

ROWE'S NEGLECTED TRAGEDIES -

NICHOLAS ROWE  
AND HIS  
NEGLECTED TRAGEDIES

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SCOPE AND CONTENTS: The introductory chapter outlines Rowe's biography and place in early eighteenth-century literary society, and makes brief reference to the whole of his literary output. Although not basically an innovator, Rowe heralds many of the changes to be made in serious drama during the early part of the century. The final two chapters analyse his two most neglected plays in an attempt to appreciate his dramatic techniques and skill. Rowe's particular strength is seen to be very theatrical manipulation of situation and character, and unusually deft handling of variations of tempo and tension.

## PREFACE

The object of this research exercise has not been to establish textual authority of the editions of Rowe's plays, but to use those editions held in the Rare Books Room of the Mills Memorial Library. First editions have been used where available. The first edition of Ulysses was used for Chapter III, but the earliest available edition of The Ambitious Step-Mother was that printed in 1702, "The Second Edition". These two plays were chosen for detailed study because little of a substantial nature has been written on them hitherto, while Rowe's three best known plays have received much attention.

Two critical methods have been used in this thesis. The first chapter consists of a general introduction to Rowe, setting forth significant details of his life, placing him in his time, and outlining his literary output. The remaining two chapters are alike in form, and are intended to be a reasonably extensive critical commentary on the two most neglected plays. The comments therein are designed to give a fuller exposition of Rowe's dramatic method and techniques.

Each of the three chapters is designed to stand on its own to some extent, although the last two chapters elaborate on some of the generalisations in the opening chapter. The same method of viewing the plays as a whole could, it seems, be applied to the rest of the plays to good effect, time and space permitting.

My most grateful thanks are due to Professor R. E. Morton, whose stimulating ideas and knowledge of the period are a constant source of inspiration. This work has also been made easier by the help given me by Mrs. Dorothy MacLennon and the staff of the Mills Memorial Library Rare Books Room, and by the staff of the Inter-Library Loans Department for secondary source material.

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## CHAPTER I

### Nicholas Rowe's Life and Writings

Nicholas Rowe was born at Little Barford in Bedfordshire of a reasonably well-to-do family, and was baptised at the local church on 30 June 1674.<sup>1</sup> Thus he was born either at the end of 1673 (the date given by most eighteenth-century writers) or during the early part of 1674. He came from an ancient Devonshire family known as the Rows of Lamertoun<sup>2</sup> but John Rowe, the father of Nicholas, left the estate to take up the law. He established a considerable legal practice and died on the Bench in 1692.<sup>3</sup>

The fullest details of Nicholas Rowe's earliest education are to be found in the Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Nicholas Rowe Esq., in a Letter to a Friend:<sup>4</sup>

I have often heard him say that it began at a private Grammar School in Highgate, but the Taste ~~had~~ there of the Classic Authors was improved and finished under the Care of the Great Dr. Busby.

But Rowe's early attentions were not directed entirely to Classical writers. Although it seems that he achieved special proficiency in them he also "made a tolerable proficiency in the Hebrew"<sup>5</sup> and "understood the French, Italian and Spanish Languages, and spoke the first fluently, and the other two tolerably well."<sup>6</sup>

When he was sixteen, he was taken from Dr. Busby's attention at Westminster School and was enlisted as a student in the middle Temple where his father was a member, and where "he might have him under his immediate Care and Instruction."<sup>7</sup> The studies in law appear to have progressed well,

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1 Genealogica Bedfordiensis. p.16. Quoted in D.N.B., p.341.

2 Welwood. "Preface to Lucan's Pharsalia", p.xli.

3 Ibid., p.xlii.

4 Works of Nicholas Rowe, Dublin, 1764, p.xvi.

5 Welwood, p.xliii.

6 Ibid., p.liii.

7 Ibid.

and Welwood seems to suggest that if a love of literature had not got in the way, he would have done very well. He

was not content, as he told me, to know it as a Collection of Statutes or Customs only, but as a System founded upon right Reason, and calculated for the Good of Mankind. Being afterwards call'd to the Bar, he appear'd in as promising way to make a Figure in that Profession, as any of his Contemporaries, if the Love of the Belles Lettres and that of Poetry in particular, had not stopp'd him in his Carreer. He had the Advantage of Friendship and Protection of one of the finest Gentlemen, as well as one of the greatest Lawyers of that Time, Sr. George Treby, Lord Chief Justice of the Common Pleas, who was fond of him to a great Degree, and had it both in his Power and Inclination to promote his Interest.<sup>1</sup>

The income he inherited at his father's death, of £300 per annum meant that he could follow his own literary inclinations with a degree of security. He remained active as an ardent Whig until the end of his life, and held several government positions, some of which were, no doubt, mere sinecures. He was made under-secretary to the Duke of Queensbury on 5 February 1708-9, and held office until the Duke's death in 1711.<sup>2</sup> His fortunes then lapsed until the accession of George I in 1715 when on 1 August he was made Poet-Laureate to succeed Nahum Tate, and was also made one of the "Land Surveyors of the Customs in the Port of London."<sup>3</sup> The Prince of Wales appointed him Clerk of the Council, and in May 1718 Thomas Parker, first Earl of Macclesfield, made him Clerk of Presentations.<sup>4</sup>

very little is known of Rowe's family life, although Welwood gives the most comprehensive account:

He was twice married, first to a Daughter of the

1. Ibid., pp.xliii-xliv.

2 Luttrell, vi, 404. Quoted in D.N.B., p.343.

3 Letter to a Friend, p.xvi.

4 D.N.B., p.343.



Deceas'd Mr. Persons, one of the Auditors of the Revenue, and afterward to a Daughter of Mr. Devenish, of a good Family in Dorsetshire: By the first he had a Son, and by the Second a Daughter, both yet living.<sup>1</sup>

Further purely biographical information is very scanty, although there are several anecdotes and odd pieces of information which are noteworthy. It is not surprising to find that Rowe was a member of the established church, for his writings often reveal this, neither is it surprising to find that he was a great advocate of moderation; we are told that he "pitied but condemned not those who dissented", and that he abhorred religious persecution.<sup>2</sup> His knowledge of the Bible is apparent from the numerous references to it in his plays, but it is interesting that Rowe was led to read Divinity and Ecclesiastical History when he "retir'd into the Country."<sup>3</sup>

Many of Welwood's observations, however, must be taken with a grain of salt, for it is likely that his physician was not in the best possible position to be the poet's biographer. He is concerned in his Life to create a good impression of the recently deceased man, to show him as a Christian gentleman --- which Rowe undoubtedly was --- but it also leads him into some rather extravagant falsifications. We are led to imagine that Rowe was a prudish man by the following comments, which certainly do not tally with the man who wrote some of the shorter poems, or with the author of The Biter:

but it may be justly said of them all, that never Poet painted Virtue or Religion in a more charming Dress on the Stage, nor were

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1 Welwood, p.lv.

2 Ibid., p.liii.

3 Ibid.

ever vice and Impiety better expos'd to Contempt  
and Hatred ...

His Muse was so religiously chaste, that I do  
not remember one Word in any of his Plays or  
Writings that might admit but of a double  
entendre in point of Decency or Morals. There  
is nothing to be found in them to humour the  
deprav'd Taste of the Age, by nibbling at  
Scripture, or depreciating Things in themselves  
Sacred.<sup>1</sup>

Rowe, indeed, may have been particularly diligent in the  
sphere of religion, but there is no super-abundant "religi-  
osity" in his writings, and Welwood himself reveals that  
he is something of an inattentive reader to miss the double  
entendres in the author's one comedy.

Much more helpful are the comments by several writers  
which indicate Rowe's sense of humour and good companionship:

His Conversation was Pleasant, Witty, and Learn'd  
without the least Tincture or Pedantry, and his  
inimitable Manners of Diverting and Enlivening  
the Company, made it impossible for any one to be  
out of Humour when he was in it.<sup>2</sup>

Rowe's conversation attracted a large group of friends,  
among them many of the famous actresses of the day, and his  
connexion with the theatre was very real, for he enlisted  
the help of Betterton to gain materials for his Shakespeare,  
and was an old school friend of Barton Booth. He himself  
was a master of the art of delivery, and Richardson says  
that Mrs. Oldfield maintained

the best school of acting she had ever known  
was only hearing him read her part in his  
tragedies.<sup>3</sup>

E.K. Broadus quotes Spence:

His voice was uncommonly sweet, his obser-  
vations so lively, and his manners so engaging

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1 Ibid., p.xlvi.

2 Ibid., p.liii.

3 Quoted in Spence, p.380.

that his friends delighted in his conversation.<sup>1</sup> F.R. Sutherland lists some of these as Warth, Steele, Prior, Swift, Dennis and Colley Cibber, and suggests relationships also with John Hughes, George Jeffries, Congreve and Mrs. Bracegirdle.<sup>2</sup> Mrs. Centlivre, too, had great affection for Rowe, who had helped her to complete her tragedy, The Cruel Gift. McAleer adds Lady Winchelsea to Rowe's list of appreciative friends.<sup>3</sup> Rowe became a friend and close associate of Pope, and the latter seems to have been in the habit of sending some of his verses to Rowe to correct.<sup>4</sup> Rowe's intimacy with Pope exposed him to venomous attacks from the piratical publisher Curll, and from Curll's hacks, whence proceeded Gildon's damning critique on Rowe's plays in the form of A New Rehearsal, or, Bays the Younger.<sup>5</sup> In a letter to Caryl, 20 September 1713, Pope says of Rowe:

I need not tell you how much a man of his turn could not entertain me; but I must acquaint you there is a vivacity and gaiety of disposition almost peculiar to that gentleman, which renders it impossible to part from him without the uneasiness and chagrin which usually succeeds all great pleasures.<sup>6</sup>

Nor was Rowe unduly abstinent, for he is depicted in Pope's "Farewell to London" (1715) as often drinking and drolling "till the third watchman's toll." Sometimes this light-heartedness did not charm to quite the same extent; Addison credited him with too much levity to make it possible for him to become a serious and sincere friend,<sup>7</sup> an opinion with which even Pope agreed on one occasion.<sup>8</sup>

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1 The Laureateship, p.105.

2 p.14.

3 Shakespeare Newsletter XVII, p.6.

4 W. Ayre. Memoirs, i, 209.

5 D.N.B., p.342.

6 Quoted in Broadus, p.105.

7 Ruffhead, Life of Pope. Quoted in D.N.B., p.344.

8 Johnson. Lives of the Poets, i, 411-12.

Rowe died on 6 December 1718, leaving his translation of Lucan's Pharsalia unpublished but almost complete. Dr. Atterbury, Bishop of Rochester

out of a particular Mark of Esteem for him, as being his School-Fellow, honoured his Ashes by performing the last Ashes himself.<sup>1</sup>

Rowe was buried beside Chaucer in the Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey on 19 December 1718.<sup>2</sup> The elaborate monument bore an epitaph penned by Pope (of which there are two versions of differing length extant) and a bust executed by Rysbrack.<sup>3</sup> J.J.McAleer notes that at the time of his death Rowe was writing a new tragedy called the Rape of Lucretia<sup>4</sup>; but I have been unable either to find further confirmation of this or to consider how much of it was actually penned at the time of his death. Rowe's will, to which Pope was a witness, was published in the Gentleman's Magazine 1822, i, 208, but contains nothing of significant interest.

During Rowe's lifetime his portrait was twice painted by Kneller, and the pictures were at the end of the nineteenth-century at Knole Park, Sevenoaks, and Nuneham.<sup>5</sup> There is also a Mezzotint of Rowe done by Faber, and dated 1715.

Though primarily known today as an heroic dramatist, Rowe indulged in other forms of literary pursuit, among them translations, imitations, private and public poems, a comedy, and an edition of Shakespeare, which has retrospectively been seen as one of his most important and significant works.

There was little or no serious editorial work on Shakespeare before Rowe, and for this enterprise someone was required with sufficient talent and perseverance to undertake

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1 Letter to a Friend, p.xviii.

2 His memorial was removed in 1939. See G.W.Wright. N.&Q.(1939).

3 D.N.B., p.343.

4 op. cit., p.6.

5 D.N.B., p.344.

the task of biographical narrative and textual purgation. Rowe was approached by Tonson, an astute judge of contemporary desires.<sup>1</sup> The sum of £36.10.0<sup>2</sup> which he received for his labours seems hardly reflective of immense gratitude on the part of Tonson for having accomplished the task. Thus in 1709 was published The Works of Mr. William Shakespear in Six Volumes. Adorn'd with Cuts. Revis'd and Corrected, with an Account of the Life and Writings of the Author. The following year a seventh volume was added, containing a collection of Shakespeare's poems, and the edition was revised in 1714 in eight volumes.

Rowe says in the Introduction that he is far from infallible, but that he has in many ways redeemed the injuries of former impressions. He had experienced difficulties with the text and he cannot thus

pretend to have restored the work to the Exactness of the Author's original Manuscripts. There are lost, or at least gone beyond any enquiry I could make, so that there was nothing left but to compare the several editions and give the true reading as I could from thence.<sup>3</sup>

The Biography is in a quiet and informative manner, and Rowe realised that people needed guidance rather than doctrine. The atmosphere, Jackson says, is "complacent and sympathetic."<sup>4</sup> Betterton's gleanings are inserted, though some are omitted by him and introduced by later writers after Pope. Betterton's facts had no real authority better than the aural tradition, but Rowe, in utilising all the available material, preserved much of what would otherwise have been lost. It is interesting that though the Biography received great criticisms, it nevertheless remained authoritative

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<sup>1</sup> A. Jackson. "Rowe's edition of Shakespeare" Library, X, 456.

<sup>2</sup> Nichols. Lit. Anecdotes; v, 597.

<sup>3</sup> Introduction to Shakespeare.

<sup>4</sup> op. cit., p. 458.

throughout the eighteenth century, and parts of it were appropriated by Pope, Hanmer, Warburton, Dr. Johnson and Steevens.<sup>1</sup>

Rowe counterbalanced many of the more extreme criticisms of his predecessors, and protested that Rymer's adverse examination <sup>2</sup>was a ridiculous vilification of a great dramatist. Very often it is Rowe's own enthusiasm which leads him to transcend contemporary prejudices in much the same way as Dr. Johnson did later in the century. Rowe's expressions of approval are frequent, with use of such expressions as "wonderful art", "finely and exactly describ'd" and "What an Image is here!"

Rowe's conclusions are typical of the eighteenth century. Shakespeare was a man who "lived under a kind of mere light of nature ... and in a state of universal licence."<sup>3</sup> But he continues:

I believe we are better pleased with those thoughts altogether new and uncommon which his own imagination supplied him so abundantly with, than if he had given us the most beautiful passages out of the Greek and Latin poets, and that in the most agreeable manner that it was possible for a master of the English Language to deliver 'em.<sup>4</sup>

Jackson concludes that while Rowe's criticism shows little penetration, his references to particular passages show the depth of his appreciation for the beauties of Shakespeare's form and versification, and he agrees with Hazlitt's verdict on Rowe as

the gentleman scholar passing on his criticisms in literature without ever coming to a close understanding of the elements involved in them.<sup>5</sup>

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1 Ibid., p.458.

2 See The Critical Works of Thomas Rymer. ed. C.R. Zimansky.

3 Quoted in Jackson, p.463.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

This does, however, seem too harsh. Rowe's understanding of the elements involved in Shakespeare's plays is reflected in the way in which he can make his own verse sound convincingly Shakespearian. While it could not be confused with Shakespeare, it echoes the true spirit of the master's verse, not only in Jane Shore which was written "in Imitation of Shakespeare's Style" but in the more lyrical and meditative passages found elsewhere.

Edward Wagenknecht studies a few of the main problems with which Rowe had to deal, in a finely illustrated article in Colophon.<sup>1</sup> He studied the stage-directions, comparing these with the Folios in an attempt to examine Rowe's method. Rowe's edition contained forty-three plays, the thirty-six of the First Folio, 1623, plus the seven plays added in the Third Folio, 1664, of which only Pericles is now in the Shakespeare canon.<sup>2</sup> Rowe added lists of dramatis personae which demanded considerable familiarity with the plays, though there are some serious omissions, particularly in the case of Julius Caesar where fourteen characters are left out. Rowe also often adds a descriptive note, and is fond of relating the characters one to another, together with a note indicating where the action of the play takes place.

Wagenknecht concludes that there is no guiding principle and that Rowe did this part of his work independently, studying the plays for himself, guided by his own preferences and the taste and interests of the reading public.

Act and scene divisions are included in twenty of the First Folio plays, but there are no new divisions. In the remaining sixteen plays he altered these divisions, and to most of them added many more scenes. It seems that he was guided by the rhyme-tags which Shakespeare often used, and

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1 Pt. VIII, 1931. (pages not numbered.)

2 Ibid.

and that he looked for changes in the action, but there are places where he does neither of these. In some other plays he combined several scenes which were separated before his time, either following the interests of what he considered to be dramatic effectiveness, or simply following the theatrical usage of his day.

Rowe seems to have been interested primarily in the tragedies, and not much interested in the histories or early comedies. It is certainly clear that as a tragedian his preference would be confirmed to lie in that direction. Rowe's understanding of Shakespeare was, no doubt, as great as any writer before him, and perhaps his main contribution to Shakespearean scholarship was that he redressed the balance of derogatory critics like Rymer, and opened the way for a more appreciative appraisal of Shakespeare during the rest of the century. Rowe praised Shakespeare's imagination, imagery, characterisation, judgement and instinct, his praise being well summed up in the Prologue to Jane Shore, where he greeted the writer who, like himself, had disregarded the Unities:

In such an age immortal Shakespeare wrote,  
By no quaint rules or hampering critics taught:  
With rough majestic force he moved the heart,  
And strength and nature made amends for art.

Rowe's critical talents seem to have been confined to his edition of Shakespeare although he had intended to do an edition of Massinger, which explains his familiarity with The Fatal Dowry which he used extensively for The Fair Penitent. This scheme never materialised, however.

The rest of his output was creative rather than critical. In spite of the fact that he was Poet-Laureate the amount of published poetry is surprisingly small, and the first edition of his poems came out after his death. His familiarity with languages allowed him to do several translations, among them De la Bruyere's Characters (1708) and Quillet's Callipaedia



(1710) neither of which is considered to be particularly good, and he contributed a memoir of Boileau to a translation of Boileau's Lutrin (1708). He also took part in a collective rendering of Ovid's Metamorphosis and prefixed a translation of Pythagoras's Golden Verses to the English version of Dacier's Life of Pythagoras (1707). Dr. Johnson calls the latter "tedious" but they are interesting in that many of them reflect the themes which Rowe was particularly interested in. There is a general note of controlled stoicism with a tinge of optimism, and though the moralism is tedious it advocates the same middle course which Rowe seems to have been attracted to. The poem's thought is well allied to the Augustan Age, as it warns that extremes should be avoided:

Distant alike from Each, to neither lean,  
But ever keep the happy GOLDEN MEAN.<sup>1</sup>

The poem closes on a religious, almost mystical note:

Among the Gods, exalted, shalt thou shine,  
Immortal, Incorruptible, Divine:  
The Tyrant Death securely shalt thou brave,  
And scorn the dark Dominion of the Grave.<sup>2</sup>

The rather trite rhymes are symptomatic of the whole, and though the verse is competent, it is uninspired.

Rowe cleverly adapted some of Horace's Odes to current affairs, and published these on public occasions. These include "Brittania's Charge to the Sons of Freedom" (1703), "Macaenas", verses occasioned by the honours conferred upon the Earl of Halifax (1714), and "On the Late Glorious Successes of her Majesty's Arms, humbly inscrib'd to the Earl of Godolphin" (1707). The latter is partly heroic, almost too elevated for this kind of congratulatory poem, a poem to "Anna". Rowe appears to be treading on rather dangerous ground as he almost

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<sup>1</sup> Poems on Several Occasions, p.5.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.7.

glorifies war before mitigating this somewhat with "All hail, ye softer, happier Arts of Peace." The poem is too long, rather meandering and, in the end, boring.

Much more successful are the shorter adaptations of Horace to celebrate less heroic events, such as "The Reconciliation between Jacob Tonson and Mr. Congreve, An Imitation of Horace Book IV, Ode IX" and "Horace Book IV, Ode I --- To Venus" which is full of pastoral and light, airy, conventional poetic diction. The best of these is probably "Horace Book II, Ode IV Imitated --- The Lord Griffin to the Earl of Scarsdale" with a light, witty, and down-to-earth tone:

Do not, most fragrant Earl, disclaim  
Thy bright, thy reputable Flame,  
To Bracegirdle, the Brown;  
But publickly espouse the Dame,  
And say G--- D--- the Town. <sup>1</sup>

It is the more familiar tone with which Rowe seems to be happiest, which is somewhat surprising in view of the sustained serious verse passages which are so effective in the tragedies. The short "Epigram on a Lady who shed her Water at seeing the Tragedy of Cato" is a remarkably successful treatment of a frivolous and trivial topic, and is worth quoting in full to counterbalance the conception of Rowe as a prudish, religio-serious writer:

Whilst maudlin Whigs deplore their Cato's Fate,  
Still with dry Eyes the Tory CELIA sate:  
But tho' her Pride forbad her Eyes to flow,  
The gushing Waters found a Vent below.  
Tho' secret yet with copious Streams she mourns,  
Like twenty River-Gods with all their Urns.  
Let others screw an hypocritic Face,  
She shews her Grief in a sincerer Place!  
Here Nature reigns, and Passion void of Art,  
For this Road leads directly to the Heart. <sup>2</sup>

Rowe has been able to satirize the lady through her Toryism

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1 Ibid., p.25.

2 Ibid., p.34.

and through mock-elevation, in couplets which are splendidly regulated. The last two lines, particularly, envelop the central Augustan concerns, yet through the event itself, these themselves are debased.

Colloquial language is used to good effect in "The Contented Shepherd -- To Miss A-- D--" (his second wife). This is in fact a love song, and the intensity of the emotion manages to penetrate the unpolished surface of the lines in a moving way.

The Songs as a whole are much better than the poems written for public occasions. The series of New Year Odes addressed to the King are very dull and conventional verses of a complimentary nature, and reveal the plight of a Poet-laureate at that time. The King was more interested in music than he was in poetry, as his connexion with Handel indicates, and as long as the poems could be set to music he was quite contented. Thus the quality of verse was very much a secondary consideration.

It is unusual for a dramatist to have written all his own Prologues and Epilogues for his plays, but this Rowe did, often (as in the case of The Ambitious Step-Mother) contrasting the serious, and even sombre tone of the play with witty, lighter passages to be spoken out of character by the principal actors. He also wrote some of these for other dramatists, among them the Epilogue to The Inconstant (1703) by Farquhar, the Prologue to The Gamester (1704) by Mrs. Centilevre, the Epilogue Spoken by Mrs. Bracegirdle at Betterton's benefit performance of Love for Love (1709), the Epilogue to The Cruel Gift (1717) and the Prologue to Cibber's Non-Juror (1718), this latter causing quite a political storm, and provoking a number of scathing attacks. Perhaps Rowe's lighter vein is seen at its best in those pieces where he combines a knowledge of the plays themselves with a felicity

for the right turn of phrase, and sufficient wit and good humour to entertain the audience.

