KING LEAR AND THE STORM

THE ECCENTRIC HERO IN DRYDEN'S HEROIC PLAYS

BERNARD SHAW AND CREATIVE EVOLUTION

by

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B.A., Acadia University, 1960.

THREE PAPERS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF

THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department

of

English

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SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

June, 1971
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Titles of Essays: King Lear and the Storm
The Eccentric Hero in Dryden's Heroic Plays
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ABSTRACTS

PAPER I: KING LEAR AND THE STORM

King Lear's concept of an orderly and harmonious universe with himself, as king, at its earthly centre, is shattered when he imagines himself to be betrayed by Cordelia and when he is, in reality, betrayed by Goneril and Regan. His final break with his former beliefs and the beginning of his understanding of the real universe occur during the storm scene in Act III, the storm reflecting, or appearing to reflect, his chaotic state of mind.

By examining in detail the opening lines of Act III, Scene 2, Lear's two invocations to the storm, and relating them to the rest of the play, rather than assessing the play as a whole, this essay attempts a different route to an appreciation both of Lear's condition and of Shakespeare's complex and extensive thinking on the subject of nature from those taken by such critics as Danby, Knight and Heilman.

PAPER II: THE ECCENTRIC HERO IN DRYDEN'S HEROIC PLAYS

John Dryden's romantic admiration of the irregular, "Herculean" hero, which is clearly indicated in
passages both from his criticism and his plays, conflicts with his sincere, conservative belief in the predominance of society over the heroic individual. After a preliminary discussion of Dryden’s concept of the "Herculean" hero as he inherited it from the European epic tradition (particularly his immediate predecessor in that tradition, Tasso), the essay attempts an exploration of this conflict and its effect on his presentation of heroism on the stage, by focussing on his two most successful irregular heroes, Maximin, in Tyrannic Love, and Almanzor, in The Conquest of Granada.

PAPER III: BERNARD SHAW AND CREATIVE EVOLUTION

Through a discussion of his two Vitalist plays, Man and Superman and Back to Methuselah, this essay explores Shaw’s concept of the doctrine of creative evolution. It concludes that Shaw is more effective as a social and moral critic in Man and Superman than as a visionary and prophet of Vitalism in Back to Methuselah,
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PAPER I: KING LEAR AND THE STORM
It is always best to state one's intentions at the beginning of an essay, if only as an indication to the reader, lost in subsequent digressions, of the paper's original aims. In this essay I hope to undertake a partial exploration of the complex and extensive thinking on the subject of nature which appears in Shakespeare's King Lear. This field has already been covered quite thoroughly by such critics as John F. Danby, G. Wilson Knight and Robert Heilman. However, while these and other commentators have approached the play from without, applying their various critical methods with equal intensity to the play as a whole, our method will be first to examine in some detail a short but important passage in the play, and then to take a broader look at the rest of the play in the light of conclusions drawn from our examination of the selected passage.

The passage we have chosen consists of two important speeches made by Lear at the beginning of Act III, scene ii, the storm scene. For the sake of convenience I will quote them here:

Lear: Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! rage! blow!
You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout
Till you have drench'd our steeples, drown'd
the cocks!
You sulph'rous and thought-executing fires,
Vaunt-couriers of oak-cleaving thunderbolts,
Singe my white head! And thou, all-shaking thunder,
Strike flat the thick rotundity o' th' world!
Crack Nature's moulds, all germens spill at once
That makes ingrateful man!

(King Lear III.ii.1-9)

Rumble thy bellyful! Spit, fire! spout, rain!
Nor rain, wind, thunder, fire are my daughters:
I tax you not, you elements, with unkindness;
I never gave you kingdom, call'd you children,
You owe me no subscription: then let fall
Your horrible pleasure; here I stand, your slave,
A poor, infirm, weak and despis'd old man.
But yet I call you servile ministers,
That will with two pernicious daughters join
Your high-engender'd battles 'gainst a head
So old and white as this. O, ho! 'tis foul.

(King Lear III.ii.14-24)

Ignoring for now their meaning, let us first
examine these lines for their rhythmic and tonal qualities. Although they are cast, for the most part, in five foot
blank verse, their rhythm is, as one might expect, highly
complex and irregular. Shakespeare uses a number of devices at the beginning of the passage to convey to the audience both the fury of the storm and the power of Lear's presence. The first line, with its sharp monosyllabic commands, and its variety of harsh sounds in close juxtaposition, the hard "k" and "ch" of "crack" and "cheeks," and the nasal, sibilant and vowel sounds of "winds," "cheeks," "blow" and "rage," suggests at once the cacophony of the storm and establishes the imperative mood of the passage. This is no prayer to the heavens, as one critic has suggested. In the first line, Lear's commands come thick and fast: "Blow, winds and crack your cheeks! Rage! Blow!" beginning the passage at a pitch set so high that it can rise no higher, but can only moderate in the lines following. A release from the tension set up by this opening line can be felt in the descending rhythms of "cataracts" and "hurricanoes" which evoke as well the downpouring rain of the storm. The feeling of tension and release from tension is strengthened by Shakespeare's contrasting of the monosyllabic first line, made up of eight short words of native origin, with the polysyllabic and imported "hurricanoes" and "cataracts" of the second line. The impact of these two lines on an Elizabethan ear must surely have been as profound as that of the tonal innovations in Wagner's music dramas on the ear of a nineteenth-
century opera-goer. 3

The dissonance of the first two lines moderates somewhat in lines three to five: fricatives give way to the vowel and nasal sounds of "drench'd" and "drown'd" and the sibilance of "steeples," "sulph'rous," and "fires," sounds which suggest the release of both the storm's natural fury and the pent-up emotional fury of the king. The course of Lear's emotions can be followed roughly by observing in this passage the positioning and frequency of his direct commands to the elements: at first they come in quick succession like a series of thunderclaps, "blow," "crack," "rage," "blow," then the release of "You cataracts and hurricanoes," then "spout"; but after this last order there follows the "descriptive" passage of lines three to five. Here the falling rhythms of "drench'd our steeples," "drown'd the cocks," "sulph'rous," "-executing," "-couriers," and "thunderbolts" evoke the release, the outpouring of feeling brought on by Lear's opening commands. At the same time the contra-puntal halting metre of "thought," "Vaunt" and especially "oak-cleaving" builds towards a second emotional peak climaxing in "Singe my white head!" This pattern is reflected in the sound structure of these lines. The first and most powerful cycle of tension and release merges into the next somewhere in the middle of line five where one can
notice a shift back from the sibilant "fires, / Vaunt-couriers" to the tight cluster of hard sounds in "oak-cleaving thunderbolts." Lines six to nine contain a second series of commands more widely spaced and at a lower intensity than the first:

Singe my white head! And thou, all-shaking thunder,

Strike flat the thick rotundity o' th' world!

Crack Nature's moulds, all germens spill at once

That makes ingrateful man!

(my italics)

Several much briefer cycles of tension and release appear in these lines: perhaps the best example appears in the seventh line where the climactic "Strike flat" is followed by the falling rhythm of "thick rotundity o' th' world!" Here again Shakespeare puts to good use his device of contrasting native words ("Strike flat") with those of foreign origin ("rotundity"). Particularly skillful is his positioning of the Latinate word "rotundity" in these lines: not only does the word itself contrast sharply with its Anglo-Saxon neighbours, "Singe," "head," "all-shaking," "Strike," and especially "thick," but its low vowel sounds at once clash with the hard fricative sounds of its immediate neighbours and echo the earlier thunder of "Vaunt," and "thunderbolts." We can thus see in these lines
further effective use of contrasting sound patterns all evoking the waxing and waning rage and fury of the storm, both in nature and within Lear's mind. In the concluding lines a new pattern of liquid sounds ("moulds", "all", "spill", "ingrateful") appears, resolving as well as possible the conflicting cracking, thundering, hissing and crashing of the rest of the passage.4

Before going on to the rest of Lear's speech we should comment further on Shakespeare's method of juxtaposing native English words with those of foreign origin, not only because of its extensive and effective use in these lines but also because the device itself is, in a sense, emblematic of the turbulent age in which King Lear was written. Although we noted only two instances, one can quite easily show by italicizing the foreign words how skillfully Shakespeare extends his use of this device throughout the passage:

Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! Rage! Blow!
You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout
Till you have drench'd our steeples, drown'd the cocks!
You sulph'rous and thought-executing fires,
Vaunt-couriers of oak-cleaving thunderbolts,
Singe my white head! And thou, all-shaking thunder
Strike flat the thick rotundity o' th' world!
Crack Nature's moulds, all germens spill at once
That makes ingrateful man!

(my italics)

Those especially marked are words which, in Shakespeare's day were just beginning to be accepted into the English language. We have already noted the skillful positioning of "cataracts," "hurricanoes," "rotundity" and the tensions and dissonances set up between them and their neighbouring vernacular words: a similar stress can be seen operating between the French "Vaunt-couriers" with its vowels and sibilants and the fricative and very English "oak-cleaving," and, in the final lines where tension subsides, lower-pitched conflicts occur between the Latinate "germens" and "ingrateful" and the monosyllabic vernacular of "all," "spill" and "makes," "man."

Without becoming too fanciful, one can see a great deal of significance in Shakespeare's use in this passage of words only partially absorbed into the language. The speech represents a climactic moment in Lear's spiritual development: here, for the first time, the king peers into the abyss and sees how woefully inadequate his old conception of an ordered nature with himself at its earthly centre is when compared to the nature of reality. Taking the English vernacular as emblematic and expressive of the medieval, ordered and
"Learian" concept of nature, we can consider any large borrowing of words from outside itself as indicative both of the break-down of the universe it describes and of its inability to comprehend the real universe. Just as Lear is unable to come to terms with reality without first going mad, so the language itself must undergo tortuous change (beginning with Shakespeare and continuing through the baroque imagery and fantastic conceits of Donne, Herbert and Crashaw) before emerging purged and rational under the "Cordelian" ministrations of Dryden, Addison, Pope and Swift, ready to cope with the new realities of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Within the context of the play, it is clear that the clash of native and borrowed words in this passage, suggesting as it does a breakdown in communication, is an excellent means of depicting Lear's failure to relate to the real universe.

After the Fool's interlude wherein he beseeches the king to surrender completely to hostile nature by accepting the sovereignty of his daughters, Lear continues. This second passage proceeds at a much lower pitch. Like the first, it begins with a series of commands: "Rumble thy bellyful! Spit, fire! Spout, rain!" However, these commands have less force than their earlier counterparts; "Rumble" suggests distant, perhaps subsiding thunder, rather than the immediate rages of the storm; "spit" and "spout" imply sporadic
violence more than the full fury of "crack your cheeks."
Yet this first line is the most powerful in the passage.
The only other command appears in line 18, "then let fall /
Your horrible pleasure." The remainder of the passage is in
the indicative mood; the fury of the imperative has been
abandoned, just as Lear appears to abandon his efforts to
control the elements, or at least to match their fury
with his own:

Nor rain, wind, thunder, fire, are my daughters:
I tax you not, you elements, with unkindness;
I never gave you kingdom, call'd you children,
You owe me no subscription:
Gone are all the harsh dissonances of the earlier speech:
instead of "cataracts and hurricanoes" we have, simply,"rain,"
"fire" for "sulph'rous and thought-executing fires," and
"thunder" for "oak-cleaving thunderbolts." We see a shift
from the highly coloured imagery of the first speech to the
general and almost abstract "rain, wind, thunder, fire,"
"elements," "kingdom," "children," and the full abstractions
of "unkindness" and "subscription." Except for the some-
what rougher sound of "subscription," which builds some
tension to be released by the final command "then let fall,"
these lines flow with hardly any friction at all. Although
the storm has not receded, one senses a widening gap between
Lear's mental outlook and the storm's continuing fury. The impression of Lear's unity with the storm, so convincingly conveyed in the first passage, fades away to almost nothing in these lines, just as his first sharp commands subside ultimately into the resignation and impotence of "O, ho! 'tis foul!"

From the apparent position of command over the storm which he takes in the first passage, Lear descends, in these lines, to one of "equality" with the raging elements and attempts a level dialogue with them: "I tax you not. . . I never gave you kingdom. . . You owe me no subscription." Lear's constant mention of himself in these lines underlines the growing distance between himself and the storm. He descends further, to a position of servitude:

then let fall

Your horrible pleasure; here I stand, your slave,

A poor, infirm, weak, and despis'd old man.

The imperative "then let fall / Your horrible pleasure," with its descending metre and compliant liquid sounds, is more a gesture of submission to the storm, of recognition of its greater power, than a command. The impression of servility is strengthened, of course, by the two lines following.

A final protest and a final recognition of his impotence can be seen in the last four lines of his speech:
But yet I call you servile ministers,
That will with two pernicious daughters join
Your high-engender'd battles 'gainst a head
So old and white as this. 0, ho 'tis foul.

Seeing his own servility, Lear accuses the elements of the same fault, and an impression of his momentary indignation at the thought of the elements conspiring with his daughters against him is reflected in the dissonance of "pernicious" and "high-engender'd" and in the tensions (like those in the first passage) set up between these Latinate words and their surrounding monosyllables. Finally, Lear breaks off his dialogue with the storm: the concluding "0, ho! 'tis foul" is addressed not to the storm, but to the spectator as a comment either on the storm's merciless fury or on his own miserable condition.

Having thus examined these two passages we are left with an impression of a series of clashes, each falling short of the last's intensity, ranging in force from the elemental fury of "Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks!" to the impotent acquiescence of "0, ho! 'tis foul." It is on this framework that Shakespeare builds his elaborate image of a man striving to comprehend the real universe, at first seeming to succeed, then failing all too clearly and falling, mentally and physically exhausted from the effort. It can be argued that
Lear's madness begins in these passages. We can examine this image in greater detail by looking again at these lines, this time for their meaning.

The first line needs little explanation, except perhaps a comment on the savagely baroque image of "crack your cheeks." Lear calls first upon the wind, the element of air, to wreak disorder on the world. The Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles quotes this line to illustrate one meaning of "crack," to snap or split asunder. Given this meaning we have the startling image of a wind spirit (wind personified by the use of "cheeks" to describe it) splitting his cheeks asunder in the act of generating the raging winds of the storm. It is a powerful image but one which might not impinge on the mind of a modern playgoer who could take "crack" simply as a description of the tendons in the cheek snapping, or seeming to snap, under the strain of bringing forth wind. If we accept the more powerful image we should note its suggestion of the wind's unfocused fury implied in its issuing forth in all directions from the torn cheeks of the wind spirit.

