

A B S T R A C TM. A. Thesis

Title of Thesis : The Changing Conception of the Tragic Hero with special reference to John Dryden.

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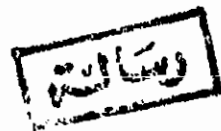
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This thesis comprises four chapters all of which work out to one end that of arriving at the difference between Dryden's conception of heroism and that of his predecessors, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Marlowe, Shakespeare, Webster, Ford, Tourner. The thesis presents a study of Dryden's heroic hero that has his roots in the epic romances as well as in the Cornelian and Racinian French dramas. Dryden's specific kind of hero, the heroic Herculean hero is shown to be distinctly different from the Greek and the Elizabethan dramatists' creation of their fundamentally tragic heroes. The response that the heroic hero evokes in the spectators is one of admiration, for his exceptional prodigious deeds rather than fear, the emotion that the Greek or Elizabethan plays arouse. The heroic hero is of a mould different from that of the tragic hero, an Almanzor or a Montezuma or a Maximin with the stress on their total possibilities essentially differs from a Macbeth, an Oedipus, or a Tamburlaine with the stress on the human limitations and failings. Hence the study made in Chapter one, that of the conception of the tragic hero according to Greek and Elizabethan dramatists furnishes the background for the study made in the other Chapters. In Chapter one an analysis is made of such Greek plays as The Oedipus Rex, Medea, Ajax and Prometheus Bound, where generally speaking, the protagonists are shown to be almost demi gods engaged in conflict with divine forces, with Fate, with gods and goddesses that shape the hero's lot, and are held to be mainly responsible for causing the hero's downfall, as opposed to what we have in Elizabethan drama where it is implied that the hero is the one mainly to be held responsible for his actions.

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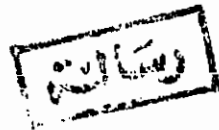
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English Dep.

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

Dryden the poet and Dryden the playwright have been ranked by critics into two different categories. While lavishing praise on his poetic talents, critics have often dismissed his heroic dramas as not being worth discussion. A considerable number of critics have been interested in presenting a study of Dryden's poetry whereas few are those that have been tempted to present a thorough examination of Dryden's plays without being contented with a mere surface look at his dramatic output. However, among those basic studies of Dryden's dramas that have been most enlightning to one in the writing of this thesis have been Bruce King's Dryden's Major Plays, Arthur Kirsch's Dryden's Heroic Drama, and Eugene M. Waith's The Herculean Hero in Marlowe, Chapman, Shakespeare and Dryden. King devotes individual chapters in his book to the interpretation of Dryden's main plays. He examines Dryden's plays in the light of the intellectual currents of his age thus pointing out the immense significance of relating the dramatist to his age, of arriving at an understanding of his heroic dramas mainly through getting immersed into the intellectual atmosphere of his time and through meticulously examining the suggestiveness behind his language and design that are replete with implicit allusions to the philosophical views and principles of some of the outstanding figures of his period. Hence King's interpretation of Dryden's plays is quite illuminating as he attempts to arrive at what

is behind Dryden's plays, to arrive at the hand that is operating them, at Dryden the man and not only the artist. Kirsch's main contribution in Dryden's Heroic Drama is that of tracing the affinities between Corneille's plays and those of Dryden while referring as well to the general features of heroic drama through an examination of some of Dryden's plays. Waith in The Herculean Hero in Marlowe Chapman, Shakespeare and Dryden, expounds forth his view that Hercules must have acted as a model for dramatists on which to build their conception of heroism. He finds all the ingredients of heroism to be embodied in the figure of that prodigy, Hercules. Thus by penetrating into the nature of that mythic figure, and presenting a study of the values he stands for, Waith attempts to prove that Tamburlaine, Coriolanus, Almanzor, and Aureng-Zebe, are but different versions of one and the same type of hero, the Herculean hero; but, whereas the author's concern in that book has been to affirm that Marlowe's, Shakespeare's, and Dryden's conception of the hero is almost the same, this thesis has attempted to show that these similarities between Dryden's conception of the hero and those of Shakespeare, or Marlowe, are apparent rather than real, and that there is no point of comparison between these Elizabethan dramatists' conception of the hero and that of Dryden. Through a study of the ingredients of tragedy as presented in the plays of Sophocles,

Marlowe, Shakespeare, and a study of the characteristics and underlying features of heroic drama, one has been able to arrive at the difference in the conception of the hero between Dryden and his predecessors. Moreover, the point most critics have taken to be the starting point from which to attack Dryden, namely the extravagance of his characters, their preposterous manners, their bombastic words and their indulgence into a world of passion, has been taken in this thesis to be the starting point from which to admire Dryden and to arrive at the real purpose behind his plays, to arrive at his intellectual satire, his conservative principles and to show that his plays are not to be reduced to a mere conflict of love and honour without realizing or coming to grips with what is at the core of his heroic drama. The thesis attempts to present Dryden in a new and more favourable light by pointing out the real merit of his art, by proving that his plays are in fact informed by a clear and well-defined scheme of values, by showing how his canvas is wide as he takes account of philosophy, politics, social life and the other arts, and by presenting his plays as not being that superficial and his heroes as not being what they are thought to be, figures,

"That strut and fret their hour upon the stage,

And then are heard no more."

