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DRYDEN'S SYNTAX: A REAPPRAISAL OF HIS
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Dryden's Syntax:
A Reappraisal of his Couplet Verse
and his Public Poetry

by

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ABSTRACT

Dryden's Syntax:
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Ruth Salvaggio

When Mark Van Doren and T. S. Eliot offered their critical revaluations of Dryden earlier this century, they called attention to the clarity and directness of his verse, what Eliot described as the "satisfying completeness of the statement." Their opinions have solidified critical response to Dryden's couplet so firmly that when William Empson detected a peculiar type of syntactic ambiguity in Dryden, he questioned the significance of his findings by remarking that this ambiguity was for the most part "not encouraged by the couplet."

In this dissertation I suggest that syntactic ambiguity is inherent in Dryden's closed couplet, and that this aspect of his poetry modifies our assumptions both about his accomplishments in this verse form and his role as a public poet. Dryden does make his statements directly: words, phrases, and clauses are well defined in the metrical and rhetorical structure of his lines.
But the ambivalent and ambiguous ways in which syntactic elements can relate to each other within the structure of his closed couplet verse allow him at the same time to make other statements indirectly. Syntax thus gives precision to his statements, while its ambiguity of reference suggests alternate syntactic sequences and modifications in meaning.

Recently Irvin Ehrenpreis has spoken of Dryden as possessing a "dualistic genius" which enabled him to give full expression and support to different sides of social, political, and moral issues. This kind of duplicity, which I find in Dryden's syntax, accounts for the public quality of his verse. We have conventionally viewed Dryden as a public writer because he took positions on certain public issues. But the different and sometimes disparate meanings enforced by syntax indicate instead that Dryden was less concerned with defending certain positions than with attracting the response of an extremely varied audience. Rather than see Dryden as a poet who makes well defined public statements with a well defined verse form, I suggest that we should view him as a poet whose ambiguous language gives shape to a kind of public poetry specifically aimed to engage the attention of a very mixed society.
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"Words strain,
Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,
Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,
Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,
Will not stay still."

T. S. Eliot, "Burnt Norton"
Chapter I  Syntax in Verse

An investigation into the ambivalent and ambiguous workings of syntax in John Dryden's verse involves a focus on one aspect of the general study of syntax in poetry, a topic which itself has received limited critical attention. In 1925 Mats Redin offered a descriptive analysis of syntactic constructions in poetry in his study of *Word-Order in English Verse from Pope to Sassoon*, and thirty years later Donald Davie's *Articulate Energy: An Inquiry into the Syntax of English Poetry* offered a discussion of several theories about the function of syntax in verse. But when in 1967 William Baker published his comparative study of syntactic constructions in *Syntax in English Poetry, 1870-1930*, he noted that aside from Davie's "figurative" discussion of the subject and the several analyses of "selected grammatical devices in poetry," there has really been no practical effort to deal "systematically and thoroughly with syntax in poetry as distinct from semantics and morphology." Criticism has produced instead selective observations on how syntax functions with respect to the line, or how it interacts with rhetorical devices, or how it sometimes underscores
an important idea in the poetry. The more particular function of syntactic ambiguity in verse has, until recently, almost gone unnoticed.

John Spenser and Michael Gregory, critics interested in the practical relationship between linguistics and literary criticism, suggest how this kind of focus on syntax can offer new perspectives: "Syntactic effects in poetry not only include complexity and recurrence, but also syntactical ambiguity. Lexical ambiguity has long been recognized in the metaphor, the pun, and other types of imagery, but it is important to observe that ambiguity is not restricted to lexis. The syntax of poetry probably deserves more attention than it has hitherto received, particularly since verse, however 'free,' has a double set of units: those of the line and the stanza, and those of syntax. Often one set is used in counterpoint with the other; in the same way that, at the phonological level, metrical patterns are often counterpointed with the rhythms of speech. It is therefore possible for a poet, by juxtaposing grammatical boundaries with those of the metrical line, to make use of syntactic expectancy, followed by syntactical resolution or surprise. In this way alternative syntactic patterns are able to co-exist, thus contributing to the complexity of the verse." ⁴
The school of criticism devoted to the study of reader response in literature has occasionally called attention to such manipulations of syntax. Stanley Fish, for instance, explains how "syntactical uncertainty" in language can have the effect of suspending the reader "between the alternatives its syntax momentarily offers." When this happens, certain syntactic structures produce specific kinds of reader response. In his examination of the role of the reader in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Fish thus distinguishes between the syntactic construction of the verse spoken by Satan and by God: "Satan's fallacies are wrapped in serpentine trails of false beginnings, faulty pronoun references, missing verbs and verbal schemes which sacrifice sense to sound. . . . In contrast, God practices a Stoic austerity; his syntax is close and sinewy, adhering to the ideal of brevity (brevitas) by 'employing only what is strictly necessary for making the matter clear. . . .'" Now Fish would further argue that the syntax of Satan's verse is part of a rhetorical attempt first to entangle and confuse the reader through language, and then to force him to re-read and become aware of the process of deception. Stephen Booth, however, who deals with syntactic ambiguity in Shakespeare's sonnets, with what he calls "False Starts and Changes of Direction," concludes that syntactic
ambivalence forces the reader's mind to move "from one system of relationship to another just as it does when it contemplates physical experience" so that the mind "operates similarly to the way it operates upon unstructured experience."\(^7\) The reader of Shakespeare's sonnets thus responds to syntactic ambiguity not as deception, but as "poetic energy," in much the same sense that Davie discusses syntax in poetry as "articulate energy." So although both Fish and Booth approach the same subject of syntax and reader response, their particular conclusions are finally shaped by different assumptions about the function of syntax in poetry and the reader's reaction to the syntax. Eugene Kintgen, in an examination of this whole question of "Reader Response and Stylistics," notes this problem of critical relativity, especially in Fish, and suggests that what we need is "to study the relationship between linguistic configurations and readers' perceptions of, and reactions to, them."\(^8\) The difficulties involved in a study of this kind are obvious, but unless we specifically deal with this issue, we will be unable to distinguish the different possible effects of a particular aspect of style. L. L. Martz, for instance, also observes how syntax functions ambivalently in *Paradise Lost*, but the specific
example he offers comes not from Satan's lines but from the epic voice, and Martz concludes that the purpose of this "ambiguous syntax" is to allow for a double perspective.\textsuperscript{9} John Broadbent likewise gives examples of what he calls "two-way syntax" in Milton, but he describes the technique as "impressionistic."\textsuperscript{10} Thus conclusions about the particular significance of syntactic ambiguity vary, while basic analysis of the technique is lacking.

When William Empson discusses ambiguity "in word or syntax" as one of his \textit{Seven Types of Ambiguity}, he makes a similar observation: "There are three possible scales or dimensions, that seem of reliable importance, along which ambiguities may be spread out: the degree of logical or grammatical disorder, the degree to which the apprehension of the ambiguity must be conscious, and the degree of psychological complexity concerned. Of these, the first seems the one about which there is least danger of talking nonsense, the one it is most important to be clear about, and the one to which least critical attention has so far been paid."\textsuperscript{11} Empson's own analysis mainly addresses itself to this first issue, though he does at times discuss the aesthetic significance of the technique, how syntactic ambiguity in Shakespeare's sonnets, for instance, promotes "an interpenetrating and, as it were, fluid unity" in the
verse (p. 50). But when Empson detects certain syntactic ambiguities in couplet verse, he is not at all sure about how they function in poets who have conventionally been regarded as "honest, straightforward, sensible, grammatical and plain," and thus leaves unanswered the question of how "their ambiguities are typical of their age and method, how fundamental for an understanding of their verse. . . . (p. 68). And when he finds in Dryden's couplets, in particular, the same kind of syntactic ambiguity characteristic of Shakespeare's sonnets, he is unsure about the aesthetic significance of a technique which he regards as for the most part "not encouraged by the couplet" (p. 74).

Dryden's closed couplet poetry provides an interesting example of how a study of syntax in verse can alter and enhance our understanding of the nature of the verse form and the effects produced by syntax. Empson's conclusions undoubtedly reflect the notion that Dryden wrote clearly and precisely, a notion firmly rooted in the critical revaluations of Dryden made earlier this century by Mark Van Doren and T. S. Eliot. But our understanding of the precision and correctness characteristic of couplet verse has in recent years undergone some modification. When Maynard Mack, for instance, attempts to describe the verse of Pope, one of our most precise poets, he identifies its
"precision and conciseness; the logical emphasis inherent in couplet rhetoric, its parallelism and antithesis," as one aspect of the poetry, but then identifies "a host of qualities that look the other way." 13 W. K. Wimsatt moves nearer to a description of how this happens in the syntax of Augustan poetry when he explains how the "tight frame of logic and meter kept words in their places, but in doing so forced them to exert all the more their interactive energies." 14 What we find in the closed couplet, then, is what William Piper describes as "that dynamic maintenance of the conflicting tendencies toward order and variety, toward stability and movement, that each individual closed couplet required." 15 It should therefore not be surprising to discover syntactic ambiguity in the couplet, and Piper, for one, briefly discusses "ambivalent syntactic constructions" in the verse of Dryden, the forward and backward movement of words, phrases, and clauses, which allow the poet on a technical level to tie couplets together and on a semantic level to suggest two different meanings that both fit the argument (pp. 104-5). Allan Rodway also notices what he calls "the syntactic pull of the antithetical syntax" and "sacrifice of grammatical correctness for syntactical strength" in Augustan poetry, and in fact considers "syntactical ingenuity" as a distinguishing feature of the poetry of that
period. Critical observations such as these should suggest the basic practical advantage of approaching a study of syntactic ambiguity in Dryden's verse: the couplet's tightly structured form, its compactness of metrical, rhetorical, and syntactical technique, provide the critic with an organized method of approach; while the couplet's "interactive energies," its variety and dynamic movement, allow for a far more complex view of the poetry than the apparent ordered framework of the verse at first suggests. It follows, then, that a reader's response to this verse form is going to be similarly complex. One syntactic option, supported by the meter, may suggest one meaning; while an alternate syntactic option, supported by the rhetoric, may modify or even contradict that meaning. A reader confronted with the dynamics of the syntax can respond in a variety of ways. Indeed, different readers may respond in different ways. Analysis of exactly how this process is at work in Dryden's couplets thus explains one aspect of the verse's complexity by accounting for the options it presents to the reader. And those options, in turn, as I will later show, give shape to the public nature of Dryden's poetry.

The method of analysis, of identifying these syntactic options, can draw from several systems of critical and
grammatical terminology. In recent years notable contributions have been made in the field of linguistic stylistics, especially in light of the emphasis placed on syntax ever since the publication of Noam Chomsky's *Syntactic Structures* in 1957. The basic problem concerning terminology is simply the question of what terms should be used to describe syntactic structures: those of feature grammar which deals with words as the basic units of structure, or of phrase grammar which generally deals with larger structural units, or traditional Latinate grammar which deals with both kinds of units, or transformational-generative grammar whose concern with deep and surface structure offers a whole new approach to the study of language. The failure of linguists to produce at least a general method of analysis for the practical study of linguistic stylistics has resulted, I think, in their theoretical bent in dealing with literature. F. W. Bateson is one literary critic who has noted the linguist's "inability to provide actual, concrete examples of the linguistic approach to a proper understanding and appreciation of particular poems, plays, or novels—or even particular parts or aspects of such works. Instead all that we get is theorizing—often of much interest simply as theory—and some skillful linguistic propaganda."
And Samuel R. Levin, a linguist, admits that "the grammars devised for English are not yet sufficiently articulated to take account of certain equivalences that occur in poetry. Attempts to incorporate grammatical rules for generating such poetic sequences would either result in the generation of a great many unsatisfactory English sentences or would require the incorporation of a great many additional, restrictive rules into the grammar. A grammar that would generate Milton's line *Him who disobeys, me disobeys*, for example, would also generate *Them who likes, us likes*, and other such questionable sentences."\(^{20}\) But another linguist, M. A. K. Halliday, distinguishes between theory and description, and argues that "the different types of description are bodies of method which derive from, and are answerable to, that theory. Each has its place in linguistics, and it is a pity to deny the value of textual description (which is appropriate, for example, in 'stylistics,' the linguistic study of literature) just because certain of the methods used in description are found to be inadequate."\(^{21}\) Nils Enkvist suggests a practical resolution, that we "regard stylistics as a subject free to pick and choose its linguistic methods from whatever quarters seem most promising."\(^{22}\) Since my own approach is literary, it will involve the use of conventional literary methods of analysis,
particularly meter, which provides a means for dealing in a distinctly poetic way with stress and pause, and rhetoric, which provides a means for describing some traditional formal manipulations of language that are also syntactic manipulations. A general familiarity with the theory of transformational grammar can be useful for the study of syntax in verse because it deals with deep grammatical structures which, as Chomsky explains, contain "information relevant to semantic interpretation." Richard Ohmann, for instance, argues that transformational grammar can have particular relevance to investigations into the role of syntax in literature: "Writers differ noticeably in the amounts and kinds of syntactic complexity they habitually allow themselves, but these matters have been hard to approach through conventional methods of analysis. Since the complexity of a sentence is a product of the generalized transformations it has gone through, a breakdown of the sentence into its component simple sentences and the generalized transformations applied (in the order of application) will be an account of its complexity." But at least in terms of syntactic ambiguity in poetry, such "conventional methods of analysis" can offer practical advantages: the meter and rhetoric of the closed couplet in particular can define certain kinds of syntactic
structures which also account for the complexity of the verse, structures which, as Samuel Levin cautions, are not yet sufficiently incorporated into generative grammars. I will therefore use the terminology of traditional grammar for describing grammatical units, like phrase and clause, subject and object, noun and verb, singular and plural. These four kinds of grammatical units correspond to Halliday's four "fundamental categories for the theory of grammar": unit, structure, class, and system. The categories, he explains, are sufficient for "a coherent account of what grammar is and of its place in language, and a comprehensive description of the grammars of languages, neither of which is possible without them."\textsuperscript{25}

Finally, one basic aspect of methodology should be emphasized. Stylistic analysis inevitably relies on some base of comparison within the poem itself: the line unit, the versification, the rhetorical structure. Thus a verse form which is well defined in terms of its metrical and rhetorical structure will be better suited to syntactic analysis. Roger Fowler's examination of the function of syntax in E. E. Cummings' poetry, for instance, becomes consumed in the effort to find a syntactic base within the language of the poetry because the verse itself provides no base of comparison from which the analysis might proceed.\textsuperscript{26}
The traditional blank verse form presents similar problems: in this kind of verse there is far more room for syntactic spread than, for instance, in closed couplet or sonnet verse where syntax is inherently related to specific kinds of metrical patterns and rhetorical constructions. In the couplet, in other words, we already have a syntactic base from which we can begin to analyze syntactic deviance. Any study of style involves such comparison. Spenser and Gregory summarize the rationale and also explain some particular approaches to comparative stylistic methods: "All concepts of style involve a consciousness of norms and the possibility of departures from them. The comparison may be implicit when an awareness of norms, the product of a developed literary or linguistic intuition, or preferably both, lies beyond a comment on the style of a particular text. The stylistically significant linguistic features of a text, however, can often be more effectively presented when an explicit comparison with another text is made, or used as a 'control' in the process of stylistic examination." 27

The kind of "implicit" comparison they identify would probably serve well enough for a study of Dryden's syntax, but an "explicit comparison" would make it possible to distinguish specific kinds of syntactic structures which
are peculiar to different texts. We can have grounds for drawing such distinctions by comparing the verse of Dryden's translation of Juvenal with the original Juvenal and with the couplet verse used by Dryden's fellow contemporary translators. How syntactic manipulation can affect the response of a reader will then be dealt with later in the analysis of *Absalom and Achitophel* where syntax shapes the relationship between poet and audience.
Notes to Chapter I

1 (Uppsala: Almqvist and Wiksells, 1925).


8 Style, 11 (1977), 8.


The Heroic Couplet (Cleveland, Ohio: Case Western Reserve, 1969), p. 19.


"Language and Literature: Reply by F. W. Bateson," in The Languages of Literature, ed. Roger Fowler, pp. 75–76.


23 Chomsky, quoted by Fowler, The Languages of Literature, p. 77.


25 "Categories of the Theory of Grammar," pp. 247-48. The terminology of traditional grammar will suit the analysis: since I will be working mainly with the English language and secondarily with Latin, there is really no need to use the terminology of either feature or phrase grammar, grammars which have adopted new categories of description because the categories provided by traditional Latinate grammar are not able to account for linguistic structures in non-Indo-European languages. Spenser and Gregory make this point, Linguistics and Style, p. 77.


27 Linguistics and Style, pp. 102-3.
Chapter II  Dryden and Juvenal: Comparing Styles

A good translator must be a good poet, according to Dryden. When Barten Holyday and Robert Stapylton translated Juvenal, Dryden's complaint was that although they could interpret the Latin, they could not create suitable English verse: "... 'tis only for a poet to translate a poem."¹ The main reason for their failure, Dryden explained, was their close literal transaltion. Dryden instead offered "a kind of paraphrase and imitation" in an attempt to "write only for the pleasure and entertainment of those gentlemen and ladies, who, though they are not scholars, are not ignorant. . . ."² But to attempt this kind of loose translation meant that it would be necessary to alter the original at least stylistically, a fact which Dryden recognized when he explained that a translator must be "a Master both of his Authours Language, and of his own" and be able "to give his thought either the same turn if our tongue will bear it, or if not, to vary but the dress, not to alter or destroy the substance."³ Thus of his translation of Juvenal he explained: "We make our author at least appear in a poetic dress. We have actually made him more sounding,
and more elegant, than he was before in English." What Dryden offered, as William Frost puts it, is "a double claim on our attention," both "an interpretation of the original" and "a new English poem of intrinsic interest," a point similar to that made by R. Selden who suggests that Dryden "comes perilously near to condoning 'innovation of thoughts' in allowing the translator to modify the style of his original. . . . When he says of the translation of Juvenal 'We have actually made him more sounding, and more elegant, than he was before in English,' he might equally have said 'than he was before in Latin.'" Michael Wilding argues that it is Dryden's "vigorous and lively style" which finally distinguishes his translation from the original: "He is not simply turning Latin into English and tagging the lines with rhymes. He is thinking through the rhyme, using it for meaning; he is using the verse movement, the stresses, the combination of words and phrases, the choice of vocabulary, to make his satiric and moral points."  

If the distinguishing feature of Dryden's translation is stylistic, and if style is mainly responsible for his creation both of the interpretative translation and the new English poem, then a translation should function as
a workable base for stylistic analysis of Dryden's own
verse simply because it can provide grounds for comparison
both with the original Juvenal and with the couplet
translations of other seventeenth-century translators.\textsuperscript{8}
Dryden and Juvenal provide an interesting case for stylistic
comparison because we can see Dryden in his translation
achieving syntactic effects which have been thought
to be peculiar to the highly inflected Latin language.
Dryden's syntax, I want to suggest, is just as complex in
terms of its syntax, though its complexity is shaped within
the structure of closed couplet verse. Its ambiguities
are similar to the inflectional ambiguities employed by
some Latin poets who, as Kenneth Quinn explains, tried
to "increase through ambiguity the power their poetry
exercised on the reader."\textsuperscript{9} The dynamics of the syntax in
Dryden's couplets prompt effects which are much like those
which Rolfe Humphries associates only with Latin verse:
"Latin, an inflected language, makes possible effects
that are impossible in our word-order English. Words
not in agreement can be placed side by side for ironic
effect; images can carry from one word to the next, the
memory, the lingering overtone of the first making a
chord, or a prism, with the second; the line, or the stanza,
can be full of ambiguities or surprises, matters held in suspense, judgment on them changed as we go along, and the resolution not coming till the very end."\textsuperscript{10} Juvenal's Latin verse, on the other hand, is comparatively unambiguous. Wilding has contrasted Dryden and Juvenal in this way: "Dryden's strength comes not only from his superior craftsmanship, but from his sense of the emotional potential of the material, his drawing out of the emotional meanings, and the powerful ambiguities of feeling that make his satires so rich. He does not provide simple diatribe or disgust; his world picture is more complex than that."\textsuperscript{11} In comparing the syntax of Dryden and Juvenal, we thus encounter syntactic effects in each writer that are the opposite of what we might expect: Juvenal's Latin verse is for the main part straightforward and direct in its diatribe; Dryden's English couplet verse, while it can be powerfully direct in its statement, is also flexible in the way its syntactic structures interrelate and suggest modifications in meaning.

I want to show exactly how this process is at work in Dryden's translation of Juvenal's first satire, one which, as Dryden explained, "gives us a summary and general view of the Vices and Follies reigning in [Juvenal's] time."\textsuperscript{12} The satire offers this general view
through specific examples, so that it is possible to deal with brief passages of the poem as self-contained thematic units. In order to understand how Dryden uses syntactic ambiguity for his own poetic purposes, we need first to know exactly what he had to work with from the Latin, and then to analyze how he transforms the subject matter of the original through manipulation of his couplet metrics, rhetoric, and syntax. For a starting point, consider Juvenal's description of the slave Crispinus who rises to the position of nobleman because of his wealth:

Cum pars Niliacae plebis, cum verna Canopi
Crispinus, Tyrias humero revocante lacernas
Ventilet aestivum digitis Sudantibus aurum,
Nec sufferre queat majoris pondera gemmae:
Difficile est Satyram non scribere (11. 26-30).

(When a member of the common people of the Nile, when the slave Crispinus of Canopus hitches a Tyrian cloak on his shoulder waves a summer golden ring on his sweating fingers, not able to endure the weight of a heavier gem: it is difficult not to write satire.)

Now here is Dryden's heroic couplet translation:
When I behold the Spawn of conquer'd Nile Crispinus, both in Birth and Manners vile, 
Pacing in pomp, with Cloak of Tyrian dye 
Chang'd oft a day for needless Luxury;
And finding oft occasion to be fann'd, 
Ambitious to produce his Lady-hand; 
Chang'd with light Summer-rings his fingers sweat, 
Unable to support a Gem of weight: 
Such fulsome Objects meeting everywhere, 
'Tis hard to write, but harder to forbear (ll. 34-43).