Rowe's most celebrated poetic work is his translation of Lucan's Pharsalia, effected right at the end of his life, and published in 1718 by his wife. It is closely connected with his Laureateship as the Dedication to the King suggests, but it is more inspired than any of his other poems. A paraphrase rather than a literal translation, it was singled out for great praise in the eighteenth-century, particularly by Warton, who deemed Rowe's version to be superior to the original,<sup>1</sup> and by Dr. Johnson, whose judgement on such matters should be revered:

The version of Lucan is one of the greatest productions of English poetry; for there is perhaps none that so completely exhibits the genius and spirit of the original. Lucan is distinguished by a kind of dictatorial or philosophic dignity, rather, as Quintilian observes, declamatory than poetical; full of ambitious morality and animated lines. This character Rowe has very diligently and successfully preserved. His versification, which is such as his contemporaries practiced, without any attempt at innovation or improvement, seldom wants either melody or force. His author's sense is sometimes a little diluted by additional infusions, and sometimes weakened by too much expansion. But such faults are to be expected in all translations, from the constraints of measures and dissimilitude of languages. The Pharsalia of Rowe deserves more notice than it obtains, and as it is more read will be more esteemed. <sup>2</sup>

In more recent years Robert Graves has rather more grudgingly paid tribute to Rowe's version. He compares the Rowe with Marlowe's translation of the first book:

It may be argued that Marlow's poetic fire honours Lucan above his deserts; and that the

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<sup>1</sup> D.N.B., p.343.

<sup>2</sup> Lives of the Poets, i, p.413.

monotony of Rowe's eighteenth-century rhymed couplets matches Lucan's use of the hexameter more exactly. <sup>1</sup>

At all events, the work was substantial, the first book alone containing 1170 lines, as against 695 in the original. The translation enjoyed great popularity in its own century, and so many editions were published that it is quite possible to obtain a second hand copy today.

Before turning to the tragedies, which will engage our attention throughout the rest of this study, a brief examination of The Biter (1706) will be instructive in that it may be more closely allied to Rowe's day-to-day behaviour in character. It fails to cohere, though, because of a will-o'-the-wisp patchy collection of jokes, and avoids the philosophical, moral and religious veins with which the author could deal so well. Most writers of Histories of English Literature have dismissed it summarily with almost no comment, but Dr. Johnson tells an important anecdote:

He ventured on a comedy, and produced the Biter; with which, though it was unfavourably treated by the audience, he himself was delighted; for he is said to have sat in the house, laughing with great vehemence, whenever he had in his own opinion produced a jest. <sup>2</sup>

It was not a success. Downes notes "it had a six Days run; the six Days running out of Breath, it sicken'd and Expir'd." <sup>3</sup> But Rev. Montague Summers, who, unlike most other critics reveals a reading of the play, comments on Dr. Johnson's anecdote:

but it is hardly credible that an audience could have been so glum, for The Biter is a bustling, busy piece, with an abundance of good characters and excellent situations. It has been severely spoken of by some modern writers, who probably

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<sup>1</sup> Lucan. Pharsalia, trans. Robert Graves, p.xiv.

<sup>2</sup> Lives of the Poets, i, 407.

<sup>3</sup> Roscivus Anglicanus, p.46.

have not read the play. Betterton as Sir Timothy Tallapoy, the sinologist, and Mrs. Leigh as Lady Stale had two first-rate roles, and it is difficult to think that they were not extremely diverting. <sup>1</sup>

This is no doubt true, but the play is no more than a "Farce". Rowe seems to have been consciously retroactive in not entirely conforming to popular tastes; in taking the theme of the biter --- a practical joker --- he avoids much of the biting contemporary and social comment and satire which was prevalent. Indeed, he complains in the Epilogue that taste in comedies has changed, and that he stands against the bitterness of contemporary satire:

Lash ev'ry Fool of ev'ry Kind and Fashion,  
And be the true Reformers of the Nation.

The author also seems to be somewhat doubtful of the reception of the play:

For tho' fond Parents on their Offspring dote,  
And ev'ry Idiot Author loves the Brat he got;  
Yet ours gives freely up his Petit Piece,  
And swears that you may use it as you please.

The tone of the play is generally good-humoured, but some of the characterisation and sense of humour is juvenile. Sir Timothy's obsession with things Chinese and with Chinese phrases becomes monotonous, and Mr. Scribblescrabble's stutter, though good business at the beginning of the play, is soon worked to death. The other obvious attempt at characterisation, in Grumble, who has a monstrous parody of an accent, is similarly too heavily done.

There is no coherent plot, and the domestic wrangles are hard to follow; many of the characters are superfluous, and Rowe was concerned more with amusing per se than with form. The play is baggy and scrappy, the wit lying solely in the language and not in the events. There is throughout a

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p.260. (Notes.)

strange mixture of very colloquial terms with an occasional grammatical construction of a rather stilted nature. One of the best scenes is that in Act I where Mariana enters to talk to Lady Stale and Lady Clever; the language is vital, the speeches short, and much is made of social deprecation:

Stale. And your Lady of Pleasure?

Mar. With a knot of Rakes. And my Man of Business is engag'd in an Affair of Consequence.

Stale. An Affair of Consequence at Croydon?

Mar. Ay I'll assure you, and very great too.<sup>1</sup>

The Song which ends the first Act is in Rowe's light style, suitable for debunking with its interjection of the pastoral into trivial subject matter:

I

Gloe blush'd, and frown'd, and swore,  
And push'd me rudely from her.  
I call'd her perjur'd, faithless Whore,  
To talk to me of Honour.

II

But when I rose and would be gone,  
She cry'd, Nay, Whither go ye?  
Young Damon saw; now we're alone,  
Do what you will with Gloe.<sup>2</sup>

The insertion of the crucial words "swore" and "Whore" is deft, for it is unexpected, and the idea of a pastoral whore is particularly amusing.

The women are on the whole less laboured than the men, and their conversation is often witty. One of the best interchanges in the play is in Act III, employing several types of wit:

Stale. Oh Wretch! do'st thou not expect the House shou'd fall down upon the instant?

Friendly. No, I trust in the Timber-work.

Stale. Oh thou wickedness incarnate; how often hast thou look'd upon me and smil'd, and

<sup>1</sup> The Biter, p.13.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.21.

then smil'd and look'd upon me again?  
Friendly. Very often truly, being for the most  
 part of a merry Disposition, as the  
 worshipful Bench here know.  
Stale. But say how often amourosly, say,  
 speak truth, if thou dar'st.  
Friendly. Never.  
Clever. A short Answer that.  
Stale. Madam, I believe he has squeez'd this  
 poor Hand --- Crying.  
Aug. Did you squeeze that filthy bony thing?  
 You shan't touch mine. <sup>1</sup>

Each speech here moves into, a different area of conversation, and the effect of the constant surprises is very amusing. The sententious Stale is suitably deflated at every turn, and the realism of the final quoted line is a good follow-up to the short "Never."

There is no viewpoint in the play, however. We are never tempted to become involved with the characters, and there is no attempt to involve the audience in the issues of the play. It is slight, trite, and, in the end, inconsequential.

Despite the fate of The Ambitious Step-Mother (1700) and Ulysses (1706), neither of which have received a great deal of attention or enjoyed great popularity on stage, Rowe's other plays enjoyed immense popularity in the eighteenth century:

Altogether the plays of Rowe were acted so frequently that the number of their performances amount to 10% of the nights devoted to tragic drama of all types and to nearly half as many nights as were devoted to the tragedies of Shakespeare. So far had tragedy become synonymous with pathos. <sup>2</sup>

By the 1750's when The Fair Penitent (1703) and Jane Shore (1714) together with Tamerlane (1701) reached the height of

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p.56.

<sup>2</sup> J.J.Lynch. Box, Pit and Gallery, p.38.



their popularity the element of pathos in the plays was emphasised heavily. After Lillo's bourgeois domestic tragedies, audiences were eager to experience the more elevated type of domestic and sentimental tragedy offered by Rowe, and "refinement" was as much in vogue then as it had been when the plays were written. Indeed, the fact that these plays became more popular after 1750 than they had been before suggests that Rowe was writing ahead of his time.

Rowe followed the preferences of the French neo-classical tragedians in that superfluities tended to be pared down, so that attention could be devoted to the central concern -- still that of the conflict between love and honour, but made more family-oriented, more easily identified with. By mid-century there was increased interest in antiquarianism and in English history, in the future of British imperialism, and a tenacious interest in classicism.<sup>1</sup> Rowe's historical and pseudo-historical themes were worked out with many features of French classicism -- there is a modified use of the Unities and a minimum number of characters, for example.

The great increase in scholarly interest in Shakespeare, which came to the fore with Rymer and Dryden, was taken further with Rowe, and his plays contain many pseudo-Shakespearian sentiments; the language, too, often aims at achieving something of the spirit of Shakespeare, particularly in the more lyrical and meditative passages in the plays. Jane Shore was written "In Imitation of Shakespeare's Style"<sup>2</sup> and though the validity of Rowe's assertion has frequently been contested (Professor Nicoll, for example, suggests that for Shakespeare Rowe intended Banks), it was possibly one feature of the "she-tragedy", Jane Shore, which was the dramatist's penultimate play, one of the most

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1 Ibid., p.39.

2 This appears on the Title Page of Jane Shore.

popular plays in London in the mid-century.

Rowe's insistence on the pathetic element in his plays is a factor which increases towards the latter part of his career, and the setting is correspondingly brought more up to date. The Ambitious Step-Mother and Tamerlane are both set long ago in the near east, and Ulysses on a classical legend. The Royal Convert moves slightly nearer home in its setting in ancient Britain, but it is the last two plays which capitalise on the early success of The Fair Penitent in being set in more recent England. It may be argued that The Fair Penitent's setting is something of an accident, as it is largely an adaptation of Massinger's Fatal Dowry, and therefore not Rowe's original creation.

In the earliest plays the focus of interest is fairly equally distributed. In Ulysses, for example, attention is divided between three characters, Ulysses, Telemachus and Semanthe, though in true heroic style it is the men who are given the most interesting characterisation. In Tamerlane the interest is almost entirely male, for the play is essentially a political allegory, Tamerlane standing for the virtuous William III, and Bajazet for the hated Louis XIV. The Royal Convert's most convincing characters are the wronged Ethelinda and the haughty Saxon princess Rodogune (whom Dr. Johnson praised highly<sup>1</sup>), but our interest is intended to be equally divided between the two men and the two women, as was the case in The Fair Penitent. In Jane Shore and Lady Jane Gray, however, the women are more conspicuous. Before Lady Jane's entry in the second act, she is constantly talked of, and it is only because Rowe over-sentimentalises his heroine that we find her constant cascade of tears irritating. The balance between convincing action and a supremely important

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<sup>1</sup> Lives of the Poets, i, 406.

heroine is achieved in Jane Shore, and it is probably the reason why this play, and not Rowe's last, became the great "hit" of the middle part of the century.

In his study of The Fair Penitent, Ferdinand H. Schwartz emphasised the moral element of Rowe's tragedies:

It is plain that every genuine work of art should be moral. But if this moral element in the nature of every genuine work of art is made to choke all the subtle feelings of poetry, if this moral purpose is disproportionately obtruded upon the reader or spectator, then the drama ceases to be a department of literature, and the stage is made to encroach upon the province of the pedagogue, of the school and the pulpit.<sup>1</sup>

Despite the fact that Rowe "placed great emphasis on the sententious couplet"<sup>2</sup> at the end of the plays, this would appear to be out of habit --- it was the accepted mode. Rarely does Rowe try to inculcate morality although he has some recurring concerns. Sometimes he stresses the moral in the Prologue or Epilogue, but this is more often than not ironic; in saying of the Royal Convert

The Moral of this Play being rightly scann'd,  
Is, He that leaves his own dear Wife is damn'd<sup>3</sup>

he is satirising the over-simplified moral seeking which many contemporary play-goers indulged in. His plays are too complex, often ambivalent, for this. We are frequently left with mixed feelings during a play when a character delivers a "moral utterance" with the assistance of rant, or at the end where the "message" appears to be wrong. The Gods are not "just" at the end of Ulysses; far from it, for the mass of slaughter sends the audience away with both pity and fear, but also with an added sense of the injustice not only of life but of "Fate" itself.

1 F.H.Schwartz. The Fair Penitent, Berne, 1907, p.10.

2 Ibid.

3 Epilogue.

Sometimes a moral speech is inserted; we tire of the repetition of the joys of marriage in The Fair Penitent or of the conscious self-righteous pitying of the heroine in Lady Jane Gray, and we are sceptical of the praise given to heroic exploits in Ulysses. Rowe offers a viewpoint, which in many cases has moralistic overtones, but is not inviting us to accept it without reservation. We frequently find that it is itself mitigated throughout the course of the play, and that the undiluted values are not good enough to sustain the lives of the characters. The dramatist moves away from the Addisonian ideas of Poetic Justice, for the fate of the characters is often unfair. Why should Artemisa be left at the end of The Ambitious Step-Mother? She represents one of the forces of "evil" but is allowed to live at the end, while all the "good" characters are destroyed. One feels that in this case the ending is unsatisfactory, but elsewhere, in the Royal Convert, for example, the ending is finely achieved as the future of a united Britain is foreseen.

Rowe's theory of tragedy depended on a balance between sympathy for the characters (which involved a degree of identification with the tearful element in the make-up of the heroines) and intellectual detachment (so that some sort of moral choice can be made). Rowe left the choice deliberately rather vague; it is unlikely that even he intended the "Ladies of Quality"<sup>1</sup> to rush out of the theatre to emulate the heroine, even if the tongue-in-cheek Epilogue suggested they should do so.<sup>2</sup> In order to achieve the equipoise he had to forsake the Unities to some extent, and he does this deliberately in Jane Shore. It would have taxed the credulity of the audience to witness Jane dying of

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<sup>1</sup> A term which frequently appears in the playbills.

<sup>2</sup> See Lady Jane Gray.

starvation in an afternoon, so to add realism the dramatist extends the time limit. In the four heavily heroic plays, however, the Unities are more or less adhered to, though not ostentatiously so. The action is contrived in such a way that it can be seen to take merely a day, but the Unities become less important as the sequence of plays progresses.

At first Rowe conforms fairly closely to the theory of tragedy as expounded first by Dryden and later by Addison. Dryden states that a play should be:

an imitation of one, entire, great and probable action, not told but represented, which by moving in us fear and pity, is conducive to the purging of these two emotions in our minds.<sup>1</sup>

The splitting of catharsis into two separate elements is essentially non-Aristotelian, but this misconception was widely held in the eighteenth-century, and Rowe follows suit:

But since Terror and Pity are laid down for the Ends of Tragedy by the great Master and Father of Criticism, I was always inclin'd to fancy, that the last and remaining Impressions, which ought to be left on the minds of the Audience, should proceed from one of these two. They should be struck with Terror in several parts of the Play, but always Conclude and go away with Pity, a sort of regret proceeding from good nature, which, tho' an uneasiness is not always disagreeable, to the person who feels it.<sup>2</sup>

The playwright goes on to exonerate his play from any strictures which might be laid according to the rules of Poetical Justice, one of Addison's great concerns, which he later modified in this way:

We find that good and evil happen alike to all men on this side of the grave, and as the principle design of tragedy is to raise commiseration and terror in the minds of the audience, we shall defeat this great end if we always make virtue and innocence happy and

<sup>1</sup> Preface to Troilus & Cressida (1679). Dryden, Essays, I, 207.

<sup>2</sup> The Ambitious Step-Mother. Epistle Dedicatory.

successful ....

To make virtue triumphant in every tragedy would remove suspense, thus defeating the tragic purpose, that of exciting pity and terror; whereas ancient tragedies, with their unhappy endings, were more effective, as well as being more true to life. <sup>1</sup>

Such questions of catharsis and justice were almost impossible to solve, but Rowe helped the situation by modifying them, so that by the end of his career, they, and the associated question of realism and the Unities, had become less important, when pity takes precedence over terror, and becomes a formal element in itself.

Two of Rowe's over-riding preoccupations in his writing are religion and patriotism, and these are well reflected in the Epistle Dedicatory of Tamerlane to Lord Huntingdon:

But there are some things more particular in his Character, some things rarely found amongst the Policies of Princes; a Zeal for Religion, moderated by Reason, without the Rage and Fire of Persecution; a charitable Compassion for those who cannot be convinc'd, and an unalterable Perseverance in those Principles of whose Truth he is satisfy'd; a desire of War for the sake of Peace; and of Peace for the Good and Honour of his Subjects equally with his own; a pious Care for composing Factions, tho' to ferment them might make him Arbitrary; and a generous Ambition that only aims at Pow'r to enable him to do good to all the rest of the World.

This in many ways encapsulises the ideas which Rowe held, and explains why at least two of the tragedies hinge round religious questions. Mirza's evil treatment of the priest, Magas, in The Ambitious Step-Mother confirms him as a villain, and Aribert's acceptance of Christianity in The Royal Convert heightens his dignity. To maintain right religion alongside patriotism is the highest sort of praise which Rowe lavishes

<sup>1</sup> The Spectator No. 40. 1711.

upon his characters. Lady Jane Gray is a martyr, not merely political but religious, and she is to be viewed as a saintly figure as she meets her death, through her strong grasp on Christianity, offering hope to her husband Pembroke. She was, perhaps, designed as a culmination of Rowe's personal values; she is steadfast, heroic, courageous, religious, concerned for the good of her country, and, above all, right. It is Rowe's insistence upon her tearful melancholy which tends to make her rather dull, and less than fully three-dimensional. In this case it is his art which is not quite sufficient to carry out his philosophical intentions.

Rowe's language is mainly of a "middle flight" sort of poetry. There is very little truly heroic rant, and the use of heroic devices is usually moderate. On the other hand there is always a certain degree of elevation in the speeches; there is a certain formality and stylised diction which prevents any alteration of language in the direction of middle-class speech. However, one can trace a pattern of development in the use of the poetry throughout Rowe's works. The speeches tend to move away from straight-forward utterance strongly marked by declamation to a greater insistence on lyricism and the expression of the melancholy aspects of life. This has a softening effect on the verse, and it has often been suggested that Rowe's most successful passages are those which are either meditative or to some extent "philosophical". In general terms it could be said that the language itself moves from the heroic to the sentimental in the same way as does the basic material.

Rowe does, on the whole, gear his use of language to the character speaking the lines, and in this way achieves a large degree of variety both in the amount of "softness" and the haste with which the lines are to be delivered, but we may trace the progression of the verse in general terms by comparing it in Tamerlane and Lady Jane

Gray.

Arpasia's meditative speech in the final act of Tamerlane is about as far as the author goes in this direction in this play. The images are quite simple, and though there is an emphasis on colour which is allied to the state of mind of the speaker, there is no great sentimentality; the utterance is rather too formal for any true degree of audience involvement with Arpasia:

My Heart beats higher, and my nimble Spirits  
Ride swiftly thro' their purple Channels round:  
'Tis the last blaze of Life: Nature revives  
Like a dim winking Lamp, that flashes brightly  
With parting Light, and strait is Dark for ever.  
And see! my last of Sorrows is at Hand:  
Death and Moneses come together to me;  
As if my Stars, that had so long been cruel,  
Grew kind at last, and gave me all I wish.<sup>1</sup>

Certainly there is a degree of pathos here, and the situation is linked with the decrees of fate, as so often is the case in Rowe, but the language is not very exuberant; and the images of light are obviously controlled.

Northumberland's description of Lady Jane at the death scene of King Edward is far less controlled. Rowe is by 1715 aiming at a much more pathetic effect, and does it by piling images of sorrow on top of each other. He uses alliteration to good effect, and the effect of the speech is of heart-rending:

All desolate and drown'd in flowing Tears,  
By Edward's Bed the pious Princess sits.  
Fast from her Lifted Eyes the Pearly Drops,  
Fall trickling o'er her Cheek, while Holy Ardor,  
And fervent Zeal pour forth her lab'ring Soul;  
And ev'ry Sigh is wing'd with Pray'rs so potent,  
As strive with Heav'n to save her dying Lord.<sup>2</sup>

Rowe achieves a flowing effect in the verse; it is both

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1 Tamerlane, (ed. Burns, 1966) V, i, p.95.

2 Lady Jane Gray, (1715) II, i, p.12.



tearful and melancholy. Northumberland is rhapsodising on the situation rather than explaining what is happening, and the audience is being directly involved in the picture of the heroine through insistence on the tears and on the piety.

One final example of the lyrical element in Rowe may suffice to give an indication of the nature of the poetry:

Say, wo't thou consecrate the Night to Sorrow,  
And give up ev'ry Sense to solemn sadness?  
Wo't thou in watching wast the Tedious Hours,  
Sit silently and careful by my Side,  
List to the tolling Clocks, the Crickets Cry,  
And ev'ry melancholy Midnight Noise?  
Say, wo't thou banish Pleasure and Delight,<sup>1</sup>  
Wo't thou forget that ever we have lov'd...

This speech is highly stylised, but Rowe achieves the sense of grandeur for which he is aiming. Lady Jane's melancholy is made thoroughly attractive, and there is a remarkable evocation of timelessness. Somehow the actual "meaning" of the passage becomes less important than the atmosphere it evokes. Thus Rowe can be seen to have moved from statement in the early plays to "evocation" in the later ones. Facts and situations give way to moods and emotions as his plays become less heroic and more the expression of pathetic events and feelings.

It is the sort of universality expressed in this last speech which is, in the end, the most rewarding aspect of a study of Rowe's plays. His many meditative speeches on the abstract features of life have lasting value, be they on honour, ambition, time, duty or love. His dramatic method is sometimes geared to contemporary conditions in the theatres, for there is one scene in most of the plays which is written to show off the latest piece of stage machinery, but the more "domestic" the situation, the more likely it is to have

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., II, i, p.16.

enduring interest.

Rowe had great competence in the actual writing of his plays. He was a master of tempo, and of the occasion on which to alter the speed and intensity of the action for good dramatic effect, and the changes in the two plays chosen for analysis are most skilfully manoeuvred. The speeds of action and the levels of tension are designed to maintain the interest of the audience, and Rowe seems to achieve this better than anywhere else in the neglected Ulysses.

T H E  
Ambitious STEP-MOTHER.

A  
T R A G E D Y.

As it is Acted at the *New Theatre*  
in *Little-Lincolns-Inn-Fields*.

By Her Majesties Servants.

---

WRITTEN BY  
N. ROWE, Esq; Author of *TAMERLANE*.

---

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---

-----*Decet hæc dare dona novercam.*----- Ovid *Metam.* lib. 9.

*Vane Ligur, frustra; animis elata superbis.*

*Nequiequam-----tentasti lubricus artes*

*Advenit qui vestra dies muliebribus armis*

*Verba redargueret.*

Virg. *Æn.* lib. 11.

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CHAPTER II

Rowe's first play, The Ambitious Step-Mother, is written very much within the conventions of heroic drama. It can be seen as a successor to the neo-classical plays of the last years of the seventeenth century, but there are some innovations which suggest the ways in which this dramatist is to develop during his career; added to the conventional features of the conflicts between love and duty is a greater emphasis on the domestic nature of the hero's difficulties, and the play is written with a greater degree of simplicity. The plot is straightforward and Rowe tries not to bring added complications to bear. The number of characters is limited, and neo-classical ideals of the unities are on the whole maintained.