The thesis comprises four chapters. Chapter one establishes the background; it deals with Greek and

Elizabethan **tragedy**. The change in the conception of heroism between Elizabethan and Greek **drama** is made clear, the change in the conception of the hero between each Elizabethan dramatist and the other, is made evident, and that is what demanded a double effort, particularly in the treatment of Webster's, Ford's and Tourner's plays, because hardly any study has been made by critics of these dramatists and even in these very scanty writings about them, no reference is made ~~to~~ their conception of the hero ... Chapter one is the entrance to the study made in the other chapters, for to trace the change in the conception of the hero with special reference to Dryden, a study of Greek and Elizabethan drama, is made necessary.

Chapter two deals with Restoration drama and the background of the age. It discusses the causes that have led to the appearance of the heroic species through a probing into the manners and the needs of the time. Finally it deals with a study of the plays of some of these long forgotten Restoration dramatists as Otway, Southerne, and Addison; the thesis introduces their plays to the reader and refers to the points of similarity and difference between the art of each of these dramatists and the other. Added to that, this chapter shows some of the major foreign influences on heroic drama; it thus tackles the plays of such French dramatists as Corneille and Racine.

Chapter three discusses Dryden's major themes and examines them in relation to the ideas of such thinkers as Hobbes. Each of Dryden's plays in that chapter is tackled more than once in accordance with the different themes under which it is discussed. Thus the one play is studied from different angles and different interpretations are made of it.

As for Chapter four, it is a penetration into Dryden's conception of heroism. In that chapter the plays have been considered from the technical point of view as well; after all, the play is an organic whole and the hero in a play is like a man in life, never to be really apprehended or understood except when he is seen in the light of his circumstances and dealings with others.

All four chapters work out to one aim, that of pointing out the changing conception of the tragic hero with special reference to John Dryden, that of proving that Dryden was pursuing a direction of his own, that of pointing out that Dryden's plays are not merely 'tales of lands of nowhere', but are, contrary to the general notion held of them, exciting and intellectually suggestive. The thesis thus confirms Dryden's place in the hierarchy of great artists, thus presenting him - contrary to the prevalent notion held of him - not in the light of a dramatist whose failure is to be established as being final, and whose high flown efforts are to be presented as coming to nothing at the end, but rather

in the light of a skilled artist to be admired.

Finally, this is but a modest effort to an understanding of Dryden and to a study of his art by which the candidate hopes to have added but one drop more to the vast sea of knowledge held by all those interested in Dryden.

C o n c l u s i o n

Dryden's attempt is at heroic satire. Heroism and satire are the two indispensable components of any of his plays. Satire underlies his major themes and the heroism of his heroes is at the centre of his plays. Dryden strikes a nice balance between heroism and satire. His heroes are heroic personages, Herculean heroes whose heroism forms the focal point of interest; the themes reveal his satiric intentions and his disapproval of certain Hobbesian traits in his characters. Heroism exalts whereas satire detracts; heroism magnifies whereas satire minimizes. That satire and heroism should go together, is what sounds quite out of tone, that satire and heroism could be fused together, could be both incorporated into his plays without making the audience turn in disgust, as the one versus the other, is probably sufficient evidence of Dryden's skill.

The greater part of Dryden's satire is directed not at the heroes of his plays but at the other characters so as to concentrate heroism more in his heroes, but that is not to say that his heroes completely evade his satire - there are certain Hobbesian traits in his heroic figures that Dryden is satiric about, but these traits satirized are moral traits, they have to do with the point of morality and virtue. Dryden writes, "Satire is of the nature of moral philosophy, as bein

instructive."¹ The satirist "who writes honestly is no more an enemy to the offender than the physician to the patient."² Heroism implies greatness but not goodness; it implies achievement, grandeur, individual capacity, accomplishment of supreme deeds, daringness of spirit, and not kindness or adherence to piety and morality. A man may be faultless, but yet may count for very little in the world. Hence, Dryden's satire being directed at moral points in his heroes' characters, at whether they are morally good or not, and not at the point of greatness, does by no means detract from the heroism of his heroes or make them less heroic personages. Emerson in his essay on "Heroism" observes, "Greatness once and for ever has done with opinion."³ Heroism "works in contradiction to the voice of mankind and in contradiction for a time, to the voice of the ... good. Heroism is an obedience to a secret impulse of an individual's character,"⁴ and Emerson proceeds to give his piece of advice, "when you have resolved to be great, abide by yourself, and do not weakly try to reconcile yourself with the world."⁵

Dryden's main contribution to the field of drama, is his development of that genre, heroic drama which is presented against a background of war and love, a background that

1) Of Dramatic Poesy And Other Critical Essays, ed. by
&2) G. Watson, Vol.II, p.122.

