

John Dryden's *An Essay on Dramatic Poesy*

1.1 Introduction

1.2. Dryden as a Critic

1.2.1. Dryden on The Nature of Poetry

1.2.2. Dryden on The Function of Poetry

1.3. An Essay on Dramatic Poesy: An Introduction

1.3.1. Definition of Drama

1.3.2. Violation of the Three Unities

1.3.3. Eugenius Arguments on Superiority of Moderns over the Ancients

1.3.4. Crites's Arguments in favour of the Ancients

1.3.5. Lisideius's view in favour of Superiority of the French Drama over English Drama

1.3.6. Neander's view in favour of Modern (English) Drama

1.3.7. The Ancients versus Modern Playwrights

1.3.8. Mixture of Tragedy and Comedy

1.3.9. Advocacy of writing plays in Rhymed Verse

1.4. Let's sum up

1.1 Introduction

John Dryden (9 August 1631 – 1 May 1700) was a prominent English poet, critic, translator, and playwright who dominated the literary life of the Restoration Age; therefore, the age is known as the Age of Dryden. He was a Cambridge Scholar, literary genius and critic, considering his extraordinary literary contribution was credited with the honour of Poet Laureate of England in 1668.

He was a critic of contemporary reality. His critical observation of contemporary reality is reflected in *MacFlecknoe* (1682). Dryden's mature thoughts of literary criticism on ancient, modern and English Literature, especially on Drama, are presented in dialogue forms in *An Essay on Dramatic Poesy*. In *An Essay on Dramatic Poesy* there are four speakers. Each one argues strongly as to which one is better, "Ancient or Modern, and French or English?"

1.2 Dryden as a Critic

Dryden was both a writer and a critic and he had rather a dogmatic bent. Most of his critical interpretations are found in the prefaces to his own works. In Dryden we find an interest in the general issues of criticism rather than in a close reading of particular texts. We call Dryden a neoclassical critic, just as Boileau. Dryden puts emphasis on the neoclassical rules. His best-known critical work, *An Essay on Dramatic Poesy*, partly reflects this tension in Dryden's commitments. Its dialogue form has often been criticized as inconclusive, but actually, as in most dialogues, there is a spokesman weightier than the others. Dryden carried out his critical thoughts effectively, stating his own ideas but leaving some room for difference of opinion. Neander's overall statement on the literary standards is that, the norms can be added to make the work ideal, but the norms will not improve a work which does not contain some degree of perfection. And as Dryden believes, we may find writers like Shakespeare who did not follow the rules but are nevertheless obviously superior to any "regular" writer. Shakespeare disconcerts Dryden; he recognises his superiority but within himself he would feel closer affiliations with Ben Jonson. In Dryden, then, we find a "liberal" neo-classicist, although he is most coherent (a trait of classicism) when he is dealing with that which can be understood and reduced to rule.

1.2.1 Dryden on The Nature of Poetry

Dryden agrees in general terms with Aristotle's definition of poetry as a process of imitation though he has to add some qualifiers to it. The generally accepted view of poetry in Dryden's day was that it had to be a close imitation of facts past or present. While Dryden has no problem with the prevalent neo-classical bias in favour of verisimilitude (likeness/fidelity to reality) he would also allow in more liberties and flexibilities for poetry. In the *The Grounds of Criticism in Tragedy* he makes out a case for double-legged imitation. While the poet is free to imitate "things as they are said or thought to be", he also gives spirited defence of a poet's right to imitate what could be, might be or ought to be. He cites in this context the case of Shakespeare who so deftly exploited elements of the supernatural and elements of popular beliefs and superstitions. Dryden would also regard such exercises as 'imitation' since it is drawing on "other men's fancies."

1.2.2. Dryden on the Function of Poetry

As we know, Plato wanted poetry to instruct the reader, Aristotle to delight, Horace to do both, and Longinus to transport. Dryden was a bit moderate and considerate in his views and familiar with all of them. He was of the opinion that the final end of poetry is delight and transport rather than instruction. It does not imitate life but presents its own version of it. According to Dryden, the poet is neither a teacher nor a bare imitator – like a photographer – but a creator, one who, with life or Nature as his raw material, creates new things altogether resembling the original. According to him, poetry is a work of art rather than mere imitation. Dryden felt the necessity of fancy, or what Coleridge later would call "the shaping spirit of imagination".

1.3 An Essay on Dramatic Poesy: An Introduction

John Dryden's *An Essay on Dramatic Poesy* presents a brief discussion on Neo-classical theory of Literature. He defends the classical drama saying that it is an imitation of life and reflects human nature clearly.

