Absalom and Achitophel in the Light of the Scholastic Canons of Aesthetics

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"ABSAŁOM AND ACHİT̆OPHEL"

IN THE LIGHT OF

THE SCHOLASTIC CANONS OF AESTHETICS

BY

EUGENE L. WATRIN

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of some of the ultimates no one would deny that there is a Scholastic Metaphysic.

Very much the same process was followed in evolving the norms of beauty. Aristotle accepted the problem from his master, Plato, and worked out what he thought was an adequate explanation for the beautiful.¹ Plotinus, Longinus, and St. Augustine stimulated interest in the problem and added helpful notes towards its final solution. Finally the Angelic Doctor with his genius for synthesis assembled these fragments into a foundation that was to serve as a starting point and directive for the later theorists.

Although Aquinas has not developed his doctrine of the beautiful in the same exhaustive way as that in which he dealt with Logic, Metaphysics, and Ethics, each word he has let fall on the subject contains the germ of a theory, and opens up immense horizons of thought.²

It is in this foundation that we find the constants that can be studied as the Scholastic Canons of Aesthetics.

It is only the objective or metaphysical aspects of the beautiful that shall be treated here, not the subjective or psychological. And that for two reasons. First, St. Thomas treats almost exclusively of the metaphysical phase. The

great stress was not on the psychological in his day as it is in ours. Secondly, the majority of disputes among the philosophers concern the psychological perception, not the objective foundation, and since we wish to deal with the points on which there is agreement we shall avoid this "no man's land" of the psychological.

Since Grabmann, Mandonnet, and De Wulf\textsuperscript{3} all agree in condemning the De Pulchro et Bono, once attributed to St. Thomas, as spurious, no matter contained in it will be considered as expressing the sentiments of Thomas. As this was the only work that purported to be an explicit treatment on the beautiful by the Angelic Doctor, we are forced to gather his views from brief passages in his other works.

With this as a preface then, we are ready to determine as far as possible just what are the Scholastic canons of beauty; what we mean by satire, and to see if, and how far, these norms of beauty can be applied to satire.

\textsuperscript{3} For the opinions on this work cf. Mandonnet, Des écrits authentiques de S. Thomas, Fribourg, 1910; Grabman, Die Echten Schriften des HL. Th. Von Aquin, Munster, 1920; De Wulf, Medieval Philosophy, Harvard, 1922, 136.
CHAPTER II

THE GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF SCHOLASTIC AESTHETICS

Three notes stand out preeminently in all the Scholastic tenets of the beautiful. They are integrity, proportion or order, and clarity or splendor of the form. Around this trinity all the other notes group themselves. Although some of the Schoolmen express their ideas in various ways it is safe to say their concepts include these three notes explicitly, or at least implicitly. Indeed, a study of the nature of these concepts will show why they are of necessity included in the idea of the beautiful, even if not always referred to specifically by the theorists.

We can take our lead for the requisites of beauty from Thomas Aquinas when he writes,

For beauty includes three conditions, integrity or perfection, since those things which are impaired are by the very fact ugly; due proportion or harmony; and lastly, brightness, or clarity, whence things are called beautiful which have a bright color.1

This first element of beauty, integrity or perfection, requires some further study if we are to have a clear notion of exactly what it is.

Thomas, speaking of integrity, says that it is twofold. One kind which is considered as the first perfection and consists in the very existence of a thing; the other is considered as the second perfection and is the operation of the thing.\textsuperscript{2} Callahan in explaining this point of integrity writes,

\begin{quote}
The condition of integrity requires that an object lack no essential parts, functions or elements. However, there is more to this condition than a mere negative side; integrity implies a positive fullness, completeness, a richness of perfection such as can call forth the attention of the cognitive faculties and provoke a lively pleasure.\textsuperscript{3}
\end{quote}

All of this really comes down to the fact that an object of beauty must be complete in its essentials and in its functions. But how precisely is this to be applied to the arts—those works fashioned by man which we consider beautiful?

We say that a piece of art has integrity if all the parts it contains fit together properly and contribute actively to

\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{2} Duplex est integritas. Una quae attenditur secundum perfectionem primam, quae consistit in ipso esse rei; alia quae attenditur secundum perfectionem secundam, quae consistit in operatione. Thomas Aquinas, Commentarium in Libros Sententiarum, IV, dist. 26, q. 2, a. 4, c., in Opera Omnia, Petrus Fiaccadorus, Parmae, 1857, VII, 923.

\textsuperscript{3} Callahan, 58.
make up the whole. This means that there is no lack of essential parts, that the work is a complete whole, and that all the parts are joined together by an ideal form which makes the organized parts an organic whole. Aristotle shows how this applies to literature when he writes

We have laid it down that a tragedy is an imitation of an action that is complete in itself, as a whole...
Now a whole is that which has a beginning, a middle, and an end. A beginning is that which is not itself necessarily after anything else, and which has naturally something after it; an end is that which is naturally after something else, either as its necessary or usual consequent, and with nothing else after it; and a middle, that which is by nature after one thing and has also another after it. A well-constructed plot, therefore cannot either begin or end at any point one likes; beginning and end in it must be the forms just described.4

This is also verified in other forms of literature. For example, in a poem we look to see if all the parts contribute to the whole effect desired by the poet. A poem is an unfolding of language, and language is a symbolic form of thought. Thought always includes motion. A poem, therefore, is a representation of thought in motion—a thought moving in one direction, having a beginning from which all the movements of all the related, interlacing, and subordinate thoughts of the whole poem begin; the poem has a middle through which all the thoughts

of the poem must flow; and an end in which they all finally culminate. This interflow and interrelation of thought constitutes the integrity of the poem. Flaccus calls it a "living unity" when he notes,

The beautiful is complete and all of a piece. The unity that it has is a living unity; a common life flows back and forth from part to part and glows with a warmth and glamour in every enhanced and enhancing part. Plotinus and certain medieval writers were aware of this: The smoothness and suavitas they pointed to in the beautiful were nothing but the result of this interflow; and their nitidas is more than brightness or brilliance, It is a shared luminosity—an interglow that is the living light of the form and all its parts.

This full complement of essential parts becomes clearer in the study of painting. We cannot admire anything as beautiful in a picture unless it exists in its fullness, or at least some part of it which retains all the necessary elements, lines, and coloring that make it a complete portion. As a minimum that part of the picture must be present which is studied for its beauty. The same holds for architecture, sculpture, and music, wherein we desire a complete cathedral, statue, or symphony, at least structurally speaking.

It follows, therefore, that any lack of this "first perfection", any diminution of this being of a thing makes an

object ugly in some way or other. A bombed cathedral, a crippled limb, a tornado-torn forest are not beautiful in so far as they lack integrity, that completeness or being which they should have by their very nature. In art too, the unfinished or the broken are in some way ugly because they fall short of the ideal, or that first perfection which they should have for their total organic completeness. How at times portions can have beauty and also integrity is explained by Callahan.

The objection based upon the universal approbation of the beauty of the Venus de Milo and other specimens of art which seem to disprove the condition of integrity which we posit for beauty, vanishes when it is understood that this factor is relative, and dependent upon the object and aims of a work. More than this, the integrity of any object of beauty must be considered not only in relation to the work itself, but also in regard to the capacities of the subject.

Finally with reference to integrity it is to be remembered that certain aspects of a whole object may be considered apart as distinct entities, and found beautiful.6

Although this "first perfection" is important, there is a perfection of still greater importance. This is the "second perfection" of function, or of operation of the being. Integrity of function is that perfection which demands the natural activity of every essential element that is part of the "first perfection" of existence. The thing which is must act like

6 Callahan, 57.
what it is. No distortion of nature is permissible in a work of art. Men in literature must act like men. In painting and sculpture wrenched limbs, elongated ears and noses, and square cheeks that serve no good purpose cannot be said to have integrity of function. Every wrinkle of a face, or every twig of a tree need not be shown, but every detail that is taken from the model should be in conformity with the normal activity of the organ or element first in nature, and secondly in the art product. Anything that is added for its own sake, i.e. for no good functional reason, would be ugly because it would be outside the pale of integrity and the being of beauty.

The condition of integrity requires that an object of beauty lack no essential parts, functions or elements. However there is more to this condition than a mere negative side; integrity implies a positive fullness, completeness, a richness of perfection such as can call forth the attention of the cognitive faculties and provoke a lively pleasure.7

The two perfections of existence and operation are not enough. They are but negative aspects. A work of art must also have positive fullness in order to arouse our cognitive faculties. This positive fullness is required to stir our aesthetic sense completely. There must be a sufficient reason for the work of art to produce in us its proper effect. Only a full cause can produce a full effect. This positive fullness is produced by

7 Ibid., 58.
the artist when he "idealizes" the form he finds in nature. In his work of art the artist subtracts whatever militates against the complete realization of the form, and then adds the correct accidental forms or notes which bring out the substantial form in all its splendor. An artist gives his work integrity when he gives everything that pertains essentially and functionally to the form; when, in brief, he makes the mere organized parts an organic whole. A failure here, just as one with regard to the elements and functions, destroys or diminishes the beauty of a work because it impairs the integrity.