The next two lines are rather more difficult: "cataracts," for example, probably had several quite different meanings for Shakespeare. There is first the literal sense of waterspout or waterfall, the meaning which the O.E.D.
illuminates by citing the line in which this word appears. Having called upon the wind, air, Lear now summons water, the next element, to wreak its fury on the world. An older sense of the word is illustrated in these lines from *Paradise Lost*:

```
all the Cataracts
Of Heav'n set open on the Earth shall pour
Rain day and night, all fountains of the Deep
Broke up, shall heave the Ocean to usurp
Beyond all bounds, till inundation rise
Above the highest Hills . . .
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(XI.824-829)

"Cataracts" here is synonymous with floodgates and as such gives Shakespeare a powerful image with which to reinforce our impression of the release of pent-up, powerful emotions, a feeling already strongly conveyed through the metre of these lines (the final "blow!" of the first line can be taken as referring to "cataracts" rather than "winds", suggesting the forcing or bursting open of floodgates). A third important meaning, and one which bears on the pattern of sight imagery extending throughout *King Lear*, is that of an opacity of the eye's crystalline lens. According to the O.E.D., *cataract* was used in this sense at least as early as 1547. Apart from echoing Lear's spiritual blindness, this sense of the word reinforces our impression of the storm's blind directionless fury conveyed in the first line and earlier, in these lines from the
first scene of Act III: "tears his white hair, / Which the impetuous blasts, with eyeless rage, / Catch in their fury and make nothing of" (III.i.6-8). "Hurricanoes" is a less ambiguous word. A recent addition to the language of Shakespeare's day from the Carib huracan, it was taken to refer to those violent sea-borne waterspouts in the tropical storms which were prevalent in the Caribbean.  

Both "cataracts" and "hurricanoes" are commanded to "spout" forth their fury, the first from the heavens above, "drench'd our steeples," the second, "drown'd the cocks," from the raging seas below: drench can have the sense of soaking by falling water or rain as well as that of wetting through immersion, whereas drown has the unambiguous meaning of submerging in water or of being engulfed by rising floods. "Steeples" and "cocks" are the only artifacts mentioned in these almost totally naturalistic passages and two of the very few in the entire play. Both can be taken as symbols of man's attempt to impose his own order on ungovernable nature and both are here swept away by its irresistible force. At this time steeple was used metonymically for church and could thus here stand for a spiritual order which Lear once believed to be in operation in his world, but which he now feels is powerless against the forces of nature and of "fili-al ingratitude." "Cocks," with its connotations of chiefdom
and leadership, could represent man's temporal power here rendered impotent, as is Lear, by the fury of the storm. The word also carries with it, from its literal sense of weather-cock, the connotations of direction and measurement, (of space and also of time, for the expressions "first, second or third cock" were currently used to express points of time). Thus, with the inundation of "steeples" and "cocks" all artificially imposed order is seen to be swept away by the destructive forces of nature.

The image these lines contain of waters both rising and falling to engulf the earth is universal, appearing in the Bible: "in the same day were the fountaines of the great deepe broken vp, and the windowes of heauen were opened" (Genesis, 7,11); Ovid's Metamorphoses; Paradise Lost (in the passage quoted earlier) and several other places in Shakespeare, typically these lines from Richard II:

Like an unseasonable stormy day,
Which makes the silver rivers drown their shores,
As if the world were all dissolv'd to tears,
So high above his limits swells the rage
Of Bolingbroke . . .

(III.ii.106-110)

Its universality indicates both the depth and the chaotic state of Lear's emotions which Shakespeare wishes to convey in this first passage. Lear, striving "in his little world
of man to out-storm / The to-and-fro-conflicting wind and
rain" (III.i.10-11), his mind charged with the shock and
horror of his daughters' ingratitude, reads into the storm
all the fury of past universal catastrophes and, in the lines
following, of the future final destruction of the earth. The
storm continues, however, here less powerful than Lear's
invocations of the Flood and the Last Judgement, later
enduring while Lear's fury subsides into impotence. Because
of the power of these lines we are in danger of forgetting
that there is never any real rapport between Lear and the
elements: the concept of a king commanding the forces of
nature is part of the mythology of Lear's old world picture,
a picture which has been shattered by his daughters'
ingratitude and whose fragments the storm is now blowing to
distant corners of his mind.

So far we have had echoes only of the Flood
(whether Noah's or Deucalion's is irrelevant) with its
connotations of regeneration; now, with "You sulph'rous and
thought-executing fires" a suggestion of Hell and the
irrevocable destruction of the Last Judgement appears. Fire
joins air and water in their destructive fury. "Sulph'rous,"
with its echoes of the infernal, poses no serious problems
of meaning; "thought-executing," on the other hand, has
inspired a number of scholarly comments and articles. The
variorum edition of *King Lear* cites Dr. Johnson's quite literal interpretation of the phrase: "Doing execution with rapidity equal to thought," and Moberly's paraphrase, "executing the thought of Him who casts you." 11 Both critics take the general meaning of *execute*, to carry out a plan or order, as valid here. As a description of the speed of lightning, Johnson's meaning is quite valid, looking forward as it does to the next line, "Vaunt-couriers of oak-cleaving thunderbolts," but Moberly's interpretation, in suggesting the existence of a director of the storm's eyeless rage," does not fit the mood of the passage. If, as one critic has done, 12 one takes the more specific meaning of *execute*, to put to death, a more satisfactory interpretation of the line can be drawn: "'thought-executing' should be paraphrased 'thought-destroying.' Lear calls for the lightning to penetrate his skull and destroy his thoughts, to blot out memories of his ungrateful daughters. This plea for the annihilation of sanity reinforces Lear's previous tirades against Goneril and Regan, and also prepares for his impending madness." 13 "Thought-destroying" continues the theme of "drench'd our steeples, drown'd the cocks": first the effects of thought, now thought itself are envisioned by Lear as casualties of the storm; it also links more effectively with "Singe my white head," bringing out more clearly the suggestion
in this phase of Lear's approaching insanity.

Thus far Lear has called on the storm to wipe out first all vestiges of reason and then reason itself: in a further descent he now invokes the storm to destroy all life, the source of reason, and finally the earth itself, the source of life:

And thou, all-shaking thunder,
Strike flat the thick rotundity o' th' world!
Crack Nature's moulds, all germens spill at once
That makes ingrateful man.

These are perhaps the most difficult and crucial lines in this passage, certainly the most often discussed. Herein lies the most powerful plea for the destruction of order in all of Shakespeare's writings. Clearly anarchy to Shakespeare is an ultimate horror, for passages invoking chaos, couched in very similar imagery, appear in a number of his other plays where they are spoken by figures close to, or at, the limits of their endurance. In *Henry IV, Part II*, Northumberland on hearing of the death of Hotspur, his son, speaks these words:

Let Heaven kiss earth! Now let not Nature's band
Keep the wild flood confined! Let order die!14

(I.i.153-154)

Macbeth, ridden by guilt and terrified of what the future
may hold, invokes the supernatural powers of the Weird
Sisters thus:

Though palaces and pyramids do slope
Their heads to their foundations; though the
treasure
Of nature's germens tumble all together,
Even till destruction sicken: answer me
To what I ask you.¹⁵

(Macbeth. IV. i. 61-65)

However, while Macbeth merely states his willingness to accept the destruction of natural order if that is what it takes to fulfil his wishes (one suspects that little more than rhetoric is involved here, though it is a rhetoric inspired by deep terror) Lear is calling directly for such destruction. The intensity of these lines can be better appreciated when, as one critic suggests, one realizes the importance of the concepts contained in them. "To trace the concept of Nature's germens, rationes seminales, the basic seeds of all living things, the stuff of creation, from St. Augustine through Sts. Anselm and Bonaventure, Albertus Magnus and Roger Bacon and Aquinas, is to be impressed, not so much with the antiquity of that concept as with the reverence accorded to it; and so with the magnitude, the more than desperate abandon of the curse."¹⁶
"Nature's moulds," the concept of ideal forms, stems of course from Plato's philosophy. Here, form and matter were conceived as two distinct qualities, one being applied to the other from without to produce material copies of ideal forms. The concept of informed matter, matter possessing within itself the seeds of creation, "nature's germens," evolved later through the complexities of Neoplatonism and the teaching of St. Augustine. The latter concept, with its moral overtones (form or reason redeeming base matter from within), permeated Elizabethan thinking on the subject of nature. However, Shakespeare reintroduces the more purely pagan "Nature's moulds" here, in this essentially pagan play, in order to strengthen Lear's plea for universal destruction: "if moulds be allowed to represent form and germens to represent the seeds in matter, or matter informed, it is clear that the destruction is one of both form and matter, is in short the condition of being and existence at the Last Judgement." While on one level "Crack Nature's moulds" and "all germens spill at once" clash in that they recall, respectively, the differing pagan and Christian Platonic concepts of creation, on a lower level of meaning they combine together and with the previous line to form a composite image. "Strike flat the thick rotundity o' th' world!" can carry either the sense of the earth's complete
destruction or, if one accepts the earth as a universal mother figure, that of a womb, round in pregnancy, miscarrying. Mould could then be taken for womb, as it is in these lines from Richard II:

Ah, Gaunt, his blood was thine! that bed, that womb,
That mettle, that self mould, that fashioned thee
Made him a man.

(I.ii.22-24)

"Crack Nature's moulds" carries with it, then, the clear sense of miscarriage, abortion, or simply, termination of the process of creation, and, possibly, destruction of its mechanisms, and thus, sterility. If "Crack" is taken to mean snap or split asunder, as in line one, rather than merely strike with a sharp noise, which it could mean (Sir Thomas Browne reported that a sharp crack of thunder could cause a miscarriage), the image of sterility and irreversible destruction of life is complete. "All germens spill at once," with its connotations of masturbation, interrupted copulation or miscarriage (the last carried from "Crack Nature's moulds") makes the impression of sterility and final death that these lines carry overwhelming.

All the fury of these nine lines, unsurpassed in their intensity in all of Shakespeare, Lear directs at one
target, "ingrateful man!" At this stage in the play, all that occupies his mind is the ingratitute of his daughters; no thought does he spare for his own fallibility, his own unjust and "unnatural" acts of the very first scene of the play; he is still a man "more sinned against than sinning" (III.ii.59). He is here only beginning to perceive, with great difficulty, the error of his beliefs, his world picture -- and his own vulnerability in the real scheme of things; the error of his acts will prove too much for his sanity to accept. The horror of his daughters' ingratitude has plagued him from the first scene of the play, growing in intensity, particularly in his dialogues with Goneril and Regan, "Ingratitude, thou marble-hearted fiend, / More hideous, when thou show'st thee in a child, / Than the sea-monster" (I.iv. 267-269), and later "How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is / To have a thankless child!" (I.iv.297-298) until it rages through his mind, in this scene, as the storm rages without, culminating in "Crack Nature's moulds, all germens spill at once / That makes ingrateful man."

Inevitably, since universal destruction does not ensue, the passages following this speech are of necessity anticlimactic; first the fool's cowardly but prudent advice, and then Lear's following speech where he abdicates a second time, this time from all claim to control of the elements.
Indeed, the imperative "Rumble thy bellyful! Spit, fire!" unlike the commands of the first passage, is really more a commentary on the natural fury of the storm, rather than a call to supernatural and daemonic fury. "Nor rain, wind, thunder, fire, are my daughters," as well as expressing clearly his disclaimer of all authority over nature, suggests that Lear (momentarily rational after his earlier burst of emotion) recognizes the reality of the storm, the fact that it is a natural phenomenon totally unrelated to his human predicament. In this line and the five following, Lear is completely rational, assessing accurately his relationship, or rather non-relationship to the storm. His language, like Cordelia's in the first act, is completely logical. Like her syllogistic answer to her father, "Good my Lord, / You have begot me, bred me, lov'd me: I / Return those duties back as are right fit, / Obey you, love you, and most honour you" (I.i.95-98), Lear's thoughts proceed in a natural and balanced manner. His opening premise, "Nor rain, wind, thunder, fire, are my daughters" leads logically to its corollary, [therefore] "I [can] tax you not, you elements, with unkindness" (the unnatural or unfamilial behaviour of his daughters). The next two lines follow almost exactly the pattern of his daughter's earlier speech (surely it must be running through his mind): "I never gave you kingdom, call'd you children, / [therefore] You owe
me no subscription." Then, the inevitable conclusion; Lear has logically proceeded to a clear appreciation of the vulnerability of his position:

then let fall

Your horrible pleasure; here I stand your slave,

A poor, infirm, weak, and despis'd old man.

Stripped of his power by his daughters, Lear is powerless, a victim or "slave" of the indifferent elements.

The rational moment passes, however, and Lear continues his descent from the mania of the first passage to the persecuted depression of these final lines:

But yet I call you servile ministers,
That will with two pernicious daughters join
Your high-engender'd battles 'gainst a head
So old and white as this. O, ho! 'tis foul.

Reality is as yet too much for him; he withdraws into his old universe where the elements, like human nature, can be governed; only here he sees the storm as servant, not to him, but to his "pernicious daughters." Lear's old world-picture has become hideously distorted to him when he sees his unnatural children occupying his own central position in it, and this, perhaps, is what finally drives him over the brink into madness, a madness foreshadowed by his vision of the ungovern-
able storm as governed by his daughters. This looks forward to his later scenes with the disguised Edgar where his obsession with "filial ingratitude" has indeed become insanity. On first seeing the half-naked figure of Tom O'Bedlam, Lear assumes immediately that an identical fate has befallen him; nothing else, surely, could account for his miserable condition: "Didst thou give all to thy daughters? / And art thou come to this?" (III.iv.48-49). The fusion in Lear's mind of the storm and his daughters appears in his choice of the phrase "high-engender'd" to describe their conspiracy against him. Engender connotes both the inorganic will of the storm and the sexual will of Goneril and Regan. Lear is still in a mood to ascribe all evil and natural disorder to the sin of filial ingratitude, for this sin is at once the instrument which shattered his old universe and the window through which he peers into the abyss of the new. Only gradually, and only in a state of madness where past preconceptions and prejudices are set aside, will Lear be able to assimilate the further horrors and beauties of this new world.

In these two passages which we have examined it is clear that the king's relationship to the storm is a complex one. On one level the storm externalizes the inner turmoil of Lear's mind, a condition which he describes later in the
third act:

Thou'ldst shun a bear;

But if thy flight lay toward the roaring sea,
Thou'ldst meet the bear i' th' mouth. When the
mind's free
The body's delicate; this tempest in my mind
Doth from my senses take all feeling else
Save what beats there -- filial ingratitude!

(III.iv.9-14)

On another level, the level I have tried to bring out in
discussing these passages, the storm symbolizes the shattering
of Lear's universe, and his induction into the real world.
To conclude this essay I should like to examine how Shake-
speare prepares the audience thematically for Lear's complete
break with his old world which occurs in these passages.
This can be done by looking at the comments and discussion on
the subject of nature made by such figures as Lear, Gloucester,
Edmund and the Fool in the first two acts of the play.

The tragedy of King Lear, like that of Hamlet,
is that of a man, supremely well fitted to play one role in
life, compelled to play another quite different role, one
in which his erstwhile talents become fatal liabilities.
Hamlet, the philosopher, is placed in a situation where
action is mandatory and speculation disastrous; Macbeth, the
courageous warrior, falls when, in his fear of appearing cowardly in his wife's eyes, he murders Duncan; Othello, a general who owes much of his military success to his wise choice of advisers, falls when he allows one of them to advise him on a non-military matter; Coriolanus, born not to sue, but to command, is placed in a position where he must woo the populace for support.  

Similarly, Lear, with all the qualities of a king except, now in his declining years, good judgement, chooses to renounce kingship for a role for which his kingly qualities of pride, honour and authority are most ill-suited.

One of Lear's most kingly aspects is his belief in the old concept of nature, the benign, ordered and essentially medieval nature of Bacon and Hooker, in which the concept of kingship, the king as the divinely ordained ruler of the body politic, held a central position. Here reason, divinely bestowed, held sway over the individual just as the king ruled the state, its purpose being, not to compete with nature, but to serve her: "Each creature...under God, was a self-maintaining 'this'. It was not part of a machine. Rather, it was an intelligence observing its rightful place in a community. What held it in place and held the community together was Reason. The law it observed was felt more as self-expression than as external restraint. It was a law, in
any case, which the creature was most itself when it obeyed. And rebellion against this law was rebellion against one's self, loss of all nature, lapse into chaos. "21 It is this sort of nature, or rather its trappings, which abounds in the long court scene of Act I. Lear, having decided beforehand on the unnatural act of dividing his kingdom, carries it out in a most seemly and proper manner. The map is called for, and Lear announces in clear but ceremonious language his precise intentions. The map really symbolizes Lear's idealized view of his kingdom: there it is on the map, divided into meticulously proportioned segments, a kingdom of "plenteous rivers and wide-skirted meads," (I.i.65) with no suggestion of the stormy heath of Act III. The ritual of asking homage of each of his daughters, then bestowing on each her dowry of land proceeds in perfect order until Cordelia's fateful answer. No matter that Goneril's and Regan's replies are clearly insincere and inflated in tone; they are in perfect harmony with the empty ritual of this ceremony.

This scene brings to mind Shakespeare's earlier play, Richard II. While only part of this one scene in King Lear is ritual, formality and ceremony pervade the whole of the earlier play. The themes of both plays are roughly comparable: in both kings renounce their rightful positions, one out of weariness and old age, the other out of weakness and self-
pity; in both nature comes under much discussion. In King Lear, order quickly gives way to chaos. In Richard II, however, though it finally surrenders to the pragmatism and opportunism of Bolingbroke, this play's Edmund, the spirit of the old order is predominant. The mood of the play is symbolized by the tournament scene where all the paraphernalia of medieval pomp and pageantry is brought out in display, but to no effect: the tournament is halted by Richard's royal command. Similarly, throughout the play, Richard explains in detail the lofty significance of his position and the nature of his power, but fails to make use of that power; instead, he surrenders it piecemeal, without a struggle to Bolingbroke. Typical are these lines from his abdication scene:

Now, mark me how I will undo myself.
I give this heavy weight from off my head,
And this unwieldy sceptre from my hand,
The pride of kingly sway from out my heart;
With mine own tears I wash away my balm,
With mine own hands I give away this crown,
With mine own tongue deny my sacred state,
With mine own breath release all duteous oaths;
All pomp and majesty I do forswear;
My manors, rents, revenues, I forgo;
My acts, decrees, and statutes I deny.

(IV,i.202-213)

