*

Plague year, and his bourgeois classic the Compleat *English Tradesman* (1725-27), apart from his novels, cover the whole gamut of English social life after the glorious Revolution of 1688.

Industry, agriculture and commerce all continued to expand. The peace and prosperity of Queen Anne's reign (1702-1714), the enclosing of fields, the rise of the business class which became the major ingredient of the middle class, are all reflected in the pamphlets and journalism of Defoe. London grew in all respects, and yet it was pre-industrial. To the writer, it provided the world of the city, the court, the coffee-house and the club. It became the symbol of national and civilized life. The exotic imports from remote countries including India made an imaginative impact on the people. The wisdom and virtue of the Orient fascinated many minds. The stability and agrarian-commercial basis of the economy gave the city and the court their urbanity and refinement.

The rule of law was established at the time of the Restoration. The victory of the common Law over the Prerogative courts was confirmed by the Glorious Revolution of 1688. It is a unique revolution in many senses. It is called 'glorious' because there was no bloodshed involved. The change in the ruling dynasty of England from Stuart to Hanoverian was no less than revolutionary. The law was now above the king. The supremacy of law and order made a deep impact on English society and mind. The Englishman felt proud and confident. England appeared to him to be the best country in the world. The self-complacency was striking.

22.2.1 The Court

The 'merry monarch', Charles II, presided over a court in which pleasure was duty. The courtiers, the first leaders of the Whig and Tory parties at the time of the Popish Plot (1678) and the Exclusion Bill (1681), laughed cynically at all forms of virtue as hypocrisy. The corrupt politicians and courtiers found pastime in Wycherley's *Country Wife* (1672) in which the hero seduces women by pretending to be a eunuch. Satire of the time's poetry coming to grips with society. The famous lines of Samuel Butler's *Hudibras* (1678) state the general situation.

What makes all Doctrines plain and clear?
About two hundred pounds a year.
And that which was prov'd true before,
Prove false again? Two hundred more

Dryden's own *Absalom and Achitophel* (1681) the greatest political satire in English, was called 'occasional' in the sense that it rendered into poetry the current political occasion,

But the courtiers were also lovers of art and literature, the theatre and poetry. The gay and relaxed morality of early Restoration society is reflected in the Restoration comedy, the utopia of gallantry and cuckoldom. (Charles Lamb's phrase). The Heroic Drama too was popular for its romance. Pope described the early Restoration court in the following couplet.

No wonder then, when all was love and sport
The willing muses were debauch'd at court

The decline of the court started when the Hanoverians took over. "Metaphorically as well as literally, the whitehall of the Merry Monarch lay in ruins, never to rise again" Charles II's court was not only the scene of much pleasure, liberty and scandal, it was also the centre of patronage for politics, fashion, literature, invention, company promoting etc. But after 1688, the glory of the court declined. Patronage was sought elsewhere, in the lobbies of Parliament, in the ante-chambers of Ministers, in the country houses of the pleasantest aristocracy in the world and finally in an appeal to

the educated public. "Although the publisher became a worse patron than the earlier aristocrat, his role was only that of the middleman between the author and the common reader who had emerged with the newspapers and periodicals of Addison, Steele, Defoe and others.

a) *The Court and the City in Politics*

The court was naturally on the Tory side; the city, which now re-entered the picture, rallied to the side of the Whigs. The light-hearted days of irresponsibility and jollity were soon over. Politics was forcing itself upon the attention of writers who had for nearly two decades concentrated only on amusing the court. **Dryden** was on the Tory side, and **Shadwell** on the Whig side. **Shaftesbury** became the political leader of the Whigs. Normal social relations were strained between the Whigs and the Tories, The Popish Plot (1678) revealed by Titus Oates divided men into political factions. The question of succession was being hotly debated in 1681. *Absalom and Achitophel* (1681) was addressed to the political issue from a Royalist angle. The writer was, generally speaking, either with the patrician or with the plebe. **Dryden** and **Defoe** are typical examples. *Mac Flecknoe* is an attack on **Shadwell** the Whig poetaster. Religious and political factions created literary factions or camps. This reflects society not as a whole but fractured or divided. The later identity of the dominant middle class could not bridge the gulf. A social dissociation of this type creates a psychological dissociation of sensibility. Eliot's insight seems to be right.

b) *Political and Religious Satire*

Samuel Butler's *Hudibras* is a mock-heroic poem, satirising the Puritans. It is "the most remarkable document of the reaction against Puritanism at the Restoration". Butler attacked the self-righteous fools of his time. Moreover, his poem exposes hypocrisy in all the ages.

The civil war had created religious factions. After the Restoration, they became more political, and the real party struggle began with the Exclusion Bill. Before the generation of **Dryden**, **Andrew Marvell** and **John Oldham** are prominent among those who wrote on contemporary topics, particularly the Dutch war (1665), and affairs of state

22.2.2 The Theatre

The playhouse was roofed in, and there were 'footlights; a drop curtain and painted scenery. Women actresses played female roles. The drama was localised in London, and confined to court audiences and the fashionable society of the town. Plays by Shakespeare and Ben Jonson were revived. **Dryden's** heroic drama adorned the theatre. The provincial theatre was to appear later in the eighteenth century.

The king had, during his exile in France, seen French tragedy in all its glory with Corneille. He brought back to England a passion for French drama. **Dryden's** *Essay of Dramatick Poesy* (1667) is a classic discussion of the relative merits of the ancient Greek and Latin drama, the contemporary French neo-classical drama, the English drama of the age of Shakespeare and Jonson, and his own experiments in the serious heroic drama in rhyming verse.

The main types of Restoration drama are: (1) Heroic drama often rhymed (2) 'humour' comedy and (3) Comedy of manners. Players and audiences knew each other. Prologues and epilogues encouraged their intimacy. Dedications were also fashionable. The art of praise or flattery was practised to please, and appease, patrons on whose patronage the author depended for his subsistence.

The Restoration Comedy is the most characteristic dramatic achievement of the age. **Dryden** and **Etherage** (1634-91) were the early poets who closely recorded

sophisticated society in their plays. **Dorimant** and Sir **Fopling** Flutter were satirical characters in Etherege's plays. They spoke in a new style which was called the modern way of writing. Wit and repartee were most prominent in his style. Wycherley was more satirical. Vanbrugh, Farquhar and Congreve were the other great comic poets of the period, Congreve being the most poetic of them.

The French influence inspired **Dryden** to write Heroic drama in which kings and queens, heroes and princesses, are characters, and their problems are the possession of a crown or the overthrow of an empire. Earlier English Tragedies and Histories had been much more varied in theme, and though heroic reflected life comprehensively. The balance of romance and realism in Shakespearean or other tragedy before **Dryden** is more artistic than in **Dryden's** Heroic drama. The romantic exaggeration, the tendency to sustained majesty, was encouraged by the women who preferred romance and chivalry. *Tyrannic Love* (1668) by **Dryden** has Maximin as the hero who defies gods. He is a master ranter.

The courtship of women was tedious in these plays. Eve says to Adam in **Dryden's** *The State of Innocence* (1674)

But some restraining thought, I know not why
Tells me, you long should beg, I long deny,
Jealousy in Eve is portrayed by **Dryden**;
Or like my self, some other may be made;
And her new beauty may thy heart invade

The difference with Milton in tone is remarkable. **Dryden** was adapting *Paradise Lost* to the theatre, and taking 'poetic licence' to suit the age, or rather the court. The gallant strain in Heroic Drama pleased women. Addison records in *the Spectator* (no.40) 'the ladies are wonderfully pleased to see a man insulting kings, or affronting the gods, in one scene and throwing himself at the feet of his mistress in another'. **Dryden** and Lee, in several of their tragedies, practised this secret with good success. The elegance of high society, its external graces, its good manners were heightened in tragedy beyond realism. *The Rehearsal* (1672) satirised the tendency. Bayes, its satirical hero, has been identified with **Dryden**. He admires 'a fierce hero that snubs up kings, baffles armies, and does what he will without regard to good manners, justice or numbers'.

Dryden's defence of Heroic Drama is special pleading and illustrated 'the unsettled condition of literary theory in his time. The heroic play in **Dryden's** practice and theory was in the words of W.P. Ker, an imitation in little of a heroic poem in which love and honour are the main themes'. The unconscious travesty of the themes of love and honour in **Dryden's** experimental heroic drama led him to discover his mock-heroic forte in satire, and the discovery was to suit the age as a whole. *The Conquest of Granada* in two parts, *Aureng-Zebe* (1676) and *All for Love* (1678), an adaptation of Shakespeare's **Antony** and Cleopatra, are **Dryden's** most important heroic plays. They have been described as an assertion of human splendour made, not altogether incongruously, by a court circle whose libertinism did not exclude flamboyant devotion and courage.

J.B. Sheridan's *The Critic* (1779) and Henry Fielding's *The Tragedy of Tragedies, or the Life and Death of Tom Thumb the Great* (1731) burlesqued and criticised the Heroic Drama of **Dryden**.

The Puritan attitude to the theatre was hostile. **Shadwell** wrote:

The city neither likes, us nor our wit
They say their wives learn ogling in the pit,
They're from the Boxes taught to make advances.
To answer stolen sighs and naughty glances.

Around 1680, public interest shifted from the theatre to political problems, particularly the Popish plot, the Exclusion Bill and the question of succession to the British throne.

22.2.3 The Coffee-house and the Periodicals

From the reign of Charles to the early Georges, the London Coffee house was the centre of social life. It sharpened wit and conversation, and concretised ideas. Thanks to the East India Company, tea and coffee had become usual drinks among the wealthier classes. Coffee was introduced in England by a Turkish merchant who set up his coffee-house in Lombard street, London in 1657. Wills coffee house in Covent Garden was patronised by **Dryden** and Samuel Pepys, and was nicknamed the 'wits' coffee house. By Queen Anne's time the number of such houses multiplied. Tories and Whigs went to different coffee-houses. News could be most easily obtained at the coffee-house. Politicians met in coffee houses, but they also had little circles or clubs of their own. Sir Isaac Newton and Laurence Sterne, theologians, Scientists, men of letters or intellectuals did not disdain the coffee-house. It became the school of wit and dialectic. Smoking was allowed, and conversation was compulsory. Pope had met **Dryden** at a coffee-house. Addison found his chief scenes of action in coffee-houses, playhouses and my own apartment.

Newspapers and periodicals appeared during this time. The periodicals like the Tatler, The Spectator, the Connoisseur and the Citizen of the World presented a **faithful** and well-composed portrait of the age. Queen Anne is said to have the Spectator taken in with her breakfast. Steele and Addison not only created a reading public but educated public taste and morality as well. Addison criticised factionalism in politics, promoted secularisation and toleration, and always took the middle course. They sought to enliven morality with wit, and to temper wit with morality. Civilisation through conciliation is the public task they performed through newspapers. This famous 'compromise' led to peace and stability in social life. 'The fair sex' was also induced to read.

22.2.4 Natural Calamities

Natural Calamities like the Plague of 1665 and the great Fire of London (1666) affected British social life considerably. The plague was described two years later by Thomas Vincent in his ***God's Terrible Voice*** in the city of London. He observed how the poor were forced by poverty to stay behind and be devoured by the demon of the disease. "People fall as thick as leaves in Autumn when they are shaken by a mighty wind". Daniel Defoe's masterly account in his ***History of the Plague (1722)*** is better than any other surviving record of the **disastrous** disease.

The great Fire had broken out on the morning of 2nd September 1666 in the north-east of London. By night it had spread along river Thames, and far into the city. On the second and third days it spread on all sides, and subsided on the **fourth** day. Samuel **Pepys** has left a vivid account in his diary. Evelyn had thought it had reached to fifty miles in length, giving the burning city 'a resemblance of Sodom or the last day'. **Dryden's** poetical version in ***Annus Mirabilis*** (1667) has following passages :

'The fire, like some dire usurper', was 'obscurely bred' in 'nean buildings'.

From thence did soon to open streets aspire,
And straight to Palaces and Temples spread.
And now four days the sun had seen our woes
Four nights the moon beheld the incessant **fire**

He expressed a hope which was soon to be realised:

Methinks already, from this Chymick flame,
I see a city of more precious mould;
Rich as the town which gives the Indies name
With silver pav'd, and all divine with gold

The incalculable loss was calculated as more than ten million sterling. Four city gates, eighty nine churches, four hundred streets, and thirty thousand two hundred houses were destroyed.

The name of the great architect Christopher Wren (1632-1723) is associated with the rebuilding of London. His genius, scholarship and sublime imagination glowed into grandeur and beauty in the new cathedral churches of St. Paul's, its Tower, and a series of city churches. He believed: 'Architecture has its political uses; Public Buildings being the ornament of a country; it establishes a Nation, draws people and commerce; makes the people love their country, which passion is the original of all great Actions in a commonwealth.

22.2.5 Social Change

The East India Company brought tea and coffee, silk and porcelain. It altered the drink, the habits of social intercourse, the dress and the artistic taste of the rich people. While religion divided, trade united the nation, and trade was becoming more important. Trevelyan has described the changing Puritan thus:

'The Puritan, sixty years back, had been Cromwell, sword in hand; thirty years back, Bunyan, singing hymns in goal; but now the Puritan was to be found in the tradesman journalist Defoe' (English *Social History*, 295).

A sensitiveness to the needs and sufferings of others, particularly the poor, was seen in philanthropic work like the foundation of charity schools and Hospitals, The boundaries of race and colour were crossed in the humanitarian spirit of Edmund Burke (1729-97) and others.

The rule of law and justice prevailed. The Reformation of Manners was being actively pursued. Drinking was discouraged. Sunday observance was strict. The society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK) and the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPGFP) were founded. The evangelical movement diverted religious zeal to the conversion of the heathens away from home.

The poise and complacency of the ethos of the Augustan Age became evident in the age of Dr. Johnson (1740-1780). Society was freed from the disturbing passions and fanaticisms of the past and was not yet troubled by the anxieties of the Industrial and French Revolutions. Such a 'classical' age regards itself not as setting out but as having arrived. It was a society which, with all its grave faults, was brilliant above and stable below.

Basil Willey described Addison's England as 'fortunate' in having behind it not only the Glorious Revolution of 1688; but such a poet as Milton, such a physicist as Newton, and such a philosopher as Locke. The optimism of the period is also its smugness.,

All the dearest ambitions of men and of Britons had been realised; the constitution had been established and 'freedom' secured; Homer and Virgil had been equalled if not outdone, the law which preserves the stars from wrong, had been made manifest, and the true workings of the mind had been revealed. All these things had been done not only by Englishmen but by Christians. The brilliant explanations of Newton and Locke had not only removed the strain of living in a mysterious universe, but confirmed the principles of religion.

Lord Chesterfield's letter to his son (1750) gives a fair idea of the education of aristocracy. He advises the young man to read Plato, Aristotle, Demosthenes, Thucydides, Homer etc. Latin alone was not sufficient. Greek distinguished a scholar. And the son was advised to mind the spelling of English words.

Swift's *The Battle of Books* (1704) reflects an on-going debate between the champions of New learning and the defenders of old learning. The famous symbols of the spider for new learning and the bee for old learning, or the Moderns and the Ancients respectively were effective, but as Sutherland said, Swift's intention was "much more to maul Bentley and Wotton than to take sides with the Ancients against the Moderns. His pronouncement is less important than his purpose to make the whole controversy appear trivial, a mere battle of books.

Pope's *The Dunciad* ridicules pedantry and verbal criticism. Pope described the lesser breed of scientists "A tribe with weeds and shells fantastic crown'd". Pope was a humanist. Natural philosophy or science and humanism were going their separate ways. The exhaustion of classical and christian mythology and scholastic learning left a blank in the creative imagination. The rise of the novel is partly the effect of the scientific method of empirical observation of society. Pope painted a very dark picture of the change in the conclusion to the Dunciad. He wrote:

Art after Art goes out, and all is night
Philosophy, that lean'd on Heaven before,
Shrinks to her second cause, and is no more.
Physic of metaphysic begs defence,
And metaphysic calls for aid on sense,
See mystery to Mathematics fly,
In vain ! they gaze, turn giddy, rave, and die.
Religion blushing veils her sacred fires,
And unawares morality expires.

Dr. Johnson elevated moral philosophy far above physical science. He felt life as a union of fact and feeling. He represents the common reader with the common sense of the Christian humanist tradition. Literature and science, traditional and modern learning, were parting ways and were to become 'two cultures' in the twentieth century.

Learning in the eighteenth century was 'general, and the specialisation of the modern learning of today was not there.

Science was sometimes made funny, as in the third book of Gulliver's Travels. Technology and industrialisation emerged in the nineteenth century.

The two old universities of Oxford and Cambridge restricted admission to members of the Church of England. The dissenters set up their own academies. Charity schools and the society for Promoting christian knowledge (1699) in particular did much to educate the poor.

22.3 THE INTELLECTUAL MILIEU

22.3.1 Science and Scepticism

Issaac Newton (1642-1727) and William Harvey (1578-1657) were the greatest British scientists of the seventeenth century. Robert Boyle, one of the founder-members of the Royal Society, described his method as sceptical. In the Advancement of Learning, Bacon had said: 'If a man will begin with certainties, he shall end in doubts, but if he will be content to begin with doubts, he shall end in

certainties'. The Scepticism of the scientists of the time was a scientific method based upon the hope that knowledge will gradually become certain.

Sprat asserted that the inductive method of enquiry was better than the deductive. He said that the greek Philosophers, and especially Aristotle, "made too much haste to seize the prize, before they were at the end of the Race: that they fix'd and determin'd their judgements, on general conclusions too soon, and so could not afterwards them, by any new appearances, which might represent themselves'. Their dogmatism was contrasted with the 'self-criticism' or scepticism of the new philosophy. Glanvill wrote that the modern free philosophers were sceptical. They "dare dissent from the Aristotelian Doctrines, and will not slavishly subscribe to all the tenets of that Dictator in Philosophy.

Scepticism, the inductive method of enquiry, and a departure from the classical Aristotelian tradition of learning characterises science. Secondly, Truth was viewed in terms of fact verifiable by reason. Thirdly, experimental and applied aspects of knowledge were valued above the speculative and merely theoretical or ideal knowledge of old philosophy. Scholasticism was replaced by scepticism, reason and experiment.

But this scepticism was not Pyrrhonist. In *The Vanity of Dogmatizing* (1661), later retitled *Scepsis Scientifica* (1665), Joseph Glanvill wrote: 'I desire it may be taken notice of once for all then, that I have nought to do with the shuffling sect, that love to doubt eternally, and to question all things. My profession is freedom of enquiry, and I own no more scepticism than what is concluded in the motto which Royal society have now adopted for theirs, NULLIUS IN VERBA (on the word of no one).'

Robert Boyle also emphasised modesty of expression and freedom of enquiry in his books, *Certain Physiological Essays* (1661) and *The Sceptical Chymist* (1661). But he brought out the difference from old scepticism of his own outlook: 'I do not with the true Sceptics propose doubts to persuade men, that all things are doubtful and will ever remain so (at least) to human understandings, but I propose doubts not only with design, but with hope, of being at length freed from them by the attainment of undoubted truth; which I seek, that I may find it; though if I miss of it in one opinion; I proceed to search after it in the opposite, or in any other where it seems more likely I should meet with it'.

The assertion of Reason's freedom and power was rooted in the 'optimistic epistemology' of Bacon and Descartes, and has been contrasted with the 'pessimistic epistemology' of Montaigne and the other philosophical sceptics (Karl Popper, 1963). Besides, the progress in the sciences of astronomy and anatomy was revolutionary. The starry spheres were replaced by the solar system. New scientific methods and instruments were being discovered. The telescope, the barometre, the thermometre, the microscope, were invented. Medicine, agriculture and mathematics were improving. The circulation of blood was discovered in advance in physiology. .

A current of rational thought was generated by the works of Hobbes and Newton. Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) reveals his practical and psychological bent. He considered man as a reasoning creature and desired him to be "well-skilled in his knowledge of material causes and effects of things in his power; directing his thought to the improvement of such arts and inventions, engines and utensils, as might best contribute to his continuance with conveniency and delight". The 'machine' was to appear in the next century. But Reason was not old logical and speculative reason. Rochester said : Man was 'that vain animal who is so proud of being rational' (*Satyr against Reason and Mankind*, 1675). Dryden too did not hope much from Reason. He said that Reason's glimmering ray

Was lent, not to assure our doubtful way,
But guide us upward to a better day.

The champions of new learning triumphed over the defenders of old learning. Literature and humanistic studies are more separated from science today than they were then. The 'two cultures' had not yet moved apart **from** each other.

The impact of the scientific temper is most felt in the criticism of the time. However, moral philosophy was still elevated far above physical science. The great hopes **from** science of human progress were not unmixed with despair and disillusionment.

Reason and imagination were gradually dissociated in epistemology. Rational knowledge was more dependable or authoritative than imaginative. Hobbes differentiated wit and judgement:

Wit and Judgement : Those that observe their similitudes, in case they be such as are but rarely observed by others, are said to have a good wit; by which, in this occasion, is meant a Good Fancy. But they that observe their differences, and dissimilitude, which is called Distinguishing, and Discerning, and Judging between thing and thing; in case such discerning be not easy, are said to have good judgement.

Fancy here is identical with imagination. Wit or imagination is synthetic or undifferentiating, reason or judgement is analytical.

Hobbes Added:

Judgement without Fancy is wit, but Fancy without judgement not. Locke also said:

For wit lying most in the assemblage of ideas, and putting those together with quickness and variety, wherein can be found any resemblance or congruity, thereby to make up pleasant pictures and agreeable visions in the fancy; judgement, on the contrary, lies quite on the other side, in separating carefully, one from another, ideas wherein can be found the least difference, thereby to avoid being misled by similitude.

In Shakespeare's time, wit had meant the faculty of knowing in general both rational and sensory. In early seventeenth century it was synonymous with poetry or imagination.

Judgement was predominant in History, Fancy, in Orations of Prayse, and in invectives. Judgement became more important, Fancy became of secondary importance. The writing of poetry did not, however, conform to the rationalist theory of composition. **Dryden's** analogical vision is more striking than Pope's but Pope's famous couplet too used illuminating analogy.

For wit and judgement often are at strife,
Though meant each others aid, like man and wife.

Swift's view in the following passage seems to be rationalist and anti-imagination:

When a man's fancy gets astride on his Reason, when imagination is at cuffs with the senses, and the common understanding as well as common sense, is **Kickt** out of doors; the first proselyte he makes is Himself. (*A Tale of a Tub*, Section i X, 1704)

Imagination was confused with enthusiasm, passion and superstition. The enthusiasm of the Puritan had become suspect after the Civil war. The passion for God was restrained. Man-woman relationship was viewed cynically (as in the Restoration Comedy), not romantically (as in the love poetry of the earlier and the later times). Lust or sex and love in its supra-sensory aspect were differentiated, and most love was realistically described as little more than lust or traced to some selfish motive.

'Wit' as a term of literary criticism was undergoing a change of meaning in Dryden's own uses,. In 1666, Dryden identified wit with imagination. Then, in 1672, he differentiated two meanings of the term. And still later, in 1677, he accepted the tamer alternative. Pope's famous description

True wit is nature to advantage dress'd
What oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed.

has been described as "the wittily summarised dilemma of the classic mind in confrontation with the scientific. Nature and art are no doubt different, but the art of expression may degenerate into superficial, artificial forms that may properly state experience. Pope's conclusion in *The Dunciad* states the end of a venerable tradition: Not only grammarian rhetorician, and poet, but Academician, Church Father, neo Platonist scholastic theologian, and aesthetician'of 'light' have contributed to the edifice of humanistic intelligence which appears in the darkly brilliant subverted image of this denouement.

Lo ! thy dread Empire, Chaos ! is restored;
Light dies before thy uncreating word

Writing or written texts became more important than the oral communication of language in human speech and conversation during the eighteenth century. The printing press has contributed much more than is commonly realised to the transformation of the human mind from the traditional to the modern.

The Impact of Science on Society (by Bertrand Russell, 1952) discusses, in the first chapter, how science brought about the change in outlook. The three ingredients of the scientific outlook of the eighteenth century are:

1. Statements of fact should be based on observation, not on unsupported authority.
2. The inanimate world is a self acting, self-perpetuating system, in which all changes conform to natural laws.
3. The earth is not the centre of the universe, and probably man is not its purpose (if any); moreover, purpose is a concept which is scientifically useless.

These items make up the mechanistic outlook denounced by clergymen.

"Eighteenth century materialists considered all causes material, and thought of mental occurrences as inoperative by products.

22.3.2 Science and Poetry in the Augustan Age

Basil Willey argued that the rise of science is causally linked with the fall of poetry which started in the second half of the seventeenth century. Sprat's *History of the Royal Society* (1667) is the first statement of the change. His hopes from experimental philosophy were great. It would turn men to work. It will cure our minds of romantic swelling. It will free them from perversity, by not permitting them to be too peremptory in their conclusions. This faith in Reason and this hope from science was prophetic. Consider the view of poetry in the following passage:

The poets began of old to impose the deceit. They to make all things look more venerable than they were, devis'd a thousand false chimaeras; on every field, River grove, and cave, they bestow'd a Fantasm of their own making : with these they amazed the world; these cloth'd with what shapes they pleased; by these they pretended, that all wars, and counsels, and actions of men were administered. And in the modem ages these Fantastical Forms were reviv'd and possess'd Christendom, in the very height of the schoolmen's time An infinite number of fairies haunted every house; all churches were fill'd with apparitions; men began to be frighted from their

cradles, which fright continued to their graves. All which abuses if those acute philosophers did not promote, yet they were never able to overcome; nay, even not so much as king Oberon and his invisible Army. But from the time in which the Real philosophy has appeared there is scarce any whisper remaining of such horrors; every man is unshaken at those tales at which his Ancestors trembled: The course of things goes quietly along, on its own true channel of **Natural** causes and effects. For this we are beholden to Experiments.

The fiction or myth of poetry and the superstition of religion are dismissed as harmful to the human spirit and personality. Classical myth prevailed in Christian society, and science explained Nature. Sprat recommended the study of nature: There is in the works of Nature an inexhaustible Treasure of Fancy, and invention, which will be reveal'd proportionably to the increase of their knowledge. He recommended to the poet the **presentation** of civil history, the Bible and the 'Arts of men's hands'.

Interestingly: Sprat's optimism about his own country was great. There are very many things in the Natural genius of the English, which qualify them above any other for a **governing** nation. **Dryden's** epic ambition was, by the way, not unrelated to this. **Dryden** also praised the Royal Society.

O truly Royal ! Who behold the Law,
And rule of Beings in your Makers mind
And thence, like limbecks, rich ideas draw,
To fit the **levell'd** use of Human kind.

But his secular Masque, his epilogue to the century, shows that the optimism of the early years of the Restoration had died out.

The relation of science and poetry was discussed also by Wordsworth. Wordsworth described poetry as the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge. According to him, the poet writes 'not as a lawyer, a physician, a mariner, an astronomer, or a natural philosopher, but as a Man. Notice the change in the view of poetry. It is a revaluation which had been started by Blake. Poetry, said Wordsworth, is "the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all science. Poetry is the first and last of all knowledge."

But, in the twentieth century, there has been a steady decline in the status and prestige of poetry and a proportionate elevation of science and technology. The two cultures – scientific, technological and the humanistic were debated by C.P. Snow and F.R. Leavis. In India, too, the literary culture seems to be out of fashion, if it has not already become out of date. The printmedia are now a less powerful means of entertainment, instruction and communication than the audio visual modes like the film, the T.V., the radio, the video etc.

22.4 THE LITERARY CONTEXT

This age is known as the **Augustan** Age in English literature. **Augustan** is an adjective derived from the proper noun. **Augustus** the name of a Roman Emperor during whose reign around the beginning of the Christian era Latin literature achieved great heights. It was the age of Roman Classicism Virgil, the Latin epic poet, regarded the Greek epic poet Homer as his master or source of inspiration and so he is a classicist. Oxford English Dictionary describes 'Augustan' as a term 'applied to the period of highest refinement of any national literature. The English literature of the Age of **Dryden** and Pope is **known** by this term.

The classical ideal had emerged during the Renaissance. Bacon, Milton and Ben Jonson foreshadow the neo classical tendency of **Dryden**, Pope and Johnson. The renaissance English poets and authors were inspired by the spirit and themes of classical literature. **Marlowe**, Sydney, Shakespeare, Jonson, Milton were all

classicists. But after the Restoration the practical application of ideas to the affairs of civic and political life of the nation, contemporary society and culture preoccupied the writers. But their learning gave them the necessary detachment. They compared their society with the ancient Roman. The parallelism of history and allegory was used by them.

22.4.1 The Neo Classical Age

Ben Jonson (1572-1637) was the first English man of letters to present a nearly complete and consistent neo-classicism in his criticism. He vigorously announced the Rules which Dryden modified. The French neo-classical critics like Corneille had shown that the Rules worked. Racine had written plays disciplining his imagination to the three unities of time, place and action. Secondly, the imitation of ancient Greek and Latin literature was regarded as the height of achievement throughout the Augustan Age in English literature. Virgil, the greatest Latin poet who wrote the epic Aeneid, had imitated Homer, the Greek epic poet. Horace, the poet-critic, recommended imitation and wrote satires. The 'Rules' and imitation were the two neo-classical principles of literary criticism. Neo-classicism is differentiated from the Roman classicism of Horace and Longinus. Pope's Essay on *Criticism* is a poetic summary of its tenets.

Those Rules of old discovered, not devis'd,
Are Nature still, but Nature methodiz'd.

Pope advises the critic to study Homer. His own translation of Homer is a great poetic rendering. He says.

Be Homer's work your study and delight,
Read them by day, and meditate by night

Virgil found, says Pope, that Nature and Homer were the same. Aristotle discovered the laws in Homer's poetry. Horace, supreme in judgement as in wit, judged with coolness, though he sung with fire. Quintilian and Longinus are also honoured by Pope.

Dryden's criticism reads frequently like a paraphrase of the Greek and Latin classical criticism. Moreover, the familiarity of Dryden and Pope with French neo-classical criticism is equally great. Dryden's translation of Virgil is the first of the two great English translations of epics, the other being Pope's Homer. The Roman satirist, particularly Horace, Juvenal and Persius, other Latin poets and authors like Ovid, Boccaccio, Cicero were familiar to the neo-classical poets and critics. Among the modern French critics who influenced them Boileau, Corneille, Racine, and Saint Evermond were prominent. Dryden was, however, convinced of the greatness of the moderns as of that of the ancients: "We equal the Ancients in most kinds of poetry, and in some surpass them".

The English literature of the neo-classical age had the historical sense which in the words of T.S. Eliot, "involves a perception not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence". Dryden and Pope were closely conscious of the past of English and European poetry. Pope's brilliant passage beginning, A little learning is a dangerous thing and concluding with the line 'Bills peep O'er hills, and Alps on Alps arise! is a beautiful description of the process of learning particularly for a poet or a critic.

Ben Jonson described Timber or Discoveries made *upon men and matter*, as they have flowed out of his daily reading, or had their reflux to his particular notion of the times. His classical scholarship is impressive, but he accepted the ancients as guides not commanders. "Nothing", he said, "is more ridiculous than to make an author a dictator as the schools have done Aristotle". He condemned the romantic extravagance of his contemporaries. His famous observation on Shakespeare's style

'would that he had blotted a thousand' did not however, show any lack of admiration. 'He loved the man and honoured his memory on this side of idolatry'. Jonson was the first neo-classicist in English criticism, but not a blind admirer of ancient masters.

The major influences on English neo-classicism were religion, the literary tradition and philosophical rationalism. The reaction against the Romantic extravagance of the Elizabethans made the new spirit more critical than creative, more rational than imaginative, more social than individual.

The Neo-classicism of France and England is differentiated from the Roman classicism of Virgil Horace and Longinus. English neo-classicism is sometimes described as 'pseudo classicism', because the poets and the critics of this age were usually confined to the surface and emphasised external form. Rules and techniques are not sufficient. The inner harmony of art and spirit is often wanting in the poetry of this age.

Dryden admired Ben Jonson as the greatest man of the last age, and a professed imitator of Horace. Dryden himself loved Latin and Greek poetry no less than English and French. In his criticism he constantly refers to the ancient Greek and Latin and the contemporary French masters of criticism Boileau Rapin, Le Bossu were some of the French neo-classical critics who influenced him. But English neo-classicism showed its distinctiveness in a supposed native dislike of abstract reasoning and system. In fact it is suggested that the English neo-classicism was never anti-romantic. Milton's *Paradise Lost* is an interesting example of the assimilation of classical learning by a Christian poet.

T.S. Eliot noticed a basic division in the English spirit, and poetry taking place and manifesting itself in the poetry of Milton and Dryden.