Though Dryden makes ten lines out of Juvenal's five, he actually follows the original verse very closely: except for the couplet "And finding oft occasion to be fann'd, / Ambitious to produce his Lady-hand," all of Dryden's couplets or lines are based on one of Juvenal's lines, and often there is a word-to-word correspondence. There are also some syntactic parallels: Juvenal frames the passage with a "cum" clause, while Dryden frames his with a subordinate clause beginning with "When"; Dryden's "Unable to support" directly corresponds to Juvenal's "Nec sufferre queat"; Dryden begins his final line with "'Tis hard" which corresponds to Juvenal's "Difficile est."
But aside from these obvious syntactic similarities, there is no source in the original Latin for Dryden's more subtle syntactic manipulations which are made possible by the English language and the couplet verse form as Dryden
practiced them. For instance, notice the ambivalence of the half-line "Charg'd with light Summer-rings": the reference obviously moves forward to "his fingers sweat" so that syntactically the first half of the line functions as a participle phrase modifying the noun "fingers" (his fingers, charged with light summer rings, sweat). Yet though this syntactic construction is enforced by the line unit, it is also possible to extend the syntax of the preceding line so that we read "Ambitious to produce his Lady-hand; / Charg'd with light Summer-rings," where we again end up with the half-line functioning as a participle phrase, this time modifying the noun "Lady-hand" (ambitious to produce his lady hand which is charged with light summer rings). The ambivalence suggests itself first because both readings fit the meaning: both "fingers" and "Lady-hand" are charged with light summer rings. And it is enhanced by an ambiguity of diction: the word "Charg'd" functions as a sort of oxymoron because though here it has connotations of lightness ("Lady-hand," "light Summer-rings," "fingers sweat"), it is normally associated with heaviness or fullness. Finally, the syntactic ambiguity suggests itself because the metrical structure of the couplet makes it possible to read the
verse in terms of well defined segments. The closed
couplet has traditionally been characterized by a hierarchy
of pauses, two mid-line and two end-line, which allow the
second half of each line and the entire second line of
the couplet to receive emphasis. This system of pauses
enables the poet to achieve variety of metrical structure
by having the pauses work with and against rhetorical
structure and syntax.¹³ Such is the case with the
ambivalent movement of the half-line "Charg'd with light
Summer-rings": the meter, which calls for a strong pause
after "Lady-hand" at the end of the preceding couplet, and
the punctuation, which typically enforces metrical
structure,¹⁴ both work against an extension of the syntax
into the following line. But because there is a well
defined mid-line pause after "Summer-rings," and because
the verbal sequence "Ambitious to produce his Lady-hand; /
Charg'd with light Summer-rings" fits the sense of the
reading, the syntactic ambivalence suggests itself. Empson,
in fact, often ignores pauses enforced by punctuation
since, as he says, "it would be hard to read the verse
aloud so that a listener was not tempted into another syntax."¹⁵

This syntactic ambivalence suggests itself for good
reason, but in order to understand why we must consider the
following line: "Unable to support a Gem of weight."
Notice how the half-line "his fingers sweat" functions ambivalently in much the same way that the half-line "Charg'd with light Summer-rings" works: it can syntactically refer backward (charged with light summer rings his fingers sweat) and also forward (his fingers sweat, unable to support a gem of weight). In other words, both half-line segments of the line "Charg'd with light Summer-rings his fingers sweat" function ambivalently by referring backward and forward, and the lines to which they refer have an almost identical syntactic structure: "Ambitious to produce his Lady-hand," "Unable to support a Gem of weight" (participle--infinitive--noun with modifier). The syntactic ambivalence, then, is cushioned between two syntactically parallel lines. Here is where couplet rhetoric becomes important: parallel structures may also enforce the ambivalent workings of syntax. In this instance, it underscores an important thematic point: everything Crispinus is "Ambitious to produce" (his lady hand, his fingers, his light summer rings), he is also "Unable to support." This phrase "Unable to support" again suggests the notion of heaviness connoted by the word "Charg'd," so that ambiguity of syntax and diction expose the core of the satire by contrasting the superficial display of Crispinus with his underlying
weakness. Syntax is ambiguous, then, because the metrical structure of segments of words allows for more than one set meaning. The nature of the ambiguity, in the last analysis, enforces a well defined though complex commentary on the inconsistency of the slave's ambitions and abilities.

The first line of the remaining couplet of the passage, "Such fulsome Objects meeting everywhere," is syntactically ambivalent in a different way. What are the "fulsome Objects"? They may be a reference to "Spawns" like Crispinus himself or they may refer to the actual "Objects" we associate with him such as his "Cloak of Tyrian dye" or his "light Summer-rings." Knowing what the reference is would help answer another question: what is the subject of "meeting." It could be that the "Objects" are always "meeting everywhere," or it could be that the poet is always "meeting" these objects everywhere. If "Objects" is the subject of "meeting," then this first line of the couplet syntactically refers backward to all the preceding references to Crispinus; but if the poet is the implied subject of "meeting," then the line syntactically refers forward to the poet's commentary, "'Tis hard to write, but harder to forbear." Notice again how metrical structure enforces the ambiguity by emphasizing a mid-line pause after "Objects." Couplet rhetoric also enforces
the ambiguity, this time through the workings of ellipsis, for if the poet is the implied subject of "meeting," then Dryden has deliberately omitted a word which is readily supplied by the context. With this syntactic construction we return to the syntax of the very first lines of the passage where the poet is also the subject: "When I behold the Spawn of conquer'd Nile / Crispinus, both in Birth and Manners vile." Even syntactically Crispinus is unable to be the subject of any action, in much the same way that he is unable to support a gem of weight or wear his cloak of Tyrian dye without having constantly to be fanned.

Syntactic ambivalence and ambiguity can thus affect poetic technique because of the ways they work together with the metrics of the line and couplet and the various devices of rhetoric. Furthermore such ambiguity can be described in precise grammatical terms; for instance, words, phrases, and clauses can modify more than one noun, verbs may have more than one subject, parallel syntactic structures may enforce an important semantic relationship between two lines of verse. And as the ambiguity affects technique, it in turn affects the meaning of the verse: by suggesting more than one verbal sequence, the meaning of a segment of verse can be read, or as Empson might say, can be "heard," in a different context. When this happens
in Dryden's tightly structured couplet poetry, the meaning takes on new dimensions and thus becomes increasingly complex, but still within a very ordered framework, so that the ambiguity finally enforces precise discriminations in meaning.

All this is not to say that Juvenal's poetic technique is comparatively simplistic. One might note, for instance, how Juvenal can manipulate syntax by separating noun and modifier in two consecutive lines of verse, "Tyrias . . . lacernas" and "aestivum . . . aurum" (Tyrian cloak and golden summer ring), in such a way that the noun-modifier relationship in the two lines is neatly parallel. He thus rhetorically emphasizes these two possessions of Crispinus, and they in turn become definitive aspects of the slave's character. But the kind of syntactic manipulation Dryden achieves in his verse is very different: it is characteristic of his own language and style. Juvenal suggested relationships and made contrasts through the arrangement of words, but Dryden syntactically connected words so that alternate sentences with different meanings are made possible, and then reinforced these syntactic possibilities through meter and rhetoric.

It might be suggested that since the syntactic ambiguity found in Dryden's verse derives from the nature of the
English language and couplet form, then perhaps the technique is also discernable in other English heroic couplet translations of Juvenal. Consider first Barten Holyday's rendering of the lines:

When one of Nilus's Rout, a servile pate, Crispinus a Canopian (whiles in state His shoulder does his purple Cloak recall) Upon his sweating fingers fannes his small Summer-rings, and a larger Jewels weight Shunnes as a burden: who but needs must straight Breathe Satyre?

Holyday's couplets are generally lacking in the metrical and rhetorical control characteristic of the best couplet poetry, and as a result it becomes difficult even to deal with half-lines or clauses in such a way that we might view them as functioning ambivalently. For instance, none of his couplets cited here has a strong end pause; in fact, his couplets are not at all closed in the sense that Dryden's are. Consider the lines, "Upon his sweating fingers fannes his small / Summer-rings, and a larger Jewels weight / Shunnes as a burden. . . ." Where Dryden was able to have two half-lines in his translation function ambivalently by moving forward and backward, Holyday, though he works within the much simpler syntactic framework of a straightforward compound sentence, is
unable to achieve any balance in his metrical and syntactic structure. The lines are enjambed, and it is difficult to pinpoint exactly where the mid-line pauses should fall. But if we do make allowance for the poorly defined metrical structure and read the half-line segment "fannes his small" as referring both to "Summer-rings" and "a larger Jewels weight," such a reading serves no purpose. It enforces no parallel structure, probably because the metrical structure is poorly defined and thus syntax cannot function within metrical units. It also fails to enhance the meaning, again because in successful couplet poetry the meaning is finally dependent on the complex workings of syntax, meter, and rhetoric. As we have seen in Dryden's version, the parallel syntactic structure of two lines provided a neat framework for the ambivalent syntactic movement of two half-lines: this careful interplay of syntax, meter, and rhetoric enhanced the ironic implications of the entire passage. With Holyday's verse, we would be hard pressed to find anything close to such precision of technique. The English language is always potentially ambiguous, but ambiguity in verse, especially in the tightly structured form of the closed couplet, is dependent on other aspects of verse form in order for it to function in distinctly poetic ways.
The case is slightly different with Robert Stapylton's translation of the passage:

When part of Nile's slime, that Canopian slave Crispinus flaunts it in his purple cloak,
Which flying back, his shoulders still revoke;
A summer-hoop his sweaty fingers swing,
Nor brooks a heavier stone should load his Ring.
'Tis hard, not to write Satyrs.

The system of pauses is somewhat balanced here. Yet despite the fact that the couplets are more closed, Stapylton seems not to have achieved any type of ambivalence or ambiguity of syntax. He might, for example, have been able to work in some kind of ambivalence with the lines "Which flying back, his shoulders still revoke; / A Summer-hoop his sweaty fingers swing," since the syntax of the second half of each line is parallel and since the ambivalence would have tied together two different couplets. But "A Summer-hoop" can only refer forward to "fingers"; it would simply make no sense if the words referred backward to the preceding line. Or take, for instance, any half-line segment in the passage and consider the possibility of its ambivalent movement: the ambivalence would simply not fit the sense of the poetry. In other words, there is potential for development of the technique in Stapylton, but it seems finally not to be a part of his style.
The technique is so much a part of Dryden's style that it not only enhances the complexity of the formal aspects of his verse and allows for alternate meanings, but also enhances and at times complicates the thematic implications of his argument. The two work closely together in the passage describing guardians who prostitute their wards:

Quid referam, quanta siccum jecur ardeat ira,
Cum populum gregibus comitum premat hic spoliator
Pupilli prostantis? (ll. 45-47).

(Why should I mention how much my dry liver burns with rage,
When this despoiler squeezes the people with his train of companions
Prostituting his ward?)

Dryden changes Juvenal's two and a half lines into a triplet and a couplet:

What Indignation boils within my Veins,
When perjur'd Guardians, proud with Impious Gains,
Choak up the Streets, too narrow for their Trains!
Whose Wards by want betray'd, to Crimes are led
Too foul to Name, too fulsome to be read! (ll. 67-71).

Dryden again works within Juvenal's general syntactic framework: he introduces the first line with the interrogative adjective "What" corresponding to Juvenal's "Quid," and
introduces his second line with "When" following Juvenal's "Cum." The syntactic structure of the lines is also similar: both first lines are main clauses and both second lines introduce subordinate clauses. But once Dryden has these constructions in English, he works in his own characteristically English and poetic ways with syntax. The final one and a half lines in Juvenal become four lines in Dryden which are knit together by the ambivalent workings of syntax. Reading the final couplet, for instance, according to the hierarchical arrangement of pauses, that is, reading it so that the second half of each line receives more emphasis than the first half, and the entire second line more emphasis than the first, makes it seem as though the "Crimes" are "Too foul to Name, too fulsome to be read." But if we read the couplet from a rhetorical perspective, we might assume a parallel relationship between each of the half-lines of the couplet, so that the "Wards," having been corrupted, are "Too foul to Name" while their "Crimes" are "too fulsome to be read." Another rhetorical possibility is that the rhetorical structure of the lines involves chiasmus, thus reversing the situation so that the "Crimes" are "Too foul to Name" and the "Wards" "too fulsome to be read." All possibilities fit the meter, rhetoric, and syntax, and just as important, they all fit the argument. Dryden thus not only
extends the reference of his commentary, but also syntactically relates "Wards" and "Crimes;" persons and actions, so that the two together are seen as a part of a situation which is deserving of the poet's censure.

Now take into account the verbs in the first line of the couplet, "betray'd" and "are led." Both are passive and must necessarily refer to a noun which would function as subject. The obvious possibility is "want" since we are told that the wards are "by want betray'd," but the real source of the action is of course the "Guardians" who are thus also, because of both their syntactic and thematic connection to the final couplet, "Too foul to Name, too fulsome to be read." With this connection Dryden has established an important technical and semantic relationship between the couplet and the preceding triplet, one which is further enhanced by another syntactic ambiguity. In the phrase "Whose Wards," which begins the couplet, "Whose" can refer to several nouns: "Guardians," "Streets," and "Trains." This ambiguity is particularly enhanced by the metrical structure of the lines since all three nouns come at the end of a half-line of verse and thus give a sense of closure to the triplet. Thus when the following couplet begins with "Whose Wards," we can immediately see how any of these nouns might serve as the proper antecedent.
The "Ward-Guardian" relationship is obviously the strongest: the very meaning of the words tells us this. But since the "Guardians" fill the "Streets" with their "Trains" of companions, and especially since the "Streets" would seem to be the likely place for the wards to commit their crimes, practically all of the nouns in the four lines of poetry become syntactically and thematically connected, and all are finally connected to the fifth line, "Too foul to Name, too fulsome to be read." Juvenal, then, has told us that he is outraged when he sees such despoilers prostituting their wards and crowding the people with their train of companions. But Dryden, in addition to telling us the same thing, establishes a relationship not only between his own indignation and those who cause it, but between his indignation and every level and aspect of the entire situation.

John Biddle's translation of the passage offers an interesting comparison because his careful syntactic structures leave little room for the type of ambiguity which gives such force to Dryden's verse:

What need I to relate with how great Ire
My dry, chaf'd, glooming Liver's set on Fire?
When that base Termagant doth proudly Strout,
And prease the People with his mighty Rout
Of his Retinue, that his person gards,
That rose to this vast Powre by Pilling Wards,
Whom now Ill-tempting Need doth even constraint
Their lives by Prostitution to sustain.
Notice the relative pronouns: "that his person gards, / That rose to this vast Powre by Pilling Wards, / Whom now Ill-tempting Need doth even constrain." These pronouns have well defined antecedents in the lines which precede them. The one possible exception is the pronoun which begins the line "That rose to this vast Powre by Pilling Wards." Here the reference may be either to "person" or to "his Retinue," both in the preceding line, both fitting the sense of the argument. But compare this possibility with Dryden's similar use of "Whose Wards." "Whose" can refer to three preceding nouns, "Guardians," "Streets," and "Trains," all of which receive emphasis because of their position at the end of a half-line segment. The three nouns are semantically related, and because they all belong to a single triplet, the ambiguous reference of "Whose" which begins the following couplet ties together not only triplet and couplet, but also helps syntactically connect the "Guardians," "Streets," and "Trains" with the line of verse which is rhetorically connected to the poet's final commentary: "Too foul to Name, too fulsome to be read." Nothing quite this precise happens in Biddle. Dryden achieves multiple reference with a single adjective; of Biddle's three relative pronouns, only one allows for ambiguity of reference. Only one of the possible
antecedents is positioned at the end of a half-line segment, which of course does not deny the ambiguity, but does make it less enforced by metrical structure. Beyond connecting the words "Retinue" and "person" in such a way so that we understand that both "rose to this vast Powre by Pilling Wards," the ambiguity suggests little else. In Dryden we have a syntactic and semantic connection between "Guardians," "Streets," "Trains," the "Wards" they corrupt, the "Crimes" to which the wards are inevitably led, and the final commentary of the poet giving vent to his indignation at the entire situation. In Biddle we have a possible syntactic and semantic relationship between "Retinue" and "person," a relationship supported by an ambiguity which we have at least some reason to doubt if only because the two other relative pronouns in the passage have clearly defined antecedents. Practically everything works together in Dryden: we can sense in his verse what Wimsatt calls the "interactive energies" of the words. Compared to Biddle's verse, Dryden's is more compact, more tightly woven in terms of meter and rhetoric, and certainly more suggestive of syntactic complexity.
Syntactic ambivalence and ambiguity in the Crispinus passage work together with the metrics and rhetoric of the couplet verse so that they enhance the complexity of Dryden's poetic technique and meaning. In the passage about the Guardians it is possible to see how this technique and especially the ways that syntax contributes to it account for Dryden's complexity of perspective. Let me offer a further example of how Dryden merges complexity of technique and meaning, this time in a single couplet. The couplet is the last in a brief passage about recognized murderers who are allowed to ride triumphantly throughout town. Juvenal cautions the reader:

Cum veniet contra, digito compesce labellum:
Accusator erit, qui verbum dixerit, hic est (ll. 160-61).

(When he will come face to face, put your finger to your lip:
He will be an informer, who will say the word, it is he.)

Dryden translates:

Be silent, and beware if such you see;
'Tis Defamation but to say, That's He! (ll. 243-44).

First simply look at the metrical structure of the couplet. Both lines have a clear mid-line pause. In the first,
the pause follows "beware": syntax and sound hold each half-line together ("Be silent and beware" are emphatic verb forms, and "if such you see" functions as a subordinate clause). In the second line the pause follows "Defamation" and thus falls exactly in the middle of the line, after the first five syllables. Notice the parallel syntax of the two lines: the first half of each line contains a main clause, the second half a subordinate clause. This well defined metrical and syntactical structure of the couplet works together with two instances of syntactic ambivalence: the subordinate clause "if such you see" in the first line can refer to the main clause which precedes it (be silent and beware if such you see), and forward to the main clause which follows it (if such you see, it is defamation, merely because you see it), and also forward to the entire second line (if such you see, it is defamation if you say 'that's he'). And in a similar way, the main clause of the second line, "'Tis Defamation," can refer to the subordinate clause in the first line (it is defamation if you see), and forward to the subordinate clause in the second line (it is defamation but to say 'that's he'). As a result of the way ambivalent syntax works together with the metrical and parallel structure of the couplet, Dryden is able to expand Juvenal's single
statement into a complex statement which suggests several meanings: the obvious meaning and the one which follows Juvenal is that if you "say, That's He," your words will be "Defamation," but another possibility is that if you merely "see," then the fact that you even recognize the murderers is "Defamation," and yet a third possibility is that what you actually "see" is "Defamation" itself, a meaning which gets at the heart of the entire passage though it is never explicitly stated.

Holyday's translation affords a notable contrast:

If he come, lay thy finger o're thy lips,
Th' informer catches the least word that slips.

The language is close to the original, and as translation it works well enough. But it fails as verse: the couplet lacks the metrical, rhetorical, and syntactic precision that characterizes Dryden's. Where Dryden is able to achieve ambiguity by working within the syntactic structure of two sets of parallel clauses, Holyday offers only one clause in each line and then uses only the rhyme words to establish any parallel relationship between the two lines. Stapylton, who follows Holyday's rhymes, moves closer to the syntactic structure of Dryden's couplet, but is still unable to make his syntax and couplet form work together:
Yes, meeting Him, lay finger on thy lip:  
'Tis slander, if but the words, That's He, slip.

Beginning the second line with "'Tis slander" might have allowed Stapylton to achieve the kind of ambiguity Dryden offers when he begins his second line with "'Tis Defamation," but the metrics of Stapylton's line fail to enforce any ambivalence. "'Tis slander" has only three syllables and only one stress, not enough to support a half-line as Dryden's "'Tis Defamation" can do. We are thus forced to extend the syntax after "'Tis slander" at least until the mid-line pause, but the line really offers no such pause. Like Holyday, Stapylton is finally unable to achieve a relationship between meter and syntax. And though his second line, like Dryden's, consists of a main clause and a subordinate clause, because the line lacks precise metrical structure the clauses can have no parallel relationship with the phrase and main clause of the preceding line. The key to having syntactic ambivalence work is to have it work together with meter and rhetoric. And this kind of fusion of technique is something only Dryden could accomplish, and then in turn use for his thematic purposes.
What is finally interesting about Dryden's use of syntax is the variety of manipulation he is able to achieve in passage after passage: ambivalence and ambiguity work in different ways and suit different technical and thematic needs in each segment of poetry. I want to offer a final close examination of how syntactic ambiguity functions in several lines of an extended passage of verse, and thus shift the emphasis from strict comparative stylistics to a fuller examination of how this technique becomes an essential aspect of the style of the poetry Dryden creates in his translation. In the passage, Juvenal describes how the new wealthy class of people idly spend their day while the true nobility are forced to live in poverty:

Ispe dies pulchro distinguishitur ordine rerum. Sportula, deinde forum, Jurisique peritus Apollo, Atque triumphales, inter quas ausus habere Nescio quis titulos AEgyptius, atque Arabarches, Cujus ad effigiem non tantum mejere fas est. Vestibulis abeunt veteres, lassique clientes, Votaque deponunt; quamquam longissima coenae Spes homini: caules miseris, atque ignis emendus

(11. 127-134).

(The day itself is distinguished by a fine order of business. The dole, then the court, and Apollo experienced in the law, and the triumphal statues, among which an Egyptian and a customs officer and I know not who else, daring to have his titles,
on whose statue one is allowed not only to urinate. The old clients leave the entrance wearied and lay aside their wishes; though the hope of dinner is the longest for man: a cabbage and a fire have to be begged by these wretches.)

Dryden translates:

Such fine Employments our whole days divide:
The Salutations of the Morning-tide
Call up the Sun; those ended, to the Hall
We wait the Patron, hear the Lawyers baul,
Then to the Statues; where amidst the Race
Of Conqu'ring Rome, some Arab shews his Face
Inscrib'd with Titles, and profanes the place,
Fit to be piss'd against, and somewhat more.
The Great Man, home conducted, shuts his door;
Old Clients, weary'd out with fruitless care,
Dismiss their hopes of eating, and despair;
Though much against the grain, forc'd to retire,
Buy Roots for Supper, and provide a Fire (11. 191-203).