An Essay on Dramatic Poesy is written in the form of a dialogue among four gentlemen: Eugenius, Crites, Lisideius and Neander. Neander speaks for Dryden himself. Eugenius favours modern English dramatists by attacking the classical playwrights, who did not themselves always observe the unity of place. But Crites defends the ancients and points out that they invited the principles of dramatic art paved by Aristotle and Horace. Crites opposes rhyme in plays and argues that though the moderns excel in sciences, the ancient age was the true age of poetry. Lisideius defends the French playwrights and attacks the English tendency to mix genres.

Neander speaks in favour of the Moderns and respects the Ancients; he is however critical of the rigid rules of dramas and favours rhyme. Neander who is a spokesperson of Dryden, argues that 'tragic-comedy' (Dryden's phrase for what we now call 'tragi-comedy') is the best form for a play; because it is closer to life in which emotions are heightened by mirth and sadness. He also finds subplots as an integral part to enrich a play. He finds single action in French dramas to be rather inadequate since it so often has a narrowing and cramping effect.

Neander gives his palm to the violation of the three unities because it leads to the variety in the English plays. Dryden thus argues against the neo-classical critics. Since nobody speaks in rhyme in real life, he supports the use of blank verse in drama and says that the use of rhyme in serious plays is justifiable in place of the blank verse.

1.3.1. Definition on Drama

Dryden defines Drama as:

Just and lively image of human nature, representing its passions and humours, and the changes of fortune to which it is subject, for the delight and instruction of mankind.

According to the definition, drama is an 'image' of 'human nature', and the image is 'just' and 'lively'. By using the word 'just' Dryden seems to imply that literature imitates (and not merely reproduces) human actions. For Dryden, 'poetic imitation' is different from an exact, servile copy of reality, for, the imitation is not only 'just', it is also 'lively'.

When the group talks about the definition of Drama Lisidieus expresses his views about Drama as "a just and lively Image of Humane Nature." And then each character expresses his views about Drama and they compare French Drama and English Drama and discuss the advantages and disadvantages of French and English Drama. The debate goes on about the

comparison between ancient writers and modern writers. They also discuss the importance of “Unity in French Drama”. So far as the Unities of Time, Place and Action are concerned French Drama was closer to classical notions of Drama. With the influence of Platonic Dialogues Dryden had designed the group that further discusses the Playwrights such as Ben Jonson, Molière, and Shakespeare with a deeper insight. Crites offers an objection specifically to the use of rhyme as he privileges the verisimilitude of the scene while citing Aristotle. On the other hand, Neander favours the natural rhyme since that, according to him, adds artistry to the plays. It was Twilight when the four friends had their final speech at the Somerset-Stairs and then the four friends parted along their separate ways.

1.3.2. Violation of the Three Unities

In an age of pseudo- classic criticism, with its precise rules and definitions, Dryden had the boldness to defend the claims of genius to write according to its own convictions, without regard for the prescription and rules which had been laid down for good writing. He cleared the ground for himself by brushing away all the arbitrary bans upon freedom of judgment and refused to be cowed down by the French playwrights and critics.

Dryden’s Defence:

Dryden’s liberalism, his free critical disposition, is best seen in his justification of the violation of three unities on the part of the English dramatists and in his defense of English tragi-comedies. As regards the unities, his views are as under:

a) The English violation of the three unities lends greater copiousness (existing in large amounts, profuse in speech) and variety to the English plays. The unities have narrowing and cramping effects on the French plays, and they are often betrayed into absurdities from which English plays are free.

b) The English disregard of the unities enables them to present a more ‘just’ and ‘lively’ picture of human nature. The French plays may be more regular but they are not as lively, not so pleasant and delightful as that of English. e.g., Shakespeare’s plays which are more lively and just images of life and human nature.

c) The English when they do observe the rules as Ben Jonson has done in *The Silent Woman*, show greater skill and art than the French. It all depends upon the ‘genius’ or ‘skill’ of the writer. d) There is no harm in introducing ‘sub-plots’, for they impart variety, richness, and liveliness to the play. In this way the writer can present a more ‘just’ and ‘lively’ picture than the French with their narrow and cramped plays.