Dryden was great in wit, as Milton in magniloquence; but the former, by isolating this quality and making it by itself into great poetry, and the latter, by coming to dispense with it altogether, may perhaps have injured the language. "Eliot's sense of the terms 'wit' and 'magniloquence', particularly 'wit', was different from their eighteenth century sense. The French spirit of the age was, according to Eliot, "Curiously enough", opposed to the tendencies latent or the forces active in Puritanism. The dissociation of sensibility that Eliot suggested had set in the seventeenth century "from which we have never recovered" resulted in the refinement of language and the simplification of feeling. The sentimental age that began early in the eighteenth century" revolved against the ratiocinative, the descriptive". "The poets thought and felt by fits, unbalanced, they reflected" but the theory seemed misleading. Styles were no doubt simplified in response to a critical aim and a need of the time 'Higher' imagination was suspect, but there is imagination in abundance in Augustan literature which gives us fact, variously patterned and ordered, but fact nonetheless. And this fact is conveyed in a vigorous vernacular which expresses its reality. "Whether it is not a misfortune that two of the greatest masters of diction in our language, Milton and Dryden, triumph with a dazzling disregard of the soul" Wit and the soul. Eliot had mocked Arnold's description of the poetry of Dryden and Pope as not genuine poetry because while their poetry is conceived and composed in their wits, genuine poetry is conceived and composed in the soul. Notice that Eliot found both Milton and Dryden triumphing with a disregard of the soul, while Arnold found the poetry of Dryden and Pope soulless and merely witty. If we remember the meaning of the word 'wit' in Hobbes's, Dryden's, Locke's and Pope's use, we are struck by the reduction of the meaning of the term. The change of the meaning of an important word of criticism explains this conflicting variety of opinions.

Some further light on Wit is shed by the opposition to it by Sir Richard Blackmore. His *Satyr Against Wit (1699)*, marks the beginning of the antipathy of the romantic sensibility. Wit was, according to him, 'a principle of universal corruption'. The Tory gentlemen and high churchmen of Pope's day constituted 'the party of wit'. Their

opponents were the rising **generation** of middle class dissenters. Joseph Warton's essay on Pope (1756) is a famous attack on Wit. He asserted : 'Wit and Satire are transitory and perishable, but nature and passion are eternal According to him, Pope "stuck to describing modern manners; but those manners, because they are familiar, uniform, artificial and polished, are, in their very nature, unfit for any lofty effort of the muse."

Freud described Wit as saving of psychic energy. According to him, Wit is a **means** of getting around hindrances to freedom of expression. Wit begins 'as play in order to obtain pleasure from the free use of words and thoughts'.

Eliot's description seems to be the best guide to an understanding of the wit of the Age of Reason. He was thinking of Andrew **Marvell** as the poet who illustrated his idea of wit. "Wit is not erudition; it is sometimes stifled by erudition as in much of Milton. It is not cynicism, though it has a toughness which may be confused with cynicism by the tender minded. It is **confused with erudition** because it belongs to an educated mind, rich in generations of experience, and it is confused with cynicism because it implies a constant inspection and criticism of experience. It involves, probably, a recognition, implicit in the expression of every experience, of other kinds of **experience** which are possible, which we find as clearly in the greatest as in poets like Marvell. A proper degree of seriousness for every subject is a **necessary** quality of Wit. Wit reflects internal **equilibrium** and is urbane.

22.4.2 Language

In the Dedication to the **Rival Ladies** (1664) **Dryden** regretted that the English had no Academy as they had in France. The Royal Society appointed **Dryden** as a member of a **small** committee set up in the same year to consider means for improving the English language. Nothing concrete could be done. Defoe had also expressed a similar wish for an Academy, and Swift made a plea for an Academy in 'A proposal' for correcting, improving and Ascertaining (i.e. fixing) the English tongue'. He taught by example and precept that good style was 'proper words in proper places: He is the great master of early Modern English prose, by the way. The Dictionary of Dr. Johnson (1755) finally fixed and standardised the language.

But the desire to arrest change in language is unnatural Pope could see it. He said:

Our sons their father's failing language see,
And such as Chaucer is, shall **Dryden** be

Dr. Johnson's view in the matter was balanced and representative. He said that standard conversation was "above grossness and below refinement, where propriety resides". Shakespeare was believed by Johnson to have gathered his comic dialogue from the normal conversation of the common man. But **Dryden** had criticised the language of the age of **Shakespeare** as less elegant and refined than that of his own age. Johnson is closer to Wordsworth than to **Dryden** in his attitude to poetic diction and common speech, but in poetic practice **Dryden** was less abstract than Johnson. In other words, **Dryden** was more pragmatic both in his use and view of language, Johnson was more theoretical.

However, Dr. Johnson admired **Dryden** for having refined the language. Matthew Arnold too conceded that "after the Restoration our nation felt the imperious need of a fit prose". The reading public was growing in number. Periodicals like **The Tatler** (began 1709) and **The Spectator** (1711-12) were highly popular because they achieved a balance of fact and feeling. The prose of Addison and Steele became model English prose. Its ease and correctness, elegance and urbanity, made it highly influential. "Propriety, Perspicuity, elegance and **cadence**" were the qualities of good style.

Contemporary standard usage was accepted as the norm. But **Dryden** approved of the language of the aristocratic upper class, the courtly wit, the conversation of courtiers and nobles. Pope too approved good breeding, but the Royal society preferred "the language of **Artizans**, countrymen, and Merchants, before that of wits, or scholars".

The **Augustan** Age was happy in its balance and the **middle** position, away from the wild extravagances of a Shakespeare's fantastic imagination or a Browne's or a Milton's pedantic prose periods as well as from the dull plainness of the uninspired passages in Wordsworth's poetry. Elite and popular divisions of the language of poetry in fact led to two types of the impoverishment of spirit and imagination. The 'sentimental' prose fiction in English crippled the imagination of Dickens. However, greatest poets and writers achieve a classless character. Swift and Jane Austen are perhaps the examples from this period.

22.4.3 Poetic Diction

Thomas Gray (who wrote the famous elegy written in a country churchyard) remarked in a letter to his friend West in 1742: 'The language of the age is never the language of poetry'. William Wordsworth had, however, held a contrary view. According to him, the language of his poetry was 'the language of common speech, the very language of men'. He asserted that in humble and rustic life 'the essential passions of the heart ... speak a plainer and more emphatic language'. He had **criticised** eighteenth century poetic diction as artificial, 'gaudy and inane phraseology', affected and lifeless language, in other words.

After the Restoration, correctness and elegance, clear and graceful sentence structure, cadence in speech and writing were stressed as a necessary sign of good breeding. Affectation, pedantry, rusticity and crudeness were to be avoided. Language was required to be a useful, clear, easy and precise means of communication. **Dryden** suggested that words should be chosen not only for elegance but also for sound in poetry. Dialect forms were to be avoided. Archaisms were discouraged by him. Latin borrowings were encouraged. 'What I want at home I must seek abroad', he defended his borrowings or Latinisms so. He disliked compound words. Technical terms were to be avoided. The use of general terms was recommended by him. He admired the introduction into English of the turns of words and thoughts in which Virgil and Ovid had excelled by Waller and **Denham**.

Eighteenth century Verse satire, in particular, used the plain middle **style**, striking a **balance** between the formal and the informal. **Dryden** had defended 'poetic licence' as the **liberty** of speaking things in verse which are beyond the severity of prose. He justified the use of rhetoric, 'nature wrought up to a higher pitch', and the heroic couplet in the heroic play.

The excesses of the eighteenth century poetic diction appeared in the second half of the century. Examples abound in Thomson's *Seasons* (1730) and Dyer's *The Fleece* (1757). Phrase like the 'feather'd choir', 'the **wingy** swarm', 'the finny tribe', 'our fleecy wealth', 'the foodful brine', had the advantage of semi-scientific precision. The **Augustan** belief in generalisation promoted the use of such language. The stock of poetic words and phrases included gales which blow, verdant vales, glittering train, swain, nymph, lawn, azure main, tender tears, melt (pity melts the eyes), smiling (land), blooming, genial, frantic, solemn hour etc. Poetic epithets were common and became conventional, Long vowels in words like gale, blow, swain etc. were useful for rhymes. Compound adjectives like 'incense-breathing morn', 'blood happy hounds', 'thick-nibbling sheep' showed the influence of Homer and Milton.

On the other hand, burlesques and translations were very common. Ned Ward, (1667-1731), a journalist in verse, belonged to the underworld of letters.

22.4.4 Poetry-Verse-Prose-Prose Fiction

Wordsworth believed that there was no essential difference between the language of prose and **metrical** composition. 'According to **him**, the antithesis of Poetry was "matter of Fact, or Science", Verse was antithetical to prose, 'nor is this, in truth, a strict antithesis'. But Arnold thought otherwise. He said that the rise of modern prose caused "some touch of frost to the imaginative life of the soul", and that the qualities of 'fit' prose (regularity, uniformity, precision and balance) involved "some repression and silencing of poetry". **Moreover**, he described **Dryden** and Pope as the classics of our prose and their poetry as the poetry "of the builders of an age of prose and reason". "Though they may write in verse, though they may in a certain sense be masters of the art of versification, **Dryden** and Pope are not classics of our poetry, they are classics of our prose". Pope himself had said:

My head and heart thus flowing thru' my quill,
Verse-man or Prose-man, term me what you will.

Pope and **Wordsworth** see verse and prose as antithetical or opposed, but **Arnold** opposed poetry with prose. Notice that Wordsworth contrasts poetry with science, and Arnold couples prose with reason. **Arnold's** use of the term 'poetry' is evidently imprecise.

The change in the relation and the relative importance of poetry, verse and prose was due to social change. The separation of wit and judgement or imagination and reason was due to science or rationalism.

22.4.5 The Heroic Couplet

The **most** popular verse form of the age of **Dryden** and Pope is the heroic couplet, and they are **its greatest** masters. **Dryden** was inspired by the examples of Waller and **Denham**. He advocated and defended the use of the rhymed couplet in heroic tragedy. His own practice in the theatre gradually made him the master of the verse form. His satires show him the master whom Pope described as follows:

Waller was smooth, but **Dryden** taught to join
The varying verse, the full-resounding line.
The long majestic march, and Energy Divine.

Clarity, precision, balance and antithesis are characteristic of the diction and rhythm of the **verse Pope** says:

Tis not enough no harshness gives offence,
The sound must seem as Echo to the sense.

"The Chief prosodical event of the seventeenth century was the resurgence and development of the decasyllabic couplet, as a fact, together with the inculcation of "smoothness and numbers" in verse, as a doctrine ..., **Dryden** exploited all its forms and possibilities in **compositions** of all kinds from his worst plays to his best poems. His couplet is full-blooded, exuberant, multiform Another region of verse in which **Dryden** exhibited his mastery was the **irregular** ode.

Dr. Johnson said that blank verse only 'looked' like verse. The music of the heroic couplet appealed to the **Augustan** taste. The blank verse of **Marlowe**, Shakespeare, Milton of the earlier times, and that of Wordsworth of the later times is the most important verse form in English, and the heroic couplet of the age of **Dryden** and Pope is second in importance. Milton had described **Dryden** as "a good **rhymist**, but no poet". The ear which is attuned to blank verse finds the rhyming heroic couplet **unmusical** and mechanical, the ear which is attuned to the heroic couplet finds blank verse unmusical and prosaic. The controversy reflects the vagary of taste. In his life

of Milton, Dr. Johnson said : "The music of the English heroic line strikes the ear so faintly that it is easily lost ... Blank verse, said an ingenious critic, seems to be verse only to the eye". He that thinks himself capable of astonishing, may write blank verse; but those that hope only to please, must condescend to rhyme'.

Augustan verse satire makes deliberate use or imitation of Latin Satire. The parallel of the Roman past with the 'British present was discovered and stressed. Its social realism, its political and literary topicality, its use of contemporary life and society, give it a **historicity**, while the implicit parallelism and comparison make it timeless. The general standard of verse composition was higher in that century than it has ever been since. As Pope put it : 'All rhyme, and scrawl, and scribble, to a man'.

According to **Dryden**, the function of satire is moral, the true end of Satire, is the amendment of vices by correction'. Besides, there is a sweetness in good verse, which Tickles even while it hurts'. Pope was more enthusiastic in his description of satire. The provocation for a satirist like him is 'The strong Antipathy of Good to Bad'. His apostrophe : 'O sacred weapon! Left for Truth's defence.

Sole Dread of Folly, vice, and insolence.

Besides, satire 'Heals with Morals what it hurts with wit'

Do all show his view of satire.

22.4.6 Prose and Prose Fiction

Dryden, Defoe, and Swift were the early prose writers. Their prose is more inventive and vivid than later **Augustan** prose.

The periodical essay, diary, memoir, letters, pamphlets, travels, **biography**, autobiography, history, literary criticism and religious prose are among the most important literary forms of prose in this age. And above all there is the novel or prose of fiction. The new reading public of the middle class was entertained as well as instructed by these writings. Addison's essays, Swift's prose satires, Richardson's and Fielding's novels, Gibbon's **History** and Burke's oratory were of greater social and literary value than the verse satires of **Dryden** and Pope.

Defoe and Swift were the great masters of prose satire. Swift described satire as a sort of glass, wherein beholders do generally discover everybody's face but **their own**; which is the chief **reason** for that kind of reception it meets with in the world, and that so very few are offended with it.

Addison and Steele helped to educate their own generation through their essays. They brought about a revolution of manners and morals. Their Horatian method of laughing men out of their follies and excesses created its own reading public.

The first English novel, Robinson Crusoe (1719), by Daniel Defoe (1659-1731) became immediately and permanently popular. Gulliver's Travels (1726) is at once an adventure story, like Robinson Crusoe, and a great satire. The first two parts are less 'impure' fantasy than the last two, and, therefore, make a greater appeal to young readers.

John Bunyan's The Pilgrim's Progress (1678-79) is another great work of the period. "It is one of the curiosities of literature that John **Bunyan** the Puritan enthusiast and Samuel Butler the satirist of Puritan enthusiasts were both in the service of this worthy knight (Sir Samuel Luke, lampooned by Butler as Sir **Hudibras**), the one as a soldier and the other as secretary". Bunyan's prose style has been described as 'one of the miracles of English literature'. His prose was 'more flexible than the heroic couplet'.

Pamela; or Virtue Rewarded (1740) is the first English novel in the full sense. The author, Samuel Richardson (1689-1751) was a master-printer. The novel grew out of letters written to and for particular friends, on the most important occasions. Directing not only the requisite style and forms to be observed in writing Familiar Letters; but how to think and act justly and prudently, in the common concerns of Human Life. The epistolary form of the novel is self-explanatory Clarissa (1747-8), the second novel by Richardson, is his best work. His influence on English and European literature was great.

Henry Fielding (1707-54) published his first novel Joseph Andrews (1742), imitating the manner of Cervantes, the famous Spanish author of Don Quixote. Jonathan Wild (1744) is a satire on 'greatness'. Tom Jones (1749) is his most famous novel, described by the author as 'a comic epic in prose'.

T.G. Smollett (1721-71) and Laurence Sterne (1713-68), and other novelists of the later Augustan Age contributed the first spell of social and psychological novels and other forms of prose fiction, more or less artistic. The serious and the comic forms of the English novel emerged then. The reading public for prose fiction was predominantly middle class.

The diaries of John Evelyn (1620-1706), Royalist, and Samuel Pepys (1633-1703), a private person, are important documents of the age.

22.4.7 Literary Criticism

The literary criticism of the age of Dryden and Pope is not yet an autonomous specialist discourse, it is a part of the moral and cultural humanism of the age. The Tatler and the Spectator were the projects of a bourgeois cultural politics whose language encompassed art, ethics, religion, philosophy and everyday life.

The hiatus, the breach, between Elizabethan and Restoration English literature caused by the civil war is great. The dissociation of sensibility may be seen in the fact that the two greatest critics of the age of Dryden and Pope are Dryden and Pope themselves. Matthew Arnold described poetry as a criticism of life. The literary criticism of Dryden is in prose, while Pope's essay on criticism, The Dunciad, Epistle to Arbuthnot and other Horatian satires are at once social and literary criticism. Moral and aesthetic values were not separated in their minds, and creative imagination was controlled by the critical faculty. Dryden is no doubt the greater critic in the modern sense.

The following passage from the preface to "Annus Mirabilis" was discussed by T.S. Eliot.

The first happiness of the poet's imagination is properly invention, or the finding of the thought; the second is fancy, or the variation, deriving or moulding of that thought, as the judgement represents it proper to the subject, the third is elocution, or the art of clothing and adorning that thought, as found and varied in apt, significant, and sounding of words; the quickness of the imagination is seen in the invention, the fertility in the fancy, and the accuracy in the expression.

Eliot pointed out that the New English Dictionary defined invention as 'the devising of a subject, idea or method of treatment, by exercise of the intellect or imagination'. His comment on the definition is : 'If there is a clear distinction between invention by exercise of intellect and invention by exercise of imagination, then two definitions are called for and if there is no difference between intellectual and imaginative invention there can hardly be much difference between imagination and intellect'. Intellect is described in the NED as 'faculty of knowing and reasoning'.

Reason and imagination are not separated in **Dryden's** account of the poetic process, but Eliot supposed that the age of **Dryden** was 'beginning to suffer a death of the spirit perhaps, he meant a decline of religious faith by the death of the spirit. Fanaticism and dogmatism no doubt declined, and the spirit became more critical and rational.

Dryden began the line of inquiry on critical aims and methods. According to Dr. Johnson, he 'first taught us to determine on principle the merits of a composition'.

22.5 RELIGION, PHILOSOPHY AND MORALITY

22.5.1 Religion and Science

The scientific spirit of the age **demand**ed that christianity should be 'reasonable'. The miraculous seemed less actual, thanks to Hobbes, as Mulgrave put it in his Essay on Poetry (1682).

While in dark ignorance we lay, afraid.
Of fancies, ghosts, and every empty shade,
Great Hobbes appeared, and by plain reason's light.
Put such fantastic forms to shameful flight.

Dryden too had suggested that the Old Testament should be searched for the 'machines' rather **than** the New Testament. In Absalom and Achitophel he used it. The contrast with **Milton's** poetic use of the 'machine' is remarkable, 'The guardian angels', 'the tutelar genii' of **Dryden's** description are half-mockingly presented in his Discourse in Satire (1693). The vision and mystery of religious experience was ignored. The miracles were dismissed.

Locke's argument for Toleration was generally accepted. His Reasonableness of Christianity (1695) was the starting point of Latitudinarianism and the English Deistic movement. That peculiarly English phenomenon, the holy alliance of science and religion, characterises the age as well as does Methodism. Both turned from dogma to morality. Archbishop Tillotson (1630-1694) was highly influential. His preaching of prudential morality was based on reason rather than revelation and deliberately appealed to common sense and sobriety. But the satire of actual, imperfect morality continued from Butler to Pope; Butler said, in Hudibras, in *A Devil's Catechism* (1678):

What makes Morality a crime
The most notorious of the Time?
Morality, which both the saints
And Wicked too cry out against?
'Cause Grace and virtue are within
Prohibited degrees of kin:
And therefore no true saint allows
They should be suffered to espouse.
For saints can need no **conscience**
That with Morality dispense;
A virtue's impious, when it is rooted
In nature's **one**l', and not imputed,
But why the wicked should do so,
We neither know, nor **care** to do,
For a large **conscience** is all one,
And signifies the **same** with None.

And **Pope** who had enjoyed the power or influence of a satirist in **society** was proud to see Men not **afraid** of God, afraid of me:

Safe from the Bar, the Pulpit, and **the** Throne,
Yet touch'd and **sham'd** by Ridicule alone.

Satire was sacrosanct to Pope. He thought it was 'Sole Dread of Folly, Vice and Insolence'. The moral effect of *Hudibras* was greater than that of Pope's Horatian satires (1735-38), because Pope had become more self-conscious. The poet satirist became his own hero.

Conduct, not dogma, became the Christian creed in religion. The primary duty was the service of man, the middle class home, with its family worship, went out to convert the souls, educate the minds and care for the bodies of the neglected poor. The humanitarian spirit led to the democratic ideal of the next century. Pope's criticism of society in the following lines shows his sympathy for the common man or the 'poor villain':

Have you less pity for the needy cheat,
The poor and friendless villain, than the great?

22.5.2 Quakerism

After the civil war, the rise of the Quaker movement, which began with the public preaching of George Fox (1624-90), led to much literary activity. The Anglican church regarded tradition as supreme, the puritans gave the Bible that supremacy, and the quakers valued a direct experience of god above all. The Quakers were so called because their leader Fox bade them tremble at the word of the Lord. Fox founded the Society of Friends. His *Journal* is a deeply moving mystic book. Gradually, the Quaker movement became a sect, and the initial glow faded.

22.5.3 Deism

Deism is an attempt to find a natural or rational religion—universal religion, in other words. It became fashionable. The identify faith with knowledge has never satisfied people who love the mystic and the supernatural.

The third Earl of Shaftesbury, grandson of Dryden's Aclitophel, was a moralist. His influential book *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (1711) was popular. He believed (with Pope) that man has both personal and social affections, and he believed in the moral sense.

22.5.4 Mysticism

The universe was a machine to the new thinker of the age. God and religion were required to be proved. In such an age, a person like William Law (1686-1761), author of a great English classic of religion, and the father of Methodism, is interesting. His argument against rational deism was that man himself is a mystery, the universe a mystery, and that reason is not a sure and dependable guide to truth in life. His most famous book is *A Serious call to Devout and Holy Life, Adapted to the state and condition of all orders of Christians* (1728) was very influential, next to the Bible, it led to the spread of Evangelicalism.

George Berkeley (1685-1753) was religious thinker and social reformer. His *Treatise concerning the Principles of Human knowledge* influenced European philosophy. According to him, subjective perception is final, the ideas are the things. He represents the transition from the Augustan to the Romantic spirit.

22.6 LET US SUM UP

The outline of the social, intellectual, literary and religious life of England during the Age of Dryden and Pope given above is far from sufficient. The reading list given at the end will help those of you who are interested in knowing more about the Age as a

guide to further study. Some aspects of the political and economic history of the time should supplement this introduction.

You should consider the Age also from the angle of the Indo British relations which had started just before this age and were growing with the expansion of the trade of the East India Company. The 'nabobs' of the company exploited the Indian society with 'an unscrupulous greed'. They belong to the Age of Dr. Johnson. We know that the Age of Dryden (1660-1700) was followed by the Age of Addison, Swift and Pope (1700-1740), and this latter was followed by the Age of Johnson (1740-1780). The nabobs were disliked by the old aristocratic English society into which they intruded with their outlandish ways. The history of the colonisation of India and the rise of British imperialism had started. But free India deliberately adopted the political system of parliamentary democracy and party politics which may be described as British in origin.

You should also compare the Age of Dryden with the corresponding age in India. The second half of the seventeenth century in Indian history should be considered in this light. You should remember that the academic discipline of 'history' in India has a British origin. Contrast the traditional puranic view of history that prevailed in India with the modern view which is western in orientation, The Aristotelian view of the comparative value of philosophy, history and poetry should help you make the comparison. Aristotle suggests that poetry is more philosophic than history as it cares not for what has happened but for what may happen. The laws of spirit, value and desire are different from the rules of physical science and measurement. Mythology according to Northrop Frye, precedes ideology, but precedence is not always a term of value.

And that bring us to the last angle – the angle of world history – that you should also adopt and apply to the study of the Age of Dryden. From this angle, the rise of science and reason in the England of Dryden was something of a relatively lasting contribution. Secondly, the balance of material and spiritual life in the age was remarkable. The mystic extreme of spiritual life was avoided no less than the unrestricted pursuit of pleasure or material advancement. Social and individual morality mattered mainly because of the manageable size of the British society of that age. People – particularly Londoners – were known to each other. They had not yet become the statistical average, the unknown entity of later times. There was much less of sociological abstraction then.

Most important, learning and education in that age was properly general. The evil of specialisation was to appear nearly a century later, in the second half of the nineteenth century. The split of the two cultures of the sciences and the humanities has been acutely felt in our own century, but some signs of the split are visible in that age. The decline of religion, morality, poetry and the traditional arts is a process which started then and which shows no signs of abating now.

Many other revolutionary changes have taken place since that age, and therefore, it is with some exercise of the historical imagination that we can appreciate the Age of Dryden in all its excellence and limitations.

22.7 QUESTIONS

1. Compare and contrast the views of Donne, Dryden, Pope and Blake on science.
2. Attempt a critical discussion of
 - (a) the relation of religion and politics in the Age of Dryden.
 - (b) The self-complacency of the age in England.
 - (c) On the basis of your study of the poetry of Victoria England compare Augustan complacency with Victorian hypocrisy.

- 3. Discuss literature and society with particular reference to
 - {a) The Court and the Theatre,
 - (b) Restoration Comedy,
 - (c) Heroic Tragedy,
 - (d) Political satire in the Age of **Dryden**.
- 4. Discuss how the rise of science in the age of **Dryden** affected religion.
- 5. Critically discuss the changing views of wit with particular reference to Hobbes **Dryden**, **Locke**, Pope and T.S. Eliot.
- 6. Write an essay on science and poetry with a special reference to the **Augustan** Age in English literature.
- 7 Explain the descriptions of the Age of **Dryden** as (a) neo-classical, (b) the Age of reason, (c) The age of balance and compromise
- 8. Do you agree with T.S. Eliot that a dissociation of sensibility took place in the seventeenth century? Discuss.
- 9. Write a note on the change in the language of poetry in the age of **Dryden**.
- 10. Summarise Sprat's view on the language of poetry.
- 11. Discuss the heroic couplet of **Dryden** and Pope. Compare it with blank verse. Write a note on the change of taste for the music of verse.
- 12. Can satire be great poetry?
- 13. Why was satire popular in the age of **Dryden** and Pope?
- 14. English poetry was more social in the Age of **Dryden** and Pope than ever before and after. Discuss.
- 15, **Dryden** and Pope are said to be 'the classics of our prose'. Do you agree? Discuss.
- 16. The neo-classical Age in English poetry was not classical enough, Why?
- 17. The epic ambition of **Dryden** was realised only in (a) the mock epic satire and (b) the translation of Virgil epic. Why did the creative imagination decline from the heroic epic of **Milton** to the mock heroic satire of **Dryden**?
- 18. Why is the lyric not found in a good number in this age?
- 19. Write a note on the classic and the romantic aspects of English poetry.

22.8 IMPORTANT DATES

A.	Kings of England	Period of Reign
1.	Charles II	1660-1685
2.	James II	1685-1688
3.	William III	1689-1702
4.	Queen Anne	1702-1714
5.	George I	1714-1727
6.	George II	1727-1760
7.	George III	1760-1820

- B. 1. The Dutch War, **1665**.
2. The End of the Stuart Dynasty Rule in **1688**.
3. The Glorious Revolution, **1688-89**.
4. The **Beginning** of the Regime of the **Hanoverian** Dynasty which is continuing till now **1689-** (more than three hundred years).
5. Parliamentary and economic union with Scotland, **1707**.

22.9 SUGGESTED READINGS

1. Arnold, M. *Essays in Criticism Vol. I-II*
2. Atkins, J.W.H. *English Literary criticism: 17th and 18th Centuries*
3. Baker, E.A. *History of the English Novel Vols. III, V*
4. Bredvold, L.I. *The Intellectual Milieu of John Dryden*
5. Bush, D. *Science and English Poetry*
6. Dobree, B. *Restoration Comedy*
7. Dobree, B. *Restoration Tragedy*
8. Dobree, B. *English Literature in the Early Eighteenth Century.*
9. Eliot, T.S. *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*
10. Eliot, T.S. *Selected Essays*
11. Enright, D.J. E. de Chicker *English Critical Texts*
12. Ford, B. *From Dryden to Johnson (The Pelican Guide series)*
13. Grierson, H.J.C. *Cross Currents in English Literature of the Seventeenth Century*
14. Grierson, H.J.C. *The English Epic and its Background*
15. Jack, Jan *Augustan Satire (1660-1750)*
16. James, D.G. *The Life of Reason*
17. Johnson, S. *Lives of the Poets Vols. I-II*
18. Ker, W.P. *Collected Essays*
19. Leagouis & Cazamian *A History of English Literature*
20. Leavis, F.R. *Revaluations*
21. Leavis, F.R. *The Common Pursuit*
22. Leavis, Q.D. *Fiction and the Reading Public*
23. Lovejoy, A.O. *The Great Chain of Being*
24. Pinto, V. De S. *The English Renaissance (1510-1688)*
25. Rickett, A. C. *History of English Literature*
26. Saintsbury, G. *The Peace of the Augustans*
27. Sampson, G. *The Concise Cambridge History of English Literature*
28. Sutherland *English Satire*
29. Trevelyan, G. *English Social History*
30. Walker, H. *English Satire and Satirist*
31. Watt, I. *Rise of the Novel*
32. Willey, B. *The Seventeenth Century Background*
33. Willey, B. *The Eighteenth Century Background*
34. Wimsatt, W.K. and Cleanth Brooks *Literary Criticism: A Short History.*

UNIT 23 JOHN DRYDEN

Structure

- 23.0 Objectives
- 23.1 Introduction
- 23.2 John Dryden: An Introduction
- 23.2 A Brief Bio-data
- 23.4 The Dramatist
 - 23.4.1 Comedies: Principle and Practice
 - 23.4.2 Tragi-comedies: Principle and Practice
 - 23.4.3 Heroic Drama: Principle and Practice
- 23.5 The Critic
- 23.6 The Translator
- 23.7 The Man of Letters
- 23.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 23.9 Questions
- 23.10 Suggested Readings

23.0 OBJECTIVES

The objective of this unit is to acquaint you with the prolific and varied aspects of the talent of John Dryden as a man of letters. A detailed discussion of Dryden as a poet and satirist will be attempted in the unit on Mac Flecknoe and Alexander's Feast,

The Age of Dryden (1660-1700) is so named because it was dominated by him. He was the most important poet, satirist, critic, dramatist, translator, and prose writer of his time. On reading this unit, you will be able (1) to appreciate that literature (the production as well as the criticism and enjoyment of literature) was the passion of his life, and (2) to form an elementary idea of Dryden as a dramatist, critic, translator, and man of letters (3) A brief biographical outline of his life will also be given, which will show how poetry or literature was the vocation and the profession of Dryden's life.

23.1. INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we shall learn some of the important details of Dryden's life and works. The life and mind of a writer are reflected in his writings, The personality of a poet, however, is greater than his poems. We shall study in some detail only two of his poems, but we must be able to see that they form part of a larger and greater whole.

The brief biographical outline shows how literature was the passion of Dryden's life. It was his vocation and profession. More important than this is the fact that as a writer he was the best representative of his age which was named after him.

His drama and drama criticism, his verse-satire and his translations, show the variety and richness of his talent. His respect for tradition was no less than his championing the cause of modernity.

The study of this unit would help us interpret and evaluate the two poems by him which are the prescribed texts.



John Dryden

Dryden began his poetic career during the civil war. His elegy on the death of the 'Protector', Oliver Cromwell, in 1658, is one of his earliest **poems**. His 'public' **spirit** gave his poetry public themes, and his greatest work is political satire. The shifting loyalties of his life as a person and poet have caused much critical confusion. He changed, as Dr. Johnson said, 'with the nation' at the time of the Restoration. His choice of blank verse in *All for Love* came in the wake of his weariness of his **long-**loved mistress Rhyme. His religious conversion to **Romanism** towards the end of his poetical career has **been** a controversial topic. It should not, however, be difficult for us to appreciate these changes—political, religious and in versification as signs of catholicity and a liberal spirit rather than of mere opportunism. The Revolution of 1688 affected his poetic career somewhat as the Restoration of 1660 affected Milton's. The steadfastness of Milton's convictions and his devotion of the causes he espoused may be contrasted with **Dryden's** cavalier attitude to life and letters.

The expansion of British colonialism had emerged. The East India company brought wealth to England. **Another** significant fact of social life was the separation of religion and politics during **Dryden's** lifetime, the power of the British parliament had been rising. The Civil War, the regicide and the 'glorious' Revolution, are all symptoms of the rise of the common man. But the class cleavage also became more marked.

The heroic couplet or rhymed decasyllabic verse is **Dryden's** major contribution to English prosody. Pope said: 'I learned versification wholly from **Dryden's** works'. We **know** that **Dryden** and Pope are the greatest masters of the heroic couplet in the English poetic tradition. Blank verse, the most important verse form in English poetry, was nearly completely replaced by rhymed verse for more than half a century during 1680-1750.

Regarding the language or poetic diction of **Dryden**, there is no critical consensus, **Dryden** believed, and Dr. Johnson agreed, that the language of poetry was improved and refined by him. But Wordsworth and **Arnold** described the language of **Dryden's** and Pope's **poetry** as unpoetical or prosaic. T.S. Eliot described the difference that **Dryden** brought about in the language of poetry as due to a dissociation of sensibility

reflected in crude poetic feeling. The earlier complexity of vision and language was lost. The rise of science, the stress on the clarity and simplicity of expression, made the language of poetry in English less connotative.

Dryden's dramatic experiment helped him master the medium of the heroic couplet which was used to great poetic effect in his satire of the sixteen eighties. His criticism is at once that of the father of English criticism and of a growing poet groping for the discovery of the form of expression that would suit his experience and that of his age. His translations fostered in him and in his age an awareness of European and universal standards of poetry. The most striking development was from the 'heroic' to the mock heroic in his poetry.

23.3 A BRIEF BIO-DATA

Birth and The Family: John **Dryden**, the son of Erasmus **Dryden**, was born of puritan stock at **Aldwinkle** in Northamptonshire on August 9, 1631. John Locke was born one year later, and Isaac Newton in 1642. These three great Englishmen of the same age gave English poetry, British philosophy and modern science respectively a new direction. **Dryden's** pride in his family is expressed in *To my Honoured Kinsman John Dryden* (1700). The following lines describe **Dryden's** idea of a patriot which he believed was illustrated by many members of his family living and dead:

A patriot both the king and country serves
Prerogative and privilege preserves;
Of each, our laws the certain limits show
One must not ebb nor the other overflow.
Betwixt the prince and Parliament we stand,
The **barriers** of the state on either hand;
May neither overflow, for then they drown the land.
When both are full they feed our blessed abode,
Like those that watered once the Paradise of God.