This brings us to the second ontological element of beauty, and we find that there is almost universal agreement on the necessity of some kind or other of proportion.

Under some form or other this doctrine has gained almost universal acceptance from the time of Aristotle down to the present day; but the expression of the theory most frequently encountered is that which states that ontological beauty is based on unity amid variety.8

We can with Speckbaugh define proportion as "that quality of an artistic production the presence of which results in the satisfying relation as to size, quantity, value or importance

8 Ibid., 61.
between the parts and the whole and the parts to each other. 

It is the arrangement of several things according to some common principle, or as the popular phrase has it "unity amid variety". The concept of proportion brings with it, we might say, includes a number of related notions that flow naturally from the qualities of unity and variety. The first of these is this oneness itself. An artistic production must have organic wholeness, or in terms of proportion, the parts of the organism must be related to the whole. From this it is quite obvious that to have order the work must have parts. One could not set in order a single dot on a paper. In short we must have a certain variety for if beauty must have order it must have the diversity of parts which is essential to the notion of order and proportion.

If mere variety, however, sufficed for beauty any bargain counter would cause aesthetic ecstacy, but the parts of a work of art must be selected and consistently ordered so that they all work toward the presentation of a satisfying idea. This is the artistic quality of harmony which so fuses unity and variety that no element in the work appears alone and separated from the whole. It deals with parts in relation to the whole, just as does the notion of restraint. Even harmonious details might be superfluous. Restraint rules out the superfluous and limits.

9 Speckbaugh, Paul F., (C.P.P.S.), Some General Canons Of Literary Criticism Determined From an Analysis Of Art, Catholic University, Washington, D. C., 1936, 101.
the artistic production to those details which contribute to
the artistic theme. It is the final check on the relation of
the parts to the whole.

But just as variety, harmony, and restraint flow from the
idea of unity and of the relation of the parts to the whole, so
there is another set of concepts that spring from the relation
the various parts have among themselves. The first of these
is balance. It may be considered as a sense of compensation.
This does not necessitate perfect symmetry but simply implies
a certain equality of opposing or contrasting elements, re­
sulting in an equal attraction on either side of the center
point. In the final analysis it means that an exaggeration on
one side has been atoned for on the other so that the natural
level has not been disturbed.

The remaining qualities are rhythm and measure which are
the guides to the notions of stress and emphasis. Rhythm is
here taken in a broader sense than in music, and consists in
the regular accentuation or emphasis on any one detail of im­
portance in a work of art. "Rhythm is that quality of an
artistic production the presence of which causes a regular­
accentuation in repeated form of certain parts or elements of
a work of art."10

10 Ibid., 100.
Measure on the other hand is a negative norm. It prohibits undue emphasis on any one detail. It is really a species of balance since here the exaggeration is not in the detail itself, but in the attention drawn to the part in the consideration of the whole. Measure is the final norm for keeping the parts in proper relation among themselves.

But the intellect too, delights in order. This rational delight demands an intrinsic proportion. It is really this intrinsic proportion which gives the ultimate reason why the extrinsic elements are proportional. St. Thomas gives us a clue to this intrinsic proportion when he speaks of "due proportion."\footnote{Aquinas, \textit{Summa Theologica}, I, q. 5, a. 4, ad 1m.}

Finally it should be observed that not all order, or all proportion is esthetic, but only that which is best suited to manifest to the intelligence the peculiar perfection of the object under consideration.\footnote{Callahan, 62.}

The question immediately arises, due to what? What is the debt involved in aesthetic proportion?

To answer this question it is necessary to stop for a moment to examine a bit of the metaphysics of the Schoolmen. This is the doctrine of matter and form that was first evolved by Aristotle. For him the world was made of matter informed with a life-giving or determining principle. It is the very
nature of things to be made of matter and form.

The word form is a technical term, signifying that which constitutes a given thing in a determined species or essence; it is the type, the abstract ideal. The scholastic conception of form should not be confused with the prevalent acceptance of the word in contemporary language. We may call it the "dominant characteristic" of a thing, if that be more acceptable to the modern mind, provided one understand by this the essential principle of either a primary or secondary mode of being, and not merely a prominent superficial feature.13

The human intellect cognizes by abstracting the form from the matter. From this it follows that if a work of art must have proportion, this proportion must primarily and fundamentally be found in the form of the work and not merely in the matter. This is the intrinsic proportion, and consists precisely in the proper conformity between the form in the work of art and the form in nature from which it was abstracted and perfected by the artist. His idea concretized in a work of art must be proportioned to nature, the source of the idea. It must be true to life. This is artistic intrinsic, or due proportion. Eric Gill writes of it,

But beauty consists in due proportion and the word "proportion" signifies the relation of part to whole and of a whole to other wholes... --but beauty consists in DUE proportion

13 Callahan, 64.
and the word "DUE" signifies a debt, so that to say that a certain thing has DUE proportion signifies that it has the proportion DUE to it—the proportion which it ought to have on account of its being what it is...

And this is also the case in what we call works of art. Thus in poetry as in ordinary speech, in music and dancing, in painting and in all the arts of men—from the making of peasant sticks to the building of St. Peter's; from the making of a fog-horn to the making of a city—Due proportion consists in justice.14

This basic proportion is determined by the intrinsic end, and this intrinsic end depends on nature and on the artistic concept of the end. Chapman gives a very worthwhile comment on this idea, one that is worth quoting at length.

The work of art also has its own end, determined by its art-form which the artist gives its intelligible or sensible matter, and it is important to consider first how the work of art conforms to its own end rather than to that of the beholder. The confluent arrangement of parts in accordance with an end is in a deeper sense the ontological order or good of a thing, for each being realizes its good in so far as it conforms to its intrinsic end or purpose, as well as to the ends or purposes of others. In thus seeking to achieve its end, which is also to achieve its form, each being seeks its good. To the degree that each being is good, that is, desirable, suitable, or agreeable to its own nature or essence, conforming to the purpose or

end determined by its form, it has its due proportion or harmony. 15

By way of summary we can say that artistic proportion has both a material and a spiritual aspect. The essence of this proportion is the conformity of the form of the work of art to nature itself. The harmonizing of the parts to the whole and of parts among themselves is the concrete, material accommodation that follows naturally on the intrinsic proportion of the form. This twofold, adequate notion is the result of the form informing the whole of the work of art.

This brings us to the third element of beauty, the splendor of the form. This has of necessity been touched on before, for unless the integrity and proportion were presented to the cognitive faculties in such a way that they could readily perceive them with an accompanying satisfaction the object would not be beautiful. Hence the need for this third element of splendor or brilliance, which is the natural result of an order so constituted as to manifest itself to the cognitive faculties. This is not really a new note.

A certain splendour is indeed according to all the ancients the essential character of beauty, — claritas est de ratione pulchritudinis, lux pulchrificat, quia sine luce omnia sunt turpis,—but it is the splendour of intelligibility: splendor veri, said the Platonists, splendor ordinis, said St. Augustine.

adding that unity is the form of all beauty; splendor formae, said St. Thomas with a metaphysician's precision of language; for FORM, that is to say the principle determining the peculiar perfection of everything which is, constituting and completing things in their essence and their qualities, the ontological secret, so to speak, of their innermost being, their spiritual essence, their operative mystery, is above all the peculiar principle of intelligibility, the peculiar clarity of every thing.16

This clarity or brilliance was often taken by the ancients to mean a mere condition of light and color. They had in mind only the sensuous delight that comes from contact with luminous bodies. That this is a necessity for certain kinds of sensible beauty goes without saying, for if a thing is to charm a perceptive faculty it must have a certain brightness or lustre. But for St. Thomas this brilliance or clarity is not a mere property of matter. He applied it to all beautiful objects, not only those perceivable by sight or sound, but to those cognized by the intellect as well. The very way in which he designates this quality gives us the key to his true meaning. He calls it splendor, claritas, and splendor formae. Chapman's explanation of this point is very worthwhile.

shining out of all the transcendentals united in the beautiful. More specifically, **claritas** is the intelligible radiance permeating the whole of a being, the splendor of form irradiating it from within, the light of ontological truth, the knowable, adequating it to an intellect. So dazzling in itself as to be blinding to human eyes, **claritas** illuminates the darkness of matter so that material beings may enlighten man's intellect through his senses. 17

To explain this more fully we can say that everything that exists has the substantial form which makes to be what it is. But this does not suffice for beauty. The substantial form must be made brilliant and manifest by the accidental forms which perfect it. It is only when these accidental forms which modify the substantial form are perfect enough to add this clarity to the substantial form that an object can be said to be beautiful. All common objects around us have a certain perfection from these accidental forms but they do not impress us with their beauty because they lack that degree of perfection which is necessary to make these objects shine out from those around them. The beauty of an object depends on its splendor.

