

# *John Dryden: The Politics of Style*

J E F F R E Y   H A R T

THE RISE in Dryden's reputation, commencing a generation or so ago, coincides perfectly with a drastic shift in our taste in poetry, and doubtless with a shift in other kinds of feeling as well. A change of taste in the arts is seldom only that; a shift in style usually reflects larger issues. In Sir Joshua Reynolds' *Discourses*, for example, the preference for line as opposed to color has political and even metaphysical implications, just as does the debate in eighteenth-century France over Shakespeare's "formlessness" in comparison with Racine's "form." In all such cases there is a party of "order" and a party of "freedom" waging a political fight in aesthetic terms. The riots over Hugo's plays, or over the Impressionist exhibits, the attacks on Eliot's aesthetic theory, or on cubism, are not to be understood in purely aesthetic terms. The new poetry of Eliot, Pound, and their followers, "classical" in its high valuation of precision and its consciousness

of form, reflected a new appreciation of the value of "order"—in art, in psychology, in politics and in theology. The political implications of this shift, associated as it is with a renewed awareness of human limitations, is spelled out in T. E. Hulme's great essay, "A Tory Philosophy." Its effect upon the opposition is best measured by comparing the mood of the earlier liberalism, as found, for example, in Wells or Parrington, with that of such current liberals as Niebuhr, Trilling, or W. W. Rostow. The old beliefs are really dying — and by old beliefs I do not mean those of Eliot.

The new poetry of Eliot and the other great moderns had to make its way against aesthetic (and of course political and moral) assumptions derived from the Romanics and established as canonical by the Victorians. Dryden was recognized as the perfect antidote to the older taste, and in championing the cause of Dryden, first in his review of Mark Van Doren's pioneer-

ing study, and then in his own on John Dryden (1932), Eliot was championing his own cause as well.

All this is more or less commonplace, but it is not often recognized how peculiarly appropriate it was for Eliot to speak out for Dryden, how alike in so many significant ways these two great poets are. Both inherited a decadent tradition in verse, the diction and technique of which no longer suited the sensibility of the age, and both, if not quite single-handedly then almost so, rejuvenated poetry by the introduction of greater colloquialness, as well as greater precision of thought and language; and both, as compared with their immediate predecessors, paid more attention to the intellectual content of verse, making it more distinctly a vehicle for serious ideas. Both Dryden and Eliot brought Continental techniques, especially French ones, to the service of English verse; both were influential critics, and in both the criticism stands in a special relationship to the verse they wrote. Neither, moreover, considered poetry to be primarily a form of self-expression, a revelation about the personality of the artist, and Eliot's conception of "significant emotion, emotion which has its life in the poem and not in the history of the poet," is as relevant to Dryden's work as to his own. Finally, the experience of writing for the theater was important to the development of both, though in each case it must be said that the plays, experimental in form and full of excellent things, and often popular, do not quite succeed as art.

Moving away from their literary activities, we find other striking similarities. Both, writing in the wake of wars that severely damaged the fabric of society, sought some principle of stability in politics, and placed a high valuation on continuity in culture, and both, buffeted by the winds of strange doctrines—atheism and pyrrhonism

in the case of Dryden, Marxism and its variants in the case of Eliot—sought in the reaffirmation of classical values and in the return to religious orthodoxy a recovery of, among other things, a sense of harmony with the cultural traditions of the West, from Homer, as Eliot put it, through the present. And in both poets—we shall return to this question—such an intellectual development is likely to have proceeded from the nature of their relationship to language, from the intensity of their involvement with English.

Dryden was, for the most part, a man of quiet temperament; given the manners of the time and the kind of career he had, he strikes one as remarkably free from self-assertion. Yet he presided over a literary revolution, and the task he accomplished as a poet and critic was no less than the destruction of the principal seventeenth-century literary modes and the creation of the style and the methods that would characterize the eighteenth. The change in style for which he was so largely responsible was not, of course, an aesthetic matter merely, but reflected cultural and political changes at once far-reaching and complex, for an important literary style—one susceptible of development by successors, or one that brings to perfection what others have imitated—may be looked upon as a kind of model of the world in which the poet lives, as the *literary equivalent* of that world. And if the style is widely recognized as a valid one, as it was in the case of Dryden, we may be sure that the poet's world is not only a private one but also one that he shares with his contemporaries.