At School : He was taught by a famous scholar Dr. Busby at his Westminster school. **Dryden** was thoroughly trained in rhetoric by Busby. In a memoir of Richard Busby (1895), the writer quotes a mother proudly writing in 1688: They are bravely taught both to be scholars and orators at Doctor Busby's School at Westminster, where my son is: In **Dryden's** poetry and drama, the poet and his characters plead a case or argue a cause. The influence of the school teacher is behind it,

Trinity College Cambridge: In 1650 **Dryden** entered Trinity college, Cambridge on a Westminster scholarship. His interest in learning developed there, but he did not get a fellowship in the College. **Later** in life, he wrote:

Oxford to him a dearer name shall be
Than his own mother-University:
Thebes did his rude unknowing Youth engage;
He chooses Athens in his riper age.
(Prologue to the University of Oxford written 1676)

London: After four years at Cambridge, **Dryden** Came to London. He became secretary to Sir George Pickering, his maternal cousin, who enjoyed **Cromwell's** favour. In November 1662, **Dryden** became a member of the newly founded Royal Society.

Marriage: **Dryden** married Lady Elizabeth Howard the sister of Sir Robert Howard, in 1663. He had three sons, Charles, John and Henry. Charles and Henry chose the religious profession, John was an author. He wrote a comedy called *The Husband His own Cuckold*.

In the translation of Juvenal (1693), **Dryden** was assisted by his sons. He cursed marriage perhaps because he was not happy in his married life. Saintsbury mentioned a joke that the poet had at the cost of his wife. One day she said to him: 'I wish I were a book, and then perhaps you would pay me some attention.' He replied: 'Then, my dear, pray, be an almanac, that I may, change you at the end of the year.' Life and art were not far from each other in the case of **Dryden**. The following lines may be noticed:

Minds are so hardly matched that en'n the first
Though paired by heav'n in Paradise, were cursed;
For Man and woman though in one they grow
Yet, first or last, return again to two
Not that my verse would blemish all the fair,
But yet if some be bad 'tis wisdom to beware,
And better shun the bait than struggle in the snare.

Dryden wrote these lines in the last year of his life.

He had started writing poems while still at school. He started writing plays in the year of his marriage, 1663. For about ten years, he wrote poems, plays, prefaces to plays and poems, and critical essays. He became popular and famous as the writer of heroic plays in which he chose to use the decasyllabic couplet. But in 1671, a burlesque, *The Rehearsal*, was staged. It satirised **Dryden** as Bayes. **Dryden** had been made poet Laureate in place of Sir William Davenant. He was also made Historiographer Royal soon after, in 1670. He was already a member of the Royal Society. Thus, he was well-known, and the travesty of his talent not only hurt him deeply but also affected his reputation. It exaggerated the artificiality and unreason of his heroic drama—the rant and bombast, the mechanical plots and the grandiose speeches, and the constant harping on the conflict between honour and love. The running commentary of Bayes reveals the weakness of **Dryden's** critical attitude in respect of heroic drama. He glories in the worthless character of Drawcansir. **Dryden's** defence of heroic plays and his satirical portrait of Zimri in *Absalom* and *Achitophel* (1681) were his revenge. But between 1671 and 1681, he had smarted.

Dryden's interest in poetry, poetic drama and literature was more than personal. He guided the younger writers and distributed poetical fame. He was highly influential as a poet and man of letters from the beginning, and his influence was greater after his death. During the **Augustan** Age, or the first half of the eighteenth century, his influence on English poetry was most **powerful and** dominant but the **Dryden** whose influence was so great emerged not before his fiftieth year 1681.

Dryden's interest in public life and affairs was great. It inspired his creative imagination better than anything else. *Absalom* and *Achitophel* (1681) happens to be the greatest political poem in English not by chance. The popish plot was disclosed by Titus Oates in 1678. Oates, the son of an Anabaptist preacher, had first been an Anglican clergyman, then he switched to the Catholic faith, but was expelled from Jesuit College where he was undergoing training for a religious profession in the new order. He claimed that he was present at a Jesuit conference held in London in April 1678. A plot to kill the king and usurp the British throne was hatched by the Catholics in that conference.

The revelation of what came to be called the Popish plot led to the passing of the Exclusion Bill by the House of Commons in opinion turned in favour of the king who wanted his catholic brother, the Duke of York, to succeed him to the British throne. He summoned a meeting of the parliament at Oxford in March, and soon dissolved it. In July, the principal leader of the opposition, the Whig Earl of **Shaftesbury** was arrested and imprisoned in the Tower on a charge of high treason. His trial was to be held in November, and **Dryden** brought out his *Absalom* and *Achitophel* on the 17th

of that month, a week before the commencement of that trial. The king described Shaftesbury as the weakest and wickedest of men, and **Dryden's** portrait of Shaftesbury as Achitophel has become one of the most famous satirical portraits in English. Interestingly, John Locke had hailed him as a brave defender of civil, religious and philosophical liberty. **Dryden's** portrait is of course mixed. Part II of *Absalom and Achitophel* was published in 1682. Both the parts had appeared anonymously, and in the second part, written mainly by Nahum Tate, **Dryden's** contribution was short portraits of Doeg and Og. But Shaftesbury had been released and a medal was struck in his honour. However, soon after **that**, Shaftesbury accepted defeat and fled to Holland. *The Medall, A Satire Against Sedition*, was published by **Dryden** in 1682. It pursued Shaftesbury, the whig medalist, with relentless vigour. One of the replies, *The Medal of John Bayes*, was attributed to Shadwell, his former associate. **Dryden** replied with *Mac Flecknoe*, or a satyr upon the True-Blue-Protestant Poet, **T.S** in 1682.

But **Dryden's** literary opponents who had concocted the *Rehearsal* in 1671 were active, and **Elkanah** Settle wrote an amusing parody of *Absalom and Achitophel*. Its title was *Absalom Senior, or Achitophel Transposed*. But it was ineffective, whereas Shadwell's *The Medal of John Bayes* was a brutal and repulsive attack. **Dryden's** reply was of course great poetry and satire.

The philosophical poetry of **Dryden** expounds theological and political controversies of the time and certainly demonstrates his awareness of fideism, modern science, scepticism and deism. T.S. Eliot described his mind as '**commonplace**', and Aurobindo regarded him as merely intellectual. But T.S. Eliot was a creature of the age of specialisation and a student of philosophy. Moreover, in comparing **Dante and Shakespeare**, and in his '*Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca*' he had convincingly argued that a poet was different from a philosopher, even when his poetry was philosophical, **Dryden's** poetry is a criticism of life. Which was at once social and spiritual in his Time. His *Religio Laici* (1682) states a Layman's Faith. Its opening lines assert how 'reason grows pale at religion's sight'. Another important point made in the poem is that traditions 'make not truth but probability'. His conclusion is:

Faith is not built on disquisitions vain;
The things we must believe are few and plain.
But since men will believe more than they need
And every man will make himself a creed,
In doubtful questions 'tis the safest way
To learn what unsuspected ancients say.

The story of **Dryden's** religious conversion has been a topic of debate among his biographers. We might satisfy ourselves with one late view. *The Hind and the Panther* (1687), an allegory, states **Dryden's** personal drama, the state of his spirit in his mid-fifties:

What weight of ancient witness can prevail
If private reason hold the public scale?
Rut gracious God, how well dost thou provide
For erring judgment, an unerring Guide?
Thy throne is darkness in th' abyss of light,
A Blaze of glory that forbids the sight;
O teach me to believe thee thus concealed,
And search no farther than thy self revealed:
But her alone for my director take
Whom thou hast promis'd never to forsake!
My thoughtless youth was wing'd with vain desires
My manhood, long misled by wandering fires,
Followed false lights; and when their glimpse was gone

My pride struck out new sparkles of her own.
 Such was I, such by nature still I am
 Be thine the glory, and be mine the shame.
 Good life be now my task: my doubts are done.

T.H. Fujimura (1972) said in an essay that both the panther and the Hind 'are personae representing **Dryden**' and that the poem dramatises the crisis in the poet's mind and spirit. This crisis was suspected to be merely mean opportunism. The poet universalises autobiographical material and dramatises confession. The Anglican foes like Edward Stillingfleet had attacked the poet. Fujimura's biographical approach is **helpful**. The Hind and the Panther, the **two** beasts, represent 'a variety of people' positions and postures' as well as 'the conflicting tendencies in **Dryden** himself. The intensely personal dilemma of the vengeful poet committed to charily replying to charges (i) that he had no religion, (2) that he had **changed** his religion for bread concludes with his reflection on fame and honour in part 111 (lines 279-305). Consider, particularly, the following lines.

1. The poet is bidding a long farewell to worldly fame.
 Then **welcome** infamy and public shame,
 And, last, a long farewell to worldly fame.

But **he** feels the sharp convulsive pangs of agonising pride.

2. The poet prays to God to teach him.
 Instruct him better, Gracious God, to know,
 As thine is vengeance, so forgiveness too.
 That **suffring from** ill tongues he bears no more
 Than what his **Soverign** bears, and what his saviour bore

Attacks on the poet had continued. The Hind and the Panther, transvers'd to the story of the country mouse and the city mouse' had appeared in the same year as the Hind and the Panther. The vitriolic lampoon by Robert Gould entitled the **Laureat** was difficult for **Dryden** to ignore. In *Britannia Rediviva* (1688), he wrote.

Our manners, as Religion were a dream,
 Are such **as** teach the Nations to blaspheme,
 In Lusts we wallow, and with pride we swell
 And Injuries, with Injuries **repell**;
 Prompt to revenge, not daring **to** forgive,
 Our lives **unteach** the Doctrine we believe.

The struggle to achieve genuine **humility** is endless for most of us. **Dryden** was a poet, not a saint. Charity and compassion were not easy for him to achieve.

Dryden's ambition to write an English epic remained unrealised. But if he could not write an epic, he could translate one of the two greatest European epics, Virgil's Latin epic, Aeneid. **Dryden's** Virgil and Pope's Homer did not achieve the poetic success of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, but they fall just short of that.

In the last decade of his life, **Dryden** translated, together with Virgil's Aeneid, satires and 'fables' from **Ovid**, Juvenal and Boccaccio.

Thus, during the sixties and seventies, **Dryden** experimented with the **art** of drama, and wrote excellent drama criticism. During the eighties, his satires were written, which made him immortal as a great English poet. The nineties were the decade of translations.

After the Revolution of 1688, **Shadwell** was made the Poet Laureate, replacing **Dryden**.

The Mind of John **Dryden**

The intellectual milieu of **Dryden** has been studied in detail. **Dryden** had an open and thinking mind. He said: Thoughts, such as they are, come crowding in so fast upon me, that my only difficulty is to choose or to reject, to run them into verse, or to give them the other **harmony** of prose.

The energy of his mind has impressed his readers, scholars and critics, but he was also believed to be more imitative than original. He himself believed that a poet should have comprehensive learning and experience. About his own learning. Critics like Dr. Johnson complain of carelessness. Johnson remarked: 'His scholastic acquisitions seem not proportionate to his opportunities and abilities. He could not, like Milton or Cowley, have made his name illustrious merely by his learning.' But Johnson **admired** the mind of **Dryden** as follows: "His works abound with knowledge, and sparkle with illustrations....A mind like **Dryden's** (was) always curious, always active, ... (but) his studies were rather desultory and fortuitous than constant and systematical. What **Dryden** said of his king and master, Charles II", is true more of himself: 'his knowledge more, his reading only less'.

The character of **Dryden** was described most sympathetically by his friend William Congreve. Congreve said that **Dryden** was very friendly and easy of access, but diffident in his advances to others. His communication was perhaps better than his knowledge. A rapidity of conception characterised his mind. T.B. Macaulay (1828) said 'By **trampling** on laws, he acquired the authority of a legislator'. He began as a rebel in poetic technique, an experimenter, and ended as the authority of a **new** poetic technique discovered by him. His mind 'fond of **splendeur**, was indifferent to neatness'. It had not decayed till his death (May 1, 1700). One thing peculiar to **Dryden** was that, in the words of Congreve, 'his parts did not decline with his years'. He kept improving till the end in 'fire and imagination, as well as in Judgement'.

'The chill of a sceptical atmosphere' is said to have turned **Dryden's** mind and imagination self-conscious. In his Defence of Essay of Dramatic Poesy (1668). **Dryden** described his discourse in the Essay as 'sceptical' according to that way of reasoning which was used by Socrates, Plato, and all the academics of old, which Tully and the best of the Ancients followed, and which is imitated, by the modest inquisitions of the Royal Society. He wrote of his 'natural diffidence and scepticism' in the Preface to *Sylvae* (1685). Earlier, in the Preface to *Religio Laici* (1682), he said that he was 'naturally inclined to scepticism in philosophy.' His criticism shows a spirit of free inquiry, a modest and tentative style and tone. He regarded his views and opinions as 'probable' rather than certain.

Dr. Johnson criticised his moral character. According to him, **Dryden** was aware of his dignity of character and importance as a poet. His modesty was by no means inconsistent with ostentatiousness. He is diligent enough to remind the world of his merit. He is accused of envy and insidiousness...**He** abetted vice and vanity only with his pen; Johnson regretted or rued that **Dryden** degraded his genius and spread the contagion of **corruption** in society.

Johnson judged the 'life' of **Dryden** as a man of letters, as a poet. His controversies with Settle, Collier, **Blackmore**, Milborne, Stillingfleet etc. are **part** not only of his 'biography' but of his life as a critic, poet and satirist.

Life and **art** are not separable in the case of **Dryden**, though, as Johnson said, **Dryden** **who** refined the language, improved the sentiments and tuned the number of English poetry, was an 'occasional' poet who had both learning and facility of composition. *Religio Laici* (1682) is 'a composition of great excellence,' almost the only work of **Dryden** which can be considered as a voluntary effusion, but it is more argumentative than poetical. As a reflective or philosophical poem, it is distinctively

Dryden's—mixing the grave with the humorous', serio-comic, in a word. *The Hind and the Panther* (1687), the longest of all Dryden's original poems, is allegorical in design and 'an example of poetical ratiocination.'

The last decade of Dryden's life was devoted to the translation of Latin classics, to writing some of his best criticism e.g. the criticism of Chaucer and *The Discourse on Satire*, and some of his best poems. *The Song for St. Cecilia's Day*, *Alexander's Feast* and *The Secular Masque* were published during this period. His creative and critical power did not decline with his age. In the last year of his life he wrote the *Secular Masque*. It is a characteristic poem, and a befitting epilogue to a century, **The seventeenth** century in English literature is perhaps the greatest, because it produced the great plays of Shakespeare, the Metaphysical poets, Milton and Dryden. Dryden's description of the end of the century focuses on its decadence rather than its glory. The concluding chorus of the masque is:

All, all of a piece throughout;
Thy chase had a beast in view;
Thy wars brought nothing about;
Thy lovers were all untrue.
'Tis well an old age is out;
And time to begin a new.

The new age that followed owed no less to Dryden than to Milton in poetry, and Shakespeare was inimitable.

23.4 THE DRAMATIST

23.4.1 Comedies : Principle and Practice

The story of Dryden's preoccupation with drama for more than three decades is the sad story of the compromise of his genius with the fashion of the day. He said, 'For I confess my chief endeavours are to delight the Age in which I live. "And the Age liked comedy. The Restoration Comedy entertained it. Though Dryden forced his genius to write comedy, he thought he was not 'so fitted by nature to write comedy'. He regarded comedy as 'inferior to all sorts of dramatic writing', but he admitted that his disgust with 'low' comedy was not so much from my judgement as from my temper'. We spoke of the **sullenness** of my humour.' A saturnine and reserved temperament.' Moreover, comedy was low because the persons in comedy are of a lower quality (than in tragedy) the action in little, and the faults and **vices** are but the sallies of youth, and the frailties of human nature, and not premeditated crimes' but while Comedy presents the imperfection of human nature, farce entertains us with what is monstrous and chimerical. We approved the mixed way of comedy, that which is neither all wit, nor all humour, but the result of both'. Repartee, the soul of conversation, was the greatest grace of comedy.' The first end of comedy is delight, and instruction only the second.

The following list of his comedies shows that (1) he was prolific, but (2) not first rate. George Etherege, William Wycherley and William Congreve were greater masters of the Restoration comedy. Dryden's Whig opponent, Thomas Shadwell is known for his Jonsonian Comedy of humour

1. *The Wild Gallant* (1663) is a comedy in prose. It did not succeed in the theatre.
2. *Sir Martin Marfall* (1667) is also a comedy in prose, Its subtitle is 'Feigned Innocence'. It is influenced by Moliere's comedy.
3. *An Evening's Love or the Mock Astrologer* (1671).
4. *Marriage a la Mode* used both blank verse and prose. It was successfully staged in 1673 and was popular.
5. *The Assination or Love in a Nunnery* (1672) is a comedy in prose.

6. **Amboyne** (1673) mingled verse and prose and was written at the time of the second Dutch war **Dryden's** patriotic and political sentiment was reflected.
7. **Limberham, or The Kind Keeper** (1678), a comedy in prose, was prohibited as **too indecent** for the stage.
8. **Amphitryon** (1690) mixes verse and prose.

We mention three important points of critical interest.

1. His ambition was as much to be read as to please his audience. The purity of phrase, the clearness of conception and the significancy and sound of words, not strained into bombast, but **justly** elevated, in short those very words and thoughts, which cannot be changed, but for the worse, must of necessity escape our transient view upon the theatre; and yet without all this a play may take: Language, it **seems**, was 'all this' to **Dryden**. So the non-verbal aspect of the art of Drama was beyond him as it did not inspire his imagination.
2. The conversation of the age impressed and inspired his imagination.

Wit's now arrived to a more high degree
Our **native language** more refined and free.
Our ladies and our men now speak more wit
In conversation than those poets writ.
Epilogue to the Conquest of **Granada II** (1672)

It was not merely flattery and sycophancy on the part of the poet to praise his age particularly its refinement of wit and language. It was recording an important historical change. Early modern English was becoming simpler, clearer, less fantastic, less complex and less barbarous.

3. The decline of the drama after the Age of Shakespeare is also to be noted. The glory of English drama is the Elizabethan and Jacobean. Later ages have failed to reach that height. Perhaps the Civil War caused **the** loss.

23.4.2 Tragi-Comedies : Principle and Practice

Tragi-comedies suited **Dryden's** genius better than comedies. **About** the use of comic relief in the tragedy of the last age, **Dryden** said: A **continued gravity** keeps the spirit too much bent and 'why should we imagine the soul of man more heavy than his sense? He was defending the native drama against the contemporary French and the Ancient Greek and Latin, in his Essay of Dramatic Poesy meant for an audience which had grown '**weary** of continued melancholy scenes'. Whoever cannot perform both serious and comic parts, is, **Dryden** said but half a **writer** of the stage.

1. **The Rival Ladies** (1664). Rhymed verse was used for the serious part and prose for the less serious.
2. **Secret Love, or the Maiden Queen** (1667).
3. **The Spanish Friar** (1680), or the Double Discovery. The comic effect predominates in the play. The friar reminds of Chaucer's **friar**. It is a satire against the papists. **Dryden** was soon to become a papist himself.
4. **Love Triumphant** (1694), or Nature will prevail. Compare this with the adaptation of Shakespeare's Love tragedy **Antony and Cleopatra** which **Dryden** called **All for Love, or the World Well Lost**. Transcendent and Triumphant Love in **Dryden's** drama is viewed both comically and tragically. Contrast **Dryden** with Shelley as poets of Love. Shelley is said to have loved the idea of Love, to be in Love with Love. **Dryden's** love poetry is-also based

in his literary experience. It does not seem to derive from life, as that of the metaphysical poets (whom **Dryden** had mocked) did.

John Dryden

Later in life, he had come to the final judgement that mirth and gravity destroy each **other** and are no more to be allowed for decent than a gay widow laughing in a mourning habit.

23.4.3 Heroic Drama : Principle and Practice

The English heroic play adopted the technique of musical and recitative spectacle. An amalgam of passion drama, melodrama, romance and opera, it was at its most glorious in **Dryden's** experiment: It urged the themes of love, honour and civic virtue, in high places, and with furious confusion and rivalry before an exotic and pseudo historical setting, to the continuous fanfare of trumpets and clash of arms on nearby plains. **Dryden** defended the romance as 'Nature wrought up to a higher pitch' But magniloquence of the speeches of the 'out size, superhuman' heroes' is **excessively** exaggerated and was burlesqued in. The Rehearsal (1672) His 'poetic licence' like Marlowe's was over reaching. Besides, he made passion **more important** than action. The following list of his heroic plays does not include his operatic and dramatic adaptations of Shakespeare and Milton.

1. The Indian Emperor (1665) deals with conquest of Mexico by Cortez. It used rhymed verse and was popular.
2. **Tyrannic Love**, or the Virgin Martyr (1668) has **Maximin** as its hero who defied gods.
3. **The Conquest of Granada**, Parts I and II (1669-70) deals with incredible love and impossible valour. The romantic heat of the wildest flights of imagination made **the** astonishing ridiculous.
4. **Aureng Zebe** (1676) in the most important of **the** heroic tragedies of **Dryden**, particularly to the Indian student. The **contemporary** Indian Mughal emperor, Aurang Zebe, is the hero. Dr. Johnson remarked: His country is at such a distance, that the manners might be safely falsified, and **the** incidents feigned. His comment that if Aurang Zebe had disliked his portrait in **Dryden's** play, 'our trade was not in those-times secure from his resentment reveals how profitable trade with India was held to be.

The play is interesting for another reason. **Dryden** said in the prologue that he grew 'weary of his long-lived mistress, rhyme'. He complained of the indifference of the audience or people to drama. He described himself as betwixt two ages cast, The first of this, and hindmost of the last. The poor income from his plays saddened him. And he feared more 'their votes who cannot judge, than theirs who can' because he boasted.

Our poet writes a hundred years too soon.
This age comes on too slow, or he too fast;
And early springs are subject to a blast.

The audience liked songs and dances, spectacle and violence but the poet offered French civility, courtly wit and civilized manners.

The famous speech in which Aureng Zebe reflects on life (Act IV) has clear and fluent style and movement. Its meaning is thin yet it strikes an attitude, gives itself unwarranted airs.

The **serio-comic** temper of the age was reflected through prologues and epilogues to his heroic drama by **Dryden**. Consider the following speech of the actress (Mrs.

Ellen)(who played Valerja in *Tyrannic love* or *The Royal Martyr* (1670) who committed suicide at the end of the tragedy) as the epilogue to the play

I come, Kind gentlemen, strange news to tellye,
I am the ghost of poor departed Nelly.
Sweet ladies, be not frighted, I'll be civil,
I am what was, a little harmless devil.

The poet praised his age and flattered his audience in the well-known Epilogue to the second part of the *Conquest of Granada*.

If love and honour now are higher raised,
Tis not the poet but the age is praised
Wit's now arrived to a more high degree;
Our native language more refined and free.
Our ladies and our men now speak more wit.
In conversation than those poets writ.

In the Prologue to *Don Sebastian* (1690), Dryden speaks of his loss of pension and that 'a play's of no religion'. The new English King (William III) was a protestant, and Dryden was a Roman Catholic. A law forbidding Roman Catholics to keep a horse of more than 5 in value had been passed. Dryden refer to it in the following lines.

Horses by papists are not to be ridden;
But sure the muses' horse was ne'er forbidden.
For in no rate-book it was ever found
That Pegasus was valued at five pound.

In the prologue to the *Assination*, (1672) Dryden compared prologues to church bells and poets with priests.

Yon damn the poet but the priest damns you

In the prologue to *The Spanish Friar* (1680) Dryden Compared of the fickle taste of his audience, 'fickle Sovereigns' who dub today and hang a man tomorrow'. He thought the French taste changed for better, while the English for worse:

The French and we still change, but here's the curse.
They change for better and we change for worse

The song Farewell ungrateful Traitor from the *Spanish Friar* is sweet. The sad reflection of a woman who loved and was betrayed is presented. Consider:

Your love by ours we measure
Till we have lost our treasure
But dying is a pleasure
When living is a pain.

He thought his age surpassed the last. 'But what we gain' d in skill we lost in strength'. Notice also the sentimental strain appearing. It was to mature in the plays of Goldsmith and Sheridan.

If Dryden is not a great English dramatist in spite of all art. It is because, as Dr. Johnson said, he was not much acquainted with simple and elemental human passions like love. 'Love of the golden Age was too Soft and subtle to put his faculties in motion. 'Ironically, he himself had found Johnson wanting similarly, Love 'which is the foundation of all comedies in other languages is scarcely mentioned in any of his plays' interestingly, he believed in the triumph of love because he thought it was

natural. Both in 'tragedy, **All for Love**, an adaptation, significantly, of Shakespeare's tragedy of love, **Antony and Cleopatra**, and in comedy; **Love Trumphant or Nature will Prevail**, he gave this idea a dramatic form. But the warmth of feeling is wanting, and the power of rhetoric in **poetry**. The transcendent love for which the world was well lost was **inrealised** poetically. In the preface to **All for Love**. **Dryden** attacked the imitation of French decorum in the English theatre.

He was bored with composing rant and bombast. The roaring rhetoric and the romantic gallantry of the Heroic play was excessive. The Elegance of high society, its external graces, its good manners provided the theme. Comedy and Tragedy alike were experimental and exploratory. **Dryden** discovered his serio-comic tone, mastered the mock-heroic form in heroic couplets which **helped** him write his famous satires. The dramatic work of **Dryden** continued for more than two decades, but his verso-satire and literary criticism is more important. He perfected his verse—the **heroic** couplet in the theatre, and discovered his creative bent. Indignation was to be better realised in poetry by him than love. The romantic turned burlesque in **Dryden's** **mature** poetry of the eighties. Besides the comedies, tragicomedies and tragedies mentioned above, **Dryden** wrote some more plays in collaboration with Lee and others. His adaptations of (1) Shakespeare's *The Tempest* for which his subtitle was **the Enchanted Island**, (2) Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cresida* which was inspired by Chaucer's great romance of the same name, (3) Shakespeare's **Antony and Cleopatra** and (4) Milton's *Paradise Lost*, which he transfigured into an opera entitled *The State of Innocence and Fall of Man*, do all show his literary preoccupation. **He** loved the literature of the past. His other opera or musical **drama** *Albain and Albanus* (1685) and *King Arthur or The British Worthy* (1691) reflect his political and patriotic interest. The former is against the Republicans and bad art. The latter is better art.

23.5 THE CRITIC

The function of criticism in **Dryden's** time was social, and not merely academic or professional as now. D.H. Lawrence required a critic to be 'emotionally alive in every fibre, intellectually capable and skillful in essential logic, and then **morally** very honest. **Dryden** seems to have met only the intellectual requirement. However, he is the fountain head of neo-classical criticism in English and of **Augustan** verse-satire.

Dr. Johnson described **Dryden** as 'the father of English criticism, as the writer who: first taught us to determine upon principles the merit of **composition**: At the right moment in the history of English literature, **Dryden** asserted the value and importance of the native element in the national heritage, particularly drama. In his essay of *Dramatic Poesy* (1168), an early english classic of **criticism**, **Dryden** showed an open mind, a keen judgement, a lively style and great learning. The method of dialogue helped him present conflicting views. His purpose was to debate, not dogmatize. The four debaters in the Essay are: (1) Crites (Sir Robert Howard), **Lisideius** (Sir Charles Sedley) **Eugenius** (Lord Buckhurst) and **Neander** (**Dryden**). The **Main** theme is the **vindication** of English plays. The **essay** was dedicated to Sir Charles Sackville, Lord Buckhurst (1638-1707). Sir Robert **Howard** (1626-98) was **Dryden's** brother-in-law and a dramatist. Sir Charles Sedley (1639-1701) was a poet and **dramatist**. **Neander** means 'new man, parvenu'. This name is used by **Dryden** for himself to denote the difference in social rank between **Dryden** and the three persons of quality. They discuss the respective merits of ancient drama in Greek and Latin, the English Drama of the Last age; and the **modern** in French drama which influenced Restoration English **drama**. The question of the verse-form proper for drama is discussed at the end. The three unities were observed in contemporary French Drama, but the English dramatists had not cared for them. The English drama had more of action and tumult or melodrama than was considered desirable. Narration should replace action. Death scenes in English tragedies were most comic. The English mingling of tragic and comic elements is, however, **defended**.

The judicial criticism of **Dryden** is very sound. Shakespeare is hailed as the largest and most comprehensive soul of all modern, and perhaps ancient, poets. Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher are also duly appreciated. The practical or applied criticism of Johnson's. The silent Woman is one of the earliest specimens of the type.

Dryden had experimented with rhymed verse in *The Indian Emperor*, and was going to repeat the experiment in his other heroic tragedies. His argument in favour of rhyme in drama has this bias. 'In serious plays rhyme is more natural and more effectual than blank verse'. Blank verse was 'too low' and unsuitable for heroic drama.

Heroic couplets, 'the noblest kind of modern verse', were more appropriate for heroic tragedy. Secondly, Shakespeare and his successors had exhausted the possibilities of blank verse in drama. So rhyming verse was the only verse form for tragedy. Rhyme is a help to memory, and gives point to repartee. Above all, it curbs the poet's fancy, 'that lawless faculty that like a high ranging spaniel must have clogs tied to it lest if outrun the judgement'. Notice how **Dryden** related imagination to reason in the following passage. Fiction may go beyond reason and realism, he seems to argue, but it should be controlled. But he abandoned his attempt at innovation in *All For Love* (1678), the adaptation of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, in which he used blank verse.

Dryden had upheld the unities for their verisimilitude, and rhyme for its transcendence of verisimilitude. In both the views he expressed the desire to maintain the formalities and to achieve form and beauty in the art of drama.

A serious play is no doubt the representation of Nature, but it is 'nature wrought up to a higher pitch'. In fact, in **Dryden's** view, the epic and tragedy were of the same genus. Imagination is allowed in fiction to mislead reason and even blind it. But this willing suspension of disbelief does not make reason a slave to imagination. Reason willingly contributes its assent, 'as far as it sees convenient, but will not be forced' (*Defence of an essay*, 1668). If imagination rises higher than life in a heroic play as in a heroic poem, **Dryden's** argument, in his essay of *Heroic Plays* (1672), was: A heroic play ought to be an imitation, in little, of an heroic poem. A heroic poet may let himself loose to visionary objects and may give his imagination a freer scope'. This anti-realistic stance is noticeable. In another essay, *Apology for Heroic Poetry and Poetic Licence* (1677), he defended his use of rhetoric, imaging, tropes and figures.

The criticism of **Dryden** is the criticism of a growing poet, exploratory, 'sailing in a vast ocean without other help than the pole star of the ancients and the rules of the French stage'. His advocacy for rhyme in the theatre did not succeed, but his long practice of writing rhyming speeches in the plays proved to be the ground where the medium of his satires was being perfected. The non-dramatic heroic couplet of **Dryden** (and Pope) is more valuable than the dramatic rhymed verse of **Dryden's** heroic plays. In the prologue to *Aureng Zebe* (1676), he said that he grew weary of his long-loved mistress rhyme. From 1665 to 1676 he used rhyme in his plays. From 1681, he used it in his satires with much greater success.

About the language of Shakespeare and his age. **Dryden** held a view which has the characteristic limitation of the Age of Reason. In an Essay on the Dramatic Poetry of the Last Age (1672), he said "Shakespeare, who, many times has written better than any poet, in any language, is yet so far from writing wit always, or expressing that wit according to the dignity of the subject, that he writes in many places below the dullest writer of ours, or of any precedent age. Never did any author precipitate himself from such heights of thought to so low expressions as he often does. He is the very Janus of poet; he wears almost everywhere two faces; and you have scarce begun to admire the one, ere you despise the other"; Similarly about Ben Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher.

Dryden flattered his age, admired its gallantry, civility and conversation. He ascribed the refinement of the **conversation** of the upper classes to the court of Charles II: The fire of the English wit, which was before stifled under a constrained, melancholy way of breeding, began first to display its force, by mixing the solidity of our nation with the air and gaiety of our neighbours, 'Notice the contrast of the English with the French:' the **solidity of our** nation with the air and gaiety of our neighbours. Notice also that the 'mixing' was due to the French influence on English language.

During the last quarter of the seventeenth century Dryden was assimilating the French influence From **Rapin** and Dacier, he derived a closer acquaintance with **Aristotic**, From Boileau a shrewd idea of Longinus's illuminating doctrine, and from St. Evermond a **sense** of the need for an active and open mind in all critical inquiries. The earlier influence of **Corneille** was enriched and modified by these later ones.

Dryden's critical work of the period consists of prefaces and dedications mainly to translations. The heroic poem was the ideal for Dryden. Milton's Paradise Lost appeared in 1667. Dryden's epic ambition could not be realised so he imitated the classics. In his preface to his Ovid, he distinguished three types of translation: (1) Metaphrase or literal translation, (2) paraphrase or **free** translator, and (3) Imitation where 'the translator (if now he has not lost that name) assumes the liberty, not only to vary **from** the words and sense, but to forsake them both as he sees occasions; and taking only some general hints **from** the original, to run division on the groundwork, as he pleases.'

