Much of Nicholas Rowe is explainable in terms of Dryden. Except for his comments on some characters of Shakespeare's plays, Rowe would seem almost entirely to move within the critical framework left by Dryden.

We began our discussion of Dryden by recalling the deep chasm that had intervened between the Elizabethan age and Augustan. We have noted how to the people of the Restoration the Elizabethans appeared so different, indeed so unlikely that even Dryden referred to them as "the Giant Race before the Flood." The civil war, the Puritan rule, and the later French influence on life, had all conspired to bring about a fundamental change in ideas and ideals. The ideas and ideals, newly made current, helped to form scales in the eyes of the people, especially in regard to their attitude to the Elizabethans. As was only to be expected, the gulf or chasm or "break in tradition" led to a loss of rapport and of a vital bridge of understanding. For, indeed, a new age had dawned, and the breach between it and the previous culture seriously handicapped any real understanding of the past. This largely explains, as we have noted, Dryden's uncomprehending look at and deprecatory remarks on Shakespeare's age and much of his language. Likewise it accounts for Rowe's incomprehension of both Shakespeare's age and language. Thus:
"As for his jingling sometimes, and playing upon words, it was the common vice of the age he lived in: And if we find it in the pulpit, made use of as an ornament to the sermons of some of the gravest divines of those times; perhaps it may not be thought too light for the stage." 1

Further: "If one undertook to examine the greatest part of these (the tragedies) by those rules which are established by Aristotle, and taken from the model of the Grecian stage, it would be no hard task to find a great many faults: But as Shakespeare lived under a kind of mere Light of Nature, and had never been acquainted with the Regularity of those written precepts, so it would be hard to judge him by a law he knew nothing of. We are to consider him as a man that lived in a state of almost universal License and ignorance: There was no established judge, but everyone took the liberty to write according to the dictates of his own fancy." 2

Dryden's references to the 'ignorant' times in which Shakespeare lived and to the 'bombast' and embroideries of his language readily come to mind. And such disparaging comments on the Elizabethan age and language become a commonplace with later critics like Pope and Johnson. Here again we quote a passage vividly describing the Elizabethan temper and the kind of language and literature it moulded:

"... These Elizabethan masses were perhaps actually an aristocracy in the sense that their culture had its roots deep in the past, in memories of the race, in that fertile soil — the consciousness of a people destined for high adventures, physical and spiritual. Such a consciousness is wakeful, embracing at once the past, the present, and the future of the nation. It takes an insatiable

2. Ibid, P. 32.
interest in everything, especially in those experiences allegorically represented in a lust for the possession of things...... Elizabethan authors knew this well, for poetic expression was their supreme venture, and for their themes there was God's own plenty.

"No subtlety, no grandeur was beyond them and their impetus carried them through to the end. No nicety, no vigour of language could stop them. Their range was boundless, their idiom ready for any purpose. They did not trouble to digest the matter they offered, and often the nut was hard to crack. But the public had good teeth, and it had a joyful appetite for everything. Hence the rich content of Elizabethan literature, its epic or suave tone, conquering, arrogant — anything could be essayed, from virtuosity to rhetoric, from eloquence to farce. And all the preoccupations of the age are to be found in it.

"Thus, close bonds were formed between the Drama and the living thought of a people ready for poetic marvels."1

By the Restoration those "close bonds" had snapped, and that inexorably led to the disappearance of that crying and soul-ful need for anything "from virtuosity to rhetoric, from eloquence to farce" and for "poetic marvels". That was why in Shakespeare came to be discovered a needless lot of virtuosity and rhetoric, eloquence and force. Rowe's complaint against 'jingle' and 'playing upon words' becomes in course of time Samuel Johnson's complaint of 'quibble' which, he finds, was to Shakespeare "the fatal Cleopatra for which he lost the world, and was content to lose it."

It should, however, he noted at the same time that Rowe's criticism is not as severe as it might possibly have been. His censure of language apart, he did find faults with Shakespeare for his neglect of the unities. But even then he stopped to take note of what he would call compensation:

"But in recompense for his carelessness in this point, when he comes to another part of the drama, the manners of his characters, in acting or speaking what is proper for them, and fit to be shown by the poet, he may generally be justified and in very many places greatly commended." 1

Shakespeare, he finds, did not take liberties with the characters he took from history, and yet without doing violence to history he achieved the signal triumph of rendering his characters of deathless appeal.