Dryden's earliest known poem, the elegy "Upon the Death of Lord Hastings" (1649), has achieved a certain immortality as one of the worst poems in English, but it nevertheless has considerable interest because of the particular nature of its bad-

ness. The lines on Hasting's smallpox are justly famous:

Was there no milder way but the small-  
pox,  
The very filth'ness of Pandora's box?  
So many spots, like naeves, our Venus  
soil?  
One jewel set off with so many a foil!  
Blisters with pride swell'd, which thro's  
flesh did sprout  
Like rose-buds, stuck i'th'lilly skin about.  
Each little pimple had a tear in it,  
To wail the fault its rising did commit.

Clearly enough, the young poet wished to be elegantly witty in the manner of the metaphysicals, surprising us with the ingenuity and extravagance of his conceits. He was imitating his boyhood heroes, and the older poets he had in mind as models had indeed violently yoked heterogeneous ideas. If Donne had compared lovers to compasses, why could one not compare pus to tears, or inflammation to roses? In the earlier poets, however, the conceit functions quite differently from the way in which it does here. In Donne, Herbert, and Marvell, and sometimes in Cleveland and Cowley, the conceit is central to the poem and essential to its meaning. It is not an ornament. The very heterogeneity of the things it compares reflects an experience that itself is heterogeneous. The ultimate "yoking" of the ideas, if it occurs, the finding, that is, of analogies that transcend the heterogeneity, suggests the re-creation of harmonious relations in experience. If, as in Donne, lovers *are* like compasses, a little world may indeed be made cunningly.

It is no doubt true that the prominence of the conceit in early seventeenth-century verse reflects a particular social circumstance: order was difficult to imagine. The disorders of society, the discords in philosophy and religion, gave rise to an experience that had to be ordered by the individual if it were to be ordered at all. The

poet, accordingly, tended to turn away from the disordered public world in order to search out the harmonies that, at the cost of great effort, might be discovered in his own heart and mind.

By the middle years of the seventeenth century, however, it was to an increasing degree the public world that engaged men's attention. Significantly, Marvell begins as a lyric poet but ends as a political writer. Dryden's generation saw civil order restored, and religious discord tempered; to Dryden and men like him, order must have seemed not so much a thing to be won as a thing to be defended. It was not to be sought in the depths of the mind but fought for in the state. The conceit becomes, under these conditions, something of an anachronism. It no longer functions as it once did—as the expression of the private intuition of analogies—but becomes, more and more, simply a technique of decoration. No longer is it a principal carrier of the meaning of the poem. It tends to become a surface embellishment. (Another aspect of this transition may be seen in the decline of the pun, a device that had been used by Donne and Shakespeare to imply analogical relationships among different realms of experience, but which by the end of the century was well on its way to becoming the lowest form of wit.) In Dryden's early verse, beginning with the Hastings elegy, we may trace some of the literary reflections of what was a profound cultural transition. We see the conceit, its earlier function gone, becoming an excrescence. And thus the negative aspect of the task before Dryden was defined: the conceit was to be eliminated from verse, or at the very least subordinated to other procedures. The new poetry was not to be introspective and psychologically analytical, but public and political, concerned with what all men know rather than with what one man might discover in

a moment of illumination. Dryden's success in forging an appropriate style may be measured by comparing the rhetoric of his Hastings elegy with that of his mature poetry—the prologues and satires, or the religious poems or the elegy on John Oldham:

Farewell, too little, and too lately  
known,  
Whom I began to think and call my  
own:  
For sure our souls were near allied,  
and thine  
Cast in the same poetic mold with mine.  
One common note on either lyre did  
strike,  
And knaves and fools we both abhorr'd  
alike.

It is the perfect public style, the style of the ideal "citizen," the rhetoric of the forum raised to its highest potential, as if to say that public things can be poetic too.

Dryden's early awareness of the direction his verse would take may be seen in a far from perfect poem, the *Astraea Redux* of 1662. In this poem Dryden celebrates the return of public order at the restoration of Charles II, and the title alludes, appropriately enough, to the same myth Donne had used long before in his *Anniversary* poems. *Astraea*, Donne proclaimed, the embodiment of justice, vitality and order, had withdrawn from the world, and all was now in pieces, all coherence gone. In consequence, order had to be sought in the inner life, or in Heaven. Dryden's poem, however, celebrates the reordering of the public world: "Oh happy age! Oh times like those alone/By fate reserved for great Augustus' throne." Certainly such poetic celebration as this was compounded at least in part of hope, but it also reflected a return of confidence in the validity of the political enterprise. The Calvinistic "paradise within" was not man's only hope. No doubt, thinking of the secret treaty of Dover and the closed

exchequer, of the machinations of Madame and Lord Russell's scaffold, we may feel some scepticism about this new Augustan Age. Yet from Dryden's point of view such considerations would have appeared subordinate to the fact of restored civil order, however shaky or morally tainted.