Dryden's aesthetic of imitation merged with that of parody and burlesque. The poet related the contemporary world to the literary past by discovering analogies and parallels.

His criticism is not systematised into a theory. It is concerned with his own creative work and that of his contemporaries. He was experimenting as late as 1685. His adaptation of two of Shakespeare's tragedies and a romantic comedy of Milton's epic into an opera and his modernisation of Chaucer's tales show that the great tradition of English poetry and drama was being renewed by him for his age.

A Discourse concerning the original and progress of Satire (1693) appeared as the preface to his Juvenal. It is an erudite, if somewhat tedious, discourse on satire, mainly ancient Satire, in which Perseus Horace and Juvenal are compared, and some interesting remarks on modern satire and epic poetry are added. Varronian Satire was meant more to divert than to teach, said **Dryden**, while Menippean satire is parody, buffonery and facetiousness.

In parallel of Poetry and painting (1695). **Dryden** said that poetry and painting were in different degrees representations of the ideal and brought out the general, common and specific features of both arts.

Regarding the relative importance of epic and tragedy which he discussed in his Dedication of the Aeneis (1697), his preference for the epic is unmistakable. While Aristotle awarded the first place to tragedy the Renaissance critics preferred the **epic**. **Dryden** hesitated to decide, and according to Austin Warren (1942) gave them joint possession of the prime category. But **Dryden's** preference for the epic is clear and emphatic. He asserted that the heroic poem had always been and would always be esteemed the greatest work of **human** nature. He opened his Dedication to the Translation of Virgil with the sentence: A HEROIC POEM truly such', is undoubtedly the greatest work which the soul of man is capable to perform'.

His preface to the Fables (1700), prefixed to a volume of translation from Homer, Ovid, Boccaccio and Chaucer is his last critical work, Its main feature is a masterly appreciation of Chaucer. Here is an extract:

In the first place, as he is the Father of English poetry, so I hold him in the same degree of veneration as the Grecians held Homer, or the Romans Virgil. He is a perpetual fountain of good sense; learned in all sciences; and therefore, speaks properly on all subjects.

Dryden was neither pedantic nor systematic as a critic. His love of form and order was not rigid but pragmatic realism and romance were both approved by him. Imitation acquired a new critical meaning in his criticism. 'It was rather a process of the spirit which aimed at recapturing something of that vital force' which had gone to the making of Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*. Dryden said in his preface (1679): "we who ape his sounding words have nothing of his thought, but are all outside; there is not so much as a dwarf within our giant's clothes. Therefore, let not Shakespeare suffer for our sakes; 'tis our fault, who succeed him in an age which is more refined, if we imitate him so ill that we copy his failings only, and make a virtue of that in our writings which in his was an imperfection. This awareness of the difference between the language of Shakespeare and his own shows that Dryden's critical judgement was keen and sound, fair even at his own cost. The decline of poetry was felt acutely by Dryden. Skill had supplanted strength, external grace had replaced the inner fire of imagination.

Dryden's critical insight was greater than his creative imagination. He defended poetic licence, but he could not go beyond rhetoric in his own poetry. His epic ambition was thwarted, his experiment with the heroic form of drama did not outlive his age. What survived is his verse satire as in the heightenings of poetry, he said, the strength and vehemence of figures should be suited to the occasion, the subject and the persons, Figures should also be suited to the chosen level of style, the grand, the middle, or the plain, Low style was fit for satire, odes occupy a middle ground, tragic, heroic and sacred poetry demanded the loftiest style. Dryden's critical principles bear the stamp of Roman rhetorical theory.

His practical experience of creative writing led him to emphasise the importance of the art of characterisation. Round characters are better than flat. A round character consists of a blend of qualities which are not incompatible. Thus a man cannot be a miser and extravagant at once, but he can be generous and valiant.

In his *Discourse On Satire*, his views on the Latin Satire of Horace and Juvenal were elaborately presented. Fine raillery is nicest and most delicate.' Horace excels in this. Dryden himself imitated the manner of Horace in *Absalom* and *Achitophel*. He regarded satire as a species of heroic poetry. A Satirical poem, he stated, should in general treat of one main theme, with one particular moral, a rule observed by Persius and later on by Boileau; otherwise the most effective method was that of Horace, the sharp well mannered way of laughing a folly out of countenance.

He had a sense of tradition which T.S. Eliot seemed to have imitated, it was a creative poet's awareness. He pointed out that Spenser insinuated that the soul of Chaucer was transfused into his body. Milton, Dryden said, 'has acknowledged to me that Spenser was his original. 'About Shakespeare, he said:

Shakespeare's magic could not copied be,
Within that circle none durst walk but he

But Chaucer's and Shakespeare's art of characterisation in particular, and Milton's great epic inspired him. Chaucer's blending of the particular with the universal, the evanescent with the permanent in the portrait gallery of the general prologue to the *Canterbury Tales* may be seen in the portrait gallery of *Absalom* and *Achitophel*.

Besides these great English poets Dryden discussed Spenser, Donne, Cowley and the Latin poet Virgil and the Roman Satirists.

His critical method was comparative, historical and psychological. His native sensibility his supra-rational judgement. His imaginative sympathy made him a great English critic. His style of criticism has a charm, an urbanity, a live-likeness which make it the first specimen of modern English prose. The human and personal touch makes his criticism readable and the power of his critical genius makes it a rewarding reading.

23.6 THE TRANSLATOR

Dryden devoted his later poetic career to the work of translation, thus introducing his readers to ancient classics. Both inspiration and financial stress were among the causes. Dryden defended the work of the ancient writers. The Battle of Books was the story of the contrary pulls of old and new learning and literature in his generation and the following generation of Swift and others. Dryden emphasised that the imitation of classical models was desirable. He translated Ovid's *Epistles* (1680), *Satires* of Juvenal and Persius (1693), the French Painter Du Fresnoy's *De Arte Graphica* (1695), Virgil's *Eclogues*, *Georgics* and *Aeneid* (1697), and selections from Homer, Ovid, Boccaccio and Chaucer published under the title of *Fables* (1700).

The importance of Dryden's translations for his original poetic work is great. The serio-comic strain in English poetry right from Chaucer is evident. Shakespeare's tragedies have comic relief to vary the serious tone to the serio-comic. The Renaissance critics preferred the epic to tragedy which was regarded by Aristotle to be the supreme literary form. Dryden wavered between the claims of tragedy and the epic, but his epic ambition and the failure of his experiment with the heroic tragedy (inspired by the influence of the French neo-classical tragedy of Corneille and Racine) made him grant the epic the supreme position, though Austin Warren thought that he gave both joint possession of the prime category.

Dryden's experiment with the tragedy failed, and his dream of writing an epic remained unfulfilled. But not altogether. His mock-epic or mock-heroic poetry, which is his original contribution to English poetry, is partly a fulfilment of that dream. In fact, *Absalom and Achitophel*, the greatest political satire in English, has been classified as an 'epyllion' having marked similarities to a heroic poem. The sceptical, self-conscious and non-committal character of Dryden and his age made it impossible for him to be heroic in the manner of Milton.

Dryden's translation of Virgil was great, but the deficiency of Dryden's own poetic imagination in contrast with Virgil's comes out in the process. E.M.W. Tillyard pointed out that with the less public and more individual sides of Virgil Dryden was unable to cope. Virgil's account of Venus revealing herself to Aeneas in the first book of his epic was distorted in Dryden's translation. Dryden had, said Tillyard (1954) 'a positive genius for making nasty every aspect of the passion of love that was not already nasty, and he transformed a goddess into a competitor in a beauty competition.'

The prose translation of the passage may be contrasted with Dryden's verse translation to demonstrate the point.

Dryden's version, first:

Thus having said, she turn'd and made appear
Her Neck refulgent, and dishevel'd Hair;
Which, flowing from her shoulders, reach'd the ground
And widely spread Ambrosial scent around:
In length of Train descends her sweeping gown,
And by her graceful walk, the Queen of Love is known.

The more faithful prose version is as follows:

She ended and turning away she flushed over her rosy neck, and her immortal hair breathed forth a divine **fragrance from** her head; her robe dropped flowing to her **feet** and by her gait she was revealed a true goddess. .

There is nothing in the original about Venus's hair being dishevelled on reaching **the** ground, or about her walk being graceful: The reduction is characteristic and representative.

George Sampson's defence is vigorous 'Dryden's Virgil is literally **Dryden's Virgil**, and was expected to be. Its readers were already familiar with Virgil's Virgil, **and** wanted to know how a great English poet would treat that familiar story' (1957).

But the Weakness of **Dryden's** worldly imagination has also a strength. If personal feeling of the positive kind was beyond his poetic power, public feeling of both positive and negative types were there in plenty for a poet. The patriotic epic intended by **Dryden** could not be written because **Dryden** turned suspicious of extravagant hopes and high motives, and so turned to language and rhetoric. **The** kind of action **that** could have suited his epic design had to be about simple human passions. In his translation of Boccaccio's Sigismonda and Guiscardo, and Theodore and Honoria, he **made** crudity convincing by the energy of his description. The heroic vein that really suited him may be seen in the following passage, according to E.M.W. Tillyard; the theme of the passage may be described as **Dryden's** rationalisation of social hierarchy as natural to social system. The parallel of Hobbes as a political thinker may be considered.

Search we the secret springs,
And backward trace the principles of Things,
There shall we find, that when the world began,
One common mass compos'd the Mould of Man:
One paste of Flesh on all Degrees bestow's
And Kneaded up alike with moistening Blood,
The same Almighty pow'r inspir'd the Frame
With **kindl'd** life, and form'd the souls the sane,
The faculties of intellect, and will,
Dispens'd with equal Hand, dispos'd with equal skill
Like liberty indulg'd with choice of Good or **Ill**.
Thus born alike, from Vertue **first** began
The difference that distinguish'd Man from Man;
He claimed no title from Descent of Blood,
But that which made him Noble, made him good:
Warm'd with more particles of Heav'nly Flame.
He wing'd his upward flight, and soar'd to fame:
The rest remained below, a Tribe without a Name.

Dryden's praise for the imperial arts of Rome seems to be prophetic. Rudyard Kipling, the poet of British imperialism would similarly write. **Dryden** wrote:

Rome, 'tis thine alone with awful sway,
To Rule Mankind; and make the world obey,
Disposing peace, and war, thy **own.Majestic** way
To tame the proud, the fether'd slave to free,
These are imperial Arts, and worthy thee.

23.7 THE MAN OF LETTERS

The dedications, the prefaces and the epilogues of **Dryden** tell the sad story of the subservience to which his genius had to stoop to get patronage. His love for his

country and his society, however, is hidden behind this surface. The independence of spirit of a poet who was something of a hero lionised by the contemporary elite or literary circle is revealed behind his formal encomiastic prose and verse. If he is not visionary like the later English poets, e.g Blake, Wordsworth and Shelley, he has the advantage of being more social. His love as well as his indignation and hatred was more real and lifelike than theirs.

His poems on the death of **Cromwell (1659)** and on the death of **Charles II (1685)**, and other elegies like *To the Memory of Mr. Oldham (1684)* and his first published poem, an elegy on the death of Lord **Hastings (1649)**, written while he was still at school, do all show his lifelong interest in the public theme. These were all great public figures. But the superficial ornateness of the ode, *To the Pious Memory of the accomplish'd young lady, Mrs. Anne Killigrew (1685)* reveals his coarse taste and insensitivity. Its melodramatic artificiality and comic exaggerating of pathos betray the ingrained flatterer in the poet or the rant and bombast of his heroic tragedy, the rhetor as poet.

He dedicated poems and plays to the king and his courtiers. He wrote poems on the occasion of the return of **Charles II** and the restoration of the British throne to him entitles (1) **Astraea Redux**. A poem on the Happy Restoration and Return of his Sacred Majesty Charles the second (1660), and (2) *To His sacred Majesty, A Panegyric on his Coronation (1661)*. A poem entitled *To My Lord Chancellor* was written (1662) to eulogies Clarendon on New Year's Day. **Annus Mirabilis**, the year of Wonders, 1666, is described in the title: *An Historical poem : Containing the progress and various successes of our Naval War with Holland under the conduct of His Highness Prince Rupert, and His Grace the Duke of Albermarl. And describing the Fire of London*. This poem was dedicated to the Metropolis of Great Britain, the most renowned and late flourishing city of London, in its representatives the Lord Mayor etc. The public spirit and royalism of the poet may be seen in these. But these are all early poems of the first phase of the poet's growth. If we compare the coronation poem of **Dryden** written in 1661 with his official ode on the death of **Charles II** written 1685, we notice a significant difference between the early **Dryden** and the mature **Dryden** as a poet. In the latter poem, his pride, confidence and sense of irony are evident. In the fifteenth stanza of the ode entitled *Threnodia Augustalis*, he writes about the new king who succeeds the old (The king is Dead, long live the King):

A warlike prince ascends the Regal State,
A Prince, long exercise'd by Fate;
Long may he keep, tho he obtains it late
Heroes in Heaven's peculiar mould are Cast,
They and their Poets are not formed in **hast**;
Man was the first in God's design, and Man was made the last
False heroes, made by Flattery so,
Heav'n can strike out, like sparkles, at a blow;
But e're a prince is to perfection brought
He costs Omnipotence a second thought,
It looks as if the Maker would not own
The Noble work for his,
Before **twas try'd** and found a Master piece.

The oxymoron of Omnipotence's second thought is ridiculous and yet somehow sublime. And such a combination is the true index of **Dryden's** double feeling. Besides, the poet Laureate asserts proudly: They and their poets are not formed in **hast**. Compare this with Pope's.

Yes, I'm proud to see
Men not afraid of God afraid of me.

Dryden's hero was the King, Pope has become his own hero. The later poet-as-hero of the romantic age celebrated among other things in Carlyle's on Heroes, Hero worship and the Heroic in History (1841) shows a new development which emerges first in Pope. In this respect Pope is more like the romantic poets of the later age than like Dryden or Milton. In other words, he is more self regarding or subjective, less dramatic and objective, more characterised by what Keats called the egotistical sublime than by 'Negative capability.'

'My chief endeavours are to delight the Age in which I live', Dryden admitted rather sadly in 1668. One of the ways in which this gave his poetry its foim is known as its occasional character. His Age was represented by the courtiers and the nobles.

The Rival Ladies (1664) was dedicated to his brother-in-law Sir Robert Howard; *the Indian Emperor* (1665) was dedicated to the Duchess of Monmouth; *the Conquest of Granada* (1669) to the Duke of York; *Marriage a la Mode* (1673) was dedicated to the Earl of Rochester; *The State of Innocence* (1674), to the Duchess of York; *All for love* (1678), to The Lord Treasurer, the Earl of Danby; and *Troilus and Cressida* (1679) to Earl of Sunderland. Chief secretary of state Aurengzebe (1676) was addressed to the Earl of Mulgrave, himself a poet, John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, and the Earl of Mulgrave, were among the court poets of the time. Sir Robert Howard, Dryden's brother-in-law, is one of the four debaters in the famous essay of Dramatic poesy, and had the reputation of being know-all.

These dedications are fulsome flattery, but the courtly, urbane, witty, and ironic prose of eulogy, makes them readable. Dryden could mock his heroes when he chose. His praise and commendation balances his censure or fault-finding better than Pope's or Swift's True, as Dr. Johnson said, 'he seems to have made flattery too cheap'.

The prefaces, prologues and epilogues of Dryden are also interesting. His views on comedy, for example, are enunciated in the preface to *An Evening's Love, or Mock Astrologer* (1671). His essay of Heroic Plays is prefixed to the *Conquest of Granada by the Spaniards* (1672). In the Epilogue to the second part of the *Conquest of Granada* have Dryden praised his age as 'more gallant than the last'. His essay on the dramatic poetry of the last age appeared as a defence of the epilogue. In the prologue to *Aurengzebe* (1676) he declared his weariness of his long loved mistress, Rhyme. His Apology for Heroic poetry and poetic licence was prefixed to the *State of Innocence: An Opera* (1677). In the preface to *All for Love, or the World well Lost* (1678), he asserted that he desired to be tried by the laws of my own country in the field of drama. His reflection on the relation between a poet and the rich in the same preface throws light on his situation A poet is not pleased, because he is not rich; and the rich are discontented, because the poet will not admit them of their number. Thus the case is hard with writers: if they succeed not, they must starve; and if they do, some malicious satire is prepared to level them for daring to please without their leave. The preface to *Troilus and Cressida* (1679) includes The grounds of Criticism in Tragedy. The other prefaces (1) to Ovid's epistles translated by several hands, (2) To the Spanish Friar, (3) To Sylvae, or the second part of Poetical Miscellanies, (4) To the satires of Juvenal and Persius, entitled A discourse concerning The original and Progress of Satire (1693) and (5) the famous preface to *Fables, Ancient and Modern* (1700), written in the last year of his life and containing the celebrated criticism of Chaucer, do all show how he educated the taste of his contemporaries. His criticism appearing in these pieces gave his readers the skill and training to criticise. The sensibility of his generation found its expression in his creative and critical writings. He was the most influential mail of letters of his age.

23.8 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have acquainted ourselves with some of the elementary details of Dryden's life and literary activities. His ways of life, the way of his world, and his cultural practises have influenced and transformed our own. We notice that as a man

of letters he was a realist. The social and historical reality of his time shaped his perception and experience. The private and the public aspects of his creative imagination should be appreciated in the light of this fact. He described 'the last age' as less refined than his own, but, he admitted 'what we gained in skill we lost in strength'.

Dryden died three hundred years ago, or to be precise, two years short of that today (1998). In the arena of world history, much has happened during this period. The most relevant event in the context of our study of his life and poetry is the story of the cultural interaction, let alone the political, between India and England. Our act of reading his poems and, as an aid to that, reading the story of his life derives from that.

23.9 QUESTIONS

1. Briefly describe the variety of Dryden's literary talent.
2. Why is the Restoration period (1660-1700 AD) called the Age of Dryden? Discuss.
3. Dryden's attitude to man-woman relationship, not unlike Milton's, was rooted in the personal experience of married life. Discuss. Would you relate his poetic account of love to his real experience?
4. Milton and Dryden were both interested in society and politics. But whereas Milton was more sacrosanct about his poetic vocation, Dryden was less serious. Explain and justify your argument.
5. Discuss the change that Dryden and his age brought about in English poetry. Was it a change for the worse?
6. Public themes are more important than private ones in Dryden's poetry. Is that essentially a disadvantage for a poet?
7. Discuss the spiritual life and moral conduct of Dryden, particularly as reflected in his philosophical poems. Discuss Dryden's theory and practice of Drama.
9. Write an essay on the future prospect of the heroic couplet and the mock-heroic satire in poetry.
10. Briefly describe Dryden's views on
 - (a) the three unities
 - (b) Comic relief in serious drama
 - (c) The English dramatic tradition
11. Dryden is said to have given the epic and the tragedy a 'joint possession of the prime category'. Do you agree? Discuss.
12. Attempt an evaluation of Dryden as
 - (a) a dramatist
 - (b) a critic
13. Discuss Dryden's theory and practice of translation.
14. Discuss Dryden's view of 'imitation' in poetry and criticism.
15. Write an essay on the relation between the poet and his patron, with special reference to the case of Dryden.

23.10 SUGGESTED READINGS

Note: In addition to the books listed in 'The Age of Dryden and Pope', the following books are of special relevance to this unit.

S.No.	Author	Title
1.	Budick, Eugene	<i>Dryden and the Abyss of Light</i> (1970)
2.	Hamilton, K.G.	<i>John Dryden and the Poetry of Statement</i> (1967).
3.	King Bruce (ed)	<i>Dryden's Mind and Art</i> (1969).

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4.	Kinsley, James and Kinsley, Helen (ed)	<i>Dryden: The Critical Heritage</i> (1971)
5.	Kirsch, Arthur C	<i>Dryden's Heroic Drama</i> (1965)
6.	Miner, Earl	<i>Dryden's Poetry</i> (1967)
7.	Moore, F.P.	<i>The Nobler Pleasure: Dryden's Comedy in Theory and Practice</i> (1963)
8.	Nicoll, A.	<i>Dryden and His Poetry</i> (1923).
9.	Osborn, J.M	<i>John Dryden: Some Biographical Facts and Problems</i> (1940).
10.	Price, Martin	<i>To The Palace of Wisdom</i> (1964).
11.	Ramsey, Paul	<i>The Art of John Dryden</i> (1969).
12.	Schilling, B.N	<i>Dryden and the Conservative Myth: A Reading of Absalom and Achitophel</i> (1961)
13.	Scott, Walter	<i>The life of John Dryden</i> ed. B. Kreissman (1963)
14.	Smith, David, N.	<i>John Dryden</i> (1950)
15.	Swedenberg, H.T. (Jr.) ed.	<i>Essential Articles of the Study of John Dryden</i> (1966)
16.	Waith, E.	<i>The Herculean Hero in Marlowe, Chapman, Shakespeare and Dryden</i> (1962)
17.	Ward, C. E.	<i>The Life of John Dryden</i> (1961).

UNIT 24 *MAC FLECKNOE*

structure

- 24.0 Objectives
- 24.1 Introduction
- 24.2 Introduction to Mac Flecknoe
- 24.3 The Development of **Dryden**
 - 24.3.1 Juvenilia and Early Poetry
 - 24.3.2 A Blind Alley (1668-1681)
 - 24.3.3 A Short Bloom (1681-86)
 - 24.3.4 The Mellowed Trans-cultural Poet (1687-1700)
- 24.4 Can Satire be Great Poetry
- 24.5 The Critical Debate and Heritage
- 24.6 Interpretation
 - 24.6.1 The Title
 - 24.6.2 The Structure of the Poem
 - 24.6.3 Textual Analysis
- 24.7 The Ode : Alexander's Feast
- 24.8 Interpretation
- 24.9 Let Us Sum Up
- 24.10 Suggested Readings
- 24.11 Questions

24.0 OBJECTIVES

The objective of this unit is to help you study Mac Flecknoe and Alexander's Feast, the two best poems of John **Dryden** of their respective types, with a view particularly to

- * understanding the texts and being able to explain passages **from** them,
- * knowing their social and literary context, particularly, the popularity of **verse-satire**.
- * appreciating the mock-heroic design, of Mac Flecknoe and the musical design of Alexander's Feast,
- * analysing the poetic style of Dryden-diction, imagery, metaphor, speech, **narrative** etc.
- * appreciating the verse-forms – the heroic couplet and the Ode, and
- * evaluating the poems by deciding their place among the poetical works of **Dryden** and as classics of English poetry.

24.1 INTRODUCTION

In this Unit, we shall study Mac Flecknoe, the first literary satire and one of the great mock-heroic poems in English. We shall also study Alexander's Feast – **the** second Ode on St. Cecilia's Day.

Our detailed discussion of Mac Flecknoe will make us agree with T.S. Eliot in whose view the poem was 'the piece of **Dryden** which is most **fun**, which is the most sustained display of surprise of wit **from** line to line.

Dryden thought that Alexander's Feast; or The Power of Musique, an Ode in Honour of St. Cecilia's Day, published three years before his death, was 'the best of all my poetry', and so did his contemporaries.

Satire, possible only in society, became poetic in **Dryden's** society, because poetry was adequately social, even public, and society was sufficiently literary. The Restoration of 1660 not only changed sensibility but also divided society into Whig and Tory. The class-cleavage was felt as political rather than economic in **Dryden's** time. And the divorce between religion and politics was not yet complete. All this is illustrated in *Mac Flecknoe*.

The development of **Dryden** from the heroic to the mock-heroic, from the serious to the serio-comic, was a self-discovery which may be compared with the late **flowering** of the genius of **W.B. Yeats**. The control and complexity of the ironic tone in *Absalom* and *Achitophel* written at the age of **fifty** is the first sign of **maturity**. And there was no decline since then. But more than two decades of criticism, self-examination and experiment, mainly dramatic, had to pass before **Dryden** could mature and discover his original genius and assert his poetic authority.

The interpretation of **Dryden's** poetry has led to a critical debate on the nature of poetry between the classicists and the romanticists. Satire, **language** and verse are all controversial. We shall see that, despite the debate, *Mac Flecknoe* and 'Alexander's Feast' belong no less to the mainstream of English poetry than the romantic lyric of the last century or the waste land of our own.

24.2 INTRODUCTION TO *MAC FLECKNOE*

Literature is a formation within language, which is a primary instance of the cultural system. Authors and readers are placed and defined inside this system as well as systems of race, gender and class. Graduate students of English literature in India read and study *Mac Flecknoe* within the network of these systems. They operate inside specific institutions (like IGNOU) which shape their practice.

Each act of reading a text prepares us for reading the next. Literature as well as criticism are, in the words of Paul de Man (1979), "condemned (or privileged) to be forever the most rigorous and consequently, the most unreliable language in terms of which man names and transforms himself". Reading, according to him, is an argument, 'an epistemological event prior to being an ethical or aesthetic value'.

The 'epistemological event' that our study of *Mac Flecknoe* is going to be has the following main aspects:

- (1) The autobiographical, social, historical, literary and poetic elements of the experience of the poet which inspired the poem: its origin and genesis, in other words.
- (2) The Poem as a communication from the poet to the reader. History and Form. Satire and Poetry,
- (3) The interpretation of the text : its mock-heroic form, the poetic technique – **verse**, diction, rhetoric, style.
- (4) The evaluation of the value-system that the poem **symbolises**.

Mac Flecknoe was published anonymously in October, 1682. The date of its composition and its authorship remained uncertain for ten years after publication. The first edition was piratical and **Dryden** had denied authorship to Shadwell. But that was merely being 'polite', for **Dryden** claimed it after **Shadwell's death** in December, 1692.

Thomas Shadwell, the target of satire in *Mac Flecknoe*, was born in 1642, and thus younger by more than ten years to John **Dryden**. He was a dramatist and professed

imitator of Ben Jonson. His witty talk and amusing writing made him popular. His **plays abound** in concrete imagery, vigorous metaphor and picturesque phrases. They **show**, as Rochester put it, 'great mastery with little care'. A **humorist** and caricaturist, he was indebted to the French Moliere and the English Ben Jonson. He ranges **from cheerful** force to coarse verisimilitude. 'His prosaic but vigorous mind plants the reader in Restoration life more faithfully than does the wit-and-intrigue comedy of Dryden, Etherage and Congreve'.

The Sullen Lovers (1668) and *The Miser* (1672) are comedies by him which have their source in Moliere. His Jonsonian Comedy of Humours is exemplified particularly by *The Humorists* (1670) and *Epsom Wells* (1672). He was witty enough to make Don Juan the hero of *The Libertine* (1676). Other popular plays by him were *The Squire of Alsatia* (1688) and *Bury Fair* (1689). He gives a picture of his age "roughly rather than finely drawn, and, to that extent, more veracious". He loved the country no less than the town. Bellamy in his *Bury Fair* expresses his own attitude.

As a drama-critic, he advocated a development of Comedy on the line of Ben Jonson. He said : "All dramatic poets ought to imitate him (Jonson)". He disapproved of the prevailing form of the Comedy of manners. He believed that the delineation of humours was more **fruitful**. Comedy as an instrument of social and moral **reform** could be created only by a satirical portraiture of real characters drawn from ordinary life. The realistic representation of human characters with satirical intent was, according to him, the essence of comedy. Keen observation and judgement was to be shown in the selection of humours. 'Judgement does indeed comprehend wit; for fancy rough-draws, but judgement smooths and finishes', he explained. In the Epilogue to *The Humorists*, he gave the definition of humour:

A humour is the bias of the mind
By which with violence 'tis inclined
It makes our actions lean on one side still
And in all changes that way bend the will.

And in the Dedication to *The Virtuoso* he asserted: 'Four of the humours are entirely new and (without variety) I may say I ne'er produced a comedy that had not some natural humour in it, not represented before and I hope, I **never** shall'. He was never tired of praising Ben Jonson. In the Epilogue to *The Humorists*, he said:

But to out-go all other men would be
O noble Ben, less than to follow thee

Sutherland (1958) allowed **Shadwell** "to creep in at the bottom" of a supposed list of twelve best English comic dramatists.

But the real or historical **Shadwell** is less important, at least in this context, than **Dryden's** Shadwell. It is, therefore, more relevant to know **Dryden's** relations with him. **Dryden** had been friendly to **Shadwell** during the first decade of their acquaintance as dramatists from 1668 to 1679. He had praised Shadwell's genius in an Epilogue to *The Volunteers*, a play by Shadwell, written a Prologue to another play by him, *A True Widow*. They had **worked** together in preparing the critical comments on Settle's *Empress of Morocco*. But, during this same period, **Dryden** had also been engaged in a literary dispute or debate with **Shadwell** on rhyme, wit, humour and other issues. In **Dryden's** view **Shadwell** had no understanding of true wit or the merit of Ben Jonson whom he professed to imitate. 'I Know', said **Dryden**, 'I honour Ben Jonson more than my little critiques, because without **vanity** I may **own**, I understand him better' (Dedication to the *Assination* 1673). Secondly, professional rivalry between **Dryden** and the younger **Shadwell** is easy to imagine. **Dryden's** appointment as Poet **Laureate** in 1668 may have made **Shadwell** envious. Ironically, **Shadwell** succeeded **Dryden** as the Poet **Laureate** in 1685.

But the Exclusion Bill of 1679 brought about a change in social life. The revelry and entertainment of the Restoration court and society which had lasted for about two decades ceased. And, the political turmoil that ensued with the Bill divided society and separated friends and turned them into enemies as in the case of **Dryden** and **Shadwell**. **Absalom and Achitophel** (1681) was published a week before **Shaftesbury** (**Achitophel**) was released. The whigs felt triumphant, and struck a medal in his honour. **Dryden** made a second attack in *The Medal* which he subtitled 'A Satire against Sedition'. One of the immediate replies was *The Medal of John Bayes*. This was attributed to **Shadwell**. **Mac Flecknoe**, **Dryden's** reply, is for greater poetry. **John Bayes**, by the way, is the satirical name associated with **Dryden's**. It is the name of the satirical character in the *Rehearsal* (1671). **Shadwell** is believed to have contributed to this concoction as well. Moreover, he had criticised rhyme in **Dryden's** plays and the Tories including **Dryden** (their champion). Thus, literary and political provocations infuriated **Dryden** known for his calm reserve.

Shadwell had often sneered at **Dryden**, a senior and superior poet. But the **Shadwell** of **Mac Flecknoe** is fictional or mythical. Its derivation from real experience is only like all other derivations of fiction from fact.

No doubt **Dryden's** best poetry (which is mock-heroic satire) is essentially social in the positive sense. He valued the commendation of adversaries as 'the greatest triumph of a writer, because it never comes unless extorted'. The best judge of a poem, according to him, however, is the impartial reader. The transmutation of life into art succeeds in **Mac Flecknoe**, because the mock-heroic ceremony (the coronation) is a comic drama, transforming personal experience into literary criticism. 'There is a sweetness in good verse' (said **Dryden**, in the Preface to *Absalom and Achitophel*) 'which tickles even while it hurts'. The rhetorical power of the poem lies as much in its verse as in its argument which simplifies, exaggerates and distorts.

24.3 THE DEVELOPMENT OF DRYDEN

A brief account of **Dryden's** development as a poet will help us appreciate how his genius flowered briefly during a half-decade (1681-86). He has been writing poems and plays, criticism and dedications, for three decades before he fully matured as a poet. (Another case of a long and slow self-discovery is that of **W.B. Yeats**). The following four phases of growth in his development may be noticed.

1. Juvenilia and Early Poetry: (1649-1667)
2. A Blind Alley – Heroic Drama: (1668-1680)
3. A Short Bloom: (1681-86)
4. The Mellowed Transcultural Poet: (1687-1700)

24.3.1 Juvenilia and Early Poetry

F.N. Lees (1957) showed how the first published poem of **Dryden** (written at the age of eighteen, while he was still at school), an elegy on the death of **Lord Hastings**, is at once characteristic and immature. The decasyllabic couplets and the 'public' theme of this poem were going to bear the stamp of his genius, but the diction reminiscent of the metaphysical decadence and the mechanical verse betray immaturity. The poem shows what **Dryden** grew out of. **Cowley**, **Marvell** and **Milton** were the most important living poets when **Dryden** began writing. His Heroic quatrains on the death of **Cromwell** (1659) reflect his tendency to use public occasions as poetic themes. The personal lyric impulse is conspicuous by its absence. Contemporary public life interested this poet from the beginning. His poems on the Restoration and the Coronation of **Charles II**, and a poem written in honour of **Clarendon** on New Year's

Day 1662, are all in the decasyllabic couplet, for which his love becomes manifest. His advocacy for it as the medium in Heroic tragedy, and his mastery of the medium in his Satires, were to follow.

Dr. Johnson defended **Dryden** against 'the reproach of inconstancy'. 'If he changed, he changed with the nation'. But he noted that **Dryden's** enemies later used it as an argument against him. In **Dryden**, the man who suffered and the artist who created were inseparable.