The beginning of the passage is notably balanced: the first line introduces the subject of the "whole day"; the next line and a half describe the "Morning-tide"; and the following half-line and line describe the evening. "Then to the Statues" begins a triplet which carries on the narrative sequence and describes how some Arab's statue has profaned the area where only the statues of famous Romans were previously displayed. Thus the subject matter of the first half of the passage is neatly ordered within
a framework of half-lines, lines, couplets, and a triplet. Notice too that the syntax is well defined: the main clauses and the subordinate clause can be easily identified, and the subjects and verbs of each are fairly obvious. But with the end of the triplet, the metrical and syntactic situation changes. The first line of the next couplet, "Fit to be piss'd against, and somewhat more," seems to belong to the syntax of the preceding triplet: both the punctuation of Dryden's translation and the syntax of the original Juvenal suggest that it is the Arab's statue which is "Fit to be piss'd against." Yet though this line syntactically connects triplet and couplet, it is metrically and rhetorically ambivalent. For instance, we must extend the syntax of the triplet into the first line of the couplet, and thus upset the hierarchy of pauses since we are forced to weaken the strong pause which should come at the end of the triplet and put this strong pause instead at the end of the first line of the couplet. The rhetoric of the line is in turn upset because this syntactically imposed system of pauses is not enforced by rhyme: ". . . some Arab shews his Face / Inscrib'd with Titles, and profanes the place, / Fit to be piss'd against, and somewhat more." Because syntax forces us to put the strongest pause at the end of the first line of the couplet, and because it upsets the rhyme pattern, syntax seems to
be working counter to meter and rhetoric. But if syntax is also functioning ambivalently, then all three aspects of technique may be working together. Suppose, then, that the line "Fit to be piss'd against, and somewhat more" also refers forward to "The Great Man" (the great man, degraded by this state of affairs, is fit to be pissed against). Such a reading would allow Dryden to temporarily ignore traditional rules about meter and rhetoric in order to make a transition from triplet to couplet, and then allow him to reestablish the fusion of syntax, meter, and rhetoric in the ensuing couplet: "Fit to be piss'd against, and somewhat more. / The Great Man, home-conducted, shuts his door." In terms of the subject matter, the ambivalence also allows him to make a transition from the first half of the passage which describes how this wealthy class spends its day, to the second half which focuses on great men and old clients who must live in poverty. The two main topics of discussion thus turn on the single syntactically ambivalent line.

Just as this line can refer both backward and forward, so the following line beginning with "The Great Man" can either refer backward to close the couplet, or forward to a new couplet with which it has more in common syntactically and thematically: "The Great Man, home-
conducted, shuts his door; / Old Clients, weary'd out with fruitless care, / Dismiss their hopes of eating, and despair." Both the line and the couplet follow the syntactic pattern of subject—participle phrase—verb—object, and both describe the situation of individuals who have been wrongfully displaced by the rich people of the town. Even the word "their" in the second line of the couplet is ambivalent because of its double reference to the "Great Man" and "Old Clients," and thus it also enforces the tendency to link these two preceding lines together despite the fact that each belongs to a different couplet. On a technical level, then, syntax continues to work both with and against the metrical pauses and rhetorical parallels of the lines. On a semantic level, the syntax allows us to view the "Great Man" and "Old Clients" as not only sullen and despairing, but also degraded in the same way that the statues of the great Romans have been degraded by the presence of the Arab.

Syntax continues to function on both a technical and semantic level throughout the remainder of the passage. We have already seen how Dryden connects the line "The Great Man, home-conducted, shuts his door" with the couplet "Old Clients, weary'd out with fruitless care, / Dismiss their hopes of eating, and despair." He also syntactically
connects the final line of this couplet with the following couplet by allowing the words "and despair" to function ambivalently: the words can refer backward (the great man and old clients dismiss their hopes of eating and despair) and forward (the great man and old clients despair, though it is much against their grain to despair). In establishing this ambivalence, Dryden again temporarily upsets meter and rhetoric by syntactically connecting two lines from different couplets: the old clients "Dismiss their hopes of eating, and despair; / Though much against the grain. . . ." But notice that the first half of this following line may also be syntactically ambivalent: it can refer backward (they despair, though it is much against their grain to despair) and forward (they are forced to retire, though it is much against their grain to be forced to retire). Again, syntax has arched the metrical and rhetorical limits of the closed couplet, but when we continue to extend the syntax into the final line of the passage, we can see how Dryden then reestablishes the fusion of syntax, meter, and rhetoric. We now read the half-line "Though much against the grain" as referring forward not only to the half-line "forc'd to retire," but also forward to the entire last line of the couplet, "Buy Roots for Supper, and provide a Fire" (they are forced to
retire, to buy roots for supper, and to provide a fire, though it is much against their grain to do these lowly tasks). With this reading we return to the conventional couplet structure. The normal arrangement of pauses and the rhyme finally fit into place, but only after ambivalent syntax has allowed us to alter our view of their technically proper function in the verse and, as a result, enlarge our perspective on the entire situation Dryden describes: the Arab, the great man, and the old clients are all "Fit to be piss'd against"; the great man and the old clients "Dismiss their hopes of eating, and despair"; they also "despair" though it is "much against the grain" to despair; they are finally "forc'd to retire," but it is also "much against the grain" that they are forced to retire; they are "forc'd" to "Buy Roots for Supper, and provide a Fire," but it is also "much against the grain" for them to perform these tasks. Dryden has made Juvenal's straightforward description into a multi-level commentary on the results of the intrusion of this new wealthy class.

When translating words it was necessary for Dryden to work within the semantic framework of Juvenal's satire, but in putting together the component parts of his own couplet
verse, he necessarily used syntax in ways that suited his verse form. As critics who have closely analyzed the translations recognize, it is Dryden's style, his poetic technique, which distinguishes the complexity of his translation from the straightforward diatribe of the original: he had indeed made Juvenal "more sounding" than he was before in English or Latin. But analysis of Dryden's verse style has conventionally relied on discussion of meter and rhetoric. The advantage of recognizing the role syntax plays in shaping the complexity of technique and meaning is that it will allow us to expand our notion of Dryden's verse style. And when we observe these same kinds of syntactic ambiguity at work in Dryden's own best original verse, it will be possible to deal with an aspect of style which offers a new perspective not only on the interrelationship of technique and meaning, but on the ways in which technique can shape a variety of meanings. In translating Juvenal, Dryden preserved the satire's central meaning, but at the same time--by allowing for other syntactic options--refined, extended, and modified this meaning. The ambiguity of syntax, to use Quinn's terminology, "exercises the reader," a process that defines the relationship between Dryden and his audience in Absalom and Achitophel.
Notes to Chapter II


2 A Discourse, p. 111. Also see "Preface" to Ovid's Epistles, pp. 114-19.

3 "Preface" to Ovid's Epistles, p. 118.

4 A Discourse, p. 113.


6 "Juvenal and Restoration Modes of Translation," MLR, 68 (1973), 483.


8 J. Bottkol notes that Dryden referred to Holyday and Stapylton for the Juvenal translations and often borrowed rhymes and phrases from them ("Dryden's Latin Scholarship," p. 243, n. 10). Chambers and Frost, in their commentary on the Juvenal and Persius translations, agree that though Dryden probably read Shadwell's translation of Juvenal's tenth satire and Oldham's imitation of Juvenal's third, Dryden mentions only Holyday and Stapylton in his Discourse, and seems to rely on them mainly for his rhymes. But it is questionable, I think, whether the editors are correct in suggesting that Dryden also works "within the rhetorical and syntactic structures those rhymes imply and impose" (Works, IV, pp. 593-94).
In their "Notes" to Dryden's translation of Juvenal's first satire, the editors refer selectively to the heroic couplet translations by Holyday, Stapylton, John Bidle, and Thomas Wood for purposes of comparison with Dryden's translation. My references are to: Barten Holyday, Decimus Junius Juvenalis, and Aulus Persius Flaccus Translated and Illustrated (Oxford, 1673); Sir Robert Stapylton, Juvenal's Sixteen Satyrs or A Survey of the Manners and Actions of Mankind (London, 1673); John Bidle, Virgil's Bucolicks Englished, Whereunto is added the two first Satyrs of Juvenal (London, 1634); Thomas Wood, Juvenalis Redivivus, or The First Satyr of Juvenal taught to speak English (1683).


"Argument of the First Satyr," in Works, IV, p. 91. All references to Dryden's translation of the first satire and to the original Juvenal are from this edition, pp. 92-109, and line numbers will be noted parenthetically in the text. For information on the editions of Juvenal which were available to Dryden, see the editors' "Commentary," pp. 587-88.

See William Bowman Piper, The Heroic Couplet, for a discussion of the tradition of the "metrical organization of the closed couplet" (pp. 6-10), and of the ways which meter works with rhetoric (pp. 10-17) and with syntax (pp. 17-19).
It is probably safer to follow pauses enforced by meter and rhetoric rather than punctuation. R.C. Bald explains the general problem: "... most of the conventions of English spelling and punctuation are the creation of printers and compositors, especially in the seventeenth century. Most authors, provided their words and sense have been accurately produced, have been content to have current printers' usage superimposed upon their writings" ("Editorial Problems--A Preliminary Survey," Studies in Bibliography, 3 (1950-51), 5). The editors of the California edition of Dryden's works account for all the inconsistencies in punctuation which are found in the various manuscripts and printings (see "Textual Notes" in Works, IV, pp. 779-81). Although the argument has not been advanced, punctuation in couplet verse seems generally to enforce the conventional hierarchy of pauses. One might notice that this is the case in the Crispinus passage.

Seven Types of Ambiguity, p. 75.
Chapter III  Absalom and Achitophel: Poet and Audience

"Si Propius stes / Te Capiet Magis"
(The nearer you stand, the more it will seize you)

There is a basic argument to Absalom and Achitophel: the poem defends the king, describes the factions of the English people, and mockingly criticizes the king's enemies. The argument seems simple because it is clear who is on what side. The verse, however, is complex: Arthur Hoffman's study of the poem's imagery, Alan Roper's investigation of its use of analogy, Earl Miner's study of its metaphor, Paul Ramsey's analysis of its versification—all these critical works testify to Dryden's expertise in the formal aspects of his verse.\(^1\) The poem, then, seems to be simple in argument and complex in technique. As Ramsey writes: "The bedrock method of satire and panegyric, underlying all the range and clustering of brilliant technique, is simply statement and argument. How do we know that Jonas is wicked and Shimei more so? Because the poem says so. . . . How are we to learn that the King is right? The narrator and the King argue that he is."\(^2\)
An investigation into the role syntax plays in *Absalom and Achitophel* can, in one sense, complement this kind of criticism by presenting further evidence of complexity of technique. But it can also show that the argument of the poem, or at least the suggestive power of the statements contained within the poem, is not as simple as it seems. I want to suggest that *Absalom and Achitophel* is a poem that presents not a single argument but multiple arguments, and that it does so for the very reason that it is a political poem. Syntactic structures, reinforced by the meter and rhetoric of the verse, isolate and define these arguments, and thus allow for a variety of perspectives which are continually shaped by the way Dryden directs our responses to them. In other words, the poem presents its reader with a variety of political options which are defined by the ambiguous syntax of the verse. I want to suggest further that the reason Dryden offers multiple arguments in the poem is that he is more concerned with the process of convincing his audience of his position than he is with straightforwardly telling them what he thinks. By allowing for a variety of perspectives on a situation, Dryden can attract a variety of responses: he thus has the advantage of being able to address a wider audience. Dryden convinces his reader not by what he says, but by how he says it.
Political poetry involves a complex relationship between poet and audience. That Dryden was, even in his non-political verse, a very political poet, one acutely aware of the public quality of his address, is now commonly recognized. Reuben Brower was one of the first to note that Dryden's affirmation of "the public role of the poet, the Graeco-Roman conception of the poet as the voice of a society" constituted one of Dryden's major contributions, a notion more recently emphasized by George McFadden in his book *Dryden: The Public Writer.*

The technical structure of the couplet especially suited this purpose: William Piper has explained how the closed couplet "was primarily a medium for public discourse. . . . Its persistent order allowed a poet to define issues, to balance arguments, and, in the process, to give the impression of a clear and balanced mind. Its interior flexibility and its exterior movement allowed him, on the one hand, to respond to the details, to the individual aspects and elements, of his discourse and, on the other hand, to extend his attention so as to comprehend the full range of its complexities. . . ." In *Absalom and Achitophel*, syntax forces us to focus on the details, these individual aspects and elements of the verse. They are what make the poem political. The detailed perspectives enforced by syntax provide us with
a variety of options which serve specific political purposes. True that Dryden supports the king and opposes Shaftesbury. But his treatment of the king is at times ambivalent, and his characterization of Achitophel includes notable praise for the man. What we have to account for is the presence of this kind of ambivalent treatment of character in a poem which seems, in terms of the political position which it extolls, to be neither ambivalent nor ambiguous.

Take for example the portrait of Zimri which Dryden himself described as "in my Opinion, worth the whole Poem. . . ." The passage is an excellent example of what Dryden means when he says that his verse "Tickles even while it Hurts." The relationship between poet and audience, including in this case that between Dryden and Buckingham, is complicated by the syntactic structure of the verse which allows for multiple perspectives and thus a variety of responses. The characterization begins:

A man so various, that he seem'd to be
Not one, but all Mankind's Epitome.
Stiff in Opinions, always in the wrong;
Was every thing by starts, and nothing long:
But in the course of one revolving Moon,
Was Chymist, Fidler, States-Man, and Buffoon. . .

(11. 545-50).

The line "Not one, but all Mankind's Epitome" is syntactically ambiguous. The words "Not one, but all," which constitute
a metrically defined half-line unit of verse, can be read as modifying "Mankind's Epitome," suggesting that Zimri is not simply one but all mankind's epitome. Another syntactic possibility, however, is that the words "Mankind's Epitome," which constitute the remaining half-line unit, function in apposition to the preceding half-line, "Not one, but all," where the words "one" and "all" now function as pronouns rather than adjectives. Here the implication is that Zimri's various nature makes him seem to be "not one" man, "but all" men, and as such, he is the epitome of mankind. The effect of this ambiguity is to allow for two slightly different readings of the couplet: we can either view Zimri as a man so various that that he seems to be mankind's epitome, or a man so various that he seems to be no man at all. And by extension, each of these readings is shaped by one of the two couplets which follow. When we read "Stiff in Opinions, always in the wrong," the general nature of the description makes it seem as though we are reading about the general epitome of mankind; but when we go on to read the specific roles Zimri assumes, "Was Chymist, Fidler, States-Man, and Buffoon," then we are back with the more specific picture of Zimri as being not one man but all particular men. Syntactic ambiguity thus allows us to view Buckingham in both general and
particular contexts, and as a result, the commentary which follows that initial couplet can refer both to the particular man and the general nature of mankind. Notice how several other perspectives are enforced: we can view Zimri as being like no man ("Not one"), like all men ("but all"), and in a possibly different sense, like the very epitome of mankind. It is as if Buckingham's nature is so closely related to his own human nature and the very nature of mankind, that our response to him is finally dependent on our response to his own humanness, and by extension, our humanness.

The question, then, is how does syntactic ambiguity, which allows for a variety of perspectives on the character of Buckingham, affect our response. And the answer is that each syntactic option allows for a different response: in doing so, it addresses different elements of the audience. Dryden understood this process quite well. In his prefatory comments "To the Reader" he makes clear that he is drawing "his Pen for one Party," but after emphasizing the extremes of, as he calls them, "Wit and Fool," "Whig and Tory," and "Knave and Ass," he concedes: "Yet if a Poem have a Genius, it will force its own reception in the World. For there's a sweetness in good Verse, which Tickles even while it Hurts: And, no man can be heartily angry with him, who pleases him against his will."\(^6\) As
syntax here allows for multiple perspectives, the resulting discriminations in meaning are of the type that might have pleased Buckingham "against his will." Dryden, on a different occasion, had written of the Zimri portrait: "'Tis not bloody, but 'tis ridiculous enough. And he for whom it was intended, was too witty to resent it as an injury. If I had rail'd, I might have suffered for it justly: But I managed my own Work more happily, perhaps more dextrously." What Dryden is really discussing here is response: the way in which he "dextrously" handles the verse has made it possible for him to please Buckingham against his will. And even the more general audience can respond in this way: just as Buckingham can be pleased against his will, so can those who sympathize with him. In allowing for this range of response, Dryden has made his verse suit his political purposes—not straightforwardly to state his position, but to articulate it in such a way that the act of persuasion becomes the process of accommodating the diverse aspects of his audience.

Here the political purposes are somewhat social: they involve responses to character. In the final lines of the Zimri portrait we can see how Dryden works with responses to a distinctly political situation:
In squandering Wealth was his peculiar Art:
Nothing went unrewarded, but Desert.
Beggar'd by Fools, whom still he found too late:
He had his Jest, and they had his Estate.
He bought himself from Court, then sought Relief
By forming Parties, but could ne'ere be chief:
For, spite of him, the weight of Business fell
On Absalom and wise Achitophel:
Thus, wicked but in will, of means bereft,
He left not Faction, but of that was left (11. 559-68).

The last couplet, which concludes the portrait, can evoke
a variety of perspectives which allow for different
responses to the general political situation and Buckingham's
role in it. The half-line "of means bereft" can have two
references and thus two meanings. It can refer to the
preceding couplets which relate how Zimri was constantly
"squandering" his wealth, thus suggesting that in terms of
money he is now "of means bereft." The half-line, however,
can also refer to the preceding half-line, "Thus, wicked
but in will," where the meaning is altered by the
juxtaposition of "in will" and "of means": now we understand
that although Zimri is wicked in his will, his intentions,
he is bereft of any wickedness in his means or actions.
What we end up with are two different possible responses
to the line, each underscored by the syntactic reference of
the half-line "of means bereft." Now notice how each
response might appeal to a different element of the audience,
and how Dryden can bring both responses to bear on the meaning of the final line of the couplet. Those opposed to Buckingham can see him as wicked in his will and bereft of money, and view him as being "left" by his own "Faction" for either or both of these reasons. But Buckingham's supporters can at least find solace in Dryden's suggestion that Buckingham is not wicked enough for his "Faction" since he is finally bereft of any wickedness in his actions. The syntactic ambivalence, then, has enabled Dryden to accommodate two diverse elements of his audience, and to ingratiate himself with even the members of the opposition. Dryden, in portraying Zimri, is not stating a position, but allowing for as much common ground as possible.

How Dryden works with the Zimri portrait, the effects he achieves and the responses he allows for, is characteristic of the methods he uses throughout the poem. But these effects and responses are finally shaped by the specific political purposes relevant to each political subject. The syntactic options in the opening lines on the king, for instance, work in ways different from those used in the characterization of the various factions of the English people, and these in turn are different from those used in the description of Absalom, Achitophel, and the other rebels. In each case Dryden deals with different
individuals and circumstances, and as a result, with different possible responses to those individuals and situations. The process is a complex one, where syntactic options must allow for careful discriminations that evoke responses which lead in specific directions. And the process becomes even more complicated when we have to deal not merely with what Dryden as poet says about characters, but with what he has the characters themselves say in their speeches. I want to deal individually with each of these subjects and attempt to isolate the various options made possible by syntax in each case. Once this is done, it becomes clear how Dryden first allows for a variety of responses, and then forces discriminations in meaning which direct these responses, a process that gives shape to what has conventionally been called the "argument" of the poem, and defines the relationship between Dryden and his audience.

Part i. The King

Most criticism of Absalom and Achitophel begins with an analysis of the poem's opening lines on the king, and attempts to deal with the witty but sometimes disturbing implications of the verse:
In pious times, e'r Priest-craft did begin,
Before Polygamy was made a sin;
When man, on many, multiply'd his kind,
E'r one to one was, cursedly, confind:
When Nature prompted, and no law deny'd
Promiscuous use of Concubine and Bride;
Then, Israel's Monarch, after Heaven's own heart,
His vigorous warmth did, variously, impart
To Wives and Slaves: And, wide as his Command,
Scatter'd his Maker's Image through the Land
(11. 1-10).

The poem, remember, is a party poem: Dryden is supposedly
on the side of the king and the conventional social and
political order. But if this is the case, then several
questions arise. Why, for instance, is there reference
to "Priest-craft," or to the times existing before
"Priest-craft" as "pious"? And why does a poem in support
of the king begin with an extended discussion of his
promiscuity? These kinds of questions, here suggested by
the diction, imagery, and metaphor of the verse, are not
easy to explain in terms of the strict political position
which the poem sets forth, and critics, recognizing this
fact, have tried to come to grips with such questions in
a variety of ways. Bernard Schilling interprets the lines
in terms of Dryden's conservative political philosophy and
emphasizes that "illegitimacy, no matter how explained or
excused, is the first incontrovertible fact. . . .
Monmouth is not the legitimate heir and nothing under the
sun can make him so." As for the matter of the king's "scandalous immorality," Schilling says the "question was never more neatly begged, nor was it ever more clearly suggested that the question is in fact pointless and should never be raised in the first place. Polygamy was quite allowable in the Old Testament, and the best way to make it allowable now is to pretend that we are discussing something which took place in those days." But all critics have not been content with begging the question, and two particular ways of viewing what seems to be Dryden's ambivalent treatment of the king have emerged in the criticism.

The first calls attention to the religious analogy. Earl Miner suggests that one way of reading the lines is to keep them in the context of "the doctrine of Christian liberty, the view that Christ freed man from the earlier rigor of the Law" so that Charles is seen as merely "exercising his Christian liberty in scattering 'his Maker's image thro' the land.'" Steven Zwicker in his study of the typology of the poem argues that the "witty juxtaposition of divine and human fertility" does not impair the typological relationship between Charles, David, and God: "There is, as students of the poem have fully recognized, some irony at work in seeing God's abundant creation reflected in the king's sexual prodigality,"
but the irony does not reduce the stature of the king . . . throughout the poem Charles reflects the godhead. . . ."¹¹ Thomas Maresca suggests that "Dryden depicts David's sexuality as analogous to God's own creativity" and in doing so distinguishes between "the dominion of law, as exemplified by the Mosaic code, and the dominion of grace, as established by the crucifixion of Christ. . . . David lives under the dominion of grace, in a kind of golden world where what nature prompts is after God's own heart: he embodies the conception of the divinely appointed king to whom law is irrelevant, who founds his dominion in God's will, in grace, and in his literal and metaphoric paternity of his people."¹² K. E. Robinson offers yet a different perspective on this kind of interpretation of the opening lines. He argues that Dryden is actually being critical of Charles at the beginning of the poem, that the implications of the lines are "morally ambivalent," but only to prepare the way for Dryden's "rehabilitation of Charles as the regenerated David at the end of the poem" where the king has finally "contained his natural impulses."¹³

Several critics have suggested an alternative way of reading the lines, one which emphasizes the wit and the resulting complexity of tone which the verse necessitates. Ian Jack points out that for Dryden to present his case clearly, he had to emphasize the illegitimacy of Monmouth,
but that for Dryden to state this "in a straightforwardly elevated idiom would have been to invite ridicule. By a masterly stroke Dryden passes the matter off wittily. Instead of incontinence he attributes to the King the venerable Old Testament habit of polygamy. Enlisting anti-clerical feeling by the way, he gains his purpose with a suave audacity."¹⁴ MacDonald Emslie suggests that the witty language of these lines was also characteristic of the Restoration gentleman: "... in an 'E'r one to one was, cursedly, confind' we are not far from the actual turns of such a gentleman's speech as we find it epitomized in the prose of contemporary comedies. The line in its context shows something of the common Dryden device of the 'urbane descent', where the level of the language falls from the formality that is usual in his couplet medium to the colloquial-urbane, the speaking voice of the Restoration Town-gentleman--a note the non-conformist parson could not catch."¹⁵ In emphasizing this kind of wit in the poem's opening lines, such criticism necessarily points to Dryden's method of dealing with a subject rather than with the actual nature of his political or religious concerns. Implicit in Emslie's statement that Dryden was adopting the language of the Restoration gentleman, for instance, is the reason for Dryden's doing so--his attempt to ingratiate himself with the town
gentleman. I would take the argument further and suggest that Dryden purposely wants to use his verse to ingratiate himself with his audience: in these opening lines he wants to praise the king, but he also wants to undercut, even if only wittily, this praise, because he knows that various elements of society approve and censure Charles' behavior. Earl Miner describes the situation well when he observes that Dryden "obviously enjoys his blandly wicked wit and manages to present the worst as something unusually admirable. The tone is impossible to describe, because it turns upon Dryden's attitude toward Charles, David, and a whole complex of ideas." But though Dryden's tone is complex, I think it can be accounted for if we approach it in terms of the audience response he tries to attract. If Dryden sets forth "a whole complex of ideas" on the subject, then he does so for good reason.