The characters are not very markedly differentiated. There are few traits which engage our particular interest and concern, and this feature is emphasised by the somewhat remote tone. Rowe does indicate the private struggles within the mind of the protagonists, and the best scenes are those where this happens in the fullest degree, but the final impression with which we are left is not that they are creatures of flesh and blood, but tools of the author. Occasionally a character comes fully to life, as in the case of Artaban when he is defying his mother towards the end of the play, but this is not maintained.

The action of the play is carefully regulated. There are few superfluities, and, with the exception of the third Act where the action is a little too choppy, and the dramatic intensity sacrificed for the sake of spectacle, the characters are all closely related to each other in the action.

L.C. Burns, Jr. has closely examined the relationship of The Ambitious Step-Mother to the heroic play.<sup>1</sup> Artaxerxes is seen as the hero with "a great soul", a god, far beyond the laws of ordinary men. He is driven to extraordinary ambition and is overcome by love -- the central features on which heroic

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<sup>1</sup> The Tragedies of Nicholas Rowe, pp. 17-20.

drama is founded. Mirza and Magas are typical villains, while their chief counterpart, Memnon, is a wise and acting rather. Amestris is the incredibly beautiful "fair one" who both merits and wins the love of the "brave one". Artaban is the rival who gives the hero opportunity to show his magnanimity. Burns maintains that the action of the play could be predicted almost to the letter, but it would seem that Rowe is certainly doing something more than follow a code. The Step-Mother herself gives him an opportunity to exploit any contemporary anti-feminist feeling, and she is drawn both strongly and convincingly. The reliance on certain heroic principles, however, is undoubted, although with some of them Rowe shows how competent a dramatist he could become as soon as he felt free to slacken some of the expected features. The language of the play has a certain heroic flavour, with some passages of rant and others of more middle flight heroic sentiments. Rowe achieves a detachment in this; we are not allowed to identify too closely with any of the characters, though we are permitted to share in their meditations in the form of soliloquies from time to time.

The greatest controversy about the play concerned the events of the final act. Rowe has often been seen as deviating from the accepted norms of decorum and restraint by allowing too much violence at the close, and we shall examine his own comments on this shortly. The last Act is certainly full of bustle and excitement, but some of it is a little unnecessary. There seems to be no good reason why there should be so many deaths, and little justification for their supreme nastiness. Rowe disposes of all but two of the dramatis personae and this slaughter does seem to be excessive.

The play was cut for its first performance, as Rowe makes clear in the Epistle dedicatory. Some of the interchanges are rather long-winded when compared with the rush of action at the end, but without them it is hard to see how the play could be

satisfactory on stage. The play established Rowe as a major dramatist, and although there were few comments of wild enthusiasm, it was seen as both a popular and well-written play, heralding considerable promise for the future.

### Publication History

The first edition was printed "For the Company" in 1701, although there is no date on the title page. Also in 1701 came the edition which does have this date on the title page, "For Peter Buck". The next edition was in the following year "For R. Wellington, and Thomas Osborne", and a new scene was added here. The Wren Catalogue calls it the second, but the first complete edition. The third edition followed after a gap of twelve years, in 1714, printed for Jacob Tonson. It was reprinted by different publishers in 1720, and in 1721 another edition "For the Company" came out. The fourth edition appeared in 1727, after a Dublin edition in 1726. The play was printed again in 1733 and 1735, followed by two more editions "For the Company" in [1751] and [1756]. The first Scottish edition came out in 1760, printed for A. Donaldson at Edinburgh. Other printings were in 1761, 1764 (Dublin), 1781 and 1795.

It is a little surprising that it should continue to appear so late in the century. People were still reading it, one imagines, long after it had disappeared from the stage. The Ambitious Step-Mother is included in all the collected editions of Rowe's plays until 1792, and there seem to be six occasions on which it was included in anthologies; the first of these was in The English Theatre in 1731-4, and the second in A Select Collection of the Best Modern English Plays printed in The Hague for H. Scheurleer in 1750. Thereafter the play was included in The English Theatre, 1769, Bell's British Theatre, 1776-78 (where all Rowe's plays were included), volume 7 of Bell's English Theatre of 1792 and volume 27 of

### Bell's British Theatre of 1797.

Thus the play did not quite last into the nineteenth century, and there have been no editions since 1797.

### Performance history

The first performance took place probably some time in December 1700. The exact date of this event is not known, but the 1701 edition gives the cast of the play, and it can be seen that Betterton took the part of Memnon. With Mrs. Barry as Artemisa and Amestris played by Mrs. Bracegirdle, the audience at the theatre in Lincoln's Inn Fields should have been treated to some very good acting. Indeed Downes seems to have been more enthusiastic about this play than he was about either Tamerlane or The Fair Penitent. He says of The Ambitious Step-Mother:

'Twas very well Acted, especially the Parts of Mr. Betterton, Mr. Booth and Madame Barry; the Play answer'd the companies expectation.<sup>1</sup>

Montague Summers in his note on Barton Booth<sup>2</sup> points out that Booth made his debut at the Smock Alley Theatre in Dublin in either June or July 1698, so that Artaban was probably Booth's first part in England. Summers also notes that Booth had been at Westminster School with Rowe, and that the dramatist had probably given him the part in this play.<sup>3</sup>

Performances then lapsed until the play was next shown 6 December 1706. Then there is a gap of nine years to the two performances in December 1715, on Wednesday 14 and Thursday 29. The only other performance in the first half of the century was on 25 January 1722.

There was a spirited revival in February 1759, however, when it was done six times, on Thursday 1, Monday 5, Thursday 8, Friday 9, Saturday 10 and Monday 19. This last seems to have

<sup>1</sup> Roscius Anglicanus. Ed. Rev. Montague Summers, p.45.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.259.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

been the most recent realisation of the play on stage.

### Sources

There is no single source for the play, or at least, none has been found. P.F.W. Borgwardt lists several plays which may well have influenced Rowe, but his material is largely an original effort. The basic story is biblical, found in II Samuel, i, and Kings i, 5-49. Borgwardt also lists the following works: Corneille's Rodogune, Ben Jonson's Volpone, Henry Cnettle's The Stepmother's Tragedy, Rob. Stapleton's The Stepmother and Xenophon's Anabasis.<sup>1</sup> Nicoll suggests that Rowe is largely following Otway's dramatic style, using also the plot of Orrery's Mustapha.<sup>2</sup> Burns, in relating the play to heroic tragedy in general, makes specific reference to Dryden's Aureng-Zebe.<sup>3</sup>

Whatever the relationship of Rowe's play to all these it is clear that in trying to "purify" the form he deliberately avoided any use of the sub-plot. All the events in the play are tied closely together by the inter-relationships of the characters. There is no scene in the play which does not have a direct bearing upon the struggle of the two young men for the crown and for love. In this way Rowe has cleared the play from any other concerns, so that our whole attention can be focused on the central issues.

The Ambitious Step-Mother is essentially a new creation, and it is not particularly illuminating to try to find source details in other works. The bare outline of ideas may have been borrowed from other plays, but no more than this.

### The Epistle Dedicatory

Rowe does much more here than present the customary

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<sup>1</sup> Der Royal Convert von Nicholas Rowe. p.86.

<sup>2</sup> Nicoll, p.98.

<sup>3</sup> p.20.



flourish to the dedicatee. Rowe here follows the practice of Dryden in prefacing his play with a defence of some of his methods and intentions.

First of all Rowe takes the opportunity to vent his disapproval at the cut version of his play which had been staged. He also states in an aside that the events depicted in the play have no relation "to any Part of true History" --- there is not here the satiric intention of Tamerlane. Then a substantial part of the apology is spent dealing with the question of the "barbarity" of the final act to which many had objected. The essential question of "Poetic Justice" is brought forward:

Some People, whose Judgment I ought to have a Deference for, have told me that they wisht I had given the latter Part of the Story quite another turn; that Artaxerxes and Amestris ought to have been preserv'd, and made happy in the Conclusion of the Play, that ... there might have been also a more Noble and Instructive Moral drawn that way.<sup>1</sup>

Rowe asserts that if this is a failing in the play it is a deliberate one. He says that there are two ways of finishing a play like this --- to give it a happy ending and reward the virtuous, or to end with disaster and send the audience away with the impression of pity and fear.

Rowe's definition of "pity" is significant in the later development of tragedy, as Lewis M. Margill suggests. Pity is.

a sort of regret proceeding from good-nature, which, tho' an uneasiness is not always disagreeable, to the person who feels it. It was this passions [sic] that the famous Mr. Otway succeeded so well in touching, and must and will at all times affect people, who have any tenderness or humanity.<sup>3</sup>

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1 Epistle Dedicatory.

2 "Poetic Justice". Wash. State Coll. Research. Studies, XXV, 27.

3 Epistle Dedicatory.

This stems from a misrepresentation of Aristotle which was to linger right through the century. Critics and dramatists continued to try to break the idea of catharsis into two separate parts, pity on the one hand, and fear on the other. Rowe is here faced by a real dilemma which the concern with "Poetic Justice" forced on them. The villains deserve death, and so pose no problem, but how can the sort of pity which provokes tears, and which is the sort of pity which the eighteenth century tragedians were aiming for, be achieved without also punishing the innocent? Distressed innocence and the effect of tragic waste are features which dramatists could not sacrifice. They are throughout the century aerended in this way, even though Aristotle did not intend this by his remarks.

Rowe says that he has achieved the state of Poetic Justice by punishing his guilty characters:

That which they call Poetical Justice, is, I think, strictly observ'd, the two principal Contrivers of Evil, the Statesman and Priest, are punish'd with death; and the Queen is depos'd from her authority by her own Son, which, I suppose, will be allowed as the severest mortification that could happen to a woman of her Imperious Temper.<sup>1</sup>

This continues to be one of Rowe's guide lines in his career. He does not hesitate to punish the innocent, although it never again results in quite such a devastating display of slaughter. Indeed the emphasis shifts somewhat from punishment to pathos, from terror to pity as the plays progress, in the same way as they move from the heroic to the pathetic. Rowe proves his point later in his dramatic writings as he shows the "other sort" of tragedy in Ulysses. Whether or not this play is good has been a matter of some debate, but the point remains that there the virtuous characters are rewarded, and even one touch of sorrow on the part of Telemachus does not

<sup>1</sup> Epistle Dedicatory.

really spoil the play's happy ending.

### Prologue and Epilogue

It is interesting to find thus early in Rowe's plays an emphasis on the pathetic. In the Prologue he is aiming at the "fair ones" in the audience as he justifies the inclusion of a strong element of pathos in the play:

Those Tears, their Art, not Weakness has confest,  
Their Grief approv'd the Niceness of their Tast,  
And they wept most, because they judg'd the best.<sup>1</sup>

The idea of the "she tragedy" is already in the poet's mind:

For in the Account of every Age we find  
The best and fairest of that sex were kind,  
To Pity Always and to Love inclin'd.<sup>2</sup>

This element, however, is not the most interesting feature of the Prologue. The reference to former dramatists leads Rowe to take stock of the present state of drama and of the theatre. The new emphasis on entertainments and music is satirised:

The Stage would need no Farce, nor Song nor Dance,  
Nor Capering Monsieur brought from active France.  
Clinch and his Organ-Pipe, his Dogs and Bear,  
To native Barnet might again repair,  
Or breath with Captain Otter Bankside Air.<sup>3</sup>

Rowe utters the hope that once again true tragedy might take the place of all these bastard entertainments. The rivalry of the London companies had led to a certain degeneration in the fare offered in the theatre, and it is likely that all these listed by Rowe were seen on the stage about this time. The dramatist is asking for the reinstatement of true drama, but he is at the same time making clear that what the audience is to see in the future is going to appeal increasingly to the "fair" members amongst them.

<sup>1</sup> Prologue, ll. 15-17.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., ll. 37-39.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., ll. 20-24.

The final cry here is to the audience to lead a change in general theatrical taste, a topic which Addison was later to take up, but which never really caught on because of the measures taken by the London theatres to try to increase their audiences:

Assert, ye fair ones, who in Judgment sit,  
Your Ancient Empire over Love and Wit;  
Reform our Sense, and teach the Men to Obey;  
They'll leave their Tumbling if you lead the way.  
Be but what those before to Otway were;  
O were you but as kind, we know you are as fair.<sup>1</sup>

Thus Rowe ends with a gentle but persuasive tribute to the earlier dramatist to whom he owed a good deal.

The Epilogue reflects the same concerns. It is clear that Rowe's appeal to clear the stage of light entertainments is meant seriously, for it is to this which he returns. The rebuke is directed here more strongly to the audience:

Musick in vain, supports with friendly Aid  
Her Sister Poetry's declining Head.  
Show but a Mimick Ape, or French Buffoon,  
You to the other House in Shoals are gone,  
And leave us nere to tune our Crowds alone.<sup>2</sup>

The tone of the Epilogue seems to be more skilfully maintained and developed than that of the Prologue. There is a clever mixture of the light-hearted and the serious, and the tone moves from rebuke to exaggeration and satire as taste is seen to hold potent yet rapidly changing attractions:

Bells shall no more be rung, nor Graves be made.  
The Hearse and Six no longer be in Fashion,  
Since all the Faithful may expect Translation.  
What think you of the Project? I'm for trying,  
I'll lay aside these foolish Thoughts of Dying;  
Preserve my Youth and Vigour for the Stage,  
And be Translated in a good Old Age.<sup>3</sup>

Prologues and Epilogues were very often written in a different style from the play itself, but rarely is the

1 Prologue, ll.40-45.

2 Epilogue, ll.22-26.

3 Ibid., ll.36-42.

discrepancy so successful as here. The joke which begins the Epilogue is very effective:

The Spleen and Vapours, and this doleful Play,  
Have Mortify'd me to the Height to day,  
That I am almost in the Mortal Mind,  
To Dye indeed, and leave you all behind.<sup>1</sup>

The audience is taken by surprise with the seriousness of the ensuing message, even though it is couched by seemingly innocuous language. It is a good touch that the speaker should start with her own projected death when the real intention is to indicate the possibility of death to the theatre as a medium for serious drama.

### Structure

The most striking feature of the play is that each of the main characters has an opposite number. The play is constructed on a series of oppositions. Only the Step-Mother herself does not have a balancing number, and this is appropriate as she it is who sparks off the entire action of the play.

The basic situation is the competition of Artaxerxes and Artaban for the crown. Artemisa tries to engineer the events so that her son, Artaban, can gain the throne instead of the rightful heir, Artaxerxes, son of the king by his previous marriage. It is established early in the play whose point of view we are to adopt. The means Rowe employs recur in later plays, for they are based on integrity and attitudes towards religion. It is soon seen that the party supporting Artaban uses the wrong kind of diplomacy, which later comes to be seen as wicked scheming. Chief among these supporters is Mirza, a characteristic villain, who does not hesitate to use high ranking members of the state for his own selfish ends. Counterbalancing him is Memnon, a chief minister of state now disgraced, and of advanced age. He at first seems very

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<sup>1</sup> Epilogue, ll. 1-4.

like Mirza, but his integrity is soon established and his kindness apparent.

The other main strand in the drama is the search for love by the two young princes. Artaxerxes is in love with, and early in the play marries, Amestris, the daughter of Memnon. Artaban is in love with the daughter of Mirza, but she will not accept him, although he does not relent in his pursuit of her. She is in fact secretly in love with Artaxerxes, but recognising the claim of Amestris is not prepared to right her way. She accepts the marriage without bitterness, and is in fact the only person to render the hero practical aid when he is in danger at the end of the play.

There are, then, three pairs, a pair of princes, each with his hoped for father-in-law as advisor, and each loving the daughter of his advisor. Our sympathies are easily sign-posted, for we adopt the viewpoint that had Artaban been "right" Amestris would have accepted him. Character traits are not so important early in the play as the correct identification of the "good" and the "bad" characters.

The first act shows how Rowe presents the situation in the same terms of simple opposition. The first scene, between Mirza and Magas, reveals not only the customary background to the action, but also the "pretence" which they are on the point of practicing. Mirza damns himself by predicting the downfall of Magas, whom he uses but at the same time is not willing to assist. The second half of the act is concerned with the other party, and Artaxerxes and Memnon are given the chance to develop the opposite view of the Queen and her machinations. Just as Cleone's melancholy had been developed earlier, so here the attention fixes on Amestris who comes on stage in person. She, like her counterpart, is unhappy with present events; her melancholy is uppermost as she dreams of obscurity, but she steels herself for the hardships which she is sure that "Ambition" will bring.

It is a little ironic that Rowe should have complained so bitterly in the Prologue about the entertainments being presented on the stage, for it certainly appears that he is joining forces with this element in the third Act. The Song adds the sense of variety and slackens the tension, but it is hardly dramatically justifiable. This element is very deliberately introduced as a preparation for the scene in the Temple of the Sun later in the Act, and some dramatic effect is obtained from the latter. Music is traditionally the art of harmony and peace, and its juxtaposition with the vying and arguments of the two factions brings the confused priorities governing the actions of the characters to a head. Both music and religion are being profaned before our very eyes, just as the rightful heir to the throne is being out-maneuvred and cheated by his half-brother.

The total effect of the third Act is of chopiness; there are too many scenes, and they are not sufficiently linked.

The dramatic tension increases as the play progresses, and Rowe seems to gain a surer touch as he proceeds. Good contrast is maintained between haste and meditation, but it was rightly pointed out in the eighteenth century that there is rather too much action in the last act, culminating in a very weak ending. Memnon's suicide, as he throws himself head first into a wall just off stage is unnecessarily gory; it seems a rather unlikely action for an eighty year old, and although Rowe saves us from the sight of this, we are still shocked by it as the Queen describes the event. The dramatist does not seem to have been able to find a neat way of rounding off his play, for Artaban's lame comment that justice has been done in the end rings very false. He has certainly gained the crown after all, but not in the way in which he wished; he had campaigned to fight the succession out with Artaxerxes, and, instead of winning this battle, he finally comes to the throne through a ghastly series of murders and suicides.

Rowe appears to have been pandering to the popular taste for blood and horror as he first presents one of the ugliest scenes of attempted rape, and then caps it by killing off all but two of the cast. Pity and fear have been inculcated to the fullest degree, but there is nothing positive offered at the end. Artaban has achieved a measure of nobility in standing against his mother, but we know that he does not really deserve the throne. Despite Rowe's attempted justification of this in the Epistle Dedicatory, Poetic Justice has not been adhered to. The Step-Mother's ambition has not been thoroughly thwarted for she has gained her principal objective of seeing her son become king.

There is another problem at the end of the play, too. We are told of the increasing public riot and disorder in the final act as the people support the cause of Artaxerxes. Artaban is reasonably confident that he will be able to gain common support, but there is no evidence to suggest that this will happen. What, then, are we left with at the close of the play? All the good characters are dead. The wrong son is on the throne. Public dissatisfaction might indicate that even his crown is in a precarious position. The woman who has caused all the trouble is still alive, though subdued. All the forces of hope are dead, and even the misguided representative of religion has been lynched by the mob. The view seems to be wholly pessimistic. It is likely that Rowe was not totally aware of this, and that his only purpose was to close the play as quickly as he could during the final act. Excitement is present to a very large degree, but because the viewpoint is wholly negative it is something short of satisfactory.

The basic weakness in the climax is structural. There is no balance to the evil actions and the terrible happens too quickly. Early in the play Rowe was often in control



but the central and final acts indicate that he had certain lapses in consistency, mainly because he did not, at this stage, fully work out the consequences of what he was presenting through the structure of the play.

### Dramatic Action

The play opens with universal images of darkness. The king's death is imminent, and Magas's description of the dying king mixes regal majesty with the sense of deep regret and even despair which at first seems fitting, but which later is ironical in view of the scheming for his successor, the focus of the interest throughout the rest of the play. Good contrast is obtained between the due regret of Magas and the brusque way in which Mirza suggests his future plans:

Mag. The balls of sight, dim and depriv'd of motion,  
Sparkled no more with that Majestick fire,  
At which ev'n Kings have trembled; but had lost  
Their common useful office, and were shaded  
With an eternal night; struck with a sight,  
That shew'd me humane nature faln so low,  
I hastily retir'd.

Mir. He dyes too soon;  
And fate if possible must be delay'd;  
The thought that labours in my forming brain,  
Yet crude and immature, demands more time.<sup>1</sup>

His wish to see the king live longer yet has nothing to do with his duty or respect to the crown. His motives are entirely selfish.

The people concerned in the plan are revealed almost immediately, and there is more than a hint that Mirza is going to cloak his actions under the mantle of religion, a sure way for the dramatist to indicate the falsely scheming nature of his designs:

The yearly Feast  
Devoted to our glorious God the Sun,  
Hides their designs under a holy veil;  
And thus religion is the mask for Faction.

<sup>1</sup> I, i, p.1.

But let their Guardian Genji still be watchful,  
 For if they chance to nod, my waking vengeance  
 Shall surely catch the moment to destroy 'em.<sup>1</sup>

One of the objects of Mirza's scheming is to get rid of the hero, Artaxerxes, in order to ravish the latter's fiancée. Mirza is full of grudges, against the king who was slow in giving him satisfaction when his brother had been killed by Memnon, and against Artaxerxes on two counts, first for refusing the hand of his own daughter, and second for avowing love for Amestris. It was the Queen who had been of service to him, by getting Memnon banished, since when Mirza thoroughly ingratiated himself with her. A neat character sketch is given of the Queen:

Cautious in good success, in bad unshaken;  
 Still arm'd against the uncertain turns of Chance,  
 'Untoucht by any weakness of her Sex,  
 Their Superstition, Pity, or their Fear;  
 And is a Woman only in her Cunning.<sup>2</sup>

Mirza constantly refers to the place of fate in events, as do other characters later. The first example of this is in connexion with her cleverness in enticing the king to marry her:

Certainly Fate,  
 Or somewhat like the force of Fate were in it;  
 And still whene'er remembrance sets that scene  
 Before my eyes, I view it with Amazement.<sup>3</sup>

Mirza embarks on a set description of that scene which he has just recalled to mind. The movement of the verse is slow and controlled, but after an interruption by Magas the tone changes as the language becomes sensuous. The king's delight in excess in the bridal bed is well described, but Rowe's conventional and sometimes Puritanical views on the supremacy of reason over the emotions sets this piece as a deliberate attempt to lower the King and Queen in our estimation:

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1 I, i, p.2.