The most important poem of this phase, **Annus Mirabilis** (1667), is 'historical'. It describes 1666 – the year of Wonders. The Anglo-Dutch naval war and the defeats at sea, the plague and the Great Fire are the main themes. The poet views the events as temporary interruptions in England's advance to power and prosperity. The heroic quatrains of the poem are believed by the poet to be the fit medium for a Heroic poem. 'Virgil has been my Master in this poem : I have followed him every where', said **Dryden**, who was later to satisfy his epic ambition by translating Virgil's Latin epic. The general fault of the poem, according to Dr. Johnson, was that it had 'more sentiment than description', but the description of the fire showed, to Johnson, a mind 'better formed to reason than to feel'. 'Sentiment' perhaps is public sentiment, and feeling private. **Dryden** evolved as master of the public mode. The poems of the first phase 'transform public events into ritualistic celebrations of the union of the hero with the nation'. The framework of historical events reveals a pattern. The ceremonial hero unites the theme of the transition from chaos to order. The poems end on a prophetic note of the future glory of England. **Dryden's** hero possesses active and passive virtues derived from Christian and Roman traditions. The 'ceremonial hero' of **Dryden's** poems of 1650-63 was replaced by Society in **Annus Mirabilis** (1667) and **Absalom and Achitophel** (1681). In these later poems, Society is of chief importance. In **Annus Mirabilis**, the king achieves magnanimity by humility, prayer and selfless love for his people. Joel Blair (1969) argued that the diminution of the hero in **Dryden's** poetry was caused by his ideas of Society and State. 'Dryden's vision of the state destroyed the idealization of the representative of the State'.

24.3.2 A Blind Alley (1668-1681)

The early poetry of **Dryden** is non-dramatic and non-satirical. It expresses a vigorous public spirit and the desire to write an epic. But at the Restoration, the love for the French drama shown by the king influenced **Dryden** who turned a dramatist against inclination. He wrote his first play in 1663 and kept writing plays for three decades. Comedies, tragedies and tragi-comedies – he attempted all these forms of dramatic composition. Regarding comedies, he said in 1668:

'I confess my chief endeavours are to delight the age in which I live. If the humour of this be for low comedy, small accidents', and raillery, I will force my genius to obey it, though with more reputation I could write in verse. I know I am not so fitted by nature to write comedy. I want that gaiety of humour which is required to it. My conversation is slow and dull, my humour saturnine and reserved'.

He had made a vigorous defence of Shakespearean and English tragedy of the last age in his Essay of Dramatic Poetry (1668). The English tragedy is tragi-comic. Comic relief and the neglect of the three unities are important aspects of its form. **Dryden** defended the native tradition of drama,

But his own heroic plays were an experiment in many senses. First, he introduced rhyme in the speeches, for he believed rhyme to be "as natural and more effectual than blank verse" and 'the noblest kind of modern verse'. Secondly, a serious play was to represent nature 'wrought up to a higher pitch'. This betrayed a love for romance beyond realism. And, thirdly, love and honour were to be the main themes. 'Love is the passion which most predominates in our souls' and 'pity and terror are not now the

only springs on which our tragedies move'. **Aristotle** might have changed his mind, **Dryden** argued, had he lived in Restoration England and seen **Dryden's** heroic plays.

Dryden loved change and novelty no less than tradition. He believed in progress-as-process and strove to direct change in the art of poetry in a direction of his choice. There is no doubt that he believed that great poems – the epic or heroic poetry – **endured** permanently. He was effecting a transition from the Renaissance ideal of **heroism** to the Restoration double view. **The** Restoration is said to have 'at once exalted and doubted the heroic posture'. **Dryden** modelled his heroic drama on the narrative epic. The neo-classical indecision in the grading of literary genres **reflects** a confusion of values. Since the grading involves social, moral, aesthetic, **hedonistic** and traditional values together, the Restoration critics led by **Dryden** himself **gave** the epic and tragedy 'joint possession of the prime category'.

The Restoration Comedy is mainly prose drama. Verse was not popular in the **theatre** any more. **In** the twentieth century, attempts to revive verse-drama have not succeeded. Prose is the regular or common medium in drama. But **Dryden** strove in vain to use rhyme in his plays. The poetic drama like *Prometheus Unbound* is **more** poetic or lyrical than dramatic. **Dryden** too leaned towards the verbal or poetic in drama. Discourse rather than action suited his talent. He believed that thoughts and words, 'the hidden beauties of a play' are not properly judged 'in the vehemence of action'. His 'special pleading' for heroic tragedy, and his own practice of the dramatic **art**, has 'historical', **not** lasting, value. They pleased and entertained contemporary audiences, but very soon they became unpopular. **The** *Rehearsal* (1672) ridiculed John Bayes, who was **Dryden** in a thin disguise. **The** resemblance of this author in the *Skit* with John **Dryden** in voice, dress, habit of taking snuff, personal gestures and favourite oaths made the identification unmistakable. The *Satire* was directed against the exaggeration of the poetic and dramatic technique. **The** rant and bombast, the harping on the theme of love and honour, the overreaching tendency was made to appear ridiculous and absurd. The satire was highly effective, and heroic drama lost its popularity.

The tragi-comedy of **Dryden** used blank verse and prose. In spite of the success of plays by him of this type like *The Spanish Friar* (1680), he rejected the **mixture** of mirth and **gravity** as indecent like 'a gay widow **laughing** in mourning habit'.

The songs in the plays are interesting. We shall consider only one stanza from a song in *The Spanish Friar* :

The passion you pretended
Was only to obtain,
But when the charm is ended
The charmer you disdain.
Your love by ours we measure
Till we have lost our treasure,
But dying is a pleasure,
Where living is a pain.

Notice the speaker talking in the plural – we, ours etc, Evidently, the woman is **talking** on behalf of her gender or the fair sex. No individual emotion but a general sentiment. Secondly, the cynical tone of the poet appears behind the sadness of the speaker. Notice also the balance and antithesis in the last two lines.

Dr. Johnson was the first to notice that love did not inspire **Dryden's** poetry. Ironically, love was predominant in "our souls", according to **Dryden**. In fact, the separation of poetic and personal love may be seen in the process. **Dryden** talked of 'poetic' love – love as the theme of poetry, Johnson talked of love as **experience** in life. But the artist detached from the man became crude in feeling.

24.3.3 A Short Bloom (1681-86)

Mec Flecknoe

The first half of **Dryden's** long poetic career was spent in experiment. He had been appointed Poet Laureate and Historiographer Royal in 1670, and, before that, **nominated** a member of the Royal Society. But his experiment with drama did not **succeed**. He had intended to leave the stage, 'to which my genius never much inclined **me**'. His desire to write a narrative epic 'for the honour of my native country, to which a poet is particularly obliged', was not likely to be realised.

His fascination with the heroic, the romantic, the uncommon was over. He mocked heroes as 'a race of men who can never enjoy quiet in themselves, till they have taken it from all the world'. The 'ceremonial' hero had outlived its artistic usefulness.

In his Discourse on Satire (1693), he stated at length his views on the epic. With the publication of Absalom and Achilophel in November 1681, he had turned to satire. In the Discourse on Satire he describes its origin and progress. His familiarity with Greek and Latin Satire shows not only his learning but also the literary source of his inspiration as a satirist. He traced the etymology of the English word Satire to the Roman word 'Satura' 'which signifies full, and abundant; and full also of variety, in which nothing is wanting to its due perfection'. About his own taste, he said, 'I owe more to Horace for my instruction, and more to Juvenal, for my pleasure'. His admiration for the French Satirist, Boileau, was superlative. He said that Boileau wrote 'the most beautiful, and most noble kind of satire'. He found 'the majesty of the heroic, finely mixed with the venom of the other, and raising the delight which otherwise would be flat and vulgar, by the sublimity of the expression'. Thus, the heroic had **turned** mock-heroic in **Dryden's** imagination. A sublime expression for vulgar and venomous experience or feeling. He admitted he was 'naturally vindictive', but claimed that he had suffered in silence, and 'possessed my soul in quiet'. The source in personal experience of what Arnold called 'some touch of frost to the imaginative life of the soul' and 'some repression and silencing of poetry' is remarkable. But it was not merely personal. A concern for social order, poetic excellence and spiritual balance is reflected, respectively, in Absalom and Achitophel, Mac Flecknoe, and the two philosophical poems Religio Laici and The Hind and the Panther. 1682 is a year of special importance in **Dryden's** poetic achievement. The Medal, Religio Laici, and Mac Flecknoe, were all published in this year. The personal drama of **Dryden** is enacted in The Hind and the Panther (1686). Humility and Charity – the Christian virtues – confront pride and malice. A belligerent and proud poet finds, and states, how difficult it is to live a religious life in the world. The sects of Christianity – Puritan, Protestant and Roman Catholic – were hostile to each other in **Dryden's** England. But the Puritan Milton and Bunyan are no more important than **Dryden** whose conversion was suspected to be sham. His religious poetry shows that he paid only a lip-service to religion, his faith was deistic, and his poetry secular, profane and almost sacrilegious.

24.3.4 The Mellowed Trans-cultural Poet (1687-1700)

The glorious Revolution of 1688 was followed by the beginning of the Hanoverian Rule of England. **Dryden** must have approved of the triumph of the British Parliament. But **Shadwell** succeeded him as the Poet Laureate in 1688, and all other expressions of royal favour were withdrawn from **Dryden**, mainly because he was a Roman Catholic, a Papist. Religion, Politics and Poetry were mixed up in **Dryden's** life and the result was nothing short of a mess.

'A poet is not pleased because he is not rich; and the rich are discontented, because the poets will not admit them of their number', **Dryden** wrote in the Preface to All for Love (1678). During the following decade, he must have been happy with himself for his success and popularity as a poet. But the poet in **Dryden's** time was an entertainer, not a legislator, of mankind, Not yet, 'a heroic figure belonging to all ages', his craft

or 'sullen art', did not any more depend 'on his lordship's patronage'. As W.H. Auden puts it, the **two types** of **Augustan** art were different:

Two arts as different as Jews and Turks,
Each serving aspects of the Reformation,
Luther's division into faith and works:
The God of the Unique imagination,
A friend of those who have to know their station,
And the Great Architect, the Engineer
Who **keeps** the mighty in their higher Sphere.

Dryden's was of the secular type. His imagination **humanised** the divine, as in the oxymoron of Omnipotence's second thought in *Threnodia Augustalis* (1685), and in the transition of Virgil, particularly the description of Venus in the following:

Thus having said, she turned, and made appear
Her Neck refulgent, and dishevel'd Hair;
Which, flowing from her Shoulders, reach'd the Ground,
And widely Spread Ambrosial Scents around;
In length of train descends her sweeping Gown,
And by her graceful Walk, the Queen of Love is known.

As Tillyard pointed out, "There is nothing in the original about Venus's hair being dishevelled or reaching the ground, or about her walk being graceful". Dryden, said Tillyard, transformed a goddess into a competitor in a beauty competition. This is **vulgarisation** and distortion, the mock-heroic with a vengeance, turning the divine into less than heroic or human.

The Translations by **Dryden** of the Satires of Persius, Juvenal, Horace, the poetry of Ovid. Homer and Boccaccio, and **Virgil's** epic Aeneid were all in verse, the decasyllabic couplet, mainly. He described translation as 'a kind of drawing after the life' which has 'a double sort of likeness'. In **Dryden's** time Latin and Greek were better understood by the learned of his society than English which was not yet an academic subject.

Dryden used the parallel of imperial Rome to inspire British imperialism of later times. He gave English culture a European character. Arnold regretted that the poets of the Romantic Revival were insular. In this century which is passing out British poetry and culture have undergone a radical **transformation**. English is now World Language No. One. Thus, **Dryden's** dream has in a sense come true. Translation from and into English, not only of poetry but of all sorts of writing, has been steadily increasing. Parody, imitation, adaptation, burlesque and collage have all gained a currency in the modern world which is a veritable Babel.

Some of the best non-satirical poems of **Dryden** were written during this phase. Apart from the two songs for **St. Cecilia's** Day in which the music is striking harmony of numbers, *Threnodia Augustalis* (1685), written on the death of Charles, and the *Britannia Rediviva* (1688), on the birth of the prince, the poems 'To the Pious Memory of the Accomplish Young lady, Mrs. Anne **Killigrew**, the best of his lyrics, 'To the Memory of Mr. **Oldham**, are most important. In the elegy on Anne **Killigrew**, he described his age as 'This lubric and adult'rous age' in the poem. The closing stanza has an improper **comic** air, perhaps because the poet failed to be solemn in his treatment of popular superstition, A lack of control of tone visible here may be judged as the failure of the poet due to some unconscious prompting. It is somewhat like Milton's treatment of Satan in *Paradise Lost*. In both cases, we may trace the uncertain tone, if any, to the **confusion** of Christian and classical influence.

The poetry of **Dryden** at its best is satirical, and it is generally held that satire cannot be great poetry. Moral criticism is mixed with literacy and aesthetic, and the high expectation that a poet should be a seer or saint is used as a critical value. This is a romantic and unrealistic approach.

Stanley Fish (1990) rightly said that the difference between serious and rhetorical man is fundamental. Henry James (1905) had beautifully said : 'All life, therefore, comes back to the question of our speech, the medium through which we communicate with each other; for all life comes back to the question of our relations with each other'. Even if the difference between serious and rhetorical man is not granted, the use of language, rhetoric and poetry in social life must be conceded. **Literary** Satire, of which Mac Flecknoe is the first example in English, is judicial and demonstrative. The satirist protests in public, addressing an audience and trying to persuade it to accept his point of view. **Dryden** had acquired the art of declamation from his school teacher Richard Busby at Westminster. He regarded rhetoric as an art. **Dryden** claimed for the poet the liberty of poetic licence, the licence to use tropes and figures. 'Imaging', according to him, is 'the very height and life of poetry'.

The tradition of the serio-comic, by turns grave and gay, is predominant in English poetry. Chamber, Shakespeare, **Dryden**, Pope, Byron are the most prominent poets of this line. Besides, Comedy and Satire have a moral purpose. Pope said : Satire 'heals with Morals what it hurts with Wit'. But Comedy is different. The writer of Comedy accepts the imperfections, follies and vices, of life. He is alive to the eccentric, the abnormal, the imperfect, as well as to the regular, the normal, the perfect. He appears as a counsel for the Defence, whereas the Satirist appears as the counsel for the Prosecution. The comic poet tolerates, even accepts, while the satirist judges and punishes. He wishes to restore balance, correct error. His intention is to expose or deride. The satirist deliberately distorts, for he sees only one aspect of the truth, not the whole truth.

The comic imagination of **Dryden** created, in Mac Flecknoe, a mock-heroic fantasy. **Shadwell** is almost an excuse for the poem. Maynard Mack (1951) described the Muse of Satire and regretted that the fictionality of Satire is overlooked in criticism. According to him, whereas tragedy exhibits the inadequacy of norms, satire asserts their validity and necessity. And the satirist assumes the authority of a hero. He transforms the historical into the rhetorical. Above all, satirical poetry is poetry at grips with what society is doing. Mac Flecknoe is one of the best verse-satires in English, and the first literary satire. His political satire has 'public' themes, but Mac Flecknoe is personal satire which the poet wrote to please himself.

Dr. Johnson compared **Dryden** and Pope as poets : 'If the flights of **Dryden** are higher, Pope continues longer on the wing. If of **Dryden's** fire the blaze is brighter, of Pope's the heat is more regular and constant. **Dryden** often surpasses expectation, and Pope never falls below it. **Dryden** is read with frequent astonishment and Pope with perpetual delight'.

If satire cannot be as great as tragedy or the epic, nor can the lyric. In fact, realism rather than romance makes poetry modern, **Dryden** is the first modern English poet in a sense in which neither Milton nor Pope is. Remember that Pope wrote criticism in verse and called it 'Essay'. His literary mode and manner were more traditional than **Dryden's**. The modern tradition has no doubt gone far beyond **Dryden**, but the change that the English language underwent in his leadership was to last. It was at once refinement and impoverishment. Hippolyte Taine (1864) observed : 'Words, before animated, and as it were swelling with sap, are withered and dried up; they become abstractions'. **Dryden's** language persuades or convinces, his verse is musical, but his poetry does not sink deep into the heart'.

The mock-heroic technique of Mac Flecknoe has its source in the analogical vision of the poet. The amplification of the exploits of Shadwell, and Flecknoe, **draws** indifferently upon the example of past and present rulers. The individual was related to the State organically in **Dryden's** vision, The coronation of **Shadwell** should be appreciated in this light. The kingdom of letters was analogical to the kingdom of England in **Dryden's witty** imagination.

24.5 THE CRITICAL DEBATE AND HERITAGE

The following abstract of **Dryden's** influence on Pope shows its range and variety, Pope told Spence : 'I learned versification wholly from **Dryden's** works'. Mark Van Doren (1960) added : Zimri and Og **begat** Wharton and Sporus; Mac Flecknoe **begat** The Dunciad; The Religio Laici and The Hind and the **Panther** **begat** the Moral Essays; the Cecilia of 1687 **begat** the Cecilia of 1708; The Virgil **begat** the Homer ; and the Fables **begat** the Paraphrases from Chaucer'.

The pervasive influence of **Dryden** on Pope is the glory of the creative heritage **from Dryden**. Pope admired **Dryden's** verse:

Waller was smooth, but **Dryden** taught to join
The varying verse, the **full-resounding** line,
The long majestic March, and Energy divine.

but he noted that 'copious' **Dryden** wanted, or forgot, 'the Art to blot'.

Among the contemporaries of **Dryden**, John Dennis, the critic, and William Congreve, the comic poet who wrote The Way of The World, admired him. Dennis praised **Dryden** for refining the language and improving the harmony of verse. Congreve wrote: 'No man hath written in our language so much, and so various **matter**, and in so various manners, so well'.

Pope had hinted at **Dryden's** carelessness as a poet, but Dr. Johnson was the first to start or suggest, a critical debate on **Dryden** which is still going on. The rise and fall of **Dryden's** reputation as a man and poet may, paradoxically, both be traced to Johnson's Life of **Dryden** (1779). His praise of **Dryden** is excellent : 'To him we owe the improvement, perhaps the completion, of our metre, the refinement of **our** language, and much of the correctness of our sentiments.... He was the first who joined argument with poetry. He showed us the true bounds of a translator's liberty He found it (English poetry) brick, and he left it marble'.

This unmixed praise is modified by the assertion that **Dryden's** mind reflected 'rather strong reason than quick sensibility'. He could not portray pure love but love mixed with rivalry, revenge **or** ambition. And, 'It was indeed never in his power to resist the temptation of a jest'. His faults of affectation and negligence are enumerated by Johnson.

Generally, the eighteenth century critics valued **Dryden** very highly, but the nineteenth century romantic critics depreciated **his** poetry as unpoetic or prosaic, Already in 1756, Joseph **Warton** (in his Essay on Pope) had distinguished real poets **from** mere versifiers, and he had placed **Dryden** and Pope in this latter category. His argument was : 'Wit and Satire are transitory and perishable, but **Nature** and Passion are eternal', But what is eternal ? **Three centuries** have passed since the death of **Dryden**. Mac Flecknoe forms a part of the Canon of English poetry.

William Wordsworth (1805) found fault with **Dryden's language**. **It was** according to him, not 'poetical', 'being neither of imagination or the passions', Moreover, **Dryden** had 'neither a tender heart nor **lofty** sense of moral dignity', And, thirdly, his subjects were mostly unpleasant 'such as the follies, vices, and crimes of classes of men or of individuals'. The attack is three-pronged—the language, the theme and the character

of the poet are all attacked. William Hazlitt (1818), Thomas B. Macaulay (1828) and Matthew Arnold (1880) continue, more or less, this line of attack. T.S. Eliot replied to some of this criticism convincingly in Selected Essays and elsewhere. The **prejudice** against the poetic material of satire vitiated its criticism by the romantics. 'Much of the **Dryden's** unique merit', said Eliot (in 'John Dryden' Selected Essays); **consists** in his ability to make the small into the great, the prosaic into the poetic, the **trivial** into the magnificent'. **Dryden transforms** his satirical portraits into something greater than the **historical** original. We shall find this illustrated in Shadwell's portrait in Mac Flecknoe. The mock-heroic **spirit** or tone of **Dryden's Satire**, by the way, **reflects** that the age of the heroic was over, and the rise of the **common** man had started.

What the eighteenth century believed to be refinement of language was also its impoverishment. Mark Van Doren described the poetry of **Dryden** as 'the poetry of statement'. The twentieth century rehabilitation of **Dryden** started early in the **century** with Doren (1920) and Eliot. But no less interesting than **the** critical rehabilitation is **the** fact that the language of **Dryden's poetry** had become the language of English poetry, **strikingly** in the eighteenth century and implicitly in the nineteenth. It was **only** in the poetry of the symbolist, imagist, surrealist **movements** of the first half of **this** century that the paraphrasable content and the conventional prose-order of poetry was rejected. This may be interpreted as the 'privatisation' of the language of poetry. Till the Renaissance, the language of English poetry was at once 'communal', in the best sense and personal; the Restoration gave it a rational and public aspect, which it retained for more than two centuries. The present century has made the poet a member of the lonely crowd. **The** language of his poem asserts his personal voice, even in the struggle to achieve impersonality. The parallel of **Dryden** with T.S. Eliot is remarkable. As poets, both are very 'literary', but the poetic **diction** and rhythm of Mac Flecknoe are extremely different **from** those of The Waste land.

In the second half of this century, **fresh** attempts to appreciate **Dryden's** poetry have been rewarded with new and helpful insights. The intellectual **climate** that nourished **Dryden's** poetry has been analysed. Let us now turn to **the reading** of the text. 'The epistemological event' that reading is must precede **'an** ethical or aesthetic evaluation'

24.6 INTERPRETATION

Interpretation is a process of perpetual '**transcoding**', a rhetorical activity. Literary texts yield analogical rather than conceptual **meaning**, as they **stand** midway between experience and knowledge, the empirical and the theoretical. The challenge to the claims of a spurious objectivity posed by Edward said in an essay, 'The Text, the World, the Critic' (1979), is that 'Texts are in and of the world because they lend themselves to **strategies** of reading whose **intent** is always part of a struggle for **interpretative** power'. The absurd contingencies of historical happenings **make** it difficult to understand the **meaning** of history and the history of meaning.

24.6.1 The Title

The full title of Mac Flecknoe is Mac **Flecknoe** or a satire upon the **True-Blue** Protestant Poet **T.S.** : 'Mac' is a Gaelic word meaning 'Son' : 'Mac Flecknoe' means 'Son of Flecknoe'. Flecknoe is the historical Richard Flecknoe believed to **have** died in the same year (1678) as Mac Flecknoe was **composed**. **Flecknoe** was **an** Irish Roman Catholic Priest who had been satirised by Andrew **Marvell** in a poem entitled 'Flecknoe, an English Priest at Rome', **Dryden** found the **connection between** a bad poet and Flecknoe natural. The name had become a literary or fictional **synonym** for a poetaster and dullard. And so **Dryden** chose it.

Rut the analogy of **Augustus**, the Roman emperor, for Flecknoe is a stroke of the mock-heroic genius. The elevation of a bad poet to the status of a **monarch** 'called to Empire' young, and governing long, seems **more** serious than comic in the **opening**

pair of couplets. The implicit analogy of the kingdom of letters to the kingdom of **Augustus** is the standard against which this monarch 'Through all the realms of Nonsense, absolute' is to be judged. The anti-climax in the second line of the third couplet is the first of the surprises which make the poem 'exquisitely satirical'.

To return to the rest of the title 'True-Blue' means an extreme whig, and its collocation with 'Protestant' is remarkable. Religion was mixed with politics in **Dryden's** England in a manner as bad as the present-day fundamentalism or communalism in conflict with statesmanship. The Reformation had divided Christianity and loosened the grip of the churchmen over politics and statecraft. **Dryden** stood peculiarly for the State, 'betwixt the Prince and Parliament'.

T.S. is Thomas Shadwell, the primary target, the 'hero' of the poem. 'He never was a poet of God's making'. At his nativity, the midwife had prophetically blessed him, 'Be thou dull'.

She saw that
Treason botched in rhyme will be thy bane;
and
Rhyme is the rock on which thou art to wreck,
'Tis fatal to thy fame and to thy neck.

24.6.2 The Structure of the Poem

The mock-heroic epic framework of the poem means, among other things, that, unlike Pope, **Dryden**, could give his satire a narrative form. If he could not write an epic, it was partly because the mock-epic expressed the spirit of his age better. Moreover, **Augustan** satire prepared the ground for the rise of modern realism and the novel.

The story of the succession of the state by the retiring king has a political overtone. Absalom and Achitophel dealt with the real topic of political succession. Mac Flecknoe presents the imaginary coronation in the pseudo-literary sphere. The selection of the successor, the 'happy' auguries, the prophecy of the future of the prince, the farcical and evanescent coronation, are all ingredients of a heroic plot. Satirical fantasy transforms a non-event into a seemingly real event.

Shadwell is found the fittest of the sons 'to reign, and wage immortal war with wit'. Notice how 'reign' and 'wage immortal war' are playfully misapplied to create mock-heroic effect. A hero reigns, wages and wins immortal wars. A mock-hero wages 'war with wit', and the poem of his creator makes him 'immortal' as really a villain. **Dryden's** censure is dramatically masked as Flecknoe's praise for Shadwell. The first speech of Flecknoe is an avalanche of twenty two couplets culminating crushingly in a triplet. **Then** the satirist-narrator takes over. **The** art is at once narrative, dramatic and descriptive. The poetry of statement is amply suggestive or densely poetic.

The Barbican and the Nursery, obscure spots in a corner of London, 'place' the mock-ceremony. The nations meet here. But 'the scattered limbs of mangled poets', instead of Persian couplets, lay in the 'imperial' way. Here the hoary prince 'in Majesty appeared High on a throne of his own labours rear'd.' The King, the Prince, the throne, the nations, are all there, The 'sacred' unction is travestied in 'a mighty Mug of potent ale'. The augury of the owls, the acclamations of the 'admiring throng', the prophetic speech of the sire, and the abrupt farce of the mantle falling 'to the young Prophet's part' are all stage-managed with great skill, A farce assumes the air of a ceremony in the art of the poet.

24.6.3 Textual Analysis

Couplet 1 is a general reflection. It soon becomes evident (line 6) that the serious tone is really serio-comic. The funny and ironic comparison of Flecknoe with the Roman Emperor, **Augustus** Caesar. The word 'Non-sense' in line 6 shocks the reader

into an awareness of the real satirical meaning intended by the poet. The bathos is **repeated** in line 12 in the phrase 'War with wit'. For **Dryden's** meaning of the word 'Wit', you may read the units on the Age of **Dryden** and also that on his life. This **word** has undergone a change of meaning since the **Augustan** Age. 'Dullness' (line 16), 'stupidity' (line 18), 'Thoughtless' (line 26) are vituperative words. But **Dryden** **adorned** abuse with the semblance of majesty.

Lines 21-24 – parody of a passage in Cowley's epic *Davideis*, I:

Here no dear glimpse of the suns lovely face,
Strikes through the solid darkness of the place;
No dawning Mom does her kind red display;
One slight weak beam would here be thought the Day.

Notice how **Dryden** twists the imagery of the play of light and darkness into a metaphorical 'Beams of Wit', 'rising fogs', 'Lucid interval' means 'short spells of sanity between fits of lunacy', 'Lucid' literally means 'bright' and 'clear'. Metaphorically, it **means** clear reasoning or literary style. **Shadwell** was the best choice, because he never 'deviates into sense'. The exaggeration or distortion is deliberate.

In line 27, 'Thoughtless as Monarch Oakes' is a simile for the 'goodly Fabrick', the bulky figure, of Shadwell. Og in Absalom and **Achitophel** (11) is Shadwell. There we have a detailed, if less poetic and more angry or virulent, description of his physical appearance:

Now stop your noses Readers, all and some,
For here's a tun of Midnight-work to **come**,
Og from a Treason Tavern **rowing** home,
Round as a Globe, and Liquor'd every chunk,
Goodly and Great he Sayls behind his Link;
With all this Bulk there's nothing lost in Og
For every inch that is not Fool is Rogue:
A Monstrous mass of foul corrupted matter,
As all the Devils had spew'd to make the batter.

Lines 29-32 – Thomas **Heywood** (1574-1641) and James **Shirley** (1596-1666) were inferior dramatists. In line 103, we have 'Much **Heywood**, Shirley, **Ogleby** there lay' among the heap of neglected authors. John the Baptist the prophet prepared the way for Christ the Messiah. Flecknoe also was sent before but to prepare thy way. Notice the disproportion of the analogy which makes it absurdly comic. But the analogy is not stated, it is only hinted. Notice further that if **Dryden** is being unfair to **Heywood** and Shirley, he is being more than fair to **Shadwell** as of their 'type'.

Line 33 – Norwich, a town in Norfolk, the birth place of Shadwell, produced rough wool from which coarse woollen garment (drugget) was prepared. An obscure, incidental, reference reinforcing satire.

Lines 35-36 – Flecknoe's self-congratulatory reference to his musical composition which pleased the King of Portugal.

Lines 37-40 – **Shadwell** was a musical entertainer at the court of Charles II. The incident mentioned in these lines has not been traced. Moreover, lines (37-50) parody Waller's serious occasional poem of the Danger His Majesty... escaped... at St. Andrews.

Line 42 – refers to the fate of Sir Samuel Hearty, a Coxcomb who 'takes himself to be a Wit' in Shadwell's *The Virtuoso* (1676) 11. 'Epsom blankets' derives from the title of an opera by Shadwell, *Epsom Wells*.

Line 43 – Arion, ancient poet and musician, was brought on **shore** by dolphins charmed by his song. He had been thrown overboard by sailors conspiring to murder him.

Lines 44-46 – The lute 'trembling' is at once literal and metaphorical. 'Treble' and 'bass' are technical terms describing two types – Treble is shrill note and bass is **deep** and grave. 'The treble squeaks for fear, the basses roar' in Shadwell's music. **Dryden** loved music, and his Odes and songs show that the music of his composition was superior.

Lines 47-50 – In this couple of couplets, the comedy or farce continues. The effect of Shadwell's music is described. Passing Alley - a lane between the Strand and **Holywell** Street in London. **Aston** hall - the supposed palatial house of Lord **Aston**, a dull-headed scribbler. The music resounds in the lane and the house. Notice that **the** echoes call Shadwell. Notice also the elevating rhythm, reminiscent of the majestic rhythm of the Odes on St. Cecilia's Day. The little fishes are a comic substitute for the dolphins of the myth about **Arion**. Dolphins are sensitive to music. Fishes are not. Secondly, the crumbs of toast tempt the fishes to gather round pleasure-barges,

Lines 51-52 - **Shadwell** is described as the leader of his musical band, making wild gesticulations with **his** hand. Notice the words 'Prince' for its heroic association, **and** 'Threshing' for its agricultural context.

Lines 53-54 – Psyche, an opera by Shadwell. It was elaborately produced at Dorset Garden in February 1675 with a company of French dancers led by 'the most famous master, St. Andre'.

Line 57 – One of the king's musicians, Singleton (d.1686) was often employed in the theatre:

Line 59 – Villerius - the name of a character in **Davenant's** semi-opera, The Siege of **Rhodes** (1656) which **Dryden** described as the first rhymed play. Singleton turned 'pale with envy' at the success of **the** music of Shadwell. Villerius appears with a sword in one hand and a lute in the other, thus combining ridiculously musical and military **accomplishments**. Singleton swore that he would never act Villerius any more because Shadwell's Psyche had thrown all other operas into the shade.

Line 61 – Notice how pathos is manipulated. Notice the word 'boy'. The old Sire's hopes **from** his joy has a touch of the universal sentiment of fathers. Cowley, in *Davideis* ii) noted that the Hebrew use of the word Boy applied to a boy of ten as well as to a **man** of thirty six, **Shadwell** was 36 in 1678, the year of the composition of *Mac Flecknoe*.

Lines 64 - 65 – London in the terror of the Popish Plot. During the period of the Roman occupation of Britain, London was called '**Londinium Augusta**'.

Line 67 – Barbican was a small round tower on the outer gate of the fort for the posting of an advance guard.

Line 69 – **Fate** has so ordained that 'of all the pile an empty name remains', the poet way of stating that it is in a state of ruin, **an** empty name.

Lines 70 -74 – The Nursery - an institution which trained actors and actresses for the stage.

Lines 72-77 - parody Cowley's *Davideis* i, particularly the following lines:

Where their vast courts the mother-waters keep,
And undisturbed by moons in silence sleep...

Beneath the Dens where unfledged tempests lie,
And infant winds their tender voices try.

Mec Flecknoe

T.S. Eliot spoke of the prejudice which dismissed the material, the feelings, of **Dryden's** poetry as unpoetic. Poetic emotion is distinguished by him from personal emotion.

Notice the transformations:

'mother-waters' becomes 'mother strumpets'
'Moons' becomes 'watch'
'Dens' is replaced by 'a Nursery'
'Tempests' becomes 'Actors'
'Winds' becomes 'Punks'

All these are distortions, turning the sublime into the bathetic, the serious into the serio-comic. **Dryden's 'Nursery'**, thus, has a literary source in Cowley's 'Dens'. The mock-heroic effect is so created.

Line 78 – Maximin is the hero of **Dryden's** heroic play **Tyrannic Love** or **The Royal Martyr**. The rant and bombast of Maximin's declamations defying the Gods made it fashionable in the heroic tragedy of the time. Remember, **Dryden** was satirised in **The Rehearsal**. The hero of the heroic tragedy can (in a couplet from **The Rehearsal**)

Make proud Jove, with all his thunders, see
This single arm more dreadful than is he.