Here is where a focus on syntactic construction in the verse can help explain the ambivalent treatment of character and the resulting complexity of tone. The interplay of metrical and syntactic structure forces discriminations in meaning similar to those suggested by the conventional aspects of the verse, discriminations which can be described in terms of the variety of responses Dryden tries to attract. Notice the system of pauses in these couplets:
In pious times, / e'r Priest-craft did begin,
Before Polygamy / was made a sin;
When man, on many, / multiply'd his kind,
E'r one to one / was, cursedly, confind. . . .

The final half-line of each couplet, "was made a sin"
and "was, cursedly, confind," supplies the moralistic
commentary. Passive verb constructions make these half-
lines syntactically parallel, and the traditional metrical
structure which places the strongest emphasis on the
final half-line segment of each couplet calls attention
to these units. Syntactically and metrically, then,
Dryden has set off the moralistic commentary from the
objective narration. This kind of structure makes it
possible to read the couplets in two different ways. We
can, on the one hand, read the beginning of each second
line as a syntactic extension of the preceding line.
For instance, "Before Polygamy" becomes another in a
series of prepositional phrases which are each defined by
a half-line segment: "In pious times, e'r Priest-craft
did begin, / Before Polygamy. . . ." Reading the line and
a half in this way causes us to view the pious times as
those which existed before polygamy existed, a notion
which obviously suits an orthodox and conventional meaning
attached to the word "pious." Or in the case of the second
couplet, the half-line "E'r one to one" becomes a separate phrase helping to define the period of time under discussion: "When man, on many, multiply'd his kind, / E'r one to one" ever existed. Of course we read and hear these syntactic sequences only before the completion of each final line of the couplets demands a different syntactic construction. We then discover that the poet is not defining "pious times" as those which existed "Before Polygamy," but ironically as those which existed "Before Polygamy was made a sin," and we discover in a similar way that the time "When man, on many, multiply'd his kind" was not simply the time "E'r one to one" existed, that is, the time before marriage existed, but rather the time "E'r one to one was, cursedly, confind."

An obvious effect Dryden achieves with this metrical and syntactic interplay is irony: the second half of each final line undercuts the anticipated syntactic construction and objective narrative tone of the preceding line and a half. But the effect is more than ironical: it forces a discrimination between the moralistic commentary and the objective narration in such a way that Dryden is able to make two very different points with what seems like only one statement. A closer look at the remainder of these opening lines will help clarify the nature of these discriminations:
When Nature prompted, and no law deny'd
Promiscuous use of Concubine and Bride;
Then, Israel's Monarch, after Heaven's own heart,
His vigorous warmth did, variously, impart
To Wives and Slaves: And, wide as his Command,
Scatter'd his Maker's Image through the Land.

Earl Miner has noted what he calls "a brilliant subdued
double parallelism with contrast of ideas" in the first
couplet of this passage where there is a relationship
between "Nature" and "law," and "Concubine" and "Bride,"
and also between "Nature" and "Concubine," and "law" and
"Bride." But the interplay of metrical and syntactic
construction suggests a slightly different parallelism.
When emphasizing the subject matter of half-line segments,
we have a relationship between what "Nature prompted" and
"Promiscuous use," and between what "no law deny'd" and
both "Concubine and Bride." The discrimination in
meaning is finely drawn: conventional rhetoric suggests
that we pair "Nature" with "Concubine" and "law" with
"Bride," while meter and syntax suggest that we pair
"Nature" with "Promiscuous use" and "law" with both
"Concubine and Bride." Each reading suggests a different
perspective on the situation, and thus accommodates a
different response. One reading makes it sound as if
having a concubine is natural while having a wife is legal;
the other makes it sound as if being promiscuous is natural
while having a concubine and bride is legal. This second reading doubles the meaning of the half-line "Promiscuous use": what nature prompts and no law denies is the "Promiscuous use" of concubine and bride. One may, in other words, still have them; he simply cannot make promiscuous use of them. Or perhaps he cannot make promiscuous use of both of them, being allowed such use of only one. Of course all of these understandings of what the verse says fit the general sense of the statement, but the specific connotations which each suggests nicely complicate the whole issue, so that when we do extend our thoughts to Charles and his many mistresses, we as readers can entertain various ideas about what prompts his behavior, what makes him promiscuous, and what kinds of social and legal structures support his relationships with concubine and bride. And each of these options makes room for the response of different readers, ranging from the town gentleman who might hold Hobbesian notions of natural behavior, to the puritan who fervently supports the law which has forbidden this kind of behavior.

In the final two couplets of the passage the connotations of the verse become increasingly complicated, and again in ways which suggest various possible perspectives on the situation. When, for instance, we read the couplet, "Then Israel's Monarch, after Heaven's own heart, / His vigorous warmth
did, variously, impart," we might initially understand the half-line "His vigorous warmth" to refer to "Heaven's own heart," that is, to God, rather than to "Israel's Monarch." Dryden obviously intended to emphasize this relationship between David and God, as he does here for the first time in the poem. In this sense the ambiguous reference of the half-line "His vigorous warmth" only serves to enhance the analogy because we can associate the "warmth" with both David and God. But the syntactic ambivalence involves more than this simple comparison. Although the "warmth" can be seen as extending from both subjects, the connotations attached to the actions of either of them are quite different: one involves a very general type of generosity; the other involves a particular type of sexual generosity. Instead of stressing what the two have in common, as the analogy does, syntactic ambivalence allows us to view the situation either way, at least momentarily, so that we can hold two different perspectives. Analogy seems to simplify the verse by relating the two subjects and the two types of action, and as a result makes the sexual behavior of "Israel's Monarch" more acceptable because it is in some ways like "Heaven's own heart." But syntax complicates the verse by separating the two, and stressing the different nature of each side
of the analogy. Again, these two options make room for different readers, those who prefer to think of the king's behavior in terms of God's generosity, and those who prefer, for one reason or another, to think of it in a more secular way.

This distinction is enhanced as we go on to read the beginning of the final couplet in which the analogy is further modified. Here syntax complicates the meter, and both in turn complicate the argument. Because of the traditional metrical structure of the closed couplet, we necessarily pause at the end of the line "His vigorous warmth did, variously, impart," assuming that both the metrical and syntactic sequence have come to an end with the closure of the couplet. But when we read the first half-line of the following couplet, "To Wives and Slaves," we realize that Dryden has extended the syntax beyond the metrical structure. As a result we are back again into the context of only one side of the analogy, and again through a manipulation of syntax Dryden has the verse work either way: one reading, enforced by the system of pauses which demands a strong break at the end of the couplet, suggests the general, godlike nature of the king's "vigorous warmth"; the other reading, necessitated by the extension of the couplet's syntax, suggests the
more particular nature of the king's sexual behavior: "His vigorous warmth did, variously, impart / To Wives and Slaves." And when we think of Charles, he too can have it either way: he can be viewed in terms of his godlike generosity, and in terms of his special generosity with women. The remainder of the passage, "And wide as his Command, / Scatter'd his Makers Image through the Land," enforces each perspective through its diction. "Scatter'd," as one critic has noted, "takes on ribald sexual overtones as part of the imagery of sowing and reaping which provided the century with a rich source of bawdy." But the fact that Charles is scattering "his Maker's Image," and that when we read "wide as his Command" the reference may be to either the king's or God's "Command," brings us back to the David-God analogy. In the final analysis we can view Charles in terms of God's generosity, in terms of David's godlike generosity, or in terms of David's sexual generosity, because the syntactic construction of the verse isolates all these particular connotations. Dryden's picture of the king, then, is complex because he allows for a variety of perspectives on the nature of the "times" in which the king lives, the nature of his motivations, and the nature of his actions. The variety of responses which the verse can attract suit Dryden's political aims. For those who already sympathize with Charles, the verse is
witty enough so that no damage is done to the king's cause or person. But for those not totally committed to the king's position, or as Dryden puts it in his prefatory remarks, who may be of "the more Moderate sort,"\textsuperscript{19} then perhaps at least some of the connotations of the verse may seem in the king's favor. The syntactic structure of the entire passage is thus rich in its suggestive power, and for a political poet like Dryden, who, as one critic explains, needed to "keep his finger on the national pulse, disclose the failures of the opposition, and carefully bolster the image of his sometimes difficult hero,"\textsuperscript{20} the kind of suggestive range which syntax makes possible provides him with a medium appropriate to the practical political aims of his verse.

Notice how these general effects Dryden achieves in his treatment of the king are similar to those he works with in his portrait of Zimri. Despite the fact that Dryden is on the side of Charles and opposed to Buckingham, both individuals have reason to be pleased against their will. In turn, those who sympathize with either the king or Buckingham can also be pleased by the witty connotations of the verse. Compare, for instance, these two couplets: the first describes the king, the second, Buckingham.
Then, Israel's Monarch, after Heaven's own heart,
His vigorous warmth did, variously, impart. . . .
(ll. 7-8)

Blest Madman, who could every hour employ,
With something new to wish, or to enjoy. . . .
(ll. 553-54)

Dryden's description of the carefree, generous nature of
the king who "variously" imparts his vigorous warmth is
finally very similar to his description of the "various"
nature of this "Blest Madman" who constantly employs
himself with actions that seem to be equally as pleasing
as those performed by the king. If we did not in fact
know that Dryden was on the side of the king and opposed
to Buckingham, it would be difficult, on the basis of
these two couplets, to make this discrimination. His
method of treatment is almost the same in both cases. And
the method is similar because the effects he wants to
achieve are similar: Dryden wants to ingratiate himself
with a large and diverse audience. With these two couplets,
he was very probably trying to attract the attention of
similar elements of his audience.

Syntactic options, then, allow for multiple perspectives,
and these in turn allow for a variety of responses on the
part of the audience. I want to focus next on Dryden's
direct treatment of his audience, the various factions of the English people. Here we can sense the same concern for political ingratiation, and yet the different political aims Dryden must have had in mind as he dealt with audience response to different segments of the audience itself.


Earl Miner points out that Dryden manages to achieve "alteration in tone" through his "skill with the biblical metaphor" in the presentation of Jews and Jebusites: his picture of the Jews is "grim" while it employs a tone of "gaity," and the Jebusites "are introduced in a reprehensible, disgusting passage on transubstantiation" while they are finally "exonerated from any serious plot against the king."

The syntactic structure of the verse sharpens these alterations in tone, allowing for double and sometimes multiple perspectives on situations. If it is true, as Miner believes, that this ambivalent treatment of the populace has as its chief function "to render the poet impartial," then we are forced to ask why Dryden might have wanted to seem impartial. A close look at the syntax of the verse can help answer this question:
these multiple perspectives are carefully constructed so that they can attract very specific responses as they continually slant the meaning of the verse. The technique works for different purposes in the depiction of each of the various factions.

Two couplets on the Jews relate the action they took when Cromwell died and his son Richard was forced from his position as Protector:

They who when Saul was dead, without a blow,
Made foolish Ishbosheth the Crown forgo;
Who banisht David did from Hebron bring,
And, with a Generall Shout, proclaim'd him King . . .

(11. 57-60).

Notice in the first line the syntactic ambivalence of the half-line "without a blow": it can refer backward so that we understand that "Saul was dead, without a blow," meaning that Cromwell simply died rather than that he was killed; and it can also refer forward suggesting that the Jews, "without a blow, / Made foolish Ishbosheth the Crown forgo," meaning that the English people acted non-violently in forcing Richard from his rule. Each reading has different connotations. To qualify a statement on Cromwell's death by adding that it happened "without a blow" is to imply that the English people do not always let their rulers die of natural causes, a suggestion
supported by events in their own recent history. But to say that the English people managed to force Richard from his position as Protector without having caused any bloodshed in the process is to give a somewhat favorable impression of the populace: One element of the audience, the Whigs, can sympathize with the impression Dryden gives in one reading that the English people are basically peaceful in times of political transition. Another element of the audience, the Tories, can appreciate Dryden's implied criticism of the people in the alternate reading for their tendency to act violently in these periods of political transition. Each syntactic option attracts a particular response, and allows Dryden to ingratiate himself with very diverse elements of his political audience.

We have a similar situation in the following couplet. Notice the metrical and syntactic structure of the verse: "Who banisht David / did from Hebron bring, // And, with a Generall Shout, / proclaim'd him King." The entire syntactic sequence of the first line makes it clear that the word "banisht" is an adjective modifying "David," so that we understand that the Jews brought "banisht David" back from his exile. But the clear metrically defined half-line segment, "Who banisht David," at least suggests that we initially read "banisht" as a verb, a reading
enforced by the parallel syntactic structure of the first half of this line and the first half of the preceding line, "Made foolish Ishbosheth" (implied subject--past tense verb--object). With this reading we understand that the English people are not only the ones who brought "banisht David" back from his exile, but also the ones who "banisht David" in the first place. Here the political implications of the options are clearly apparent: the Tory position is attracted by one, the Whig position by the other. And if we allow for this double reading, then we might also allow that the first half of the following line, "And, with a Generall Shout," can have double reference to both the act of banishing David, suggested in the preceding line, and the act of proclaiming him king, described in the final line of the couplet. All of the discriminations in meaning enforced by syntax fit the sense of Dryden's general depiction of the English people as headstrong, moody, and giddy; but each enforces a different perspective on their actions, and each perspective allows us to recognize a different segment of the body politic.

There are comparatively few ambiguities of reference in Dryden's presentation of "The sober part of Israel," the moderates. When they do occur they enforce a double
perspective which enhances the effect of a single meaning. Let me quote the entire passage for context:

The sober part of *Israel*, free from stain,  
Well knew the value of a peacefull raign:  
And looking backward with a wise a'right,  
Saw Seames of wounds, dishonest to the sight;  
In contemplation of whose ugly Scars,  
They Curst the memory of Civil Wars.  
The moderate sort of Men, thus qualifi'd,  
Inclin'd the Ballance to the better side:  
And David's mildness manag'd it so well,  
The Bad found no occasion to Rebell (ll. 69-78).

Dryden develops the meaning contained in the lines, "Saw Seames of wounds, dishonest to the sight; / In contemplation of whose ugly Scars, / They Curst the memory of Civil Wars," by calling attention to key words: "Seames of wounds," "ugly Scars," and "Civil Wars." The half-line "They Curst the memory" can thus have multiple reference to wars, scars, and seams of wounds. Here the ambiguity gives power to a single meaning: the English people of the "moderate" sort curse the memory of all the unpleasant aspects of their past which have been associated with these wars. As a result of this extended reading, we have a multiple perspective, but a single vision, of the situation which the poet describes.

In the two couplets which follow we have another instance of how syntactic construction can tie couplets
together and at the same time suggest complexity of perspective. When we read that the moderates "Inclin'd the Ballance to the better side: / And David's mildness manag'd it so well," we can understand "it" to refer both to the "Ballance" and the "better side," each mentioned within different half-line segments of the preceding line. Here the ambivalence is enforced by the "b" alliteration, and suggests that David can manage two things equally well. And again syntax allows for two perspectives while it enhances a single meaning. Either way we read the pronoun reference, we have a favorable impression of the king's political abilities, which is exactly the sort of impression that Dryden would want to give in his description of the moderates.

The alterations of tone in the depiction of the Jebusites seem more carefully controlled than those he draws on in his characterization of the Jews, probably because the social situation necessitated some caution. When, for instance, Dryden describes the failures and losses of the English Catholics and says,

Thus, worn and weaken'd, well or ill-content, Submit they must to David's Government . . . (11. 92-93), it is not clear whether the Catholics are in fact "well or
ill-content." In terms of the meter and syntax of the
couplet, the half-line "well or ill-content" can refer
backward to "Thus, worn and weaken'd," suggesting that the
Jebusites may be well or ill content in their worn and
weakened position, or it can refer forward to "Submit
they must to David's Government," implying that they may
be well or ill content in their submission to the king's
rule. And in terms of the diction, we can entertain two
notions of what is meant by "David's Government": it can
refer to the king's own rule, or more likely, to the
power of parliament. All of these ambiguous references,
seem finally to suggest the actual ambiguous position in
which the Catholic populace found itself. The verse becomes
even more complicated when we remember that Dryden had to
deal not only with possible responses from the English
Catholics, but also from the various elements of the
Protestant English populace who read this verse describing
the Jebusites. When, for instance, Dryden describes the
Catholics as "well or ill-content" in their "worn and
weaken'd" condition, he allows for two possible responses
to whether the Catholics are "well" or "ill" content,
responses which can be held by either the Catholic or
Protestant element of the populace. But he also allows
for distinct Catholic sympathy when he describes their
condition as "worn and weaken'd." When, on the other hand, the half-line "well or ill-content" syntactically moves forward so that Dryden describes the Catholics as "well or ill-content" in their submission to the government, he again allows for two possible responses to whether they are well or ill content. But this time he also allows for distinct Protestant sympathy by emphasizing that the Catholics, no matter what their situation, must after all submit to the government.

The variety of options enforced by the syntax of the final lines of the passage can attract an even wider dimension of response:

Some thought they God's Anointed meant to Slay By Guns, invented since full many a day: Our Authour swears it not; but who can know How far the Devil and Jebusites may go? (ll. 130-33).

The half-line "but who can know" is ambiguous in several ways. It can refer backward, suggesting that although "Our Authour swears it not," who can know whether he is correct in his opinion; and it can refer forward, suggesting that aside from the author's opinion, who can know how far the Devil and Jebusite may go. In other words, we are given the syntactic option to believe or doubt either what the author says or what others might know.
In a much larger context, the half-line reminds us that in addition to the author, there are several individuals who are willing to swear to their opinion on this matter, so that when Dryden asks "but who can know," any segment of the audience might readily supply its own answer, and might even think that Dryden implies that particular answer in his question.

Such ambiguities and ambivalences of syntax function differently as they allow for various kinds of multiple perspectives on these factions of the English people. In the description of the Jews, we can recognize Dryden's treatment of different elements of the Protestant populace who respond in specific ways to syntactic options which might attract their attention. Though the situation is similar with Dryden's treatment of the Jebusites, here it is complicated by the fact that it was necessary for Dryden to deal with extremely diverse elements of the audience. And the case is again different with the depiction of the moderates: this element of the audience lacks the diversity of opinion characteristic of the Jews, and the extremity of opinion characteristic of the Jebusites. Syntactic options are still present in the verse, but they enforce a single meaning, a process which is again appropriate when we consider the nature of this moderate
segment of the audience, and also appropriate when we consider that it allows as well for sympathetic response from Jews and Jebusites.

In noticing the ways that syntactic ambiguity functions in the verse, it becomes clear that Dryden's manipulations of syntax assume their form as they work within the technical structure of the closed couplet. Syntax, in other words, can work together with or slant the meanings enforced by meter and rhetoric, so that when the verse allows for several syntactic options, these options become primary or secondary in their effect depending on the extent to which they are enforced by these technical aspects of the couplet. Let me again examine lines describing the Jews and the Jebusites to discuss the implications of these primary and secondary options.

Who banisht David / did from Hebron bring,  
And, with a Generall Shout, proclaim'd him King. . . .

Thus, worn and weaken'd, / well or ill-content,  
Submit they must to David's Government. . . .

In the first couplet on the Jews, the effect of the syntactic ambiguity is enforced by the metrical structure of the couplet which calls attention to half-line units
of verse. When we read "Who banisht David / did from Hebron bring," we read it in terms of half-line segments, in terms of the metrically balanced structure of closed couplet verse. Thus the half-line "Who banisht David" appears, in the process of reading, to constitute a self-contained syntactic unit: subject--verb--object. This syntactic option enforces a specific meaning and evokes a specific response: the reader understands that the English people are the ones who banished Charles, and thus forms an impression of these people based on this description. But when the entire line is read, "Who banisht David / did from Hebron bring," the line rather than the half-line constitutes the syntactic unit, and another meaning altogether is suggested: the reader now understands that the English people are the ones who brought Charles back from his exile, and now forms a different impression of these people based on this description. What we have, then, are two syntactic options, the primary option enforced by the line unit, and the secondary option enforced by the half-line unit. Though the primary option dominates, we cannot ignore the secondary option, mainly because we have already been forced to entertain it, but also because it too is supported by the metrical structure of the verse. Dryden can have his argument work both ways through this kind of syntactic manipulation, and can also manage to comment on
both situations in a politic way: instead of coming out and directly stating that the English people have actually banished Charles, he adopts the more politic method of embedding this statement within a larger one on how they brought Charles out of his banishment. The secondary option becomes a way of dealing with a touchy issue, and Dryden manages the issue by never directly stating the fact which the suggestive power of the syntax makes all too clear.

In the second couplet, describing the situation of the Jebusites, the syntactic options are again enforced by the metrical structure of the couplet, but this time Dryden achieves his effects through the ambivalent reference of a half-line of verse, "well or ill-content." In this case the primary syntactic option would involve reading the entire first line as a syntactic unit: "Thus, worn and weaken'd, well or ill-content." Both the dominance of the line unit and the "w" alliteration support this reading. Yet despite the fact that the line unit is well defined, it does not constitute a self-sustained syntactic unit because it lacks a main verb, which "Submit" in the following line provides. The entire couplet, then, forms the syntactic unit, making it possible for the reader to extend the syntax of the preceding half-line, "well or ill-content, / Submit they must to David's Government," and slant the meaning of the verse. Dryden again can have
his argument work both ways. If the primary option, which informs us that the English Catholics may be well or ill content in their worn and weakened position, can attract some sympathetic response from the Catholic populace because it sympathetically describes their situation, it does so at the expense of the secondary option which in this case seems to carry the stronger meaning. Here we understand Dryden to say that no matter if the Catholics are well or ill content, they must nevertheless submit to the government, a stronger argument if only because it must appeal to a larger segment of the audience. Because the secondary option carries more force than the primary option, that is, because the syntactic extension of the line is more forceful than the closure of the line, the effect here is in some ways similar to that which Dryden achieved in his couplet on the Jews where the meaning enforced by the line unit is not strong enough to dismiss the implications of the half-line unit. In both cases we see Dryden manipulating syntax within the framework of the couplet verse form, and doing so in ways which suit his political purposes.