Each item of power is carefully listed and catalogued before its surrender. In a sense, Richard II can be considered an extensive valedictory to the medieval concept of nature. Richard, the last king of legitimate descent, retires with his court, the old order, before the Hobbesian Bolingbroke. Life has gone out of this old order; only the forms remain. Similarly in the first scene of King Lear only empty ritual remains of what may have been a highly effective and beneficent reign. It must be remembered that the ceremony of asking homage and distributing land in return, so empty and false here, where he treats his daughters as feudal vassals, was a standard ritual of medieval kingship and, under the proper conditions, one charged with meaning. Lear's tragic mistake, but one understandable in a king, is in treating familial love on the same terms as feudal loyalty. Goneril and Regan, of course, have no feelings, either of love or feudal loyalty towards their father; Cordelia, on the other hand, has love, but recognizing the ritual for what it is, offers only the loyalty of a vassal. Lear's tragic misreading of Cordelia's reaction precipitates the chaotic action of the play and sets the king on his tortuous path toward self-knowledge.
Consider Cordelia's fateful reply to Lear's demand for filial love:

Lear. what can you say to draw
A third more opulent than your sisters? Speak.

Cor. Nothing, my lord.

Lear. Nothing?

Cor. Nothing.

Lear. Nothing will come of nothing: speak again.

(I. i. 85-90)

Lear's incredulous "Nothing?" may be the most important single word in the play. How it is delivered on stage should affect a production's entire interpretation of King Lear. I imagine the word not shouted in protest, but spoken in a subdued tone, expressing a sense of numbed, shocked disbelief. Lear's whole universe of artifice is challenged for the first time; the word and the meaning he sees behind it threatens to "strike flat the thick rotundity" of his world. Just as the word itself poses a threat to Lear's physical universe ("nothing" suggests to the modern reader the seeming chaos of modern theories of creation) its use by Cordelia Lear takes as an attack on his moral universe -- "Till you have drench'd our steeples." The king, like the philosopher Hooker, takes certain modes of behaviour as proper and necessary for the orderly management of human society, whether the family or
the larger body politic, and their violation as unthinkable: "Axioms . . . so manifest that they require no further proof, are such as these, 'God to be worshipped'; 'parents to be honored'; 'others to be used by us as we ourselves would be by them'. Such things, as soon as they are alleged, all men acknowledge to be good; they require no proof or further discourse to be assured of their goodness." Cordelia's reply not only suggests to Lear the possibility of her own ingratitude (which, in a state of shock he takes for certainty), but also calls his attention, for the first time in his life, to the existence of such a vice as filial ingratitude. The play's irony lies in the fact that the faithful Cordelia, by replying as she has, inadvertently sets Lear on a course that leads him to suffer from this crime at the hands of the faithless Goneril and Regan.

The schism in Lear's mental universe, brought about by Cordelia's reply, is reflected in his ensuing curse:

For, by the sacred radiance of the sun,
The mysteries of Hecate and the night,
By all the operation of the orbs
From whom we do exist and cease to be,
Here I disclaim all my paternal care. . .

(I,i.109-113)

These lines are still couched in the language of medieval
nature; yet here for the first time there is the suggestion of conflict between ordered nature, "the sacred radiance of the sun," and chaotic nature, "The mysteries of Hecate and the night," intellect and energy -- the Apollonian and Dionysian dichotomy of Nietzsche (Dionysian nature, of course, is still mysterious to Lear). Bacon sees these two aspects of nature fused in the figure of Pan, as does mad Lear later in the play:

Down from the waist they are Centaurs,
Though women all above;
But to the girdle do the Gods inherit,
Beneath all is the fiend's . . .

(IV.vi.126-129)

Here, of course, the king, purged by the storm, sees reason and passion as opposing, incompatible forces within man, but in the earlier lines Lear still sees them united, controlled by "the operation of the orbs." Nevertheless the suggestion of potential conflict is clear.

Conveniently, in the scene between Edmund and Gloucester which follows, Shakespeare sets out the contrasting old and new concepts of nature. At first, Edmund sounds like a traditionalist, "Thou, Nature, art my goddess; to thy law / My services are bound". However, it is soon clear that he is not appealing to the benign ordered nature of Lear or
Gloucester: "Wherefore should I / Stand in the plague of custom, and permit / The curiosity of nations to deprive me . . . ?" (I.ii.1-4). Edmund's goddess is the energy of the storm, divorced completely from human affairs, the "plague of custom." The nature within himself is energy or passion which his reason must serve, not govern. His subordinating of reason to passion is what distinguishes Edmund from the regenerate Lear of Act V. Although in the storm scene ("You owe me no subscription") and later in the play ("Let copulation thrive") (IV.vi.117) Lear's concept of nature becomes identical with Edmund's, he will eventually learn from Cordelia that even in such a world reason and humanity can still subdue the passions within one, and that man need not become a servant to his animal nature. This is a lesson which Edmund does not learn.

Gloucester's concept of nature, like Lear's, is based in tradition and order, but, also like Lear, he is beginning to find his world-picture inadequate to cope with reality: "These late eclipses in the sun and moon portend no good to us: though the wisdom of Nature can reason it thus and thus, yet Nature finds itself scourg'd by the sequent effects. Love cools, friendship falls off, brothers divide: in cities, mutinies; in countries, discord; in palaces, treason; and the bond crack'd 'twixt son and father" (I.ii.107-114). Sensing
the impending moral chaos around him, yet bound to the idea that nature is governed by intellect, he cannot escape the conclusion that the universe is willing its own destruction.

In the remainder of Act I and in Act II Shakespeare portrays Lear as a man, who "hath ever but slenderly known himself" (I.i.293-294), who has given up a fixed position in a stable society, striving to regain his bearings in a social order now rendered chaotic by his own action. Although Lear the king is now becoming aware of the existence within him of Lear the "unaccomodated man," this new knowledge confuses rather than enlightens him. Before his "fall" Lear was sure of his position in the universe and his relationship to nature; now, however, both his position and nature itself are undefined. Right up until his final confrontation with nature in the storm scene Lear casts desperately about trying either to re-establish his old relationships or to find new ones, and in doing so he sees nature in many different guises and himself, reluctantly, as nothing, "an O without a figure" (I.iv.200-201). However, he cannot yet accept this latter vision even though the Fool keeps it constantly in his mind. He does acknowledge that nature within him, if not he within nature, has been turned upside down:

O most small fault,

How ugly didst thou in Cordelia show!
Which, like an engine, wrench'd my frame of nature
From the fix'd place, drew from my heart all love,
And added to the gall. O Lear, Lear, Lear!
Beat at this gate, that let thy folly in,
And thy dear judgement out!

(I.iv.275-281)

In dismissing Cordelia he allowed passion within him to
overrule reason, its rightful master; yet, immediately after
this confession he repeats his error. Just as he commanded
his court to banish Cordelia, he now commands nature to
effect a much worse punishment on Goneril:

Hear, Nature, hear! dear Goddess, hear!
Suspend thy purpose, if thou didst intend
To make this creature fruitful!
Into her womb convey sterility!
Dry up in her the organs of increase,
And from her derogate body never spring
A babe to honour her!

(I.iv.284-290)

Lear still sees nature in her traditional role of bearer of
all life and himself as yet possessing the traditional
kingly power of invoking the elements. Yet he asks nature
to do a most unnatural thing; he calls on the fertile bringer
of life to "convey sterility." Clearly Lear's "frame of
nature" has indeed been "wrench'd" if he sees her now in this unnatural light. Again passion dominates reason as the idée fixe of filial ingratitude takes greater and greater possession of Lear's mind.

With Goneril's treachery, only Regan remains to Lear as a fixed point in the rising chaos of his emotions. Desperately he clings to the illusion that she will provide a refuge for him, that her "tender-hefted nature" will soothe away all his wrathful feelings that threaten to spill over into madness:

No, Regan, thou shalt never have my curse:
Thy tender-hefted nature shall not give
Thee o'er to harshness: her eyes are fierce, but thine
Do comfort and not burn. *Tis not in thee
To grudge my pleasures, to cut off my train,
To bandy hasty words, to scant my sizes,
And, in conclusion to oppose the bolt
Against my coming in: thou better know'st
The offices of nature, bond of childhood,
Effects of courtesy, dues of gratitude . . .

(II.iv.172-181)

Lear, striving to see in Regan all the best aspects of benign nature, has clearly staked all his hopes on her. But when she
denies him by siding with Goneril, she delivers a blow that all but tears him asunder: "O sides! you are too tough; / Will you yet hold?" (II.iv.199-200). Denied by Regan, Lear veers away from his old concept of "tender-hefted nature" which he had prayed would be vindicated in her. He begins to see nature through Edmund's eyes, as a potentially hostile force, independent of his control. Now, rejected again by Goneril, instead of calling nature's wrath down on her for the third time, he merely reminds his daughter of its existence and potential fury: "Let shame come when it will, I do not call it; / I do not bid the thunder-bearer shoot, / Nor tell tales of thee to high-judging Jove" (II.iv.228-230).

Finally, just before his departure into the storm, Lear, denied everything by both daughters, makes this last, ambiguous appeal to nature:

You Heavens, give me that patience, patience I need,—
You see me here, you Gods, a poor old man,
As full of grief as age; wretched in both!

He calls on benign nature to help him remain rational; but then his point of view shifts:

If it be you that stirs these daughters' hearts
Against their father, fool me not so much
To bear it tamely; touch me with noble anger . . . 

(II.iv.273-278)

If nature does consist of Edmund's passion and energy, then let it fill Lear with anger, just as it has filled his daughters with greed and ingratitude. The duality of these lines hearkens back to Lear's original curse, "For, by the sacred radiance of the sun, / The mysteries of Hecate and the night . . . ." Lear's ensuing anger, "I will do such things,/ What they are, yet I know not, but they shall be / The terrors of the earth" (II.iv.282-284) comes not from the heavens but from within; similarly, Lear's ensuing fury in Act III comes from within himself: his is not a rage inspired by heaven, but a natural fury from within contesting the cosmic fury without. Throughout Act II, and particularly in this final scene, Lear has been walking the fine line between madness and sanity, fury and calm reason. Regan says rightly about her father, "Nature in you stands on the very verge / Of her confine!" (II.iv.148-149). Now nature within the king is about to break out in fury and madness; and Lear within nature is about to break out of the confines of his old concept of the universe to embrace the Dionysian energy of the storm, and to understand the ultimate gulf separating rational man from tempestuous nature.
The storm thus marks Lear's final break from the old order, re-enacting on a cosmic physical plane what has already occurred on a moral level within Lear's mind; the raging elements match and quicken the turbulence within the king, bringing his obsession with his daughter's ingratitude to a fever pitch, and pitching his mind over the brink into madness.
NOTES


7Williams, p.66. Williams points out in a footnote that "hurricano" is used in the sense of a descending spout in Troilus and Cressida, however.

8Cited in Williams, p.66.


13Heninger, loc. cit.


17A fuller discussion of this topic can be found in Fraser, and in W.C. Curry, Shakespeare's Philosophical Patterns (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1937), pp.29-49.

18Williams, p.69.

19Ibid., p.70.


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PAPER II: THE ECCENTRIC HERO IN DRYDEN'S HEROIC PLAYS
Among the many critical problems confronting the student of John Dryden's heroic plays is the question of his ambiguous attitude to heroic character. For while we can clearly ascertain in his treatment of his dramatic heroes a conscious commitment to society and a belief in its necessary precedence over the individual, we cannot overlook certain important passages in his essays prefatory to these plays, and in the plays themselves which suggest an almost romantic attachment to the iconoclastic hero who can stand independent, apart from society. Consider this passage from a letter dedicating The Conquest of Granada to the Duke of York:

I have formed a Heroe, I confess, not absolutely perfect, but of an excessive and overboylng courage: but Homer and Tasso are my precedents. Both the Greek and the Italian poet had well consider'd that a tame Heroe who never transgresses bounds of moral vertue would shine but dimly in an Epick poem. The strictness of those Rules might well give precepts to the Reader, but would administer little of occasion to the writer. But a character of an excentrique vertue is the more exact Image of humane life, because he is not wholly exempted from the frailties. Such a person is Almanzor. . . .¹

and this more famous passage from his preface, Of Heroic Plays:

You see how little these great Authors [Homer, Tasso] did esteem the point of Honour, so much magnify'd by the French, and so ridiculous ly ap'd by us. They made their Hero's men of honour; but so, as not to divest them quite of humane passions and frailties. They contented themselves to shew you, what men of
great spirits would certainly do when they were provok'd, not what they were oblig'd to do by the strict rules of moral vertue; for my own part, I declare my self for Homer and Tasso; and am more in love with Achilles and Rinaldo than with Cyrus and Oroondates. I shall never subject my characters to the French standard; where Love and Honour are to be weigh'd by drachms and scruples; yet where I have designed the patterns of exact vertue, such as in this play [The Conquest of Granada] are the parts of Almahide, of Ozmy, and Benzayda, I may safely challenge the best of theirs.2

In order to reconcile with his essentially conservative view of society, and the place of the individual within it, Dryden's romantic attitude to heroic character, as illustrated by these passages and exemplified by his efforts to bring to the stage an epic hero modelled not, as one might expect, on Agamemnon, Aeneas or Tasso's Goffredo, all staunch defenders of the social order, but upon the individualistic and essentially tragic Achilles, we should explore briefly the development of heroic character in the epic tradition which Dryden inherited from his predecessors.

Torquato Tasso, though writing a century earlier than Dryden, and in another country, worked in a very similar literary environment. Both concerned themselves with the same literary problems: first, how to give form, direction and critical justification to a developing vernacular epic tradition so that it might be better able to celebrate the growing spirit of nationalism in Europe with
its increased emphasis on social order; second, how to present, within the confines of such a form, a hero who could retain his individuality and remain a figure worthy of admiration. The evolution of the epic hero from classical antiquity down to the heroic poems of Tasso and the plays of Dryden is the story of a constant struggle to impose the necessary moral restraints of society upon an heroic temperament without destroying the primitive energy of that temperament, the essential quality which makes it heroic.

Tasso attempted to show, in his criticism, that the loosely structured, episodic romanzi of his predecessors, Boiardo and Ariosto, though they differed greatly, particularly in their emphasis on the several exploits of a hero, rather than a single unifying action, did deserve comparison with the classical epic; in Gerusalemme Liberata he tried to show that the formal elements of the classical epic could be combined with the fanciful qualities of the Italian romanzo to produce a successful modern epic or, as Tasso termed his work, a heroic poem. The three primary figures of his poem, Goffredo, Tancredi and Rinaldo, possess, among them, virtually all possible elements of the heroic temperament that had appeared in epic literature up to that time.

Goffredo is the hero as leader of a great enterprise. Tasso describes him thus in a preface to his poem:
Godfrey, which of all the assembly is chosen chieftain, stands for understanding, and particularly for that understanding which considereth, not the things necessary, but the mutable and which may diversely happen, and those by the will of God. And of princes he is chosen captain of this enterprise because understanding is of God, and of nature made lord over the other virtues of the soul and body, and commands these, one with civil power, the other with royal command. Rinaldo, Tancredi, and the other princes are in lieu of the other powers of the Soul, and the Body here becomes notified by the soldiers less noble.  

Goffredo, then, descended as he is from Agamemnon and Aeneas, is the perfect "regular" hero, the blameless pattern of a leader, to paraphrase a later description, by Dryden, of a similar figure, Aureng-Zebe. Yet, as C.M. Bowra points out, in an essay on Tasso, there are limits on Goffredo's stature as a hero. "Since Goffredo is the commander of a Christian army, his task has a special character. He is not a knight of the old kind who can pursue prowess to his heart's content. His duty is to command his army and to conduct the campaign. His heroism is limited by his position..."  

Tancredi and Rinaldo, free of the responsibilities of command, are better able to realize their full heroic potential. Tancredi's love for Clorinda, his loyalty to Rinaldo, and his several impressive feats of single combat, show him to be an admirable hero, though more "regular" than the temperamental Rinaldo. Related as he is to the courtly
yet battle-worthy Christian heroes of the romances of Boiardo and Ariosto, he is kept in check through his adherence to their codes of Christian chivalry and courtly love. Only in Rinaldo do we have a genuine echo of the primitive energy of the Herculean hero. I have borrowed this term from Eugene Waith's study, The Herculean Hero in Marlowe, Chapman, Shakespeare and Dryden. Waith provides a good explanation of this term in the following description of the particular nature of Hercules' heroism:

Although Hercules has often been thought of as the hero, the embodiment of what is quintessentially heroic, his career is not a paradigm of the career of all heroes. It reveals a strength and fierceness which relate him more closely to the Achilles who refuses to be reconciled with the Greeks, for example, or the Ajax who commits suicide to defend his heroic reputation than to the Odysseus who wins out through cunning or the Aeneas who sacrifices himself to the great purpose of founding Rome. Certain of the great warrior heroes, then, are more "Herculean" than others, but Hercules differs (in important ways) from even those who resemble him most closely. "This is no Achilles," says R.C. Jebb, emphasizing the differences, "no image of that chivalry which Aeolian legend had delineated and Ionian poetry adorned... he has never known such tears as came into the eyes of the young Achaean warrior, when the aged king of Troy, kneeling at his feet, kissed the hand that had slain Hector." Hercules, the Dorian hero, is a more primitive embodiment of areté than Achilles. He is incapable, as Jebb suggests, of the scene with Priam, and is even more rigorous, more god-like, in his wrath. In Hercules the core of primitive strength, never completely transmuted by the refining power of more civilized ideals, is touched with the strangeness and mystery which belong to a demigod.  

Tasso, and Dryden, would know Hercules, not only as a figure
of classical mythology, but also from his appearance in the Heracles of Euripides and the Trachidae of Sophocles, or their Roman counterparts, Seneca's Hercules Furens and his Hercules Oetaeus.

Seneca, in Hercules Oetaeus, follows Sophocles' treatment of the hero's suffering in the poisoned shirt of Nessus; however, he draws his characters in a far cruder manner: Deianira is the chronically jealous wife, rather than a woman who, acting on a momentary impulse, causes her husband's tragic death; Hercules, who does not appear until towards the end of the Trachidae, opens this play with a heroic rant which would not be out of place in a Dryden play, and continues in the same bombastic vein through to the final scenes. Indeed the play, like all of Seneca's tragedies, is a vessel for oratory rather than action, and has much more in common with the Restoration heroic play than with Greek tragedy. Most important, from our point of view, it presents, for Tasso's and Dryden's inspection, a boldly, if crudely, drawn portrait of the archetypal eccentric hero which, if it lacks the spontaneity of Sophocles' model, lacks nothing of its force and clarity.

Hercules appears, throughout the play, totally preoccupied with his own greatness. Typical is a "rant" delivered to the heavens in the midst of his suffering:
Hercules: Turn back, O shining Sun, thy panting steeds, and let loose the night; let this day wherein I die perish for the world, and let heaven shudder in the pitchy dark. So thwart my stepdame. Now, father, were it fitting to restore blind chaos; now this side and that should heaven's frame be burst and both poles rent asunder. Why dost thou spare the stars? Thou art losing Hercules, O father. Now, Jupiter, look well to every part of heaven, lest any Gyas hurl Thessalian crags and Othrys become a slight missile for Enceladus. Now, now will haughty Pluto open his dark prison gates, strike off his father's chains and give him back to heaven. Since I thy son, who on earth have been in place of thy bolt and lightning flash, am turning me back to Styx, Enceladus, the fierce will rise, and the mass 'neath which he now is crushed will he hurl against the gods; yea, father, thy whole realm of air will my death put to hazard. Then ere thou art utterly despoiled of heaven, bury me, father, 'neath the whole ruined world; shatter the skies which thou art doomed to lose.

(lines 1131-1150)

Here indeed, one can sense the mystique of the demigod to which Waith alludes in his characterization of Hercules. Because Hercules, unlike Rinaldo or Almanzor, has such a vast tradition of myth behind him, his extravagant speeches, like the one cited above, have a ring of conviction about them which naturally could not be matched in their heroes by either Tasso or Dryden. Yet it was just this effect that Dryden wished to achieve in his heroic plays, particularly The Conquest of Granada.

Rinaldo, clearly, represents Tasso's conception of the Herculean hero. He is the most "irregular" of the
three, and it is probable that Tasso took a greater interest in him than he did in Goffredo or Tancredi. Certainly Dryden did. As this summing up of his character by Bowra indicates he is both a direct descendent of Achilles and an important model for Dryden's Almanzor:

Rinaldo differs from Tancredi in being not a courtier but a romantic adventurer. . . . In his independence, his sense of personal honour, and his youthful ardour, he is an uneasy subordi- nate. He cannot endure insults, and in his high temper he kills Gernando. His pride prevents him from accepting punishment, and it is character- istic of him that he goes off alone to seek adventure in foreign lands. . . . Even before his departure Rinaldo has shown that he is the best of the Crusaders in battle, and when he returns, spiritually strengthened and reformed, he performs prodigies of valour. . . . Rinaldo is the crusader who comes nearest to being a hero in the old sense. He has the heroic pride and sense of honour, but in him these are eventually curbed and disciplined until they are turned to the use of his Christian cause, although they lose none of their fierce- ness in the actual fighting.

Within the epic tradition, the heroes of Geru- salemme Liberata were the closest real examples Dryden had upon which to model his own heroes. Unlike the perfectly formed paragons in the romances of de Scudéry and La Cal- prenède, written only shortly before Dryden wrote his heroic tragedies, Goffredo, Tancredi and Rinaldo reflect their creator's concern with the problem of the "irregular" hero, and the larger, but related literary question of striking a balance between the creative imagination
(necessary for the creation of an Achilles, a Rinaldo or any compelling heroic character) and an adherence to established literary convention -- specifically the elaborate literary codes of late Renaissance Italy and seventeenth century England -- believed necessary to keep such heroes suitable as moral examples for the reader. The problem of imagination versus literary convention affected Dryden as strongly as it did Tasso, more strongly perhaps, and his efforts to come to grips with it can be seen all through his writing, particularly in his early criticism and in his heroic plays.

One of the minor literary issues of the age in which Dryden was writing, but one which shows clearly the critical temper of the period, was the question of whether the rhymed couplet was a suitable medium for the serious play. Dryden addressed himself to this question on several occasions, and in his various comments upon the subject we can see the great difficulties he had in facing the larger issue of the imagination versus literary convention. Originally, in defending its partial use in *The Rival Ladies*, Dryden praises the couplet as a device for controlling the poet's imagination:

> For imagination in a poet is a faculty so wild and lawless, that like an high-ranging spaniel, it must have clogs tied to it, lest it outrun the judgement. The great easiness of blank verse renders
the poet too luxuriant; he is tempted to say many things, which might better be omitted, or at least shut up in fewer words; but when the difficulty of artful rhyming is interposed, where the poet commonly confines his sense to his couplet, and must contrive that sense into such words, that the rhyme shall naturally follow them, not they the rhyme; the fancy then gives leisure for the judgement to come in, which, seeing so heavy a tax imposed, is ready to cut off all unnecessary expenses.10

However, when his critics, particularly Sir Robert Howard, argued that the rhymed couplet curbed, not excessive fancy, but natural discourse in the serious play, Dryden responded, not by strengthening his defence of the couplet as a means of restraining fancy and thus lending a sober and more moderate tone to stage dialogue, but by exalting the position of the serious play and arguing that its lofty position can best be maintained through its use:

This last is indeed the representation of Nature, but 'tis Nature wrought up to an higher pitch. The plot, the characters, the wit, the passions, the descriptions [of a serious play] are all exalted above the level of common converse, as high as the imagination of the poet can carry them, with proportion to verisimility. Tragedy, we know, is wont to image to us the minds and fortunes of noble persons, and to portray these exactly; heroic rhyme is nearest Nature, as being the noblest kind of modern verse.11

Nowhere in his early criticism does Dryden refute his remarks concerning the rhymed couplet as a device for regulating the fancy; yet, clearly, in his Essay of Dramatic Poesy (1668), his Defence of an Essay of Dramatic Poesy (1668), and his
essay, Of Heroic Plays (1672), he sees the rhymed couplet more and more as a way of bringing nature "up to an higher pitch," than as an instrument of restraint.

It appears at first glance, then, that Dryden is trying to have the best of both worlds, yet his position is valid; one can see in his concept of the serious play, perhaps best summed up in the difficult phrase "nature wrought up to an higher pitch," the essence of the Baroque spirit of controlled exuberance, a spirit which was admirably served by the polarizing device of the rhymed or "heroic" couplet, with its capacity both of screening out, through its restrictive medium, distracting flights of fancy, and of embellishing those lines of thought considered by the poet to be truest to nature. However, what was to be the true nature of the heroic play? Was its subject to be the predominance of the social order, and its importance as a restraining force on man's unruly nature? Then the couplet, both as a medium requiring artistic discipline and as a vehicle for exposition and reasoned debate, would be well suited to treat of such a topic. Or was its primary subject to be the glorious nature of the eccentric hero? Then the couplet would serve equally well, here as a medium of embellishment. Could any play successfully contain two such opposing subjects, even if its medium, the heroic couplet, were apparently capable of treating
both of them equally well? Dryden may have been seduced by his faith in the heroic couplet into believing that he could successfully incorporate both subjects into his plays. Certainly the rhymed couplet is capable of describing heroic character, but can it or can a play composed completely in rhyming couplets evoke such character? Can it present an eccentric hero favourably in the presence of strong arguments, reinforced by the use of the couplet, to the effect that such a hero is dangerous to the social order? The problem becomes clearer when we consider this passage from his Essay of Dramatic Poesy in the light of his earlier quoted remarks concerning the eccentric hero. Neander (Dryden) is answering an objection to the rhymed couplet put forward by Crites (Howard):

But you tell us, this supplying the last half of a verse, or adjoining a whole second to the former, looks more like the design of two, than the answer of one. Supposing we acknowledge it: how comes this confederacy to be more displeasing to you, than in a dance which is well contrived? You see there the united design of many persons to make up one figure; after they have separated themselves in many petty divisions, they rejoin one by one into a gross: the confederacy is plain amongst them, for chance could never produce any thing so beautiful; and yet there is nothing in it, that shocks your sight.12

Here Dryden, in his defence of the rhymed couplet, comes close to the concept of tragedy as artifact, wherein all action is carefully and obviously plotted out before-hand,
as in a dance or a masque. Such a format would be indeed suitable for stressing the social theme, but how could it accommodate the "irregular" hero and with him, the idea of individual greatness? Certainly some of Dryden's sub-plots, at least, do have the quality of masque, particularly that involving Ozmyn and Benzayda in *The Conquest of Granada*. With his perfect virtues as guides, Ozmyn, a "regular" hero in the French manner, as Dryden admits, has no trouble entering into such a dance. But how could Almanzor, supposedly a man of great spirit, like Achilles and Rinaldo, not bound by "the strict rules of moral virtue," fit into a play designed upon such rigid principles and still retain his "Herculean" temperament? It can be argued that if the "irregular" Achilles can remain heroic while fitting into the carefully formed plot of the *Iliad*, surely Almanzor can do the same in *The Conquest of Granada*. Yet, in the former case, Achilles' action in withdrawing from the battle clearly affects the outcome of the epic -- in short, the story can be said to be a function of the hero's impulsive character; in the latter case, as I shall attempt to show upon examining *The Conquest of Granada*, Almanzor's character is, to a great extent, shaped by the excessively formal demands of the plot, the "dance which is well contrived."

If Dryden intended his heroic tragedies to carry
together both themes, that of the heroic potential of the individual and that stressing the need for social control and guidance of such potential, then he had to find a convincing way of presenting his heroes as Herculean figures who, without losing that vital streak of primitive energy, would be amenable to guidance and correction from a higher authority. As we have seen, Dryden was not the first poet to face this problem. However, it must be remembered that, more than in any epic of his predecessors, heroic character was central to Dryden's early tragedies. The important elements of narrative and description, upon which Homer, Virgil and Tasso focused much of their creative energy, had to be abandoned by Dryden when he chose to set his epics upon the stage. He could afford, therefore, to devote much more time to characterizing the hero; indeed he had little choice but to do so. Where Dryden differed from his predecessors, then, was in his raising his heroes, principally through their own rhetoric rather than through action, to as high a level as possible before applying to them the required social strictures. If a hero could be raised high enough, perhaps the necessary humbling process of his social integration would appear less destructive and he could successfully make the transfer from "Herculean" to "regular" hero, along the lines of Aeneas and Coffredo, and still retain
some of the "divine" aura of the eccentric hero. In this way both themes, social and "heroic," could be sustained through to the end of the play.

How does Dryden succeed, then, in the characterization of his heroes? By narrowing our treatment of this question to a discussion of Maximin and Almanzor, his two most ambitious essays in heroism, rather than attempting a coverage of all his heroic plays, we can focus more directly on Dryden's treatment of this quality on the stage. The "heroic" villain, Maximin, represents Dryden's closest approach to a truly primitive hero. Primitive energy counts for everything in his character; social morality, even a rudimentary sense of right and wrong, for nothing. With Almanzor, Dryden comes closest to realizing his ideal of heroism blending with social morality, of the super-hero tamed, but not broken by society.

Maximin comes closest of all Dryden's dramatic characters, to Marlowe's Tamburlaine and to the concept of the totally self-absorbed Herculean hero. On reading Tyrannic Love one can see clearly that Dryden, while recognizing the inherent evils of such a character and its basic incompatibility with any form of social order, was, like Marlowe, fascinated with its energy and particularly with the rhetorical possibilities that a display of such energy allowed the dramatist.
In the opening scenes of *Tyrannic Love*, Dryden attempts to involve his audience at least partially with his villain-hero by presenting him in as sympathetic a light as he can. He establishes Maximin's credentials as a formidable warrior-hero in the opening lines of the play, "Thus far my Arms have with success been crown'd; / And found no stop, or vanquish'd what they found . . ." (I.i.p.335).¹³ Maximin quickly displays an heroic contempt for the less violent elements in his society and even for the idea of a stable social order:

That Senate's but a name;
Or they are Pageant Princes which they make;
That pow'r they give away, they would partake.
Two equal pow'rs, two different ways will draw,
While each may check, and give the other Law.
True, they secure propriety and peace;
But are not fit an Empire to increase. . . .

(I.i.p.336)

Dryden allows his audience a certain ambiguity here. Since the play's historical setting is the declining Roman Empire of the third century, the playgoer could, if he wished, accept as valid Maximin's view of the Roman Senate as standing (like Boabelin in *The Conquest of Granada*) for a corrupt, failing society. Maximin's view of the Senate is refuted, but
not until the end of the play, when Porphyrius, after the tyrant's death, upholds the legitimacy of the Roman Senate, "Two Emperors at Rome the Senate chose, / And whom they chuse no Roman should oppose . . ." (V.i.p.393).

Maximin is shown at his best when he first receives the news of his son's death. He utters his first of a long series of hyperbolic rants in a tragic situation, one which merits the sympathy of the audience:

**Max:** Stay; if thou speak'st that word, thou speak'st thy last:

Some God now, if he dares, relate what's past:
Say but he's dead, that God shall mortal be.
**Alb:** Then what I dare not speak, look back and see.

(Charinus born in dead by Souldiers.)

**Max:** See nothing, Eyes, henceforth, but Death and woe;
You've done me the worst office you can do,
You've shewn me Destiny's prepost'rous crime;
An unripe fate; disclos'd e're Nature's time.

(I.i.pp.340-341)

These lines, while hinting at the depths of a tyrant's passionate nature, can be taken simply as an honest outpouring of grief, admirable in its intensity. However, when Placidius and Porphyrius try to calm his grief by suggesting that his great nature should be able to withstand the blows of fate:
Placid: Asswage, great Prince, your passion, lest you show
There's somewhat in your Soul which Fate can bow.
Por: Fortune should by your greatness be controul'd:
Arm your great mind, and let her take no hold.
(I.i.p.341)

Maximin continues in a speech which, stressing as it does the persistently defiant nature of his grief, shows, most clearly, the great depth and insatiable quality of the man's passion:

Max: To tame Philosophers teach constancy;
There is no farther use of it in me.
Gods! (But why name I you!
All that was worth a prayer to you, is gone:)
I ask not back my virtue, but my Son.
(I.i.p.341)

The tyrant soon gives more concrete proof of his immoderate passion when he unjustly demands that the legion which fought with his son at his death be decimated. An objection is answered by "Why, they take Pay to die" (I.i.p.341).

Nevertheless, up to this point, Maximin has been shown as a courageous and successful general, a possibly just critic of a declining society, and a grieving father. Even in his first encounter with Christianity, he appears more as a
defender of the State against zealous factions than as a cruel persecutor:

Max: From me they can expect no grace, whose minds
An execrable superstition binds.

How, to their own destruction, they are blind!
Zeal is the pious madness of the mind.

(I,i.p.339)

Thus far, then, Dryden has made every effort to involve his audience as much as possible in the unique character of Maximin before going on to demonstrate its fatal flaws. For although he was careful, in a preface, to justify his play on moral grounds, setting great store by the virtuous character of St. Catharine, I believe Dryden's intent in the play, initially at least, was to attempt a thorough exploration of the psychology of the Herculean heroic character, its potentialities and its weaknesses.

However, from the end of the first act to the end of the play, Maximin's weaknesses, his immoderate passion, whether grief, love, jealousy or lust for power, and his total self-preoccupation, become all too apparent, as in speech after speech he indulges his great capacity for rant. In these speeches Dryden often indulges, at considerable cost to the convincing portrayal of character, his own capacity for
hyperbolic statement and provocative argument. A ranting speech which Maximin makes upon bestowing the rank of Caesar and his daughter's hand upon Porphyrius may be taken as typical:

Yet Heav'n and Earth, which so remote appear,
Are by the Air, which flows betwixt 'em, near.
And 'twixt us two my Daughter be the chain:
One end with me, and one with you remain.

(II.i.p.346)

Suggesting, as they do, the tyrant's usurping of the Godhead itself, these are the words, not merely of a proud over-bearing tyrant, but of the very personification or emblem of excessive pride. They are, not what one would say, but the most one can say, in such a situation, if he wishes to display supreme authority. The impression of Maximin's blasphemous pride is reinforced when, shortly after, St. Catharine, appealing to the true Godhead, makes a similar, but more pious reference to the Great Chain of Being:

This doctrine well befitted him who thought
A casual world was from wild Atoms wrought:
But such an order in each chance we see,
(Chain'd to its cause, as that to its decree,)
That none can think a workmanship so rare
Was built or kept without a Workman's care.

(III.i.p.353)
In such speeches we see a much stronger emphasis on presenting the idea of self-obsession as an aspect of the Herculean temperament than on the development of a plausible character within a play. Dryden shifts his focus away from Maximin the individual villain: as the play progresses and the tyrant delivers more of his rants in this vein, he appears less and less as a villain in a play and more and more as an emblem or speaking picture of Herculean self-obsession, the quality which Waith calls arete.

Up until the end of the second act Maximin appears as a ranting hero in the same vein as Tamburlaine, spurred on solely by his lust for self-aggrandizement. The Herculean temperament of Tamburlaine is central to Marlowe's play, and is therefore buttressed by Marlowe with a host of lesser characters who serve merely to reflect the hero's glory. Tamburlaine continues unopposed in his career of conquest and self-aggrandizement through to the end of the play. However, Dryden could not step outside of Christian morality, as Marlowe did in Tamburlaine, and still be true to his essentially moral conception of drama and of the heroic play in particular. Against the character of Maximin, therefore, Dryden sets the character of St. Catharine, the moral precepts of her arguments for Christianity, and the moral examples of the ennobling love relationship between Porphyrius and Berenice and of Valeria's
self-sacrifice. Porphyrius may chafe a little in his role of courtly lover -- he has some elements of the irregular hero -- but Berenice and Valeria are flawless in their reactions to their respective testing situations. Together these figures make up a moral order, totally incompatible with the anarchic temperament of Maximin. Having set up this opposition, Dryden could deal with Maximin in one of three ways: he could persist in treating him as another Tamburlaine, allowing him to persevere in his role of conqueror through to the end of the play, avoiding somehow a confrontation with the play's moral elements. However, by thus preserving his Herculean hero intact, Dryden would have produced a double-plotted work, something like his *Marriage à la Mode*, but, with its inevitably conflicting themes, even more hopelessly divided. Or he could arrange a confrontation between his hero and the moral elements of the play by which Maximin's Herculean temperament might be challenged, exposed as socially disastrous, but allowed to remain unchanged. Such a treatment, while properly moral, would still give Dryden ample opportunity to explore the psychology of the Herculean hero. This is what he chose to do. The third alternative, a confrontation between the hero and society, resulting in the hero's education and integration into that society, Dryden was to take in *The Conquest of Granada*. 
Maximin's confrontation, like Almanzor's, comes in the form of "heroic" love. He acknowledges love, yet, unlike Almanzor, he cannot freely surrender to it and allow himself to be guided by it, for to do so would be to deny his other passion, his will to power which is rooted deep in his total self-preoccupation, "Wild with my rage, more wild with my desire, / Like meeting tides -- but mine are tides of fire" (III.i.p.354). The resulting conflict of these passions within him becomes the essence of his relationship with St. Catharine, and of his character for the rest of the play. His character, static like Tamburlaine's and that of all true primitive heroes, now becomes totally frozen -- he can no longer move even along the narrow course of his desire -- for now even the gratification of passion, the mainstay of the action in Marlowe's play, is denied him; his two conflicting passions feed on one another: should he submit to love and spare St. Catharine, or should he obey his will to power and destroy this threat to his supremacy? His lust guides him into the former course, but when, pursuing this course, he is rebuffed by the saintly lady, his pride sends him back to the latter. Thus immobilized by his passions, Maximin, while retaining the character of the Herculean hero, loses all his potency, his ability to act. "The irony which underlines the whole play is that Maximin