In order that a being be beautiful it is not sufficient merely that it possess the qualities of integrity and of proportion in the sense just explained, but it is required that these factors be present in such a way that the mind

17 Chapman, 339.
perceive them without too great effort and strain. Hence, a third esthetic quality, brilliance, which is simply the natural result of order so constituted as to fulfill the requirements of the perceptive faculties.18

In a work of art this splendor is produced by the artist, who after he has determined on the first form of the object he is to portray, perfects the form by adding to it the accidental form he has perceived perfecting other members of the species. The artist must conceive his ideal of the species and then clothe the first form with the secondary or accidental forms which are best calculated to insure the resplendence of the form. When he succeeds we have a great work of art.

That the lapidary integritas, consonantia, and claritas articulated by St. Thomas are not of too high a degree of generality for a creative understanding of beauty may be seen from the influence it has exerted—and is this not a sign of its vitality?—more on artists than on professors of philosophy.19

By way of summary then we may say that the three essentials of all beauty are: integrity, because the mind likes being; proportion because the mind likes order and unity; clarity because the mind likes light and intelligibility.

18 Callahan, 61.
19 Chapman, 340.
These are the three requisites for beauty which Thomas Aquinas set forth and the subsequent Schoolmen developed, and the trio on which we shall base our criticism. We are ready now to turn to the study of "Absalom and Achitophel" by John Dryden, but first we must see the many implications in the modern use of the word "satire".
CHAPTER III
THE NATURE OF SATIRE

If one feels some antipathy for this subject of satire it is not to be wondered at. In fact, according to David Worcester, the author of the latest and most complete work on satire, the repugnance only proves one's normality.

Many persons instinctively shrink from satire as they might from a scorpion. Is not satire the expression of controversial heat, of venomous rancor, of the raw, negative emotion out of which humanity struggles to rise age by age?...I hope to show that no such generalization is valid... Oceans of ink have been poured out in acrimonious and shocking libels and invectives; but so have oceans been spent on nauseous obituary verse and summer-verandah romances. In thinking of satire, we should consider the hundreds of works that have risen to the top. The millions below, graduated from acidulous gruel to a thick sludge of hell-broth, are interesting only insofar as they help to explain the principles of great satire.1

According to the Oxford English Dictionary the word "satire" came into the English language in 1509.2 Since that time its meaning has been so growing and changing that not only


has it matured from a narrow, specific, to a broad general word, but the very root significance of the word has changed. To grasp its meaning is like picking up a piece of quick-silver, it looks so easy until repeated efforts have shown the difficulty. Consequently it is necessary to determine just what we mean by satire before we attempt to explain its nature.

An examination of the definitions from the leading authorities will show us the common points as well as the discrepancies. The *Encyclopedia Britannica* has this definition,

Satire, in its literary aspect, may be defined as the expression in adequate terms of the sense of amusement or disgust excited by the ridiculous or unseemly, provided that humor is a distinctly recognizable element and that the utterance is invested with literary form. Without humor satire is invective; without literary form, it is mere clownish jeering. The first exercise of satire no doubt consisted in jibing at personal defects. To dignify satire by rendering it the instrument of morality as the associate of poetry was development implying considerable advance in the literary art. 3

We might note here that this definition emphasizes the element of humor about which we shall have more to say later.

Ronald Knox in his *Essays In Satire* contrasts satire with humor.

Satire has a wider scope, too.

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It is born to scourge the persistent and ever-recurrent follies of the human creature as such. And, for anybody who has the humility to realize that it is aimed at him, and not merely at his neighbours, satire has an intensely remedial effect; it purifies the spiritual system of man as nothing else that is human can possibly do... Satire is thus an excellent discipline for the satirized: whether it is a good thing for the satirist is more open to question.4

We find a definition of satire in poetry that is quite different, and somewhat difficult to reconcile with other definitions.

Satiric Poetry: Verses treating their subject with irony or ridicule. The term is a loose one, since it characterizes method of treatment rather than content or form.5

But before we go into a detailed study of these views let us look at two more definitions that will help us understand the complexity of the maze through which we hope to make our way. In the Dictionary Of World Literature we read

Satire--Satirical writing conveys censorious criticism of human frailty. Its prime purpose is ethically or aesthetically corrective. From other


ways of expressing disapproval  
satire differs in tone and  
techniques. The preacher is more  
direct and more oratorical than  
the satirist; the scold is less  
logical and more abusive. The  
satirist that deals especially with  
artists and the arts is a destructive  
critic concerned rather with in-  
genious devices of denunciation than  
with the subtleties of intellectual  
analysis.  

John Dryden quotes for his definition the one used earlier  
by Heinsius.  

Satire is a kind of poetry, without  
a series of action, invented for the  
purging of our minds; in which human  
vices, ignorance, and errors and all  
things besides, which are produced from  
them in every man, are severely rep-  
rehended; partly dramatically, partly  
simply, and sometimes in both kinds of  
speaking; but, for the most part,  
figuratively, and occultly; consisting  
in a low familiar way, chiefly in a  
sharp and pungent manner of speech; but  
partly also, in a facetious and civil  
way of jesting; by which either hatred,  
or laughter or indignation is moved. 

There is considerable diversity in these definitions.  
The first one emphasizes the need for laughter while the last  
two make little of this element. "Censorious criticism" and  
"scorn" are not calculated to inspire much laughter. The phrases  

6 *Dictionary Of World Literature*, ed. by Joseph T. Shipley,  

7 *The Works Of John Dryden*, ed. by Sir Walter Scott and  
George Saintsbury, T. and A. Constable, Edinburgh, 1887,  
XIII, 107.
"has an intensely remedial effect" and "is a destructive critic" also need some reconciliation with the note of humor. But greater than all of these is the opposition between "a literary manner" and "literary form" of the definitions. If satire is merely a literary manner we can dismiss the whole question, for it needs no special aesthetic treatment. How can these difficulties be cleared up? What is the secret of unifying these divergent attitudes?

Perhaps there is no adequate answer to some of the questions, and those which can be answered with some satisfaction cannot be dismissed in a few words. Hence to get by this sphinx we must go into a more detailed study of the nature of satire. To ascertain the reality of the problem it is necessary, first of all, to show that satire is a form of literature and not merely a literary manner.

It is impossible to draw a line at any one place and say that everything on one side of it is satire, and all on the other side is not. If satire, like light, could be submitted to the spectrum analysis it would run from the red of invective at one end to the violet of fine irony at the other. Beyond either end are forms not classed as satire, the infra-red of mere abuse, and the ultra-violet of pure criticism.

But within this spectrum is an area where satire is not only a literary manner but a mode or form of literature. This superb quotation from Zeitlin and Rinaker is introduced here to sum up the whole point.

The satirist may and does give expression to his mood and his critical sense in almost any form—in dramas, in novels, in prose pamphlets and essays, and in poems of every species from the long burlesque epic to the sharp epigrammatic couplet. Satire is often an ingredient in works which are primarily conceived in an altogether different spirit. But though satire manifests itself with such freedom in any literary form, it is possible nevertheless to recognize a distinct class of poems which is entirely dominated by its spirit and which observes quite definite principles of style.

In English literature it is the more important to give separate recognition to this class because there was one period covering nearly a century, when satire was the most prominent type of writing, exercising the energies of the greatest men of letters and giving birth to not a few masterpieces. 9

This is of special interest to us because one of these masterpieces is to be the subject of our further study.

But since this difference between satire as a manner and as a form is of great importance, and one which many literary men seem to confuse, it will be well to study it a little further. Humbert Wolfe cites a few concrete examples that may

help to clinch this point.

There is an element of satire in many other forms of art, just as a hint of caricature may be described in some faintly malicious portraits by Sergeant. But the fact that the American pilloried some of his most remunerative clients does not set him by the side of Daumier. With one it is a hint of onion in the salad, with the other there is no salad. To say of a novelist that he is "satirical" is a contradiction in terms. He must choose between his characters and their follies. Though he may with perfect propriety emphasise weaknesses, he must not judge them. He is not asking for judgement but for understanding. The satirist seeks not only for judgement, but condemnation.  

To deny that satire can be a manner of treatment would be absurd, and certainly not the intention of this work, but to say that it cannot be a form of literature seems equally ridiculous. How indeed, would we classify the works of Juvenal, Swift, or Pope if there were no form of literature that could stand as satire? But the question immediately arises, in what does this mode of literature consist? To admit that there is such a mode is one thing, but to determine its precise nature is another. The latter is by far the more difficult of solution. By way of determining what satire is, let us first determine what it is not.

Lyric poetry, tragedy, and the novel are literary forms

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which obviously are not satire, although the latter two may be so in part or tone. Indeed this passage on the point of the novel gives us much valuable aid toward the final solution:

The novelist who uses his story for the purpose of the satirist, will fail as both, or certainly as one. Thus, if Swift had sought to interest us in the love affairs of Gulliver, we had had more of a man and less of a satire. So Martin Chuzzlewit suffers as much as a novel by the intrusion of Sairey Gamp as satire gains. Which is not to say that a satirist may not have characters or a novelist his ridicule, but with the first the second, and with the second the first must prevail.11

There are other forms much closer to satire and therefore less easily distinguished from it. Comedy is one of these. There is probably no academic formula that can be used to plot the dividing line between comedy and satire. In fact they are often so much part of each other that, as we noted in the beginning of this chapter, our first two definitions of satire demanded humor as one of the constituents of satire. Most of the leading satirists, Dryden, Pope, Chesterton and Anatole France use humor abundantly, but humor is clearly not satire.