And even when exhibiting ignorance (characteristic of Augustan writers) about the climate of Shakespeare's age, Rowe praises the poet for his magnificent services to the stage. Thus:

"When one considers that there is not one play before him of a reputation good enough to entitle it to an appearance on the present stage, it cannot but be a matter of great wonder that he should advance Dramatic Poetry so far as he did." 2

It is clear that Rowe is rather lenient. As he says: "I shall not undertake the tedious and ill-natured trouble to point out the several faults he was guilty of....." He would not blame Shakespeare so much as the age for whose fault he

1. Rowe's Account etc. in Shakespeare Criticism, 1623-1840, ed. D.N. Smith, the World's Classics, 1958, P. 33.
2. Ibid, P. 32.
had to suffer. The suggestion is that the fault in language and non-adherence to the rules of drama must not be blamed on Shakespeare as much as on the age itself. In fact, the Augustan critics beginning with Dryden rejected the Elizabethan age, but clung to Shakespeare. They accepted Shakespeare, but rejected the Shakespeare moment.

But if Rowe criticises Shakespeare's language in general, he is all admiration for the language Shakespeare gives to his supernatural characters. And this brings us to the classical theory of poetic imitation. We quote below a few statements of Aristotle in this connection.

"Tragedy is an imitation not of persons but of action and life ...... Tragedy is an imitation of action; if it imitates the personal agents, it does so mainly for the sake of the action."

"The marvellous is certainly required in Tragedy ...... The marvellous ...... is a source of pleasure as appears from the fact that we all tend to embellish a story, in the belief that we are pleasing our hearers."

Now it is clear from the observations above that drama involves both an imitation of life (nature) and the marvellous or what may be called

the supernatural. In our discussion of the critical temper of the age in a previous chapter also we saw how the insistence on 'Nature' was seen combined with a recognition of the 'marvellous'. This coexistence is not only pointed out but also urged by Aristotle. Against this background of Aristotelian sanction, it was only natural that the neo-classical doctrine of art as an imitation or mirror of life should at the same time embrace the relevance or even the necessity of the marvellous (that is, what is beyond the pale of empirical existence). Dryden himself admitted the necessity of magic or the marvellous. Thus:

"If any man object the improbabilities of a spirit appearing, or of a palace raised by magic: I boldly answer him, that an heroic poet is not tied to a bare representation of what is true, or exceedingly probable..... 'Tis enough that, in all ages and religions, the greatest part of mankind have believed the power of magic, and that there are spirits and spectres which have appeared. This, I say, is foundation enough for poetry."¹

According to Dryden, therefore, the universality of opinion is sufficient reason why 'the power of magic' and 'spirits and spectres' should be accepted in poetry. The important criterion of credibility is that the delineation of the marvellous should be such as to achieve inner

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¹ Of Heroic Plays, 1674, Essays I, P. 153.
consistency. The action on the part of such supernatural creatures must be made to appear probable and likely. As Aristotle says:

"All the characters should remain consistent throughout the play; if the original to be imitated is inconsistent, then his character should be consistently inconsistent."¹

And the significant thing to note with regard to Rowe is that he is able to discover the inner consistency in the character of Caliban in The Tempest, the Ghost in Hamlet, and the Witches in Macbeth. Aristotle attaches more importance to 'action' than to character; character, according to him, becomes acceptable or otherwise by action. It is the action that is the deciding factor, not vice versa. And a perfect action is that action which shows inner consistency. Now according to Rowe, the otherwise grotesque characters such as those mentioned above have become eminently acceptable on the Aristotelian ground of sound action or inner consistency.

Rowe of course notes that in The Tempest "the unities are kept..... with an exactness uncommon to the liberties of his writing,"² but he does not think it worth his while to look long at this aspect of the play. Instead, he talks with

¹. Aristotle, Poetics, Every Man's Library (901), 1963, P. 36.
evident delight of the poet's masterly conduct of the departure from "that likeness to truth" which should normally be observed. Caliban has become highly acceptable through the action and language assigned to it. And this has been possible because of Shakespeare's 'magic'. As Rowe puts it:

"I am very sensible that he does, in this play, depart too much from that likeness to truth which ought to be observed in these sort of writings; yet he does it so very finely, that one is easily drawn in to have more faith for his sake than reason does well allow of. His magic has something in it very solemn and very poetical. And that extravagant character of Caliban is mighty well sustained, shows a wonderful invention in the author, who could strike out such a particular wild image and is certainly one of the finest and most uncommon grotesques that was ever seen. The observation, which I have been informed three very great men concerned in making upon this part, was extremely just. That Shakespeare had not only found out a new character in his Caliban, but had also devised and adapted a new manner of language for that character."