2 I, i, p.2.

3 Ibid.

In short,  
 After some faint resistance, like a Bride  
 That strives awhile, tho' eager for the bliss,  
 The furious King enjoy'd her,  
 And to secure their Joys, a snare was laid  
 For her unthinking Lord, in which he fell. <sup>1</sup>

Because Artemisa's plans to secure the throne for her son are juxtaposed with this description of her excessive sexual indulgence, they are themselves undercut by Rowe's viewpoint of her character. Artemisa appears to appreciate the difficulties involved in the scheme, and Mirza reveals himself as a characteristically devious villain, in a play whose framework depends much upon heroic values, by declaring that Artaban's claim to the throne is not fraught with insurmountable difficulties:

The wise and active conquer difficulties,  
 By daring to attempt 'em; sloth and folly  
 Shiver and shrink at sight of toil and hazard,  
 And make th'impossibility they fear. <sup>2</sup>

Because Mirza is seen to some extent archetypal, he adopts the very characteristics of a hero, using them as skilfully as a hero, but for base motives and towards base ends. In this sort of play the gods confirm the "rightness" or "wrongness" of the characters. They only prosper if the gods view them favourably, and those who fail do so because they lack the essential favour of the deities. Mirza is clearly deluded as he scorns those who are working for "right" ends with genuinely heroic attributes:

Valiant Fools  
 Were made by Nature for the wise to work with;  
 They are the Tools, and 'tis the Sport of Statesmen,  
 When Heroes knock their knotty Heads together,  
 And fall by one another. <sup>3</sup>

Mirza utters views characteristic of the villain of an heroic drama and there can be little doubt as to the nature of the action to follow; it will be a struggle between the strong-minded, judged according to the rules of heroic conduct, and though Rowe may complicate the issue of motives, these

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1 I, i, p.4.

3 I, i, p.5.

2 Ibid.

will be readily apparent to the audience, and the final outcome will establish the favour of the gods. Mirza has a very low opinion of mankind as he continues to make disparaging remarks on the nature of human friendship, and he urges the priest on to try to renew his ties with Memnon, thus making things far easier for future trickery. His terms are still partly religious as he moves smoothly into the sort of appeal which will gain the favour of the priest. He says that a false show of friendship will "varnish o're our Arts/ And sanctifie dissembling." Mirza's enthusiastic greeting of his friend who has now agreed to assist him reveals the power which he holds and is prepared to share. It also, though, contains a hint of the scheming plans of priests in general as they aspire to stations of high eminence:

My worthy Priest. Still be my Friend, and share  
The utmost of my Power, by greatness rais'd.  
Thou like the God thou serv'st, shall shine aloft,  
And with thy Influence rule the under World.<sup>1</sup>

This rather long opening scene is followed by a soliloquy by the Queen on the subject of weakness in women. It is a set piece, though she appears to exhibit no sign of weakness at all as she confesses how she managed to shake off the control of her husband.

Mirza's public face is evident in his conversation with the Queen, and this is produced by elevated language:

The Thoughts of Princes dwell in sacred Privacy,  
Unknown and venerable to the Vulgar;  
And like a Temples innermost recesses,  
None enters, to behold the hallow'd Mysteries,  
Unbidden of the God that dwells within.<sup>2</sup>

This mixture of elaborate compliment and self-deprecation is the language of diplomacy, but it also acts as a disguise for Mirza's true feelings. He will not show his true nature even to his ally.

<sup>1</sup> I, i, p.6.

<sup>2</sup> I, i, p.7.

When the conversation turns to Mirza's daughter, he exhudes gratitude, for the Queen has decided that Artaban is to be given in marriage to her. The description of Cleone's behaviour affords Rowe the opportunity to reveal his powers of lyricism in a fine speech. The movement of the verse is measured, and stately:

A melancholy Girl;  
Such in her Infancy her Temper was ...  
Her Closet and the Gods share all her time,  
Except when (only by some Maid attended)  
She seeks some shady solitary Grove,  
Or by the gentle murmers of some Bróok  
Sits sadly listning to a Tale of Sorrow,  
Till with her tears she swell the narrow stream.<sup>1</sup>

The influence of Shakespeare can be found here as the action slows for a memorable meditation. This sort of speech announces to the audience that Cleone's melacholy is the result of a profound sadness, most probably brought about by frustrated love. The pattern is conventional enough, but Rowe has endowed it with a beauty and poignancy which prevents it from being merely hackneyed.

The Queen responds to this in a predictable manner, reminiscent of the way Gertrude reacted to the melancholy sadness of Ophelia. In terms of conventional imagery the Queen hopes that her son will liven the girl to new interest in life:

That eating Canker Grief, with wastful spight,  
Preys on the Rosie bloom of Youth and Beauty:  
But love shall chase away these clouds of sadness;  
My Son shall breathe so warm a gale of sighs,  
As shall dissolve those Isicles, that hang  
Like death about her heart.<sup>2</sup>

When the Queen leaves Mirza alone, he returns to the subject of the previous scene with Magas. He confesses that the priest's action is liable to bring about his defeat, but is quite unconcerned. If Magas fails to form a liason with

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1 Ibid.

2 I, i, p. 8.

Memnon, then the priest will be entirely in his power. He expected failure but urged him on to it so that he could more easily manipulate him.

This part of the Act is rather choppy. Rowe finds difficulty in managing a smooth transition between the two halves of the Act, and in the end dismisses Mirza only by making him refer back to something which has already been dealt with.

The same compliment which we saw Mirza using returns with Memnon. The two men are roughly correspondent. This time it is used to gain the favour of a prospective son-in-law. Again action is in the air as Memnon questions why they have waited so long to do something about the situation in view of the radiant majesty of Artaxerxes. All those who have been on stage earlier are put in their rightful place:

Now basely aw'd by factious Priests and Women,  
They [The crowd] start at Majesty, and seem surprised,  
As if a God had met them. <sup>1</sup>

The King and Queen are described in powerful terms which reveal once again Rowe's powers when he has an extended passage of description:

And all her Sex's Cunning, wrought the King,  
Old, obvious to her Arts, decay'd in greatness,  
Dead to the Memory of what once he was,  
Just crawling on the Verge of wretched Life,  
A Burthen to himself and his friends Pity;  
Among his other Failings, to forget  
All that a Father and a King could owe  
To such a Son as you were. <sup>2</sup>

A stylised description of Artaban follows, but those qualities singled out by Memnon for possible commendation are sharply deflated by the young Prince:

Be that his Glory,  
Let him with Pedants hunt for Praise in Books,  
Pore out his Lire amongst the lazy Gown men,  
Grow old and vainly proud in fancy'd Knowledge. <sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> I, i, p.9.

<sup>3</sup> I, i, p.10.

The valorous man's life is to be spent in action. Any show of bookishness is an open proclamation of weakness to the cause to which one's life should be devoted.

The claims of love in a heroic society are well set forth by Amestris:

Love gives a Right superior ev'n to Nature;  
Or Love is Nature, in the noblest meaning,  
the cause and the preserver of the World.<sup>1</sup>

thus love is placed high on the scale of values, and this is to some extent a justification for the prominent place of love in the play. The following remarks by Amestris on ambition are set to contrast with those on the same subject by Artaxerxes shortly after the young woman's entrance. Artaxerxes had said:

Ambition! The Desire of active Souls,  
that pushes 'em beyond the Bounds of Nature,  
And elevates the Hero to the Gods.  
But see! my Love, your beauteous Daughter comes,  
And ev'n Ambition sickens at the Sight.<sup>2</sup>

Amestris sees this same Ambition as the chief danger to her happiness:

Curst Ambition!  
Why dost thou come to trouble my Repose,  
who have even from my Infancy disclaimed thee? <sup>3</sup>

She has no interest in the possible greatness of position which may await her, because she knows that it must be dogged by misfortune. She utters a cogent plea for peace and quiet away from all the clamour of the struggles for power. It is traditionally the lover or the hero who wishes for this escape, but in this case the sincerity is achieved through Rowe's poise in the verse:

Had Fate allotted us some obscure Village,  
Where only blest with Life's Necessities,  
We might have pass'd in Peace our happy Days,

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> I, i, pp. 10-11.

Free from the Cares which Crowns and Empires bring;  
 There no Step-Mother, no Ambitious Brother,  
 No wicked Statesman, would with Impious Arts,  
 Have strove to wrest from us our small Inheritance,  
 Or stir the simple Hinds to noisie Faction.<sup>1</sup>

The hint of the pastoral in Amestris's desire for a rural life of retreat is taken up effectively here in the reference to the common people as "simple Hinds". There might be a hint of danger to the hero in his response to this appeal:

The Joy of Conquest, and Immortal Triumph,  
 Honour and Greatness, all that fires the hero  
 To high Exploits, and everlasting Fame,  
 Grows vile in sight of thee.<sup>2</sup>

The true hero should be able to avoid this sort of temptation. There is no doubt of his nobility, but this, in the terms of the heroic code, is a sign of weakness. The scene ends with an affirmation by both of the cause to which they should be devoted. Amestris is worried about the possible consequences of the struggle for the throne, but resolves to pray. The final speech of the Act, by Artaxerxes, in verse to round things off neatly, consists of high-flown heroic verse:

Our glorious Sun, the source of Light and Heat,  
 Whose Influence cheers the World he did create,  
 Shall smile on thee from his Meridian Skies,  
 And own the kindred Beauties of the Eyes;  
 Thy Eyes, which, could his own fair Beams decay,  
 Might shine for him, and bless the World with Day.<sup>3</sup>

The second Act begins with the interview between Magas and Memnon, but from the start Memnon shows that flattery will get the other man nowhere:

Flattery! the meanest kind of base dissembling,  
 And only us'd to catch the grossest fools:  
 Besides, it stains the honour of thy function,  
 Which like the Gods thou serv'st, should be sincere.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I, i, p.11.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> I, i, p.12.

<sup>4</sup> II, i, p.12.



Magas was not prepared for this strong counter-attack. He went to see Memnon because of his own great confidence of success. Throughout the play he is unaware of the effect which his actions will have, though he always seems to be acting in good faith, Memnon is well aware of the value of his past actions, and he is rightly sceptical of ever gaining the favour of the crown again. His actions are presented in terms of seasonal labour, unregarded by the decayed hierarchy:

Full fifty Years harvest in rugged Steel,  
I have endur'd the biting Winters Blast,  
And the severer Heats of parching Summer;  
While they who loll'd at home on lazy Couches  
Amidst a Crew of Harlots and soft Eunuchs,  
Were at my Cost secure in Luxury.<sup>1</sup>

Magas himself rather unwittingly suggests that there can be some weaknesses in the kingship:

Unbounded Power, and height of Greatness, give  
To Kings that Lustre, which we think divine;  
The Wise who know 'em, know they are but Men,  
Nay, sometimes weak ones too; the Crowd indeed,  
Who kneel before the Image, not the God,  
Worship the Deity their Hands have made.<sup>2</sup>

Magas goes on to put forward the claims of Artaban to the throne, and not surprisingly provokes the worst of Memnon's anger:

I tell thee, envious Priest, should the just Gods  
Require severe Account of thy past Life,  
And charge remembrance to dispose thy Crimes,  
In rank and hideous Order to thy View,  
Horror and Guilt of Soul would make thee Mad.<sup>3</sup>

This powerful language ensures that the dramatic tension during this argument is kept at a high level. After Magas has departed with his failure Memnon delivers a speech full of invective at the corruption of those of the clergy like Magas:

Revenge your selves, your violated Altars,  
That those who with unhallow'd Hands approach,  
May tremble at your Justice.<sup>4</sup>

1 II, i, p.14.

2 II, i, pp.14-15.

3 II, i, pp.15-16.

4 II, i, p.16.

The second scene of the Act begins with strong words, and the strength is aided by relatively short speeches. Contempt is present everywhere, no more powerfully displayed than by Artaban who is seen as a very violent young man, whose eagerness has to be rebuked by the Queen whose schemes will only prosper if all is done with calm in the cunning. There is a touch of edge in the Prince's agreement to be more calm:

I obey;  
And willingly resign th'unmanly Task,  
Words are indeed your Province.<sup>1</sup>

All is not perfect harmony even in the pretender's camp. The Queen delivers her threat quietly, but we are compelled to take note of her promise: "A Woman's Vengeance waits 'em."

Artemesa schemes in her ensuing interchange that Artaxerxes should be provoked onto the attack, and her desire is quickly rewarded as the Prince is not in a mood to accept insult calmly. By bringing Memnon into the conversation she gets a little more than she bargained for. He does not take being called a "hoary Ruffian" too kindly, and he defends his past conduct eloquently. The Queen accuses him of the same sort of deception which is her particular speciality:

Didst thou not meet him with dissembled Friendship,  
Hiding the Rancour of the Heart in Smiles ...<sup>2</sup>

The climax of the scene comes when Artaxerxes wishes to see his dying father, and is forbidden entry. In a fine change of harsh words with his mother, Artaxerxes forces her to reveal her true sense of grievance:

Hast thou not  
With thy false Arts poyson'd his Peoples Loyalty?  
What meant thy pompous Progress thro' the Empire?  
Thy vast Profusion to the Factionous Nobles,  
Whose Interest sways the Croud, and stirs up Mutiny? <sup>3</sup>

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1 II, ii, p. 17.

2 II, ii, p. 19.

3 II, ii, p. 20.

Artemisa's chief motive, then, in wishing him to be cheated of the crown is very human jealousy -- jealousy of his popularity with all sectors of the people, not only the nobles but also the common people whose affection Artaxerxes has managed to gain in no mean proportions. This explains why such care is being taken. The Queen must fear that if the people hear of her plans too early they may intercede on this son's behalf. Provoked by Artaxerxes's curse that his mother was unfaithful Artaban jumps to his sword, and the two Princes both exhibit their claims to honour. Somewhat surprisingly Rowe does allow Artaban a measure of nobility. He does not deny his half-brother's claims, but pits his strength, and not his right, against the legal claim:

Proud and Ambitious Prince, I dare like thee,  
All that is great and glorious. Like thine,  
Immortal Thirst of Empire fires my Soul,  
My Soul, which of superior Power impatient,  
Disdains thy Eldership.<sup>1</sup>

Artaxerxes responds with the traditional heroic insult by the elder brother:

O Energy divine of great Ambition,  
That can inform the Souls of beardless Boys,  
And ripen 'em to Men in spite of Nature.<sup>2</sup>

But nevertheless Artaban's declaration to fight for the succession stands, and is, in the circumstances, a reasonable result. The two Princes are well-matched, for they are both men of heroic seriousness, wishing to leave all rancour as far out of the question as possible until after the death of their father.

The tension of this powerful scene is broken by a long speech of Magas, who describes the forthcoming festival in the Temple of the Sun. He is basically a simple soul, very much delighting in all the pageantry that such a Festival

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<sup>1</sup> II, ii, p. 21.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

offers. Mirza, however, sees here the opportunity for further devilment as he projects the slaughter of the rightful heir during the ceremonies. He is cleverly put in the wrong by his reaction to Magas's scruples:

Art thou (who dost inspire their Oracles,  
And teach 'em to deceive the easie Crowd  
In doubtful phrase) afraid of thy own Gous? ...  
The Gods shall certainly befriend our Cause,  
At least not be our Foes<sup>1</sup>

He has revealed the corruption of the religious set-up, but he has equated this with his own corruption. Magas has true insight into the popular supporters of this religion when he says:

But more I fear the superstitious Vulgar,  
Who tho' unknowing what Religion means,  
Yet nothing moves 'em more than zealous Rage  
For its Defense, when they believe it violated.<sup>2</sup>

Mirza ignores the import of this message, and merely smoothes matters with the priest whom he dismisses as basically overcome by misguided scruples. Mirza's speech which closes the Act moves into a loftier realm of rhetoric. In an epic comparison of Memnon to the hunted lion Rowe introduces a pastoral element ("while the surrounding Swains at pleasure wound him") before finishing on heroic imagery of the statesman who finally cheats the fighter of his expected spoils.

Pastoral retirement was associated with Cleone when she was mentioned in the first Act, and so it is with some dramatic justification that Rowe begins the third Act with a picture of her melancholy retreat with her maid, as the song, a rather stilted pastoral lyric, is heard. The song warns lest the maid should court despair, and at first it appears that Cleone has not taken enough notice of this. Cleone is full of tears and sighs, indeed the prototype of most of Rowe's later heroines. The maid has a fruitless task

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<sup>1</sup> II, ii, p. 23.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

cheering her up, for Cleone is aware of the presence of love in every feature of daily life:

In vain we hope by flying to avoid it  
In Courts and Temples it pursues us still,  
And in the loudest Clamours will be heard.<sup>1</sup>

Its presence in "Courts and Temples" is one of the themes of the play, and we cannot but recognise that Cleone has a measure of courage in escaping; after all, this is what two of the other lovers have said that wished they could do. Cleone agrees that it was because she gave in to love too easily at the start that she faces these problems now, but this is no encouragement to her. The sensual side of love is not neglected, for she describes the feelings she had when she was first in love. She is also able to realise that her self-pity will do her no good, and she finally dismisses all her complaints in impressive terms:

But whither does my roving fancy wander?  
These are the sick dreams of fantastick Love.  
So in a Calenture, the Sea man fancies  
Green Fields and Flowry Meadows on the Ocean,  
Till leaping in, the wretch is lost for ever.<sup>2</sup>

This is a good example of Rowe's upper-middle flight of poetry. Terse, highly imagistic, elevated, yet remarkably relevant, it conveys a thoughtful dilemma well. When Artaban arrives to pursue his love suit once again, Cleone is able to step out of the introversion to attack. She is seductively attractive as she once again refuses his advances with a comparison of her own feelings to the general state of mankind:

Do but survey  
The miserable State of humane kind,  
where wretches are the general Encrease,  
And tell me if there be not Cause for Grief.<sup>3</sup>

This is a human touch; when in great distress it is helpful to feel that one is merely a reflection of a universal state.

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1 III, i, p. 25.

2 III, i, p. 27.

3 III, i, p. 28.

There is good use of irony in her reply to Artaban's plea:

Oh, name not Love, the worst of all Misfortunes,  
The common Ruin of my easie Sex,  
Which I have sworn for ever to avoid,  
In Memory of all those hapless Maids,  
That Love has plung'd in unexampled Woes.<sup>1</sup>

Even more ironical is Artaban's certainty that she has never had any experience of matters of love. Artaban is adamant in his demand:

I swear I would prefer thee, O Cleone  
With all thy Scorn and cold Indifference,  
Would choose to languish and to aye for thee,<sup>2</sup>  
Much rather than be blest, and live for them.<sup>2</sup>

In a way this scene is appealing in its pathetic deadlock. Rowe has not done anything new here, but he has presented very conventional material in quite pleasing colours. At least this peaceful struggle is a good contrast to the more bitter variety which we saw earlier.

Artaxerxes's tremendous excitement shortly after his marriage is once again a contrast to what went before, but his ecstasy savours something of that of the King which was related at the beginning of the play. Rowe does not hesitate, in this play at least, to represent the sexual delights of love. Amestris responds to his "furious Bliss" with "chilling Fears" continuing the careful balance of emotions. Artaxerxes is at times rather irritatingly optimistic, but his attempts to parry his wife's remarks are unsuccessful for she reiterates her fears. They are as yet unspecified -- just fear of "the malice of our fate" and the dread of separation. Her greatest concern is that her husband will either grow tired of her or forget her. This gives rise to another fine universal statement about the nature of love:

Love shall survive, immortal as our beings,  
And when at once we climb yon azure Skies,

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<sup>1</sup> III, i, p. 28.

<sup>2</sup> III, i, p. 29.

We will be shown to all the blest above,  
 For the most constant pair that e're deserv'd  
 To mingle with their Stars.<sup>1</sup>

This is the hope of most heroic lovers; they alone have the power to be fully constant. The sentimentality in some of the Prince's remarks is mawkish. The reference to his wife as "My soft complaining Fair" is not too happy, but worse is:

Oh thou delicious perfect Angel Woman.  
 Thou art too much for mortal sense to bear.<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps it is being a little over-sensitive to point to lines such as these, but Rowe does run the risk of failing to win sympathy by overstepping the mark, and verging on the trite and ludicrous.

So far in the Act the scenes have matched each other. Each Prince has been seen with the woman he loves, and the success of Artaxerxes and failure of Artaban might be seen as pointers to their relative merit.

Memnon enters full of heroic valour, as he wishes he could just fight one last battle for his son-in-law. Both men make a lot of the heroic deeds of the past, but their supreme confidence seems a little premature. There follows a very brief scene where the Queen and Mirza talk of the future events at the Temple. Mirza, in appearing to be rational, is in effect denying one part of the heroic code:

He'll be convinced that only fools would lose  
 A crown for notional Principles.  
 Honour is the unthinking soldier's Boast,  
 Whose dull Head cannot reach those finer Arts,  
 By which Mankind is governed.<sup>3</sup>

The Hymn to Light is full of rather dull conventional images, and pretentious phrases which sound most impressive but mean very little:

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1 III, 11, p. 31.

2 Ibid.

3 III, 11, p. 33.

What is the soul of Man but Light,  
 Drawn down from thy transcendent height?  
 What but an intellectual Beam?  
 A Spark of thy immortal Flame? <sup>1</sup>

This does have the effect of thoroughly deriding the religion of sun-worship, but it hardly justifies its inclusion here, for most people did not need to be told that worship of the sun was essentially a bad thing.

Mirza's hesitation is to achieve dramatic intensity, badly needed after the lapse during the Song, but it is not very well done. The language is forced and stilted, and melodramatic:

And now like Oyl my flaming Spirits blaze;  
 My Arteries, my Heart, my Brain is scorcht,  
 And I am all one fury. Feeble Mirza.  
 Can'st thou give way to dotage, and become  
 The jest of Fools? No! 'tis impossible:  
 Revenge shall rouse...<sup>2</sup>

Not that it is fear of what he has to do which has caused this -- apparently it is the thought of Amestris which has again sapped all his energy.

Some good short speeches follow as Magas is roused by the prophanation which is taking place within his Temple, and as Artaxerxes is captured by the guard. The language is again elevated a little more as the fate of the captives is lamented, and as Mirza cannot help but rub salt into the wounds, gloating over his success. First Memnon rails, and he is followed by Artaxerxes in a fine example of heroic rant:

Oh death to Greatness. Can we fall so low  
 To be the slavish objects of his Mirth?  
 Shall my just Rage and violated Honour  
 Play the Buffoon and Minister to laughter?  
 Down, down my swelling Heart, hide thy Resentments,  
 Nor prostitute the ruffled Majesty  
 Of injur'd Princes to the gazing Crowd.<sup>3</sup>

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1 III,iii, p.34.

2 III,iii, p.35.

3 III,iii, p.37.



It is Amestris even more than her husband who is prepared to meet true adversity with calmness. As long as they are to be together she will be his strength. Inserted here is a ghastly speech by Mirza which, one can imagine, might even have been met with hisses had the <sup>play</sup> kept the stage a little longer. He is a thorough villain, and as he watches their misfortunes, he can only think of his own desires:

With a malignant Joy my Ears drink in,  
Hear each Harmonious accent every glance,  
Goes to my Heart and stirs, alternate Motions  
Of Heat and Cold, a lazy Pleasure now  
Thrills all my Veins, anon Desire grows Hot,  
And my old Sinews shrink before the Flame.<sup>1</sup>

This ghastly effort is capped by an extremely beautiful, lyrical and melancholy utterance by Amestris. It is certainly both a "set-piece" and a "purple passage" but its quality is hardly matched by anything else by Rowe:

Since this is all our wretched Consolation,  
Let us indulge our Grief, till by long use,  
It grows Habitual, and we lose the Pain,  
Here, on the marble Pavement will we sit  
Thy Head upon my Breast; and if remembrance  
Of cruel Wrongs, shall vex thy noble Heart,  
The murmur of my Sighs shall charm the Tumult,  
And Fate shall find us Calm; nor will the Gods,  
Who here inhabit and behold our Sufferings,  
Delay to end our Woes in Immortality.<sup>2</sup>

The calm brought about by this does not last long as the Act ends in a great hurry of activity. Artaxerxes is once again taken captive, and Amestris is ushered off to Mirza's palace.

