Preface

*Dryden employed numerous prose styles, and they have been variously described. Very much the same thing can be said of the subjects to which he addressed himself in prose and of the Protean guises in which he chose to appear. This volume might best be described as a sampler of Dryden as biographer-historian, political commentator, religious controversialist, literary polemicist, literary theorist, and practical critic. Here "the other harmony of prose" is heard in numerous keys; also audible are some discords that can be resolved only in the larger concord of a life devoted to letters in the many realms over which Dryden reigned. If he was, as Dr. Johnson said, the father of English criticism, that is but one subject on which his prose pen touched; but without doubt his fatherhood began with his most carefully articulated piece of literary criticism, familiarly known as *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy*. As our commentary aims to show, the *Essay* achieves its stature not only by virtue of its superbly ordered yet relaxed style and the intrinsic importance of its ideas, but also by reason of its quasi-fictional dialogue form. Dryden's mastery of the form enabled him, in good conscience, to claim kinship with Plato, Cicero, and other Academic philosophers.*

The same assurance is not found in all the pieces included here. The rather lengthy period covered by this volume provided many challenges to the poet, to the prose writer, and to the man alike. The commotion over the Popish Plot and the succession, the controversy on religious matters after Dryden's conversion, and debate with fellow writers provoked responses from Dryden which were often hurried and sometimes passionate. On one occasion, indeed, his reaction to the redoubtable pen of Thomas Rymer was sufficiently private to have been taken no further than the writing of the "heads" for a critical treatise on drama. And yet there were also times, as when Dryden took up his pen to write a dedication on behalf of his friend Henry Purcell, or as he sat down to review the achievement of Plutarch, when he could reflect upon the major issues of human civilization, taking that wider view that marks his thought at its finest.

The aim in this volume has been to provide the reader with the resources to understand, analyze, and judge a number of Dryden's prose pieces which were not connected by way of preface to other works. The essential basis of the commentary and its design have been supplied by Samuel H. Monk, who has also contributed, over a period of many years, to commentary on critical works in other volumes of the California edition of Dryden's works. A. E. Wallace Maurer has written the headnote and the annotation for the Life of Plutarch and has lent valuable assistance in other ways as well. For An Essay of Dramatic Poesy, R. V. LeClercq has furnished new material on the classical and French backgrounds, Earl Miner has put the headnote in its final form, and H. T. Swedenberg, Jr., has expanded the annotation. Maximillian E. Novak has amplified the commentary on Notes and Observations on The Empress of Morocco. Vinton A. Dearing has provided the text for this volume, the first of four to be devoted to Dryden's prose writings.

The Editor of this volume expresses his gratitude to the staff of the William Andrews Clark Memorial Library at the University of California, Los Angeles, for its generous and efficient service during his tenure as Senior Fellow in 1964, as well as to the Clark Library Committee for appointing him to that fellowship. He is also grateful to Dr. Louis B. Wright for a three-month grant to work at the Folger Shakespeare Library in 1965-66.

Since Dryden's classical learning, or his ease with the classics, exceeds that of his editors, it is a mercy to be able to draw upon the learning of colleagues in the classical literatures. We wish to express our indebtedness and gratitude, therefore, to Philip Levine, Professor of Classics and Dean of Humanities at UCLA, for his generous assistance, especially for his guidance through the altering forms of the dialogue and the Academic tradition. We also wish to thank Professor Clarence Forbes of the Ohio State University Classics Department who has translated the Latin passages from the Rualdus edition of Plutarch.

Modern standards for editions of English authors are such,

and life is such, that the editors could not make what claim they can to accuracy without alert and intelligent assistance. Mrs. Geneva Phillips, the editorial assistant for this edition, has held up standards for which the General Editor and the Associate General Editor can only bow their heads gratefully, and Mrs. Grace H. Stimson of the University of California Press has assisted the editors to a degree that only those engaged in similar endeavors will understand. The checking, rechecking, and checking yet again of text and of commentary owes much to the devoted care of UCLA graduate students. Michael Seidel, David Latt, Mrs. Melanie Rangno, Mrs. Janette Lewis, Mrs. Diane Eliel, and Nick Havranek have corrected manuscript and proof with a fidelity as necessary as it is invisible.

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S. H. M.

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