It is this sense of something held to be important and championed—the paying off of an insult, the defence

11 Ibid., 12.
of social values, the critical inspection of life—that marks off satire from the playful caprice of fun, the indulgent and provisionally constructive laughter of humor, and the light and inconsequential cleverness of wit.  

Perhaps no better distinction can be made between humor and wit than the one Worcester uses.

The laughter of comedy is relatively purposeless. The laughter of satire is directed toward a preconceived end. Comedy demands little of the audience. Reading Stephen Leacock's delightful Nonsense Novels may be compared to lying in a hammock and being pleasurably tickled. A half-hour with Jonathan Wild on the other hand, makes the brain reel with the constant effort of unraveling the irony and capturing Fielding's true meaning.

The allied arts of lampoon, parody, and allegory should also be distinguished from satire. The lampoon inflicts injury for the sake of mischief and is popular only in ages of moral degeneration. The work of the lampoonist is usually personal, furtive, and transitory. He scribbles a name on the front door with a bawdy epithet, rings the bell, and darts around the corner. His aim is not to portray but to traduce. The lampoon is at best a surface pastime not admissible in

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13 Worcester, 38.
Parody is a distorted reflection on some piece of literature. It seldom overwhelms a hated and hateful original for the parodist more often confessed admiration than distaste for his original. In a brilliant bit of imagery Wolfe explains parody in this way,

Parody that acts as page or lackey to the thing parodied may amuse. It cannot exalt or destroy. It must be dismissed therefore as a drawing-room firework, that may be let off in the presence of young children without damage to feelings or furniture. But satire so used would blow the house down. 14

Allegory has frequently been the instrument of the satirist but it is not his peculiar province. This becomes clear when we recall that Christ made frequent use of allegory in His sermons, but certainly one would not consider the story of the Prodigal Son a satire. It is just as possible to write satire that is not allegory as it is to write allegory that is not satire.

So much for what satire is not. But the irksome question of what it is still remains. To answer this question directly is perhaps impossible because of the multifarious

14 Wolfe, 17.
meanings of the word today. As a working description which can serve as foundation for further explanation we might say that satire is literature written to reform or improve, rendered effective by rhetorical devices. Or as the Schoolmen might put it, satire is a literary production in which the correction of abuse is the principal form, and the rhetorical devices which add brilliance to this first form are the secondary forms. The three notes which characterize satire are the literary manner, the corrective purpose, and the use of rhetoric. The first distinguished it from the sermon or oration, the second from comedy, and the third from impassioned diatribe.

These definitions show that satire is of the nature of a genus. This illustrates again the point we made earlier that satire extends from invective to fine irony. A glance at the various species of the genus satire seems necessary for a clear understanding of the subject.

On the border-line of satire, sometimes within its demesne, but more often without, we have invective. Satire has been compared to a ray of light, and that analogy is very apropos here. Just as it is almost impossible to indicate exactly the point where light shades off into oblivion and darkness begins, so too is it difficult to draw a mathematical line and say that all invective on one side of it is satire
while that on the other is not. There will always be dispute about the border-line cases but they are beyond the scope of this work.  

It is the general principle which concerns us. Usually invective in which wrath, anger, and hatred predominate is not satire. The phillipic, jeremiad, and political diatribe lie beyond the scope of satire because of their direct bluntness. Where the anger is controlled, and an indirect approach is used to soften the blow we have invective satire. Furious anger is a most repellent emotion and hence must be tempered if it is to be effective. We might say that invective satire is the expression of anger while gross invective is the engine of anger. This position is well stated by Worcester when he writes,

Invective falls into two divisions. One lies within the province of satire, one outside it. A man who writes, "The asinine folly and loathsome immorality of the Government make decent citizens see red," is producing invective, but not satire. This gross invective, or abuse, is distinguished from satiric invective by direct, intense sincerity of expression. Satiric invective shows detachment, indirection, and complexity in the author's attitude.

Perhaps the best example of invective satire is Hudibras of Samuel Butler, studded as it is with its rich and varied

15 Cf. Wolfe, 7, and 15.

16 Worcester, 19.
similes. Its sturdy genius moved Dr. Johnson to write,

The poem of Hudibras is one of those compositions of which a nation may justly boast; as the images which it exhibits are domestic, the sentiments unborrowed and unexpected, and the strain of diction original and peculiar.

...If inexhaustible wit could give perpetual pleasure, no eye could ever leave half-read the work of Butler; for what poet has ever brought so many remote images that were never found before...Butler has not suffered life to glide by him unseen and unobserved.17

The next species of satire in the ascending order, is burlesque. Here again it must be noted that there is a form of pure burlesque or buffoonery that has as its sole purpose the producing of guffaws. It is not of this that we speak, but of that which has reform as its principal purpose and merely makes use of burlesque as a means to attain this end. Burlesque satire uses a ludicrous imitation or caricature as the accidental or secondary form to adorn the substantial form of satire. It is conveniently divided into high burlesque and low burlesque.

High burlesque treats a low and trivial subject in an exalted manner. It creates a scale of comparison by placing the standard so far above the victim that his defects become ridiculous when viewed in the light of this norm. Working on 17 The Works Of Samuel Johnson, ed. by Arthur Murphy, S. and R. Bentley, London, 1823, VI, 190.
the principle of magnification the author raises his victim to
the rank of a great hero, but because of his shortcomings the
supposed hero is unable to maintain himself in this exalted
position and comes crashing down with a ridiculous thud that
is extremely pleasing to the onlookers. Dryden's "Absalom and
Achitophel" with its reverent admiration and superb portraits
is an example of high burlesque.

If the scale of comparison is below the victim we have
low burlesque. The author draws a portrait of a fellow engaged
in mean or trivial pursuits and puts just enough of the victim
in this degraded portrait to permit the audience to recognize
the true villain. A common method is to metamorphize the
feature of a fox or hawk to fit the visage of the victim.18
Although the first impulse on seeing the eyes of a man peering
from behind a fox's snout or a hawk's beak is one of laughter,
we find it hard to think of these eyes again without recalling
the snout or the beak and the animal ethics they represent.
The satiric element is built on the comic but endures beyond it.

Burlesque is largely mimetic.

Of all the types of satire--here
classified as invective, burlesque,
and irony--burlesque offers the greatest
freedom to the artist and exacts the
most from him in terms of creative in-
vention. Burlesque is imitative, it is

18 Wolfe, 30-32.
true, yet the imitation goes no deeper than surface and form. Once an affinity with the model has been established, the more extravagant and ludicrous the action the better the public is pleased. Unless the author has skill in creating original incidents the work is likely to drag.19

Burlesque may strain the creative genius of the author most but it does not offer to the critic the difficulties of description and cataloguing that are found in irony. Subtlety, evolution, and variety of form make it extremely difficult to define or confine irony. If we consider it in its widest scope we can enumerate five different varieties—verbal irony, irony of manner, dramatic irony, romantic irony, and cosmic irony. Before studying these various species in detail let us try to decide just what we mean by irony. If we cannot define it at least we can describe it. Worcester does so by use of analogy:

Irony is so versatile in operation, so Protean in its form, that electricity is the only natural force with which we may compare it. Electricity can perform the humble office of cooking our egg and browning our toast; it can dazzle us as lightning; if we take undue liberties with it, it can kill us or leave us shocked and shuddering. Irony may appear as a minute trope of rhetoric, useful for pointing up a phrase; it may inform a brilliant style, like Jane Austen's; it may become a habit of thought, an unseen governor in the choice and ordering of literary material. Finally, it may take on itself the form of the Adversary, or

19 Worcester, 49.
diabolos, and confronting God with self-comparisons put His justice and His mercy to the question. James Thomson and John Davidson were thus led to curse God and die. 20

Verbal irony in its simplest form is sarcasm, derived from the Greek word that means "flesh-tearing". When someone replies to a criticism, "Of course we know that you could have given a much better oration if you had been the speaker", we see the fitness of this word. Like most irony it is produced by an inversion of meaning. But it always has its barb exposed and does not, like the more literary forms, deceive its victim for a time.

If irony ever had a human likeness it was in the person of Socrates. This ancient Greek with his mystical daimonion is the unfolding of a series of contradictions. Beneath the ugly countenance is a keen philosophical intellect and a limpid, innocent soul. As we see Socrates, with his feigned ignorance of all truth, draw his interlocutors by disingenuous questions into their self-made snare we appreciate the irony of the process because we are aware of his quick wit and keen intelligence. But the author who makes use of this irony of manner runs the risk of failure because many of his readers

20 Ibid., 75.
will be ignorant of the total personality of the character. Chaucer, the unsurpassed artist in the use of this irony of manner paid the penalty of almost five centuries of comparative oblivion.