Mirza's closing soliloquy is not particularly effective. He foretells what is going to happen to those taken away, and once again repeats what he is going to do with, or rather to, Amestris. In villain fashion he is going to feast himself on the young woman and then cast her away until he needs to use her again. It would have been more effective to

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1 III,iii, p.38.

2 Ibid.

end on the parting of husband and wife. Rowe is certainly managing to instil the emotion of fear into the audience, but one feels that pity might have been a more fitting close to an Act which saw great diversity of action and concerns. Some sort of unifying element, differentiating between the principal elements in the action of the play seems to be called for at this juncture.

The fourth Act begins strongly with the general disorder which has set in among the populace. Artaban sees this as the just and direct result of his own actions, and a tone of gloom creeps into the language:

The sacred Power of Majesty, which should  
 Forbid, owns and protects the Violence;  
 It must not, shall not be; Who steals a Crown  
 By Arts like these, wears it unworthily.<sup>1</sup>

Artaban further grows in stature and nobility in the way in which he reacts to the news of his father's death, brought by his mother:

Peace to his Ashes, and Eternal Fame  
 Look back with Emulation on his Greatness,  
 And with Laborious Steps strive to ascend  
 That Height where once he sat.<sup>2</sup>

This is deliberately formalised, and its use of biblical reference is ironic in that the Queen is trying to deny the rightful inheritance to Artaxerxes. This is the turning point in the fortunes of the Queen; she is not always going to get her own way. She has no sense of emotion at her husband's death, but her son is too idealistic -- too heroic -- to see the death as a mere piece of good luck. Artaban feels that some sort of tribute is called for, and is not so corrupted that he neglects the common decencies of life.

Artaban is eager to take the throne, but only within the limits which his creed suggest are reasonable. While the

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<sup>1</sup> IV, i, p.40.

<sup>2</sup> IV, i, p.41.

capture of the throne would clearly be "wrong" the important considerations are several:

I cannot take a Crown upon these Terms  
Tho' even from your Hands: The Conscious Virtue  
That witnesses within my Breast for Glory,  
Points me to Greatness by the Paths of Honour,  
And urges me to do as a King ought,  
That would not wear his Purple as the Gift  
Of impious Treachery and base Deceit.<sup>1</sup>

Artaban must not only have the acclaim of the people; the gods must also be satisfied that his claim to the crown has in some measure been justified. There is no sense in which the Queen can be said to be in control here. She tries light insult, taunts, and more obvious scorn to impose her views, but these are met firmly but calmly. Her language is elevated from time to time as in the following passage:

In Battles with  
Uncertain Wings the wavering Goddess flies,  
And oft with partial hand bestows her Favour  
On Fools and Scull'd Heroes; seize her now  
While She is thine, or She is lost for Ever.<sup>2</sup>

This has no effect. Artaban's attack on her is on her sore point. She is very conscious of her superiority as a woman, and her son here casts doubts on her aptitude for the affairs of state. This is a good dramatic device, for the Queen is unable to see the very heavy sarcasm in Artaban's

The World would be well govern'd, should the God's  
Depute their Providence to Women's Care  
And trust them with the Fate of Kings and Empires.<sup>3</sup>

When her son has gone Artemisa unburdens her soul and utters her extreme ambition. It is her great sorrow that she might have to give way to a man. She has been able to control the actions and even the thoughts of the King, but now he is dead a worse threat has come to her command when her son displays the independence of his mind. Mirza as usual makes the best

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> IV, i, p.42.

<sup>3</sup> IV, i, p.44.

of an opportunity for devilment, and suggests that they should effect an early execution of the other faction. In almost innocuous fashion Rowe ends this scene with a brief command indicating once again the degeneracy of the Queen. In making her ask for her eunuch the dramatist is confirming our impression of her in even the most insignificant details.

Cleone in the next scene confirms her sensitivity to the sufferings of others in her concern for Amestris. Her confidante is very chary of allowing her mistress to put herself into any kind of danger, but Cleone's plan of campaign has been fully worked out. Cleone's soliloquy reveals the rest of the details of her plan. It is only inserted to give the audience details of future events, but it also heightens the pathos of the play, and is well contrasted to the previous scene. Her thoughts are wholly engaged on her helplessness; she cannot live to be happy with Artaxerxes and so death is the only solace. Rowe has managed to find an expedient way of furthering his plot at the same time as giving her nobility. She will be the instrument of the hero's liberation even though she herself cannot benefit by it.

Pathos is the key-note of the ensuing scene between the hero and Memnon, as they meditate on their hopeless plight. Even in the older man's growing acknowledgement of fatality there is suppressed violence and strength. He rails against his fate in language coming close to rant:

Shall a Dog tell me  
Thus didst thou once, and now thou art my Slave;  
My Foot shall spurn thee, tread upon thy Neck,  
And trample in the Dust thy Silver Hairs?  
Shall I not rather choak? Hold in my Breath?  
Or smear some Wall or Pillar with my Brains?<sup>1</sup>

This is so near to the traditional language of rant in a state of frustration that we do not really pay much attention to the words themselves. In fact Rowe is preparing us for the old

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<sup>1</sup> IV, iii, p.48.

man's horrible suicide at the end. This is interesting on two counts, first that the end is foreseen by the dramatist and not a sudden inspiration, and second, that Rowe is conforming to one of the often used heroic devices of preparing the audience for the main events in advance, so that our concern is not primarily with the events themselves, but with the manner of execution. One might object that this particular instance is neglected because of its context, but it is clear that even this early in his career Rowe intended us to pay more attention to the content of the speeches than was often the case in this sort of play.

Melodrama often goes hand in hand with rant and this scene is no exception. Artaxerxes is perilously near melodrama once or twice, and his comments on Amestris are inserted for their value in provoking tears:

Was she not  
Forc'd from my panting Bosom (yet I live!)  
Ev'n on our Bridal Day? Then, when our Flames  
Were kindly joyn'd, and made but one desire...  
To lose her then! Oh! -----  
And yet you bid me think of her no more? <sup>1</sup>

Memnon discloses the fact that Mirza is only interested in raping Amestris, and this provokes yet another strongly worded outburst from the prince, and the scene is invested with a further example of the domestic nature of the dilemma of the play. Cleone's entrance with the "lanthorn", appropriately used for dramatic -- even melodramatic -- effect, begins a most effectively executed scene. It is still pathetic, but there is good psychological realism in the men's doubt and relentless questioning of their visitor's honesty and motivation.

Gloom soon gives way to an atmosphere of distrust,

Ha! as I live a Boy! a blushing Boy!  
Thou wert not form'd sure for a Murderer's Office.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> IV, iii, pp.48-49.

<sup>2</sup> IV, iii, p.50.

Cleone's "Gleam of Light" assumes symbolic importance as it is first of all seen as possible salvation, but the mention of Mirza's name dispels all hopeful interpretations of the purposes of the visitor. The suspicion is, of course, naturalistic enough, for by normal standards Cleone's intentions are extraordinary.

Rowe takes the fullest advantage possible of this encounter, by letting Artaxerxes doubt the fact that the girl's "mistress" would still wish him well even after he had refused to marry her. Thus irony and pathos together create one of the dramatist's most tense and exciting scenes. Cleone's suicide, to try to convince Artaxerxes that she is honest in her request, is well portrayed, and the ensuing words of the dying maid are full of self-sacrifice:

May every God assist and guard your Flight;  
And oh when all your Hopes of Life and Glory  
Are Crown'd with just Success; will you be good,  
And think with Pity on the lost Cleone.<sup>1</sup>

Her life closes with gratitude that her beloved prince has uttered kind words to her. She will be remembered, and this is all she had hoped for. There is a touch of the over-sentimental as Artaxerxes says:

The Iron Hand of Death is on her Beauties,  
And see like Lillies nipp'd with Frost they languish.<sup>2</sup>

Yet one feels that these words are justified -- and the nature of the accompanying sentiment. It is the most difficult thing to portray innocent honesty well, and Rowe has been successful in this case. In later plays he relies more heavily on the rather mawkish kind of tear-jerking, and nowhere does he quite so simply convey this very exacting kind of feeling. The high quality of the verse is maintained to the very end of the Act, for Artaxerxes finishes with a majestic statement:

On one fix'd Day in each returning Year,  
Cypress and Myrtle for thy Sake I'll wear,

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<sup>1</sup> IV, iii, p.53.

<sup>2</sup> IV, iii, p.54.

Ev'n my Amestris thy hard Fate shall mourn,  
 And with fresh roses Crown thy Virgin urn.  
 Till in Elysium blest thy gentle Shade  
 Shall own my Vows or Sorrow justly paid.<sup>1</sup>

So at the end, this scene has turned from gloom and decay to hope and brightness with the imagery of light and flowers. Nor is the religious aspect of the play neglected, for the final confident hope is that the dead maiden will experience something of paradise, albeit a pagan one.

The final busy Act begins with the two schemers in another recapitulation scene where we are reminded of the general public disorder, but Magas has some good insight:

Arm! Arm! they Cry, Religion is no more,  
 Our Gods are slighted, whom if we revenge not  
 War, Pestilence and Famine will ensue,  
 And Universal ruin swallows all.<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, the affront to religion, not the dishonest dealings of the pretenders, is what does provoke the people; this emphasises the particular interest of Rowe in a time when the insults to religion may not have sparked off as strong a protest as the dramatist might have liked to see. This element is given further emphasis when Mirza finally dismisses religion:

'Tis a most apt Amusement for a Crowd,  
 They'll gaze, and gather round the gaudy Shew,  
 And quite forget the Thoughts of Mutiny.<sup>3</sup>

Yet for once Mirza has entirely misunderstood the crowd, and his final "May all your Gods assist you", with its sneering ridicule, becomes truly ironic at the end.

The next scene, where Mirza tries to entice Amestris to his bed, and finally begins to rape her, is full of hideous and ghastly speeches. It may be that Rowe is going too far. He has already fully developed the atrocities of the old statesman, and this scene adds little. It develops fear in the audience, but its insertion is not, perhaps, dramatically

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> V, i, p. 55.

<sup>3</sup> V, i, p. 56.

justifiable. It does, however, afford the playwright ample opportunity to display the "fireworks" of language, for the tension is high throughout the scene, and the speeches both strong and powerful. There are also one or two fine examples of dramatic irony in Mirza's utterances, for example:

I wage not War with fair ones;  
But wish you would efface those ugly Thoughts,  
That live in your Remembrance to perplex you;  
Let Joy, the native of your Soul return,  
And Love's gay God sit smiling in your Eyes.<sup>1</sup>

Rowe excels in imagistic language here, with a great variety of metaphors and similes which, although conventional, add to the potency of the contrast between Mirza, the would-be lover, and Mirza, the evil, Machiavellian schemer, whom we saw before. His best attempt to put his feelings of "love" into words debases the whole system of conventional, courtly compliment:

Frame not thy lovely Mouth then to Blaspheme  
Thy great Creator, thou art his, and made for  
His more peculiar Service; thy bright Eyes,  
Thy moist red Lip, thy rising snowy Bosom,  
Thy every Part was made to furnish Joy,  
Ev'n to a riotous Excess of Happiness;  
Oh give me but to taste thy blissful Charms,  
And take my Wealth, my Honour, Power, take all,  
All, All for Recompence.<sup>2</sup>

We are aware that the greater part of this is a lie. From the beginning of this quoted passage we know that Mirza's advances are built upon sham, for he renounced the very religion he now appeals to not five minutes before. The keynote to his behaviour is in "riotous excess of Happiness". This sort of phraseology has been used twice before in the play, and is associated with disreputable behaviour. Amestris is almost hysterical in her replies to all this, for she several times cries out for vengeance, while recognising that there is little that she can do to stave off her attacker. Mirza's tone abruptly changes when he sees that she is not going to give in to his desires, and

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<sup>1</sup> V, ii, p.57.

<sup>2</sup> V, ii, p.59.



he throws insults at her as he announces his intention to use force. Their fight is full of "rough and tumble" but the sense of climax and tension does not let up. In the end she is able to break away from his lecherous advances in time to stab him. This end to the action comes as an immediate relief, and the tension drops sharply as Mirza's words are almost humorous:

Oh Ideot, Ideot! to be caught so poorly;  
Where are thy fine Arts now? Unravell'd all,  
Mangl'd and cut to Pieces by a Girl!  
Oh Shame of Wisdom!

The entry of the guard is rather engineered. His reason for entering is to give the news that the prisoners have escaped and that Mirza's daughter is dead. Mirza's dying concern, however, is not with his daughter, for he says that the "Death of my Revenge" is much more important. Part of this is that Amestris should be killed by his own hand, and she meets her end as she is held down by Orchanes. It is a good touch that Mirza should die incoherent, not having had any time to give thought to his own death because he has been too busy trying to bring about the extermination of his enemies. Thus he is not able to "form one Thought/That pleases" him about his own end.

Amestris is not dead yet; she struggles off stage to look for her husband as he himself walks on the other side of the stage. This could hardly be described as good management, and Rowe falls into the trap of confusion at this point by allowing too much to happen in too short a space of time.

When Memnon sees the body of his old rival he is moved to a touch of sardonic humour in;

Damnation then is now to him,  
And if there be one deeper Pit of Sepulchre,  
One Plague above the rest in those dark Regions,  
He as the most abandon'd Dog may claim it,  
And vie for Preference with Devils themselves.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> V, ii, p.61.

<sup>2</sup> V, ii, p.64.

This is particularly effective as they see the dying Amestris coming towards them at this moment. Artaxerxes realises that there is now no future for him with his wife so savagely killed, and after he has lamented his fate, been offered temporary cheer by the dying maid, he adopts a tone of stoicism. There is no hope left for him, but this does not lead to a great tirade on his fate. Indeed Rowe has managed to maintain a calm and strength in his hero's suffering which makes the scene memorable not for its violence or excess, but for its heroic nobility and calm. Seeing that Memnon has been so stunned by the sight that he is no longer fully aware of what is happening, Artaxerxes stabs himself in order to avail himself "Of Death, the gentlest -- surest way to Peace." This leads directly to one of the most poignant moments of the play:

[Memnon stands looking on the Bodies some time,  
and then speaks.]  
Yet will I gaze! Yet! Tho' my Eyes grow stiff  
And turn to Steel or Marble; here's a sight  
To bless a Father! These! These were your Gifts,  
Ye Bounteous Gods, you'll spare my Thanks for 'em.<sup>1</sup>

One can imagine how effective this would be in the theatre. Gone are all the passages of rant and here is a slow, calm, yet bewildered speech by a once-valiant warrior, suddenly become a very old man. The thoughts of battle recur to him as he gazes on the sight, and involved in a memory of bygone days he rushes off stage. This is, perhaps, the most satisfactory way to regard this scene. If the suicide, as the eighty-year old rushes head-first into a wall, is taken in this way, then it might be satisfactory. At its face-value, as suggested at the beginning of this chapter, it is wildly extravagant, and uncalled for. There is the hint, which has been pointed out, that Rowe intended the old man to be out of his right mind. If this is the case, then we might be wrong in accusing the dramatist of a gross lapse of taste.

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<sup>1</sup> V, ii, p.66. [The edition used here erroneously reads 60.]

The remaining few moments of the play are devoted to tidying up and commenting on the action. The Queen's sudden arrival is unexpected and unprepared. It is clear here that Rowe now wishes to finish the piece as soon as possible. Thus Artemisa is rather over-hasty in dismissing the deaths. But she is herself confronted with real danger when the Officer announces that there is a state of affairs outside comparable to civil war. Artemisa is supremely confident:

Let 'em come on,  
I cannot fear; this storm is rais'd too late,  
I stand secur'd of all I wish already.<sup>1</sup>

Artaban has been working to ensure the popular support of his own regime, as far as possible. His words to his mother are surprising, for they confirm his own resolve to be an independent agent, and show his marked distaste of his mother's behaviour:

Well has that Care been shewn,  
Have you not foully stain'd my sacred Fame?  
Look on that Scene of Blood; the dire Effects  
Of Cruel Female Arts. But oh what Recompence.  
What can you give me for my murder'd Love? <sup>2</sup>

The Queen leaves in great anger, but this does not dissuade the new King from ordering her to be kept under surveillance. Cleanthes recounts the death of Mages who was set upon by the crowd, and thus the list of the slaughtered is complete.

The final speech of the play, though, is hardly satisfactory. Artaban asks his companion to "confess/The Gods are Great and Just" yet the whole action of the play indicates the falseness of this. All the "good" characters are dead, either killed off, or stimulated to take their own lives. The only characters remaining are those of the "evil party". The Queen herself is still at large even though she has not exhibited a single redeeming feature throughout the entire action. Rowe has done his best to give Artaban some measure

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<sup>1</sup> V, ii, p. 68.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

of nobility, but one cannot help but remember that the "wrong" man is now on the throne. There is no solution to this. Rowe clearly wanted to send the audience away with "pity and fear", and to do this he wanted also to present catastrophic events at the finish. One does feel, though, that Artemisa, who had, after all, organised all the evil machinations, should have deserved considerably more harsh treatment. The final pair of triplets is designed to round the play off neatly, but the end is not satisfactory; Rowe has in his first play revealed many signs of future mastery, but the final Act is not really thought out well enough.

Let Honour, Truth and Justice crown my Reign,  
 Ne'er let my Kingly Word be giv'n in vain,  
 But ever sacred with my foes remain.  
 On these Foundations shall my Empire stand,  
 The Gods shall vindicate my just Command,  
 And guard that Power they trusted to my Hand.<sup>1</sup>

#### Postscript

Gildon<sup>2</sup> is not the best critic of Rowe because it is his intention to draw attention to as many faults as he can in order to dampen Rowe's reputation. He is, nevertheless, interesting as some sort of gauge to popular taste, for the things he singles out are all likely to have been suggested at the time in some degree or other. Many of the criticisms levelled against The Ambitious Step-Mother reflect the ideals of the day, and comments relating to the Unities and the use of source material, for example, can readily be deduced from a knowledge of contemporary criticism. What is most interesting are the general observations. Gildon (through the persona of Freeman in this instance) says:

In short, the Murdering of so many, shows the Weakness of the Poet's Genius; the Dagger being at hand to help out every Bungler. And it farther justifies the Reproach thrown on our Country by Rapin and some others, that we

<sup>1</sup> V, ii, p.69.

<sup>2</sup> A New Rehearsal, 1715.

Insularies are delighted with Blood in our Sports, and to our Shame, our Tragic Poets every Day confirm it; but none more, than your worthy Friend Mr. Bays.<sup>1</sup> [Rowe.]

This criticism seems to be justified. Indeed, it would seem that this is not the only example in the play of the dramatist pandering to popular taste. The songs in the third Act rather suggest that Rowe was not prepared, or had not enough confidence in his abilities as a dramatist, to purge the play of the sort of entertainment condemned in both Prologue and Epilogue.

The heroics of the play have been pointed out in the fore-going pages. They stretch into all aspects of the art — into characterisation, setting, action and even language, which itself depends on the upper-middle flight for the lyricism, rant for the more violent scenes, and frequent reference to and use of conventional imagery.

There are no really original creations among the dramatis personae, but Cleone is endowed with rather more life than the traditional scorned maid. Indeed, it is she who wins the majority of the audience's sympathy. Amestris is rather thinly developed; she is far less the heroine than her more unfortunate counterpart. Artaban and Artaxerxes are thoroughly conventional, though the older men, Memnon and the villain Mirza, are painted in stronger colours than usual.

The action is, on the whole, well regulated. By breaking the play up into different scenes (as is the case in the edition used for this study) the necessity for good connections between scenes is to some extent lessened. If, however, these divisions were not present, there would often be insufficient bridges between one part of the Act and the next. The first and fourth Acts are particularly well constructed, though this is not a consistent feature in the rest of the play. The breaks in the central Act are too conspicuous, and the result is choppiness. The final Act seems to be ill-managed. There

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<sup>1</sup> op. cit., p.35.

is too much business coming on top of itself, so that there is a certain amount of confusion. The last few moments of the play are very unsatisfactory, as has already been pointed out, and the sentiments at the close are out of keeping with the action of the whole.

There are touches of the pathetic and the sentimental, and from time to time a suggestion that the action is domestic. These elements are not as marked as in the rest of Rowe's dramatic output, but they can be seen as experiments in this sort of form. The play gives promise of greatness. At its best it is tightly knit, and carefully controlled. The heroic tends to argue with the sentimental from time to time, but there are examples of each working well. By the time of Ulysses Rowe has perfected the balance between these two elements, and the play succeeds in the study in a way that Rowe's first play does not. The plays in the heroic vein were never popular; the time for this sort of drama seems to have passed by the beginning of the eighteenth century. The way to Rowe's popular successes is not really through The Ambitious Step-Mother at all. For this first play is an heroic play. It is the sentimental and domestic that later audiences liked in Rowe. There is not enough moral message yet, and the sense of total negation with which we are left at the end is out of keeping with the way in which serious drama is to progress during the eighteenth century.

# ULYSSES.

A

## TRAGEDY.

As it is Acted at the

QUEEN'S THEATRE in the  
*Hay-Market.*

By Her MAJESTY's Sworn Servants.

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Written by N. ROWE, Esq;

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*Stultorum Regum & Populorum continet astus—  
Rursus quid Virtus, & quid Sapientia possit  
Utile proposuit. Nobis exemplar Ulysseni.*

Horat. Epist. Lib. I. Epist. 2.

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L O N D O N,

Printed for Jacob Tonson, within Grays-Inn Gate next  
Grays-Inn Lane. 1706.

CHAPTER III

Ulysses, first performed in 1705, is Rowe's most neglected play, and the nature of the few lines which have been written on it would indicate that this neglect is just. Despite the description on the title-page, it is a heroic play with a happy ending, and not a tragedy in the Shakespearian sense. As far as I can ascertain, only one study of the play has been made, and that in German at the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>1</sup> Allardyce Nicoll's comments may be seen as a typical attitude towards it:

One wonders, because it is again heroic in character, whether it was not penned at the time of Tamerlane and deferred until now. Portents and heroic love and and disguisings and rant are all in the olden style, with only a touch of pathetic sentiment.<sup>2</sup>

These qualities are certainly apparent, but the play should not so hastily be dismissed. The piece harks back to the days of heroic drama, but Rowe has brought his own particular strengths to bear. The rhetoric is nicely shaded, and the language moves from the colloquial to the elevated in not only frequent, but convincing, manner. Our attention is not focussed on the love affair of Telemachus and Semanthe, but on the actions of the hero. It seems to the present writer that F.S.Boas's remarks on the focus of interest in the play are not altogether true:

It is a highly equivocal close to the tortuous story of the love between her Semanthe and Telemachus, which on the stage goes far to "steal the show" from Ulysses and Penelope.<sup>3</sup>

Ulysses remains the centre of interest because Rowe does not show on stage several of the scenes which would allow our focus of interest to sympathise with the young lovers completely.