We might again look at a few lines from the opening passage on the king for an instance of how these primary and secondary options function within the limits of the couplet form:
Then, Israel's Monarch, after Heaven's own heart,
His vigorous warmth did, variously, impart
To Wives and Slaves: And, wide as his Command,
Scatter'd his Maker's Image through the Land.

When we read the first couplet, it seems to be closed: it is at least able to function as a self-contained syntactic unit. But when we go on to read "To Wives and Slaves" at the beginning of the second couplet, it becomes obvious that syntax has arched the metrical structure of the closed couplet through enjambment. It is difficult to say which reading constitutes the primary syntactic option: the closure of the couplet necessarily works against the necessary syntactic sequence of the verse. Again these two options alter the implications of the verse, each shaping a meaning that offers a different perspective on Charles' activities. And again Dryden's political purposes are served. The closed couplet informs us that the king is like God in his generosity, a statement which allows for a favorable impression and evaluation of Charles. The syntactic extension of the couplet, however, modifies this impression by specifying, almost as an afterthought, the actual recipients of Charles' generosity, wives and slaves. If we cannot respond positively to this note on the king's behavior, as the restoration gentleman could,
then we can at least appreciate the more general comparison of the king and God. Or we simply might appreciate the irony of Dryden relating the two different types of generosity. Each option has its function.

The English people, Charles, and Buckingham are all different, yet Dryden works with the same basic kinds of syntactic options in depicting each of them. The particular effects he achieves depend on the character and situation, but the general effect is to allow for multiple perspectives which can attract a diversity of response and thus establish a base for political toleration.

Part iii. The Rebels: Absalom, Achitophel, Shimei, Corah

It was especially important for Dryden to establish this sense of toleration in his presentation of the rebel faction. Instead of writing straightforward diatribe, Dryden carefully shapes his commentary on the rebels so that we are allowed to entertain various notions about their characters, and then directs our responses so that we are led to conclusions which any sensible member of the audience would be hard pressed to reject. The method is effective because rather than simply state a position, it invites
response to a range of opinion on characters who themselves attract different and varied kinds of response.

Absalom

Several critics have noted how Dryden faced a particular problem in his characterization of Absalom: he had to treat the young man with reserve because Charles actually had ambivalent feelings about Monmouth. No doubt certain elements of the audience held similar ambivalent feelings. The syntactic structure of the verse provided Dryden with an excellent method for dealing with these diverse responses and using them to serve his political aims. In Absalom's case, the various perspectives which syntax enforces are drawn in extreme terms: when there are two syntactic options, for instance, one will sustain a favorable impression of Absalom, while the other will suggest an unfavorable impression. As with the depiction of Zimri, the king, and the English people, Dryden here uses syntactic manipulation in his handling of Absalom to achieve specific political purposes dictated by the nature of the character and situation. Two passages illustrate this point. The first is the poet's initial description of the young man:
Of all this Numerous Progeny was none 
So Beautiful, so brave as Absalon: 
Whether, inspir'd by some diviner Lust, 
His Father got him with a greater Gust; 
Or that his Conscious destiny made way 
By manly beauty to Imperiall sway. 
Early in Foreign fields he won Renown, 
With Kings and States ally'd to Israel's Crown: 
In Peace the thoughts of War he cou'd remove, 
And seem'd as he were only born for love. 
What e'r he did was done with so much ease, 
In him alone, 'twas Natural to please. 
His motions all accompanied with grace; 
And Paradise was open'd in his face (ll. 17-30).

Consider the third line, "Whether inspir'd by some 
diviner Lust." When we read this line after having just 
read the preceding line, "So Beautiful, so brave as 
Absalon," then it seems as though Absalom is the one who 
has been "inspir'd by some diviner Lust," and the term 
"Lust" takes on connotations which we associate with the 
young man's beauty and bravery, his possible desire for 
renown and military victory. But when we read the 
following line, "His Father got him with a greater Gust," 
then it becomes obvious that it is David who has been 
"inspir'd by some diviner Lust," and the term "Lust" now 
takes on connotations which we associate with David's 
sexual desires. The syntactic function of this third line, 
then, is ambivalent: when it refers backward to Absalom, 
we initially form a favorable impression of the young man;
but then when it refers forward to "His Father," the reference of the compliment shifts, and we are back again into Dryden's witty handling of the king, a subject which we are now accustomed to.

The metrical and syntactic construction of the couplet "Early in Foreign fields / he won Renown, // With Kings and States / ally'd to Israel's Crown" suggests this same kind of ambivalence. Who is "ally'd to Israel's Crown"? The subject can either be "Kings and States" mentioned in the preceding half-line, or it can be Absalom, "he" who "won Renown," mentioned in the next preceding half-line. Here again we are allowed two perspectives: we can understand that Monmouth won renown with those kings and states which are allied to England, or that he won renown in his own alliance to the king. This question of alliance, emphasized by the syntax, calls attention to the fact that Absalom's situation has indeed changed since these "Early" days: any reader would have been aware that, at the time the poem was published, the young man had shifted his alliances and was gaining renown for very different reasons.

Both of these instances of syntactic ambivalence in the passage enforce a distinction between the causes and effects of Absalom's character and actions. In the first instance, we initially think that the cause of Absalom's
beauty and courage is the fact that he was "inspir'd by some diviner Lust," until we read on and discover that it is not Absalom but his father who was inspired by lust. And in the second instance, we initially understand that Absalom's renown is associated with the fact that he was "ally'd to Israel's Crown," until the syntactic ambivalence suggests that we also consider the renown Absalom has gained through his opposition to the crown. This same kind of distinction between the causes and effects of Absalom's character and situation is supported by the larger syntactic structure of the first four couplets of the passage. The two middle couplets, "Whether, inspir'd by some diviner Lust, / His Father got him with a greater Gust; / Or that his Conscious destiny made way / By manly beauty to Imperiall sway," constitute a subordinate clause which can modify the main clause contained either in the first couplet or in the fourth couplet. If it modifies the first couplet, then we understand that the subordinate clause explains why Absalom is "So Beautiful, so brave"; but if it modifies the fourth couplet, then we understand that the subordinate clause explains why Absalom was able to win "Renown." On a technical level, the syntactic ambivalence of this two-couplet clause is an example of the way Dryden is able to weave together a whole complex of argument with
the supracouplet structure of his verse. On a semantic level, it enforces again this distinction between cause and effect: we are allowed to hold two perspectives on the situation, attributing either Absalom's beauty or his renown to either of the causes stipulated in the middle couplets, his father's "diviner Lust" or his own "Conscious destiny."

Each of the final three couplets of the passage offers an example of how Dryden sustains this ambivalent treatment of Absalom's character. In the couplet "In Peace the thoughts of War he coud remove, / And seem'd as he were only born for love," Christopher Ricks has noted the "skepticism in 'And seem'd as he were only born for love'; first, seem'd; and second, the puns in 'for love' (because David made love; to make love; to be loved)."23 The syntax of the couplet enforces these ironies of diction by framing the puns within the final half-line, "were only born for love." In the previous couplet Dryden had also used the final half-line, "ally'd to Israel's Crown," for similar purposes. And in the couplet which follows, he again uses the final half-line to undercut the favorable tone of the verse: "'What e'r he did was done with so much ease, / In him alone 'twas Natural to please." Was it natural for Absalom to be pleased, or was it natural for him to please others? Again both meanings can apply, but
if we do read the lines in terms of Absalom's ability to please others, then the obvious situation which comes to mind is the young man's ability to please his father, and, as later recognized by Achitophel, his ability to please the English people. This ability to please thus becomes associated with a different picture of Absalom, one which stresses the propensity for deception which is also inherent in his character. Perhaps this is why in the final couplet of the passage Dryden describes how "Paradise was open'd in his face." The emphasis has consistently been on Absalom's appearance, his beauty. Bernard Schilling writes: "The more attractive he was, the easier the deception of those who must be deceived. His beauty suggests the surface charm of the illusions leading to rebellion." The picture we finally have of Absalom, then, is filled with connotations which are as ambivalent and as complex as those which Dryden used in his opening lines on the king. But the nature of these connotations is different: syntax allows for a variety of perspectives on the king's behavior, each enforcing a different kind of sympathetic impression of the monarch; while the variety of perspectives on Absalom which are allowed by syntactic ambivalence seem to cancel each other, so that in each instance we end up with two possible readings,
only one of which can give a favorable impression of the young man.

The passage which immediately follows this initial presentation of Absalom can help clarify how Dryden uses syntax for different purposes in his portrayal of the king and Monmouth:

With secret Joy, indulgent David view'd
His Youthful Image in his Son renew'd:
To all his wishes Nothing he deny'd,
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 constru'd Youth that purg'd by boyling o'r:
And Amnon's Murther, by a specious Name,
Was call'd a Just Revenge for injur'd Fame.
Thus Prais'd, and Lov'd, the Noble Youth remain'd,
While David, undisturb'd, in Sion raign'd (ll. 31-42).

Just as syntactic ambivalence in the previous passage had
on occasion allowed us to read the verse in terms of
reference to both David and Absalom, so in the first couplet
of this passage Dryden brings the two men together, and
frames each reference metrically and syntactically. David
views "His Youthfull Image / in his Son renew'd": the
first half-line gives us a picture of the young David; the
second half-line gives us a picture of the young Absalom.
When we thus go on to read the following couplet, the
pronoun reference inevitably becomes ambivalent. In the
couplet "To all his wishes Nothing he deny'd, / And made the Charming Annabel his Bride," we might ask who cannot deny whose wishes: is it that David does not deny Absalom's wishes, or Absalom David's wishes. If it is the king who cannot deny his son's wishes, then the impression of the king is favorable. He is seen as an "indulgent" but well intentioned father. But if it is Absalom who will not deny the wishes of his father, then we may be back again in the context of Absalom's rather ambiguous ability "to please" with all its suggestions of possible deception. These impressions of both David and Absalom, here enforced by an ambivalent pronoun reference, are further enforced by the sense of the following couplet: "What faults he had (for who from faults is free?) / His Father cou'd not, or he woud not see": the emphasis is on the negative qualities of Absalom's character, his "faults," while the king continues to be viewed simply as indulgent father, and more importantly, as a father who may be easily misled and mistaken.

When we go on to read about Absalom's murder of Amnon, ironically referred to as one of the "warm excesses" of his "Youth," we encounter some interesting syntactic ambiguities enforced by metrical structure. Notice how the syntactic construction of each final half-line of the
couplet allows for two different meanings: "And Amnon's
Murther, / by a specious Name, // Was call'd a Just
Revenge / for injur'd Fame." The half-line "by a specious
Name" can be a reference to "Just Revenge" so that we
understand that "Just Revenge" is the "specious Name"
applied to Absalom's murder of Amnon. But the half-line
might also function as part of a passive voice construction
so that we understand that Amnon was actually murdered "by
a specious Name," the reference being to Absalom whose
name is "specious" because of his superficial attractiveness.
In a similar way, the half-line "for injur'd Fame" can be
a reference to Absalom's motivation for killing Amnon,
meaning that Absalom committed the murder because his
fame was injured. But it might also mean that the murder
committed by Absalom injured his own fame, and for that
reason "Was call'd a Just Revenge," suggesting that
Absalom thus committed the murder "for injur'd Fame."
Notice how both readings of each final half-line alter
the rhetorical structure of the couplet which in turn
enforces each different meaning: one perspective allows
for a parallel relationship between "Murther" and "Just
Revenge," while the other perspective allows for a more
complex antithetical relationship between "Murther" and
the "injur'd Fame" which apparently caused it, and also
between the "Just Revenge" which is but "a specious Name"
for the murder itself. In this context, we might wonder about the meaning of the word "undisturb'd" in the final couplet: "Thus Prais'd, and Lov'd, the Noble Youth remain'd, / While David, undisturb'd, in Sion reign'd." Is it that David as king is generally undisturbed in his kingly position, or is it that David as indulgent father is undisturbed by the "warm excesses" of his son? Or is it, in yet a different sense, that David's reign is undisturbed so long as his son poses no threat to his rule? The king comes out favorably with all of these perspectives, Absalom only with some.

Achitophel

Achitophel is the poem's main villain, and criticism has conventionally treated him as such by emphasizing how every aspect of the verse supports the villainy of his character. Hoffman observes how the image of Satan is constantly "pressing down on Achitophel"; Bruce King gives examples of how wordplay sustains this "imaginative identification of Achitophel with Satan"; Schilling traces the "wealth of associations" Dryden draws on for the portrait; and Ramsey demonstrates how rhyme and metrics enhance the effect of the satire. But Dryden's manipulations of syntax in the Achitophel portrait show Shaftesbury to be a man whose basic nature is revealed in
complex linguistic ways. In the opening lines of the passage, for instance, Dryden initiates his strong condemnation of Shaftesbury, yet he allows for two perspectives on the man's character, which can modify our impression of him:

Of these the false Achitophel was first:
A Name to all succeeding Ages Curst:
For close Designs, and crooked Counsells fit;
Sagacious, Bold, and Turbulent of wit... (ll. 150-53).

Notice how the third line begins with the preposition "For." Not until we complete the line, "For Close Designs, and crooked Counsells fit," is it apparent that "For" should syntactically follow the participle "fit," suggesting that Achitophel is "fit" for close designs and crooked counsels. Instead, it initially seems that the preposition follows the participle "Curst," suggesting that Achitophel is "Curst" for his close designs and crooked counsels. Two readings are enforced: first, that Achitophel is "Curst" for his close designs and crooked counsels, and second, that he is "fit" for these designs and counsels. While allowing for two responses, the syntactic ambivalence also solidifies our general impression of Achitophel. We can see him as "Curst" for his ability to perform those very actions for which he is naturally "fit."
Dryden's portrait of Achitophel is typically characterized by this kind of double satire, both when he mockingly criticizes the man and when he praises him. In one passage which describes the dangerous and extreme nature of Achitophel, we are allowed to follow several syntactic options, each enforcing a particular meaning but at the same time leading to a general conclusion:

A daring Pilot in extremity;
Pleas'd with the Danger, when the Waves went high
He sought the Storms; but for a Calm unfit,
Would Steer too nigh the Sands, to boast his Wit
(11. 159-62).

The general structure of the passage enforces several syntactic ambivalences. In the first couplet, for instance, the first half of each line describes Achitophel: "A daring Pilot," "Pleas'd with the Danger"; while the second half of each line modifies this character description by qualifying the circumstances: "in extremity," "when the Waves went high." Because of the parallel relationship between the kinds of statement each half-line makes, we have a situation similar to that observed by Miner in the poem's opening lines, one which he describes there as a "double parallelism with contrast of ideas." There is a relationship here between "daring Pilot" and "extremity," and "Danger" and "high Waves," and also between "daring
Pilot" and "Danger," and "extremity" and "high Waves."
Several discriminations in meaning are enforced. Because
of his daring nature Achitophel can be viewed as both
dangerous and extreme, just as the high waves are both
dangerous and extreme. And syntactically, the half-lines
can move backward and forward: "in extremity" can refer to
"A Daring Pilot," suggesting that Achitophel is daring in
his extremity, and can also refer to "Pleas'd with the
Danger," suggesting that in his extremity Achitophel is
pleased with the danger. In a similar way the half-line
"Pleas'd with the Danger" can refer backward, again
suggesting that in extremity Achitophel is pleased with
the danger, and forward to "when the Waves went high,"
implying that he is pleased with the danger when the waves
went high. Finally, there is the ambivalent syntactic
movement of the half-line "when the Waves went high" which
can modify "Danger" in the first half of that line or
"sought" in the next line, and which in this case also
serves to tie two couplets together. Each discrimination
in meaning, made possible by the metrical structure of
half-lines and the resulting syntactic interplay, supports
the general sense of Dryden's picture of Shaftesbury: he
is a daring, extreme, dangerous man who seeks out situations
which suit his character in their own danger and extremity.
We are forced to this general conclusion despite the fact that we are allowed to view Shaftesbury as daring, extreme, and dangerous in a variety of different ways.

We are forced to a similar kind of conclusion even when reading Dryden's praise of the man. Schilling rightly points out that Dryden, like Pope, knew that "praise is sometimes called for as part of satiric convention" because it "underlines the thing to be deplored," so that when Dryden praises Achitophel's ability as a judge, he underlines "'what a pity it is' that such superior gifts were not on the right side." But the syntactic structure of the verse suggests that more than this type of satiric convention is at work:

In Israels Courts ne'r sat an Abbethdin
With more discerning Eyes, or Hands more clean:
Unbrib'd, unsought, the wretched to redress;
Swift of Dispatch, and easie of Access.
Oh, had he been content to serve the Crown,
With virtues only proper to the Gown;
Or, had the rankness of the Soyl been freed
From Cockle, that opprest the Noble seed... 

(11. 188-95).

The metrical structure of the line "Oh, had he been content to serve the Crown" can be accounted for in two different ways depending on where the mid-line pause falls: it may come before or after "content." If it falls before "content," then the resulting half-line "Oh, had he been"
can have ambivalent reference. When it refers forward, we read the poet as simply lamenting over the fact that Achitophel might have been content to serve the crown. But when the half-line refers backward, then we have the poet lamenting that Achitophel might have been unbribed, unsought, swift of dispatch, and easy of access, all mentioned in the previous couplet. And when we then continue to read the remainder of the line, "content to serve the Crown," it becomes obvious that Dryden is lamenting the fact that Achitophel might have been unbribed, unsought, swift of dispatch, and easy of access if only he had continued to serve the crown. Each reading prompts a slightly different perspective on the situation. If, however, the mid-line pause falls after "content," then again we end up with a straightforward reading of the line, "Oh, had he been content / to serve the Crown," but this time with the implication being that if Achitophel had merely been "content," then it follows that he would have naturally continued to serve the crown.

The political value of these alternate readings derives from the fact that we can entertain different notions about what the poet is lamenting. Is it that Achitophel might have been unbribed, unsought, swift of dispatch, and easy of access? If so, then we as readers must modify our impression of Achitophel to understand that
he never actually possessed any of these attributes, but only had the potential to possess them. Or is it that Achitophel might have been content with these attributes? If so, then we can understand that his discontent was with his good qualities rather than with the general political situation. Or is it, finally, that Achitophel might simply have been content to serve the crown? In this case, we can assume that he actually did possess good qualities and that he was content with these qualities, but was not content to use them to serve Charles' government. We have three syntactic options, each of which might appeal to a different segment of the audience. Though none of the options would accommodate the rebels, those who hate Achitophel and those who merely lament his actions can both find a meaning in the verse to suit them.

The following line, "With vertues only proper to the Gown," which completes the couplet, further modifies our impression of Achitophel and our understanding of what the poet is lamenting. Its metrical structure is more clearly defined since the mid-line pause must follow "only" so that each resulting half-line has at least two stresses. But the discriminations in meaning enforced by the syntax are as complexly drawn as those in the preceding line. The half-line "With vertues only" can be read as an extension of the first line of the couplet, so that we
understand that Achitophel might have been content to serve the crown only with virtues. When the verse is read in this way, the meaning of the remaining half-line "proper to the Gown" can take on two very different connotations. The half-line can refer to "he" in the preceding line, suggesting that "he," Achitophel, might have been "proper to the Gown"; or it can refer to "virtues" in the preceding half-line, suggesting that Achitophel might have been content to serve the crown with virtues which are "proper to the Gown." Dryden seems thus to draw a distinction between the virtues being proper and Shaftesbury's ability to act properly. The situation is complicated by the possibly ambiguous reference of the word "only": the meter, which calls for a mid-line pause after "only," links this word with "virtues," and again suggests that Achitophel should have served the crown only with virtues. But consider what happens if syntax runs counter to meter. Now "only" may modify "proper," and syntax thus forces a distinction between only virtues, only proper virtues, and virtues proper only to the gown. Though syntax in this instance would run counter to meter, it works together with couplet rhetoric which juxtaposes "virtues" and "Cockle" in the final line of each couplet, a juxtaposition which is itself enhanced by the parallel syntactic structure of
the first three syllables of each of these lines: "With
vertues," "From Cockle" (preposition—object of preposition).
If it is true, then, as Schilling argues, that Dryden's
praise of Achitophel functions as an integral part of
the satire, it is just as true that the effect of this
praise is undercut not merely by its juxtaposition to the
condemnation of Achitophel supplied by the surrounding
verse, but even more so by the complex and often
confusing ambiguities of meaning enforced by the metrical,
rhetorical, and syntactic structure of the verse. We are
forced to ask what it means for Achitophel to be content
and to act properly. And when we survey the possible
answers, it becomes clear that Dryden is allowing us to hold
a variety of perspectives which emphasize Achitophel's
inability to act in praiseworthy ways. Moreover, each of
these perspectives can accommodate a different element of
the audience: the condemnation of Achitophel is obvious,
but the verse still allows those who might have some
sympathy with Shaftesbury a way both to acknowledge
their support of the man and at the same time agree, at
least to some extent, with Dryden's criticisms of him.

One final example, a couplet in which Dryden summarizes
the effect of Achitophel's arguments on the English people,
demonstrates how the verse supports such a double perspective:
Weak Arguments! which yet he knew ful well,
Were strong with People easie to Rebell (ll. 214-15).

The syntactic ambivalence of the half-line "which yet he knew ful well" suggests two possible understandings of what it is that Achitophel knows: that his arguments are weak in themselves, and that they are strong with people easy to rebel. Again, for those who have some sympathy with Shaftesbury, the verse can be understood to say that Achitophel's arguments are weak only to the narrator, while they are strong with people easy to rebel. But for those set against Achitophel, both readings can be understood as damaging to the man's character, and the effect of Dryden's criticism is doubled.