thinks he is in control of all the Romans about him, yet he is the blind instrument by which Christianity gains a foothold in the imperial court."  Here we have the raw material for tragedy. Dryden could now, as he was later to do with Antony in All for Love, focus on the essentially tragic nature of the tyrant's emotional predicament, and forego his attempts to portray him as "heroic." Instead, Dryden passes over to the rhetorical and intellectual possibilities of his situation, for only through rhetoric can Maximin continue to appear heroic and, his character being fixed in the "heroic" mold, only through debate, specifically in his role of devil's advocate to St. Catharine, can he remain interesting to the playgoer.

With Maximin thus "fixed," the dramatic and intellectual initiatives of the play pass over to St. Catharine, Porphyrius and Berenice, and Valeria. Opposed to the bombast and dramatic impotence of Maximin's rhetoric we have the lucid discourse (particularly in her scenes with the Roman philosophers and with the tyrant himself wherein she successfully counters Stoic and Hobbesian objections to Christianity) and calm fortitude of St. Catharine as well as the heroic but never "Herculean" defiance of the others. The blustering "heroick" posturings of Maximin are refuted time and again by St. Catharine, both explicitly in her debates with the tyrant and implicitly in her calm acceptance of a
martyr's death. Yet she shares with Maximin something of the Herculean heroic temperament: her presence in the play condemns the unprincipled ambition of Maximin's character but not his heroic energy, for she has a great deal of her own. Her debate with the philosopher Apollonius early in the second act indicates this, Apollonius outlines the eminently reasonable, decidedly unheroic doctrine of the Stoics:

And what more noble can your Doctrine preach,  
Than Vertues which Philosophy does teach?  
To keep the passions in severest awe,  
To live with Reason, (Nature's greatest Law)  
To follow Vertue, as its own reward;  
And good and ill, as things without, regard.  

(II.i.p.348)

St. Catharine replies with arguments suggesting that such a sterile philosophy makes no allowance for the weaknesses of the human spirit, nor does it carry any appeal to its potential strengths:

Yet few could follow those strict Rules they gave;  
For humane life will humane frailties have;  
And love of Vertue is but barren praise,  
Airy as Fame: nor strong enough to raise  
The actions of the Soul above the sence.  
Vertue grows cold without a recompence.
We virtuous acts as duty do regard;
Yet are permitted to expect reward.

(II.i.p.348)

In further arguments St. Catharine stresses both the human need for some reward for virtue other than simply the knowledge of having done the right thing, and the human ability, given the right incentive, to pursue the virtuous course with far greater, more heroic, intensity, than that envisioned by the Stoics:

**Apoll:** By how much more your Faith reward assures,
So much more frank our Virtue is than yours.

**S. Cath:** Blind men! you seek ev'n those rewards you blame:
But ours are solid; yours an empty name.
Either to open praise your Acts you guide,
Or else reward your selves with secret pride.

**Apoll:** Yet still our Moral virtues you obey:
Ours are the Precepts though apply'd your way.

**S. Cath:** 'Tis true, your virtues are the same we teach;
But in our practice they much higher reach.
You but forbid to take anothers due;
But we forbid e'vn to desire it too.
Revenge of injuries you Virtue call;
But we forgiveness of our wrongs extoll:
Immodest deeds you hinder to be wrought,
But we proscribe the least immodest thought.
So much your Virtues are in ours refin'd,
That yours but reach the actions, ours the mind.

(II.i.p.349)

In a later scene with Maximin, St. Catharine uses similar arguments in an attempt to convince the tyrant that it is more heroic to control passion than to submit to it. Maximin cannot agree for to do so would mean that, in order to remain a hero in his own eyes, he would have to subdue his desire and deny himself his prize. Maximin cannot even admit control of passion to be possible, for that would amount to a direct confession of his own impotence. To remain "heroic" he must make a case for the ungovernable nature of passion. In doing so, he relies heavily on a Hobbesian deterministic concept of the passions:

If to new persons I my Love apply,
The Stars and Nature are in fault, not I;
My Loves are like my old Praetorian bands,
Whose Arbitrary pow'r their Prince commands;
I can no more make passion come or go,
Than you can bid your Nilus ebb or flow.
'Tis lawless, and will love, and where it list:
And that's no sin which no man can resist:
Those who impute it to me as a crime,
Would make a God of me before my time.

(IV.i.p.369)

St. Catharine refutes this argument, suggesting that control of the passions may seem Godlike, but is humanly possible:
"But you may make yourself a God below: / For Kings who rule their own desires are so." Maximin reiterates his position:
"How can I help those faults which Nature made?" St. Catharine makes a final effort to "instruct" Maximin and bring him out of the solipsist state of the Herculean hero and into the more acceptable mold of a Christian hero:

But when you place your joys on things above,
You fix the wand'ring Planet of your Love:
Thence you may see
Poor humane kind all daz'd in open day,
Err after bliss, and blindly miss their way:
The greatest happiness a Prince can know,
Is to love Heav'n above, do good below.

(IV.i.p.369-370)

In both these scenes, St. Catharine, in her defence of Christianity, places a much stronger emphasis on the religion's heroic qualities, particularly the role of the individual will as subduer of passion, than on its gentler aspects. The heroine's own will reaches something approaching
Herculean proportions in her "damn the consequences"
pursuit of a martyr's crown: at one point she is willing
to sacrifice Berenice's life to this goal. As with the
Becket of T.S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*, it is difficult
to assess her motives. Her will in suppressing her desire
to live and her natural feelings for the plight of the empress
and submitting to what she believes to be God's will is
indeed heroic, but is there not something of the blindly
Herculean hero in her headlong pursuit of this course? Is
there not an element of "pious madness" here, or of pride
in her confident assumption that her actions will have no
effect on Berenice's fate? One can detect in her replies
to Berenice, perhaps the Achilles' heel of the martyr, a
sublime belief in the supreme importance of her actions to
the rest of the world:

Ber: Of death's contempt Heroick proofs you give;
    But, Madam, let my weaker Vertue live.
Your Faith may bid you, your own life resign;
    But not when yours must be involv'd with mine.
Since, then, you do not think me fit to dye,
    Ah, how can you that life I beg, deny!
S. Cath: Heav'n does in this my greatest tryal make,
    When I for it, the care of you forsake.
But I am plac'd as on a Theater,
Where all my Acts to all Mankind appear,
To imitate my constancy or fear.
Then, Madam, judge what course I should pursue,
When I must either Heav’n forsake, or you.

Por: Were saving Berenice’s life a sin,
Heav’n had shut up your flight from Maximin.

S. Cath: Thus with short Plummets Heav’ns deep
will we sound
That vast Abyss where humane wit is drown’d!
In our small Skiff we must not launce too far;
We here but Coasters, not Discov’rers are.
Faith’s necessary Rules are plain and few;
We, many, and those needless Rules pursue:
Faith from our hearts into our heads we drive;
And make Religion all Contemplative.

You, on Heav’ns will may witty glosses feign;
But that which I must practise here, is plain:
If the All-great decree her life to spare,
He will, the means, without my crime prepare.

(IV.i.p.373)

Certainly St. Catharine’s unwavering devotion to a higher law expressed in the passages cited above, and throughout the play, is the moral antithesis of the Herculean self-absorption which motivates Maximin; yet, by the single-purposed nature of their characters, the two protagonists
are effectively linked together: the obsessive qualities of both, Maximin's self-concern, St. Catharine's concern with the divine will, complement each other after a fashion, and maintain throughout the heroic tone of the play. One passes from the apparently lofty but, in reality, false and inflated rhetoric of the tyrant to the truly lofty spirit of the saint, appreciating that quality of all-consuming energy which is common to both.

Although St. Catharine is the guardian of the play's moral tone, and Porphyrius, Berenice, and the others control events, after the tyrant's paralysing infatuation with St. Catharine, it is Maximin who dominates the spirit of the play, and he dominates it almost completely through the force of his rhetoric. Virtually every major speech the tyrant makes is either a straight-forward rant in which he is claiming supreme power for himself or asserting it over one or other of his subjects, or, after his encounter with St. Catharine, a re-statement of some aspect of his emotional predicament, the conflict between love and his will to power. None of these speeches, for all their impact, rhetorical display, and skillful argument, reveals anything significant about Maximin further than the fact that he is a tyrant consumed with passion. Yet Dryden cannot be faulted for failing in what he set out to do, to make a thorough study of the Herculean temperament.
For the sad fact is that, unless one is willing to go below its surface and treat it on a more human level, thus denying its "heroic" stature, there is nothing more to reveal about such a temperament. A primitive hero such as Maximin, with his infinite capacity for passion, whether anger, lust, pride or ambition, resists a complex treatment. Apart from commenting on the magnitude of his passions there is little one can say about the infinitely passionate individual. In his treatment of Maximin, Dryden indeed "loos'd the Reins, and bid his Muse run mad,"15 but his imagination could run only along the clearly cut channels of rhetoric and debate. (We may fault Dryden for failing to present us with a hero as impressive as Marlowe's Tamburlaine: could his imagination not reach as far? Perhaps it was simply that while Marlowe, at the time he wrote Tamburlaine, was emotionally committed to the idea of the purely Herculean hero; Dryden, always a staunch Tory, devoted to the cause of a stable society, had only an intellectual interest in, or at most a romantic, fanciful feeling for, such a character.)

Dryden's "irregular" villain, because of the infinite and uncompromising nature of his passion, becomes completely "regular" in character: the absolutely passionate Maximin turns out to be as predictable as the absolutely virtuous Berenice, Ozmyn or Indamora. Nevertheless, there is something about the
tyrant's "heroism," his efforts, however unsuccessful, to impose order and meaning on his world by the force of his own will alone, which affects the audience more than the perfect virtues of Dryden's other characters. Only St. Catharine's seeming excesses in her pursuit of a martyr's crown excite a comparable response. "If Maximin's tyranny submits easily to moral diagnosis, his titanism still carries force and wins a sympathy it does not ask."  

For all its moral intent, _Tyrannic Love_, because of its detailed treatment of its Herculean protagonist, cannot help but stress the concept of impulsive heroism over that of the ordered society. (St. Catharine's support of the latter concept is overshadowed somewhat by her "heroic" pursuit of martyrdom.) The titanic energy of Maximin's character, however, is shown to be un gover nable and totally destructive. The two themes, in effect, cancel each other out: the social theme triumphs at the end, of course, but it is the heroic theme, embodied in the character of Maximin, which Dryden intended to capture the audience's imagination. In _The Conquest of Granada_ Dryden brought all his creative energies to bear on the problem of combining these themes so that he could reconcile two basic elements in his own character, and in that of his age: an essentially conservative belief in the need for a stable society, and an intuitive,
romantic admiration of heroism. The age in which these plays were written should not be overlooked. It was an age which embodied in its art, music, literature and politics a distinctive Baroque quality of controlled exuberance. It was a vigorous period, not debilitated as Dobrée suggests,\textsuperscript{17} but one in which, both in the arts and in society, a fear of anarchy was beginning to take hold, and restraints were starting to be placed on the elemental energies of an earlier age.

It was true that memories of first hand experience with war were beginning to fade. Though the threat or promise of conflict, war with the Dutch or the French, or even renewed civil conflict, was always in the background, the traumatic shock of the Civil War, which had involved nearly all members of the nobility, was beginning to disappear. As a result, war was coming to be regarded in a more glamorous light. Heroism on the stage stirred memories of brave deeds in the minds of older playgoers and inspired younger ones with heroic thoughts of future exploits. However, if on the emotional level the horrors of a general civil war were being forgotten, there remained, on the intellectual level, memories of the political turmoil of the period, and, as a result, the Restoration playgoer looked to find, and found, vindicated in the heroic play, the ideal of the well-
ordered state. For though he admired heroism and avidly sought it on the stage, he could not accept intellectually the social anarchy implicit in the triumph of a Tamburlaine or a Maximin.

The conflict between admiration of the free spirit and the wish for individual liberty on the one hand, and the desire for "law and order" on the other appears in any age, but in few periods did it so strongly dominate the literary and social scene as in the reign of Charles II -- and in few literary forms was this conflict seen reflected so clearly as in the heroic tragedy. The ten act Conquest of Granada, Dryden's most ambitious heroic play, represented his most serious effort to resolve this conflict both on the stage and in his own mind.

At the beginning of the play Almanzor, like Maximin, is presented as an iconoclastic hero, respecting nothing but his own will in which he holds a supreme confidence: 18

I alone am King of me.
I am as free as Nature first made man,
'Ere the base Laws of Servitude began,
When wild in woods the noble Savage ran.

(I C.G.I.i.p.34)
In a sense Almanzor's heroic stature rests more easily upon him than it does upon Tamburlaine or Maximin, and thus more strongly affects the audience. He feels no need to dominate society, as does Maximin, but instead is quite secure in the position he takes outside the social order: "My laws are made, but only for my sake..." (I C.G.I.i.p.34).

As Waith points out in his study of the Herculean hero, "there is an inescapable suggestion that Almanzor himself belongs to an incorruptible world remote in time and space." 19

An immediate impression of the primitive purity of Almanzor's heroism is conveyed by the first scene of the play. The play opens with a description of a bull-fight, an equal contest between Almanzor and a particularly ferocious bull. There is an implied comparison between them. The bull is "beyond the rest," and "Monarch-like" he puts all lesser adversaries to flight; Almanzor is referred to as "the brave unknown" (I C.G.I.i.p.30). The bull, sighting Almanzor, recognizes him immediately as a worthy opponent:

Abdelmelech: Thus, while he stood, the Bull who saw this foe,

His easier Conquests proudly did forego:

And, making at him, with a furious bound,

From his bent forehead aim'd a double wound... 

(I C.G.I.i.p.31)
Almanzor is thus identified with the primitive energy of the bull. In the following scenes Dryden points out the ambiguous and potentially dangerous quality of such energy. In a sudden conflict between two rival Moorish factions, the Abencerrages and the Zegrys, following the bullfight, Almanzor immediately sides with the weaker party: "I cannot stay to ask which cause is best; / But this is so to me, because opprest" (I C.G.I.i.p.32). His action recalls that of the bull in choosing to fight him -- he sees the larger faction to be a more formidable opponent. His motives are surely similar to those of the bull in choosing him, but there is as well an element of what can be taken as "natural virtue" by the audience, his stated desire to support the underdog. The question arises, is Almanzor exhibiting a primitive sense of justice here, or is he simply responding, like a proper conventional hero, to the long established code of romantic chivalry? Would a true Herculean figure act from such motives, or would his impulse be identical to that of the bull, a simple desire for hard conflict? Yet Almanzor's act is primitive to the extent that it is undertaken without any regard for its social or political consequences. His intervention on behalf of the Abencerrages is, by sheer chance, politically the right one. In supporting the royalist faction, he supports the king, and thus upholds the tottering
order of the Moorish state, the only presently visible alternative to chaos. However, it soon becomes clear that Almanzor's decisions, whether based upon a Herculean desire for combat, his own concept of personal honour, or a primitive appreciation of the chivalric code, have a completely random effect on the general good, and, in a manner which brings to mind Maximin's impotence, caused by his conflicting passions, the effects of his actions tend to cancel each other out. When the Duke of Arcos appears, representing Spain, and makes a clear case for her legal authority, by treaty, over the Moorish kingdom, Almanzor is unmoved by such legalisms and continues in his support for the corrupt regime of Boabdelin. "The Moors have Heav'n and me t'assist their cause" (I C.G.I.i.p.38), he replies when Arcos claim divine support for Spain. When Almanzor does break with Boabdelin, it is over an affront to his personal honour: the king will not allow his champion to release the captured Duke of Arcos so that he may again engage him in battle.

Almanzor, meeting no one strong enough to oppose his will, until his encounter with Almahide, moves through these early scenes with complete freedom, his audience free to enjoy, for the moment, this unchecked display of heroic temperament. Although Dryden points out, through plot, the dangers of such a temperament, at the same time he seems to
suggest through his choice of images that its energy may have great potential for good. Almanzor's freedom of will is described, not in harsh military terms, but in the morally neutral terminology of nature:

**Almanzor:** I am as free as Nature first made man,
'Ere the base Laws of Servitude began,
When wild in woods the noble Savage ran.

(I C.G.I.i.p.34)

**Abdalla:** Vast is his Courage; boundless is his mind,
Rough as a storm, and humorous as wind . . .

(I C.G.I.i.p.35)

The image Dryden uses to describe Almanzor's dispatch of the bull evokes the peaceful activity of harvesting, rather than war:

**Abdelmelech:** Not heads of Poppies, (when they reap the grain)
Fall with more ease before the lab'ring Swayn,
Than fell this head . . .

(I C.G.I.i.p.31)

By such a dual treatment the energy of Almanzor's heroic temperament is shown to be, like that of Hercules, and unlike the conciously destructive force working within Maximin, quite amoral and capable of either good or evil.

Having thus raised Almanzor, through rhetoric and
action, to as great a height as he can, Dryden must begin
the long process of his conversion from a "Herculean" to a
"regular" hero, one amenable to the dictates of society.
His infatuation with Almahide binds him to a member of that
society and prepares the way for his complete social integration
which occurs in the final scenes of the play. The "conversion"
scene with Almahide, where Almanzor's will is checked for
the first time, is a crucial and difficult one, much more so
than its counterpart between Maximin and St. Catharine in
_Tyannic Love_. Here Dryden must depict his hero as being seized
by a passion from without, surrendering to it, unlike Maximin,
yet retaining his lofty stature. Almanzor must play the role
of a conventional heroic lover without quite descending to the
level of one. His "irregular" stature must be preserved.
Dryden manages primarily through the use of grotesque,
intellectually apt, but emotionally disquieting imagery.
Almanzor reveals his emotional state in the following manner:

I'ne pleas'd and pain'd since first her eyes I saw,
As I were stung with some Tarantula:
Armes, and the dusty field I less admire;
And soften strangely in some new desire.
Honour burns in me, not so fiercely bright,
But pale as fires when master'd by the light.
Ev'n while I speak and look, I change yet more;
And now am nothing that I was before.
I'm numm'd, and fix'd, and scarce my eyeballs move;
I fear it is the Lethargy of Love!
'Tis he; I feel him now in every part:
Like a new Lord he vaunts about my Heart,
Surveys in state each corner of my Brest,
While poor fierce I, that was, am dispossest.
I'm bound; but I will rowze my rage again:
And though no hope of Liberty remaine,
I'll fright my Keeper when I shake my chaine.

(I C.G.III.i.p.54)

Clearly Almanzor's reaction to the power of "heroic" love is much more complex than Maximin's "Wild with rage, more wild with my desire, / Like meeting tides -- but mine are tides of fire" (T.L.III.i.p.354). This famous passage deserves particular attention for not only does it reveal much about Dryden's complex approach towards the character of Almanzor and towards heroism in general, but it also epitomizes the Baroque "controlled" extravagance of his style in these plays, the result of his efforts at once to glorify and justify heroism.