Rowe's main strength in this play is in dramatic method. Structurally it is a very good play, and the constant

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1 By Alfred Hilde, 1903.

2 Nicoll, p.100.

3 Boas, p.21.



hurry of events ensures interest throughout. The climaxes are well regulated and the sequence of events in the later part of the play brings a constant flow of surprises and dramatic tension. Rowe's energy does not seem to flag at all and there are far fewer passages of meditation which slow the action.

Of course, there is little point in making great claims for Ulysses. It was very nearly a flop, for after its first run it was rarely performed. However, the following pages may indicate why I feel it is, and was then, unjustly neglected. Audiences in the eighteenth century were much more likely to go to see a play which made them feel sentimentally involved. Rowe at this juncture is not really writing with this popular taste in mind. His steps towards the sentimental and the domestic are here very tentative, but for an "old-fashioned" play Ulysses is very good!

#### Publication History

The first edition was printed for Jacob Tonson in 1706, and the second edition did not appear until after Rowe's death -- 1719. Further editions came out in 1720, 1726, (with a Dublin printing that year too) 1733, 1735 and 1764. These seem to be the only occasions when it was printed alone. It was included in all the collections of Rowe's Dramatic Works -- in 1720, 1728, 1733 and 1736, and in the edition by Anne Devenish in 1747 and 1756. The only complete editions thereafter seem to have been in 1764 (in Dublin) 1766 and 1792. One wonders, though, if it were not included merely for the sake of completeness, and it seems more than likely that left over copies from previous printings were included in the later issues. Ulysses is unique among Rowe's serious plays in that it hardly ever came out in anthologies. The only case of this happening is in Bell's British Theatre where it was included in the 1776-78 issue and again in that of 1780. In each case it is

in volume 18, and it is possible that the same printing was used for both. There are no editions of the play after 1792, so it was the first of this dramatist's serious plays to disappear from the scene.

### Performance History

The catalogue of performance dates is even less voluminous. Given ten times in November and December 1705 it should, perhaps, be regarded as a reasonably successful play, but its popularity came to an end then. It was played once in February 1706, and then not again for a half a century, in March 1756. The letter printed in the Daily Advertiser for Wednesday 1 February, 1749 apparently went unheeded:

To Mr. G ----- You will very much oblige many of your friends by reviving the play of Ulysses wrote by the celebrated Mr. Rowe; we apprehend there are four characters in which yourself, Mr. Barry, Mrs. Cibber, and Mrs. Pritchard would shine inimitably. If you think this hint worthy your notice, we make no doubt it will in every Respect answer your expectations, as well as gratify the town in general. S.W., S.T., etc.

It seems that the actors concerned were not so enthusiastic about the prospect as the authors of the letter, but at a time when some of Rowe's other plays were at the height of their popularity the play may have had something of a revival. The performance of 1756, however, suggests that Ulysses was just not the sort of thing that the Town wanted.

Downes notes that this play was not as popular as its two predecessors, though he does not blame this on the actors:

this T., being dressed and excellently performed, had a run of 9 nights, but was not so successful as the Ambitious Step-Mother and Tamerlane.<sup>1</sup>

What exactly "dressed" means is not clear, but it may refer

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<sup>1</sup> Downes, p.48.

to period costume. With Betterton in the title role and Mrs. Barry as Penelope the play should have got off to a good start, particularly as Booth was backing up in the part of Telemachus. It is somewhat surprising that Mrs. Woffington, who had been a great hit in some of Rowe's more popular dramas should have presented Ulysses for her benefit in 1756, but perhaps she was among those who lamented its long absence from the London stage. It was the occasion for a hitherto unknown actress to make her debut. The London Stage identifies the "Young Gentlewoman who never appeared on any stage" as possibly Miss Condill,<sup>1</sup> who took her part on the stage later in the year in November.

#### Sources

The main source for Rowe's play is, of course, Homer's The Odyssey, but Rowe makes substantial changes. Remarks have been made on the appropriateness of Rowe's alterations since Genest, from whom Boas borrowed his idea noted on p. 75. Most helpful of Genest's remarks is: "he has made the story somewhat more probable than in Homer, but less interesting".<sup>2</sup> Rowe certainly intended to humanise Ulysses, and he makes his conduct more "probable", giving him genuine motivation for his actions, and taking away the vindictive, bloodthirsty element which appears in Homer. The opportunity which Homer's material gave the dramatist for domestic portrayal was only partly taken, but the events are nevertheless made credible as a family situation.

Ulysses's testing of Penelope is seen as legitimate, all the more so because the hero steps in just where it looks as if her fidelity is beginning to falter. The gods and hero work together to preserve the Queen's honour in a way that is attractive but hardly Homeric.

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1 Pt. II, 108.

2 II, 345.

Telemachus is a very attractive character. His youthful energy and vigour are well portrayed, and he is given more prominence than he had in the source. The love affair with Semanthe seems to be Rowe's own invention, and is handled carefully. This part of the play is not an "Episode" as Genest says, but rather an integral part of the main plot. We are prevented from seeing things too much from the young lovers' point of view because much is filled in for us by Ulysses's observations while the pair are off stage. In the disguise of Aethon, the hero tells us that Antonious, the confidant of the prince, is not to be trusted. We take Ulysses's point of view early in the play, and though we are sorry that the love story is frustrated we still realise that the most important focus is that on Ulysses and Penelope. Because it is Telemachus who kills Semanthe's father there is an element of tragic pathos in the situation, but filial duty is more important.

Although not modelled closely on its source, the play derives its basis from Homer just as it derives much of its dramatic method from French Classical drama. Theatre-goers were bound to feel that the play was old-fashioned in that it rested on the old conflict of feeling and duty, of love and honour.

Books 17-23 of The Odyssey serve only as a background on which Rowe can superimpose his own interests. Thus the nurse, and the paraphernalia regarding the recognition of the hero as he returns home can be dispensed with. Tragedy is averted not through the interference of the gods, or through chance, but because Rowe allows his hero to behave like a modern man. When real danger approaches he saves the situation by revealing himself, and by fighting off the enemies. Careful balance is maintained throughout regarding the hero's character traits and it is in this way that we can accept the result, far more easily than the events of the old Homeric tale. Rowe has tried to

bring the old myth up to date. That he failed is evident from the response, but the dramatist is in this play in line with many of the early eighteenth-century artists who wished to purify and make "good taste" of a popular story from the past.

Most critics have drawn attention to the almost independent nature of the two plots, and D.B. Clarke points out that the sub-plot was taken from Corneille's Le Cid.<sup>1</sup> J.R. Sutherland suggests that the play is an "attempt to Graft the gentler scion of classicism onto the more buoyant stock of Elizabethan drama." He also notes the influence of Elizabethan tragedy in the independent plots, the increased number of characters, the scene where the clouds part to reveal Pallas, the sound and fury of the close of the play, and the increased freedom of the verse. The main classical influence he sees in the strict adherence to the unities of time and place, in an attempt to achieve "poetic justice", and in the very long speeches.<sup>2</sup> Some of these assumptions do not appear to be totally valid as will be indicated later, in the discussion of the dramatic action. Though there may be in Rowe's mind these considerations, he does bring his own ideas to bear in larger measure than Sutherland suggests. Clearly Sutherland does not like the play at all for he goes on to say that these two forms of drama which Rowe uses for his sources fail him. He says that Rowe had not got the Elizabethan exuberance to reanimate a Ulysses, and he lacked the imaginative sympathy to breathe life into his borrowed characters. He "found his characters dead and left them so." These are harsh strictures. The performance history would indicate that the "Play is too remote from life to excite any but a literary interest"<sup>3</sup> but it seems to the present

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<sup>1</sup> p.13.

<sup>2</sup> Three Plays. p.31.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.32.

writer that in fact Rowe was trying to breathe life into the characters, to make the story less remote, and to make the personages into people with whom the audience could have a certain degree of sympathy.

F.S. Boas makes a different point, but none the less damning. He suggests that Rowe's style was mainly at fault, but he is still saying that the choice of material was wrong:

Rowe was misguided in going to "old Homer" for a source. The noble simplicity of The Odyssey did not lend itself to the glittering embroidery of heroic drama. And as so often it is not the titular part which is the centre of interest.<sup>1</sup>

Further, the material which Rowe chose seemed to restrict him, in that he could not reveal the best features of his art given this material as a basis: "Nor did this Greek tragedy contain many of the reflective passages in which Rowe has previously shown to advantage."<sup>2</sup>

The trouble with this sort of criticism is that it has not been pointed out how unlike the original Rowe's play is. It is essentially a heroic play, but not in the classical Greek sense; it is rather "heroic" in the way that other Restoration and early eighteenth century plays were, glorying in the celebrated and the high-principled, and added to this were Rowe's tentatively stated moral and Christian philosophical assumptions.

### Dedication

The Dedication is an important document in that it is one of the first examples of the use of the term "Augustan Age" with reference to the state of poetry in England, and in that it explores the situation of patronage, albeit in

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<sup>1</sup> p. 18.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

general terms.<sup>1</sup> Rowe's confidence in the state of poetry is tied in with his belief in enlightened patronage and in the religious uses of the art:

Poetry, which was so venerable to former Ages, as in many Places to make a Part of their Religious Worship, and every where to be had in the highest Honour and Esteem, has miserably languish'd and been despis'd, for want of that Favour and Protection which it found in the Famous Augustan Age. Since then, it may be asserted, without any Partiality to Present Time, it never had a fairer Prospect of lifting up its Head, and returning to its former Reputation than now.<sup>2</sup>

As Erskine-Hill says, the augury of the new Augustan age is the old ideal of the union of intellect and strength, wisdom and power, understanding and action, which harks back to the idea of Plato's philosopher prince.<sup>3</sup> The revival can only occur with the coincidence of "Taste", "Understanding", and Power" in order to stimulate "Great Men" to action on behalf of the arts.

Rowe is always ready to indicate an intermediate stance for he notes that this happy state of affairs can only be brought about with harmony,

when those unreasonable Feuds and Amimosities, which keep Faction alive, shall be bury'd in silence and forgotten.<sup>4</sup>

There is little doubt that the happy ending of the play, with reconciliation foremost, is in keeping with these sentiments. There is a humanist note in "the Restoring and Preserving any Part of Learning." Rowe, in the Dedication, is very conscious of the part he is trying to play in this new birth of literature.

As very often happens in these Dedications, the tone is not consistent. The piece starts off modestly with "find

1 Erskine-Hill, E. p.60.

2 Dedication.

3 Erskine-Hill, E. p.60.

4 Dedication.

an Hour to Divert Your Lordship", but in the later stages the compliment, though conventional, is ridiculously extravagant: "the Patronage of so Great and Universal Genius for Knowledge as Your Lordship's." This is somewhat ironic in that only three or four years earlier Godolphin was one of the most hated politicians by the Whigs, and therefore by Rowe. It may, however, be an attempt to bridge the gaps between political factions in order to make possible the safe arrival of the "new Augustan Age" of literature.

#### Prologue and Epilogue.

The tone of these pieces is vastly different from that of the play. Instead of the lofty heroics here is colloquial chat. The main emphasis is that the play ought to serve as a sort of example to the "Fair sex" watching the play, but Rowe's high seriousness is missing. It is here that we catch a glimpse of the man who loved to laugh in cheerful company, and who took great delight in making jokes to keep his companions happy. The play itself is for the most part temporarily forgotten as the author gently chides the audience for their behaviour. Even the theme of the play appears in debased form:

Her Husband, still a Man of Sense reputed,  
(Unless this Tale his Wisdom have confuted,)  
Left her at ripe Eighteen, to seek Renown;  
And Battel for a Harlot at Troy Town.<sup>1</sup>

The speaker draws the conventional moral from the play:

But all in vain, the Virtuous Dame stood Buff,  
And let 'em know that she was Coxcomb Proof;  
Messieurs the Beaux, what think you of the Matter?<sup>2</sup>

There is an attempt to link the action of the play to contemporary events as the absent Ulysses is compared to the many absent husbands fighting in the war against France, which gives rise to one patriotic cry, but this is not

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<sup>1</sup> Prologue, 11.5-8.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 11.18-20.



laboured. Some of the most important imagery is heralded at the end of the Prologue, and a certain universal and timeless application is suggested:

From Realm to Realm their Chief unweary'd goes,  
And restless journaies on, to give the World Repose.  
Such are the constant Labours of the Sun,  
Whose active, glorious Course is never done;  
And tho', when hence he parts, with us 'tis Night,  
Still he goes on, and lends to other Worlds his Light.<sup>1</sup>

Light and dark, night and day and quiet and repose, together with love and honour (which are mentioned in the last line) are some of the key antitheses in the play, and it is good that they are introduced before the play gets under way.

The tone of the Epilogue is even more relaxed and chatty. There is a slight sense also of self-consciousness, and perhaps apology, in the mention of the adherence to the Unities:

You see how ill my Love has been repaid,  
That I am like to live and die a Maid;  
Poetic Rules and Justice to maintain,  
I to the Woods am order'd back again,  
To Madam Cinthia, and her Virgin Train.<sup>2</sup>

Much is made of the various affectations and fopperies in social living, especially regarding the use of cosmetics, and the empty conversation of the drawing-room. This hardly seems like Rowe at all, but it is rather charming, reminding one a little of Pope:

There are no Indian Houses, to drop in,  
And fancy Stuffs, and chuse a pretty Screen,  
To while away an Hour or so -- I swear  
These cups are pretty, but they're deadly dear:  
And if some unexpected Friend appear,  
The Dev'l! -- Who cou'd have thought to meet you here?<sup>3</sup>

This is entertaining and harmless, probably designed to break both the tension and the "unreality" developed in the play, before the audience leave the theatre. It seems to indicate

1 Prologue, ll.33-38.

2 Epilogue, ll.3-7.

3 Ibid., ll.28-33.

that the dramatist was aware that some sort of different impression was necessary; the heroics were not the right note on which to send the audience away to the interval. At any rate Rowe is here very briefly seen in his less familiar role as social satirist. He is not all high-minded heroic rant!

### Structure

The most striking feature of the play is its vitality. This is achieved through careful manipulation of the characters, so that there is continual contrast to keep the interest at a high pitch. The cast list is larger than usual with Rowe, and there are four main strands to the plot. It does not, though, give the impression of a sub-plot as has been suggested by most critics of the play. This is because of the dramatist's careful and insistent use of parallelism.

The marriage of Ulysses and Penelope, fraught by great difficulties, is balanced by the secret marriage of Telemachus and Semanthe, which also experiences great hardship before our eyes. The suit of Eurymachus for Penelope is balanced by that of Antonious, and both are characterised by the same sort of intrigue and ingratiating, Eurymachus hoping to manipulate the disguised Ulysses, and Antonious hoping to do the same with Telemachus. The family of Ulysses is thus brought into direct conflict with that of the King of Samos, but both are opposed by the rebellious family of Ithaca, symbolised by Antonious. As the hero eventually uses his son to help him bring justice to bear, these strands become too intricately woven to be separable, and so they should be viewed as different facets of the whole.

It is not difficult to see how many of the features of the play would not have appealed to an audience in the eighteenth century. First, the play is too busy. We may appreciate the patterning and parallel situations, but this is far from the dictum of simplicity which was gaining such favour. Second, the author is not faithful to his source.

The deviations from Homer are so many that Rowe has in fact made the material his own. This is particularly apparent in the matter of structure, for the events are often differently placed, in order to retain some sort of credibility for the actions of the characters. Thus the events surrounding the revelation of the hero are completely altered, and the battle at the end of the play bears no resemblance to that in Homer. Rowe builds gradually to his climaxes, and can usually maintain the high level of dramatic tension for a considerable length of time. Thus the most exciting events are not foreseen, and they tend to come as surprises.

What Rowe gains in altering the story in this way he partly loses because he adheres strictly to the Unities. As the century wears on the emphasis shifts to naturalness and credibility, thus the play would hardly be expected to receive great acclaim. However, the Unities are on the whole very skilfully managed. There are some occasions when there is not sufficient reason for a character to appear, but this is a weakness in all Rowe's plays. There appears to be a blunder in the fourth Act where Semanthe comes on stage to witness the death of her father. There seems to be no reason why Semanthe should be looking after the Queen at this moment, particularly as her father is expected at any moment to perform his ritual rape. Indeed, Rowe has here sacrificed likelihood for a sentimental and pathetic scene. We would have preferred a more agile handling at this point. The other main difficulty in the use of the Unities is traditional enough. It is hard to believe in the marriage of the two young people, particularly as they are usually so resourceful and level-headed. It is even more hard to believe in all the turmoil which they experience on their wedding day. It would perhaps have been better if Rowe had avoided the marriage altogether for the play gains nothing from this element which it would not have gained from a love relationship outside marriage.

The play is so constructed that the action keeps it always busy, and that there is a sort of theme for the business of each act, and this has its own flavour. The first act deals with the background to the events, and sets out the "wiles" of each of the main characters. The second Act catches the audience with the infection of the action, so that impartiality is impossible after this stage. By now we want to know the results to the story, and we begin to get something of the flavour of a mystery. As Aethon/Ulysses has by the end of the first Act become completely in charge in his own sphere, so does Penelope in the second. The third act is the Act of reconciliation, and its flavour is predominantly domestic. Within this act is the pivot on which the play turns; from the testing of the faithfulness of Penelope, we move to the justification of Ulysses, who begins to take control, and to be the deus ex machina. The fourth Act is devoted to problems, both on the domestic and the national fronts. It begins the killing, but here the death of Eurymachus is isolated. Thus the domestic problem comes to the fore before the national. The last act turns to the whole family of Ithaca, and we see tragedy just being averted by the association of the hero with the gods, and we see Telemachus proving his valour and worth by taking the attack in relieving his mother. Finally there is the sorting out of the various elements. Love has to be subservient to Honour, and the Domestic has to give way to the Heroic.

Rowe exhibits great mastery of technique in the play. His material is very carefully organised, so that there are constant echoes of previous scenes and speeches, and when it is deemed necessary, there are subtle presages of what is to happen later. By dividing the interest in the play between about six characters, there is more happening than the eighteenth century liked, but for the modern student of the drama of the period, there is a vitality and wide scope in the dramatic structure and method which is very appealing.

### Dramatic Action

The play opens with Telemachus lamenting his high state to his tutor, Mentor. The note of stoicism is established straight away with Mentor's reply:

to struggle with Adversity,  
To wait the Leisure of the righteous Gods.<sup>1</sup>

This is stoicism tempered with optimism, though, for Mentor is sure that the gods are on the side of Ulysses and his family. Thus the tone of the play is set in the opening lines, for all the characters have to accept sooner or later that they must allow the gods to control their actions. There is also an occasional hint that the gods of Greece may be interpreted as the Christian God, so that the acceptance of "Fate" by the righteous characters is a reflection of the Christian Faith necessary for life. Telemachus hints subtly at this:

Forgive my Transports: if I seem to lose  
The Rev'rence to the Sacred Precepts.<sup>2</sup>

This opening scene is used to fill in all the details surrounding the action of the play, and it is done very well, with a short resume of past events and a heralding touch of elevated rhetoric:

Ten Years ran round e'er Troy was doom'd to fall,  
Ten tedious Summers and ten Winters more  
By turns have chang'd the Seasons since it fell,  
And yet we mourn my Godlike Father's Absence<sup>3</sup>

The Greek motifs are used well; they do not receive undue emphasis, but it is clear that Mentor's optimism is grounded in the belief that "Oracles are true."

In his speech of "Rage and honest Indignation" the young Prince neatly capsulises the dangers confronting Ithaca, and the present state of unwillingness to welcome his father should he by chance return:

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1 I, p.1.

2 Ibid.

3 I, p.2.

What Voice of Joy shall cry, Hail King of Ithaca?  
 Riot, and Wrong, and woful Desolation,  
 Spread o'er the wretched Land, shall blast his Eyes,  
 And make him curse the Day of his Return.<sup>1</sup>

Somewhat abruptly Telemachus announces the entrance of Aethon. We know from the hint given in the Dramatis Personae list that he is Ulysses in disguise, and in the announcement of his person here, we note the high renown with which he is known, on account of his avowed friendship with the hero. After a description of the decay in the state, there is a fund of dramatic irony in Aethon's "He was my Friend, / I think I knew him" which is effective.

Telemachus's rhetorical description which follows is reminiscent of Milton:

From Morn 'till Noon, from Noon 'till the Shades darken,  
 From Evening 'till the Morning dawns again,  
 Lewdness, Confusion, Insolence and Uproar,  
 Are all the Bus'ness of their guilty Hours.<sup>2</sup>

There are some fine lines and sentiments in the rest of this short scene, culminating in Aethon's sound and fatherly advice to his son, which becomes even more poignant as the deceitful Antonious is to enter forthwith:

Learn thou, my Son, the cruel Arts of Courts;  
 Learn to dissemble Wrongs, to smile at Injuries,  
 And suffer Crimes, thou want'st the Power to punish;  
 Be easie, affable, familiar, friendly,  
 Search, and know all Mankinds mysterious Ways,  
 But trust the Secret of thy Soul to none.<sup>3</sup>

This advice is to enable Telemachus to be truly heroic, but it carries with it the idea of stoicism and Princely superiority. Reminiscent of Polonius's advice to Laertes, it is a set speech with all the dignity and accumulated experience of a man of the world. The "Day of Recompense and Righteous Justice" is Aethon's answer to his son's earlier "just Rage and honest Indignation", and the play hinges on a balacce

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1 I, p.2.

2 I, pp.2-3.

3 I, p.3.

(or sometimes conflict) between these two.

Antionous begins with an outburst of patriotism and submission to the Prince, but there is effective irony in the first phrase of Telemachus's reply -- "Thou greet'st me like a Friend." It is not at first apparent why he experiences "Joy", "Felicity", or "dear Delight" or why this man's entry should give him an "Omen of Happiness", though some sort of amorous relationship is implied in "thou know'st my fond fond Heart." It transpires that the object of his love is "the fair Semanthe", but Telemachus wishes to discuss this in private.

It is a good dramatic touch that we do not learn of Antionous's wiles directly. It is from Aethon that we take our viewpoint, and hereby Rowe makes clear whose point of view we are to adopt. Aethon both sees the signs of love and establishes distrust of Antionous; the latter is not to be trusted; we are not to take his friendly behaviour at face value:

This smooth Speaker,  
This supple Courtier is in favour with you.  
Markt you the Prince? How at this Man's Approach,  
The fierceness, Rage, and Pride of Youth declin'd...<sup>1</sup>

Mentor underlines the Prince's naivety; his "Temper/Is open as the Day, and Unsuspecting." Aethon quickly jumps to the right conclusion, even before the audience has completely grasped the remark: "You said he was a Woer."

Mentor's remarks on the suitors, and the Queen's reaction to them, allows Aethon to vent his disgust at the changeable nature of the allegiances of the people:

Unthinkable, changeable, ungrateful Ithaca!  
But Mentor! say, the Queen! Could she forget  
The Difference 'twixt Ulysses and his Slave?<sup>2</sup>

Antionous's vow to be humble and loyal is greeted with contempt by Aethon. The speech serves as a fine lament on

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<sup>1</sup> I, p.4.