Lines 79 -80 – John Fletcher (1579-1625) who collaborated with Beaumont was an Elizabethan dramatist.

Buskins - high-heeled shoes usually worn by actors in tragedy. Symbol of tragedy.

Socks - Low heeled light shoes worn in comedy.

Ben Jonson - the famous comic poet and neo-classic critic.

Line 81 – Simkin - a **cobbler** in an interlude, a stupid clown intriguing with an old man's wife.

Line 82 - **Dryden** borrowed the phrase from Davenant's **Gondibert**(**IV,36**):

This to a structure led, long known to fame
And call'd the moment of vanished minds.

Line 83 – Clinches - puns

'the suburban Muse' of poetasters.

Line 84 – **Panton** - a celebrated punster of the day.

Line 87 – Dekker - Elizabethan comic dramatist. The prophecy referred to here is perhaps Dryden's own invention. **Dryden** was prejudiced against Dekker possibly because of his confrontation with Ben Jonson. Ben Jonson had satirised him in his **The Poetaster (1602)**, and Dekker had replied in **Satiromastix**.

Lines 90 -93 – **Shadwell's** early plays are satirised. **Psyche**, a rhymed opera, already mentioned (see the **note** on 11 **53-4**). **The Miser (1672)**, **The Hypocrite (1671)**, and **The Humorists (1671)** are 'three as silly Plays as a Man would wish to see'. The remark was made by Settle in the Preface to **Ibrahim (1677)**. **Dryden's** critical controversy with Settle is, by the way, described at length by Dr. Johnson in his **Life of Dryden**.

Raymond is a character in *The Humorists* and Bruce in *The Virtuoso* (1676).

Line 94' – Refers to Virgil, *Aeneid* iv.173 ff.

Line 97 –near- Bun-Hill and distant Watling Street • from far and near. Bun Hill is in Finsbury district of London suburb in the north, and Watling Street is old Roman Road in South Britain.

Line 102 – For Heywood, Shirley see the note on line 29. **Ogleby** was John Ogleby, dancing master and poetaster. He translated Homer and Virgil. In the *Dunciad*, Pope calls him 'Ogleby the great'. The Scottish poet was also the founder of the Dublin theatre, printer, translator and cartographer.

Line 104 – The King's customary 'Yeomen of the Guard' are burlesqued here. 'Bilk't Stationers for Yeomen'. Cheated booksellers were there. **Oldham** said that **Shadwell** was cursed by the broken stationers.

Line 105 – Henry Herrigman, the publisher, was also **Dryden's** publisher.

Lines 108-111 – **Dryden** parodies Virgil, *Aeneid* ii 682-4. Ascanius, Son of *Aeneas*, was the second hope of Rome, the first was Aeneas himself. The epic heightening makes the mock-epic admirable poetry. 'Pillar of the State' imitates **Milton's**

With grave aspect he rose
And in his rising seemed a pillar of state
(*Paradise Lost*, 11)

The fiery halo over the head of *locus* signifies glory in Virgil (*Aeneid* lines 680-86). *lambent radiance* is burlesqued in 'lambent dullness'.

Lines 112-113 - refer to Livy's *Histories*, XXXI.

As a child, Hannibal was made by his father to swear eternal hostility to Rome.

Line 118 - 'Sacred Unction' signifies the holy oil used to anoint in a religious ceremony like baptism or coronation.

Lines 120-121 – When the king leaves the Abbey after coronation, the Orb ('Ball' in the poem) is in the left hand and the sceptre in the right. The 'mug of ale' refers to **Shadwell's** love of ale. Refer to the note on line 27 above.

Line 125 – *Love's Kingdom* is a tragi-comedy by **Flecknoe**.

Line 126 – 'Poppies' is soporific, parching and sterilising, and aphrodisiac but not fertilising. The sexual implication of *Psyche* springing from his 'loins' is related to barren poppy. **Shadwell** was said to be an opium-addict.

Lines 129-131 – Romulus is the legendary founder of Rome. He disagreed with his twin-brother Remus about the site of Rome. They decided the question by augury. Twelve owls are supposed to be auspicious augury. The reference to the heroic legend makes fun of **Shadwell**.

Lines 134- 138 –Parody of the classical representation of Jupiter and Virgil's description of the Sibyl (*Aeneid* X, 113-15; Vi. 46-51, 77-82). Also, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, i : 'Thrice he assayed to speak and thrice ...'

Flecknoe's second speech is inspired. The buslesque of epic convention here is noticeable. The inspiration is of course mock-heroic and comic.

Lines 139-140 – Ireland, homeland for Flecknoe, is fatherland for Shadwell. Barbadoes is the British West Indies. Western main is Atlantic Ocean. Ireland and Barbadoes are chosen because they are remote and uncivilized regions. The idea is that in these countries people would take his dullness as brilliance.

Line 143 – Love's Kingdom is the title of a tragi-comedy by Flecknoe. The father naturally wishes his son to achieve more than he himself did.

Line 144 – The epic style of benediction burlesqued.

Lines 147-148 – Virgil, Aeneid, xii 435-6 burlesqued.

Line 149 - In the Prologue to The Virtuoso (1670) Shadwell declared that 'Wit, like China, should long buri'd lie', and hit at 'Drudges of the Stage' like Dryden who were 'bound to struggle twice a year'.

Line 151 – Sir George Etherage. The following lines refer to his plays: Dorimant, Mrs. Loveit, and Fopling are characters in The Man of Mode, Culley in The Comical Revenge, and Cockwood in She wou'd if she cou'd. The epithet 'gentle' is used by Dryden because Etherage did not choose to reply to Shadwell when the latter lampooned him. Etherage is credited with having written 'the pattern of genteel comedy' and is regarded as the forerunner of Congreve, Goldsmith and Sheridan.

Lines 163-164 – Sedley wrote a poor prologue for Shadwell's Epsom Wells (1673), and was said (in spite of Shadwell's denial) to have helped him write the play 'hungry' may mean devoid of wit.

Line 168 – 'The greatest master of Tropes and figures', 'the most Ciceronian coxcomb' in Shadwell's The Virtuoso. A pompous fool who 'never speaks without Flowers of Rhetorick'.

Shadwell is as great a fool as his Sir Formal Trifling, the character in his play.

Line 170 – Till 1678, Shadwell had dedicated five of his nine plays to the Duke or Duchess of Newcastle. Newcastle is to the north of England. Hence 'northern dedications'.

Line 171 – 'false friends'. Dryden and Shadwell differed on Jonson. See 'Introduction to Mac Flecknoe' above. Dryden had tried to correct Shadwell's opinion of Jonson in vain. So 'false' as friend. Notice the irony. Jonson is 'hostile' (Line 172).

Lines 173-174 – Parody of Virgil, Aeneid, iii.342-3. For 'Ogleby', see note to Line 102 above.

Lines 179-180 – The reference is to a ridiculous love-scene in Shadwell's opera Psyche, where the heroine (Psyche) sweeps the dust to show her humility.

Line 181 – Dryden echoes Sir Samuel Hearty in The Virtuoso, ii : 'hold thy peace, with a whip-stitch, your nose in my breech'. The phrases of this line are all from Shadwell's plays. 'to sell bargains' meant to make a fool of, to make obscene exchanges in conversation.

Line 182 – In the dedication to The Virtuoso, Shadwell wrote : 'I have endeavour'd in the Play, at Humour, Wit and Satire, I say nothing of impossible, unnatural Farce Fools, which some intend for comical, who think it the easiest thing in the world to write a Comedy'. His own promise 'dwindled to a farce'.

Lines 183-184 – Plagiarism from Fletcher and **Etherege** is the criticism here. But the pilferage was unassimilated like oil on waters (Line 185). **Dryden** referred to the similarities of situation between Epsom-Wells and **Etherege's** She would if she could.

Lines 189-92 – Parodying Shadwell's Jonsonian definition in the Epilogue to the **Humorists**:

A Humor is the **Byas** of the Mind,
By which with violence 'its one way inclin'd:
It makes our Actions lean on one side still,
And in all changes that way bends 'the Will.

Line 194 – 'likeness' to **Jonson**. Tympany; 'A kind of obstructed flatulence that swells the body like a drum' (Johnson).

Lines 195-196 – A Tun of Man : like Falstaff (1 Henry IV, 11.IV.440). Kilderkin : fourth part of a tun.

Lines 204-208 – Varieties of 'false wit' (see the Spectator, nos. 61-63). Poems in shapes were common in the seventeenth century. George Herbert's 'Easter Wings' and 'The Altar' are famous examples.

An anagram is a change in a word from a transposition of letters. **An** acrostic is a short poem in which the initial letters of the lines spell a word.

Lines 212-213 – **In** The Virtuoso, iii, Bruce and Longvil, 'Gentlemen of wit and sense' dispose of the rhetorical amorist Sir Formal through a trap-door in the very midst of flight of eloquence.

Lines 215-217 – Parody of 2 Kings ii 9-13 (The Bible). But whereas Elijah's mantle fell from him as he went up to heaven in the whirlwind, Flecknoe's is returned from below.

Notice the sacrosanct mock-heroic manner of abrupt end.

Literary allusions, Cartoon, Caricature, parody, burlesque, lampoon are the poetic devices used.

The Poetic Diction in the *Mac Flecknoe*

The poem is a performance. Its narrative design has a purpose – to create comedy and satire, to laugh at a fellow-dramatist in a mock-heroic manner in sweet verse. Let us attempt an interpretation of the diction, and then rhythm, to see how the purpose is attained. **Dryden**, the classicist, protested against affectation and pedantry, and appealed to polite idiom and educated speech.

Dryden's choice of words was always careful. In this poem, the primary aim was to create a mock-heroic effect. The choice of words was made from this angle.

1) The most important words are taken from the register of royalty. The poem is full of them. Some are mentioned here:

Nouns - Monarchs, **Augustus**, Empire, Subject, realms, prince, State, majesty, monarch, nations, King John of Portugal, Commander, Prince of thy harmonious band, Throne, Empress Fame, coronation, the Nations, Sceptre, Captain of the Guard, Ascanius, Hannibal, Realms, Romulus, Dominion, Kingdom, mantle, triumph, rule of sway, province.

Verbs - summons, governed, to reign, to wage war, rule, reign.

Adjectives - absolute, royal, imperial.

II) The poem is literary satire. The register of poetry and rhetoric is most prominent. **The** register of royalty or majesty is used to true the unheroic or contemptible into **mock-heroic**. The literary field is made analogical to the heroic in a comic vein. The Kingdom of England and the Kingdom of Letters are comic parallels. Nouns and noun-phrases, prose, verse, **non-sense**, wit, dullness, stupidity, meaning, sense, thoughtless majesty, **tautology**, **dance**, **hymn**, paper, rhyme, actor (acting), plays, buskins, socks, vanished minds, clinches, muse, war with wit, war with words, peace **with** wit, **truce** with sense, oblivion, pen, ignorance, write, author, writer, false flowers of rhetoric, nature, art, oratory, quill, learning, farce, scenes, humours, numbers feebly creep, tragic, comic, satire, inoffensive satire, iambics anagram, acrostic, word, song, lute, treble, bass.

The Superhuman and the Religious : Fate, immortal, bless, perfect, soil, solemn, prophet, celestial, muse, **prophecy**, prophetic, martyr, relique, altar, the sacred action, priest (by trade), consecrate, omen, Heaven, the raging God, Amen.

Nature : Nature, beams, fogs, oaks, fishes, silver Thames, shore to shore, poppies, mountain.

Light and darkness : beams, day, night, shade,

Farming : threshing, flail.

Roman Myth : Ascanius, Romulus, Hannibal.

Roman History : Augustus.

Arts : music- the lute, **harmonious**, band, **trable**, bass

dance- feel keeping equal time.

Image and Metaphor : **Dryden** described 'imaging' as 'the very height and life of poetry'. **An** image, he said, "which is strongly and beautifilly set before the eyes of the reader, will still be poetry, when the merry fit (of comedy or satire) is over, and last when the other is forgotten". The comic imagination of **Dryden** created the poetic image in Mac Frecknoe in this sense. The narrative is dramatic. The scene and the action are set before the mind's eye.

- (i) Father-son and king-prince. The story of coronation are all figurative.
- (ii) Beams of wit, rising fogs - play of light and shade, intelligence and dullness, image as metaphor, mountain belly.

Other figures : Archaisms - Whilom, hight, thou, **methinks**, thy, sire, of yore.

Cliches - warbling lute, silver Thames.

Similes 'like Augustus', 'as oil on water'

Dryden's poetry is the 'poetry of statement'. 'at his best he wrote without figures', Van Doren (1920) said. But Van Doren could not see that language gives **shape** to experience. The language of **Dryden** does not have the illumination, the magic, of Shakespeare's language, because the vision is less spiritual and more social in focus. **Dryden's** attempt to combine the heroic **with** courtly wit was the product of a perspective that is said to be inflationary and bad', 'looking not in to the realm of spirit and word, **where** poetry really is, but into a **gigantorama** of grossly direct stimulations, of pageantry, drums, duals, warfare, spectres, loud, protestations of lust, honour and **valour**'. But this is unfair because unintelligent **about** the poetry. What T.S. called the dissociation of sensibility was a secularisation of spirit and,

consequently, art. **Dryden** has missed the 'human' in Milton's epic. Life in society and the state **interested** the poet. The heroic for **Dryden** was the imperial dream of England, **Dryden** inspired the dream. But the realisation being far distant in the future, culture, poetry, social institutions, particularly the political state, interested him. Wordsworth was prejudiced against the 'unpleasant' poetic material of **Dryden**, but his love for England was similar: 'In everything we are sprung of Earth's first blood, have titles manifold'.

Moreover, the line of wit turned to the concrete reality of life and experience. Reality is both pleasant and unpleasant. The material of poetry includes the beauty, the horror and the ugliness of experience. A thing of beauty which, to **Dryden**, was 'a joy for ever' was more a poem than a person. The transitions from Shakespeare to Keats via Milton and **Dryden** and Wordsworth is significant. **Dryden** alone was dramatic, Milton and Wordsworth were not. His serio-comic vision was sound and whole. It was not the egotistical sublime of Wordsworth. Milton did not separate religion from literature, but **Dryden** did, though not completely. God, to him, was that UNIVERSAL HE who is 'Unmade, **unmov'd**; yet making, moving All'. But he was aware that finite reason could not reach 'Infinity'. The Divine was replaced by the Imperial.

Interpretation is the translation of a text for an audience. Our interpretation of Mac **Flecknoe** is sufficiently detailed. The 'epistemological event' leads us on to ethical and aesthetic evaluation. The form of **Dryden's** experience was social, and the form of his poetry reflects that. His own ethical or didactic purpose is **doubtful**, and to detach the ethical from the aesthetic is bad philosophy. The ethical humanism was inseparable from moral, cultural and religious reflection.

Though Harold Bloom regards the line from Spenser, through Milton to Blake, Shelley, Lawrence and **Yeats** as the central and describes it as 'Protestant, radical and Miltonic-Romantic', Eliot and his followers preferred Donne, Herbert, **Dryden**, Pope, Johnson, Hopkins, Eliot etc. They were 'Catholic', conservative and, in their own view, classical. We notice that the former is **serious**, and the latter serio-comic. Metaphor, according to Paul de Man, is a delusory attempt to cover its own textual workings. The **organicist** metaphors allegorise thought in reflection. Metonymy is realistic. **Dryden** used analogy, not metaphor. And analogy is a mode of knowing, and history used as paradigm, in **Dryden's** poetry. Finally, **Dryden** found God's throne

'darkness in th' abyss of light,
A blaze of glory that forbids the sight

Mac Flecknoe belongs to the 'manhood' of **Dryden**, which, in his words, was 'long misled by wandering fires', and followed 'false lights'. Like **Chaucer**, **Dryden** disowns his early life as mundane and profane. The personal drama of **Dryden's** life, his intellectual and spiritual struggles, became, in *The Hind and the Panther*, a pattern of the Christian drama in a neo-classical form.

24.7 ALEXANDER'S FEAST OR THE POWER OF MUSIC

Poetry and Music

The modern separation of music from poetry started in the 16th century. The main cause of the separation was the development of instrumental music. But there was also reaction against this tendency. The reaction sought to unify, or discover the common ground between poetry and the audio-visual arts like music and pictures or painting. The formula 'poetry plus melody equals music' means that a single melodic line should closely match the verbal line, note for syllable, quantity for quantity, and create a **harmony** of notes and modes with passions and motions, with heights and depths of verbal meaning. Sound should echo sense, in simple words. By **Dryden's** time, poetry was expected to meet musical requirements. **Dryden** himself stressed the

importance of sweet and musical words in poetry. His operas and librettos, odes and **songs**, created musical effects. **Purcell** and, later, Hancel set his odes to music. **Dryden** believed that poetry 'must please hearing rather than gratify understanding'. **Songs**, ballads, hymns and odes were popular.

The London Musical Society celebrated **St.Cecilia's Day (22nd November)** every year by musical performances in honour of the patron saint of music, St. Cecilia. **Dryden** wrote his two odes for this occasion in 1687 and 1697. The second is our text. The odes were musically performed with orchestra and chorus at the annual concerts which had been given since 1683 to celebrate **St.Cecilia's Day**. The music for the song (1687) was composed by Giovanni Baptista **Draghi**, an Italian organist and music master at the court. Alexander's Feast, or The Power of Musique was given its music by Jeremiah Clarke, but that is lost. A second musical setting was composed by **Handel** in 1736, which is 'about fifteen times' longer than a plain reading of the song.

The Poem

Dryden wrote to his publisher **Tonson** : 'I am glad to hear from all hands that my ode (Alexander's Feast) is esteemed the best of all my poetry, by all the town : I thought so myself when I writ it'. The ode is a complex dramatic encomium of music. **Dryden** has combined the story of Timotheus moving **Alexander's** feelings by music – a stock example of the doctrine of the aesthetic 'effect' – with the other story of Alexander incited by Thais to fire Perseopolis : Dr. Johnson valued this second ode as more splendid. Its distinction was, he said, that it exhibited the highest flight of fancy and the exactest nicety of art. It is without a rival, according to him.

But its defective rhyme in some lines, the fading of the fire of emotion in the last stanza, the vicious conclusion, are, in particular, the imperfections of the poem. 'The music of Timotheus, which raised a mortal to the skies, had only a metaphorical power ; that of Cecilia, which drew an angel down, had a real effect, the crown, therefore, could not reasonably be divided', argued Dr. Johnson. But **Dryden** wrote:

Let old Timotheus yield the Prize,
or both divide the Crown;
He rais'd a Mortal to the Skies;
She drew an Angel down.

Notice the near-jocular tone bursting out, particularly in the antithesis of he and she. The sublime and the bathetic were so close in **Dryden's** poetry. Moreover, Dr. Johnson failed to appreciate the spiritual struggle raging in the poet's soul and imagination between classical and Christian values. The 'immortal ragtime' reflects the poet's love for life and its variety. If he does not partake of the divine, he is rich in humanity.

The ODE

The ode is a type of lyric, serious, dignified, and frequently in the **form of an** address. As a poetic oration, it is either personal in inspiration like Keat's Ode to a Nightingale, or impersonal like Alexander's Feast. Examples of the regular ode (so called because it uses the same stanza-pattern) are Wordsworth's Ode to Duty and Shelley's Ode to the West Wind. The irregular Odes have varied rhyme, rhythm and stanza-pattern. The examples are **Dryden's** Odes, Wordsworth's Ode on the Intimations of Immortality and **Tennyson's** Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington. The English Ode in general disregards the Greek or **Pindaric** Ode and the **Latin** Horation Ode.

Line 1 - The occasion of the song, Mythical or historical. Alexander's conquest of Persia. A moment of triumph and glory in the life of the Conqueror who has become archetypal.

Line 4 - Dryden's ideal - 'The God-like Hero'.

Line 7 - Conventional poetic decoration—rose and myrtles—of martial heroes.

Line 9 - Thais, a famous Athenian Courtesan. She was kept by Alexander. It was after drinking with her that he destroyed Persepolis.

Line 20 - Timotheus - A musician (flute-player) at Alexander's wedding. He could move Alexander as he liked by his music.

Line 25 - Jove - Chief of the Roman gods and ruler of heaven.

Line 30 - Olympia - Alexander's mother. She **claimed** that he was the son not of Philip of **Macedon**, but of a supernatural serpent. This led to the belief in Alexander's divine origin, and he himself demanded worship as a god.

Line 47 - Bacchus - The Roman god of wine, identified with the Greek Dionysos.

Line 53 - Hautboy - a musical instrument which produces music by being blown.

Line 70 - Darius - King of Persia, destroyed by Alexander.

Line 97 - Lydian measures - The Greeks classified music as (1) Phrygian, (2) Lydian and (3) Dorian. Lydian music was soft, sweet and tender. Phrygian music was exciting and warlike. Dorian music was simple and solemn.

Lines 132-133 - The Furies are deities of revenge. Snakes grow in their hair on the head, and their eyes are blood-shot. They personify revenge.

Line 150 - Thais, like Helen, caused the destruction of a city. Persepolis is parallel to Troy, Thai to Helen.

Line 162 - St. Cecilia is believed to have invented the church-organ.

Line 170 - In the first ode, song for St. Cecilia's Day (1687), **Dryden** wrote

Orpheus could lead the savage race;
And trees uprooted left their place;
Sequacious of the Lyre:
But bright Cecilia rais'd the wonder higher
When to her organ, vocal breath was given
An Angel heard, and straight appeared
Mistaking Earth for Heaven.

The spirit of harmony is attracted to the earth. The association of the saint with organ music seems to be a Renaissance development of the legend.

Aids to a Critical Appreciation

1. In Indian poetics, the sentiment of valour (वीर रस) the sentiment of love and beauty (शृंगार रस) and the sentiment of pity (करुण रस) are the three most prominent of the seven sentiments (रस - *Rasas*). *Rasas*, or sentiments, are aesthetic effects created by proper poetic material.

There are seven sections or stanzas in the Ode. The first presents valour; the second **traces** the human or heroic to the divine, and transforms the heroic into the divine; **the** third presents **drinking**, pleasure and the festivity, the play of life, the lightness of revelry; the fourth presents the ridiculous folly of Vanity (The sentiment of **merriment** (हास्य रस), particularly in the following lines:

Fought all his **Battails** o'ver again;
And thrice He routed all his Foes;
and thrice He slew the slain.

The madness of vanity takes this form. But the music of the master leads on to pity for the fallen Darius.

The Tragic and pathetic is followed by the amorous in stanza V. Stanza VI presents the Furies of Revenge operating on the soul of the hero. And, in the concluding stanza (VII), **St.Cecilia**, the Christian patron saint of music, appears: At last Divine Cecilia came.

2. Musical instruments like the lyre, the trumpet, **the drum**, the hautboys, the flambeau, the flute are described as pagan and pre-Christian. The organ is specifically Christian or associated with the rise of Christianity. The expansion of music adding length to solemn sound and making it religious.
3. The varying rhymes **and rhythm** of the stanzas make it an irregular ode. Spenser had written odes of this type, and Ben Jonson had attempted the regular form, before **Dryden**. In spite of the assurance of the poet and his ease of execution, the verse is not subtle, the thought and feeling is trivial but portentous.
4. The following epigrams are memorable.
 - (i) None but the Brave deserve the Fair.
 - (ii) Sweet is Pleasure after Pain.
 - (iii) For Pity melts the Mind to Love.
 - (iv) War, he sung, is Toil and Trouble;
Honour but an empty Bubble.
 - (v) The Vanquish'd Victor – a paradox.
 - (vi) And, like another Helen, **fir'd** another Troy.
 - (vi) Could swell the Soul to rage, or kindle **soft** Desire.
 - (vii) He rais'd a mortal to the Skies;
She drew an Angel down.
5. The **ode** seems to narrate the evolution **from** the pagan to the Christian in terms of an uncertain or undecided conflict. Dr. Johnson's interpretation mentioned above seems to **be** from a Christian or orthodox point of view. The 'metaphorical' is less important than the 'real', he says. Did **Dryden** too believe like this, literally in Christian legend?

The Ode presents Alexander and Darius analogically to contemporary William **III** and James II, but the analogy is unintended, The revolutionary settlement of 1688 was the potential analogy, but **Dryden** had by this time lost **interest** in current political affairs and concentrated on poetic creation,

As a 'progress-piece', the poem should be read together with the earlier song for St. Cecilia's Day. In that song, eternity is presented as 'limitless parentheses to human history' and human progress is shown as interwoven with divine progress. In Alexander's Feast, **Dryden** does not seem to remember what he had said earlier: 'What passions cannot Music raise or quell?' **He** shows music only raising the

passions. Perhaps, half-consciously, he reveals his mind which was essentially secular and believed that religion quells the passions and worldly life raises them.

6. The **Serio-comic** or mock-heroic spirit is occasionally betrayed in the otherwise solemn and sublime atmosphere of the poem.
7. Diction and rhythm show a perfect mastery of the art of poetry. The music of the verse aspires to echo the **harmony** of the spheres in which the age believed.

From Harmony, from Heav'nly Harmony
This Universal Frame began.

8. The poet was speaking for his age 'What passion cannot **Musick** raise and quell!' was the belief. The popular superstition that '**Musick** shall untune the sky' is also given expression.

24.9 LET US SUM UP

Our study of the age of **Dryden**, his literary and dramatic work, and *Mac Flecknoe* and *Alexander's Feast*, or *The Power of Music*, concludes with this note. All these units studied together should help you appreciate neo-classical poetry in general and the prescribed texts in particular.

The transition from the heroic to the mock-heroic was to lead to a further transition i.e. the rise of the common man or the common reader who is unheroic but idealised in English poetry after The French Revolution. Secondly, **Dryden** expressed, in his plays and poems, an implicit aspiration of his age and country – the expansive, imperial dream. So his mock-heroic does not altogether replace or repress the heroic dream of the race. Perhaps unconsciously, his poetry expressed the imperial urge prophetically.

24.10 SUGGESTED READINGS

Sl.No.	Author	Title
1.	Butt, J.	The Augustan Age (1952)
2.	Collins, J.C. (ed.)	The Satires of Dryden
3.	Davison, D.	Dryden (Literature in Perspective Series)
4.	Dobree, B.	John Dryden
5.	Doren, Mark Van	The Poetry of John Dryden
6.	Eliot, T.S.	Homage to John Dryden
7.	Frye, B.J. (ed.)	John Dryden : Mac Flecknoe (A Merrill Literary Casebook, 1970)
8.	Hales, J.W.	Dryden's Mac Flecknoe
9.	Hamilton, K.G.	John Dryden , and the Poetry of Statement (1969).
10.	Jack, Ian	Augustan Satire (1952)
11.	King, Bruce (ed.)	Dryden's Mind and Art (1969)
12.	Kingsley, James and Helen (eds)	Dryden : The Critical Heritage (1971)
13.	Miner, Earl	Dryden's Poetry (1967)
14.	Moore, F.H.	The Nobler Pleasure : Dryden's Comedy in Theory and Practice (1963)
15.	Schilling, B.N. (ed)	Dryden : A Collection of Critical Essays.

24.11 QUESTIONS

1. Discuss *Mac Flecknoe* as a mock-heroic poem. It has been described as the perfection of the mock-heroic among personal and literary satires. Do you agree? Discuss.

2. Discuss the fun and humour in the story of Mac Flecknoe.
3. How does **Dryden** combine creation with criticism, particularly literary, in Mac Flecknoe?
4. Discuss the satirical portraiture of Mac Flecknoe.
5. Discuss the narrative art in Mac Flecknoe.
6. The heroic couplet of **Dryden** is his most important contribution to the canon of English poetry. Do you agree? Discuss, with particular reference to Mac Flecknoe.
7. Show how **Dryden** used parody and burlesque in Mac Flecknoe.
8. Write a note on the rhetorical devices used in Mac Flecknoe.
9. Attempt a critical appreciation of Alexander's Feast.
10. Alexander's Feast is said to be more rhetorical than poetic. Do you agree? Is the rhetoric proper for the public occasion? Discuss.
11. How is personal experience transformed into poetry in Mac Flecknoe.
12. Would you call **Mac** Flecknoe a comic fantasy?
13. Do you think that the real estimate of **Dryden** is not so high as the historical? What is your personal estimate of the poet?
14. Can satire be great poetry? Discuss with reference to Mac Flecknoe.
15. Examine the critical debate on **Dryden**.

UNIT 25 POPE : A BACKGROUND TO AN EPISTLE TO DR. ARBUTHNOT

Structure

- 25.0 Objectives
- 25.1 Introduction
- 25.2 What is an Epistle?
- 25.3 Dr. Arbuthnot : A Biographical Sketch
- 25.4 *An Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot* : A Background Note
- 25.5 Scriblerus Club – A Brief Outline
- 25.6 Pope's Life and Works
- 25.7 Theme
- 25.8 Structure
- 25.9 Some Characteristics of the Age
- 25.10 Questions

25.0 OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this unit are to familiarise you with the form and early growth of the epistle and also provide the background to the poem in terms of all the relevant information about the poet and his age. On reading this unit carefully, you should be able to:

- understand the theme and structure of the poem;
- analyse the poet as a **son** and **friend**; and
- relate the poem to the specific ethos and conditions of the **Augustan** period.

25.1 INTRODUCTION

In the first place, in this unit, we shall discuss the genre of literary epistles briefly outlining its growth and development. We shall then focus on Dr. Arbuthnot, his friendship with Pope and the genesis of the poem. This is followed by a biographical note on the poet highlighting only those aspects of his life and personality that are directly related to the poem. Then we briefly discuss the theme and structure of the poem. We have prepared some exercises for you. Please complete them before moving on to the next unit.

25.2 WHAT IS AN EPISTLE?

Epistle, in its original sense, means simply a letter. Over the ages the term has come to denote only formal letters which though addressed to a particular person are concerned with public rather than personal matters and express a universal feeling on a particular occasion. The epistle is written for an audience with a conscious **artistry**, in an elaborate style, to develop an argument or theme. In the classical times the word *epistola* acquired the additional significance of an imperial **decree**.

The Pauline Epistles of the New Testament represented the 'imperial edicts and rescripts' by which the Roman law grew, Papal encyclical letters, addressed to the whole church, have carried on this apostolic epistolary tradition.

In the post-apostolic period the epistle became a communication between branches of the church, rather than between individuals treating specific questions on general principles.

In the secular period, epistles developed increasingly into a branch of literature and the ten books of *Symmachus' Epistolae* were highly esteemed in the 14th century, linking Cicero's letters with the Renaissance literary epistles, superbly exemplified by Petrarch.

There are broadly two types of literary epistles : (1) on moral and philosophical themes, e.g. Horace's *Epistles* and (2) on romantic and sentimental themes, e.g. Ovid's *Heroides*.

In the Middle Ages the Ovidian type was more popular and influenced the theories of courtly love. Samuel Daniel's *Letter from Octavia to Marcus Antonius* (1603) can be quoted as an example. His *Letter to Lucy*, countess of Bristol, is one of the early examples of the verse epistle in England. During the Renaissance and thereafter, it was the Horatian kind which exercised greater influence. Petrarch, Ariosto and Boileau wrote such epistles. In England Johnson was perhaps the first to use the Horatian mode in *The Forest* (1616) and *Underwoods* (1640). Vaughan, Dryden and Congreve also wrote in the same mode. Dryden's epistles to Congreve (1694) and to the duchess of Ormond (1700) are still among the most graceful that we have. The literary epistle soon developed as a vehicle for satire as in Swift's *Drapier's Letters* (1724), for religious and contemplative ideas as in Pascal's *Lettres a un Provincial* (1656-7), and for polemics as in *The Epistle* and *The Epitome* (1588-9) of Martin Marprelate.

Pope proved to be the most successful practitioner of this form, especially in his *Moral Essays* (1731-35) and *An Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot* (1735). In 1721 his Epistle to Robert, Earl of Oxford, was prefixed to his edition of Parnell's *Poems*. In May 1737 his *Epistle to Augustus* was published.

After Pope the mode fell into disuse. It revived with Cowper, Samuel Rogers, Keats' *Epistle to Charles Clarke* (1816), Shelley's *Letter to Marie Gisborne* (1820) and Landor's *To Julius Hare* (1836).

It was not much favoured in the nineteenth century but has been again adopted in the more recent times. Auden's *Letter to Lord Byron* and *Netv Year Letter* and Louis MacNeice's *Letters from Iceland* are some of the notable examples.

25.3 DR. ARBUTHNOT – A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Scientist, antiquary and an admirable writer, Arbuthnot (1667-1735) created the nickname, John Bull, for the patriotic Englishman and in *The History of John Bull* (1712) wittily attacked the war policy of the Whigs. He was a member of the Scriblerus Club and one of the chief contributors to *The Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus*, first published in 1741. He took part with Pope and Gay in writing *Three Hours after Marriage*, a farce satirizing the antiquarian Woodward, produced in 1717. In 1700 he published an *Essay on the Usefulness of Mathematical Learning*, won high reputation as a man of science and was elected a fellow of the Royal Society. His genius and generosity were acknowledged by almost all his contemporaries.

A very distinguished doctor of medicine as well, he was made Physician Extraordinary to Queen Anne and was Pope's personal physician and close friend. It was in 1712-13 that Pope had first made acquaintance of Gay, Parnell, Swift, Arbuthnot, Jervas and Fortescue.