Behind Dryden's celebration of public peace, behind the intensity of his later defence of the Crown against its domestic foes, lay the recent memory of Civil War. A generation before, Charles' father had lost his head, and the country had been placed under the control of a dictator. The atrocities of the struggle itself were fresh in memory, and of such a nature as to foster Royalist sympathies. Perhaps, today, we may stop to consider this circumstance. We are all too likely to assume that wartime outrages are perpetrated in equal proportion by both sides; in ordinary wars, indeed, such may be the case. But in revolutions the situation is usually rather different. The side in revolt feels that it has been injured, and grievously so: nothing else would justify the revolution. Retribution for the injury is therefore required. This emotion fosters a kind of antinomianism on the insurgent side, and as a result the temper, and the style, of the opposing sides usually stand in marked contrast. Such Royalists as Astley or Goring, Rupert or Lunsford, have never been charged with anything approaching the Drogheda massacre, or the slaughter of the Irish women after Naseby, or the butchery of Doctor Hudson at Woodcroft in Dryden's own neighborhood, where the Commonwealth troops cut off the priest's fingers as he clung to the gargoyles of the tower, and, using their pikes, forced him back into the moat which, though mutilated, he nevertheless had managed to swim.<sup>1</sup> The desecration of Litchfield cathedral was a vivid local memory a century after the Restoration, in the time of Dr. Johnson. If men

behaved in such a way when the civil order broke down, the faults of the legitimate government would seem to a man like Dryden insignificant in comparison with its value as a source of stability.

## II

Requiring as it did intelligibility, rapidity, and an approximation of public speech, the theater proved to be the perfect place for Dryden to develop a style suitable for a public poetry. The role of playwright, however, was not particularly congenial to his talents, and though, commencing with *The Wild Gallant* in 1663, he was primarily a writer for the stage, the experience must have been in many ways an uncomfortable one for him. He had little gift for the dramatization of personality, and he preferred to borrow his plots. Yet it is in his plays that we can trace the processes by which his style reached its perfection, and observe his transformation from the seventeenth-century poet of the Hastings elegy and even *Astraea Redux* and *Annus Mirabilis* to the great Augustan poet of the later works. He was obliged by financial need to devote himself to the fashionable and flourishing Restoration stage, but the necessity turned out to be a fortunate one for his art.

The subordination of metaphor and conceit in the poetic medium Dryden forged suggests attitudes that go beyond the writing of verse, and that involve the deepest questions of politics and morals. The elaborate and often far-fetched comparisons that characterized the metaphysical style, in prose and even in sermons as well as in verse, were felt to reflect an impulse toward exhibitionism and self-assertion. Though the author of a metaphysical poem, or a sermon conceived in the same mode, might at the last moment preserve the integrity of the poem or of the paragraph, and rescue the overall meaning

from the spectacular details, the details at times seemed nevertheless to be overwhelming the work itself. The writer seemed in a suspicious way to be directing attention toward his own virtuosity at the expense of the poem or sermon. It is such exhibitionism that Swift, toward the end of the century, parodied in *A Tale of a Tub*:

. . . Wisdom is a Fox, who after long hunting, will at last cost you the pains to dig out: 'Tis a Cheese, which by how much the richer, has the thicker, homelier, and the courser Coat; and whereof to a judicious palate, the Maggots are the best. 'Tis a Sack-Posset, wherein the deeper you go, you will find it the sweeter. Wisdom is a Hen, whose Cackling we must value and consider, because it is attended with an Egg; But then, lastly, 'tis a Nut, which unless you chuse with Judgment, may cost you a Tooth, and pay you with nothing but a Worm.

The ostensible author of the *Tale*, of course, is a "modern" writer, and it is the essence of his modernity that he refuses to subordinate detail to form. The very formlessness of the *Tale* itself, parodying the "formlessness" of earlier seventeenth-century literature, is to be taken as criticizing the modern *will* of the persona, a voluntarism continually exercised at the expense of form. Literary manners, of course, are related to manners of other kinds, and so voluntaristic a style, suggesting as it does an extreme individualism, could scarcely be harmonized with the desire to celebrate a restored public order. If the individual, in the wake of Civil War, should subordinate himself to the order of the state, so should detail be subordinated to the overall intention of the poem.