<sup>2</sup> I, p.5.

the fickleness of men, and on the length of time that true submission takes:

Deceit and Artifice! the Turn's too sudden;  
 Habitual evils seldom change so soon,  
 But many Days must pass, and many Sorrows,  
 Conscious Remorse and Anguish must be felt,  
 To curb Desire, to break the stubborn Will;  
 And work a second Nature in the Soul,  
 E'er Virtue can resume the Place she lost.<sup>1</sup>

This is dramatically effective because it establishes the greater insight of the hero, and also because it is a valuable comment on the "Nature of the Soul", designed to point out to the audience the difference between genuine repentance and dissimulation.

The arrival of the suitors heralds a scene which rises in tension. Aethon gradually works upon their passions and their lack of reason becomes apparent, related to their "Riot and Injustice." The imagery at the beginning is good for Polydamus and Agenor liken their condition to the melancholy of the dawn which does not enervate their spirits after the "lazy, leaden Night." On the one hand, they intend this to be taken as the Queen's "Beams" which do not lighten their day, but the audience can see that this state has been brought about by their drunkenness, and a large hang-over. There is pastoral imagery, but it is here presented in negative terms. They think they are love-sick, but they are really depraved. Penelope is described as "the cruel Beauty", "the female Artifice is plain" --- significantly abstract. She is only a figment of their imagination, a dream.

Aethon replies to their declaration to "call on Bacchus, the jolly God of laughing Pleasures" with derision:

Is this the Rev'rence due to sacred Beauty,  
 Or these the Rights the Cyprian Goddess claims?  
 These rude licentious Orgyes are for Satyrs.<sup>2</sup>

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1 I, p.5.

2 I, p.6.



The unpleasantness of the suitors becomes clear in their crude and uncultivated abuse of Aethon. As the attack mounts, the speeches become shorter:

Aeth. Why dost thou call me poor, and think me wretched?

Pol. Because thou art so.

Aeth. Answer to thyself,

And let it serve for thee and for thy Friend.

Agen. He talks like Oracles, obscure and short.

Aeth. I wou'd be understood, but Apprehension  
Is not thy Talent ---<sup>1</sup>

After the threats have died down a little, Eurymachus enters, making clear what Rowe intended earlier in the imagery of night and day:

What Daughter of Old Chaos and the Night,  
What Fury loiters yet behind the Shades,  
To vex the peaceful Morn with Rage and Uproar!<sup>2</sup>

Aethon as always takes the initiative, obsequious to the King of Samos, but at the same time very strong in his accusation:

Boldly I dare appeal --- This King of Seriphos,  
This Island Lord, this Monarch of a Rock,  
He and his fellow Princes there, yon' Land  
Of eating, drinking Lovers, have in Scorn  
Of the Gods Laws, and the Strangers Sacred Privelege,  
Offer'd me foul offence and most unmanly Injuries.<sup>3</sup>

The scorn in "Monarch of a Rock", the irony of "drinking Lovers" and the righteous indignation of the hero combine to make a dramatically powerful episode. Eurymachus's reply is ironic, for he refers to Aethon as "a Thing beneath you."

Following the plea for peace, the pastoral imagery is used again, but the heralding of Penelope sees brightened rhetoric. Penelope's beauty is described as "that sweet and pleasant Influence/Breaks like the Day-Star from the chearful East." Her attendants are seen as "a Crowd of Fair Ones", and as soon as the Queen arrives on stage Eurymachus utters a fine epic simile:

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<sup>1</sup> I, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> I, p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

Diana thus on Cynthus shady Top  
 Or by Eurota's Stream leads to the Chace  
 Her Virgin Train, a Thousand lovely Nymphs  
 Of Form Celestial all, Troop by her Side,  
 Amidst a Thousand Nymphs the Goddess stands confest,  
 In Beauty, Magesty, and Port Divine,  
 Supreme and Emminent.<sup>1</sup>

She is, indeed, a goddess. Like all Rowe's heroines, however, she is a melancholy figure, at once seeing through "this humble fawning Phrase, this faithless Flattery" and shifting the emphasis to "the Sighings of my lonely Nights."

The scene is very well constructed, for the suitors all make their claims one by one, and at the end Penelope is left by far the grandest character, vastly superior in her devotion and constancy. She emerges as an immensely strong woman, counteracting all fawning with attacks on the hypocrisy and licentiousness of the adversaries. She, like Aethon, is established as living with a higher degree of insight than the rest of the characters. Aethon joins her in condemnation of the suitors and he gets lavish and enthusiastic offers of protection from her.

Eurymachus attempts to persuade the Queen of her husband's death, following the common line of thought in the people. Strangely, he phrases this in terms which reflect the "slothful ease" of the minor kings themselves:

His honour'd Shade rests from the Toils of Life  
 In everlasting Indolence and Ease,  
 Careless of your Pray'rs and vain Complainings,  
 Which the Winds bear away, and scatter in the Wantonness.<sup>2</sup>

After Penelope has stated that she will only chose someone to take her husband's place who will prove as valiant as he, and who will avenge all the insults done her, Aethon is left to soliloquise upon her "matchless Proof of Faith and Love unchang'd." Rowe does not miss the opportunity to make a contemporary comment on the wives left at home by their

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1 I, p. 9.

2 I, p. 11.

fighting spouses:

'Tis wonderful! and Wives in later Times  
 Shall think it all the Forgery of Wit,  
 A Fable curiously contriv'd t'upbraid  
 Their fickle easie Faith, and mock them for their Lightness.<sup>1</sup>

There are, perhaps, too many exclamations in this scene, but it is not out of keeping with the lofty heroic tone, and the subtle use of irony is such that the heightening of emotion and style appears convincing.

The final scene in the Act consists of an interview between Aethon and Eurymachus. We have just seen that the latter is the most powerful of the kings, and this scene shows his superior cunning. He is the most unscrupulous of the rivals, the smoothest, and therefore potentially the most dangerous. He provides a good contrast to Antonious, and begins his wiles in the same fawning manner, thoroughly prepared to compromise his stand in order to gain the favour of the only man whom the Queen will listen to:

This sullen Garb, this moody Discontent,  
 Sits on thee well! and I applaud thy Anger;  
 Thy just Disdain of the licentious Rout:  
 Yet all are not like these.<sup>2</sup>

He means, of course, that he is in a different class. He certainly has more daring and a more active and adaptable intelligence. Aethon for once is not too sure where the talk is leading, and so uses the same sort of extravagant compliment and hypocrisy. He is astonished to find that his aid is being requested to persuade the Queen to marry Eurymachus. There is a delightful touch of the sensuous in the King of Samos's description of the idol of his love, a sense of budding luxuriousness:

The Beauteous Queen,  
 That Summer-Sun in full Meridian Glory,  
 Brighter than the faint Promise of the Spring,

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> I, p. 12.

With Blessings ripen'd to the Gatherer's Hand,  
Mature for Joy, and in Perfection lovely.<sup>1</sup>

It is rather amusing that Eurymachus should be talking of the death of Ulysses to the man himself, and this Rowe uses to diminish the tension coming towards the end of the Act. The conversation results in Aethon's declaration that the Queen will be tested. Little does Eurymachus know that he is testing her on his own account, making sure that she does not finally fall prey to any of the suitors:

Yes Sir, be certain on't, she shall be try'd;  
Thro' all the winding Mazes of her Thoughts,  
Thro' all her Joys, her Sorrows and her Fears,  
Thro' all her Truth and Falsehood I'll pursue her.  
She shall be subtler than Deceit itself,  
And prosperously Wicked, if she 'scape me.<sup>2</sup>

Thus the theme of Penelope's trial is set, at the expense of Eurymachus who is under the strong delusion that he is being assisted.

The first Act ends with a highly rhetorical passage, invoking the gods to "assist my Purpose" and closes on the elevated triplet:

Let her no more from Nature's Laws be free,  
But learn Obedience to thy great Decree,  
Since Gods themselves submit to Fate, and Thee.<sup>3</sup>

With this change in tempo the audience is prepared for a change in the focus of the dramatic action. Having seemed to be in a rather precarious position in the middle of the Act, the hero is totally in command at its close.

The beginning of the second Act sees Antonious being persuaded to ravish the Queen in order to prevent her capture by his rival. Although it is still a matter of rape rather than love the Ithacans believe that it is dangerous for Penelope to marry a foreign king. The first scene implicates the Ithacans in their desertion of Ulysses, and heightens

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<sup>1</sup> I, p.13.

<sup>2</sup> I, p.14.

<sup>3</sup> I, p.15.

the domestic element. Eurymachus tries to gain the Queen by forcing the relationship of his daughter with Telemachus while Antonius encourages this in order to gain the confidence of the young Prince. Arcas takes it upon himself to impress the urgency of the matter by reiterating the belief that Ulysses is dead, and he connects this strongly with the will of the gods. Antonious is reluctant to press his suit because he has already been rejected and does not want to face yet another rebuff. Even though she is absent Penelope is the force at work here; they are frightened of her because she appears immoveable. She cannot be threatened if she is confronted by fair means. Antonious hopes to ingratiate himself eventually, though:

To favour my Design,  
With low Submissions, with obsequious Duty,  
And vows of Friendship fit to flatter Boys with,  
I've wound my self into the Prince's Heart.<sup>1</sup>

The snake-like implications are clear enough; he has debased himself with fawning and is trying to capitalise by "Inspiring lazy Wishes, Sighs, Languishings, / Unactive dreaming Sloth, and womanish Softness" so that he might eventually satisfy the same feelings within himself.

When Telemachus and Semanthe arrive on the stage, we find that they have been secretly married. This act allows a certain heightening of the domestic situation at the end, and adds to the general atmosphere of frustration in the play, but it does not seem dramatically justified, and creates more problems for Rowe than it solves.

This scene is once again very rhetorical, containing several odd features. After their marriage Semanthe, apparently, has broken down in a fit of weeping. The imagery moves from the domestic to the pastoral (with the metaphors of "vernal Jove", "increase", "spiry grass", "painted Flow'r" and "Pearly Drops of Heavenly Rain"<sup>2</sup>) to the mythical with the invocation

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<sup>1</sup> II, p.17.

<sup>2</sup> II, p.18.

of "ye Virgin Dryads", and the "Huntress Cynthia." Curiously, there follows an interchange on the theme of foreboding.

Telemachus compares them to:

the careful, thrifty Hind  
Who provident of Winter fills the Stores  
With all the various Plenty of the Autumn.<sup>1</sup>

Semanthe, however, is full of "Anguish", "boding Dreams that haunt my Slumbers" together with a "heavy Sigh and painful Thought."

Here follows an extended dream vision narrated by Semanthe, very rhetorical both in tone and techniques, and highly impressive. The first part is modelled on the epic hunt by "great Latrona's Daughter" with the traditional accompaniment of the "Golden Quiver at his Back" and "sounding of the Silver Bow." It is more convincing than several of Semanthe's earlier speeches because she is narrating here rather than asking herself rhetorical questions. One wonders why, though, she should be threatened by the goddess in this way:

A Virgin at my Altar wert thou Vow'd,  
'Tis fix'd by Fate, and thou art mine for ever.<sup>2</sup>

This pair of lines serves as a transition between the focus on the hunt and that on the hunted; Semanthe has to forgo the consummation of her marriage only because of the strictures of the Unities which Rowe has imposed on the play. Her father, whom she will see killed later in the day by her own beloved, is now viewed as dead in her vision, and the premonition is well done:

In my Flight,  
Backwards, methought I turn'd my Eyes to thee,  
But found thee not, for thou wert vanish'd from me,  
And in thy Place my Father lay extended  
Upon the Earth, a bloody lifeless Coarse;  
Struck to the very Heart, I shriek'd aloud,  
And waking, found my Tears upon my Pillow.<sup>3</sup>

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1 II, p.19.

2 II, p.20.

3 Ibid.

This is effective despite the clumsy Miltonic inversion at the beginning. It is capped by Telemachus's mention of the "golden Sun" and "drowzy Night" again. These constant references make us aware of the cosmic importance of the events, and that both day and night have a good and evil form and influence.

Telemachus invokes Care, Melancholy, Disquiet and Grief, crying on them to "Fly to your Native Seats." His function is to stave off his wife's melancholy which next returns in a different form:

Alternate Heat and Cold shoot thro' my Veins,  
Now a chill Dew hangs faintly on my Brow...  
'Tis Pain and Pleasure blended, both at once,  
'Tis Life and Death, or something more than either.<sup>1</sup>

Sexual frustration is here phrased finely and the last line is pregnant with meaning in the context of the actions which are to ensue. Telemachus explains the nature of this "other Pain" but the "something more than either" remains in our minds.

The first impression is that the scene has been highly lyrical, yet this is the work of the rhetoric rather than the sentiments. The violent close of the play has been predicted so that all the fears uttered will come true --- this is hardly matter for lyricism, but Rowe manages to get this end result.

Ignoring Aethon the couple leave the stage, and another amorous interview follows --- yet how different from the former. A certain parallelism is surely intended; the happy young lovers are overcome with premonitions but still make their preparations for the night; the Queen fights to stave off the advances of her most powerful suitor but fails in the end because of his evil. Aethon, playing pandar, is caught in a dangerous situation. He has gone too far to reveal himself now and has to continue in his avowed mission

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<sup>1</sup> II, p.21.

to test the Queen, his wife.

Penelope is tired of these continual advances; they only add "Weight to the Sorrow of my Days,/That drag too slow, too heavily along." Eurymachus begins his attack like a conventional suitor:

What Sounds can move this fierce relentless Fair,  
This cruel Queen, that pityless beholds  
My Heart that bleeds for her, my Humble Knee,  
In abject low submission bent to Earth,  
To deprecate her Scorn, and beg in vain,  
One gracious Word, one favourable Look.<sup>1</sup>

Aethon is summoned to her aid, but instead he and Eurymachus deliver a three-fold attack. First, he appeals to her waste of the past, using both epic and pastoral images, and brings to mind her lack of fertility:

But left unheeded, like a barren Moor  
Lies fenceless, wild uncultivate, and waste.<sup>2</sup>

This evokes her pitying "Alas", and he is set for the second element, the appeal to carpe diem ideas:

Taste the good things of Life, yet e'er they perish,  
Yet e'er the happy Season pass away.<sup>3</sup>

It is left to the King of Samos to make the final appeal of love. Aethon appears to support the suit, reiterating these ideas, but he is met by a violent rebuff, full of rejection, full of tension and vigour:

Traitor! no more -- at length thy wicked Arts  
Thy false dissembled Friendship for my Lord,  
Thy Pious Journey hither for his Sake,  
Thy Care of me, my Son and of the State,  
Thy Praise, thy Counsels, and thy shew of Virtue,  
So holy, so adorn'd with Rev'rend Age,  
Are all reveal'd, and thou confest a Villain.<sup>4</sup>

The tension is at its height here, while she goes on to suggest that he has changed sides for the love and allurements of gold. She dismisses Aethon, but before he can go the great

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1 II, p.22.

2 II, p.23.

3 Ibid.

4 II, p.24.



surprise of the play is unleashed. Eurymachus suddenly reveals his plan, replete with complete change of tone. He decides on revenge and we later learn that it was entirely premeditated. The threat to kill Telemachus seems to come to Aethon as an even greater surprise than to the Queen. Eurymachus's reference to Penelope as "Proud Queen", full of bitterness, contrasts vividly with the playful, humble tone of "fierce relentless Fair."<sup>1</sup> The words themselves are alike, but supplication has given way to murder and rape. Penelope has little choice. She is willing to sacrifice herself to save her son, but still pleads for his life with feeling:

Oh spare him, and let all thy Rage fall here;  
Remember 'twas this haughty, stubborn Queen  
Refus'd thy Love, and let her feel thy hate.<sup>2</sup>

Even in the face of this extreme adversity she is somehow magnificent; her dignity and strength of purpose are not really weakened, and she is able to thrust this last insult at the pretence of offered love.

Lamenting her fate, the gates of sentimentality are opened, though it is not mawkish for her affliction is severe, her tone fervent and her love for her son "truly affecting." Eurymachus, not to be outdone by violent words, offers a counterbalance:

How have I mourn'd thy Scorn, unkind and cruel?  
How have I melted in unmanly Weeping?  
How have I taught the stubborn Rocks of Ithaca  
And all the sounding Shore to eccho my Complaining?  
And hast thou e'er Relented? Now Mourn thou.<sup>3</sup>

This highly tense, emotional and bitter yet controlled sequence is rather marred by the Queen's

Death is too poor a Name, for that means Rest,  
But 'tis Despair -- 'tis mad -- tormenting Rage,  
'Tis terrible -- 'tis bitter Pain -- it is  
A Mother's Mourning for her only Son.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> II, p.22.

<sup>2</sup> II, p.25.

<sup>3</sup> II, p.26.

<sup>4</sup> II, p.27.

More effective is Aethon's attempt at cosmic importance in an aside; he uses epic simile to retain the heightened rhetoric:

The Sea-Nymphs sate around, and joyn'd their Tears,  
While from his lowest Deep old Father Ocean,  
Was heard to groan in pity of their Pain.<sup>1</sup>

Eurymachus offers feigned comfort, but Rowe is not able to maintain the poise between the epic and the tearful, and in Penelope's following speech the effect collapses as the tears in the audience are jerked forth:

Oh Shame! Oh Modesty! Connubial Truth  
And spotless Purity! Ye Heav'nly Train!  
Have I preserv'd you in my secret Soul,  
To give you up at last, then plunge in Guilt,  
Abandon'd to Dishonour and Pollution!<sup>2</sup>

Even her resolve not to give in, and the mention of Proserpine cannot recover the effect, and Aethon's "Oh racking racking Pain of secret Thought!" aside to the audience together with the violent one word repartee, is too much, destroying the epic quality of what went before.

A good touch of characterisation, however, is present. Overlain with irony, Eurymachus's melifluous lines make us despise him:

My Queen! My Goddess! Art thou kind at last?  
Oh softly, softly breath the charming Sound,  
And let it gently steal upon my Soul,  
Gently as falls the balmy Dew from Heav'n.<sup>3</sup>

The religious references and "Art thou kind at last" emphasise the King's malicious cunning. His description of the bridal bed involves the excess to which he and his rivals indulge in, and it culminates in an open lie:

The Gods of Marriage, and of Love invoking,  
I will renew my Vows and at thy Feet  
Devote ev'n all my Powers to thy Command.<sup>4</sup>

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1 Ibid.

2 Ibid.

3 II, p.28.

4 Ibid.

Clearly the only powers he will devote are his sexual ones. In marked contrast, the simplicity and pathos of Penelope's request to be left alone are affecting; she compares her new conqueror unfavourably with Ulysses. The level of tension, having previously sagged, has risen again by the time that the heroine makes her exit and Aethon is left with Eurymachus to round out the scene. It is shocking to find how callously and unfeelingly the King of Samos dismisses the acts of the last few minutes:

At length we have prevail'd: Fear, Doubt and Shame,  
Those peevish Female Virtues, fly before us,  
And the disputed Field at last is ours.<sup>1</sup>

It is clear how Rowe intends us to take this; he is on the point of devoting the rest of his dramatic career to exploring what are here dismissed as "peevish Female Virtues." The voice of "Right" is seen in Aethon's sneering tone:

Yes you have Conquer'd, have approv'd your self  
A Master in the Knowledge of the Sex.  
What then remains but to prepare for Triumph,  
To rifle all the Spoils of Captive Beauty,  
And reap the sweet Reward of your past Labours.<sup>2</sup>

The juxtaposition of "Captive Beauty" with "Sweet Reward" is good, especially as Aethon shortly attacks the revelers. The preparation for jollification had apparently begun even before the Queen had been "captured". This gives Aethon every excuse for condemning the party with the vehemence of a strong Puritan:

Portended witless Mirth, vain Laughter, Boasting,  
Contentious Brawling, Madness, Mischief, and foul Murder,  
While to appease the Gluttons greedy Maw  
Whole herds are slain, more than suffice for Hectacombs,  
Even more than Zeal, with Pious Prodigality,  
Bestows upon the Gods to feed their Priests with.<sup>3</sup>

The religious parallel is pertinent, for Rowe is not only

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<sup>1</sup> II, p.29.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> II, p.30.

condemning the pagan; he is hinting at Catholicism too. It is one of the virulent attacks in which he delights, but hardly anywhere else in his writings is it done more pertinently. The final horror is revealed by Eurymachus --- that he will execute thorough revenge by arranging for his warriors to attack while he is consummating his marriage. Aethon's utter amazement is combined with cynicism in

Ha! at a Blow! --- 'tis just --- 'tis greatly thought!  
By Jove, th'Avenger, 'twill be noble Slaughter;  
Nor doubt the Event, I answer for 'em all,  
Ev'n to a Man.<sup>1</sup>

It is, of course, Jove whom he now invokes seriously in his final short soliloquy, asking for "Revenge", confident that the gods are on his side.

Thus a fine act comes to an end. Rowe has exhibited great mastery of tension and conflict. The stage for future events is now fully set, and the events so far have been so crowded that it is hard to see how an audience could help but be thoroughly caught up in the events.

When the action resumes at the beginning of the third Act, Aethon is half-angry, half-lamenting the supposed fall of Penelope in the "Battel" for her honour. Mentor and Eumaeus, however, are far more tolerant, defending her on grounds of "Woman's Weakness" and the "wild Distraction" resulting in her "bitterest Pangs of Sorrow". Aethon's epic simile is based upon heroic exaggeration:

These Eyes beheld her yeilding --- Cursed Object!  
Beheld her in the Samian King's Embrace;  
The sight of Hell, of baleful Acheron  
That rows his livid Waves around the Damn'd  
Roaring and yelling on the farther Shore,  
Was not so terrible, so irksome to me,  
As when I saw his Arms infold Penelope.<sup>2</sup>

The Queen, however, is very "much unlike a Bride" when she appears immersed in sorrow, her condition aptly compared to

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1 II, p.30.

2 III, p.31.

that of the "guilty Night." Great emphasis is placed on the "Moment" -- the point of time -- and this is picked up again several times later . This particular moment is full of evil omens:

The fatal Moment comes, ev'n that dread Time,  
When Witches meet to gather Herbs on Graves,  
When discontented Ghosts forsake their Tombs,  
And ghastly roam about, and doleful Groan,  
And hark! The Screech-Owl screams, and beats the Window  
With deadly Wings -- 1

Full of portent, this is dramatically effective, invoking the supernatural which is to appear later in the form of Pallas. Here all is desolate, gloomy and hopeless. Even Aethon is seen as a "Messenger of Fate!" and Ulysses's pretended congratulations spark off one of Rowe's favourite images of foreboding which is to reappear in Lady Jane Gray:

So the hoarse Raven  
Croaks o'er the Mansion of the dying Man,  
And often warns him with his dismal Note,  
To think upon his Tomb.<sup>2</sup>

Aethon picks up the theme of moment and asks about the "auspicious Hour" of the marriage.