e) To the view that observance of the unities is justified on the ground that (i) their violation results in improbability, (ii) that it places too great a strain on the imagination of the spectators, and (iii) that credibility is stretched too far, Dryden replies that it is all a question of 'dramatic illusion'. Lisideius argues that "we cannot so speedily recollect ourselves after a scene of great passion and concernment to pass to another of mirth and humour, and to enjoy it with any relish". Neander questions this assumption and replies to it by saying why should he imagine the soul of man more heavy than his senses? "Does not the eye pass from an unpleasant object to a pleasant in a much shorter time?" – 'gratification of sense is primary, secondary that of soul'. Sensory perception helps in dramatic illusion

1.3.3. Eugenius's Arguments on the Superiority of the Moderns over the Ancients:

Eugenius says that "the moderns have profited by the rules of the ancients" but moderns have "excelled them." He points first to some discrepancies in the applications of the Unities, mentioning that there seem to be four parts in Aristotle's method: the entrance, the intensifying of the plot, the counter-turn, and the catastrophe. But he points out that somewhere along the line, and by way of Horace, plays developed five acts (the Spanish only 3). As regards the action, Eugenius contends that they are transparent, everybody already having known what will happen; that the Romans borrowed from the Greeks; and that the *deus ex machina* convention is a weak escape. As far as the unity of place is concerned, he suggests that the Ancients were not the ones to insist on it so much as the French, and that insistence has caused some artificial entrances and exits of characters. The unity of time is often ignored in both. As to the liveliness of language, Eugenius counters Crites by suggesting that even if we do not know all the contexts, good writing is always good, wit is always discernible, if done well. He goes on to say also that while the Ancients portrayed many emotions and actions, they neglected love, "which is the most frequent of all passions" and known to everyone. He mentions Shakespeare and Fletcher as offering "excellent scenes of passion."

1.3.4. Crites's Arguments in favour of the Ancients:

Crites develops the main points in defending the ancients and raises objections to modern plays. The Moderns are still imitating the Ancients and using their forms and subjects, relying on Aristotle and Horace, adding nothing new and yet not following their good advice closely either, especially with respect to the Unities of time, place and action. While the unity of time suggests that all the action should be portrayed within a single day, the English plays attempt to use long periods of time, sometimes years. In terms of place, the setting should be the same from beginning to end with the scenes marked by the entrances and exits of the persons having business within each. The English, on the other hand, try to have all kinds of places, even far off countries, shown within a single play. The third unity, that of action, requires that the play "aim at one great and complete action", but the English have all kinds of sub-plots which destroy the unity of the action.

In anticipating the objection that the Ancients' language is not as vital as the Moderns's, Crites says that we have to remember that we are probably missing a lot of subtleties because the languages are dead and the customs are far removed from this time.

Crites uses Ben Jonson as the example of the best in English drama, saying that he followed the Ancients "in all things" and offered nothing really new in terms of "serious thoughts".

1.3.5. Licideius's view in favour of the Superiority of the French Drama over the English Drama:

Licideius speaks in favour of the French. He agrees with Eugenius that in the last generation the English drama was superior. Then they had their Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher. But English drama has decayed and declined since then. They live in an awful age full of bloodshed and violence, and poetry is an art of peace. In the present age, it flourishes in France and not in England. The French have their Corneille (1606-84), and the English have no dramatist equal to him.

The French are superior to the English for various reasons:

1. They follow the Ancients. They favour the Unity of time and they observe it so carefully. When it comes to the Unity of Place, they are equally careful. In most of their plays, the entire action is limited to one place. And the Unity of Action is even more obvious. Their plays are never over-loaded with sub-plots as is the case with the English plays. The attention of the English playwrights is constantly diverted from one action to the other, and its due effects. This fault of double-action gives rise to another fault till the end. Licideius therefore concludes: no drama in the world is as absurd as the English tragic-comedy. The French plays also have much variety but they do not provide it in such a bizarre manner. The English are guilty of the folly, while the French are not.
2. The Plots of the French tragedies are based on well-known stories with reference to the theory and practice of the Ancients. But these stories are transformed for dramatic purposes; in this regard they are superior even to the Ancients. So their stories are mixture of truth with fiction, based on historical invention. They both delight and instruct, at one and the same time. But the English dramatists for example Shakespeare, do not modify and transform their stories for dramatic purpose. In order to satisfy the human soul, the drama must have verisimilitude (likeness to reality). The French plays have it, while the English do not.
3. The French do not burden the play with a fat plot. They represent a story which will be one complete action, and everything which is unnecessary is carefully excluded. But the English burden their plays with actions and incidents which have no logical and natural connection with the main action so much so that an English play is a mere compilation. Hence the French plays are better written than the English ones.