Alexander Pope

Arbuthnot died on 27 February 1735, two months after the *Epistle* was published. Arbuthnot is given the persona of a patient listener and prudent adviser in the *Epistle*:

Good friend **forbear!** you deal in dang'rous things,
I'd never name queens, ministers, or kings

(lines 75-76)

He again advises Pope not to name his mighty adversaries for fear of prosecution for libel:

Hold; for God-sake - you'll offend,
No names - be calm - learn prudence of a **friend** :

(lines 101-102)

He is a temperate, restraining influence on the poet's angry impetuosity and counsels patience and caution. 'But why insult the poor, affront the **great?**' (line 360). Later however, Arbuthnot himself gets involved, becomes a satirist and lashes Sporus as a mere white curd of ass's milk? (line 306). This once friendly dissuader has become actively involved with the protection of virtue and battle against vice. His plea that Pope should not waste his fire on a mere 'butterfly' (line 308) seems to give the poet the cue for a full-scale treatment of Hervey as an insect.

25.4 AN EPISTLE TO DR. ARBUTHNOT : A BACKGROUND NOTE

An Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot was published on 2 January, 1735. Pope did not so much compose it as compile it. It consists of a series of fragments composed and published over a period of twenty years by snatches (Pope's *Advertisement*). Pope rearranges events of his life for the **purpose** of presenting a public view of his best self. For example, in lines 406-13 Pope dedicates himself, in moving terms, to the care of his ageing mother. The poem came out in 1735 while Mrs. **Editha** Pope had died in 1733. The passage was obviously written before her death and its inclusion in the *Epistle* may seem a deception. Dates are however, irrelevant to the persona Pope is adopting. What is relevant is the disposition he expresses towards his mother.

Known later as *The Prologue to the Satires*, the *Epistle* was addressed to Pope's old friend when in 1735 he was dying. It is at once an apologia for Pope's own life and art, and an affectionate tribute to the old Scriblerian who had also doctored him:

The muse but serv'd to ease some friend, not wife,
 To help me **thro'** this long disease, my life,
 To second, **Arbuthnot!** thy art and care
 And teach the being you preserv'd to bear.

(lines 131-134)

The **Epistle** rightly concludes with the poet wishing his **friend** health, wealth and happiness:

May heav'n, to bless those days, preserve my **friend**
 Preserve him social, cheerful, and serene,
 And just as rich as when he serv'd a queen.

(lines 415-417)

The immediate provocation for the **Epistle** was the composition jointly by Lord Hervey and Lady Mary **Wortley Montagu** of **Verses Addressed to the Imitator of Horace** wherein Pope was told that he was dull.

John, Lord Hervey, son of the Earl of **Bristol**, was attached to the Court of George II, in the capacity of Vice-Chamberlain. He was a Whig and a favourite at Court. His loyalty towards his patron, Queen Caroline was well-known. He was emotionally attracted towards his own sex but normal enough to marry the beauty of the Court, Molly Lepell and have 8 children by her, and also seduce the mistress of the Prince of Wales, Miss Wade. Though permanently invalid, he was brave enough to risk his life in a duel forced on him by an insult. A **niminy-piminy** official at Court, he was all airs and graces and intrigue but very intelligent.

The tall, elegant and beautiful Lady Mary, his one-time friend, had become estranged from Pope, her neighbour at Twickenham, in about 1725, possibly because he had made her a declaration of love which she had met with a fit of immoderate laughter, a cruelty she was capable of. Earlier she had responded civilly but coolly to Pope's heated epistolary passion. Pope had met her in 1715 and formed an instant infatuation for her. The ending of their relationship is marked by his repeated characterisation of her as Sappho (line 369). Sappho was a Greek lyric poetess who is believed to have thrown herself into the sea in despair at her unrequited love for Phaon.

His **Verses to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady** (1717) are also about a lady who has taken her life to escape the torture of hopeless love. A noted child-prodigy and a proficient reader like Pope, Mary **Montagu** responds to Pope's unflattering portrait of herself as Sappho in the **First Satire of the Second Book**. She charges that Pope's imitation distorts Horace beyond recognition, that Pope's text is a monstrous distortion and Pope himself a monster and that Pope's body explicates the evil within. Till Pope's death the two remained ardent enemies.

25.5 SCRIBLERUS CLUB – A BRIEF OUTLINE

Pope floated the idea by suggesting in **The Spectator** of August 1712 that as a balance to the monthly abstract **The History of the Works of the Learned**, he would issue **every** month **An Account of the Works of the Unlearned**, especially the English 'who many of them make a very Eminent Figure in the **Illiterate** World'. It was not however, till the spring of 1714 that the Club was actually formed and it decided to produce the work as **The Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus** which would spoof all pedantry and bad writing.

Swift, **Prior, Arbuthnot**, Parnell and Harley, Lord Oxford, Tories all, were **the** **founding** members of the Club, an anti-pomposity, anti-pedantry venture, **determined**

to defeat and demolish dullness, that is, bad writing in every form, and dunces. They scorned false taste in learning and aimed to conserve the best from the past.

The collapse of the Tories in the summer and the death of the Queen on August 1, 1714 broke the Club up. Arbuthnot was replaced as court physician, Swift left for his voluntary exile in Ireland, Parnell also returned to Ireland (and died in 1718), Oxford was impeached and put in the Tower and Atterbury was charged in 1722 with complicity in a plot to reinstate the Pretender, found guilty of Jacobitism and exiled (line 355). Pope survived the change of government by retiring to the country.

25.6 POPE'S LIFE AND WORKS

A familiarity with Pope's personal life is essential to an adequate appreciation of his art. We have, therefore, given in brief outline those aspects of his life and character which have a direct bearing on the *Epistle*. We have left out those details including some of his works which have been incorporated in the discussion of the poem.

Pope was born on 21 May, 1688 in London of elderly parents. He was the only son of his father, a linen-merchant or tradesman and a Roman Catholic at a time when the members of that church were prescribed by law. The elder Pope retired from business soon after his son's birth and settled at Binfield, nine miles from Windsor, perhaps to comply with anti-Catholic regulations. In April 1716 Pope's family sold their house at Binfield and settled at Chiswick. After the death of his father in 1719, Pope and his mother moved in March 1719 into a villa which he leased on the bank of the Thames at Twickenham. The 5 acre grounds here were divided by the main road from London to Hampton Court. To avoid crossing it, Pope built an underground passage ('my grot' in line 8) which also led to a stone arbour or temple, adorned with a large number of rare stones given to him by his friends. Pope's garden was an imitation of the landed aristocrat's estate, with its statuary, mottoes from the classics, famous grotto and carefully designated wilderness area. Pope had also employed a waterman to convey him between London and Twickenham, in 'the barge' (line 10).

He was physically deformed and extremely stunted in growth. Tubercular disease of the bone later known as Pott's disease at the age of 12 had caused a curvature in his spine so that he measured a mere 4 feet 6 inches in height. Humpbacked, he became almost a cripple and suffered from severe bodily weakness in need, as Dr. Johnson tells us, of wearing stays in order to be able to stand. He later called it 'a long disease' (line 132). Conscious throughout of his misshapen and grotesque body, Pope was so hurt by the caricature of his figure, 'the pictur'd shape' (line 353), that he ranked it among the most atrocious injuries he received from his enemies.

Lady Mary Montagu and Martha Blount were the two women who meant most to Pope. He only acknowledged friendship with Martha for fear of provoking mirth even though rumours alleging a much deeper relationship were constantly afloat. His deformity also got connected with his sexual indeterminacy. Consciousness of his physical disability perhaps made him assert his 'manly ways' (line 337) in his depiction of *Sporus*.

As a Papist Pope was excluded from the Universities and from every public career. He gained some instruction from the family priest and also went to school for a short time but for the most part he was a self-educated man and studied so severely that at 17 Dr. Radcliffe had to advise him to read less and ride on horseback everyday. Commenting on Pope's tender frame, feeble and weak constitution, Dr. Johnson says that 'his deformity was probably in part the effect of his application' — 'application' being excessive literary exertions or efforts. In those days authorship was construed to be 'the disease of the learned'. His rhythmic faculty was developed very early, he 'lisp'd in numbers' (line 128) and showed precocious metrical skill in his *Pastorals* written when he was 16.

Pope was uncertain about the social class he belonged to in a rigidly hierarchical society. His father had retired from business in 1688 and from about 1700 lived on a 14 acre estate at **Binfield** until his death in 1719. Pope's portrait of his father in the *Epistle* (lines 392-403) shows him a harmless, natural man who was untouched by the political and religious currents of the age. But Lady Mary wrote that Pope's verse was 'Hard as thy Heart, and as thy Birth obscure'. This gibe at his parentage hurt him more than anything else. John Dennis had connected his physical deformity with a diabolical ancestry. The pamphlet *Codrus* of 1728 claims that Pope's father was 'but a Husbandman on Windsor-Forest, and that only his consumptive weakness invalidated him out of agricultural labour'. Later he becomes a hatter. Or sometimes a mechanic. In 1733 in *An Epistle from a Nobleman to a Doctor of Divinity*, Lord Hervey made an obscure allusion to the hatter's trade, raking up the old slander on his parentage. Pope claimed to be connected on the father's side with the Earls of **Downe**. His mother was the daughter of William Turner, a Roman Catholic gentleman of Yorkshire. One of the Turners was killed and another died in the service of Charles I. Hence Pope talks of his 'gentle blood' (line 387) on his mother's side. In the *Epistle* he avoids any talk about his father's lineage.

In 1708 his early friend, Sir William Trumbull had advised him to translate the *Iliad* and five years later the poet, following the custom of the age, invited subscriptions to the work which was to appear in six volumes at the price of six guineas. Around this time Swift came to know Pope, zealously proinoted his scheme telling people at the coffee-houses that 'the best poet in England Mr. Pope a Papist' had begun a translation of Homer which he should not print till he had a thousand guineas for him. Swift also introduced Pope to St. John, Atterbury and Harley. The first volume of Pope's Homer appeared in 1715.

After his move to Twickenham in 1719 Pope devoted himself for several years to translating Homer into English couplets, editing Shakespeare and gardening. His business instinct made him market his translation of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* by seeking patronage of all his aristocratic friends, putting pressure on them to buy sets and persuade their friends to do likewise. The commercial success of the Homer translation guaranteed his independence of professional writing. It is said that the entire payment for his version of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* spread over eleven years, yielded Pope a clear gain of about 9,000 pounds besides making the fortune of his publisher. By 1725 he had enough money to indulge in the aristocratic tastes.

In 1725 Pope published his edition of Shakespeare, the errors in which were pointed out in a pamphlet by Theobald. This led to his selection as the hero of *Dunciad*, a satire on Dullness (1728). In 1733-34 Pope published a series of moral and philosophical poems, *An Essay on Man*, and *Moral Essays*. In 1733 he published the first of his miscellaneous satires, *Imitations of Horace*, entitled *Satire I* in which he defends himself against the charge of malignity and professes to be inspired only by love of virtue. However, he inserts an attack on Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. This was followed up with his *Imitations of Horace's Satires II and Epistles I*. In 1738 appeared *One Thousand Seven Hundred and Thirty Eight*, two satirical dialogues. These satires, and the *Satires of Dr. Donne Versified* (1735) and the *New Dunciad* (1743) with Cibber replacing Theobald as the hero, closed his literary career.

The concept of imitation in literature may sound strange to the modern reader. It does not mean servile or unimaginative copying. It is to emulate and rival an earlier author, acknowledging his excellence and endeavouring to render him in modern terms. Imitation was the chief means by which the Renaissance poet sought to learn from and live up to the achievements of classical antiquity. In *Timber or Discoveries* Ben Jonson defined it thus, "The third requisite in our poet is Imitation, to be able to convert the substance, or Riches of another Poet, to his own use ... Not, as a creature, that swallowes, what it takes in, crude, raw or indigested, but, that feedes

with an Appetite, and hath a **stomache** to concoct, divide, and **turne** all into nourishment."

Pope was a Roman Catholic mainly because his father was a Catholic. **He** could **not** renounce Catholicism fearing the pain his apostasy would cause his devout parents. **After** the 1689 Bill of Rights and the 1701 Act of Settlement, the Catholics were being excluded from positions of high office and subjected to repressive **legislation**. **A bill** that passed the Lords in 1723 levied additional taxes on Catholics. In 1730 Pope's nephew Henry Rackett lost his practice as an attorney for failing to take the Oath of Supremacy. Pope's father declined to take various oaths (line 397) which were at that time necessary qualifications for civil offices. The law forbade the Catholics from living within **10** miles of London. Though kept in **abeyance** most of the time, it could be invoked in any emergency. In February 1744 it was indeed invoked with the threatened Jacobite invasion of England. All the Catholics were suspected Jacobites.

Pope was a **Tory** opposed to Sir Robert **Walpole's** 20 year long Whig administration. He was consequently excluded from the lucrative patronage that writers who supported the Walpole Whigs could obtain. He was a Jacobite sympathiser. Some of his best friends were active Jacobites like Bolingbroke, Atterbury, Robert Harley, Wyndham, Lord Lansdowne, Lord **Bathurst**, John Sheffield, Duke of **Buckingham**, **Cobham**, John Caryll, etc. Francis Atterbury, the Bishop of Rochester, was exiled on charges of Jacobite conspiracy in August 1722. In 1723 Pope's edition of **Sheffield's** works was seized, Sheffield having been exposed as a Jacobite. In the same year, Pope's kinsmen Charles and Michael Rackett became involved in an outbreak of social unrest in **Windsor** Forest.

The heavy blows delivered to the **Tories** by the Hanoverian Succession in 1714 and the disaster of the Jacobite rebellion in 1715 appear to have convinced Pope of the wisdom of retreating from politics for the time being. By the early 1730s however, he became actively involved in politics for the first time **as** an alliance of Tories and anti-government Whigs strove to build up a Country Programme which denounced the political **corruption** and the moral degeneration of the Walpolean regime. Pope became the poet-laureate of the Opposition. The failure of the Country principles, by the end of the 1730s led to his disillusionment with politics. In the last few years of his life he again retreated to a more private life, safe from political strife and the clash of **political** personalities.

25.7 THE THEME

The poem is a condensed autobiography on the whole course and pattern of Pope's life and on his **motives** and reasons for being a poet and a satirist. It is an attempt at self-justification, self-education and self-definition. The poet is defending his personal integrity. He writes an ***apologia pro vita sua***, explaining how he has been forced to change from a poet of 'pure Description' (line 14) to one of satire and how he was motivated in doing so not by malevolence but the simple desire to live in peace and honour with family and friends. It includes self-defence also against the libels and slanders of some of the literary third-raters.

These hacks who pursue him everywhere have scant regard either for his privacy or for their own honour or respect. They have even gone against their own true natures since most of them, in insisting on becoming poets, have violated their true callings:

A clerk, foredoom'd his father's soul to cross,
Who pens a stanza, when he should engross?

(lines 17-18)

Similarly **James** Moore Smythe, son of Arthur Moore, a politician, 'neglects the laws' (line 23). (It is said that Smythe had offended Pope by refusing to remove some of

Pope's unpublished verses from his comedy *The Rival Modes*, 1727.) These poetasters who seek to use him to further their work, who 'fume, and stamp, and roar, and chafe!' (line 191), make it impossible for Pope to sit back 'with sad civility' any longer (line 37).

The *Epistle* thus presents us with a vivid close-up of those many years as they affected the literary world. .

Pope's views on good, lasting poetry are also indirectly revealed. He is full of disdain for the professional/hack writers who write only or mostly the panegyric and whose pen is controlled from outside. They thus become the dummies and their patrons the prompters, the ventriloquists (line 318). Pope's logic was that one should write poetry to share values or communicate something worthwhile, not just to earn because then it cannot be good art.

The poem also describes, to an extent, the process of Pope's personal development, his growth as a satirist. His earlier works defined only the nature of a thing, now he deals with becoming, with the process, and not just the static stage of being.

Perhaps Pope fears that just like the fools satirized in the poem he himself may be cursed because the form he has chosen to write in is useless or harmful. Hence he insists on their imperviousness:

You think this cruel? take it for a rule,
No creature smarts so little as a fool

(lines 83-84)

Whom have I hurt? has poet yet, or peer,
Lost the arch'd eye-brow, or Parnassian sneer?

(lines 97-98)

The other fear is that his impulse to write was itself a curse brought upon by a sin of his parents or his own:

Why did I write ? What sin to me unknown
Dipt me in ink, my Parents', or my own?

(lines 125-26)

Pope, therefore, links the question of why he writes to how he became the man he is.

By thus connecting the two questions Pope also tackles the prevalent charge that a satirist cannot be a good man. He establishes beyond doubt that he has been an obedient, dutiful son. He left 'no calling for this idle trade, No duty broke, no father disobeyed' (lines 129-30), unlike Moore-Smythe (line 23). He wrote because verses came to him naturally:

As yet a child, nor yet a fool to fame
I lisp'd in numbers, for the numbers came

(lines 127-28)

A true Christian, he pays his debts, believes in a God and says his prayers (line 268). The end provides yet another proof of Pope's filial piety in the affectionate solicitude with which he hopes to tend the declining years of his aged mother.

A man of fair conviction, Pope came to the rescue of Dennis when he fell on evil days towards the close of his life:

Foe to his pride, but friend to his distress:

(line 371)

Even though Dennis' *Character of Mr. Pope* (1716) was perhaps the earliest of the libels upon him, Pope furnished a prologue to *The Provoked Husband* when it was brought out at the Haymarket for Dennis's benefit.

He defends his satire on the ground that he selected his friends on pure merit, was not misled by wealth, power, fashion or mercenary motives, did not give in to flattery, did not lie and stooped only to truth and moralized his song (lines 340-41). From here he slips into the defence of his moral character. He has patiently borne slanderous assaults on his writings without seeking vengeance, the attacks on his morals and the abuse that did not stop at his writings and morals but included his deformed, sickly body, exiled friends and dead father (lines 36-381). He thus substantiates his satiric ethos of the good poet and the good man.

The *Epistle* thus attempts an account of Pope's growth as a satiric poet and a good human being. The poem can be regarded as literary autobiography, as a personal testament and exercise in self-defence, as a survey of the contemporary literary milieu and as a testimony to Pope's poetic skill where personal grudges merge into a general and profound concern for society and its values.

Byron and Ruskin called him "the moral poet of all civilization" for dealing with the moral problems of an artificial and complex society.

25.8 THE STRUCTURE

Instead of sketching the landscape or creating an atmosphere of affection and friendly intimacy, Pope draws the reader straight into the middle of a real-life situation with the help of a dramatic dialogue. Eluding the literary hacks persistently hounding him, Pope manages somehow to get into his own house. Out of breath, he asks his servant-gardener John Searle to shut the front door, 'tye up the knocker' (line 2) and not let anyone in, and finds his old friend and physician waiting for him.

A perfect situation for the frank and direct outbursts of an irritated and overwrought poet.

The poet himself as a persona is present in the poem all through from line 1, beleaguered, under siege, desperately avoiding the fellow writers who all want something out of him, 'My friendship, and a prologue, and ten pound' (line 48).

The opening section (lines 1-68) dramatises shameless violations of the poet's privacy by other poets and would-be poets who all want favours. Despite his walls, shades, thickets and grot (lines 7-8) and despite various modes of transport available to him (lines 9-10), these people 'rave, recite and madden round the land' (line 6) and pester him like a pestilence 'to keep them mad or vain' (line 22).

The free colloquial movement of dialogue catches succinctly the opposition of a moral and an expedient view.

A strong sense of contrast and confrontation is gradually and systematically built up between the haves and have-nots — economically, socially, artistically and morally. The contrast between Pope and his antiselves is effectively elaborated.

Detailing the standard and motives of these professional hacks who flatter, bribe and can stoop to any extreme to publish and thereby earn money, name or fame, Pope relates the slander he has patiently borne, the attacks made on his integrity and morals and the vitriolic that did not stop at his writings or ideology but freely extended to his sickly, deformed body, his exiled friend and his dead father. Attributing all his virtues to his parents, the *Epistle* closes with a double farewell, an affectionate,

respectful epitaph for his father (lines 392-405) and a traditional salute to his lifelong friend and guide, the poem's dedicatee (lines 414-17).

Pope

The poem closes as it began, with return to the home, but instead of the desperate flight now there is the calm assurance that here alone the true values and self exist. Image of retreat at the beginning develops into mature acceptance by the end. When he insists that the door be shut he is escaping his poetic responsibilities as well as the nuisance of the poetasters. 'Say I'm sick, I'm dead' (line 2) —this retreat is a kind of death. The end heralds peace within and without.

25.9 SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF THE AGE

The infliction of personal injury was not confined to the desperadoes of the streets. Men of letters were in danger of revenge from the poets and politicians whom they satirized or vilified. Pope was threatened with a rod by Ambrose Philips, which was hung up for his chastisement in Button's coffee-house (line 158). 'The blow unfelt' (line 349) alludes to a fictitious account of a whipping inflicted on Pope in 1728 in Ham Walks. Pope believed it to be the fabrication of Lady Mary Montagu. Later, when his satires had generated passionate heat, Pope used to carry pistols and have a large dog for his companion when walking out at Twickenham.

Drunkenness was very common among the fine gentlemen of the town and men occupying the highest position in the State. Bolingbroke is said to be a 'four-bottle man'. Harley went more than once into the Queen's presence in a half-intoxicated condition. Fenton died of 'two bottles of port a day'. Parnell, a man of high character, is said to have shortened his life by intemperance. Gay died from indolence. Pope's frail body could not withstand excess and he is said to have hastened his end by good living.

Every section of English society was infected with this devil. Malt alcohol, and not the inspiration of the Muses seems to be the cause of the bewilderment of poet laureate, Laurence Eusden (line 15). Arthur Moore's son is giddy with drinking (line 23).

Marriages were negotiated on business principles, to gain a good settlement. Dryden and Addison had sought advancement by connecting themselves with noble families, only to have domestic unhappiness (line 393). Only by the end of the eighteenth century negotiating a marriage solely on financial considerations was explicitly denounced.

The loss of principles among statesmen and the bitterness of faction had a baleful influence all around. There were ruffians who sought employment in Westminster Hall as false, hired witnesses (line 365). Budget was charged by common repute with forging the will of Dr. Mathew Tindal by means of which he excluded the next lawful heir and himself obtained the greater part of the estate (line 379). Japhet Crook alias Sir Peter Stranger had forged a conveyance of an Estate to himself, fraudulently obtained a will by which he possessed another considerable Estate and was imprisoned (line 363). Telling lies and spreading rumours were also very common. Welsted, it seems, had told two lies (line 375) — that Pope had occasioned a lady's death and had also libelled Mr. Brydges by implying that Timon's Villa meant the Duke of Chandos' seat at Cannons (line 300). Welsted had also said that Pope had received from the Duke a present of £ 500. Pope vehemently denied it and admitted to receiving only the subscription for Homer from him. Welsted's lies remained in circulation for over ten years 'three thousand suns' (line 374). During this period Pope never wrote a word in answer to these falsehoods and scurrilities.

Booksellers like Edmund Curll specialized in publishing scandalous biographies and unauthorized private papers not meant for public consumption (line 53). In some of

Curl's pamphlets, Pope's father was said to be a mechanic, a hatter, a farmer, even a bankrupt (line 380).

Pamphlet and newspaper wars between writers were a prevalent feature of the eighteenth century literary life. Self-seeking in politics and public life augmented professional writing with scant regard for virtue or ethics.

25.10 QUESTIONS

1. What role does **Arbutnot** play in the poem?, What purpose does his **persona** serve?
2. Mrs. **Editha** Pope had died much before the Epistle was published. Why **does** Pope show her as ailing towards the end of the poem?
3. What are Pope's physical deformities as described in the poem? How does he use them to his advantage?
4. What kind of relationship did his parents enjoy?
5. Which, lines reveal his material affluence?

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UNIT 26 POPE : THE STUDY OF *AN EPISTLE TO DR. ARBUTHNOT*

Structure

- 26.0 Objectives
- 26.1 Introduction
- 26.2 **Animal/Insect Imagery**
- 26.3 Christian Imagery
- 26.4 Economic Leitmotif
- 26.5 Pope as a Satirist
- 26.6 Satiric Portraits
 - 26.6.1 **Philips, Tate and Atticus**
 - 26.6.2 Bufo
 - 26.6.3 **Sporus**
 - 26.6.4 Neglected Genius
 - 26.6.5 Self-portrait
- 26.7 Suggested Readings
- 26.8 Questions

26.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit carefully, you will be able to:

- recognise the rich imagery in the poem and the use it is put to;
- analyse the economic motif predominant in the poem;
- identify the satiric portraits relating them to the life and times of Pope; and
- evaluate Pope as a satirist.

26.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit, we **gave** you an introduction to the poetic epistle, Dr. **Arbuthnot** and his role in **Pope's** life, and the immediate reasons for the publication of the Epistle. We also discussed those aspects of Pope's life and works which ensure a **fuller** understanding of the poem. Some of the general tendencies of the age were summed up to help you grasp references in the poem not hitherto covered. We then **analysed** the theme and structure of the poem.

In this unit, we shall discuss the imagery in the **poem—animal/insect** imagery and Christian imagery. We **shall** also discuss economics as the overriding motif throughout the poem. Then we evaluate Pope's satire, the satiric devices he **uses** and the satiric portraits he gives us. We have given some exercises at the end of the unit so that you are able to check your progress before moving on to the next author.

26.2 ANIMAL/INSECT IMAGERY

The poem opens with Pope resisting the invasion of his home and privacy by a horde of insectile and variously deranged bad poets. In a way Pope is surrounded and tortured by a swarm of insects or a pack of hounds which 'renew the charge' (line 9) and 'stop the chariot' (line 10).

Dog-star Sirius reappears in late summer heat which is traditionally a time of satiric rage. It is dangerous in the ascendant to sanity, one thinks of mad dogs and mad men. But it was the **customary** time for public recitals of poetry in Ancient Rome.

The two **major** animal images used by Pope throughout the poem are of a dog and an ass, the ass taken literally as a symbol of stupidity and not as a vulgarized **metaphor** which it has become of late.

Pope seems to suggest that the royal courts set in motion the process of corruption in sound judgement and good taste. **Midas** receives his asses' ears for wrongly judging that Pan was a better poet than Apollo. These ears are a mark of his folly. This grievous monarchic offence to the gods and good taste was replayed in the British Court's selection of Cibber as the poet laureate. Queen Caroline's patronage of Stephen Duck and Walpole's patronage of many literary hacks also weighed in Pope's mind. The Court is thus responsible for breeding bad values and asinine taste. **Midas** is thus George II who is at the centre of the literary corruption that Pope is trying to expose (lines 70-72). And just like **Midas'** minister or queen Pope will speak out 'that secret to each fool, that he's an ass' (line 80) and gain sleep through purgation (line 82). Pope sees himself as the truth-teller. He must like the queen in the fable '**speak, or burst**' (line 72).

The second time 'Ass's milk' is contemptuously used in connection with Sporus (**line 306**). Brought up on ass's milk, Lord Hervey is too insensitive and foolish to even realise that he is being ridiculed. The reference however, is both ironic and incongruous because ass's milk was **commonly** described as a tonic in all weakly constitutions as being more easily digestible than even cow's milk and Pope himself was advised a valetudinary diet.

Soon thereafter Pope calls Sporus a well-bred spaniel who dares not bite, whose smiles betray emptiness (lines 313-315).

Earlier Pope describes Savage as 'a puppy' (line 225) who was said to have lived in convivial familiarity with the town authors and to have secretly supplied Pope with scandalous anecdotes about them. Like a puppy he fetched and **carried** in his **mouth** the works of all the Muses. Even though Pope himself was the beneficiary, he sees the wits and **witlings** as disease-carrying insects.

Sporus is supposed to have a cherub's face and a reptile's body (**line 331**). According to the Jewish tradition the Eve's tempter was not an ordinary serpent but a creature with **human** head, sometimes of a man, sometimes of a woman, and a reptile all the rest. Of course, here Lord Hervey's Satanic machinations are being hinted. Hervey was trusted and consulted by Queen Caroline who controlled George II. The toad at the ear of Eve (line 319) suggests Hervey's easy access to Caroline. The reference is to *Paradise Lost IV*, where Satan is found, squat like a toad, close at the ear of Eve. The animal imagery is used to insinuate secret machinations.

Pope wouldn't toady to even the royalty. He stoops only to truth as a falcon to its prey (line 341).

Earlier the scribbler who writes hastily and carelessly and is an inferior writer is portrayed as a filthy house-spider. Unaware of his thin designs, **flimzy** lines, dirty work and rickety edifice, he goes on spinning the structure anew out of his excrement even if his fibs are openly exposed (lines 89-94).

Lord Hervey is described as '**a butterfly**' (line 308), a 'bug with gilded wings' (line 309). 'This painted child of dirt stinks and stings' (line 310). The stink makes him horrid and repulsive and the sting causes sharp pain, even wound. His mosquito-like '**buzz** the witty and the fair **annoys**' (line 311). Hervey's **charm** and treachery, his

creeping and licking (line 333) are in sharp contrast to Pope's integrity and courage of conviction.

In *The Dunciad* and *Satires* also Pope presents pedants and bad writers as clumsy animals, insects, reptiles and river-birds. Malevolent dull-headed critics like Lewis and Theobald only scan and spell and catch words (lines 165-166) and live on syllables as some **frog** or **lizard** snatches at flies and gnats. This plague of repulsive, stinging, snapping insects and animals must be flapped (line 309) and destroyed in the wider interest of decorum and reason.

Interestingly, in the *Verses addressed to the Imitation of Horace* (1733) Pope is described as both a wasp and reptile. In *Codrus* (1728), printed in *Pamphlet Attacks* he is portrayed as a splenetic toad, venomous but harmless. In Dennis' *True Character* (1716) Pope was presented as a Satan with an angel's face.

26.3 CHRISTIAN IMAGERY

Pope stresses that he is a true Christian to prove that he is a far superior poet and human being than those he has been satirizing in the poem. He pays his debts, believes in a God and says his prayers (line 268). If a critic justifiably **criticised** him or his work he 'kiss'd the rod' (line 158) in the non-retaliatory manner of offering the other cheek.

By pursuing writing as his career he didn't disregard any duty or disobey his father (line 130) like many others. His father was an ideal Christian:

Born to no pride, inheriting no strife,
Nor marrying discord in a noble wife,
Stranger to civil and religious rage,
By nature honest, by experience wise, (lines 392-403)

And Pope is the Christian son of Christian parents—an obedient, loving and devoted son of an ailing mother.

Pope's fearless outspokenness unmindful of the possible repercussions is also a Christian virtue:

Who can't be silent, and who will not lye: (line 34)

'Not proud, nor servile' (line 336) his is a **free** life of the soul. He enjoys total freedom to choose and to refuse. The anti-materialistic posture of Christianity has also been **emphasised**:

Not fortune's worshipper, nor fashion's fool,
Not lucre's madman, nor ambition's tool (lines 334-35)

Here Pope uses the Christian imagery for an idealized construction of the self.

Pope dismissed as 'imputed trash' (line 351) the general impression that he had rendered a pew version of *Psalms* and asserted that *Psalms*, Court Poems and other scandalous pieces were mischievously printed in his name by **Curll** and others **obviously** to **encash** his name and reputation because **Curll** published every scrap he could rake out against Pope and his friends. But Dr. Johnson thought that Pope indeed was the author of a Roman Catholic Version of the **First Psalm** for the use of a Young Lady.

Pope always emphasized family-based piety and **distrusted** unaided **human** reason as the sole means of finding one's way in the world. Though influenced by Anglican

divines like Isaac Barrow and John Tillotson and friendly with Anglicans like **Atterbury** and Swift, his traditional allegiance remained intact.

His justification of why he wrote is a reference to Christian baptism to symbolise a literary initiation:

Why did I write? What sin to me **unknown**
Dipt me in ink, my parents', or my own? (lines 125–126)

In one sense, the act of writing is a washing away of the original sin, in another the dipping in black ink suggests some form of divine punishment. Writing, especially of the satire, involves a lot of mud-slinging, character-assassination and slander. Has he been burdened with this ineffectual or harmful work because of some unknown past sins, his own or his parents'? One is also reminded of the blind man in **St. John 9 : 2-3**. Could his parents' sin be devolved upon him instead of being removed by baptism? But a few lines later he talks of the healing, restorative influence of poetry (lines 131-133). The Muse becomes Dr. **Arbuthnot's sickroom** attendant and helps the poet 'to bear' the sufferings of life.

The imagery is thus used to substantiate **Pope's conviction** that satire was a moral teacher and a social therapeutic.

26.4 THE ECONOMIC LEITMOTIF

Then from the Mint walks forth the man of rhyme,
Happy! to catch me, just at dinner-time (lines 13-14)

The Mint was a sanctuary for insolvent debtors in Southwark; the man of **rhyme** is happy because Pope can be trusted to give him dinner. Such lines reveal very clearly the **gap** between the poet and those who seek his help. 'Fire in each eye' (line 5) could be the fire of passion or hunger. One must publish before the term ends, 'obliged by hunger, and request of friends' (lines 43-44). These hacks flattered Bufo everyday and 'some days eat' (line 240).