Again: "It is the same magic that raises the fairies in *Midsummer Night's Dream*, the witches in *Macbeth*, and the ghost in *Hamlet*, with thoughts and language so proper to the parts they sustain and so peculiar to the talent of the writer."

This 'magic' is synonymous with that intuitive or imaginative power which invests a work of art with an unearthly splendour combined at the same time with a rare naturalness, and which is apt to incorporate

the marvellous in such a work. We have already seen Dryden refer to Shakespeare's 'magic'. However, Rowe's appreciation of the appropriateness of the language and action Shakespeare has given to his supernatural characters, which have turned singularly probable and likely thereby, is worth noting. This aspect of his criticism, seen in terms of Aristotle's precepts, also shows his neo-classical bearings.

Besides, when Rowe remarks that Shakespeare's "images are indeed everywhere so very lively that the thing he would represent stands full before you and you possess every part of it"; we immediately recall what Dryden had earlier said: "All the images of nature were still present to him ......... when he describes anything, you more than see it, you feel it too", and what Gray was to say later ('Every word in him is a picture'). Not many critics of the time exhibit any turn for the marvellous poetry which is one of Shakespeare's deathless achievements. One who could entertain this opinion and record it at that time may perhaps be admitted to be a critic of some sensibility and penetration. If we care to mark the words 'indeed everywhere' of the above extract from Rowe, and if we put ourselves

1. Ibid, P. 30.
in mind of the general state of criticism of the time, the merit of this aspect of Rowe's criticism will become all the more clear. At the same time however it ought to be borne in mind that Rowe's general attitude to Shakespeare's language is one of disapproval. This apparent contradiction is but a very real paradox or ambivalence of the Augustan mind whose almost instinctive recognition of the merits of Shakespeare's language often conflicted with what may be called a sort of routine denunciation. An identical feature concerning Dryden's attitude comes to mind in this connection.

Attention may now be drawn to that aspect of Rowe's Shakespeare criticism which practically initiates a new tendency destined to flower forth in the 19th century and even reach out into the early part of the 20th century itself. This tendency relates to character criticism. When we remember that critics had not yet learnt to single out characters for any notice and that whatever criticism existed was there by way of general reflections on the works as a whole (Thomas Rymer being a solitary exception in his own way with his remarks on Othello), we can put Rowe's observations on characters in their proper perspective. His appreciations of Falstaff, Shylock and Caliban, among others, are worthy of
notice. These character studies are an anticipation, on however small a scale, of the splendid character studies of 19th century romantic criticism of Shakespeare.

It may not be out of place to take a glance here at some of Rowe's comments on characters. Falstaff not only tickled him but roused him to take an intellectual stand on the question of the justice of the dramatist's final treatment of this figure of fun. Rowe says:

"Falstaff is allow'd by everybody to be a Master-piece; the character is always well sustained.... and even the account of his death, given by his old landlady Mrs. Quickly, in the first act of Henry V, the' it be extremely natural, is yet as diverting as any part of his life ....... and I don't know whether some people have not, in remembrance of the diversion he had formerly afforded them, been sorry to see his friend Hal use him so scurvily, when he comes to the Crown in the end of the Second Part of Henry the Fourth."1

A tremendous lot of criticism of Shakespeare's treatment of Falstaff was to come later, but here is probably the first critical attitude indicated.

Having "that incomparable character of Shylock" in mind, Rowe remarks of The Merchant of Venice, "Tho' we have seen that play received and acted as a comedy, and the part of the Jew perform'd by an excellent comedian, yet I cannot but think it was

design'd tragically by the author. There appears in it such a deadly spirit of revenge, such a savage fierceness and fellness, and such a bloody designation of cruelty and mischief as cannot agree either with the style or characters of comedy."

This is perceptive criticism. It is proof that the sensitive critic was powerfully affected by the character of Shylock whose presence does violence to the comic texture and tone of the play.

Rowe's comments on Caliban have already been noticed. It is therefore worthy of mention that Rowe stands as a proud pioneer with his analysis, however imperfect, of individual characters and plays. Trying to account for this new interest in character, one may not be altogether wrong to suggest that it is but an expression of the century's passionate interest in men and affairs, of its admiration for whatever is lifelike and natural. It is at the same time perhaps an example of the age's discursive intellect at work.