4. The English devote considerable attention to one single character, and the others are merely introduced to set off that principal character. But Lisideius does not support or favour this practice. In the English plays, one character is more important than the others, and quite naturally, the greater part of the action is concerned with him. The English play the character relates to life and therefore, it is proper and reasonable that it should be so also in the drama. But in French plays, the other characters are not neglected. While in the French plays such narrations are made by those who are in some way or the other connected with the main action. Similarly the French are more skilled than the Ancients.

5. Further, the French narrations are better managed and more skilful than those of the English. The narration may be of two kinds. The action of the play which is dull and boring, and is often not listened to by the audience. The narration of things happening during the course of the play. The French are able to avoid the representation of scenes of bloodshed, violence and murder on the stage, such scenes of horror and tumult has disfigured many English plays. In this way, they avoid much that is ridiculous and absurd in the English plays.

6. The major imperfection of English plays is the representation of Death on the stage. All passions can be in a lively manner represented on the stage, only if the actor has the necessary skill, but there are many actions which cannot be successfully represented, and dying is one of them. The French omit the same mistake. Death should better be described or narrated rather than represented.

7. It is wrong to believe that the French represent no part of their action on the stage. Instead, they make proper selection. Cruel actions which are likely to cause hatred, or disbelief by their impossibility, must be avoided or merely narrated. They must not be represented. The French follow this rule in practice and so avoid much of the tumult of the English plays by reducing their plots to reasonable limits. Such narrations are common in the plays of the Ancients and the great English dramatists like Ben Jonson and Fletcher. Therefore, the French must not be blamed for their narration, which are judicious and well managed.

1.3.6. Neander's View in Favour of Modern (English) Drama:

Based on the definition of the play, Neander suggests that English playwrights are best at "the lively imitation of nature" (i.e., human nature). French poesy is beautiful; it is beautiful like a "statue". He even says that the newer French writers are imitating the English playwrights. One fault he finds in their plots is that the regularity also makes the plays too much alike. He defends the English invention of tragi-comedy by suggesting that the use of mirth with tragedy provides "contraries" that "set each other off" and gives the audience relief from the heaviness of straight tragedy. He suggests that the use of well-ordered sub-plots makes the plays interesting and help the main action. Further, he suggests that English plays are more entertaining and instructive because they offer an element of surprise that the Ancients and

the French do not. He brings up the idea of the suspension of disbelief. While the audience may know that none of them are real, why should they think scenes of deaths or battles any less "real" than the rest? Here he credits the English audience with certain robustness in suggesting that they want their battles and "other objects of horror." Ultimately he suggests that it may be there are simply too many rules and often following them creates more absurdities than they prevent.

1.3.7. The Ancients versus Modern Playwrights:

Dryden in his essay, *An Essay on Dramatic Poesy*, vindicated the Moderns. The case for the 'Ancients' is presented by Crites. In the controversy Dryden takes no extreme position and is sensible enough to give the Ancients their respect. Through his wit and shrewd analysis, he removes the difficulty which had confused the issue. He makes us see the achievement of the Ancients and the gratitude of the Moderns to them. Thus, he presents the comparative merits and demerits of each in a clearer way.

Crites Favours the Ancients:

(i) The superiority of the Ancients is established by the very fact that the Moderns simply imitate them, and build on the foundations laid by them. The Ancients are the acknowledged models of the Moderns.

(ii) The Ancients had a special genius for drama, and in their particular branch of poetry they could reach perfection. Just as they excel them in drama.

(iii) Thirdly, in ancient Greece and Rome poetry was more honoured than any other branch of knowledge. Poets were encouraged to excel in this field through frequent competitions, judges were appointed and the dramatists were rewarded according to their merits. But in modern times there is no such spirit of healthy rivalry and competition. Poets are neither suitably honoured nor are they rewarded.

(iv) The Ancient drama is superior because the Ancients closely observed Nature and faithfully represented her in their work. The Moderns do not observe and study Nature carefully and so they distort and disfigure her in their plays.

(v) The rules of Dramatic Composition which the Moderns now follow have come down to them from the Ancients.

(vi) Crites makes special mention of the Unities, of Time, Place, and Action. The Ancients followed these rules and the effect is satisfying and pleasing. But in Modern plays the Unity of Time is violated and often of the Action of a play covers whole ages.

(vii) The Ancients could organize their plays well. We are unable to appreciate the art and beauty of their language, only because many of their customs, stories, etc, are not known to us. There is much that is highly proper and elegant in their language but we fail to appreciate it because their language is dead, and remains only in books.