Shimei and Corah

The portrait of Zimri, as Dryden himself explained, is not bloody but is ridiculous enough, and this is so because Dryden suited his verse to particular political aims: "... he for whom it was intended, was too witty to resent it as an injury. If I had rail'd, I might have suffered for it justly: But I manag'd my own Work more happily, perhaps more dextrously." With the portraits of
Shimei and Corah, however, Dryden has different political purposes. Ian Jack has explained some of the differences in Dryden's handling of the rebels: "Serious scorn distinguishes the 'characters' of Shimei and Corah from that of Zimri, while an indirectness of approach involving some degree of humour marks them off even more clearly from the unsmiling arraignment of Achitophel. It is not because they are censured any less decidedly, but because commoners cannot be as dangerous to the nation as a nobleman, that there is a contemptuous humour in the lines devoted to Slingsby Bethel and Titus Oates which is completely absent from the description of Shaftesbury."28 This "contemptuous humour" is embedded in the metrical and syntactic construction of the lines, but in a way that makes our feelings of contempt allowable. Even those who sympathize with these men would be hard pressed not to respond to the ridiculousness Dryden finds in them. In the opening lines of the Shimei portrait the final half-line of each couplet ironically modifies the straightforward narrative tone of what precedes it:

Shimei, whose Youth did early Promise bring
Of Zeal to God, / and Hatred to his King;
Did wisely from Expensive Sins refrain,
And never broke the Sabbath, / but for Gain:
Nor ever was he known an Oath to vent,
Or Curse unless / against the Government (ll. 585-90).
Schilling explains the effect of the satire in terms of "the construction of lines and couplets that set up the anticlimaxes showing the man as odious after leading us to hope that he is better than we have thought." But this kind of metrical and syntactic construction, as we have seen, was also characteristic of Dryden's presentation of the king in the poem's opening lines, where, for instance, the final half-lines "was made a sin" and "was cursedly, confind" jar with the objective narrative tone of the surrounding verse. It seems obvious, then, that Dryden is able to use similar kinds of metrical and syntactic construction for the achievement of very different effects and purposes. In his depiction of the king, these final half-lines supply seemingly incidental information which both calls attention to the moralistic implications of what is sinful and should be confined, and at the same time slights the significance of these implications. With Shimei, the final half-lines become the most significantly revealing aspects of his nature: we see him as a combination of contradiction and hypocrisy.

The variety of syntactic manipulation in the portrait of Shimei shows how different kinds of ironic discriminations suit specific purposes in terms of our response to character. The ambiguities here, like those in the portrait of Achitophel, are more filling because of the
general sense of condemnation in the verse, but at the same time might accommodate different elements of the audience:

If any leisure time he had from Power,
(Because 'tis Sin to misemploy and hour;)
His business was, by Writing, to Persuade,
That Kings were Useless, and a Clog to Trade:
And, that his noble Stile he might refine,
No Rechabite more shund the fumes of Wine.
Chast were his Cellars, and his Shrieveal Board
The Grossness of a City Feast abhor'd:
His Cooks, with long disuse, their Trade forgot;
Cool was his Kitchen, tho his Brains were hot.
Such frugal Vertue Malice may accuse,
But sure 'twas necessary to the Jews:
For Towns once burnt, such Magistrates require
As dare not tempt Gods Providence by fire.
With Spiritual food he fed his Servants well,
But free from flesh, that made the Jews Rebel:
And Moses's Laws he held in more account,
For forty days of Fasting in the Mount (11. 612-29).

Notice the possible backward and forward movement of the first line of the third couplet, "And, that his noble Stile he might refine." If we read the line as referring forward, then each couplet becomes a separate syntactic unit, and we thus understand that Shimei's business was by writing to persuade that kings were useless and a clog to trade, and also understand that to refine his style, no Rechabite shunned, more than he, the fumes of wine. But if we read this third line as referring backward, then it becomes a syntactic extension of the first couplet, and we
understand that Shimei's business was by writing to persuade that kings were useless and a clog to trade, and also by writing to persuade that he might refine his noble style. One reading is enforced by self-contained syntactic units functioning within the couplet structure; the other is enforced by a parallel relationship between two relative clauses, "That Kings were useless, and a Clog to Trade: / And, that his noble Stile he might refine." Both readings fit the sense, but each gives a very different impression of Shimei by explaining exactly what his business was. In suggesting that Shimei wanted both to condemn the king and refine his writing style, Dryden emphasizes here, as he does throughout the Shimei passage, the selfishness underlying the man's political motives.

The verse which follows develops the description of Shimei's eating habits: "His Cooks, with long disuse, their Trade forgot; / Cool was his Kitchen, tho his Brain was hot. / Such frugal Vertue Malice may accuse, / But sure 'twas necessary to the Jews." In the last couplet we have a possible subject-object reversal which is enforced by the metrics of the line since each noun falls within a half-line unit of verse: "Such frugal Vertue / Malice may accuse." If we read the first half of the line in a straightforward manner, then "Vertue" becomes the subject, and it is "Vertue" which may accuse "Malice." But
if we read the second half of the line in a straightforward manner, then it is "Malice" which may accuse "Virtue," a reading enforced by Dryden's beginning the following line with "But": "But sure 'twas necessary to the Jews." It is as if we must excuse the fact that malice accuses virtue because it is necessary to the Jews. Implied in this syntactic ambiguity is the possible twist on the meaning of the word "accuse," which may mean either to disclose, or to blame. Still another possibility is that the pronoun "it" in the line "But sure 'twas necessary to the Jews" has double reference both to "Vertue" and "Malice" so that when we hear the verse, we at least momentarily wonder exactly what is necessary to the Jews, virtue or malice. And if it is virtue which they find necessary, then it is a virtue which their own vice requires.

There is a similar ambiguity of pronoun reference in the following lines: "For Towns once burnt, such Magistrates require / As dare not tempt Gods Providence by fire. / With Spiritual food he fed his Servants well, / But free from flesh, that made the Jews Rebel." In the line "With Spiritual food he fed his Servants well," does "he" refer to God, mentioned in the previous line, or does "he" refer to the unmentioned Shimei. Both, interestingly, would fit the argument. And in the following line, "But free from
flesh, that made the Jews Rebel," does the pronoun "that" simply refer to "flesh," suggesting that "Flesh" made the Jews rebel, or does "that" refer to the entire preceding half-line "But free from flesh," implying that what actually made the Jews rebel was that their spiritual food was free from flesh? Both readings fit the metrical structure of the line, and both fit the argument, but each gives a very different picture of the Jews and their motives.

In the final couplet there is a different kind of syntactic parallel, this time between Shimei and Moses: "And Moses's Laws he held in more account, / For forty days of Fasting in the Mount." Did Shimei hold Moses' laws in more account because Moses fasted for forty days, or because he, Shimei, fasted for forty days? These ambiguities of syntax, enforced by the metrical structure of the verse, prompt ambiguities of reference which establish a curious parallel between God, Moses, and Shimei. Hoffman offers an explanation of these relationships in terms of the poem's imagery: just as God imagery is used in the presentation of the king, so Dryden uses "anti-God imagery for David's enemies. . . ."30 While this explanation surely identifies part of Dryden's intention, it fails to allow for the humor of the situation. Just as Dryden was able to merge our conceptions of God and the king by
emphasizing the creativity of both, but at the same time wittily distinguishes between God's creativity and David's sexual promiscuity; so he is able to distinguish between the actions of God and Moses and those of Shimei, but at the same time humorously merge our notions of the three figures. Once again we can observe Dryden using similar techniques to achieve different particular responses. The Hobbesian element of the audience can appreciate the irreligious tone; while the Puritan element, though they sympathize with Bethel, can respond to what Hoffman calls the anti-God imagery.

The portrait of Corah, like that of Shimei, emphasizes the man's religious fervor while at the same time satirizes it. The opening lines of the passage, as the editors of the poem note in their commentary, recall "the account of the brazen serpent that Moses set up at God's command; anyone who gazed upon it was saved from the bite of the snakes that God had earlier sent to punish the people for their murmuring." 31 Corah is compared to Moses, as Shimei had been, and is asked to take action to secure the safety of the English people:

Yet, Corah, thou shalt from Oblivion pass;
Erect thy self thou Monumental Brass:
High as the Serpent of thy mettall made,
While Nations stand secure beneath thy shade (ll. 632-35).
In the Shimei passage, Dryden had used metrical and syntactic construction for ironical purposes by allowing final half-lines to undercut the meaning of the surrounding verse. Here in the Corah passage he uses meter and syntax in a different way, but for a similar purpose. Notice the two possible meanings contained in the line "Erect thy self / thou Monumental Brass." A straightforward reading of the line makes it seem like the poet is commanding Corah to erect a monumental brass for the people of England to stand secure beneath. But it is also possible to read "thou Monumental Brass" as functioning in apposition to "thy self" in the preceding half-line, so that the real command is for Corah to "Erect thy self," a meaning noted by Ramsey and described by him as "the most savage and the most proper sexual pun Dryden ever made."32 The religious fervor of Corah is thus undercut not only by the irony implicit in the comparison with Moses, but by the blatant sexual reference, and finally by the suggestion that Corah, as "Monumental Brass," is himself the brazen serpent sent to punish the people of Israel.

As with his portrait of Achitophel, Dryden is here able to draw as much negative criticism as possible from syntactic interplay. In the following passage, the multiple perspectives enforced by syntax prompt a single effect:
His Judgment yet his Memory did excel;  
Which peic'd his wondrous Evidence so well:  
And suited to the temper of the times;  
Then groaning under Jebusitick Crimes.  
Let Israels foes suspect his Heav'nly call,  
And rashly judge his writ Apocryphal;  
Our Laws for such affronts have forfeits made:  
He takes away his life, who takes away his trade  
(ll. 660-67).

In the first two couplets all references to Corah are merged by the multiple reference of the third line, "And suited to the temper of the times." The line can refer to "his Judgment," "his Memory," and "his wondrous Evidence." The couplet that follows, which first seems to be a suggestion encouraging the reader to "Let Israels foes suspect his call, / And rashly judge his writ Apocryphal," is actually, we discover when we go on to read the following couplet, a conditional clause that stipulates a possible situation in order to explain what will result if this situation arises: "Our Laws for such affronts have forfeits made: / He takes his life, who takes away his trade." This final line is filled with ambiguities of pronoun reference. "He" may refer to one of "Israels foes" who takes away Corah's life by taking away his trade, that is, by rashly judging his writ apocryphal. Or "He" can refer to Corah, who takes away the "trade" and thus the "life" of "Israels foes" by executing the "Laws"
which prosecute such affronts. Either way we see Corah as an individual who is dangerous and threatening to the people who "suspect his heav'nly call," and through them, threatening also to himself.

The final lines of the passage continue to demonstrate how syntactic interplay enforces different meanings which all work against Corah:

His Zeal to heav'n, made him his Prince despise,  
And load his person with indignities:  
But Zeal peculiar priviledg affords;  
Indulging latitude to deeds and words.  
And Corah might for Agag's murther call,  
In terms as course as Samuel us'd to Saul.  
What others in his Evidence did Joyn,  
(The best that could be had for love or coyn,)  
In Corah's own predicament will fall:  
For witness is a Common Name to all (ll. 672-81).

We encounter ambiguity of pronoun reference in the first couplet: when we read "And load his person with indignities," the obvious reference of "his person" seems to be "his Prince" mentioned in the preceding line. But the reference may also be to "him," namely Corah, who from another perspective can be seen as loading his own person with indignities by despising his prince. The metrical structure of the first line of the following couplet enforces a different kind of ambiguity which prompts a similar effect: "But Zeal peculiar / priviledg affords." A straightforward syntactic reading of the line makes it seem as though
"peculiar" modifies "privledg" since normally an adjective precedes the noun it modifies. But the metrical structure which enforces a half-line pause after "peculiar" links this adjective with the word "Zeal," since both words fall within the half-line segment. A further discrimination in meaning is provided by the possible wordplay on "peculiar" which, as Bruce King notes, has the literal meaning of "singular" and the additional meaning of "eccentric." Both the ambiguity of syntax and of diction thus enforce a variety of meanings, with the character of Corah gaining little from any of the implications.

The remaining couplets go on to describe the particular nature of Corah's "peculiar Zeal" and "peculiar privledg" first by offering an example of how he called for "Agag's murther," and then by drawing to a conclusion filled with ambiguous meaning. In the couplet "What others in his Evidence did Joyn, / (The best that could be had for love or coyn,)" we again have an instance of pronoun ambiguity. The word "others" can refer to other victims of Corah's peculiar zeal and privledge who he "did Joyn" in his evidence. In this case the pronoun refers backward to the preceding couplet where "Agag's murther" is mentioned, Agag being one such victim of Corah's zeal. But "others" can also generally mean those who contribute to the
evidence which Corah brings together, a meaning supported by the implications of the following line, "(The best that could be had for love or coyn,)" suggesting that Corah bribes these others with "love or coyn" in order to gain the "best" evidence. This reading is in turn supported by the sense of the first line of the final couplet, "In Corah's own predicament will fall," which suggests that these "others" will finally fall into Corah's situation, and at the same time suggests, by the play on the meaning of "fall," that they will morally degenerate to Corah's state. The final line, "For witness is a Common Name to all," brings together the references to "others" and to "Corah's own predicament" in terms of what it means to "fall." Since Corah is a witness, these "others" may "fall" because he will bear witness against them, as he did against Agag. But because "witness is a Common Name to all," these "others" may cause Corah himself to "fall" because they will bear witness against him. The various options thus connect Corah with some of his fellow puritans, and at the same time distinguish him from other puritans. What we finally have is a situation in which Corah and all the "others" who join in his evidence are mutually threatening and thus mutually destructive.

The procession of ambiguities in both the Shimei and Corah passages complements their role in the political
situation. The dynamics of the verse, which sometimes enforce the powerful definition of metrical structure, and sometimes enforce the powerful movement of half-lines, lines, and couplets, underscore the shiftiness of the language. And our response to this kind of shiftiness—our not being sure, for instance, if Shimei writes to persuade others or to refine his own noble style, or if the poet is commanding Corah to erect himself or to erect a monumental brass for the people of England—inevitably influences our response. The verse at the same time can accommodate an audience of different factional elements by suggesting these different syntactic options; but the options themselves, like the general tone of the verse, point to the destructive potential of these men and the inconsistency of their behavior. It is an appropriate note for Dryden to strike in concluding his presentation of the rebels.

The Loyalists

The kinds of syntactic manipulation Dryden works with in his portraits of the loyalists are similar to those he uses elsewhere, but the effects are not as ironical and witty as those he achieves when he describes the rebels. Miner suggests that the small band of loyalists "lacks the
vitality of the plotters, perhaps because in literature villainy is always more interesting than virtue.\(^{34}\) This explains part of the situation. The difference, however, also results from the nature of Dryden's approach to his subject matter. Part of his criticism of the rebels, or the Jews, is dependent on the satirical nature of the way he treats them. Dryden does not use direct invective. As Michael Wilding explains, "That we tend now to expect wit, humour, obliqueness, double entendre and subtlety in satire is a result very much of Dryden's achievement.\(^{35}\) Thus in his satire, syntactic interplay can often function ironically and wittily so that simple argument takes on complex satirical implications. And this is not only true for the presentation of the poem's villains. Few lines in the poem are as witty and ironical in terms of syntactic interplay as the opening lines on the king, the poem's apparent hero. But Dryden is not writing this kind of satire, no matter how heavy or light in tone, when he describes the loyalists. As with his depiction of the "sober part of Israel," he can still allow for multiple perspectives on the loyalists, and he can still use meter, rhetoric, and syntax to draw a complex tissue of meaning from the verse; but he does not use technique to produce what we conventionally think of as satiric effects. It is not a question of whether Dryden
is dealing with the good people or the villains, but rather a question of how he uses the verse to suit his purposes. In terms of audience response, the various options presented to the reader in the rebel portraits can both accommodate different factions within the audience, and enforce a general critical tone as one meaning cancels the implications of the other. The syntactic options in the loyalist portraits, however, mark discriminations in meaning which all support the obvious message of the verse. In the Barzillai portrait, for instance, these options offer the reader several reasons for admiring the man:

The Court he practic'd, not the Courtier's art:  
Large was his Wealth, but larger was his Heart:  
Which, well the Noblest Objects knew to choose,  
The Fighting Warrior, and Recording Muse (l1. 825-28).

There are several ambiguities of reference. "Noblest Objects" can refer to "The Fighting Warrior" or to the "Recording Muse," suggesting that Barzillai knew to choose the noblest objects, whether warrior or poet. Or the phrase may refer to "his Heart," suggesting that though the man has great wealth, he, being one of the "Noblest Objects," knows that it is better to choose or value a great heart. Still another possibility is that "The
Fighting Warriour, and Recording Muse," being "Noblest
Objects," themselves "knew to choose" or value the heart
of a man like Barzillai. This final reading is literally
true: Dryden, as poet, as "Recording Muse," has chosen
to honor Barzillai in his poem. Syntactic ambiguity thus
draws a tissue of meaning from the verse and in doing so
enriches its effect. But there are no satiric effects,
no syntactic sequences which wittily undercut meaning, no
ironies which support contrary perspectives. Instead the
effect of syntax is to bring all associations together
so that they interact in specific ways which serve to
compliment the character of Barzillai.

Almost a third of this entire section of the poem
devoted to the loyalists is taken up with Dryden's elegy
on the death of Barzillai's son. Again syntactic
ambiguity serves to enrich the verse on this young man
by enforcing multiple perspectives which all work in the
character's favor:

His Eldest Hope, with every Grace adorn'd,
By me (so Heav'n will have it) always Mourn'd,
And always honour'd, snatcht in Manhood's prime
By unequal Fates, and Providences crime . . .
(11. 831-34).

The participles "adorn'd," "Mourn'd," and "honour'd," each
falling in different half-lines, all refer to "His Eldest
Hope." But each can have a different subject. The half-
line "By me (so Heav'n will have it)" can refer backward
to "adorn'd," suggesting that the poet is the one who
adorns the son in his verse; or it can refer forward to
"Mourn'd," suggesting that the poet will always mourn
the son; or by extension it can also refer forward to
"honour'd," implying that the poet will always honor the
son. We can thus read the poet as the subject of all
three participles, or we can read him as the subject of
only one participle, so that the other two function without
stated subjects and thus imply that the son is naturally
"adorn'd," or "Mourn'd," or "honour'd" by everyone.
Another possibility is that the father, Barzillai, is the
implied subject of any of the participles. These ambiguities
of subject reference enlarge our perspective on the group
of individuals who hold the son in esteem. They add fullness
to the panegyric by making possible a variety of responses
to the verse, all of which serve a single purpose.

The brief passage on Jotham shows how syntax enforces
these effects by closely working together with meter and
rhetoric:

Jotham of piercing wit and pregnant thought,
Indew'd by nature, and by learning taught
To move Assemblies, who but onely try'd
The worse awhile, then chose the better side;
Nor chose alone, but turn'd the balance too;  
So much the weight of one brave man can doe  
(ll. 882-87).

The final half-line of the first couplet, "and by learning taught," can syntactically refer backward and forward. When it refers backward, we read that Jotham is "Indew'd by nature, and by learning taught," a reading enforced by the meter and rhetoric of that entire couplet which establishes a parallel relationship, in terms of the workings of chiasmus, between "wit" and "learning," and "nature" and "thought," each word belonging to a different half-line segment of verse. But the half-line can also refer forward, suggesting that Jotham is "by learning taught / To move Assemblies," a reading supported by the parallel syntactic extension of the final half of each line, "and by learning taught," and "who but onely try'd." Syntactic ambivalence thus makes possible two ways of reading the verse, both of which compliment Jotham's abilities; and at the same time it suggests two series of parallelisms enforced by the interplay of meter and rhetoric.

Dryden ends his presentation of the loyalists with the portrait of Amiel, one which relies on several different kinds of syntactic manipulation:
Indulge one labour more my weary Muse,
For Amiel, who can Amiel's praise refuse?
Of ancient race by birth, but nobler yet
In his own worth, and without Title great:
The Sanhedrin long time as chief he rul'd,
Their reason guided and their Passion coold;
So dextrous was he in the Crown's defence,
So form'd to speak a Loyal Nation's Sense,
That as their band was Israel's Tribes in small,
So fit was he to represent them all (ll. 899-907).

The final half-line of the second couplet, "and without Title great," prompts several options. The adjective "great" can modify Amiel, suggesting that he is great despite the fact that he possesses no "Title." Reading the adjectival reference in this way enforces the backward syntactic movement of the half-line, so that we read the couplet as a self-contained syntactic unit: Amiel is of ancient race by birth, is nobler yet in his own worth, and is great without holding a title. But the word "great" can also modify "Title," so that when we now read the couplet as a syntactic unit, we understand that Amiel is of ancient race by birth, is nobler in his own worth, and he is all this without holding a great title. Reading the adjectival reference in this way now enforces the forward syntactic movement of the line, so that we read "and without Title great: / The Sanhedrin long
time as chief he rul'd." The multiple meanings allowed by both the syntactic ambivalence of the half-line and the ambiguity of adjective reference all contribute to Dryden's "praise" of Amiel.

In the following line, "Their Reason guided and their Passion coold," the words "guided" and "coold" seem to function as past tense verbs, like "rul'd" in the preceding line, "The Sanhedrin long time as chief he rul'd," thus suggesting that while ruling the Sanhedrin, Amiel "guided" their reason and "coold" their passion. But the words can also function as participles, each modifying the noun which precedes it. The meaning is slightly altered: since Amiel has ruled the Sanhedrin for a "long time," their "Reason" is now "guided" and their "Passion" is "coold." The discriminations in meaning, which distinguish Amiel's actions from the results he achieves through his actions, enlarge our impression of the man's abilities as a ruler.

Three of the remaining lines of the passage begin with the word "So": "So dextrous," "So form'd," and "So fit." All of these initial phrases are connected by the syntactic ambiguity of the half-line "in the Crown's defence." When this half-line refers backward, we read the entire line as a self-contained syntactic unit: "So dextrous was he in the Crown's defence." When the half-
line refers forward, we strengthen the mid-line pause after "he" and understand that "So dextrous was he," and "in the Crown's defence, / So form'd to speak." When syntax and meter enforce this reading, the remaining half-line, "a Loyal Nation's Sense," can function as object of the infinitive "to speak," meaning that Amiel is "So form'd to speak a Loyal Nation's Sense"; or it can function in apposition to the implied subject, Amiel, who is himself "a Loyal Nation's Sense." The final couplet, "That as their band was Israel's Tribes in small, / So fit was he to represent them all," functions as its own syntactic unit. But since the half-line "So fit was he" almost exactly parallels the half-line "So dextrous was he," it too can be read in terms of its relationship with "in the Crown's defence," so that we finally understand that Amiel is "So dextrous," "So form'd," and "So fit" in the crown's defence, and for that reason is, in terms of Israel's tribes, "So fit . . . to represent them all."

As we read the verse, all the options identifying different qualities in the man become connected to his service to the crown. This kind of cumulative effect of the syntax might be contrasted to the effects Dryden achieves in the couplet on Achitophel:

Oh, had he been content to serve the Crown, With vertues only proper to the Gown. . . .
Here, as we have seen, syntax supports several discriminations about how Shaftesbury served the crown: with virtues only, with only proper virtues, with virtues proper only to the gown. A reader might respond to any one of these different implications. In the case of Amiel, however, response to any one option inevitably leads to a general and consistently supported response to the praiseworthy abilities of his character.