We are at the present time accustomed to thinking of art as standing in opposition to other social activities, and to thinking of the integrity of the artist as being con-

tingent upon his intransigent opposition to society. Art is thought of as something entirely special and apart, a matter of pure spirit; and we insist as a matter of course that it establish its claim to such purity through recognizable gestures of disaffiliation—through, for example, its difficulty, its aura of strangeness, its anger and the insults it offers to ordinary manners and morals. Dryden's passionate celebration of the social order upsets these expectations; and it is this, rather more directly than any quality of his verse, that causes students encountering him for the first time to doubt that he is really a poet. But our assumption that the individual possesses integrity, is capable of spontaneity and joy, and can really write poetry only to the degree that he is antagonistic to society, derives from the nineteenth century and from the Romantics. Arnold's Scholar Gypsy is a touchstone for this sort of withdrawal. It is only by separating himself from society and living a life "unlike to ours" that he can recover the sources of joy. But the earlier set of assumptions that we designate "Augustan" has as one of its primary assumptions the belief that the self finds its fulfilment in harmony with society and not in opposition to it. The Augustan mode conceives of satisfaction as a social possibility. If Dryden gives this an early articulation its later chronological limit might be placed in Jane Austen. It is very much the point of *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) that Darcy's estate Pemberley, which is described as holding nature and artifice in delicate but harmonious balance, also provides the distinctively *social* order within which Darcy and Elizabeth finally are reconciled. They find their true selves when they overcome pride and rejoin society. *Pride and Prejudice*, as highly organized as a poem, moves from the opening paragraphs, which insist upon the opposition between "feel-

ings" on the one hand and "families" and "property" on the other—the opposition, that is, between the private self and the social order—to the conclusion, in which there is no contradiction between Elizabeth's feelings and her involvement with Darcy and Pemberley, and no disharmony between the "Norman" name Darcy and the strikingly English "Elizabeth Bingley," or, socially, between the upper and the middle. The final words of the novel are, significantly enough, "uniting them."

It is doubtless because he was most at home with the assumption that society and the private self are reconcilable that Dryden's poetry, in comparison with that of virtually any other English poet, is farthest removed from what is called self-expression. Of all the English poets, including even such rigorous neoclassicists as Johnson and Pope, Dryden infuses his poetry with the least sense of "self," and in few poets are biographical details less relevant. He seems to have cared, as far as the practice of poetry is concerned, primarily for the perfecting of his medium; he conforms, perhaps the most closely of all, to Eliot's dicta that poetry "is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality," that "the emotion of art is impersonal," and that "the poet cannot reach this impersonality without surrendering himself to the work to be done." It is symptomatic of Dryden's attitude that when he reflects on his artistic shortcomings—mainly, in his view, the writing of obscene plays—he thinks of them as a betrayal of the *language*:

O gracious God! how far have we  
Profan'd thy heav'nly gift of poesy!  
Made prostitute and profligate the Muse,  
Debas'd to each obscene and impious  
use,  
Whose harmony was first ordained  
above  
For tongues of angels, and for hymns  
of love!

The posts of poet laureate and historiographer royal which his renown as a dramatist had won him enabled him to turn, by the early 1680's, to forms he found more congenial than the drama. The excitement surrounding the Popish Plot and the agitation over the Exclusion Bill brought political questions to the forefront, and Dryden responded to the situation with two poems that made him the leading satirist in Europe, *Absalom and Achitophel* and *The Medal*. The many issues that had divided England earlier in the century, and had then received expression in the controversy over religion, still existed in the 1680's. Men who feared, perhaps before all else, the outbreak of civil strife had good reason for alarm. "Signs were already discernible," writes Macaulay, "which portended the approach of great troubles. Men who in the time of the civil war and of the Commonwealth had acquired an odious notoriety, had emerged from the obscurity in which, after the Restoration, they had hidden themselves from the general hatred, showed their confident and busy faces everywhere, and appeared to anticipate a second reign of the Saints." But though the forces and the values that were in contention were much the same as they had been earlier in the century, the vocabulary of the struggle had become secularized. In *Paradise Lost* Milton had written a religious poem that had political and social overtones; in *Absalom and Achitophel* Dryden wrote a poem about politicians that alluded to religious themes. Milton's Satan sometimes reminds us of Cromwell or the Pope; Dryden's Shaftesbury is associated through allusion with Milton's Satan, and the structure of values in the poem depends upon allusions to Milton's account of the Fall. The transposition of the religious and the secular was part of a process that began at about the time of the Restoration and went forward