The image of the tarantula, like much of Donne's imagery, shocks the senses while it stimulates the intellect. Whatever its poetic value, it is an accurate and imaginative
description of love's paralysing effect. In using it Dryden is trying for something above the conventional reaction to "heroic" love, typified by Porphyrius in *Tyrannic Love*, where he relies more on traditional imagery to convey the psychologically destructive effect of love: "What dangers in these charming Eyes appear! / How my old wounds are open'd at this view! / And in my murd'rers presence bleed anew!"

(T.L.I.i.p.339). Almanzor's greater nature is not merely symbolically "wounded" but actually paralysed by love. While Porphyrius still has wit remaining to relate his encounter with Berenice to previous events, Almanzor is momentarily completely overwhelmed by the suddenness of his passion. The tarantula sting is a moment in and out of time. However, although the image is dramatically and psychologically apt, it is still a poetic monstrosity. Dryden probably did not read the following passage from Longinus until after he completed *The Conquest of Granada*. On reading it, he must have recognized its applicability to his own work.

Longinus complains of the excessive imagery in a lost play by Aeschylus: "Such things are not tragic but pseudo-tragic -- 'flame-wreaths,' and 'belching to the sky,' and Boreas represented as a 'flute-player,' and all the rest of it. They are turbid in expression and confused in imagery rather than the product of intensity, and each one of them, if
examined in the light of day, sinks little by little from the terrible into the contemptible." Although Dryden was surely aware of the dangers of lapsing into tedium in his efforts to push beyond conventionally heroic rhetoric, he often pushed ahead regardless, finding humour in excess and converting that humour into conscious wit. In passages such as Almanzor's "tarantula" speech, the epic spirit, overburdened with metaphysical wit, often topples over into satire, and we can see, here, the beginnings of a mock-heroic tradition which extends through Dryden's *Absalom and Achitophel*, *MacFlecknoe* and *The Medal* to the works of Pope and Fielding.

Although this satiric spirit pervades the "tarantula" speech, there is evidence that he still takes Almanzor, and heroism, very seriously. The tarantula image, though psychologically effective, shocks and amuses, as does "I'm numm'd, and fix'd, and scarce my eyeballs move; / I fear it is the Lethargy of Love!" However, consider the unadorned honesty of "Armes, and the dusty field I less admire; / And soften strangely in some new desire," or the psychological accuracy of "Ev'n while I speak and look, I change yet more; / And now am nothing that I was before." While there is nothing really outstanding about these lines, they do indicate that an effort is still being made to depict the heroic character in a serious manner and to render it at least partially
plausible. The lines, "Honour burns in me, not so fiercely bright, / But pale as fires when master'd by the light," greatly strengthen this impression. The image here is pleasing and completely fitting; it anticipates Dryden's skillful uses of light imagery in the opening lines of *Religio Laici*:\textsuperscript{22}

> Dim, as the borrow'd beams of Moon and Stars
> To lonely, weary, wandring Travellers,
> Is Reason to the Soul: And as on high,
> Those rowling Fires discover but the Sky
> Not light us here; So Reason's glimmering Ray
> Was lent, not to assure our doubtfull way,
> But guide us upward to a better Day.
> And as those nightly Tapers disappear
> When Day's bright Lord ascends our Hemisphere;
> So pale grows Reason at Religions sight;
> So dyes, and so dissolves in Supernatural Light.

(lines 1-11)

Here the image of a lesser light giving way to a greater clarifies the difficult concept of reason as but a stepping-stone to revealed truth; Dryden applies it with equal felicity to love's mastery of "honour" or the passion for self-aggrandizement within Almanzor's soul. In this couplet, at least, satire gives way to a serious treatment of heroic
character. Yet the overall impression given by this speech is a puzzling one. Satiric rant and serious exposition appear in uncomfortable juxtaposition. Within the play, such a speech serves well to reflect the hero's confused mental state, but in a larger context, it reveals perhaps more clearly than any other comparable speech in his early plays Dryden's ambiguous and unsettled attitude towards heroism.

Almanzor thus surrenders to love, but not without a final struggle, "I wonnot love you; give me back my heart. / But give it as you had it, fierce and brave . . ." (I C.G. III.i,p.54). His final surrender is, as befits a hero, complete and unreserved, "I'm all o're love: / Nay, I am Love; Love shot, and shot so fast, / He shot himself into my breast at last" (I C.G. III.i,p.55). The hero thus, rather than allowing himself to be diminished by his surrender to an external force, ennobles that force by investing it with his own tremendous ego. However, true obedience to an external will still lies ahead. Like Maximin, Almanzor hopes for immediate consummation of his passion. Only when Almahide tells him of her unbreakable vow to Boabdelin does he truly appreciate his situation, his position of subservience to an external order of things:

Give me that Minute when she made her vow!
"That Minute, ev'n the happy, from their bliss
might give:
"And those who live in griefe, a shorter time
would live.
So small a link, if broke, th'eternal chain
Would, like divided waters, joyn again.
It wonnot be; the fugitive is gone,
Prest by the crowd of following Minutes on;
That precious Moment's out of Nature fled:
And in the heap of common rubbish layd,
Of things that once have been, and are decay'd.

(I G.G.III.i.p.56)

With "It wonnot be" Almanzor recognizes, for the first time,
the existence of things that are beyond his control to
change. From this point he becomes a willing pupil of Almahide,
"Forgive that fury which my Soul does move; / 'Tis the Essay
of an untaught first love. . . .There's something noble
lab'ring in my brest: / This raging fire which through the
Mass does move, / Shall purge my dross, and shall refine
my Love" (I G.G.III.i.p.56).

Having thus placed his "irregular" hero in the
most uncomfortable of social roles, and the most artificial
of literary roles, that of the Platonic or courtly lover,
Dryden must wrestle, through the remainder of the play, with
the problems of retaining Almanzor's individuality and those qualities which make him truly heroic. Almanzor must steer a middle course between the unchecked self-defeating passions of a Maximin and the flawless "perfect" behaviour of a Porphyrius or an Ozmn, and he must do this while locked in the part of a courtly lover, a role which, since its inception in the medieval romance, had never been more than a collection of rigidly prescribed attitudes, leaving no margin for individuality or eccentricity of behaviour. In its evolution from the medieval romance, through the poems of Spenser and Tasso, and particularly through such French romances as D'Urfé's Astée and the pastoral dramas of Lodowick Carlell, Thomas and Henry Killigrew, and Sir John Suckling which they influenced, the role of Platonic lover had become steadily more and more stylized. Dryden maintains Almanzor's heroic character first by stressing his strong reactions to the confines of such a role, and later by laying heavy emphasis on his "heroic" capacity for suffering, for enduring the frustrations that this role imposes upon him.

Through to the end of the play, Dryden places his hero in a succession of situations wherein, in his role of courtly lover, he must subordinate his own will to the perfectly virtuous will of his mistress. In each he struggles heroically but unsuccessfully against the confines of his
role, and in some he makes a small advance towards his
goal of union with Almahide and Dryden's goal of his total
integration into society. The first significant occasion,
after his first meeting with her, occurs when Almanzor,
having recaptured the Alhambra for Boabdil and the Aben-
cerrago faction, is on the point of releasing Almahide to
the king. Almahide praises his chivalry:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Almanzor} & \text{ can from every Subject raise} \\
\text{New matter for our Wonder and his Praise.} \\
\text{You bound and freed me, but the difference is,} \\
\text{That show'd your Valour; but your Vertue this.} \\
\end{align*}
\]

(I C.G.IV.ii.p.70-71)

Almanzor, encouraged, again presses his suit, but is again
firmly rejected by Almahide: "Cease; cease a Sute / So
vain to you, and troublesome to me . . ." Almanzor demands
his way: "You wonnot hear! you must both Hear and grant; / For,
Madam, there's an impudence in want." He is again refused and
sternly rebuked: "Your way is somewhat strange to ask Relief;
/ You ask with threat'ning, like a begging Thief . . ."
(I C.G.IV.ii.p.71). Frustrated, Almanzor retreats to fantasy,
characteristically displaying, like Maximin, his heroic
temperament through rhetoric where it cannot be maintained
in action:

\[
\text{If not a Subject, then a Ghost I'le be;}
\]
And from a Ghost, you know, no place is free.
Asleep, Awake, I'le haunt you every where;
From my white shrowd, groan Love into your Ear:
When in your Lovers Arms you sleep at night,
I'le glide in cold betwixt, and seize my Right.
And isn't not better in your Nuptial Bed,
To have a living lover than a dead?

(I C.G.IV.ii.p.72)

The struggle continues but is resolved, temporarily, when Almahide explains in more detail the nature of her vows, and gives him leave to petition the authors of her suit, Boabdil and her father, Abenemar. Almanzor is overjoyed at her recognition of him as a suitor, and is only too willing to humble himself, temporarily, before Abenemar and Boabdil in order to gain her: "Born, as I am still to command, not sue, / Yet you shall see that I can beg for you .. ." (I C.G. IV.ii.p.73). As these lines indicate, Almanzor considers the act of subordinating himself to another, because of the immense exertion of will that it requires (remember St. Catharine's admonitions to Maximin), as heroic, and therefore worthy of him. True humility, and the heroism of enduring that which cannot be changed, has yet to be learned.

Almanzor's encounter as a suitor with Boabdil is a disaster. His excessive pride and Boabdil's jealousy
result in his imprisonment and the threat of his death. Almahide must intercede for his life. In this scene Almanzor reverts to his original character as a ranting primitive hero, but, being no longer in the situation of one, his behaviour wins him not glory, but rather exile and the threat of death. Humbled, he must suffer the admonitions of his mistress, to whom he now owes his life:

Almahide: Rash men, like you, and impotent of will, Give chance no time to turn; but urge her still. She would repent; you push the quarrel on, And once, because she went, she must be gone. (I C.G.V.i.p.84)

Earlier Almanzor had responded to Boabdelin's decree of banishment with characteristic arrogance: "Where'eere I goe there can no exile be; / But from Almanzor's sight I banish thee . . ." (I C.G.V.i.p.80). Now, however, thus chastened by Almahide, but assured of her love, even if it can be only the love of a sister, he accepts his banishment with something like resignation and humility:

Almanzor: Like one thrust out in a cold Winters night, Yet shivering, underneath your gate I stay: One look -- I cannot go before 'tis day -- (she beckens him to be gone.
Not one -- Farewell: what ere my sufferings be
Within; I'le speak Farewell, as loud as she:
I will not be out-done in Constancy. . . .
(I C.G.V.i.p.85)
The first part of the play thus ends with the temporary
defeat of the hero.

By displaying him first as a purely primitive hero, for the better part of two acts, then as an "irregular" hero, shaking his chain, struggling against the confines of a social role unnatural to him, Dryden has thus far sustained convincingly the force of Almanzor's character. Although he has been careful to point out the dangers of such a temperament, Dryden has taken pains to stress its potential for greatness within society, not only through his choice of imagery at the beginning of the play, but also through a number of speeches made by other characters, particularly Almahide, commenting on Almanzor's "natural" virtue. Abenemar epitomizes this quality in these lines:

**Abenemar:** A Soul too fiery, and too great to guide:
He moves excentrique, like a wandring star;
Whose Motion's just; though 'tis not regular.
(I C.G.V.i.p.78)
The image of the eccentric planet is ingenious; it conveys precisely the sense of an heroic figure who, though
seemingly independent, will be ultimately answerable to an order imposed from without. Almahide, upon first seeing him, senses immediately both the immense power of his character and its potential for good:

Almahide: Mark but how terrible his Eyes appear!
And yet there's something roughly noble there,
Which, in unfashion'd Nature, looks Divine;
And like a Gemm does in the Quarry shine.

(I C.C.III.I.p.53)

More striking is her reaction to Almanzor, the effect of her discovery in him of "an excellence beyond Boabdelin":

How blest was I before this fatal day!
When all I knew of love, was to obey!
'Twas life becalm'd; without a gentle breath;
Though not so cold, yet motionless as death.
A heavy quiet state: but love all strife,
All rapid; is the Hurrican of life.
Had love not shown me, I had never seen
An Excellence beyond Boabdelin.
I had not, ayming higher, lost my rest;
But with a vulgar good been dully blest.
But, in Almanzor, having seen what's rare,
Now I have learnt too sharply to compare,
And, like a Fav'rite, quickly in disgrace,
Just know the value 'ere I loose the place.

(I C.G.V.i.p.82-83)

Here we have the essence of Almanzor's "natural" virtue, that quality which makes him both heroic and essential to a healthy society, the ability to imbue with his own boundless energy his surroundings and those in contact with him: the hitherto quiescent and tractable Almahide, the uncomfortable formalities of Platonic love, even the moribund regime of Boabdelin. It is this quality which sets him apart from the totally self-absorbed Maximin whose purely destructive energy inspires nothing but fear or hatred in those around him.

Despite his heroic qualities, however, Almanzor leaves Granada, at the end of Part I, as a failure. The force of his passion has impressed, but not overcome society, not even the weak society of Boabdelin's court. Part I of The Conquest of Granada could be thought of as a tragedy complete in itself, its theme being the failure of the heroic temperament, through its inability to endure the shock of social contact, to realize its great social potential. Since there was an interval of about a fortnight between the performances of Part I and Part II, it is possible that Dryden intended his audience to consider seriously the implications of Almanzor's defeat before returning to witness his further adventures.
The early acts of Part II depict the hero at his lowest ebb. At Almahide's bidding a chastened Almanzor returns to Granada and on three occasions goes to Boabdelin's aid, content now merely with the honour of serving her:

_Almanzor:_ I'le stop at nothing that appears so brave;
I'le do't: and now I no Reward will have.
You've given my Honour such an ample Field,
That I may dye, but that shall never yield.
Spight of my self I'le Stay, Fight, Love, Despair;
And I can do all this, because I dare. . . .

(II C.G.II.iii.p.114)

An increasing sense of resignation, even despair, appears in Almanzor's speeches as he comes to realize that in serving Almahide, in his role of courtly lover, he has, in effect, descended as well to the political role of vassal to Boabdelin. He rejects Spain for a second time, but for different reasons when, during a truce in which prisoners are exchanged, the Duke of Arcos suggests that he forsake the ungrateful Boabdelin and "That beauteous Queen, whom you can never gain. . . ." His reply indicates a humble acceptance of his position:

_Almanzor:_ Then be it so: let me have no return
From him but Hatred, and from her, but Scorn.
There is this comfort in a noble Fate,
That I deserve to be more fortunate.

(II C.G.III.iii.p.125)

There is a similar note of resignation when he rejects the sexual and political temptations of the ambitious Lyndaraxa:

Almanzor: 'Tis pity words which none but Gods should hear,

Should lose their sweetness in a Soldiers Ear:
I am not that Almanzor whom you praise;
But your fair Mouth can fair Idea's raise:
I am a wretch, to whom it is deny'd
T'accept, with Honour, what I wish with Pride.
And, since I fight not for my self, must bring
The fruits of all my Conquests to the King.

(II C.G.III.iii.p.127)

Finally, in a supreme gesture of despair, he elevates his constancy to an unrequited love above all else in his nature by identifying it with his immortal soul:

Almanzor: Though Almahide with scorn rewards my care;
Yet; than to change, 'tis nobler to despair.
My Love's my Soul; and that from Fate is free:
'Tis that unchang'd; and deathless part of me.

(II C.G.III.iii.p.128)

Almanzor embraces despair here with the same self-identifying intensity with which he accepted love. Can the audience accept
such behaviour as equally heroic? Although his suffering may be thought of as "heroic," as Dryden hopes it will be ("I can do all this, because I dare"), Almanzor, in his complete acceptance of his fate, clearly departs from the pattern of the primitive hero struggling against destiny. The hero has sunk to so low a point that one finds it difficult to believe that his primitive passion has not been entirely extinguished -- his despair being simply the negation of his former passion -- that he has not been taken over completely by his role of courtly lover.

In order, therefore, to sustain his audience's interest in his hero, Dryden must demonstrate that Almanzor's passions have not been extinguished, but merely sublimated, temporarily, in his too thorough identification with his role of Platonic lover. Almanzor returns to battle, and it is soon clear that, in war at least, his primitive energies are still very much in evidence:

The minds of Heroes their own measures are,
They stand exempted from the rules of War.
One Loose, one Sallye of the Heroes Soul,
Does all the Military Art controul.
While tim'rous Wit goes round, or foords the shore;
He shoots the Gulph; and is already o're.
And, when th'Enthusiastique fit is spent,
Looks back amaz'd at what he underwent.

*II C.G.IV.ii.p.133*

The sentiments of this speech, as well as the lingering effects of Lyndaraxa's attempt to seduce him, are surely in his mind when, soon after in a surge of passion, Almanzor abandons the role of Platonic lover, "shoots the gulf," and attempts a direct seduction of his mistress. Here, where he has so carefully brought his hero back from the condition of despair to the point where he is "heroically" ready to sever all ties with society, Dryden reveals Almanzor's true social role. It is done through the *deus ex machina* device of a revealed parenthood which both links Almanzor irrevocably to society and guarantees him a lofty position within it. The ghost of his mother bars his entrance to Almahide's apartments and tells him of his true origin and his legitimate familial ties to Christian Spain:

> From ancient Blood thy Father's Linage springs;
> Thy Mothers thou deriv'est from stemms of Kings.
> A Christian born, and born again, that day,
> When sacred Water wash'd thy sins away.
> Yet bred in errors thou dost mis-employ
> That strength Heav'n gave thee, and its flock destroy.

*II C.G.IV.iii.p.140*

Having so recently resigned himself to the ultimate conse-
quences of accepting love rather than personal honour as the center of his being, Almanzor (ironically as the immediate effect of his sudden impulsive attempt to free himself from these consequences) is once again thrown into a state of turmoil, like that on his first encounter with Almahide, as other considerations now contend for this position. He is now made aware of new restrictions which bind him to a social order alien to that to which he had earlier submitted himself for the sake of his mistress. He finds himself bound to this other, Christian, society by three new imperatives, to which his "natural" virtue instinctively responds: filial piety, political allegiance (implied by his mother's mention of a royal ancestry, but not fully realized until he learns that his father is the Duke of Arcos), and Christian morality, a morality that militates against his love for Almahide: "Heaven does not now thy Ignorance reprove; / But warns thee from known Crimes of lawless Love . . ." (II C.C.IV.iii.p.140).

Almanzor, his will torn by the conflict between his love for Almahide and his new loyalties, breaks down completely. In horror he renounces all ties with society, becoming once again the primitive iconoclastic hero. He reverts to the blind fury of the bull:

Almanzor: Let Fate be Fate; the Lover and the Brave
Are rank'd, at least, above the vulgar Slave:
Love makes me willing to my death to run;
And courage scorns the death it cannot shun.

(II C.G.IV.iii.p.141)

In this passionate state Almanzor renew his efforts to seduce Almahide (the ghost leaves her to fend for herself) and is prevented only when she threatens suicide. At this the hero returns to his senses, and to his role of Platonic lover. Once again he is tested in this role when he must defend Almahide, by combat, against charges of adultery, even though, in his jealous passion, he doubts her innocence. Here, for the first time, Almanzor declares himself to be motivated in a social role, not by his acquired love for Almahide, but by his innate "primitive" concern for personal honour, "Yet her protection I must undertake; / Not now for Love; but for my Honours sake. / That mov'd me first, and must oblige me still. . . ." (II C.G.V.i.p.148), and in clearing the reputation of the innocent Almahide, his primitive energy is seen at last to work directly, rather than incidentally, towards the good of society. The hero is now ready for his complete integration with society. This comes in the final scene of the play with the sudden triumph of Spain over the forces of Boabdelin, aided partly by the treacherous Lyndaraxa, but primarily through Almanzor's