All these poetasters are insolvents. The best they can aspire for is Pope's 'friendship, and a prologue, and ten pound' (line 48). Some of them have given up their profession in favour of poetry—the clerk (line 17) and James Moore **Smythe** (line 23) ought to be earning an honest living following their natural calling. The drunken parson, Laurence Eusden and maudlin (alcohol-induced sentimentality) poetess are neglecting their duty.

There is a glaring economic gap between the poet and his pursuers. Now a man of substance, Pope looks down on those not as well off as himself, who **nevertheless** aspire to be poets. Pope feels superior on 3 counts:

- 1) he does not need to sell his Muse
- 2) he is undoubtedly a good poet, and
- 3) he has the courage (good fortune?) to stand by his convictions and do only what he considers right. He doesn't need to compromise his honour. He doesn't have to earn or steal a meal. 'Born to write, converse, and live with ease' (line 196) he can relax in sweet retreat on the **bank** of Thames or choose to travel by land or by water, in a chariot or a barge (lines 9-10).

But Pope seems to be a fortunate exception. **Dryden**, for example, was not so lucky with all his talent and integrity.

The hacks live by their wits—they need to write poetry to pay the rent, to eat. They live in Mint (line 13), in **Drury-lane** (line 41) and in Grubstreet (line 111)—well-known resorts of **prostitutes** and writers in garrets. Writing is thus connected with

hunger, with low-life, with stealing and theft. Writers prostitute their art and honour charging only a prostitute's customary fee (line 180). The venal, mercenary **hack-poet** is converting his Muse into bread. The wealthy and the **powerful** are often exchanging literary praise for hard cash or **position** of some significance or sometimes only a dinner or **two**. The filth, stench and violence associated with actual slum regions in London became **an** objective correlative for bad writing. Bad art is considered as immoral as bad conduct. The prostitute author is an object of contempt, not pity.

The writers are encouraged in this by **some**, **happily** not all, of their social **superiors**—**Atticus**, Bufo and Sporus. Walpole was believed to be encouraging inferior writers whose pens could be bought. Re neglected writers of true genius who **refused** to kowtow to his whims and fancies. By professional writers Pope means those writers whose content is decided by someone else.

Patronage was the dominant economic apparatus for the sponsorship of the arts. The royal patronage had started in Charles II's time. The fall of absolutism and the rise of the two party system led to the emergence of politically-affiliated noblemen who were ever keen to enlist the support of the men of letters. **Some** writers **were** only too keen to oblige. With the growth of the reading public the economics of writing became more complex. We now have a three-tier structure of

- 1) what the government wants,
- 2) what the patron wants, and
- 3) what the reading public wants.

The professional writer has to cater to at least one of them to survive. This obviously leads to corruption and commercialism in art. Their relationship is based on selfishness and **dishonesty**.

The wealthy and the titled would support a project entirely or be fed with **soft** dedication (line 233). Writers would be given **government** jobs carrying real duties or mere sinecures guaranteeing a living. Writers could also become journalists in the pay of the government. Of course, they would **then** toe the official line. Booksellers agreed to publish books only by subscription, **i.e.**, advance orders, and only the rich could be expected or persuaded to risk their money. The least they would expect in return was humility and public acknowledgement of their patronage of the arts.

Timon's villa with its massive tasteless structures only betrays the vulgar excrescence and bad taste of its owner. The impressive study inside filled with rare editions the contents of which the owner knows or cares nothing about shows only the pride of the owner. Bufo's library is another example. The faculty of judging right is sadly lacking. Wealth is being lavished on vulgar displays and true sympathy is being bypassed in the interest of snobbery. Arts are being fostered by uncritical men of wealth and title with pretensions to literary taste.

Writers praise these pseudo patrons to get some money or position, to survive. Their time-tested devices are **flattery** and bribery. And these patrons, these men of influence and power **like/want** to be flattered. So they encourage these poetasters to sing their praises, to buttress **up** their ego. The dependence is reciprocal but perverse. The poetasters serve the potential patron, not the Muse. The pretending patron doesn't speak his mind, doesn't give them the sound advice, doesn't properly **guide** them. Together they are poisoning the world of letters at source.

26.5 POPE AS A SATIRIST

Pope wrote to Swift in March 1732, 'I know nothing that moves strongly but Satire, and those who are **ashamed** of nothing else, are so of being ridiculous.' Two years later, in a letter dated 17 July, 1734, Arbuthnot urged Pope to 'continue that noble

Disdain and Abhorrence of Vice which he seemed naturally endued with' but begged him to show 'due regard to your own Safety, and Study more to reform than chastise.' The distinction that **Arbuthnot** presses on Pope is the distinction that exists between Horatian and Juvenalian Satire. Although both Horace and Juvenal use the same **form**, Satire, the basic difference between them is that while Horace attempts to persuade with witty and urbane ridicule, Juvenal attempts to chastise with fierce and savage denunciation. Horace tries to laugh us into truth, Juvenal provokes our indignation and horror. Though Pope had chosen to imitate Horace's poems in the 1730s, it was Juvenal's savage mode that actually influenced his work.

Pope's reply to **Arbuthnot** clearly sums up his theory of Satire:

But General Satire in Times of General Vice has no force, and is no
Punishment : People have ceas'd to be ashamed of it when so many are joined
with them; and it's only by hunting one or two **from** the Herd that any
Examples can be made.

On another occasion Pope reiterated, 'To attack Vice in the abstract without touching persons may be safe fighting indeed, but it is fighting with shadows, and in the name of assailing the Vice. Pope usually betrayed his venomous contempt of the men he caricatured.

He singles out individuals and argues that he needs to write particular satire because people like **Atticus**, **Bufo** and **Sporus** exist.

Usually Pope subdivides mankind into groups—fools, knaves, good men, the rich, the poor, ancients, moderns, **friends**, enemies, etc. His individual obviously belongs to these groups. Even when there is a close resemblance to an actual historical person or when Pope addresses the individual by his actual name or by a different but clearly recognisable name, the portrait takes on some generality. While speaking seemingly of an individual with all his individual traits, he presents him as a representative of a class, with typically generic attributes—attributes which in his situation he is most likely to possess. The class characteristics constitute the general appeal and instructiveness of a character. **Philips**, **Dennis**, **Gildon**, **Atticus**, **Bufo**, **Sporus**—all become more than individuals, 'not one, but all mankind's epitome'

May some choice Patron bless each gray goose quill
May **ev'ry** Bavius have his Bufo still ! (lines 249-250)

Bavius, since Virgil, has been a traditional name for a wretched poet. **Codrus** has been an inept poetaster since Juvenal. Originally belonging to real life, in time they came to stand as typical representatives of the moral qualities (or lack of them) for which these persons were noted. Bufo, also a **proper** name, is made to represent another class. The former refers to every bad poet, the latter to every rich fool who gives his patronage to all such. **Bentley** and **Theobald** (lines 65-72) represent the carping critic who misses the greatness of a work in his misplaced emphasis on the trifling points of grammar or punctuation. In *An Essay on Criticism*, Pope defines a perfect judge as one who responds to the total **harmony** of a work, not its particular parts. But these commentators only scan and spell and end up being mere word-catchers (line 166).

Some of the satiric devices **Pope** employs here are as follows :

A satiric adversary is **introduced** in **Arbuthnot**. The interlocutor is presumed to be in debate with the poet and may give friendly counsels of caution or attack the speaker's motives alleging spite, envy or cruelty. Besides being a dramatic device, his interventions provide dynamism and open-mindedness. Pope anticipates a protest within the mind of the reader and states it as **Arbuthnot's**. Another viewpoint is **given** and reader's participation/identification is **invited/ensured**.

Arbuthnot's word of caution ultimately establishes Pope's fearlessness and fair-mindedness. He is not bothered by the status and high office of the persons he is exposing. A reconciliation of opposite stances proves Pope's moral integrity.

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For the moral attack to carry conviction, the reader must be drawn in sympathetically. Direct autobiography may not meet the artistic and moral demands. Hence even the autobiographical details become part of the designed artefact of the poem though autobiography lends credibility to the narrative.

External and internal dialogue is used to gain confidence and sympathetic agreement of his reader. The opposite point of view is given a hearing, it is not ignored.

'Shut, shut the door, good John' – introduces dramatic immediacy which in turn establishes the urgency and authenticity of what the poet has to say. This dramatic quality marks the entire poem. There are marked variations though in mood from affectionate reminiscences to the most virulent attacks.

Satire compels attention by overstatement. The object of satire should appear too contemptible, too trivial and too revolting to deserve our sympathy. Hence the biting attack on Bufo and Sporus.

The two predominant satiric metaphors are of bestiality and madness—of both counsel-seekers and counsel-givers. We have already discussed in detail the bestial metaphors which take the shape of dogs and asses. Dogs connect bestiality to madness. The very appearance of Sirius reminds one of mad dogs and mad men. Poets rave, recite and madden boundlessly. They want Pope's counsel to keep them mad or vain. There is general madness that urges scribblers into print and brings them to ridiculous conclusions. **Cornus** blames his wife's elopement on Pope because his name sounds like her action. Lintot chooses his profession of printing because it sounds like his name. Bestiality and madness thus reinforce each other.

Pope creates antiselves through his major portraits. **Atticus** is a talented writer like Pope himself. The poet steadily builds up with Drydenesque mock grandeur in his heroic couplets, his genius, his talent, his fame and his art but he is desperate for **praise** and envious of rivals. Thinks too much of what the world thinks of him. Pope doesn't. Bufo feeds on others while caring nothing for them. Pope will not lie, will not encourage the fool. Sporus has a weak constitution like Pope. But he is a corrupt satirist-turned **scandalmonger**. Pope will never be like him—scheming and plotting all the time. These three serve as developing antitypes to Pope. Using the device of **antithesis** **Pope** establishes himself as a perfect poet and a perfect human being.

26.6 SATIRIC PORTRAITS

26.6.1 Phillips, Tate and Atticus

Atticus is, as is too obvious, a portrait of Addison (lines 192-214),

Initially Pope was **drawn** into the circle of Buttonians, that is, the group of writers headed by Addison, meeting regularly at Button's Coffee-house, the rising centre of literary interest. The group was also known as 'the little senate'.

Pope was entrusted with the responsibility of **writing** the prologue to Addison's great tragedy *Cato*. With its ringing declarations about liberty the play could be **taken** for a Whig manifesto which would be risky since the Tories were in power. The prologue was, therefore, to be written by Pope and to even things up and save recriminations, the epilogue was given to Garth, a known Whig,

In the **beginning** Pope was all enthusiasm and respect for Addison. He wrote a hilarious Satire on Dennis, the *Narrative of Dr. Robert Norris* following Dennis's remarks upon *Cato*. Addison was dismayed by Pope's defence of his play and through Steele conveyed his disapproval of the pamphlet to its publisher, Lintot. Lintot passed the letter to Dennis, who printed it in 1729. This unfortunate incident of Pope's affection being rebuffed by Addison presaged the course of their relationship.

Addison praised *The Rape of the Lock* when it appeared in 1712 but advised Pope not to attempt any improvement which he proposed to do incorporating the machinery of sylphs and gnomes adopted from the mysteries of the Rosicrucians and Pope attributed this advice to jealousy.

Ambrose Philips (1671-1749) was a writer of popular verse and belonged, like Tickell, to Addison's 'little senate'. His *Pastorals* had appeared in Tonson's Miscellany (1709), sixth volume, along with Pope's. The praise awarded to Philips by Addison, Tickell and others was taken by Pope as direct depreciation of himself. This was the foundation of Pope's bitter antipathy to Philips and added ground for dislike of Addison:

Still to one bishop Philips seem a wit? (line 100)

The bishop was Boulter who later became the Archbishop of Armagh. Philips had gone to Ireland as his secretary.

Later Pope caricatures Philips by associating his scanty literary output with sexual impotence and constipation:

Just writes to make his barrenness appear,
And strains from hard-bound brains, eight lines a year (lines 181-182)

'Strains' and 'brains' emphasise his laborious and sterile effort, his writing is forced and not free-flowing creativity.

In 'The bard whom pilfer'd Pastorals renown' (line 179) Pope charges Philips with plagiarism alleging that Philips had pilfered ideas from other pastoral writers. Philips' *Pastorals* were a professed imitation of Spenser.

Pope also decries Philips for translating the *Persian Tales* 'for half a crown' (line 180). This used to be a prostitute's customary charge.

Playwright Nathum Tate is also sketched as proud and empty. Pope has nothing but scorn for Philips and Tate whose worthlessness is compounded by their complacency (lines 176-178). Nathum Tate died in the Mint, a sanctuary for debtors, in great indigence. He had been much employed as a contributor to the versions of the classical poets in collective volumes – 'Translated by several hands' – which were much in vogue in his day. Pope's sneers at the translators as inferior species are surprising considering that he had been able to secure his own fortune and position only by a translation of the *Iliad*. Also, in putting the *Odyssey* into English he had himself sought the assistance of Broome and Fenton, two minor poets and Cambridge scholars. Broome translated eight books and Fenton four out of the twenty-four. Pope's contempt for Tate's literary partnerships, therefore, defies comprehension.

W e portraits of Philips and Tate blend into one another and lead up to the portrait of Atticus.

The first volume of Pope's Homer appeared in 1715 and in the same year Addison's friend Tickell published his version of the first book of *Iliad*. Pope believed this to have been done at Addison's instigation. He was also convinced that Addison was

pushing Tickell's version against his. Pope ceased henceforth to regard Addison as a friend.

Pope could not possibly present Addison as a fool and so he painted the picture of the evil of the literary temperament. Addison is a true genius 'blest with each talent and each art' (line 195) who unfortunately likes to be surrounded by inferior writers and distrusts rising genius like a Turkish ruler who, to forestall rivalry and assassination, often eliminated even his close kinsmen (line 198). A talented writer like Pope himself, 'born to write, converse, and live with ease' (line 196), Addison's desperation for praise and envy of rivals has made him give away his identity and expose himself to ridicule and regret at what he once was and what he had now become:

Who but must laugh, if such a man there be?
Who would not weep, if Atticus were he ! (lines 213-14)

Concern with what the world thinks of him and weakness for hero-worship and flattery have made him a model of insincere literary patronage, 'dreading ev'n fools, by flatterers besieged' (line 207). Pope condemns his autocratic, anti-democratic stance giving 'his little senate laws' (line 209) and his 'hate for arts that caus'd himself to rise' (line 200).

Addison is also shown to be a manipulator (line 211). When *Cato* was brought out Steele would bring into the pit a band of friendly listeners from the Inns of Court. Another such band came from Will's Coffee-house. These law students and wits applauded every sentence that Addison read out (line 211).

Addison who could have been a father figure to the budding poets insists on ruling alone (line 197). And even there he fails in his duty because he is afraid 'to strike' (line 203). The contrast to Pope's 'manly ways' is only too obvious. Pope treated his fawners with the same Oriental distance with which Atticus had treated him. Pope refused thus to 'spread about the Itch of Verse and Praise' (line 224). He refuses to spread the contagion. That's why Pope's circle is of distinguished men, Atticus's is made up of fools and flatterers.

26.6.2 Bufo

This frog-like patron of letters, 'full-blown' and 'puff'd' (line 232) likes to further his own name. Here is a Theophrastan character of a patron, composed of certain traits which Pope had observed in Bubb Dodington (1691-1762) and Charles Montagu, Earl of Halifax. Bubb Dodington, Bubo of the *Epistle*, was known for his political improbity, tactless extravagance and affectation of patronage (line 280). Dodington and Montagu together are satirised as Bubo (Latin for owl) and Bufo (Latin for toad) here.

The Earl of Halifax was one of those noble patrons of the Augustan Age on whom writers were forced to hang, leech-like, for a living, a man who was exploited as much as he exploited others:.

Receiv'd of wits an undistinguish'd race,
Who first his judgement asked, and then a place:
Much they extolled his pictures, much his seat,
And flatter'd ev'ryday, and some days eat: (lines 237-240)

Bufo is a hard task master whose proteges must earn their bread with devotion and humiliation and even then it is only very rarely that he offers them an adequate reward (lines 240-44).

As he grows older, however, he becomes more frugal and the payment becomes increasingly unsatisfactory:

He paid some bards with port, and some with praise
To some a dry rehearsal was assigned
And others (harder still) he paid in kind. (lines 242-244)

Obviously these hacks have no use for his own verses, their panegyrics or commemorations are meant to fetch them 'a place' (line 238) or at least a meal (line 240).

Like the toad that swells up with air this aristocratic patron swells with flattery and 'soft Dedications' (line 233). Addison's Epistle and vol. IV of Steele's *Tatler* were dedicated to the Earl of Halifax. Bufo is a vain, empty-headed patron who has hardly any self left, just like Atticus; his bust of Pindar is headless and it's, in fact, his library that attracts these poetic dependants (lines 235-36). Pope ridicules the affectation of Antiquaries who frequently exhibit the headless Trunks and Terms of Statues for Plato, Homer, Pindar, etc.

Bufo has no **knowledge** of literary worth and exists only for flattery which extolls him as a modern Maecenas, Horace's patron (line 234). He can't discern real merit and encourages the bad and starves the good. Dryden had lived in utter poverty **much** of his life and Halifax did nothing to relieve his wants but he offered to pay the expenses of the funeral, with 500 pounds for a monument (line 248).

Pope is sarcastically thankful that Bufo and his kind draw away some part at least of the crowds of Pope's would-be flatterers, leaving him time to devote to true genius and true friendship, like that of Gay:

And those they **left** me; for they left me Gay
Left me to see neglected genius bloom
Neglected die, and tell it on his tomb (lines 256-258)

Gay died at the house of the Duke of **Queensberry**. The Duke and his Duchess were the patrons and friends of Gay and deeply mourned his death. The epitaph on his tomb was written by Pope (line 260).

Pope had also written a brief epistle To Mr. **Gay** (1720) when Gay had sent him a congratulatory letter on the finishing of his house at Twickenham.

Bufo thus represents the vain aristocracy who are vitiating the literary atmosphere by encouraging the non-deserving and neglecting the **truly** meritorious. Bufo **symbolises** the decline of the aristocrats' morals and literary taste.

26.6.3 Sporus

Sporus is the name of Nero's boy kept for homosexual gratification. **Here** Pope gives this name to John, Lord **Hervey**. The name of one of Nero's minions is designed as an insult. Pope sneers at him under the **name** of 'gentle Fanny' earlier also (line 149).

When Pope declares that his lash is meant to make the babbling blockheads like Sporus tremble, Arbuthnot objects in a very different manner. **Sporus** doesn't deserve to be talked about, written about. He won't even understand he is being mocked. That's the level of his insensitivity, his intelligence. Why should Pope waste his satiric skills on him? 'Who breaks a butterfly upon a wheel?' (lines 305-308). **Arbuthnot thus** concedes that Sporus is an insect but is for turning aside in contempt rather than **plan an** attack, preparation for torture of such an insignificant being **would** be totally out of place. He also reinforces Pope's earlier assertion that **no** creature smarts so little as **a fool** (line 84).

But Pope insists on flapping 'this bug with gilded wings, this painted child of dirt, that stinks and stings' (lines 309-310). Despite his good looks and social charm, his stink makes him irritating and his sting renders him dangerous. Poisoning the ear of Eve (Queen Caroline), besides having overtones of *Hamlet*, portends his evil nature. He can do you a lot of harm. He is a threat because of his venom (line 320). Hence the need to expose him. Satirists of this period made frequent use of the story of Temptation and Fall. In the Jewish tradition Eve's tempter is not any natural serpent, but Satan in a form half seraphic, half serpentine. Despite his cherub's face, Sporus is really a reptile (line 330) that can creep and lick the dust (line 333). Surface beauty becomes synonymous for Pope with artful corruption, his own deformed body becomes a figure of artless **vitru**e.

Pope has however become much too personal. A well-bred spaniel, Sporus dares not bite. His spite, smut, whispers and mumblings are clearly opposed to Pope's outspokenness. 'His eternal smiles betraying his emptiness' are a reference to Hervey's false teeth (line 315). 'Froth' may hint at his fits of epilepsy (line 320). 'This painted child' alludes to his effeminacy and ladylike beauty (line 310). His sexual ambiguity and suspected sexual impotence are stressed very emphatically (lines 324-329). His homosexual preference may be based on his well-known love for Stephen Fox but the charge of impotence is hard to sustain because Hervey married the beautiful Molly Lepel, sired a large family and even had a couple of affairs. Even the dig at Hervey's valetudinary diet seems ironic considering that Pope himself was of very poor health and had to live lifelong on special diet. He is said to have tried that remedy himself. The asses' milk obviously had nothing to do with Hervey being a 'fop' (line 328) or 'that thing of silk' (line 305). Pope was equally conscious of his physical appearance and was quite proud that his deformity had not affected his facial features. He took care that all portraits showed his face prominently displayed with his deformed body completely left outside the frame.

With his 'trifling head' Hervey has no judgement or views of his own. Walpole is the prompter, the ventriloquist and Sporus his dummy (line 318). The metaphor has political overtones. Pope was opposed to Walpole's rule. He disliked Hervey's proximity to **Walpole**. Walpole is the **prompter** who works the Lord Chamberlain Hervey who was responsible for **literary** censorship.

Through **his** portrait of Lord Hervey Pope attempts to project general psychic collapse and moral degeneration in the supposedly elite circles. Hervey is the corrupt and lying maker of **mischief** and debaser of satiric poetry.

For the Augustans moral virtue lay in moderation. Sporus is always leaning to this side or that (line 323). He can never be a good or witty writer or appreciate true wit in others because his own wit is merely see-saw, its inconsistency reinforcing a sexual incompleteness. He thus combines in himself the **extremes** of beauty and evil.

Pope makes ample use of alliteration and onomatopoeia to bring out Hervey's true character—stinks and stings, ear of Eve, puns or politics, spite or smut, etc.

Apparently there is an unfair spite against those Pope dislikes. He can be wantonly malignant as well as benign. Dr. Johnson thought his portrait of Sporus a 'mean' piece of writing.

26.6.4 The Neglected Genius

Men of genius who refuse to be bought starve to death;

Dryden alone (what wonder?) came not nigh

Dryden alone escap'd this judging eye:

But still the great have kindness in reserve,

He help'd to bury whom he help'd to starve.

(lines 245-248)

It's no wonder really because poets truly great like **Dryden** would disdain to join the throng of toads kowtowing to the present-day Maecenas. **These** self-serving patrons cannot discern and do not care for true merit or genius. Lord Halifax, therefore, does nothing to help **Dryden** in his lifetime but generously offers to meet the expenses of his funeral.

The proud Gay also died neglected (line 258). It is however, on record that Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* was received very well and made him quite rich. Gay is also said to have benefitted from the system of patronage. The Duke of **Queensberry** and his Duchess stood by him till the very end (line 260).

What Pope really attempted to do was to highlight the opposition between independent and, therefore, neglected poet-genius and the prostituted poet-scribbler. Men of real genius refuse to be anyone's minions, let alone the politician's. Confidence in their own capabilities gives them the courage to assert with Pope:

Above a patron, tho' I condescend
Sometimes to call a minister my friend. (lines 265-66)

The introduction of Parliamentary government had resulted in the courting of the wits and men of letters by the political parties. The writers and wits considered themselves superior to the politicians in the reign of Queen Anne.

26.6.5 Self-portrait

The poem opens with **Pope's** prosperity. He has got a servant waiting on him (line 1). His palatial house is surrounded by luxuriant shades and thickets. He has his own underground passage (lines 7-8). He has got a chariot and also a barge to be rowed to London (line 10). The contrast between his easy affluence and the indigent **Mint-crowd** feeling happy to catch him 'just at dinner-time' is obvious (line 14). What shows want of good feelings however, is Pope's constantly harping upon the beggary and miseries of the poor authors, especially when we recall that he owed his own well-being to the Homer subscription. What is equally ironic is Pope's sneers at the translators as an inferior species in his censure of **Tate** (line 190).

Unlike these poetasters persistently pursuing him, Pope is a born poet and 'lisp'd in numbers' (line 128). Nor did he defy his father or neglect his duty to pursue his poetic career (line 130). He is not only an obedient but also a **grateful** son, acknowledging unreservedly his parents' role in inculcating high **moral** values and judiciousness in him (line 382-405). He prays for his ailing mother's recovery and would like to tend her till **her** last breath (lines **408-413**).

Unlike the Clerk (line 17) and James Moore Smythe (line 23) who should have been copying legal **documents** or studying law, Pope has not gone against his natural 'calling' (line 129). The Muse has only been a harmless diversion to help him 'thro' this long disease, my life' (line 132).

Pope is also a true Christian, a good human being, **A** firm believer, he pays his debts and says his prayers (line 268). His satires are motivated not by any malevolence but a genuine desire to reform the 'babbling blockheads' (line 304). He sums himself up in the following lines:

Not Fortune's worshipper, nor Fashion's fool,
Not Lucre's madman, nor Ambition's tool,
Not **proud**, nor servile; (lines 334-336)

Some of these hypocritical hacks even compliment him on his infirmities and deformities (lines 115-124) just to **win** his 'friendship, and a prologue, and ten pound' (line 47). Pope wants the reader to judge the lowness of the minds that will use his

physical weaknesses to flatter him. But Pope 'can't be silent' and 'will not lye' (line 34). He 'gave them but their due', no matter how they raged (line 174) and poured in their unwilling ears Horace's advice to 'keep your piece nine years' (line 40) knowing full well that the counsel would be ignored. Reference to his deformity shows what his art has successfully transmitted. His malformed body does not offset his poetic feats.

Pope is an affectionate and grateful friend. He openly acknowledges his debt to Arbuthnot:

Friend to my Life ! (which did not you prolong
The world had wanted many an idle song) (lines 27-28)

The poem ends with a prayer for this dear friend of his (lines 415-417).

Pope also uses this occasion to pay grateful tributes to some other friends—all writers and scholars of high repute and integrity. The 'polite Granville', Lord Lansdowne of Bideford, ranked among the poets and wits of Queen Anne's time (line 135). In the eighteenth century 'polite' denoted much more than social agreeableness; it included a true mastery of the arts as opposed to mere dry scholarship. 'Knowing Walsh' was one of the first to discover Pope's merit and to patronise him (line 136). 'Well-natured' Sir Samuel Garth, M.D., was a man of letters and a distinguished doctor. Author of *The Dispensary*, he was President of the College of Physicians (line 137). William Congreve was well-known for his witty comedies (line 138). Charles Talbot, Duke of Shrewsbury, who held some of the highest offices in the State (line 139), Lord Somers and John Sheffield, Duke of Buckinghamshire, were statesmen and patrons (line 139). Sheffield's poems were edited by Pope. Francis Atterbury, Bishop of Rochester and Dean of Westminster approved of Pope's couplets (line 140) and Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke, was Pope's greatest friend and patron (line 141).

The use of the plural 'friends' suggests that all of them were Dryden's friends, to begin with (line 141). Sheffield was Dryden's first patron and erected to him a monument and bust in Poets' Corner. Paying them a tribute Pope is at the same time establishing his own literary credentials.

These are the real poets and patrons, people who really matter or ought to matter. And they have received Pope with open arms (line 142). While it shows their effusive generosity against the petty jealousy of Addison, who 'like the Turk would bear no brother near the throne' (line 198), it also reinforces Pope's own status in society. His work has been applauded by these men of genius (line 144). Men who encouraged Pope as a young poet are lauded as models for a sound judgement of much of life:

From these the world will judge of men and books (line 145)

Pope couldn't now care less for the Burnets, Oldmixons and Cooks, 'authors of secret and scandalous history' according to Pope's own subsequent note. Pope has obviously tried to lower Bishop Burnet, the author of *History of My Own Time* by ranking him with two far inferior writers. And if the Cook of line 146 is the same as of line 51, it refers to Thomas Cooke, who wrote against Pope in the 'British', 'London' and 'Daily' journals and later sent him a letter feigning innocence, (It has also been suggested that the allusion here could be to Roger Coke's *Detection of the Court and State of England*, 1694.)

Pope is tolerant and forgiving, Gildon and Dennis had studiously depreciated him. Gildon had *The Rape of the Lock* censured in *A New Rehearsal* (1714) and Dennis in *The Progress of Dulness* (1728). Though in a letter to Swift Pope called Gildon and Cibber 'bad people', he wished Gildon 'a dinner, and sate still' (line 152), and did not

react to Dennis' furious '**frettings** and ravings' (line 153) for 'full ten years' (line 374). And when Dennis was in distress, he came to his rescue (line 371).

Pope places deep value on friendship and declares himself a fearless friend of virtue. That's why he takes up the cudgels for Gay who died neglected (line 258) and **Dryden** who was forced to penury.

Pope portrays himself as a man of great restraint and balance. He took the just punishment without demur:

If wrong, I **smil'd**; if right, I kiss'd the rod. (line 158)

He is a fearless satirist who does not hesitate to risk anything in declaring his mind. Despite Arbuthnot's pragmatic counsel to 'hold ! for God-sake—you'll offend' (line 101), he satirises the king's well-known contempt for literature (line 222). Like his father, George II hated all poets and painters. Pope's attack on John, Lord Hervey, Vice-Chamberlain in the court of George II is outright virulent (lines 305-333).

Refusing to 'learn prudence of a friend' (line 102), he reiterates that, unlike Bufo, he is above flattery and 'sought no homage from the Race that write' (line 219), and '**flattery**, ev'n to kings' he held a shame (line 338). 'Sick of fops, and poetry, and grate' (line 229), he declares that if 'he pleas'd, he pleas'd **by** manly ways' (line 337). Pope's claim to 'manly ways' catches everyone's attention partly because he has just been talking about Sporus' corrupt sexuality (lines 324-329) and partly because of his own ailment and health. By 'manly' he means his ability to be unambiguous and final in whatever he criticizes or commends. He doesn't 'hint' or 'hesitate' (line 204). He speaks out plainly and boldly, unlike **Atticus**. And unlike Sporus he doesn't 'mumble' (line 314), 'creep' (line 333) or 'squeak' like a puppet (line 318). He can tell each fool 'that he's an ass' (line 80) and censure 'Eve's tempter' (line 330) in no uncertain **terms** for his moral degeneration. By 'manly' then he means the formal energy and power of his fearless satires where you need to take a stand. He would like to maintain a **poet's** dignity and ease:

And see what **friends**, and read what books I please (lines 263-264)

There is a lot of self-justification in Pope's self-portrait. How is he different **from** the pack he is eluding? He writes because he is a **born** writer. He writes because his father encouraged **him/wanted** him to write. Why does he publish? He publishes because all the reputed men of letters and learning have unequivocally praised him (lines 135-144). He is different from them in the following ways:

- 1) He was a born poet. Poetry was to him a natural accomplishment against the professional who 'strains from hard-bound brains, eight lines a year' (line 182).
- 2) Poetry has never been for him a means of earning a living. It was a pastime, a painkiller, like Arbuthnot's medicines, to help him '**thro'** this long disease, my life' (line 132). Unlike William **Windham** he doesn't have to write anything to please his mistress (line 376). His 'Muse but **serv'd** to ease some friend, not **Wife**' (line 131).
- 3) Publication of his poems? No **one** advised him to keep his 'piece nine years' (line 40). On the **contrary**, all the renowned men of letters received him 'with open arms' and 'approved' of his works (lines 142-143). He didn't need to engage in **flattery**, bribery or surrender (lines 45-46) to get published. He was encouraged not by courtier-patrons but **by** independent and gifted men.
- 4) He is determined not to be 'silent' and not to 'lye' (line 34), and to tell the truth and reveal the secret (lines 80-81), whatever be the consequences.

There are several other instances of self-praise. Lintot usually adorned his shop with titles of books in red letters. Books were advertised by clapping copies of title pages to boards or posts in front of the book-shops. Lintot displayed Pope's books obviously because there was a big **demand** for them (lines 215-216).

And this public recognition has also given him vanity and perhaps led to a want of discernment. **Bentley** who is ridiculed here (lines 159-166) was a real wit whose *Dissertation on Phalaris* (1699) was much appreciated by the English, though much later.

Phalaris was a tyrant of **Agrigentum** in Sicily, probably in the first half of the 6th century, B.C. Certain **letters** attributed to Phalaris were edited by Charles Boyle in 1695 and praised by Sir William Temple. Richard **Bentley** was able to prove that they were spurious. **Bentley** had also attempted to restore the true text of *Paradise Lost* (1732) on the assumption that Milton was at the mercy of an amanuensis. And it is sheer vanity, if not falsehood, that makes Pope declare:

Above a Patron, tho' I condescend
Sometimes to call a Minister my **friend**: (lines 265-266)

Pope's private self thus reveals the friend of distressed enemies, the dutiful son of good and honest parents, the comforter of his dying mother and the seriously ailing **Arbuthnot**. His public self projects the virtuous writer and lashing satirist:

A lash like mine no honest man shall dread
But all such babling blockheads in his stead (lines 303-304)

And this is followed by a renewed declaration of his poetic mission:

Welcome for thee, fair Virtue ! all the past:
For thee, fair Virtue ! welcome ev'n the **last** ! (lines 358-359).

26.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

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26.8 QUESTIONS

- 1) Why shouldn't the **truly** great poet be **afraid** of Pope's satire?
- 2) When does satire become ineffective?
- 3) What do you learn about Pope's father in the poem?
- 4) How does Pope turn purely personal matters into **general/universal** concerns?
- 5) Do you find Pope an objective and fair-minded satirist?
- 6) How does Pope connect being a good man to being a good satirist?