Only after many little brushstrokes have been marked and enjoyed, can they coalesce into a new conception of Chaucer's literary personality. He uses himself as the master character among the rest of his creations, and his ironical manner controls the tone, keeps his reader alert and amused, and diffuses an air of genial skepticism and penetrating humor through his major writings.  

The worth of this irony of manner is indicated today by the appreciation our generation has for the incomparable irony of Chaucer.

Among the various species certainly dramatic irony ranks as the most important. By the very fact that its field of observation opens up on life as a whole and not merely on words or personalities one can see the reason for its predominance over the preceding kinds. Greek tragedy is rich with dramatic irony. It supposes a certain prescience in the audience. Often the full force of the irony is not apparent until subsequent events have revealed contradictory meanings contained in the hero's speech. The greatest tragedians of all times, Sophocles, Aeschylus, Euripides, and Shakespeare have

21 Ibid., 101.
made frequent use of this dramatic irony. Perhaps it is the norm and secret of their greatness.

As an off-shoot but not a development of dramatic irony we have romantic irony. It was developed by Friedrich Schlegel and his followers and was limited almost exclusively to the German nation. It amounts to little more than an admiration for the objectivity of the ancients mixed with a subjectivity of style.  

Finally we have cosmic irony. As the name implies, it chooses a position or a subject that is beyond the confines of earth. Cosmic irony frequently attacks the position and beliefs of all mankind. Shelly, Hardy, Housman, and Eugene O'Neil are a few of the outstanding cosmic ironists.

Now that we have seen the broad outline of the various species of satire it would be most interesting to study each of them in detail. But since this would take us too far from our original purpose, and since there is much dispute about the predominance of the satiric element in many of the works that fall under some of these species we will limit ourselves to the scrutiny of the tiny area known as formal English satire. It is here especially that satire holds its own as a separate art form, and is not solely an ingredient of some

22 Cf. Worcester, 125.
other form. Formal satire is a form of literature, not merely a manner of treatment. To appreciate fully formal satire it will be helpful to see some of its characteristic notes.

A very fine introduction to the whole point is provided by Raymond Alden when he distinguishes between formal and informal satire.

The Study of formal satire is a more modest task. Formal satire arose comparatively late in the history of literature, and has always taken one of a few easily distinguishable forms. Its identity is generally proved at once by its own professions; for while not always sincere, it is one of the most self-conscious of literary forms. Dealing usually only with the faults and follies of mankind. 23

Most commentators avoid all attempts to give a definition of formal satire because of the wide divergence of notes that is often found to be a part of it. Most of these are enumerated in the following description.

In its long history formal satire has been many things. Its only universal and permanent feature is the heroic couplet. To attempt to capture this slippery quarry, one might say that formal satire is a poem of short or middling length, designed to express the author's disapprobation of political, social, or personal actions, conditions, or qualities, written in the heroic couplet, in real or fancied imitation.

of one or more of the Roman satirists; its prevailing tone may be one of gross invective, satiric invective, or burlesque; it may or may not be constructed on a narrative framework; it also contains an indefinite number of the following features: Roman type-names, Roman manners, intentional roughness of style, assumption of a mission comparable to that of a Hebrew prophet, rage and bluster, Olympian disdain, dark and ominous innuendo, dialogue—often taking up the greater part of the poem, portraits of men or women, speeches that betray the speaker, passages of philosophic reflection. 24

The need for verse is emphasized by all the commentators on this form. As Walker puts it, "Verse tends to neatness and concision; and the more concisely and neatly he makes his points, the better for the satirist." 25 Wolfe in discussing Hall's apology for the shortcomings of English verse says,

This is the odder because his own example and later experience prove that it is precisely because of the hammer of rhyme that verse satire strikes a cleaner blow than prose... If Hall had, in fact, studied the earlier poet he would have, discovered that, whatever other merits blank verse has, its very lack of terminal stress is inimical to the epigrammatic necessity of satire. 26


25 Walker, Hugh, English Satire and Satirists, J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd., London, 1925, VII.

26 Wolfe, 50.
Since this use of verse is the predominate characteristic of formal satire it may be well to cite Alden on this point too.

Very early in the development of the English satire its metrical form became fairly well fixed, as had been the case in other languages. The decasyllabic couplet may probably be regarded as at least the equal, for satiric effect, of the Latin hexameter or the Italian terza rima.27

Once the author of formal satire has established his verse form he is comparatively free in developing his thought. He may follow the road of invective, high burlesque, or low burlesque as long as his aim is primarily corrective, either morally, politically, or aesthetically. To soften his chastisement and hold the interest of his reader numerous rhetorical devices lay ready at hand. We shall see more of their value and use in the next chapter.

There is one great objection that is frequently leveled at satire as an art form, namely, that art can have no end but that of aesthetic delight, and satire with its corrective aim does not meet this demand. Without going into the whole question of "art for art's sake" we can briefly answer this objection with Humbert Wolfe.

Some hold that Art can have no object outside itself, and must either deny the satirist the name of artist, or reject the definition of his function.

27 Alden, 225.
But in this lies a confusion. All art has an object, but one consistent with itself. An architect who built a dwelling-house in which none could live, though it were as strange as the Indian temple Taj Mahal, had achieved nothing, because he had failed of the purpose of architecture. Or again, a house perfectly adapted to habitation may be as offensive as the other was at first sight well. From this it appears that without its proper object an art will fail, but also that the object must be subdued to the rules of what constitutes beauty in that kind. The satirist's object, which is to reprobate weakness and folly, is not contrary to but the essential factor of his craft, as to provide room is that of the builder. 28

It is true that a satirist does not produce a work of art just because he has reproved folly any more than the architect who designs a construction-hut creates a thing of beauty. But when both have followed the norms of good taste in their work, their production does not lack beauty simply because it is useful. Indeed, satire which does not exhibit artistic qualities is not likely to succeed in its first purpose.

Having seen the norms of the Scholastic aestheticians, and having studied the various forms and requirements of satire we are in a position to see how far these norms can be

28 Wolfe, 11.
applied to the purest mode of satire—formal satire. This can best be done by choosing a concrete example of the latter to which the norms can be applied. As a worthy representative of its class we shall study John Dryden's satire "Absalom and Achitophel".
CHAPTER IV

EXEMPLIFICATION FROM DRYDEN'S "ABSALOM AND ACHITOPHEL"

"Absalom and Achitophel" has been chosen as a representative formal satire because of the popularity it once enjoyed, and because of the high esteem students of satire have had for it ever since. This will sound strange to the readers of popular literature, who are, for the most part, ignorant of the work, or at least unimpressed by it. This is due to the modern readers lack of acquaintance with the Bible, especially the Old Testament, which serves as the foundation of the work.

Dryden in writing "Absalom and Achitophel" must have been confident that his allegory would be comprehended at sight by readers born hundreds of years to come. How many today can read it for the first time without recourse to Bible or to "Notes"?

The absence of knowledge of such an enduring work as the Bible would hardly be a valid reason for condemning "Absalom and Achitophel". That is why those who have the required background are enthusiastic in their praise of Dryden and his work. Zeitlin and Rinaker write

The golden age of satire began in England in the reign of Charles II.

Its development was greatly favored not only by prevailing conditions in government and society but by certain special ideas as to the proper subject matter and style of poetry... but political satire was established in its full dignity by John Dryden, the greatest poet of his day. With the shifting in the political scene, Dryden found it necessary to shift his own ground repeatedly, but no matter what side he was on he always wrote as though from a position of moral superiority, with an air of strong conviction in his rightness, and could always make his opponents very uncomfortable.  

This opinion is substantiated by Walker also when he writes:

A place was still vacant; not indeed for the first modern satirist, for he is to be found in the age of Elizabeth, but for the first master of that style. Dryden was the man, and his earliest attempt remains still unsurpassed... Dryden showed that it was possible to write satiric verse without being either inflated or harsh; and he was the first to convince the world of the possibility... It is this combination--smoothness of verse, lucidity of style, urbanity of manner--which makes Dryden's satire so strikingly original. In English there had hitherto been nothing comparable to it.  

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The worth of Dryden's work is also attested by other great authorities such as James Hanay and Humbert Wolfe. J. M. Alden, the author of *The Rise Of Formal Satire In England*, is an authority that cannot be passed over when it come judging the worth of an English satire. He goes all out for our poet laureate in the following passage;

In "Absalom and Achitophel" were united a witty criticism of contemporary events, a keen analysis of character, and classical dignity and compactness of style. By this time, too, the limitations to the success of satire as a literary form, which had been felt in the Elizabethan Age, had largely disappeared... Above all the incapacities of satire for poetic idealization were no longer felt to be grievous, for poetry had become the vehicle of subject-matter which in other periods has been chiefly reserved for prose. This was the time when the greatest poet of England could show his strength in satire. It was the Age of Dryden.4

Even for those who think that taste and style have so changed that Dryden is now obselete we have the authority of T. S. Eliot, our leading contemporary poet and critic. He is constant and diffuse in his commendation of Dryden's work, and as one who has his finger on the literary pulse of the day he must be listened to. In his essay on Dryden he says,

In the next revolution of taste it is possible that poets may turn to the study of Dryden. He remains one of those who have set standards for English verse which it is desperate to ignore.  