recognition of, and his refusal to fight against, his father the Duke of Arcos. The hero's remaining inner conflicts are now quickly resolved, typically, from without: Almahide is freed from her marriage by Boabdelin's death and from her vows of chastity (made against Boabdelin after the trial by combat) by Isabella's intervention. With Almanzor's "heroic" acceptance of his rightful place in the flourishing moral society of Christian Spain, "I bring a heart which homage never knew; / Yet it finds something of itself in you: / Something so kingly, that my haughty mind / Is drawn to yours; because 'tis of a kind" (II C.G.V.i,p.161), the play comes to its triumphant conclusion.

Whether or not Dryden has succeeded in his goal of bringing the epic hero to the stage is difficult to ascertain. In contrast to Tyrannic Love, where we rarely see Maximin as anything more than a rhetorical platform for a fixed point of view, we have in The Conquest of Granada, as in epic, an extensive and detailed treatment of a protagonist's developing character and of the problem of the hero in society. However, it is a treatment which is in virtually every way highly artificial and forced, belying that quality of spontaneity essential to a true Herculean hero. The atmosphere of artifice which pervades the play is the unavoidable result, both of
Dryden's use of the "ennobling" heroic couplet and of his attempt to transfer to the more restrictive medium of the stage that impression of universality which is characteristic of the epic. To achieve such an effect Dryden chose to compress, rather than select from, a large body of material, and, in order to accommodate it all, he had to devise a highly intricate plot structure. *The Conquest of Granada*, like most heroic plays, as Martin Price states in his *To the Palace of Wisdom*, "is trying for an experience different from the tragic. In making fate so obvious, oppressive, and busy an agent, Dryden prevents the action from moving inexorably to its central tragic reversal; instead we are given a succession of reversals. The solution of any one problem only introduces the next. The fortuitous world makes these characters almost comically impotent. Only their intransigence gives them stability. These characters are not immovable, they are inextinguishable; and their movement, the constant reforming and redirection of their will and self, is the only form of constancy available to them." \(^{24}\) Ozmyn clearly fits this pattern; he follows precisely every step of the "dance which is well contrived," his character remaining unchanged throughout. Almanzor, too, follows the dance, the difference being that his character does change, but only as guided by the steps of the dance. It can be
argued that Achilles, Rinaldo, and even Hercules also move along courses set for them by events over which they have no control; however, each is affected by a single event, not a succession of them: Achilles' wrath is motivated by Agamemnon's seizure of Briseis, his prize; Rinaldo's adventures stem from his being banished from the Christian camp by Goffredo; Hercules' fate is sealed, at least in Sophocles' version of the legend of the poisoned shirt, by a momentary jealous lapse of his wife. Their reactions to these events make up the rest of their stories and take on the importance of independent actions. In The Conquest of Granada one is continually aware that Almanzor is reacting to the most recent event which has befallen him, or being prepared for an event that is about to befall him. Fate is indeed present in the Iliad, Gerusalemme Liberata, and the Trachidae, but surely not to such an oppressive degree as in The Conquest of Granada.

Almanzor's heroic nature, denied its full scope by the intricately woven plot, appears in the rhetoric of his verbal reaction to the events which befall him, and, as we have seen, this rhetoric, and those speeches made by others which describe him, often depict quite accurately the nature of heroism, but, largely because of the artifice of the rhymed couplet, never fully evoke it. The essence
of the true "irregular" hero, then, his spontaneity, is in large part missing in Almanzor, and without it Dryden cannot be said to have succeeded completely in his goal of bringing the epic hero to the stage. Nevertheless, Almanzor represents his closest approach. Van Doren has these words to say concerning the lack of the sublime in Dryden's poetry:

"Dryden spent energy on both his figures and his heroic declarations; but the effect is one of words rather than things. The words seem stark naked on the page; they throw off no enlarging rings of suggestion or illusion; there is no light behind."25 These comments apply with particular force to the creation of Almanzor: all the ingredients of the heroic temperament are there, carefully measured out, yet the essential spark of life is missing.
NOTES


3 cf. John C. Sherwood, "Dryden and the Critical Theories of Tasso," *Comparative Literature*, 18 (1966), 351-352. Dryden and Tasso did not merely feel a theoretical obligation to the ancients; they were enthusiasts for classical values who wished to encourage classical order and decorum in the drama and epic of their own countries. Further, both had to take account not only of "genius and contemporary fashion," but also of a native tradition seemingly at odds with their classical values -- for Dryden the tradition of the Elizabethan drama, for Tasso the tradition of Ariosto and the romances.

4 For my remarks on the epic tradition and on Tasso's position within it I am indebted chiefly to the following works:


6 Bowra, p.156.


12. Ibid., p.102.

13. Dryden, "Tyrannick Love, or The Royal Martyr," Summers, II, 335. All subsequent references to this play are cited in the text. Page numbers given refer to this edition. Since exact line references cannot be given from this edition, ellipses are employed where needed to indicate that a speech has not been quoted to its conclusion.


18 Dryden, "Almanzor and Almahide, or The Conquest of Granada by the Spaniards," Summers, III, 34. All subsequent references to both parts of this play are cited in the text. Page numbers given refer to this edition.

19 Waith, p.156.


23 Summers, III, 13.

24 Price, pp.34-35.

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PAPER III: BERNARD SHAW AND CREATIVE EVOLUTION
The development of science, particularly from the Renaissance to the present, can be pictured as the construction of a series of imperfect models of the physical universe, each a more elaborate and accurate representation of reality, but each moving man himself further from the centre of things, and moving mind further and further from a dominant role in the material world. The comforting concept of man's central position in creation, his essential unity with God and nature -- and the unity of mind and matter within him -- is best expressed in the medieval and Elizabethan models of the universe which place man physically at or near its centre and spiritually midway between the pure intellect of the angels and the lower, material tendencies of animal and vegetable life.

Despite their union within man, the dualism of mind and matter was recognized by the Elizabethans and their predecessors back to Aristotle. Until Descartes, however, the will, and its guide, the intellect, were seen (much as Shaw saw them) as agents working within the material nature of man to raise him to a higher level of existence, or in the Elizabethan scheme of things, to restore him to his prelapsarian state and eventually, with the removal by death of the hindrance of the body, to complete unity with his spiritual Maker.

To move towards man's earthly goal of complete self-awareness, however, the will and the intellect were obliged to work
through the impeding medium of the body. "Man's understanding, though allied to the angelical, operates differently. The angels understand intuitively, man by the painful use of the discursive reason. ... The angels have perfected their understanding and are replete with all the knowledge they are able to hold. Man, even though he may in the end rival the angels in knowledge, begins in ignorance." ¹ Descartes took the Elizabethan concept of man as an essentially rational being to be a basic principle of his philosophy and, by drawing from this premise the conclusion that the material body is completely separate from and subservient to the mind, serving man only as a vehicle and not as an integral part of his make-up, he cleared the way for the total divorce of mind from the material universe which was furthered by Newton and his followers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and Darwin in the nineteenth century. Newton's postulation of a purely mechanical universe initiated, but not necessarily sustained, by mind was carried one step further from the control of mind by Darwin's suggestion that mind itself was merely a chance product of the mindless workings of a mechanical universe.

At the present time, when probability theory and quantum mechanics appear even more vehemently to deny mind any role in creation, when the very term "creation" seems to
have lost its meaning, the attempts of Shaw, and of his contemporaries, Samuel Butler and Henri Bergson, to find in the concept of creative evolution a rationale for restoring mind to something like its former dominant role in the scheme of things, are of particular interest.

It is clear that by the time Bernard Shaw wrote Back to Methuselah, in 1921, creative evolution had become as much a religion with him as socialism had before the Great War. His first interest in it may have arisen, along with his involvement with socialism, out of the polarization of his energies which his biographer Hesketh Pearson claims occurred on his reading of Karl Marx for the first time. He suggests that there was not the slightest doubt that Das Kapital had a tremendous effect on him; "it converted him to socialism, turned him into a revolutionary writer, made him a political agitator, changed his outlook, directed his energy, influenced his art, gave him a religion, and, as he claimed, made a man of him."² Although socialism is the religion Pearson refers to, creative evolution or vitalism had also a religious significance for him by the turn of the century, certainly by the time Man and Superman and Major Barbara were written. Shaw's embrace of both religions, socialism and vitalism, most clearly set forth in Major Barbara, sprang from his recognition of the fact that one could not change society without
the co-operation of its constituents, and from his consequent rejection of the socialist belief that man could be changed simply by changing society; man had to co-operate in this venture and to do so man himself had to change. "He had begun by asking for change from without; he later asks for change from within, not instead, but as well."³

The basis for Shaw's "not Either/Or but Both/And"⁴ approach to man and society lies in his concept of the Will, which he may have borrowed from Schopenhauer, but changed drastically to suit his own much more optimistic temperament. Whereas Schopenhauer held that, although the Will is the essence of existence, it is without real purpose, a ceaseless striving whose only apparent goal is further striving, Shaw saw the Will, or the Life Force, as having the definite goal of self-perfection, or realization of its full potential. Further, as Sen Gupta points out in his study of Shaw, the Shavian Will, unlike that of Schopenhauer's philosophy, does not sharpen itself through conflict with its material environment, but functions best when it can avoid such conflict.⁵ If the struggle against its environment is too taxing the Will finds a way to lighten the burden. Lilith, the personification of the Life Force in Back to Methuselah, finds the effort of reproduction too much for one individual and so produces two creatures, Adam and Eve, who will share the effort between
them. Shaw saw socialism not as an end in itself but as a means of making the social environment more receptive to the operation of the Life Force and the evolution of the Superman.

In *Major Barbara*, his most optimistic play, Shaw builds a drama around the thesis that poverty is the central obstacle to the fulfilment of most of humanity's aspirations, and therefore to the fulfilment of the Life Force operating through it. Poverty is thus to be regarded as the greatest of all crimes, and its elimination or avoidance the duty of both society at large and each individual within society. Andrew Undershaft is at once an individual within the old social order who has succeeded through sheer will-power (the Life Force within him) in escaping the crime of poverty; the founder and advocate of a new community which has abolished poverty; and the manufacturer of means by which the old social order can possibly be converted to one which would eliminate all poverty. Undershaft is a complex figure who embodies, perhaps more than any other character in Shaw's plays, the Shavian concept of vitalism which, though discussed at much greater length in *Man and Superman* and *Back to Methuselah*, really succeeds as a dramatic force only in *Major Barbara*. Not only is Undershaft himself a sort of Superman (certainly Samuel Butler would consider him one) in his self-willed evolution from poverty to wealth and power, but he also
suggests a possible path by which a primitive capitalist-based social structure could evolve into a superior society, based on socialist principles, which would be more receptive to the operation of the Life Force. It is important to note the stress that Shaw lays on the possession of money as a prime requirement for individual happiness: socialism is only the means by which each member of society can be assured of sufficient money to allow him the full development of his potential. Butler considered wealthy men as superior beings made so by their possession of greater power in the form of money, an economic extension of their biological powers. Shaw carries this seemingly conservative argument to a revolutionary conclusion: a society must be established which would permit all responsible men the use of this power. Such men would be far more fitting receptacles for the Life Force than the poor vagrants who frequent Barbara's West Ham shelter.

However, although Major Barbara is important to our discussion for its demonstration of the relationship between Shavian socialism and vitalism, and of Shaw's concept of the Will as acting both within man and on his society in its drive towards fulfilment, it is only through a study of Methuselah and the Hell Scene of Man and Superman that we can come to a full appreciation of Shavian vitalism.
Although the ideas contained in both these avowedly vitalist plays are essentially the same, there is a basic dramatic difference between the plays themselves, which stems from Shaw's approach to his subject in each play. When he wrote *Man and Superman* (1903) and *Major Barbara* (1905), Shaw believed that a better society was quite close at hand. As Bentley points out, Shaw at this stage of his career operated on two time-tables: on one level he was concerned with the short-range goal of a socialist society, which he suggests in *Major Barbara* could be quite close; on the other level, in *Man and Superman*, he was intrigued with the idea of an evolving superior species of man as the long-range goal of the Life Force. His treatment of this idea in *Man and Superman* suggests, however, that he was not yet totally committed to it, as he was to become in *Methuselah*: where it is clear that he considers the evolution of the Superman to be man's only hope as he faces the imminent collapse of his civilization after the Great War. The difference between the two plays in their treatment of their common subject is clearly pointed out by Shaw in his preface to *Back to Methuselah*:

> In 1901, I took the legend of Don Juan in its Mozartian form and made it a dramatic parable of Creative Evolution. But being then at the height of my invention and comedic talent, I decorated it too brilliantly and lavishly. I surrounded it with a comedy of which it formed only one act, and that act was so completely episodical (it
was a dream which did not affect the action of the piece) that the comedy could be detached and played by itself. . . . The effect was so vertiginous, apparently, that nobody noticed the new religion in the centre of the intellectual whirlpool. . . .

I now find myself inspired to make a second legend of Creative Evolution without distractions and embellishments. My sands are running out; the exuberance of 1901 has aged into the garrulity of 1920; and the war has been a stern intimation that the matter is not one to be trifled with. I abandon the legend of Don Juan with its erotic associations, and go back to the legend of the Garden of Eden.

The dramatic superiority of Man and Superman to its successor probably arises from Shaw’s motives in writing it; he had a much smaller ax to grind than he had when he set out to write Methuselah. As he claims in the preface, the letter to Arthur Bingham Walkley, who had challenged him to write a Don Juan play, or in other words a play with sex as the central theme, he wished to cut through all the false sentimentality of the conventional love farce or melodrama and write a play which would look objectively at the sexual relationship. Shaw took the suggestion to write a Don Juan play and, indulging in his love of paradox, produced a dialogue featuring the Don, not as a great lover, but as a Promethean "artist-philosopher," fleeing the instinctual creative energy of the mother-woman in order to preserve his own intellectual
creative energy. He surrounded this dialogue with a three-act farce which traces the unsuccessful efforts of Jack Tanner, the Don's spiritual descendent, to do the same thing. The light-hearted nature of the farce is extended into the Hell Scene, where Shaw, distributing the best lines equally among all four players in the quartet, appears as much concerned with providing good drama through a genuine conflict of ideas and points of view as he is with presenting his own case for creative evolution. One senses that what precipitated the "Shavio-Socratic dialogue" in Man and Superman was not the playwright's concern for the survival of the species, but merely his annoyance at the superficiality of contemporary stage treatment of sex and his desire to put things right by setting forth as clearly as possible his own ideas on the subject.

The important ideas on creative evolution which appear in this dialogue arise for the most part from Don Juan's efforts to explain the nature of the Life Force and its relation to the sexual relationship. In a short but important passage he explains how the creative energy in Woman effected his conversion from a Cartesian rationalist to a Shavian vitalist by evoking within him untapped resources of creative energy, the intellectual energy of the artist-philosopher:
ANA. It seems that Woman taught you something, too, with all her defects.

DON JUAN. She did more: she interpreted all the other teaching for me. Ah, my friends, when the barriers were down for the first time, what an astounding illumination! I had been prepared for infatuation, for intoxication, for all the illusions of love's young dream; and lo! never was my perception clearer, nor my criticism more ruthless. The most jealous rival of my mistress never saw every blemish in her more keenly than I. I was not duped: I took her without chloroform.

ANA. But you did take her.

DON JUAN. That was the revelation. Up to that moment I had never lost the sense of being my own master; never consciously taken a single step until my reason had examined and approved it. I had come to believe that I was a purely rational creature: a thinker! I said, with the foolish philosopher, "I think; therefore I am." It was Woman who taught me to say "I am; therefore I think." And also "I would think more; therefore I must be more."8

The Don goes on to explain how, though his reason rebelled, he was compelled by the Life Force within him to make love to the woman: "And whilst I was in the act of framing my excuse to the lady, Life seized me and threw me into her arms as a sailor throws a scrap of fish into the mouth of a seabird" (M.S.III.p.632). This experience related by Don Juan closely parallels one in Shaw's own life, one which may have had a powerful influence on his attitude towards sex and,
more important, on the final substance of his vitalist philosophy. On his twenty-ninth birthday Shaw lost his virginity to a Mrs. Jenny Patterson, a widow in her forties who was a music student of Shaw's mother. In a letter to Frank Harris, written in 1930, forty-five years after the event, he describes the experience in these terms: "a celestial flood of emotion and exaltation of existence which, however momentary, gave me a sample of what may one day be the normal state of being for mankind in intellectual ecstasy..." In a Puritan, or simply fastidious, rejection of the messier aspects of physical sex, Shaw transposes the Life Force which overwhelmed him on his twenty-ninth birthday from the physical to the intellectual plane. This is exactly what Don Juan claims as his desired goal, to answer the physical energy of the mother-woman with the intellectual energy of the artist-philosopher.

Drawing thus from his own experience, the Don argues that the Life Force is striving through the human brain towards consciousness with an energy, at least in the minds of some artists, equivalent to the sexual energy of the Woman:

**LTJo** Life, the force behind the Man, intellect is a necessity, because without it he blunders into death. Just as Life, after ages of struggle, evolved that wonderful bodily organ the eye, so that the living organism could see where it was
going and what was coming to help or threaten it, and thus avoid a thousand dangers that formerly slew it, so it is evolving today a mind's eye that shall see, not the physical world, but the purpose of Life, and thereby enable the individual to work for that purpose instead of thwarting and baffling it by setting up shortsighted personal aims as at present.

(M.S. III.p.627-628)