at an increasing rate during the eighteenth century. Hegel has called this process the secularization of spirituality, and Carl Becker has discussed it in his remarkable little book *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers*. Both point out that such characteristic features of the Enlightenment as the belief in universally valid principles, future earthly felicity, the truth of posterity's judgment, and the beauty of humanitarian sentiment represent secularized versions of the older belief in a "law of nature," Heaven, the Last Judgment, and the necessity for *caritas*.

But if Dryden was in important respects a poet of the Enlightenment, he was also one of the first major figures to react against it in an intellectually significant way. As is well known, the central tendencies of the Enlightenment, when pressed to their logical conclusions, lead to atheism, as in Holbach, Helvetius, La Mettrie, and Messelier, or, in England, Hobbes and Hume. In European culture at large, it is true, these tendencies would work themselves out only slowly, for those who rejected the older beliefs often did so quite selectively, giving up one point of doctrine but not another; and this process went forward more slowly, it seems, in England than it did elsewhere. Nevertheless, the implicit logic of the Enlightenment was unmistakable, and from the beginning there were men who saw clearly the meaning of the new doctrines, and rejected them in thoroughgoing fashion. It is to this reaction against the Enlightenment that the religious poetry of Dryden belongs, for he anticipates such later writers as Newman and Eliot in rejecting the doctrines of the Enlightenment to those of orthodox Christianity.

It is difficult to understand why Dryden's shifts in religious opinion were for

so long regarded as insincere or time-serving. *Religio Laici* (1683), his defence of Anglicanism, was not likely to have pleased either Charles or his prospective heir, the Roman Catholic James. The Catholicizing atmosphere at Court must have been thoroughly familiar to Dryden even as he was putting into verse his arguments for the Church of England. On the other hand, the poem is scarcely calculated to please the Anglican clergy, in view of its reluctant acceptance of the Church of England and its overt longing for infallibility: "Such an omniscient church we wish indeed, 'twere worth both Testaments, cast in the Creed. . . ." Given this state of mind, it is surely not surprising that four years later he took the next step and was received into the Church of Rome. The fact that James, a Catholic, was then on the throne is not necessarily relevant. As Bredvold has shown, James' government by 1687 was on shaky foundations, and, indeed, was to be overthrown the next year. If Dryden had been an opportunist he surely would have waited to see where events would lead. Later on, under William, his Catholicism cost him his government posts and prevented his sons from attending the university, yet he did not recant. One may very well reflect, furthermore, that the very publicness of Catholicism, its insistence upon ritual and upon visual observance, would very likely have rendered it congenial to a man whose career had been devoted to the development of a public style in verse.

What may seem surprising, however, is the suddenness of his religious involvement. Before the 1680's he had shown no interest in theological questions and had moved entirely in the secular and political milieu of theater, court, and coffee house. He had been very much a man of the world, and his consuming preoccupation had been the development of poetic form

and language. Yet it may well be that it is in the intensity of his involvement with language that we can find the roots of his intellectual development and his reaction against the spirit of the Enlightenment.

This poet who is deeply aware of words, who is aware of his dependence at every point upon their shades of connotation, is likely to advance to an awareness of the assumptions that underlie those connotations. He will know, to choose only very obvious and highly charged examples, that such words as "chastity," "fidelity," and "sacrifice" have in virtually every connection a favorable connotation in English, and that these favorable connotations imply a particular system of values, and indeed a particular civilization. He will find that the assumptions of that civilization pervade the entire vocabulary, and even the grammatical habits, as in the custom of mentioning the other person before one's self: "he and I." The connotations of words change very slowly and are to a considerable degree independent of the ethical and theological opinions that may prevail at any given moment: the system of values implicit in the connotations of the words I have cited above is obviously at variance with an ethic based on hedonism and self-interest. The transvaluation of values occurs much more easily in abstract thought than in the language men actually speak. An awareness of words, therefore, is one way of becoming aware of what the substance of a civilization actually is, and it may be that linguistic awareness, particularly intense in Dryden and in such later writers as Newman and Eliot, played a large part in their rejection of the central tendencies of the thought of their time.