Coming to *Hamlet*, Rowe shows a remarkable insight and at the same time his Aristotelian legacy, in other words, his neo-classical background in the best sense of the expression. He compares *Hamlet*

1. Ibid, P.
with *Electra*, notes many points of similarity between the two plays, and establishes *Hamlet's* superiority over *Electra*. *Hamlet's* superiority, he explains, is due to Shakespeare's discriminating judgment which forbade any exhibition of needless horror which taints Sophocles's play. In both the works the mother is guilty. Sophocles makes Orestes kill his mother (Clytemnestra) in which act *Electra* is seen to encourage her brother. This introduces an element of horror. Shakespeare, on the other hand, shows restraint in *Hamlet*. As Rowe puts it:

"*Hamlet* is represented with the same piety towards his father, and resolution to avenge his death, as Orestes; he has the same abhorrence for his mother's guilt, which, to provoke him the more, is heightened by incest. But 'tis with wonderful art and justness of judgment, that the poet restrains him from doing violence to his mother. To prevent anything of the kind, he makes his father's ghost forbid him that part of his vengeance...... This is to distinguish rightly between Horror and Terror. The latter is a proper passion of tragedy, but the former ought always to be carefully avoided. And certainly no dramatic writer ever succeeded better in raising Terror in the minds of an audience than Shakespeare has done."

To clinch the issue, Rowe makes a reference to the murder scene in *Macbeth*, where again the dramatist displays his fine judgment. Shakespeare does not actually show the grotesque murder, but merely reports it, which serves the dramatic purpose

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1. Ibid, P. 36.
all right. Rowe mentions it as "a noble proof of that manly spirit with which he (Shakespeare) writ."4

Indeed, the relevant Aristotelian precept supports Rowe. As Aristotle says:

"Fear and pity may be aroused by Spectacle, but they may also be aroused by the very structure of the incidents — which is the better way and indicative of the better poet. The plot, in fact, should be constructed in such a way that even without seeing the things, he who simply hears the account of them shall be filled with horror and pity at the incidents...."2

Thus, according to Rowe, Shakespeare's method which consists, to borrow Aristotle's language, in arousing fear and pity "by the very structure of the incidents" is the "better way and indicative of the better poet."

Regarding his discussion of Hamlet and Electra, what Rowe evidently means to say is that in a genuine tragedy there is no room for "Horror", i.e. the feeling that is aroused by the exhibition of wholly unnatural and uncalled for violence on the stage, which, incidentally, goes with blood-and-thunder tragedies. Here again we may find Rowe vindicated by what Aristotle says in his Poetics. We quote the relevant words from Aristotle.

1. Ibid, P. 37.
"Those who employ Spectacle to parade what is merely monstrous and not productive of fear have no share in the art of tragedy; one must not expect every kind of pleasure from a tragedy, but only its own distinctive pleasure."¹

Indeed, the very fact that Shakespeare does not "employ spectacle to parade what is merely monstrous" shows his perfect understanding of and insight into "the art of tragedy." It is therefore legitimate to hold that Shakespeare is greater than other dramatists no less by reason of his art than by his natural parts. And Rowe naturally did not remain content with praising Shakespeare's 'wit' alone. Rowe refers pointedly to the "wonderful art and justness of judgment" with which Shakespeare restrained Hamlet from doing violence to his mother, and which therefore prevented the introduction of "what is merely monstrous" (in the words of the Poetics) into the play. It is necessary here to record that Dryden too had recognised Shakespeare as both a marvel of 'nature' and a marvel of 'art', which is a different thing to say from speaking of him as a mere child of nature. Thus Dryden remarks:

"Shakespeare, who (taught by none) did first impart To Fletcher Wit, to labouring Jonson Art."²

². Prologue to The Tempest or the Enchanted Island, 1667.
Besides being at one with Dryden on this point, Rowe would seem to agree with Ben Jonson who in his celebrated _Elegy_ said:

"......................... thy art,
My gentle Shakespeare, must enjoy a part."

In the light of the discussion above we can only take the following judgment of David Nichol Smith with some reservations:

"The burden of Rowe's criticism (of Shakespeare) is that 'strength and nature made amends for art.'"¹

Throughout the discussion above of Nicholas Rowe we have sought to evaluate his criticism by trying to point out and explain his neo-classical bearings, his particular indebtedness to Dryden and his own distinctively individual contributions, more particularly his pioneering work as a character critic. And while doing so, we have always endeavoured to probe and discuss the principles involved in the critical comments. In the next chapter we take up Addison who is a reminder of a lot of previous criticism and who at the same time paves the way for some new trends in subsequent Shakespeare criticism.