Having established the upward driving nature of the Life Force, Don Juan has difficulty, as does Shaw both here and in Methuselah, in defining its eventual goals. Shaw wisely prefers to leave the spectator with an emotional impression of the vitality and buoyant optimism of the Don's philosophy rather than pursue it to its logical conclusion: "I tell you that as long as I can conceive something better than myself I cannot be easy unless I am striving to bring it into existence or clearing the way for it. That is the law of my life. That is the working within me of Life's incessant aspiration to higher organization, wider, deeper, intenser self-consciousness, and clearer self-understanding." (M.S. III.p.641). The Devil cavils, not at the vaguely defined goals of creative evolution, but at the, to him, unrealistic optimism of its philosophy. He is the Darwinian determinist whose Spenglerian view of history precludes any thought of progress, even the long-range, biological progress of creative evolution. Although Don Juan counts himself among the
heavenly "masters of reality," his concern for what will be sometimes contrasts oddly with the Devil's concern for what is, making him, rather than the Devil, appear momentarily as the illusion-prone, romantic idealist. Shaw gives the Devil's point of view fair treatment, and, though making it quite clear where his sympathies lie, leaves the spectator to make a free choice between Don Juan's vitalism and the Devil's determinism.

Back to Methuselah offers no such choice to the spectator (or reader, for the play is very rarely performed); this is made clear in the preface which, unlike that of Man and Superman, can be considered an integral part of the play: the gospel of Shavian vitalism is preached with equal fervor in both. The optimism of Man and Superman and Major Barbara is absent from this play, for through the intervening years of the war creative evolution has become for Shaw not just a possible means, but the only means, of salvation for humanity. He has abandoned all hope of the short-range political solution of a socialist society and, as becomes clear in Part IV, Tragedy of an Elderly Gentleman, has rejected humanity itself for a species which, though evolved from man, and in Part IV coexisting on the same planet with men, possesses none of the qualities characteristic of man, except that of thought. In short, Shaw has chosen to reject
the best piece of advice which the Devil gave to Don Juan in *Man and Superman*: "Beware of the pursuit of the Superhuman: it leads to an indiscriminate contempt for the Human."

(M.S. III. p. 648).

The preface is an unrelenting attack on the Devil's philosophy of Darwinian determinism. However, the only powerful weapon Shaw can bring to bear against it is his own moral indignation. Like Butler, he finds he cannot refute the logic behind Darwinism -- indeed, he is probably aesthetically attracted to its formal beauty (at any rate he could understand how some of his contemporaries could be intrigued with the beauties of matter and its deterministic behaviour in the physical sciences) (B.M. Pref. p. lxvi); he can only rail against the immorality of applying it to human society. In one of his stronger passages Shaw cites the recent war as an example of determinism gone mad:

*If the Western Powers had selected their allies in the Lamarckian manner intelligently, purposely, and vitally, ad majorem Dei gloriam, as what Nietzsche called good Europeans, there would have been a League of Nations and no war. But because the selection relied on was purely circumstantial opportunist selection, so that the alliances were mere marriages of convenience, they have turned out, not merely as badly as might have been expected, but far worse than the blackest pessimist had ever imagined possible.*

(B.M. Pref. p. lxxi)

Yet, for all his railing against the moral wrongness of
Darwinism Shaw keeps finding evidence that its principles rather than those of creative evolution are shaping his society. In continuing to denounce Darwinism his position comes closer and closer to that of Lady Britomart in Major Barbara who asks her husband, Undershaft: "What does it matter whether [wrong things] are true if they are wrong?" to which a determinist, or a realist commenting on the post-war situation, could answer with Undershaft: "What does it matter whether they are wrong if they are true?" Yet Shaw is too much the social reformer to renounce as futile his visions of a better future, which seemed so close to reality before the war, and to accept the chaotic reality of the post-war world. So, sacrificing his reputation as a realist, which he gained by puncturing the myths of the nineteenth century, Shaw, by pushing his visions of what will be (or what must be, he claims, if mankind is not to perish) into the distant and obscure future, sets out to create his own myths, the "consoling myths" of Back to Methuselah.

The set of five plays which make up Back to Methuselah can best be appreciated if the reader accepts the fact that the playwright has broken off the struggle with reality, or at least the reality of the present, in order to set out the ideals and goals of Shavian vitalism. Shaw retains the dramatic form, one feels, only because he still finds
argument the best means of setting out ideas convincingly.

Of the five plays, Part I, *In the Beginning*, is perhaps the one most worth reading: apart from containing the essential points of Shaw's philosophy, it holds a certain artistic value as a clever reworking of the Creation myth. Shaw follows Milton in postulating the Fall as fortunate, even necessary, for the betterment and eventual salvation of man, and follows Blake in having the serpent, the devil of tradition, as the spokesman for the Life Force. The Shawian Fall also possibly owes something to Butler's "World of the Unborn" in his *Erewhon*. Butler's unborn creatures enter the world of matter apparently for no other reason than from boredom with the monotony of their potentially eternal existence. Adam is in a similar situation and feels the same dread of monotony:

> It is the horror of having to be with myself for ever. . . . I want to be different; to be better; to begin again and again; to shed myself as a snake sheds its skin. I am tired of myself. And yet I must endure myself, not for a day or for many days, but for ever. That is a dreadful thought. That is what makes me sit brooding and silent and hateful. . . .

(B.M. Part 1.I.p.5)

Clearly the Life Force is working both through the unborn Erewhonians and Adam and Eve, attempting through trial and error to arrive at higher and higher forms of life. In Shaw's fable the Life Force has the further motive of
escaping the determinism of the "chance" deaths of its principals, a chance that approaches certainty as their lives lengthen. The "Fall" occurs, then, when Adam, or rather the Life Force within him, chooses mortality and variety over the monotony of eternal life; eternal, that is, until Circumstantial Selection snuffs it out.

Having sacrificed the natural security of eternal life, Adam and Eve now attempt to create a secure future for themselves in a world made uncertain by the introduction of the variable elements of reproduction and death. In perhaps the most interesting passage in the play, Shaw shows how their reactions to these new conditions establish the patterns which result in the imperfect civilization of the present. Adam is tempted into the discovery of procrastination by the serpent, who points it out as one of the advantages of mortality:

ADAM [rubbing his foot] A thistle. And there, next to it, a briar. And nettles, too! I am tired of pulling these things up to keep the garden pleasant for us for ever.

THE SERPENT. They do not grow very fast. They will not overrun the garden for a long time; not until you have laid down your burden and gone to sleep for ever. Why should you trouble yourself? Let the new Adams clear a place for themselves.

(B.M. Part 1.I.p.13)

Adam thus starts the evolutionary trend towards irresponsibility which Shaw sees as having culminated in the Great War:
men have got into the habit of ignoring the future consequences of their actions; they will not be around to suffer them. From this observation Shaw begins to build his case for the need to return to immortality.

Adam's fear of the unknown begins to outweigh his joy at being relieved of the burden of eternal life:

ADAM [angrily] How can I help brooding when the future has become uncertain? Anything is better than uncertainty. Life has become uncertain. Love is uncertain. Have you a word for this new misery?

THE SERPENT. Fear. Fear. Fear.

ADAM. Have you a remedy for it?


(B.M. Part 1.I.p.17)

However, this does not satisfy Adam. He cannot adjust to the possibility of his relationship with Eve, which would have been a mainstay of his eternal life, dissolving with the arrival of new Adams. The devil suggests a vow between them and marriage is invented:

ADAM. I will live a thousand years; and then I will endure no more; I will die and take my rest. And I will love Eve all that time and no other woman.

EVE. And if Adam keeps his vow I will love no other man until he dies.

(italics mine)

THE SERPENT. You have both invented marriage. . . .

(B.M. Part 1.I.p.18)
Shaw's views on marriage are well known from *Man and Superman*. It is an institution arising from, but bearing no real relationship to, the sexual relationship, which, as Don Juan has pointed out, is fundamentally impersonal. As this scene bears out, Shaw sees marriage as serving no real function, but only as drawing short-lived men's attention from more important matters. If men had longer lives, they would no longer feel the need to seek security in marriage.

Most important, in this scene, the sexual roles of Adam and Eve are firmly established. They are made clearer in the second act, which is set several centuries after creation. Eve has become firmly established in her role as the mother-woman, ceaselessly producing dying generations of offspring. Her male descendants have evolved into a variety of types through which the Life Force is seeking new forms of expression. Adam has become merely a bread-winner, subordinate to the creative energy of Eve. Cain, however, shows an energy as intense as his mother's, but bent towards destruction rather than creation. Through him Shaw foretells the evolution of such imperfect human institutions and activities as slavery, capitalism and war. But through him the Life Force is seen struggling upwards:

**CAIN.** I revolt against the clay. . . . I revolt against these births that you and mother are so proud of. They drag us down to the level of the beasts. . . .
Stay with the woman who gives you children:  
I will go to the woman who gives me dreams.  
Groped in the ground for your food: I will  
bring it from the skies with my arrows. . . .

(B.M. Part 1.II.p.29)

His destructive energy comes from the Life Force within him making room for further experimentation with matter. He is the spiritual forebear of Andrew Undershaw, whose munitions can open the way for the creation of new societies. Both serve as agencies through which the ground is cleared for the evolutionary production of higher forms of life.

While Adam and Cain, fearing the unknown, lay the foundations for modern civilization in their attempts to impose an artificial certainty on the naturally uncertain future, Eve, a creature of hope, possessing the Life Force within her in its most elemental form, looks forward to the future and puts her faith in those Enochs among her descendants, progenitors of future artist-philosophers who subordinate their own fears and desires to the creative Will working within them; that is, towards the realization of its full potential and the salvation of mankind. Yet she fears that their lives are too short for them to understand fully their own potential, and that they will thus be misled and in turn mislead mankind:

Will they learn all the ways of all the stars in their little time? It took Enoch two hundred
years to learn to interpret the will of the Voice. When he was a mere child of eighty, his babyish attempts to understand the Voice were more dangerous than the wrath of Cain. If they shorten their lives, they will dig and fight and kill and die; and their baby Enoch will tell them that it is the will of the Voice that they should dig and fight and kill and die for ever.

(B.M. Part I.II.p.34)

Thus Shaw secures his case for the need to return to immortality.

The remaining four plays of this work do not hold the reader's interest as this first play does, and the reason is not difficult to discern. Shaw is at his best examining present conditions and explaining their causes. When he attempts to prescribe for them, he often loses his audience. In Man and Superman the Don is convincing in his indictment of contemporary society until he presents his remedy for its ills, eugenic breeding supervised in some mysterious manner by the Life Force. Similarly the accurate exposure of the real nature of poverty in Major Barbara gives way to the Utopian visions of Cusins, Undershaft and Barbara in the final scenes. In Methuselah the reader is asked to accept the "miracle" of self-willed longevity proposed in Part II by the brothers Barnabas. Such miracles are easy to accept in the mythological setting of Part I, where Shaw puts to skillful use the time-honored device of clothing metaphysical
truths in conventional myths, but they lose their credibility in the contemporary setting of a London drawing-room. Truth in a fantastic setting has always been found more palatable than myth in a factual setting.

What remains of interest in *Methuselah* is Shaw's concept of the goals of creative evolution. Parts II and III of the work are concerned with the miracle, the transition from man to Superman through self-willed longevity, and it is not until Part IV, *Tragedy of an Elderly Gentleman*, that the nature of the Shavian Superman is revealed. The play could be taken as an ironic version of Yeats' poem "Sailing to Byzantium." The Elderly Gentleman is making a pilgrimage, not from the Ireland of "dying generations" to Byzantium, the citadel of the reality to be found in pure art, but from Byzantium, or at least the Middle East, the present home of the short-livers ("dying generations"), to Ireland, now the home of the "masters of reality" who are evolving towards the state of pure thought. The long-livers of this play seem to be evolving towards a state of "innocence" similar to that enjoyed by Adam and Eve before their "fall". They have forgotten or rejected all the emotive words which Adam and Eve learned from the serpent and which are still part of the Elderly Gentleman's vocabulary. Similarly, they have rejected all the institutions of civilization devised by Adam, Cain
and their descendants, and still in use in the Middle East; these are praised highly by the Elderly Gentleman. Indeed, they seem to have successfully willed out of themselves all the defects of short-lived man. But what remains? Sen Gupta makes these perceptive comments on Shaw's supermen:

The defect of this portraiture of men in A.D. 3000 is that there is no positive quality in it. We know that there is no morality, no marriage, no election turmoil, no nationalism, no indulgence in poetry or art, but Shaw does not make any attempt to dive below the surface and show us what the men are like. What have they in place of politics, morality, and religion? Shaw can "imitate humanity" only as he knows it, and when he wants to portray men whom he does not know, his picture is incomplete and full only of negations. The men and women that he portrays are not seen to do anything; only they are free from certain fictions by which men who die young are guided. 11

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that these beings are simply no longer human, or at most are born with human qualities only to lose them at maturity. One of the brothers Barnabas has these remarks to make:

FRANKLYN. The force behind evolution, call it what you will, is determined to solve the problem of civilization; and if it cannot do it through us, it will produce some more capable agents. Man is not God's last word; God can still create. If you cannot do His work He will produce some being who can.

(B.M. Part 2 I.p.81)

The remarks are ambiguous. Shaw may be saying that if humanity does not have the inner energy to will longevity it will
simply be replaced in time by a completely different species, so that the sooner it modifies its behaviour and attributes the better; or he may be simply stating that humanity is indeed going to be replaced by a completely different species, namely the long-livers. If he means the latter, which is less likely, one must conclude that his optimism is not for humanity at all, but only for life itself, and that in the death of the Elderly Gentleman at the end of Part IV he is chronicling the demise of the human species.

The long-livers become even less human in the final play, *As Far as Thought can Reach*, except in the first four years of their existence wherein they pass quickly through numerous stages of development from the primitive emotions of love and jealousy in the Newly-born (it takes only twenty minutes to outgrow jealousy) to the intellectual striving after existence independent of material which is the preoccupation of the Ancients. This development is reflected in the varying tastes of the several youthful artists. The youngest see art as beauty and strive to make their sculptures as beautiful in the conventional sense as possible; the taste for beauty gives way to a greater desire to capture reality in art. One artist, emulating Rembrandt in *Man and Superman*, "who would paint a hag of 70 with as much enjoyment as a Venus of 20" (M.S.III.648), produces likenesses
of the Ancients, who are not beautiful, but who represent reality to the more mature artists of three or four years. Pygmalion goes one step further to reality and attempts to create life from without. The younger Ancients delight in shaping life from within, drawing on the almost fully realized Will within them to shape extra limbs; and finally the most advanced Ancients yearn after the ultimate goal of overcoming matter completely and existing as a vortex of pure thought. At the end of the play Lilith, the original embodiment of the Life Force in Shaw's mythology, outlines this final goal of the Ancients:

LILITH. They have redeemed themselves from their vileness, and turned away from their sins. Best of all, they are still not satisfied: the impulse I gave them that day when I sundered myself in twain and launched Man and Woman on the earth still urges them; after passing a million goals they press on to the goal of redemption from the flesh, to the vortex freed from matter, to the whirlpool in pure intelligence that, when the world began, was a whirlpool in pure force. And though all that they have done seems but the first hour of the infinite work of creation, yet I will not supersede them until they have forded this last stream that lies between flesh and spirit, and disentangled their life from the matter that has always mocked it. . . .

(B.M. Part 5.I.p.261)

Shaw appears to have returned to the Cartesian concept of the total separation of mind from matter, even though, as we noted at the beginning of this essay, the acceptance of
this principle of Descartes is what began that trend which
Shaw so strongly deplored in his own day, the movement towards
materialism that culminated in the determinism of Darwin's
"Circumstantial Selection." Not only does he follow Descartes,
he takes the further step of denying matter any role whatever
in his perfectly evolved universe of pure intellect: "I am
Lilith; I brought life into the whirlpool of force, and
compelled my enemy, Matter, to obey a living soul. But in
enslaving Life's enemy I made him Life's master; for that is
the end of all slavery; and now I shall see the slave set
free and the enemy reconciled, the whirlpool become all life
and no matter" (B.M. Part 5.I,p.262). Matter has become merely
the means by which the primeval state of pure physical energy
evolves into the ultimate state of pure intellectual energy.
By thus denying matter an ultimate role in the universe, Shaw
arrives quite suddenly at his final vision of a universe of
pure thought with nothing to think about. C.E.M. Joad points
out the unsatisfactory nature of this, the final outcome
of Shaw's philosophical drama and of his Vitalist philosophy.
"But if, insisting once again that thought must surely be of
something and that that something must be other than the
thinking about it, we repeat the question, what, then, does
Life in its ultimate expression think about, there is no
answer." 12
Shavian vitalism is really less a philosophical system than a rationalizing of the playwright's own temperament. Its strengths and weaknesses are Shaw's own. Specifically it embodies that essential element of his character, the conflict of the realist with the idealist within him. On the one hand, Shaw, the rational critic of society, the chronicler of things as they are, exemplifies what is best in his philosophy, his concept of the Artist-Philosopher as the embodiment of vital, intellectual energy struggling creatively with the material universe. On the other hand, turning away from this struggle, Shaw the idealist and visionary, the propounder of things as they should be, loses himself in a sterile contemplation of the unknowable that results in his meaningless vision of a universe consisting of nothing but pure thought, and in doing so, becomes indistinguishable from one of his Ancients. Clearly the element of conflict is essential both to Shaw's philosophy and to his drama; when it is removed, as it is at the end of Back to Methuselah, there is very little left of either.
NOTES


4Ibid., p. 58.


6Bentley, p. 56.

7Shaw, "Back to Methuselah, Preface," in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, by George Bernard Shaw (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1962), II, Ixxxviii-lxxxix. Subsequent quotations taken from this play are cited in the text. Page numbers are given since lines are unnumbered; ellipses are employed where needed to indicate that a speech has not been quoted to its conclusion.

8Shaw, "Man and Superman," in Complete Plays, with Prefaces, III, 631. Subsequent quotations taken from this play have been treated in the same manner as those from Back to Methuselah.


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