Syntactic manipulation in the loyalist portraits continually shows how Dryden is able to draw a variety of complimentary meanings from the verse which have the effect of adding fullness to his brief description of each individual. And here, as elsewhere, Dryden aims for effects which suit his political purposes. This use of syntax contrasts with the kind of syntactic manipulation which prompted satiric effects in the presentation of the rebels and the English people, and ironical effects in the opening lines on the king. But it does mark an important point in the poem. The poet's address to "foolish Israel," which immediately precedes the presentation of the loyalists, and David's speech to his people, which follows the loyalist portraits, are both characterized by this same kind of syntactic manipulation that allows for multiple perspectives all enforcing a single argument. And these
speeches, in turn, contrast with those which come earlier in the poem, the speeches of Achitophel and Absalom. Here the variety of syntactic options produces satiric effects that were also characteristic of Dryden's description of the rebel faction which, in terms of the poem's structure, provides a framework for these rebel speeches.

Part v. The Speeches: Achitophel, Absalom, The Poet, The King

When Schilling writes of Achitophel's speeches to Absalom that their "rapid, specious, rushing arguments are subtly ambiguous," one might note that at least in terms of the interplay of syntax, meter, and rhetoric they are no more ambiguous than any other verse in the poem, only ambiguous in different ways and for different purposes. The belief that Achitophel's speeches are in some sense peculiarly specious and ambiguous seems to stem from the assumption that Achitophel's use of language is modeled on that of Milton's Satan. Anne Ferry in her study of *Milton and Miltonic* Dryden writes: "The connections between Achitophel and Satan as corruptors of language are even richer and more important in their implications than the effects achieved by the parallel temptation scenes. Achitophel not only uses the original tempter's tool of
flattery and fraud; he is also made to express an attitude
toward language reminiscent of Satan's in Paradise Lost,
and to debase words in characteristic ways recalling the
modes of speech by which Milton distinguishes Satan's
fallen condition. He is therefore presented like Satan
as an artful abuser of language, the nature and consequences
of his abuse of it envisioned as Milton defines Satanic
rhetoric.\textsuperscript{37} Some comparison of the two figures is implicit:
we know that Dryden had Milton's Satan in mind when he
created his Achitophel. But to say that Achitophel uses
"Satanic rhetoric" complicates the comparison by
suggesting that Milton and Dryden held the same notions
about rhetoric. Stanley Fish has argued that Milton
writes in a tradition of "deep distrust, even fear, of
verbal manipulation," where the "appeal of rhetoric was
traditionally associated with the weakness of fallen
intellect. . . ."\textsuperscript{38} Even Satan's syntax, Fish explains,
prompts fallacies which "are wrapped in serpentine trails
of false beginnings, faulty pronoun references, missing
verbs and verbal schemes which sacrifice sense to sound
('Surer to prosper than prosperity / Could have assur'd');
it is a loose style, irresponsibly digressive, moving
away steadily from logical coherence (despite the
appearance of logic) and calling attention finally to the
virtuosity of the speaker." It would be difficult to compare this use of rhetoric and syntax with Achitophel's language, simply because the kinds of syntactic manipulation inherent in his speeches prompt the same kinds of discriminations in meaning and multiple perspectives that occur in much of the language used by the poet in his description of such various characters as the king, the English people, and the rebels. Achitophel's language, in other words, may be "satanic" in some respects, especially in terms of some of its diction and the way it mimics some of Milton's syntactic structures. But in terms of syntactic ambiguity, it produces effects which, like those produced elsewhere in the poem, have specific relevance to the character with whom they are associated. The comparison of Achitophel and Satan can thus be useful, but only up to a certain point. Beyond that it leads into matters concerning Dryden's use of language which are neither relevant to his presentation of Achitophel nor revealing of the ways in which he uses language in the poem. There is nothing inherently wrong with Achitophel's language--its rhetoric or syntax. But as with other characters in the poem, Achitophel's language can help us see what is wrong with him.

A. W. Verrall and Paul Ramsey have analyzed the metrical structure of the opening lines of Achitophel's speech to
Absalom, noting how the first five couplets have clearly defined mid-line pauses and how the sixth couplet upsets this pattern so that, in Ramsey's terms, "the very strong stress given to 'Saviour' completes the blasphemous typology of the opening lines, the Old Testament prophecies being fulfilled by the coming of the Messiah."^40 At this point syntax too loses its pattern and begins to work in ambivalent ways which suggest a different focus on what Achitophel is saying and revealing:

Auspicious Prince! at whose Nativity
Some Royal Planet rul'd the Southern sky;
Thy longing Countries Darling and Desire;
Their cloudy Pillar, and their guardian Fire:
Their second Moses, whose extended Wand
Divides the Seas, and shews the promis'd Land:
Whose dawning Day, in every distant age,
Has exercis'd the Sacred Prophets rage:
The People's Prayer, the glad Diviners Theam,
The Young-mens Vision, and the Old mens Dream!
Thee, Saviour, Thee, the Nations Vows confess;
And, never satisfi'd with seeing, bless:
Swift, unbespoken Pomp's, thy steps proclaim,
And stammering Babes are taught to lisp thy Name.
How long wilt thou the general Joy detain;
Starve, and defraud the People of thy Reign?
(11. 230-45).

Because of the well defined mid-line pauses in each of the first five couplets, and possibly even in the first line of the sixth couplet, "Thee, Saviour, Thee, the Nations Vows confess," we are easily led to expect that there should be a similar mid-line pause in the following line,
"And, never satisfi'd with seeing, bless." Of course there is no mid-line pause: as Verrall notes, the metrical pattern has been broken and the pause follows "seeing." But when we read the line expecting to find a mid-line pause, and as a result at least momentarily assign one to the line, notice how the syntax and meaning are altered. The half-line "And, never satisfi'd" refers to the "Nations Vows," so that instead of suggesting that the English nation is "never satisfi'd with seeing" Absalom, the verse suggests that the nation is simply "never satisfi'd." The connotations attached to the remaining half-line, "with seeing, bless," in turn complement this reading: just as the English nation is "never satisfi'd," so whenever they "see" someone as striking as Absalom, they bless him. Verrall had noted a similar type of double meaning embedded in the final couplet of the passage, "How long wilt thou the general Joy detain; / Starve, and defraud the People of thy Reign." He explains how "the necessary pause after 'people,' to save the sense, brings a surprise to the ear and so emphasizes the suggested royalty."41 This observation is another way of accounting for the interplay of meter and syntax. When the half-line "Starve, and defraud the People" moves forward, it prompts a favorable impression of Absalom who
is seen as starving and defrauding the people by denying them his services. But when the half-line syntactically refers backward, "How long wilt thou / the general Joy detain ; // Starve, and defraud the People," two different meanings are suggested. First, we might understand that Absalom has all along been starving and defrauding the people since when Achitophel asks "How long wilt thou the general Joy detain," the implied question may be, how long will this situation continue. Or second, we might understand that the real joy of the English people, who, as the poet says, feel compelled to change their ruler every time the moon renews her prime, is to be starved and defrauded by pretenders like Absalom, and that by not usurping the crown, Absalom is detaining their joy. Both of these readings, along with the ambiguity of the line "And, never satisfi'd with seeing, bless," have the effect of undercutting our impression of Absalom and the English people. And yet the lines are spoken by Achitophel. We can assume that Dryden as poet is using language to undercut our picture of Absalom and the English people: he has done this before in his own portraits of these characters. But now he has Achitophel do the very same thing. In this sense both Dryden as poet and Achitophel as speechmaker use language in similar ways: satanic rhetoric is also the poet's rhetoric. But though their methods and
even their purposes are similar, the kinds of responses which their syntactic options attract are different. Dryden as poet makes subtle distinctions between meanings in order to accommodate different audience elements. Achitophel's language, however, works against his own intentions: in trying to praise Absalom, he criticizes him; in trying to commend the English people, he insults them. He again reveals himself as false, this time to the very ones whose rights and power he claims to support.

Achitophel's syntax often suggests two meanings which jar with each other. Typically one will seem to be what he obviously intends to say, while the other will be more revealing of his thought, as in this example:

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All sorts of men by my successful Arts,
Abhorring Kings, estrange their alter'd Hearts
From David's rule: And, 'tis the general Cry,
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The half-line "Abhorring Kings" seems to refer to the first half of the preceding line, "All sorts of men," so that we understand that these men, abhorring kings as they do, now estrange their hearts from David's rule because of Achitophel's "successful Arts." But "Abhorring Kings" can also function as a syntactic extension of a straightforward reading of the preceding line, "All sorts of men by my successful Arts, / Abhorring Kings," implying that because
of Achitophel's "successful Arts," these men abhor kings. Achitophel seems, in this case, to say that he has estranged the hearts of men who have already abhorred kings; but at the same time he suggests that he is the one who has made them abhor kings in the first place.

A slightly different instance of how Achitophel can modify his meaning occurs when he describes to Absalom what the young man can gain by usurping the crown:

Not barren Praise alone, that Gaudy Flower,
Fair only to the sight, but solid Power . . .
(11. 297-98).

It seems as though Achitophel is describing "barren Praise" as a "Gaudy Flower" which is "Fair only to the sight," and then uses the conjunction "but" to separate all these descriptions of "Praise" from the final reference to what Absalom really has to gain, "solid Power." The conjunction, however, may only serve to separate that final half-line from the preceding half-line, so that when we read "Fair only to the sight, but solid Power," we understand that though "Praise" is "Fair only to the sight," it is also "solid Power." Again, there is a clear difference in meaning, and as with the previous example of this kind of syntactic effect in Achitophel's speech, the less obvious reading seems more revealing of the rebel's intentions: he
seems to be not so much interested in turning people away from David as he is in making them abhor any king; and he seems not to want to distinguish gaudy praise from solid power so much as he wants to let Absalom know that to gain praise is to gain power. As a result of this syntactic ambiguity, we can get two versions of what Achitophel says, two options which allow for different reference, both of which fit the general sense of the argument, but only one of which reveals the heart of his meaning. The hypocrisy of his position, here revealed by the contradictory meanings enforced by two different options, can also be seen on a more general level when we keep in mind that Achtiophel, though he tries to persuade Absalom to destroy the crown in the name of liberty and commonwealth, is all the while actually trying to make the young man into a king.

Although it is possible to read these syntactic ambivalences as deliberate attempts on Achitophel's part to confuse Absalom, the way Achitophel manipulates syntax is basically characteristic of the ways in which Dryden as poet has worked with syntax throughout the poem. We can hear Dryden through Achitophel's speeches, but no more so than we can hear Dryden through David's final address to the English people. And the same general effects are produced: syntactic ambiguity allows for multiple perspectives which suit specific political purposes. In
Achitophel's case, these effects lead us to certain conclusions about the man. The syntactic options contained in his speeches have different references and thus different meanings, and as we entertain these various meanings, we are forced to recognize the inconsistencies inherent in his language.

Again, these same kinds of options can produce different effects for different characters. For instance, Achitophel's lines on David might be compared to the way Dryden handles the king in order to see how in each case different purposes are served:

God said he lov'd your Father; cou'd he bring
A better Proof, than to Anoint him King?
It surely shew'd he lov'd the Shepard well,
Who gave so fair a Flock as Israel (ll. 429-32).

The pronoun "Who" in the line "Who gave so fair a Flock as Israel" can refer to God or David, that is, to either "he" or "Shepard" both mentioned in the preceding line. Depending on which noun is antecedent, the connotations of the verse change. If "Who" refers to God, then we understand that God surely loved his shepherd David since he gave him so fair a flock as Israel. But if "Who" refers to David, then the line "It surely shew'd he lov'd the Shepard well" refers to the preceding line, and we understand that God surely loved David since he anointed
him king. When read in this context, the final line
"Who gave so fair a Flock as Israel" refers to David's
own propagation of Israel, and recalls Dryden's
description of the king in the opening lines of the
poem as one who "Scatter'd his Maker's Image through the
land." There Dryden explained how "Israel's Monarch,
after Heaven's own heart, / His vigorous warmth did,
variously, impart. . . ." The ambiguity of "His" made it
unclear whose "vigorous warmth" was imparted, that of
"Israel's Monarch" or that of "Heaven's own heart," namely
God. The implied comparison of the king and God in
Achitophel's speech is revealed in much the same way. The
basic effect of the syntactic ambiguity, in other words,
is the same in both cases. But the particular effect is
different, because each ambiguity functions within a
different context and serves a different purpose. In the
beginning of the poem, Dryden tries to deal wittily with
the king's promiscuity: the verse allows us to think of
both the king and God as imparting "His vigorous
warmth," thus we can enlarge our perspective on the
situation and view David's "Polygamy" with some humor and
lenience. But when Dryden has Achitophel use this kind
of double perspective in his attempt to persuade Absalom
to rebel, the effect is different. Achitophel's idle
flattery of the king contrasts with the poet's witty description. Since we know that Achitophel's aim here is to undercut Absalom's favorable impression of his father, the comparison of David and God makes Achitophel's attempt seem all the more deceitful. When, for instance, he goes on to say, "The name of Godly he may blush to bear: / 'Tis after God's own heart to Cheat his Heir" (ll. 435-36), he is clearly inverting the meaning of the poet in the opening lines of the poem who explains how "Israel's Monarch" acts "after Heaven's own heart." While the poet uses the comparison of the king and god so that it works in the king's favor, Achitophel uses the comparison for the exact opposite effect: when he idly flatters the king, he does the same to God; and when he undercuts this flattery by suggesting "'Tis after God's own heart to Cheat his Heir," he undercuts his flattery of both God and the king.

A similar instance of Achitophel confusing a reference to God, this time with reference to Absalom, occurs when he responds to Absalom's defense of his father. The poet introduces Achitophel's remarks by describing him in Miltonic terms:

Him staggering so when Hells dire Agent found,
While fainting Vertue scarce maintain'd her Ground,
He pours fresh Forces in, and thus Replies:
Th' Eternal God Supreamly Good and Wise,  
Imparts not these Prodigious Gifts in vain; 
What Wonders are Reserv'd to bless your Reign? 
Against your will your Arguments have shown, 
Such Vertue's only given to guide a Throne

(11. 373-79).

The couplet structure is broken in the transition from 
the poet's description of Achitophel to the beginning of 
Achitophel's speech: the first line of the couplet, "He 
pours fresh Forces in, and thus Replies," is part of the 
poet's description; the second line, "Th' Eternal God 
Supreamly Good and Wise," is part of Achitophel's speech. 
As a result of this broken couplet structure, the line 
"What Wonders are Reserv'd to bless your Reign" is 
metrically and syntactically ambivalent. It should refer 
to the preceding line, "Imparts not these Prodigious 
Gifts in vain," since the two rhyme words "vain" and 
"Reign" define the conventional couplet structure. But 
this preceding line seems to have a stronger connection 
to the sense of the line which precedes it: "Th' Eternal 
God Supreamly Good and Wise, / Imparts not these Prodigious 
Gifts in vain," so that the line "What Wonders are Reserv'd 
to bless your Reign" might also be read in terms of its 
forward syntactic movement to the following line, "Against 
your will your Arguments have shown." The resulting
implications are very different. When the line syntactically moves backward, as couplet structure would have it do, then the "Wonders" reserved to bless Absalom's reign are seen as "Prodigious Gifts" imparted by God. But when the line moves forward and breaks the conventional couplet structure, just as the first line of Achitophel's speech had done, then the "Wonders" reserved to bless Absalom's reign are seen as having been "shown" by Absalom's own "Arguments."

With one reading, God becomes the subject of the action, reserving "Wonders" to bless Absalom's reign. With the other reading, Absalom becomes the subject, revealing through his own arguments the "Wonders" reserved to bless his reign. The final line of the passage, "Such Vertue's only given to guide a Throne," reestablishes the conventional couplet structure by allowing us to read the preceding line, "Against your will your Arguments have shown," as syntactically moving forward to complete the couplet. But this happens only after Dryden, by breaking the couplet structure in the transition from the poet's description of Achitophel to Achitophel's speech, has allowed for the metrical and syntactic ambivalence of the following lines, and the resulting ambivalence in meaning.

Achitophel, here by confusing a reference to God with a reference to Absalom, achieves certain specific effects.
He manages to compliment God for doing the same things which he praises Absalom for accomplishing. In this sense he equates the two. But whereas his comparison of the king and God had the effect of undercutting the king's position, here the comparison of Absalom and God serves to enhance Absalom's position. Each comparison thus provides an example of how Dryden can make Achitophel's language ambivalent by employing similar techniques and even similar subject matter, but at the same time allows Achitophel to achieve very different kinds of effects. What finally makes Achitophel's speeches interesting is this way in which his language can serve his purposes so well, both to help reveal the real meaning of what he is saying, and to reveal in spite of himself his real nature. The syntax of his speeches is as effective in producing its own kind of complexity of meaning and revelation of character as that which Dryden as poet uses anywhere else in the poem.

Absalom has two brief speeches: the first, his response to Achitophel in defense of the king; the second, his address to the English people asking for their support of the rebellion. Schilling, in noting the difference between the two speeches, contrasts what Absalom says
with the poet's description of him: "Absalom's first speech was a careful reply to temptation; the second speech shows that the temptation has succeeded. We should distinguish between what the narrator says about Absalom and what the young man himself says, especially in the 'progress' speech. What is said about Absalom shows him as being deceived; what he says in the end shows him as a deceiver, someone going after power as he must. Absalom says things that are more subtly revealing and damaging than what the narrator generously records about him." \(^{42}\)

This assessment of Absalom again presents the notion that there is something peculiarly subtle about the language used for temptation and deception. But in terms of the syntax of the verse, Absalom's address to the English people is no more subtle in its suggestive power than his reply to Achitophel in defense of his father, or than the poet's description of Absalom himself early in the poem where he allowed for double perspectives on the young man's qualities and abilities. With the speeches, Dryden sustains our ambivalent impression of Absalom. And as syntax defines this ambivalence in different ways, it undercuts a possibly favorable impression of his character.

Most of the syntactic units in Absalom's first speech in defense of the king are either interrogative or
conditional, at least in terms of how accurately these syntactic units can be defined by the subject matter and the metrical system of pauses. Consider how the clauses function in this passage in which Absalom describes the king:

Whom has he Wrong'd in all his Peaceful Reign?  
Who sues for Justice to his Throne in Vain?  
What Millions has he Pardon'd of his Foes,  
Whom Just Revenge did to his Wrath expose!  
Mild, Easy, Humble, Studious of our Good;  
Enclin'd to Mercy, and avers from Blood.  
If Mildness Ill with Stubborn Israel Suite,  
His Crime is God's beloved Attribute.  
What could he gain, his People to Betray,  
Or change his Right, for Arbitrary Sway?  
Let Haughty Pharaoh Curse with such a Reign,  
His Fruitful Nile, and Yoak a Servile Train.  
If David's Rule Jerusalem Displease,  
The Dog-star heats their Brains to this Disease (11. 321-34).

Three couplets pose questions; two couplets begin with "If" and function as conditional statements. Of the two remaining couplets, one seems to function as part of a conditional statement, and the other has nothing at all to do with the king. The first of these, "Mild, Easy, Humble, Studious of our Good; / Enclin'd to Mercy, and avers from Blood," cannot function as a self-contained syntactic unit since it has no verb. It must therefore function as part of the question which precedes it, or
as part of the conditional statement which follows it, since subject matter ties these two couplets together. The only other couplet in the passage which serves as a direct statement is the one which says nothing about the king: "Let Haughty Pharaoh Curse with such a Reign, / His Fruitful Nile, and Yoak a Servile Train." Subject matter here seems to relate this couplet with the following one on "David's Rule," another couplet which begins with "If" and poses a conditional statement. As a result of the syntactic structure of his speech, Absalom actually makes no direct statements about his father. The praise implied in his questions and conditional statements is always somewhat modified by the syntactic function of the language.

Absalom's entire defense of the king is ironically framed by questions about himself. He begins by asking "And what Pretence have I / To take up Arms for Publick Liberty?" (11. 315-16), and on two other occasions he echoes this same meaning: "Why then shoud I, Encouraging the Bad, / Turn Rebell, and run Popularly Mad?" (11. 335-36); "Why shoud I then Repine at Heavens Decree; / Which gives me no Pretence to Royalty?" (11. 361-62). His only direct statement of praise for the king is couched within a syntactically ambiguous passage:
My Father Governs with unquestion'd Right;
The Faiths Defender, and Mankind's Delight:
Good, Gracious, Just, observant of the Laws;
And Heav'n by Wonders has Espous'd his Cause
(11. 317-20).

All of the terms of praise, "The Faiths Defender,"
"Mankind's Delight," "Good, Gracious, Just, observant of
the Laws," either function in apposition to or modify a
noun. But they can refer to two nouns, "My Father" or
"unquestion'd Right." It is not clear, in other words,
whether Absalom's praise specifically refers to the person
of his father, or to the position his father assumes as
king, his "unquestion'd Right." This alternate reading
which praises the position rather than the man is enforced
by the sense of the final line, "And Heav'n by Wonders has
Espous'd his Cause," which emphasizes the king's "Cause,"
his "unquestion'd Right," rather than his own individual
qualities. Thus Absalom's seeming statement of praise
is finally modified by ambiguities of reference; and when
we keep in mind that these two couplets are Absalom's
only direct statements of praise for his father, that all
other praise is implied within the context of interrogative
or conditional statements, then the final effect of the
young man's defense of his father is significantly lessened
by the syntactic structure of his language.
There are only three other statements of direct expression in this first speech. The longest, lines 349-60, is devoted not to the king, but to praise of the king's brother. And in the remaining two statements, which close the speech, Absalom speaks to himself:

I find, I find my mounting Spirits Bold,
And David's Part disdains my Mothers Hold.
Why am I Scanted by a Niggard Birth?
My Soul Disclaims the Kindred of her Earth:
And made for Empire, Whispers me within;
Desire of Greatness is a Godlike Sin (ll. 367-72).

The syntactic ambiguity of the final couplet is an instance of the way in which Absalom will use language in his address to the English people. Each half-line segment of the line "Desire of Greatness / is a Godlike Sin" can refer to what Absalom's "Soul" whispers within to him. When read, for instance, in terms of the context of the surrounding lines which describe the young man's growing ambition, the meaning of the final couplet seems to be contained within a line and a half: "And made for Empire, Whispers me within; / Desire of Greatness." It is, in other words, Absalom's awareness of his "Desire of Greatness," rather than his recognition that such desire is a "Godlike Sin," that shapes our picture of him. The oxymoronic phrase "Godlike Sin" enhances our perspective on the ambivalences of Absalom's situation: we can view
his ambitions as both "Godlike" and sinful, just as we have been able to view his praise of the king as direct and conditional, and just as we have been able to view Absalom himself, in terms of the poet's description of him, in both favorable and unfavorable contexts.

When Absalom speaks to the English people his syntactic units are those of direct declarative statements. Ambivalence of meaning typically results from syntactically and metrically enforced double readings:

I mourn, my Countrymen, your lost Estate; Tho' far unable to prevent your fate: Behold a Banisht man, for your dear cause Expos'd a prey to Arbitrary laws! (ll. 698-701).