3) Emerson, R.W., The Harvard Classics : Essays And English Traits, p.134.

4) Ibid., p.128.

5) Ibid., p.133.

provides possibilities for the telescoping of the heroic features of the hero by presenting him as being engaged in all sorts of struggles and conflicts that emphasize the hero's true greatness, his superhuman abilities, his liberality of spirit, his extreme magnification of the self, his Herculean valour and perseverance that can withstand all sorts of overwhelming odds. In the arena of that world, the focus of our attention is on the heroism of the hero, a heroism that pales all other lights within its orbit and brings out most clearly the hero's total possibilities rather than his human limitations, the hero's greatness rather than his errors. For that, Dryden's heroes are to be accounted as being quintessentially heroic figures rather than tragic ones. That is a main point of difference in the conception of the hero between Dryden and his predecessors, Sophocles, Shakespeare and Marlowe.

Sophocles presents us a tragic view of life and death; his heroes are godlike creatures that are always engaged in conflict with divine powers and are finally hunted and victimized by Fate and Destiny. These Greek heroes presented as being supermen and demigods are not to be classed as heroic figures but rather as tragic ones for after all, they are crushed by Fate; they are mere balls in the hands of gods, they are but flies in the hands of Providence. Hence the stress in these plays is not on the total possibilities of

man but on human limitations. As we watch these heroes swept down waterfalls and see the gods exercising their power over them, we feel the limits of human power, the weakness of man in general, and his insignificance when facing the unknown, when facing his destiny. We get the impression that destiny is character rather than that character is destiny, that is to say, the final picture we have of man is that he deserves to be pitied and sympathised with rather than to be wondered at or admired. Man cannot control his future. There are other forces that are mightier than he is, other powers that he cannot withstand. That is not so with Dryden's plays. Dryden's protagonists have nothing to do with the gods. Dryden's heroes are presented as being heroic from beginning to end; Dryden does not attempt to shock us in the picture we frame for ourselves of these heroes as being miracles and prodigies by presenting them to us as being mere flies in the hands of other mightier forces. Dryden's heroes are heroic heroes unlike Sophocles', Shakespeare's, and Marlowe's heroes who are in the main tragic figures; Anne T. Barbeau observes,

"Dryden's vision of the world is essentially untragic, the opposite of that vision found in the plays of Euripides, Shakespeare, and other tragedians. This is a comic view in the large sense, because ... there is enough scope for the free exercise of virtue on the part of individuals that these may deserve happiness."¹

1) Barbeau, The Intellectual Design Of John Dryden's Heroic Plays, p.123.

Though at times Shakespeare's and Marlowe's heroes, as in the case of Coriolanus and Tamburlaine exhibit capacity, power and daringness of spirit that are beyond the power of common man and that can only pertain to the field of the heroic, still such heroes remain in essence basically tragic figures rather than heroic ones. What they cope with, is the genuine spirit of tragedy and the mere show of heroism. Fundamentally they are tragic figures apparently they are heroic ones. At first sight Tamburlaine and Coriolanus, give the impression that they are similar to many of Dryden's heroes, but on analysis, they are found to be quite different.

Coriolanus, the chief of a group of Roman patricians, is a declared enemy of the people; he denounces them as being mean and contemptible. For that, despite his martial disposition and marvellous victories which he wins for Rome, the people declare their grievances, reject the idea of electing him the first magistrate of Rome, and insist on his being banished from the lands, a fact which outrages Coriolanus and makes him join hands with Aufidius, Rome's enemy to carry out vengeance against its citizens.

Shakespeare instils in his hero certain heroic traits; he endows his protagonist with prowess, with power, with an adventurous, risky spirit that may qualify him for being classed with heroic personages and that may confirm all the

more the hero's heroic dimensions. His mother Volumnia, says,

"... When yet he was but tender-bodied and the only son of my womb, when youth with comeliness plucked all gaze his way, ... to a cruel war I sent him; from whence he returned, his brows bound with oak. I tell thee, daughter, I sprang not more in joy at first hearing he was a man - child than now in first seeing he had proved himself a man." I.III.

Titus Lartius addresses Coriolanus calling him

"Thou worthiest Marcius," I.V.

Sicinius and Brutus, the tribunes of the people for whom Caius Marcius Coriolanus expresses great contempt, discuss his behaviour in a way that helps in raising the hero to heroic proportions :

Sicinius : When we were chosen tribunes for the people,-

Brutus : Mark'd you his lip and eyes ?

Sicinius : Nay, but his taunts.

Brutus : Being moved, he will not spare to gird the gods.

Sicinius : Bemock the modest moon.

Brutus : The present wars devour him ! he is grown Too proud to be so valiant.

Sicinius : Such a nature,
Tickled with good success, disdains the shadow
which he treads on at noon...." I.i.

But let Marcius Coriolanus speak for himself,

"They have a leader,
Tullus Aufidius, that will put you to't.
I sin in envying his nobility,
And were I anything but what I am,
I would wish me only he." I.i.

Coriolanus feels the enormity of Aufidius's disposition.