The following interchange is marked by conventional use of asides to reveal to the audience the mind of the speaker. While Aethon thinks that she is totally lost the reverse proves to be true when Penelope tries to stab herself -- an act full of control and dignity which is only averted in the nick of time. Great excitement is engendered in this piece of dramatic business. The emotions are at their height, and because Aethon has prevented her death she cries out

Off! Off, thou Traitor!  
Give way to my just Rage! -- Oh tardy Hand!  
To what thou hast betray'd me! Let me go,  
Oh let me, let me die, or I will curse thee,  
'Till Hell shall tremble at my Imprecations,  
'Till Heav'n shall blast thee -- lost! -- undone for ever!<sup>3</sup>

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1 III, p.32.

2 Ibid.

3 III, p.33.

The appearance of Mentor and Eumaeus only increases her anguish though they offer her hope. Eumaeus tries to prepare for the "moment", the time when all shall be set right. This event is described in terms of purity and joy ("the white, the smiling Minute") and also in partly religious terms with a reference to the Book of Revelation:

To wipe the Tears from these fair Eyes for ever;  
That Good we daily pray'd for, but pray'd hopeless,  
That Good which ev'n in the Prescience of the Gods  
(So doubtfully was it set down in Fate)  
Uncertainly foresaw, and darkly promis'd  
That Good one Day, the happiest of our Lives.<sup>1</sup>

The parenthetical phrase does not help, but the tone of optimism and hope is a good preparation for the scene of divine intervention when Pallas Athene descends. Hope after gloom is tied in with imagery of Day and Night, light and dark:

The solid Gloom of Night is rent asunder,  
While Floods of daz'ling, pure Aethereal Light,  
Break in upon the Shades.<sup>2</sup>

This "Flood" of light counterbalances the floods of tears in distress, while the language is further heightened with "Majestic", "Celestial" and "ineffably effulgent".

Pallas in fact does not speak; she merely represents the open intervention of the gods in human affairs. Ulysses himself is a god, and his appearance without disguise is heralded with the aid of the new machinery which was becoming both elaborate and popular in the theatre during the early years of the eighteenth-century. But it is not merely an excuse for a spectacle; the deity's presence is in keeping with the elevated tone at which the dramatist is continually striving. Genest complains that Pallas has nothing to say<sup>3</sup> but it is all the more effective that she is only an introduction to the greater god, Ulysses, the deus ex machina of

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1 III, p.34.

2 III, pp.34-35.

3 Genest, II, 345.

the play. Mentor's statement "And to the left auspicious  
rowls the Thunder" is really a stage direction that leads  
us to think that the particular device used was placed at  
the side of the stage, and not, as was often the case, over-  
head.

The Queen's amazement is particularly well expressed:

Nay 'tis most impossible to Reason.  
But what have I to do with Thought or Reason?<sup>1</sup>

In a way, the dramatist is here openly demanding our "suspension of disbelief". This is how the heroic action is taking place, and we should accept it.

Rowe is distinctly in command of his climaxes and pauses; after a scene of violent exertions and great haste there is a temporary lull while the Queen and Ulysses meditate upon the situation in joy and expectation. The idea of death in "Sea-green Neptune's Seats" spurs off a description -- or heroic episode -- where Ulysses recounts his adventures briefly and concisely. The reconciliation between husband and wife has thus been effected in the heart of the play, half-way through the middle Act. These few speeches serve as another hinge. The testing is now over, and Mentor urges the consequences of prolonged conversation at this juncture, There are many dangers in the air, and Ulysses dismisses Penelope so that the second half of the play, the resolution, can begin with the enlistment of Telemachus's help.

This business is transacted so quickly that there is hardly a break in the tension between the fore-going and the second reconciliation scene, that between father and son. The emphasis shifts from marital love to heroic valour again where Telemachus has to alter his affiliations from love to duty, from Semanthe to his father. Thus Ulysses is forced to seem rather harsh in saying:

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<sup>1</sup> III, p.35.

Thou hast not one, one dear selected Mate,  
That ought to stand before me in thy heart.<sup>1</sup>

Telemachus's insistence that the new stranger is a "harsh, ungentle" version of Aethon is good, particularly as Ulysses has changed roles, from passive investigator to active agent of retribution. The Prince's "Soul is aw'd with reverential Fear"; his heart is prepared to receive his father. His impressions are quickly modified from

Aethon, my Father's Friend, thou art some God<sup>2</sup>  
to

And when my Tongue for Rapture can no more,  
Silent, with lifted Eyes, I'll praise the Gods,  
Who gave me back my King, my Lord, my Father.<sup>3</sup>

Paternal care is part of Ulysses too. He is in control now. Rowe skilfully paints his character to reveal both heroic vigour and kindly concern at once. His effusion at his son's declaration to help is a bit too much, however:

Oh Nobleness innate! Oh Worth divine!  
Aethereal Sparks! that speak the Hero's lineage,  
How are you pleasing to me?<sup>4</sup>

But this does place Telemachus strongly in the line of the gods, and the speech is redeemed by the fine extended epic simile of the eagle, hunting through the sheep and finally lighting on and carrying off the dragon. In this way father and son will attack at the point of most danger and end victorious.

Telemachus reveals his desire for valour but appears to be far more mature than in Homer's story. This is useful to establish at this stage, for it allows credibility in his heroism at the end of the play.

Ulysses reveals the plan of campaign and the tone here is once again slightly Puritanical as he plans to conquer those "Immerst in Riot, careless, and defying/The Gods

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1 III, p.38.

4 Ibid.

2 Ibid.

3 III, p.39.



as Fables." A formal agreement is signified in classical style by the kneeling and kissing the sword, and the Act ends with a statement of heroic intent:

No more, thou hast thy Charge, look well to that;  
For these, these riotous Sons of Noise and Uproar,  
I know their Force, and know I am Ulysses.<sup>1</sup>

The "god" will bring "Fair Nature, Form and Order" into "Discord and Confusion." He will bring peace and right to bear even though the odds be heavily against him. Like Jove at the "war of Atoms":

Calm and serene, upon his Throne he sate,  
Fix'd there by the eternal Law of Fate,  
Safe in himself, because he knew his Pow'r.  
And knowing what he was, he knew he was secure.<sup>2</sup>

This is a pagan version of Milton's view of God, intense yet predicting a happy outcome. Though in the turbulence of the final action we may wonder if this remark was true, Rowe has made it quite clear that it will be happy.

From the private world we move into the public sphere at the beginning of the fourth Act, to the other suitor. Antonious is using his friendship with Telemachus to try to take advantage of the situation. The Prince's words are full of irony as he presses the older man to preserve the "fatal Secret", and he again noted the pressure of the moment:

No, thou art true, such have I ever found thee;  
But haste, my Friend, and summon to thy Aid  
What Force the shortness of the Time allows.<sup>3</sup>

Antonious is despatched to gain aid and Telemachus begins a brief meditation on love. The tone is that of lament, but it is at the same time very high-minded:

Malicious meddling Chance is ever busie  
To bring us Fears, Disquiet and Delays...  
Ambition calls us to its sullen Cares

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1 III, p.41.

2 III, p.42.

3 IV, p.42.

And Honour stern, impatient of Neglect,  
 Commands us to forget our Ease and Pleasures,  
 As if we had been made for naught but Toil,  
 And Love were not the Bus'ness of our Lives.<sup>1</sup>

But Rowe does not allow his characters to continue in this memorable vein, for the action becomes even more hurried. No sooner than one suitor is dismissed, another arrives, this time Eurymachus, to be annoyed to find the Prince still at his post, guarding his mother's doorway.

Eurymachus begins gently, trying the arts of persuasion. He wonders why the Prince should be alone while every one else is enjoying themselves. He touches on the theme of many of Rowe's plays:

And like the sighing Slave of Sorrows, wasting  
 The tedious Time in melancholy Thought.<sup>2</sup>

The sorrows and melancholy are only too apparent, but the dramatic irony in "sighing slave" and "Tedious Time" is very good, for we are here watching a lull before the storm which Eurymachus himself provokes.

The Samian King appeals first of all to love, but this is opposed by the young man's duty, and a series of thrusts ensues, each of which is well parried. A gradual climax builds throughout the scene, as the older man's emotions change from gentle questioning to violence. Even his insults fail to arouse more than slight annoyance and when violence is first offered it is met in this way:

Oh 'tis long since that I have learnt to hold  
 My Life from none but from the Gods who gave it,  
 Nor mean to render it on any Terms,  
 Unless these Heav'nly Donors ask it back.<sup>3</sup>

Telemachus, then, is a potentially great figure of seriousness and courage mixed with self-control and strength of purpose. When he is drawing his sword he is aware of the

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1 IV, p.43.

2 Ibid.

3 IV, p.45.

conflict of his actions and love, but this is conquered by fine Shakespearian sentiments and counter-insult:

I hear the sacred Name of her that bore me  
Traduc'd, dishonour'd by a Ruffian's Tongue,  
And I am tame! -- Love, and ye softer Thoughts,  
I give you to the Winds. -- Know, King of Samos,  
Thy Breath, like pestilential Beasts, infects  
The Air, and grows offensive to the Gods.<sup>1</sup>

His righteous scorn at Eurymachus's emphasis on his youth is reflected finely in "I laugh at all that Rage, and thus I meet it."

Interestingly, the wounded King feels that this has come about because of the gods. Rowe is only hinting that here again is divine intervention. Certainly the stress which is placed on the "beardless Stripling" suggests that this is a display of more than usual valour.

Semanthe's sudden arrival on the scene is not dramatically justifiable. There is no good reason why she should be keeping Penelope company at this time, particularly as her father was expected to come to claim his bed. It is a rather clumsy device to bring about the sentimental, pathetic scene between the newly married couple.

One would expect that as soon as the killing was effected the tension would drop markedly. This, however, is not the case, for Semanthe brings with her an image of omen even before she sees her dying father:

Just as I enter'd here the Bird of Night  
Ill-boading shriek'd and strait, methought, I heard  
A low complaining Voice, that seem'd to murmur  
At some hard Fate, and groan to be reliev'd.<sup>2</sup>

Her horror and distress is heightened by her father's dying plea for vengeance. The effect collapses for a few moments as the speeches are too choppy:

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<sup>1</sup> IV, p.46.

<sup>2</sup> IV, p.47.

Sem. What says my Father! -- no! -- it is impossible!  
He could not -- would not -- for Semanthe's sake.---

Enter Telemachus

Tel. Alas! --- there is none near --- no Help --- Semanthe!<sup>1</sup>

Her faint is traditional and sentimental, a device to be exaggerated by less capable dramatists later in the century. Her recovery, though, brings a fine picture of distraction with the welding of opposites:

Stand off, and let me fly from thee for ever,  
Swifter than Light'ning, Winds or winged Time;  
Fly from thee 'till there be whole Worlds to part us,  
'Till Nature fix her Barriers to divide us,  
Her frozen Regions, and her burning Zones,  
'Till Danger, Death and Hell do stand between us.<sup>2</sup>

Strangely, both characters grow in stature in the scene; they are both resolute, both deeply affected, both clear-minded and both right. Both are compelled to act because of their fathers. As the scene continues they each try to convince the other of the greater amount of misery they feel. Semanthe increases the sentimental, pathetic note with "What would not I have born for thee" while Telemachus bases his justification of "Mine was a harder, a severer Task" on the concrete details of the situation. His appeal is to honour, which his wife is unable to accept:

What is this vain, fantastick Pageant, Honour,  
This busie, angry thing, that scatters Discord  
Amongst the mighty Princes of the Earth[?] <sup>3</sup>

Rowe is not, however, rejecting the claims of honour; he is placing them against those of love for pathetic and "heroic-tragic" effect; he is trying to make both noble so that the happy ending has dark edges, but is none the less happy. This kind of heroic situation does not have a right and wrong in this way, he suggests. Neatly counterbalancing Semanthe's outburst against Honour is this personal emphasis by the Prince:

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> IV, p.48.

<sup>3</sup> IV, p.50

Nor ever implore her Mercy -- for alas!  
 Cruel Semanthe has forgot to pardon:  
 For Blood, Destruction and Revenge she calls,  
 And Gentleness and Love are Strangers.<sup>1</sup>

Further vying for the other's pity ensues, but the dramatist knows how far he can take this. The scene ends with mutual accusation and self-pity. The most unsatisfactory feature is that Rowe draws attention to his use of the Unities:

When warm, when languishing with sweet Delight,  
 Wishing she meets him, may he blast her Sight,  
 With such a Murder on her Bridal Night.<sup>2</sup>

The trite triplet does not do justice to the rest of the scene, full of tension and action.

Telemachus is left to realise that the whole episode "is all the Work of Cruel Policy" when Antonious arrives. Exhausted, and with his guard down, the Prince cannot smell danger any longer, and he falls for all the lies, departing to his father with grudging feelings of martial exploits.

The traitors are unmoved by the sight of the dead rival, but gloat over their luck, and hasten on to abduct the Queen. This itself is a good dramatic touch. The action appeared to be over, but in this brief scene is the most calamitous incident of all. Perhaps the scene is rather too insignificantly placed, but Rowe manages to squeeze one more good climax before the Act ends; Arcas feels that they should not have allowed the Prince to go, and Antonious seems totally to underestimate him saying "A Life like his is but a single Stake." Antonious ends the Act with classical, mythological references and a return to the more objective rhetoric of the earlier part of the play:

Possess'd, like happy Paris, of the Fair,  
 I'll lengthen out my Joys with Ten Years War,  
 And think the rest of Life beneath a Lover's Care.<sup>3</sup>

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1 Ibid.

2 IV, p.51.

3 IV, p.53.

Love and war are thus united in thought here, and this is a fitting touch for the conclusion of an Act dealing with the primacy of these elements.

Eumaeus's change of tone at the start of the last Act seems to forecast disaster, but this is not to be the case:

Where is the Joy, the Boast of Conquest now?...  
 Why reeks yon' Marble Pavement with the Slaughter  
 Of rival Kings that fell beneath his sword? <sup>1</sup>

Mentor's description of Telemachus's bitter sorrow at having unwittingly helped in the abduction of Penelope is very pathetic, but we are doubtful whether in fact the Prince we have seen could be like this:

Now motionless as Death hie Eyes are fix't,  
 And then anon he starts and casts 'em upwards,  
 And groaning cries, I am th'accurst of Heav'n,  
 My Mother! my Semanthe! and my Mother. <sup>2</sup>

Rowe has spoiled his verisimilitude in order to provoke pity in the audience. Mentor is really depressed about the outcome, seeing no hope for anything except "Despair."

The picture of the warring crowds is good, particularly the use of debased pastoral imagery:

A thousand blazing Fires make bright the Streets,  
 Huge gabbling Crowds gather, and roul along  
 Like roaring Seas that enter at a Breach;  
 The neighb'ring Rocks, the Woods, the Hills, the Dales  
 Ring with the deaf'ning Sound while bold Rebellion  
 With impious Peak of Acclamation greets  
 Her trait'rous Chief Antonious. <sup>3</sup>

Here several of the images scattered throughout the play are gathered together. There is the emphasis on light, destruction (and its implied antithesis of darkness in their despair) and the raucous merrymaking of the rival suitors. Finally, a moral comment is implied in "impious" and "trait'rous." All the events of the last hours are now known to the Ithacans

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<sup>1</sup> V, p.54.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> V, p.55.

who are out in force to effect a result. One event swiftly follows another. Even the break with the interview of Semanthe, now Queen of Samos, and Telemachus does little to impede the sense of haste.

The tension in this interview consists in the debate on what sacrifices they are going to make. Semanthe is undergoing an intense inner struggle, as is evident in her reluctance to name the murderer of her father. Rowe may be excused the artificial way in which Telemachus comes onto the scene because the events have now reached a pitch where we are not quite so concerned with plausibility, and when he does appear he utters a fine, elevated lament which captures our interest:

Why was I born? Why sent into the World,  
Ordain'd for mischievous Misdeeds, and fated  
To be the Curse of them that gave Me Being?  
Why was this Mass ta'ne from the Heap of Matter,  
Where innocent and senseless it had rested,  
To be indu'd with Form, and vext with Motion?<sup>1</sup>

There are few such meditations of this nature in the play, and this soliloquy provides a good contrast to the business of the play's conclusion.

Semanthe is splendidly balanced between knowledge of her duty and love-longing. She appeals to Darkness as soon as she sees her husband:

let Darkness  
Still spread her gloomy mantle o'er thy Visage,  
And hide thee from these weeping Eyes for ever.<sup>2</sup>

While she confesses her love in an aside, her direct speech is characterised by a formal harshness:

Whate'er the righteous Gods have made thee suffer,  
Just is the Doom and equal to thy Crimes.<sup>3</sup>

More rhetorical passages follow until the Queen feels compelled to admit that she "durst not, could not, wou'd not once accuse thee". Somehow the reaction is surprising, bringing

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1 V, p.56.

2 V, pp.56-57.

3 V, p.57.

an unexpectedly realistic note to bear in the implied sexual overtones of

And wherefore art thou merciful in vain?  
 ...Are Tears and Mourning  
 The bitterness of Grief, and these Lamentings,  
 Are these the Portion of our Nuptial Night?<sup>1</sup>

It is strange to see them vying with each other for the third time, to prove who is suffering the most. Semanthe combines weakness, in confessing her love, with moral strength in declaring that this is the moment at which they must part for ever. There is no doubt in her mind at all; the time is short and the gods are definite in their wish:

Oh sigh not, nor complain --- Is not thy Hand  
 Stain'd with my father's Blood? Justice and Nature,  
 The Gods demand it, and we must obey.<sup>2</sup>

The bitterness has now gone; it is a case of love having to suffer because of circumstances. In this way Rowe can gain sympathy for them both. Here are the tragic consequences of the conflict between love and honour, but both parties can take those consequences with equanimity. Telemachus makes a final speech on the human condition which is affecting:

Let mighty Kings contend, ambitious Youth  
 Arm for the Battel, Seasons come and go;  
 Spring, Summer, Autumn, with their fruitful Pleasures,  
 And Winter with its silver Frost, let Nature  
 Display in vain her various Pomp before thee,  
 'Tis wretched all, 'tis all not worth thy Care,  
 'Tis all a Wilderness without Semanthe.<sup>3</sup>

His stoical acceptance implied in this compares favourably with her vow to "Fly to the pathless Wilds, and sacred Shades." Both are of noble status, Telemachus by remaining in the active world, and Semanthe by fleeing from it.

Faced with a possible confrontation with his father Telemachus leaves to try to find some sort of refuge for his sorrow. Ulysses, however strong the odds against him may be, retains a godlike optimism. Even the pessimistic observations

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1 V, p.58.

3 Ibid.

2 V, p.59.



by Eumaeus cannot deflate his confidence.

The confrontation between Ulysses and the fighting forces is very formal, vastly unlike Homer. Exactly where the fighting takes place is left deliberately vague so as not to destroy the effect of the Unities. Wherever the battle-ground is, the main combatants meet to exchange insults and patriotic cries. Ulysses not surprisingly is the most formidable, uttering a most impressive harangue on his own identity:

And dost thou dare, dost thou, audacious Slave,  
Thou rash Miss-leader of this giddy Crowd,  
Dost thou presume to match thy self with me,  
To judge between a Monarch and his People?  
If Heav'n had not appointed me thy Master,  
Yet it had made me something more than thou art,  
Then when it made me what I am --- Ulysses.<sup>1</sup>

If he were not so godlike we would have to suggest that he was immensely self-opinionated! Antonious replies to this by means of a counter insult, followed by a stance of defiance. Ulysses exerts his righteous anger at the suitor's audacity, and the wounded Arcas enters to symbolise the carnage which is taking place nearby. He brings with him some startling news. Telemachus has not been moping all the time for he has freed the Queen from her captivity. It is a good feature of the play that the Prince can set to rights his previous error. It is clear at this juncture that the day is already that of the Ithacan Royal Family, but Antonious refuses to flee. He attempts to reach a certain measure of nobility but he is left to his own defeat as the play closes on the final reconciliation of Ulysses and Penelope. Mentor is used in a manner similar to the Greek Chorus, filling in the final gaps in the story. Semanthe apparently has lied to save her husband, and has stated that Antonious was the murderer of her husband. This is a handy way of getting rid of the last suitor, but despite Mentor's certainty we are

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<sup>1</sup> V, p.61.

left with the feeling that Rowe has sacrificed credibility to the satisfaction of having all the ends neatly tied together.

The play ends having confirmed the stature of Ulysses as hero. He alone, apparently, seems to come unscathed from the series of misfortunes. There is no hint of potential happiness for Telemachus as we learn that the strangers are setting off to bear "the sad Semanthe back to Samos." His only consolation is to be found in mourning her departure.

The hero's final speech seems to dismiss the human misery of his son rather too easily, but the play certainly closes on an heroic flourish:

Sigh not, nor of the common Lot complain,  
Thou that art born a Man art born to Pain;  
For Proof, behold my tedious Twenty Years  
All spent in Toil, and exercis'd in Cares:  
'Tis true, the gracious Gods are kind at last,  
And well reward me here for all my Sorrows past. 1

#### Postscript

About the only critic to suggest that Ulysses is among the better plays in the Rowe canon is Gildon in A New Rehearsal, or, Bays the Younger (1714). Admittedly, the purpose of this work is to discredit and satirise Rowe, and for this reason the author may have picked out simply the play which was the least successful, and given it the most praise (grudging though it is). It may be worth while to look first at the comments by Mr. Truewit before looking at the play in conclusion:

I shall be the more tender of Ulysses, because it is by much the best of his, and has a sort of a Face of a Tragedy. The Poet indeed has left it without any Moral; he has made Semanthe unfortunate without any demerit. He has taken all Ithaca for his scene, which, by as good a Reason, might have been extended to all Greece, and so to all Europe, nay, indeed, to the whole Earth. He has introduc'd I know not how many Kings with the

Manners of Scoundrels or Porters; he has been fond, admiring Penelope's Beauty at Forty odd. He has made Ulysses put Penelope to an unnecessary and unjust Tryal, not at all conducive to the Plot, nor agreeable to the Wisdom, or Gratitude of his Hero. But these, and a great many more Absurdities of the Design, Conduct, and indeed of the sentiments and Diction, I will sacrifice to your good Nature; and to the weak Appearance of a Tragedy, which he has in no other of his Performances.<sup>1</sup>

Some of the points raised are interesting. Particularly so is the fact that the play is being judged according to the "rules" for heroic drama. Gildon notes the absence of "Poetic Justice" yet this is a point which Rowe stresses in the Epilogue. To Rowe this term means something a little different. It means that there must be some likelihood of the events happening in character, and it means that there should be no punishment without due cause. The matter of the lack of a "demerit" in Semanthe is interesting. Rowe seems to be saying that in this kind of heroic drama there is often no justice. This would seem to fit in with his strong beliefs in Christian society. In a Pagan society anything can happen, and to ask for true justice is to ask for too much.

Although easily classifiable as "A Heroic Play", Ulysses marks a transition from the pure form to a hybrid of the heroic, the slightly sentimental and the domestic. There is even a touch here and there of the elements which compose a "she-tragedy." The dramatic techniques displayed here and the control of contrast, pause, haste and meditation is as good as can be found anywhere else in the dramatist's works.

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<sup>1</sup> Gildon, II, p.56.

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