Eugenius' Case for the Moderns:

Eugenius then replies to Crites and speaks in favour of the Moderns.

In the very beginning, he acknowledges that the Moderns have learnt much from the Ancients. But he adds that by their own labour the Moderns have added to what they have gained from them, with the result that they now excel them in many ways. The Moderns have not blindly imitated them. Had they done so, they would have lost the old perfection, and would not achieve any new excellences. Eugenius proceeds to bring out some defects of the Ancients, and some excellences of the Moderns.

(i) The Moderns have perfected the division of plays and divided their plays not only into Acts but also into scenes. The Spaniards and the Italians have some excellent plays to their credit, and they divided them into three Acts and not into five. They wrote without any definite plan and when they could write a good play their success was more a matter of chance and good fortune than of ability. In the characterization they no doubt, imitate nature, but their imitation is only narrow and partial – as if they imitated only an eye or a hand and did not dare to venture on the lines of a face, or the proportion of the body. They are inferior to the (English) Moderns in all these respects.

(ii) Even the Ancients' observance of the three unities is not perfect. The Ancient critics, like Horace and Aristotle, did not make mention of the Unity of Place. Even the Ancients did not always observe the Unity of Time. Euripides, a great dramatist, no doubt, confines his action to one day, but, then, he commits many absurdities.

(iii) There is too much of narration at the cost of Action. Instead of providing the necessary information to the audience through dialogues the Ancients often do so through monologues. The result is, their play becomes monotonous and tiresome.

(iv) Their plays do not perform one of the functions of drama, that of giving delight as well as instruction. There is no poetic justice in their plays. Instead of punishing vice and rewarding virtue, they have often shown a prosperous wickedness, and an unhappy piety.

(v) Eugenius agrees with Crites that they are not competent to judge the language of the Ancients since it is dead, and many of their stories, customs, habits, etc., have been lost to them. However, they have certain glaring faults which cannot be denied. They are often too bold in their metaphors and in their coinages. As far as possible, only such words should be used as are in common use, and new words should be coined only when absolutely necessary. Horace himself has recommended this rule, but the Ancients violated it frequently.

(vi) Ancient themes are equally defective. The proper end of Tragedy is to arouse “admiration and concernment (pity)”. But their themes are lust, cruelty, murder, and bloodshed, which instead of arousing admiration and pity arouse “horror and terror”. The horror of such themes can be softened a little by the introduction of love scenes, but in the treatment of this passion they are much inferior to such Moderns as Shakespeare and Fletcher. In their comedies, no doubt they introduce a few scenes of tenderness but, then, their lovers talk very little.

1.3.8. Mixture of Tragedy and Comedy

Dryden is more considerate in his attitude towards the mingling of the tragic and the comic elements and emotions in the plays. He vindicates tragi-comedy on the following grounds:

a) Contrasts, when placed near, set off each other.

b) Continued gravity depresses the spirit, a scene of mirth thrown in between refreshes. It has the same effect on us as music. In other words, comic scene produces relief, though Dryden does not explicitly say so.

c) Mirth does not destroy compassion and thus the serious effect which tragedy aims at is not disturbed by mingling of tragic and comic.

d) Just as the eye can pass from an unpleasant object to a pleasant one, so also the soul can move from the tragic to the comic. And it can do so much more swiftly.

e) The English have perfected a new way of writing not known to the Ancients. If they had tragic-comedies, perhaps Aristotle would have revised his rules.

f) It is all a question of progress with the change of taste. The Ancients cannot be a model for all times and countries, “What pleased the Greeks would not satisfy an English audience”. Had Aristotle seen the English plays “He might have changed his mind”. The real test of excellence is not strict adherence to rules or conventions, but whether the aims of dramas have been achieved. They are achieved by the English drama.

Dryden’s view on Tragi-comedy (Dryden’s own phrase is ‘Tragic-comedy’) clearly brings out his liberal classicism, greatness and shrewdness as a critic. Dryden is of the view that mingling of the tragic and the comic provides dramatic relief.

1.3.9. Advocacy of writing plays in Rhymed Verse

Rhymed Verse versus Blank Verse Controversy:

In the Restoration era rhymed verse or Heroic Couplet was generally used as the medium of expression for Heroic Tragedy, while the great Elizabethan dramatists had used blank verse for their plays. Dryden himself used rhyme for his plays upto ‘Aurangzebe’. But in the Preface to this play he bids farewell to his ‘mistress rhyme’, and express his intention of turning to blank verse. However, in the Essay, he has expressed himself strongly in favour of rhyme through the mouth of Neander.