Once we have established the satires of John Dryden as the representatives of formal English satire there is little discussion about which is the best of his satire. As we have partially seen above, it is almost universally conceded that his "Absalom and Achitophel" is supreme. In Notes On English Verse Satire we read,

A great satirist in 1681 (the year of "Absalom and Achitophel") had more influence than, or at least as much as the whole London press. It was not a democratic age. Power lay with small groups of men, to whom it mattered extremely if the greatest writers of the age were for or against them. Dryden's adhesion to one side or the other was, therefore, a matter of capital importance... But all that matters for our purpose is that the perfect object for the perfect instrument was achieved when "Absalom" --the greatest of all political satires--saw the light of day.  

We have sufficient external evidence from authority for the value of "Absalom and Achitophel". It now remains for us  


to marshal internal evidence by applying the aesthetic principles of the Scholastics to this satire, and from that gather evidence that can be applied to satire in general.

In our study we shall consider only the first part of the poem which is usually simply referred to as "Absalom and Achitophel", for while there is a second part it can hardly be considered as part of the same work. Furthermore, the author of most of the second half is not Dryden but Nahum Tate. We turn to the study of the first part then, of which John Dryden is the author, and which forms a complete unit in itself.

Following the same order that we used in the development of our requisites for beauty we wish to inquire first if this satire has integrity. The first demand of integrity in literature is that a work have a beginning, a middle, and an end. From the precepts of Aristotle we learn that, "A beginning is that which does not itself follow anything by causal necessity, but after which something naturally is or comes to be." 8

The first lines of "Absalom and Achitophel",

7 Walker, 158.
In pious time, ere priestcraft did begin
Before polygamy was made a sin;
fulfill these requirement for a good beginning, for the previous events of history do not exercise any causal necessity on the incidents of the poem. In relation to the action of this poem there is nothing which precedes. On the other hand, once the time setting and the circumstances of Absalom's birth have been given we naturally expect something else to follow, and since it does these first lines are a true beginning.

"An end on the contrary is that which itself naturally follows some other thing, either by necessity or as a rule, but has nothing following it." 10 There is a decisive note of finality in

Once more the godlike David was restored,
And willing nations knew their lawful lord. 11

Although these final two lines imply that the reign of David was continued, the events that took place in his kingdom subsequent to this had no relation to the action of the poem.
The submission of the other powers to David is what we naturally expect as a result of the successful defense of his throne,

9 Dryden John, Poetical Works Of, Cambridge Edition, Riverside Press, Cambridge, 1909, 108, "Absalom and Achitophel", 1., 1-2. (All line numbers are from this text but modern spelling is used to facilitate the reading.)

10 Butcher, 108.

11 "Absalom and Achitophel", 1., 1030-1031.
but once this is accomplished, nothing else is looked for. That is the end.

Once the function and presence of a beginning and end are determined it is easy to understand that the middle is that which follows something else and has something following it. The beginning sets the stage for the action of the middle, while the end pulls the curtain and turns out the lights once the action is over.

But that is not enough, "Integrity demands, on the other hand, not only that the object lack nothing essential, but that it possess in a marked degree a certain fullness of vigor and life, in order that it may evoke the lively pleasure which characterizes esthetic experience."12 The perfection of the heroic is one constant factor that serves to unite the whole of this work for it unites the individual lines into couplets, and also preserves a uniformity of style that gives a oneness of tone to the whole. At the same time the couplets add much to the fullness of vigor and life. A few outstanding blossoms culled at random from this garden of verses will show our point.

But life can never be sincerely blest; Heaven punishes the bad, and proves the best.13

13 "Absalom and Achitophel", l., 42-43.
God's pampered people, whom, debauched with ease,
No king could govern, nor no God could please; 14

But wild ambition loves to slide not stand,
And Fortune's ice prefers to Virtue's land. 15

O that my power to saving were confined!
Why am I forced, like Heaven, against my mind
To make examples of another kind? 16

In speaking of Dryden's verse form Wolfe writes:

   His heroic couplets, in the first
   place, are as great an advance on
   anything that preceded them as Shake­
   speare's blank verse over it predecessors.
   He took a ragged, dog-mouthed blunderbuss
   and changed it into a nickel-plated rifle.
   He not only redoubled the accuracy of the
   weapon, but immensely increased its range. 17

But there is another approach to integrity. Callahan
in explaining it says, "Finally, with reference to integrity it
is to be remarked that certain aspects of a whole object may
be considered apart as distinct entities and found beautiful." 18

We have a splendid example of this in "Absalom and Achitophel".
The concise, cameo-like portraits of the minor characters are
masterpieces in themselves. As Coleridge so aptly said

   You will find this a good gauge or
criterion of genius—whether it pro­
gresses and evolves, or only spins

15 Ibid., l., 198-199.
16 Ibid., l., 998-1000.
17 Wolfe, 79.
upon itself. Take Dryden’s Achitophel and Zimiri... every line adds to or modifies the character, which as it were, a building up to the very last verse. 19

Let us study for a moment the portrait of Zimiri, a licentious and ambitious old Duke.

Some of the chiefs were princes of the land; In the first rank of these did Zimiri stand; A man so various that he seemed to be Not one but all mankind’s epitome: Stiff in opinions, always in the wrong; Was everything by starts, and nothing long; But, in the course of one revolving moon, Was chymist, fiddler, statesman, and buffoon: Then all for women, painting, rhyming, drinking, Besides ten thousand freaks that died in thinking. Blest madman, who could every hour employ, With something new to wish, or to enjoy! Railing and praising were his usual themes; And both (to show his judgment) in extremes: So over-violent, or over civil, That every man, with him was God or Devil. Nothing went unrewarded but desert. Beggared by fools, whom still he found to exalt, He had his jest, and they had his estate. 20

These lines give us a full picture of a fickle old courtier who wishes to do everything and succeeds at nothing. He is a pompous person that would impress the rest of the court with his learning, ability, and importance. The rest of the court encourage him in his riotous living so that they can enjoy themselves at his expense, and in the end they

20 "Absalom and Achitophel", l., 543-560.
finally succeed in obtaining all his wealth. A prose statement of the description fails to be impressive, but Dryden's selection and multiplication of the details which emphasize the foibles of the Duke move one to good-humored laughter.

Unity, humor, force of language, and moderation of detail produce here, as in the other portraiture, a remarkable fragment of satire. The inmost secret of his art is the careful selection of those details which are most effective as stimulants to the imagination. Dryden is never loud and violent, nor exhaustive. He gives those details, and only those which will suggest the impression he wishes to portray.

That Dryden was well aware of the necessity of integrity, or unity, in theory at least, we see in "Essay On Satire".

...Will you please to observe, that Persius, the least in dignity of all the three, has notwithstanding been the first who has discovered to us this important secret, in the designing of a perfect satire,—that it ought only to treat of one subject; to be confined to one particular theme; or, at least, to one principally. If other vices occur in the management of the chief, they should only be transiently lashed, and not insisted on, so as to make the design double.21

In "Absalom and Achitophel" we find that Dryden practices

what he preaches for his one great theme is the preservation of the rightful succession. The whole weight of the satire is thrown against any violent or extraordinary attempts to alter the traditional system of royal succession. He pillories, portrays, and preaches to this one end, and thus preserves the unity of theme. This is integrity of function, for the whole work does that one thing for which it was intended. Much more could here be said about the richness of perfection of the poem which make the integrity outstanding, but since these points also are included in the other two points—proportion and splendor of form—they shall be treated of more at length under these two heads. As to this first point, we may conclude that Dryden rather successfully and completely fulfills the requirements of integrity.

Are the postulates of proportion equally observed? This question can best be answered by first checking on the demands of extrinsic proportion. We recall that "proportion consists in the correct disposition of the various parts of an object or action among themselves, and of each of the parts to the whole."22 Included under the notion of extrinsic proportion are variety, harmony, restraint, balance, rhythm and measure.