The loss of his official posts after the Revolution of 1688 forced Dryden once again to write for the booksellers. The translations he produced in the twelve

years that remained to him, however, though the product of necessity, represent some of his best efforts in verse and form a coherent part of his career as a whole. In his political poems he had defended what he viewed as the natural order of the state; in his religious poems he had sought to define and defend the religious assumptions underlying the inherited civilization of Europe; and in his translations—of Virgil, Juvenal, Persius, Ovid, and Plutarch—he made available to a wider English public, and to an educated class in which classical study was markedly on the wane, some of the chief products of the Latin past that was so integral a part of their civilization. Dryden would surely have agreed with Eliot that the basis of European literature is Latin and Greek culture, “not as two systems of circulation, but one, for it is through Rome that our parentage in Greece must be traced,” and that underlying the civilization of Europe are “inextricably involved,” as he puts it, “the Christian faith and the classical languages which Europeans inherit in common.”

It is one of the striking things about Dryden’s life that so comprehensive and European a mind (compare, for example, his attitude toward Chaucer with that of his young protégé Addison) belonged to a man who had no taste at all for travel. Except for a few visits to his father-in-law’s residence at Charlton in Wiltshire, and a few other brief excursions, London and the valley of the river Nene, in whose long slow reaches, thick with water plants, he acquired his love of fishing, exhaust the list of places we associate with him. Indeed, there is something oddly stationary about Dryden. We are likely to imagine him most characteristically as seated at Will’s coffee house, where he presided during his later years as undisputed monarch of letters, but where Pepys had seen him—“Dryden, the poet I knew at Cambridge”

—many years before, just after the Restoration. Perhaps the example of Dryden may be cited in support of Chesterton’s view that travel narrows the mind.

It is no accident that Dryden, in the last year of his life, wrote a poem that defined with extraordinary precision the tone of the culture that would be characteristic of the eighteenth century: he had, after all, virtually created it himself. In March 1700, only a few weeks before his death, grateful admirers staged for his benefit a performance of *The Pilgrim* by Beaumont and Fletcher at the Theater Royal. For the occasion Dryden himself contributed *The Secular Masque*, perhaps the last of his works, which was set to music. In it he reviews by means of allegorical pageant the history of the seventeenth century. First Diana appears, the virgin huntress, representing the virgin queen who ruled at the beginning of the century; next comes Mars, who stands for the Civil War; and finally Venus, who represents the eroticism and gaiety of the Restoration. When these figures have appeared and been characterized by the songs they sing, Momus, the god of ridicule, dismisses them all, and we understand that satire, the ascendant literary mode, which Dryden had raised to its present eminence, is dismissing the seventeenth century by means of laughter.

*Momus*: All, all of a piece throughout;  
 Thy chase had a beast in view;  
 [pointing to Diana]  
 Thy wars brought nothing  
 about;  
 [pointing to Mars]  
 Thy lovers were all untrue.  
 [pointing to Venus]

And Janus, the two-faced god, representing Dryden himself who is looking both back to the seventeenth century and forward to the eighteenth, concludes, “’Tis well an old age is out,” and Chronos, the god of time, agrees: “And time to begin

a new." The assembled characters then sing these lines in unison, and together with other huntsmen, nymphs, warriors, and lovers take part in a dance, symbolic of harmony, and representing Dryden's hope that harmony had been established at the commencement of the new century. The old causes of enmity might indeed seem to have exhausted themselves as in the new and orderly London that Wren had built on the ruins of the fire the descendents of Cromwell's revolutionaries had become prosperous tradesmen and advocates of common sense.

There is, however, an irony about Dryden's *The Secular Masque* that so far has gone unnoticed. In the dance at the end, though harmony has been restored, the identity of the allegorical figures remains

unchanged. The new age, Dryden seems to be saying, will be composed of the same elements as the old one; and the harmony in fact may be only a dance. It is surely important that Dryden employed as the vehicle of his salute to the new age a form characteristic of the old one, a masque, though he qualified it with the adjective "secular." If he meant to suggest that the new age would resemble the old one, but would carry on its controversies in secular terms, then he possessed a gift for prophecy which has not received its due. The vocabulary of the old disputes had come to seem antiquated, or "gothic" as men said, but the disputes themselves had not really been settled, and because they involved the profoundest questions perhaps it is impossible that they could have been.