Crites’s attack on Rhyme occurs towards the end of the Essay, the discussion turns on rhyme and blank verse, and Crites attacks rhyme violently on the following grounds:

- Rhyme is not to be allowed in serious plays, though it may be allowed in comedies.
- Rhyme is unnatural in a play, for a play is in dialogues, and no man without premeditation speaks in rhyme.
- Blank Verse is also unnatural for no man speaks in verse either, but it is nearer to prose and Aristotle has laid down that tragedy should be written in a verse form which is nearer to prose – “Aristotle, 'Tis best to write Tragedy in that kind of Verse which is the least such, or which is nearest Prose: and this amongst the Ancients was the Iambique, and with us is blank verse.” (.....)

- Drama is a ‘just’ representation of Nature, and rhyme is unnatural, for nobody in Nature expresses himself in rhyme. It is artificial and the art is too apparent, while true art consists in hiding art.

- It is said that rhyme helps the poet to control his fancy. But one who has not the judgment to control his fancy in blank verse will not be able to control it in rhyme either. Artistic control is a matter of judgment and not of rhyme or verse.

Neander’s defence:

- The choice and the placing of the word should be natural in a natural order – that makes the language natural, whether it is verse or rhyme that is used.

- Rhyme itself may be made to look natural by the use of run-on lines, and variety, and variety resulting from the use of hemistich, manipulation of pauses and stresses, and the change of metre. • Blank Verse is no verse at all. It is simply poetic prose and so fit only for comedies. Rhymed verse alone, made natural or near to prose, is suitable for tragedy. This would satisfy Aristotle’s dictum. • Rhyme is justified by its universal use among all the civilized nations of the world.

- The Elizabethans achieved perfection in the use of blank verse and they, the Moderns, cannot excel; them, or achieve anything significant or better in the use of blank verse. Hence they must perforce use rhyme, which suits the genius of their age.

- Tragedy is a serious play representing nature exalted to its highest pitch; rhyme being the noblest kind of verse is suited to it, and not to comedy.

At the end of the Essay, Dryden gives one more reason in favour of rhyme i.e. rhyme adds to the pleasure of poetry. Rhyme helps the judgment and thus makes it easier to control the free flights of the fancy. The primary function of poetry is to give ‘delight’, and rhyme enables the poet to perform this function well.

1.4. Let’s sum up

In a nutshell, John Dryden in his essay, *An Essay on Dramatic Poesy*, gives an account of the Neo-classical theory. He defends the classical drama saying that it is an imitation of life, and

reflects human nature clearly. He also discusses the three unities, rules that require a play to take place in one place, during one day, and that it develops one single action or plot.

The Essay is written in the form of a dialogue concerned to four gentlemen: Eugenius, Crites, Lisideius and Neander. Neander seems to speak for Dryden himself. Eugenius takes the side of the modern English dramatists by criticizing the faults of the classical playwrights who did not themselves observe the unity of place. But Crites defends the ancient and pointed out that they invited the principles of dramatic art enunciated by Aristotle and Horace. Crites opposes rhyme in plays and argues that through the moderns excel in science; the ancient age was the true age of poetry. Lisideius defends the French playwrights and attacks the English tendency to mix genres. He defines a play as a just and lively image of human and the change of fortune to which it is subject for the delight and instruction of mankind.

Neander favours the Moderns, respects the Ancients, critical to rigid rules of dramas and he favours rhyme if it is in proper place like in grand subject matter. Neander a spokesperson of Dryden argues that tragic comedy is the best form for a play; because it is the closest to life in which emotions are heightened by both mirth and sadness. He also finds subplots as an integral part to enrich a play. He finds the French drama, with its single action.

Neander favours the violation of the unities because it leads to the variety in the English plays. The unities have a narrowing and crumpling effect on the French plays, which are often betrayed into absurdities from which the English plays are free. The violation of unities helps the English playwright to present a mere, just and lively image of human nature.

In his comparison of French and English drama, Neander characterizes the best proofs of the Elizabethan playwrights. He praises Shakespeare, ancients and moderns. Neander comes to the end for the superiority of the Elizabethans with a close examination of a play by Jonson which Neander believes a perfect demonstration that the English were capable of following the classical rules. In this way, Dryden's commitment to the neoclassical tradition is displayed.

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