22 Callahan, 62.
"Variety is that quality, the presence of which causes an artistic production to possess diversity of character or form."23 After following the heroic through a thousand lines one might be tempted to doubt if the note of variety is to be found in this satire. It is true that the couplet seems to get monotonous much sooner than blank verse. Perhaps the reason is this, that each heroic couplet contains a notable bit of artistry and beauty in itself, while a line of blank verse is often nothing apart from the whole. And though one like whipped cream better than bread, if he were to get them both at every meal he would tire of the fluffy delicacy much quicker than of the staff of life. So an extended use of the rhymed couplet seems too rich for one's aesthetic system. But if the poem is looked at a little more closely one sees that Dryden was not ignorant of this truth. He has varied the couplets by introducing unfinished lines in imitation of Virgil's hemistichs,24 and by using at intervals a rhymed triplet in place of the couplet.25 The use of direct quotations for the speeches of the leading characters gives a little more of that variety which is no less the spice of literature than

22 Callahan, 62.
23 Speckbaugh, Paul F., Some General Canons Of Literary Criticism Determined From an Analysis Of Art, Catholic University, Washington D. C., 1936, 97.
25 Ibid., l. 156, 175, 270, etc.
of life. Ultimately it must be admitted that the love of the Neo-Classicists for measure, uniformity, and restraint no longer exists today. The love of our age for liberty, diversity, and spontaneity, perhaps to excess, finds itself quickly bored by the constancy and uniformity of this poetic piece. So "Absalom and Achitophel", along with the other longer pieces of the Neo-Classical age, fails to display that spontaneity and diversity that we expect in poetic works. The note of variety is not found in its perfection in this satire of Dryden's.

Closely allied to variety is harmony. "Harmony is that quality of artistic production which produces a satisfying impression through the selection and arrangement of consistent objects and ideas." This is evidenced in the steady advancement of thought in this satire. At the opening David is secure on his throne but soon this security is weakened by the rising of opposing factions. It is still further threatened by the revolt of Absalom, but is finally restored by the action of David. The proper use of imagery also is included under harmony, for if an image is to be effective it must harmonize with the rest of the thought. Though the imagery in "Absalom and Achitophel" is limited by the very nature of the poetry, there are several superb examples. When Achitophel is striving to stir up Absalom to revolt he speaks of the Duke of

26 Speckbaugh, 98.
York thus:

Though now his mighty soul its grief contains,
He meditates revenge who least complains;
And, like a lion, slumbering in the way,
Or sleep dissembling, while he waits his prey,
His fearless foes within his distance draws,
Constrains his roaring and contracts his paws;
Till at the last, his time for fury found,
He shoots with sudden vengeance from the ground;
The prostrate vulgar passes over and spares,
But with lordly rage his hunters tears. 27

Another bit of harmonious imagery is found in David's final speech.

Kings are the public pillars of the State,
Born to sustain and prop the nation's weight;
If my young Samson will pretend a call
To shake the column, let him share the fall. 28

There are little gems of fine imagery scattered throughout the whole to add to the harmony of the poem, and thus make it successful and secure on this point.

Restraint limits an artistic production to those details which contribute to the artistic theme. Where superfluous images and unnecessary incidents are absent there is had this note of restraint. But does not the introduction of so many subordinate characters violate this canon? In any work where a large number of characters appears it is difficult to say whether every one of them is absolutely essential to the perfection of the piece. So in "Absalom and Achitophel" one

27 "Absalom and Achitophel", l. 444-454.
28 Ibid., l. 953-957.
would hesitate to say that the theme would limp if Balaam, Jonas, Nadab, or Corah were absent. But the nominal multiplication of these leaders of the revolution adds immeasurably to the ominous force threatening David, and increases the reader's aversion toward Absalom, and augments his concern for David. They are then "details which contribute to the production of an artistic theme."29

Another constitutive element of proper proportion is balance. The passages of direct address are a good example of this. They are five in number. The third, delivered by Achitophel is the longest and is the center of conflict. The speeches immediately before and after it are by Absalom. In the speech preceding Achitophel's Absalom is hesitant as to the course of action he should follow, but in the one following it David's son is haranguing his compatriots to rebellion against his father. The first speech is by Achitophel while the last is by David, balancing the opposition between the hero and his foil. The balance is not equally maintained in the length of the speeches, for they are too long to fit properly into the rest of the piece. While they do help to delineate the characters and advance the plot they are so drawn out that they become monotonous. This is an obvious fault against proper balance.

29 Speckbaugh, 99.
The next element of proportion is rhythm. The iambic pentameter united with the rhymed couplet is readily perceived as fulfilling the demands of rhythm. The wide variety in the length and speed of the line adds a pleasing note of diversity while preserving the rhythm throughout. The frequent return to the theme of the kingship of David and his rights to the throne forms a sort of secondary rhythm of thought or theme but it is not very forceful.

Measure is one of the outstanding features of the poem. To each point is given the proper amount of space and emphasis so that there are no extremes nor one-sidedness to be found in it. Measure was the great virtue of Dryden and his age.

These qualities all unite to give this satire a sufficient measure of external or structural proportion. We must now turn to the intrinsic or formal proportion from which strength must flow to the exterior. This formal proportion is a naturalness that makes the characters of a work act like real men, and creates events which might and do occur in real life.

Dryden's proportion in his characterization in this piece is quite outstanding. "God-like David" is great-souled, quiet, patient, and long-suffering through the whole work. His attitude toward Absalom at the opening is consistent with these traits.
With secret joy indulgent David viewed
His youthful image in his son renewed. 30

Later Absalom speaking of his father says,

My father governs with unquestioned right,
The faith's defender, and mankind's delight;
Good, gracious, just, obsequiant of the laws;
And Heaven by wonders has espoused his cause.
Whom has he wronged in all his peaceful reign?
Who sues for justice to this throne in vain?
What millions has he pardoned of his foes
Whom just revenge did to his wrath expose?
Mild, easy, humble, studious of our good,
Inclined to mercy and averse from blood.
If mildness ill with stubborn Israel quit,
His crime is God's beloved attribute. 31

Even Achitophel says,

And who can sound the depth of David's soul? 32

Finally David, in his closing speech, expresses his regret at
the need for action against his enemies and urges his followers
not to attack unless the rebels refuse to

Retire, and traverse, and delude their force, 33

His confidence arises from this,

For lawful power is still superior found
When long driven back at length it stands the ground. 34

These are the traits of a magnanimous character whether we meet
him in real life, or in a work of literature.

30 "Absalom and Achitophel", l. 33-34.
31 Ibid., l. 317-334.
32 Ibid., l. 467.
33 Ibid., l. 1021.
34 Ibid., l. 1024-1025.
Absalom too, is a true-to-life character. Talented and high-minded, he stands by the king until his ambition united with the prompting of artful Achitophel at last proves too much for his young virtue. It is only with great difficulty, and after long hesitation that he is led to revolt against his kind father.

Achitophel is cunning and crafty throughout, and is portrayed as the perfect foil to David.

Achitophel, grown weary to possess
A lawful fame and lazy happiness,
Disdained the golden fruit to gather free
And lent the crowd his arm to shake the tree.
Now, manifest of crimes contrived long since,
He stood at bold defiance with his Prince,
Held up the buckler of the People's cause
Against the crown, and skulked behind the laws.35

When his perfidy finally comes to light and he treacherously plans the revolt against the crown it does not come as a suprise to us, but is what one expected all along. The numerous minor characters evolve in their own small way with the same naturalness and verisimilitude. So much for the characters, now for a word about the action.

If the characters were true to life but the circumstances in which they found themselves were entirely impossible the intrinsic proportion of the work would not be satisfactory. But such is not the case in this work. That spoiled children often

injure the parents who showed them special favor is a verity. That a youthful, ambitious nobleman might easily be led into error by a crafty old courtier is undeniable. And this is exactly what happens in "Absalom and Achitophel". David's attitude towards Absalom is revealed in this passage;

To all his wishes nothing he denied,  
And made the charming Annabel his bride.  
What faults he had (for who from faults is free?)  
His father could not, or he would not see.  
Some warm excesses, which the law forbore,  
Were construed youth that purged by boiling o'er;  
And Amon's murder by a specious name  
Was called a just revenge for injured fame.  
Thus praised and loved, the noble youth remained,  
While David undisturbed in Sion reigned.36

Thus favored, we might even say, spoiled by his father, it is not surprising that fear of the power of the crown does not deter him from treachery when false Achitophel entices him to revolt. Of this cunning old chief we read,

Achitophel still wants a chief, and none  
Was found so fit as warlike Absalom:  
Not that he wished his greatness to create,  
For politicians neither love nor hate,  
But, he well knew his title not allowed,  
Would keep him still depending on the crowd,  
That kingly power, thus ebbing out, might be Drawn to the dregs of a democracy.  
Him he attempts with studied arts to please,  
And shed his venom in such words as these:37

In the speech that follows, after Achitophel heaps such flattery on the youth as,

36 Ibid., l. 31-42.
37 Ibid., l. 219-227.
Swift unbespoken pomps thy steps proclaim,
And stammering babes are taught to lisp thy name.  38

He then goads the youth to revolt with these specious reasons;

All sorts of men by my successful arts,
Abhorring kings, estrange their altered hearts
From David's rule: and 'tis the general cry,
'Religion, commonwealth, and liberty.'
If you, as champion of the public good,
Add to their arms a chief of royal blood,
What may not Israel hope, and what applause
Might such a general gain by such a cause?
Not barren praise alone, that gaudy flower
Fair only to the sight, but solid power;
And nobler is a limited command,
Given by the love of all your native land,
Than a successive title, long and dark,
Drawn from the moldy rolls of Noah's ark.  39

It does not come as a surprise when finally

The ambitious youth, too covetous of fame,
Too full of angels' metal in his frame,
Unwarily was led from virtue's ways,
Made drunk with honor, and debauched with praise.  40

All of this builds up naturally to the consequence one sees when,

The crowd that still believes their kings oppress,
With lifted hands their young Messiah bless;
Who now begins his progress to ordain
With chariots, horsemen, and a numerous train;  41

The probability of the interplay of events in the plot.

38 Ibid., l. 242-243.
39 Ibid., l. 390-404.
40 Ibid., l. 308-312.
41 Ibid., l. 727-731.
development is quickly grasped in this series of actions. We saw before that the characters evolved in a regular and orderly manner. From this then, we can say, that the formal or intrinsic proportion of the both characters and plot is preserved. But one criticism that has been leveled against the plot, and not unjustly, is that the action ends too quietly. After building up to the great struggle between the forces of Absalom and David the denouement comes quickly and quietly without the expected pitched battle. Unless we hold that the overpowering personality of David was sufficient to frighten the revolutionaries out of a battle it must be admitted that this sudden fading out of the action is a defect against proportion in the plot development. This defect diminishes but does not destroy the due proportion. There is an equating of the characters and action of the poem with people and acts that are found in nature. A natural balance permeates the whole and fulfills the requirements of proper proportion. With the proportion of the poem intact we are ready to turn to the study of the dominant form, or clarity of the satire.

If one has tried for himself to determine the dominant form of "Absalom and Achitophel" he is well aware of the difficulty of the task. Is it chiefly a tirade against the Earl of Shaftesbury? Or, is it an allegory showing the evils of revolt and sedition? Or, could it not be just a dramatic portrayal of the attack of Absalom on the kingship of
David? But whatever we ultimately decide on, we must admit that it is a complex unity of satire, allegory, and narrative. To help understand the function of the dominant form we recall from our definition the main objective of satire. We saw that satire "is a kind of poetry,...in which human vices, ignorance, and errors and all things besides, which are produced from them in every man, are severely reprehended." 

The primary purpose of satire is corrective, either politically, ethically, or aesthetically. This primary purpose determines the dominant form. In "Absalom and Achitophel" this dominant form is the reprobation of political unrest. Dryden comes back to this point in numerous places.

God's pampered people whom debauched with ease,
No king could govern, nor no God could please; 43

Those very Jews, who, at their best,
Their humor more than loyalty expressed,
Now wondered why so long they had obeyed
An idol monarch, which their hands had made;
Thought they might ruin him they could create,
Or melt him to the golden calf, a State. 44

Plots, true or false, are necessary things,
To raise up commonwealths and ruin kings. 45

So several factions from their first ferment,
Work up to foam, and threat the government. 46

43 "Absalom and Achitophel", l. 48-49.
44 Ibid., l. 60-66.
46 Ibid., l. 140-141.
In other places also Dryden comes back to this theme which constitutes the dominant form. This reprobation of political unrest is the essential form which is made manifest through the accidental forms.

The many perfections we saw in the study of integrity and proportion are part of the splendor of the form. In reality, all the notes that reveal the beauty of "Absalom and Achitophel" are accidental forms that bring out the nature of the essential or substantial form. Many of these accidental forms such as balance, rhythm, unity and the like were grouped under integrity and proportion where they were more easily studied.

In addition to the perfections arising from the action, portraits, versification, and characterization which have already been seen, is that of the allegory. In a day in which the Bible is a closed book of secrets it is hard for most people to appreciate the force, precision, and beauty of this allegory. In Dryden's time the Bible was the most extensively printed, and most widely read book in England. It formed an integral part of everyday life. The story of David is always a favorite with Bible readers. When Dryden chose it he immediately had a narrative that would captivate his reading public.47 More outstanding than his choice however, is the skillful way in

47 Cf. Worcester, 43.
which Dryden works out the allegory so that the characters of the Bible story coincide almost perfectly with the political figures of the day, and are easily identified with them.

The characters are types which represent various political movements. They are labeled with historic names and cloaked with allegory but are recognized by all. A few obvious traits are borrowed to recall the well-known contemporary personalities, but they possess many typical qualities. While tragedy manifests the type through the individual, satire on the other hand tends to merge the individual in the type. The villains in our satire are rebels as much as, if not more than, they are Absalom and Achitophel. The single characteristic which in nature is organically related to many other qualities is here exaggerated to secure the heightened effect. It may be said of satire, as of comedy, that it creates personified ideals, while tragedy creates idealized persons. When it was seen that the author of "Absalom and Achitophel" so skillfully worked out these principles of satire in his work there is little wonder that the satire was immediately acclaimed the work of a genius by Dryden's contemporaries.

The restraint of emotion in Dryden's satire is a note

48 Butcher, 385.
that is frequently lacking in the works of other satirists, yet it is very necessary for artistic work, and adds a great deal to the perfection of "Absalom and Achitophel". Dryden must have been tempted at times to assail his adversaries with abusive language but he restrained the impulse. He more effectively opposes their schemes by moving others to anger rather than showing this anger himself. The easy and aristocratic way in which he holds up to ridicule the foibles of the members of the opposition is a piece of craftsmanship that deserves the highest praise when we consider that disgusting name calling and infamous slander were the common practices in the time in which the satire was written. Many think that this "Vergilian calm" is one of Dryden's greatest traits. It is one of the rhetorical devices that prevent satire from becoming mere impassioned abuse.

When we add together all these accidental forms we find that there is a wealth of splendor adorning the substantial form. This exemplifies for us the last of the aesthetic principles that were elaborated in the beginning. Not only has the substantial form been determined as the reprobation of political unrest, but it has also been found that are a multitude of accidental forms that give the splendor or clarity

49 Worcester, 158.
to this substantial form. In addition to fulfilling the requirements of integrity and proportion "Absalom and Achitophel" also displays this necessary splendor of form. It is safe to say then, that the principles of Scholastic aesthetics are verified in this satire.
Looking back over the ground we have covered there seem to be three major points that we have fairly well established. The first is the fact that the Schoolmen have in common a rather definite system of aesthetics, embracing the same fundamental principles. This system is based on the requirements of beauty formulated by St. Thomas Aquinas. Its fundamental requisites include integrity of parts, and of functions; proportion, both structural and formal; and splendor of form. Under these three major divisions are included many subordinate points of explanation and exemplification that are, for the most part, common to the Schoolmen. But there are many other points of ultimate explanation on which there is some divergence of opinion. This does not, however, destroy the main part of the system from which these branches spring. Once these principles, rooted in Scholastic Metaphysics, have been established they can serve as a criterion to judge the aesthetic value of a work of art.

The second point we fixed was the nature of satire. We saw that there is a note of satire in many forms of literature, but that this does not make these works formal satire. Satire can readily be divided into three main divisions, invective, burlesque, and irony. But our point here was to
determine that within the realm of satire there is a region where satire is a literary form in itself. The outstanding examples of this are the formal English satires. To determine what is satire and what is not we fall back on the doctrine of the Schoolmen. Where the substantial form is endowed with the specific notes of satire the work can be classed as formal satire, while if the satiric element is only an accidental form the work is not a satire, but is novel, lyric, drama, or whatever the substantial form happens to be.

Thirdly we showed that the principles formulated were not only true in the abstract, but that they can be applied to a concrete example, in our case "Absalom and Achitophel". This satire by John Dryden measures up to these principles in a very marked way, and has therefore, been rightly judged as one of the best formal satires in English. We can safely say then, that our principles form a valid theory of the beautiful, and that satire, when it measures up to this theory, can be beautiful and hence a valid form of art.

There is still one great objection that could be proposed, namely, that if satire, and here "Absalom and Achitophel" possess so much beauty why is it not more popular. To answer this it must be admitted that in literature, just as in nature or other forms of art there are different kinds of beauty. Flowers, mountains, and bushes all have many notes of
beauty, though that of the bush is usually not considered as being so sublime as that of the flower or the mountain. So too in literature, the lyric, the tragedy, and the satire all have their elements of beauty, but that of the satire is not as appealing as that of the lyric or the tragedy. It must be admitted that satire is not a primary form of literature, but it is still a true form. It served as a valid example however, for if the principles of the Schoolmen are effective in finding the true beauty of satire it is readily seen that they will also easily discover the greater and more impressive beauty of the primary forms of literature.

Satire is by its very nature cut off from the beauty of the great forms of literature, for if it indulged in lyric flights or sublime emotions it would fail of its very purpose. The audience would turn its full attention to this beauty and forget about the message the satirist wished to impress upon them. The beauty of the satire must be only an accidental form helping to sustain the interest of the reader. But we can not for this reason neglect satire. Our sentiments must agree with Maynard when he says,

But whether satire is immediately effective or not, the world needs it. For the sake of our own reputation, we must let our descendants know that vulgarity, stupidity, and folly, however securely entrenched, did not live quite
unchallenged. And it is possible that persistence will be eventually rewarded.¹

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APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by Eugene Lawrence Watrin has been read and approved by three members of the Department of English.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts.

Oct. 8, 1946
Date

Signature of Adviser