The half-line "for your dear cause" can refer backward and forward: each reading prompts a different impression of Absalom's motivations. When it refers backward and we read "Behold a Banisht man, for your dear cause," then it seems as though Absalom is a banisht man who is "for," in support of, "your dear cause." The word "for," however, can have a different meaning: it can suggest that Absalom is a banisht man "for," because of, his support of the cause, a reading enforced by the forward syntactic movement of the half-line, "for your dear cause, / Expos'd a prey to Arbitrary laws," which implies that Absalom has
been "Expos'd a prey" because of his support of the cause. The two readings distinguish between Absalom's possible motivations for being involved in the people's "cause": on the one hand, it seems as though his support of the cause has little to do with the way he views his banishment, a reading enforced by the sense of the following couplet, "Yet oh! that I alone cou'd be undone, / Cut off from Empire, and no more a Son." But on the other hand, we might understand that Absalom views his banishment and the fact that he has been exposed to arbitrary laws as a direct result of his support of the cause, a reading enforced by the triplet which completes the opening lines of the speech, "Now all your Liberties a spoil are made; / AEgypt and Tyrus intercept your Trade, / And Jebusites your Sacred Rites invade." As a result of this kind of ambivalence in meaning, we cannot be sure how Absalom views his banishment or his involvement in the cause. He seems to interpret these situations in both a social and personal context, and his intentions can thus be seen as deriving from very different motivations. Absalom's syntax, then, like that used by the poet elsewhere in the poem, offers two different options, with one tending to undercut the meaning of the other: seeing Absalom's political
motivations as deriving from a personal, selfish source weakens his position as a spokesman for a social cause.

When he goes on to describe the king, we have a similar instance of how syntactic ambiguity enforces this kind of double perspective:

He gives, and let him give my right away:
But why should he his own, and yours betray?
(11. 713-14).

The half-line "But why should he his own" can refer backward to the verb "give," meaning why should the king give away his own right; or it can refer forward to the verb "betray," meaning why should the king betray both "his own right" and "yours." This ambiguity again recalls the way the poet described Absalom in the early part of the poem: one reading prompts one response to the situation, while the alternate reading modifies the implications of what seems to be the intended meaning of the verse. And the ambiguity serves similar political purposes: the two syntactic options attract two different responses, each altering our understanding of what Absalom is saying about the king. In suggesting that Charles may "give" his own right away, and that in this sense he will betray the right of the people, Absalom might appeal to those who sympathize with the king and who believe that the king's right and their
own right are dependent on each other. But in suggesting that Charles may "betray" his own right and that of the people, Absalom might appeal to his own sympathizers by implying that Charles is betraying these rights because he gives away Absalom's right. Here the shiftiness of Absalom's syntax serves purposes very similar to those of Achirophelel whose manipulations of language, though aimed at persuasion, can also have the effect of undercutting our impression of the speaker by allowing us to entertain two disparate notions of what he says. Notice that this process of syntax allowing for two options, one of which contradicts the other, differs from the method of syntax enforcing two options which accommodate different factions of the audience. While the method of accommodation allows for flexibility in meaning, the mainly contradictory nature of Absalom's syntax enhances a dominant effect, that of calling the speaker's motives into question. This contradiction, of course, is apparent only to the reader who can see both options.

The final lines of the speech expose this same kind of ambivalence inherent in Absalom's language:

Take then my tears (with that he wip'd his Eyes)
'Tis all the Aid my present power supplies:
No Court Informer can these Arms accuse,
These Arms may Sons against their Fathers use,
And, 'tis my wish, the next Successors Reign
May make no other Israelite complain (ll. 717-22).
Notice in the line "'Tis all the Aid my present power supplies" that "Aid" refers to "tears" mentioned in the previous line. The reference also moves forward to the following couplet where the "Aid" is described as "Arms." Thus the half-line "'Tis all the Aid" has both a backward and forward reference that helps explain the meaning. We have a similar type of syntactic movement with the half-line "And, 'tis my wish." The couplet structure enforces the forward syntactic movement of the half-line, suggesting that Absalom's wish is that "the next Successors Reign / May make no other Israelite complain." But the parallel syntactic structure of the half-line with that of "'Tis all the Aid" makes it possible to read this segment of verse as also moving backward for its meaning. In this case, Absalom's wish is that "these Arms may Sons against their Fathers use." We again end up with two possible ways of reading the verse, one of which contradicts the implications of the other. And notice that the double perspective enforced by the syntactic ambivalence here involves a general distinction between Absalom's social concerns and his own personal desires, a distinction characteristic of the way he uses syntax throughout his speeches.

The double perspectives which were typical of the poet's description of Absalom early in the poem, and which
there helped define his ambivalent character, now here also define his ambivalent language. In his initial reply to Achitophel, for instance, we cannot be sure whether Absalom is praising his father or is posing interrogative and conditional statements about the king's abilities; nor can we be sure about the young man's feelings, whether he believes "Desire of Greatness" to be a "Godlike Sin," or believes that he actually feels this compulsion, this desire of greatness, himself. And in Absalom's speech to the people, we again confront such double perspectives which, on the one hand, can serve his own scheming purposes and which, on the other hand, can serve to undercut any solid impression we might have held about what he is and what he says.

What is finally interesting about these manipulations of syntax in the speeches of Achitophel and Absalom is that the variety of manipulations and even some of the effects they produce are characteristic of the ways Dryden as poet uses language throughout the poem. What Dryden as poet does well, for his own purposes, Achitophel and Absalom do even better, both for their own specific purposes, and for those of Dryden who can make what they say work against their arguments. The situation is similar with the speech of David and with the poet's own address to "foolish Israel,"
where syntactic manipulations and their effects are again characteristic of Dryden's use of syntax at other points in the poem, and where we can again see Dryden through the speeches, shaping them in such a way so that they too serve specific purposes.

In the poet's address to "foolish Israel" we have an example of how Dryden uses similar techniques to achieve different effects: like Absalom's initial reply to Achitophel, the poet's commentary here is filled with interrogative and conditional statements. Consider his description of the potential power of the people and then contrast it with the way Absalom had framed his statements:

If they may Give and Take when e'r they please,  
Not Kings alone, (the Godheads Images,)  
But Government it self at length must fall  
To Natures state; where all have Right to all.  
Yet, grant our Lords the People Kings can make,  
What Prudent man a settled Throne wou'd shake?  
For whatsoe'r their Sufferings were before,  
That Change they Covet makes them suffer more  
(11. 791-98).

Whereas Absalom's interrogative and conditional statements are framed within references to himself, "And what Pretence have I," "Were he a Tyrant ... Well might I Mourn," the poet never calls attention to himself. Absalom leaves his questions unanswered, continually supplying Achitophel with material for his second speech. The poet, on the
other hand, answers the questions he poses, as with the
final two couplets of the passage quoted above. His answer
is even more direct elsewhere when he explains:

What shall we think! can People give away
Both for themselves and Sons, their Native sway?
Then they are left Defensless, to the Sword
Of each unbounded Arbitrary Lord . . . (11. 759-62).

The similar syntactic constructions used by Absalom and the
poet thus finally work to achieve very different effects.
Throughout the poem we are continually encountering
instances of these kinds of variations in technique and
effect: syntax shapes the meaning of the verse, while at
the same time subject matter shapes the effect of
syntactic manipulation.

The general nature of syntactic ambiguity in the
poet's commentary is to allow for multiple options which
all enhance a single argument, the same kind of ambiguity
Dryden used in his presentation of the moderate faction of
the populace, in his depiction of the loyalists, and in
David's speech to the people. The opening lines of
the poet's remarks, for instance, allow for several
discriminations in meaning which add fullness to the
main argument:
Oh foolish Israel! never warn'd by ill,
Still the same baite, and circumvented still!
Did ever men forsake their present ease,
In midst of health Imagine a desease;
Take pains Contingent mischiefs to foresee,
Make Heirs for Monarks, and for God decree?

(ll. 753-53).

The half-line "Still the same baite," for instance, can directly refer to "Israel," suggesting that in its folly and naivety, Israel is itself "the same baite" which it has always been for those who exploit the nation. But the meaning changes when we read the half-line as governed by an understood verb like "take": it then suggests that Israel still takes the "same baite" and as a result is "circumvented still." With one reading, Israel is the object of the action, itself the "baite" for its own ruin; with the alternate reading, Israel is the subject of the action, taking the "baite" and thus assuming a more active role in the political situation.

The remaining two couplets lament the actions of men who mistake health for disease, and in doing so, "Make Heirs for Monarks, and for God decree." Both halves of this final line have ambiguous connotations. When we read, for instance, that "men" "Make Heirs for Monarks," we can understand that they make certain potential heirs into monarchs, "for Monarks," who otherwise would make
their own heirs, or that they actually choose these heirs and thus act in the place of monarchs. The discrimination may seem slight, but it does distinguish between the people acting in the position of a monarch and their acting to usurp the power of a monarch by creating someone to replace him. The final result of their actions is the same, but different readers can be impressed by the different degrees of action which the poet portrays the people as taking. Such is the case with the following half-line "and for God decree": if "decrease" is a verb, then the meaning is that these men "decree" in God's place, "for God"; but if "decrease" is a noun, then the syntax of the half-line reverses that of the preceding half-line, and the meaning is that just as men make heirs for monarchs, so they make "God" into a "decrease," or more properly, they replace his power with the power of popular decree. Again the implications enlarge the suggestive power of the verse, but at the same time sustain the main point of the argument.

When we finally come to David's speech, which closes the poem, we are prepared for the effects this kind of syntactic manipulation produces: we have seen it work
before in passages on the moderates, the loyalists, and in the poet's own commentary. And in turn we can appreciate how syntactic ambiguity in these passages differs from that used in the depiction of the Jews and Jebusites, the rebels, the speeches of Achitophel and Absalom, and even the opening lines on the king. Ian Jack, for instance, has described the speeches of Absalom and Achitophel as "examples of forensic oratory" which "can hardly be over-praised," whereas David's address to the English people, according to Jack, is an exception: "It is no more dramatic than the speeches of the Miltonic Deity." Just as the loyalist portraits seemed less interesting than the rebel portraits, so the king's speech seems less interesting than those of Absalom and Achitophel. Both the portraits and the speeches differ in subject matter and style, and as a result, they differ in effect. Dryden manipulates syntax in the king's speech, but he does so in ways which produce only those effects which enhance the implications of what the king says.

Syntactic ambivalence in Absalom's speeches, for instance, underscored the ambivalence of Absalom himself, the speaker. When David speaks of Absalom, however, these kinds of syntactic manipulation do not work against what the speaker says, but rather continue to emphasize
the ambivalence of Absalom by stressing the king's own ambivalent notions of his son:

If my young Samson will pretend a Call
To shake the Column, let him share the Fall:
But oh that yet he woud / repent and live!
How easie 'tis / for Parents to forgive! (ll. 955-58).

The metrical construction of the second couplet makes it possible to read three of the four half-lines in an ambivalent manner. "But oh that yet he woud" seems to refer forward to "repent and live," suggesting that the king wishes that his son would repent and live. If the half-line moves backward, however, and becomes a syntactic extension of the preceding half-line "let him share the Fall," then the suggestion is that David wishes that Absalom would "share the Fall," and the remaining half-line "repent and live" functions as an imperative clause wherein the king urges Absalom to "repent and live" rather than become involved in a situation which will necessitate his death. By implying that either or both of these fates suit Absalom's circumstance, the king reveals his ambivalent attitude toward his son: on the one hand, he can suggest that punishment is necessary; on the other, he can urge Absalom to repent and escape punishment.
The ambivalence of the half-line "How easie 'tis" serves a slightly different purpose. When it refers to the preceding half-line "repent and live," the king suggests that it is easy for Absalom to repent and live. When the half-line refers forward, the king suggests that it is easy for him as parent "to forgive" his son. One reading implies that Absalom is the subject of the action; the other implies that the king is the subject of a different action. Syntax here suggests the kind of compromise which Dryden speaks of in his preface to the poem when he writes: "Were I the Inventour, who am only the Historian, I should certainly conclude the Piece, with the Reconcilement of Absalom to David. And, who knows but this may come to pass? Things were not brought to an Extremity where I left the Story: there seems, yet, to be room left for a Composure; hereafter, there may only be for pity." The double meaning enforced by the syntactic ambivalence of the king's remarks seems to stipulate the terms of what might be required of each side in order to secure such a "Composure."

If the king's view of Absalom is ambivalent, so is his view of his own role in shaping his son's character:

Poor pitied Youth, by my Paternal care,
Rais'd up to all the Height his Fame could bear . . .
(11. 961-62).
The straightforward reading of the couplet indicates that David blames himself in part for Absalom's situation, and the syntactic ambivalence of the half-line "by my Paternal care" enhances this meaning. When the half-line moves forward, the king suggests that through his own paternal care Absalom has been raised up to a position almost too high for what nature has suited him; when the half-line moves backward, the king assumes a different kind of blame by suggesting that his paternal care has been responsible for making Absalom a "Poor pitied Youth."

Both readings enhance the king's argument, though each enforces discriminations in meaning which add complexity to what the king says, and to our response to the language.

David's treatment of his son might be contrasted with his treatment of the rebels, where syntactic manipulation supports multiple meanings which all enhance the king's condemnation of these men:

Law they require, let Law then shew her Face;  
They could not be content to look on Grace,  
Her hinder parts, but with a daring Eye  
To tempt the terror of her Front, and Dye.  
By their own arts'tis Righteously decreed,  
Those dire Artificers of Death shall bleed.  
Against themselves their Witnesses will Swear,  
Till Viper-like their Mother Plot they tear:  
And suck for Nutriment that bloody gore  
Which was their Principle of Life before (ll. 1008-15).
The line "By their own arts 'tis Righteously decreed"
has ambivalent reference: it can refer to the previous
line, "To tempt the terror of her Front, and Dye,"
suggesting that both the actions and fate of the rebels
are the inevitable outcome of "their own arts"; or it can
refer to the following line which completes the couplet,
"Those dire Artificers of Death shall bleed," which begins
a different train of thought developed in the following
couplets, that the rebels' destruction of their own
"Mother Plot" is an inevitable result of "their own arts."
One reading thus stresses how the rebels cause their
legal fate, death; while the other emphasizes how they
bring about their own mutual destruction.

The king's elaboration on the destruction of the
rebel cause is complicated by the syntactic ambiguity of
the line "Against themselves their Witnesses will Swear."
The pronoun "themselves" can refer to "Witnesses" mentioned
in the followng half-line, or to the "Artificers of Death"
mentioned in the previous line. One reading suggests that
the testimony of the witnesses will be so confused and
reckless that it will work against the witnesses
"themselves," a reading which describes the "Viper-like"
destruction of the "Mother Plot." The alternate reading
suggests that the witnesses will, through their reckless
testimony, swear against the main rebels "themselves," the
"Artificers of Death," a reading which recalls the sense of the initial lines of the passage that emphasize the legal fate of the rebels. The king thus manages to distinguish between how the "Law" will treat the rebels and how "Those dire Artificers of Death" and their "Witnesses" will treat themselves; and at the same time shows how both these actions which shape the rebels' fate ultimately achieve the same end—inevitable destruction of the rebel cause.

If the king's speech and the poet's address to Israel are finally not as interesting as the speeches of Achitophel and Absalom, or as captivating as the poet's description of the rebels, it is not because Dryden fails here to use the formal aspects of his verse to achieve complex effects, but rather because meter, rhetoric, and syntax enforce different effects for different kinds of subject matter. Bernard Schilling is mistaken, I think, when he writes: "When we come to Absalom and Achitophel itself, it is fair to say that the title does not mention the poem's real subject. The poem is in fact about Charles II and his kingly office, showing that the man who is now king is really possessed of the qualities gathered in the conservative myth for the ideal king." The poem
is "about" many things, and it treats them all differently. The "Verse" itself, as Dryden pointed out in his preface "To the Reader," has a "Genius" of its own which will "force its own reception in the World," because there is "a sweetness in good Verse, which Tickles even while it Hurts." Here is the recognition of the function of ambiguity. The king's speech, like the opening lines of the poem devoted to the king, has its peculiar value in terms of both subject matter and style. Dryden would not have claimed that it was superior simply because it was the speech of the king, nor would he have suggested that his own censure of "foolish Israel" was more valuable because it demonstrates how he "draws his Pen for one Party": remember that Dryden considered his portrait of Zimri "worth the whole Poem..."

Absalom and Achitophel is a long and complex poem, but Dryden meant for us to read it with a close focus. The epigraph on the title page, "Si Propius stes / Te Capiet Magis," is from Horace's Ars Poetica: "Ut pictura poesis: erit quae, si propius stes, / te capiat magis, et quaedam, si longius abstes..." ('A poem is like a picture: one strikes your fancy more, the nearer you stand; another, the father away.') Dryden quotes only the first part of Horace's maxim: the nearer you
stand, the more it will seize you. The syntax of the poem surely validates the meaning of the epigraph: it allows for multiple perspectives which all support a single argument, double perspectives which function ironically, and discriminations in meaning that call attention to various aspects of individual characters.

In this sense it is possible to redefine what is meant by the "argument" of the poem. What Dryden suggests in his epigraph and what the syntactic structure of the verse indicates is that the argument of the poem is not something that we derive by general summary, but rather, is continually being shaped by the details which we encounter, which seize us, as we closely follow the verse.

If Absalom and Achitophel is a political poem, it is not so simply because its subject matter happens to be political. Its language is far more political because it offers a variety of options and attracts a variety of responses. The artful ambiguity presents the reader with two kinds of options: one which "Hurts" as it straightforwardly presents opinions, and another which "Tickles" as it tries to attract and accommodate an audience divided in its political sentiments. Dryden's reliance on this kind of ambiguity is the natural product both of his own inheritance of the public voice of the poet, and his peculiar handling of the closed couplet verse form which suited itself so well to the political aims of his poetic discourse.
Notes to Chapter III


2 The Art of John Dryden, p. 103.


7 The Original and Progress of Satire, p. 71.


9 Dryden and the Conservative Myth, p. 148.
Dryden's Poetry, p. 119.


"A Reading of Absalom and Achitophel," YES, 6 (1976), 56-60.


"Dryden's Couplets: Wit and Conversation," EC, 11 (1961), 267. Bruce King in his study of wordplay in the poem makes a similar point. He describes the word "cursedly" as a "very rich pun, working on multiple levels of awareness": it has both "the primary meaning of 'afflicted' and the sarcastic, colloquial meaning of 'damnable.' Within the Pentateuch analogy created at the beginning of the poem, the curse on adultery can be seen as an allusion to Exodus 20:14 or Leviticus 18:20 where adultery was first banned. However, any seventeenth-century reader would recognize a commonplace of Renaissance libertine wit: Christ's new law established monogamy and put an end to the plurality of wives. . . . While redeeming man from the curse in Genesis the new law might be said to have brought another curse" ("Wordplay in Absalom and Achitophel: An Aspect of Style," Lang & S, 2 (1969), 335).

Dryden's Poetry, p. 121.

Dryden's Poetry, pp. 116-17.

Robinson, "A Reading of Absalom and Achitophel," p. 56.

"To the Reader," in Works, p. 3.

Zwicker, Dryden's Political Poetry, p. 121.
21 Dryden's Poetry, p. 129.


23 "Dryden's Absalom," p. 278.

24 Dryden and the Conservative Myth, p. 162.

25 John Dryden's Imagery, p. 78; "Wordplay in Absalom and Achitophel," p. 335; Dryden and the Conservative Myth, p. 185; The Art of John Dryden, pp. 121-22. Ruth Wallerstein, in her article "To Madness Near Allied: Shaftesbury and His Place in the Design and Thought of Absalom and Achitophel," MLQ, 6 (1943), 445-71, traces the background notion that great wit is allied to madness and explains why Dryden uses this idea in his presentation of Achitophel.

26 The Heroic Couplet, pp. 104-5.

27 Dryden and the Conservative Myth, pp. 192-93.

28 Augustan Satire, p. 69.

29 Dryden and the Conservative Myth, p. 207.

30 John Dryden's Imagery, pp. 84-85.


32 The Art of John Dryden, p. 110.

33 "Wordplay in Absalom and Achitophel," p. 331. King's reference is to a line on Zimri, "In squandering wealth was his peculiar art"; but the word seems to work here in the Corah passage in the same way.

34 Dryden's Poetry, p. 137.

36 Dryden and the Conservative Myth, p. 186.


39 Surprised by Sin, pp. 74-75.

40 Verrall, Lectures on Dryden, ed. Margaret De G. Verrall (Cambridge: The Univ. Press, 1914), p. 67; Ramsey, pp. 122-23. The line which Ramsey quotes, "Thee, Saviour, Thee, the Nations Vows confess," and which, as he says, "completes the blasphemous typology of the opening lines," seems also, however, to be an allusion to Lucretius, the beginning of De Rerum Natura: "te, dea, te fugiunt venti...," where the poet praises the goddess Venus. The irony here is that while the poet asks Venus for peace, Achitophel incites Absalom to war. See the Loeb edition of De Rerum Natura (London: William Heinemann, 1924), p. 2, l. 6.

41 Lectures on Dryden, p. 68.

42 Dryden and the Conservative Myth, p. 155.

43 Augustan Satire, p. 63, n. 3.

44 "To the Reader," p. 4.

45 Dryden and the Conservative Myth, p. 277.

46 "Notes" to Absalom and Achitophel, in Works, p. 236. The editors use the Loeb translation for Horace.
Chapter IV Syntax and Dryden's Verse

We have seen how various syntactic options in Absalom and Achitophel enabled Dryden to ingratiate himself with different elements of the political spectrum, and thus how syntactic manipulation served specific purposes in terms of audience response. In one sense, Absalom and Achitophel is almost too suitable as an example of how syntax in verse helps define the relationship between the public poet and his audience because it is a poem which itself is so public and political in its concerns. But this same kind of process is constantly shaping the dynamics of Dryden's poetry, and affecting the relationship between poet and audience in ways that are peculiarly suited to the context of the verse. In this final chapter I want to focus attention on a few passages from a selection of Dryden's other couplet poetry in order to suggest some of the ways in which syntax affects the poet-audience relationship in poems with different aims and contexts.

Dryden's prologues and epilogues obviously rely heavily for their effect on the constant give-and-take between the speaker of the verse and the audience. Syntactic interplay merely serves to support what the
words themselves make clear, that the playwright is actually addressing the audience about their responses to his play. But Dryden's translations are a different story. He wrote most of them late in his career when he had stepped out of the public light, and yet they too are profoundly audience-directed poems. Finally, I want to look at Dryden's most popular poem, *MacFlecknoe*. The variety of syntactic manipulation that he draws on here constantly suggests different subjects for ridicule, and provides a gloss on the types of ambiguity on which Dryden relied in order to enhance the suggestive power of his verse.

Prologues and Epilogues

How to handle an audience: this was Dryden's main concern in the prologues and epilogues. Because of the nature of this problem, it may seem all too obvious that Dryden should draw on syntactic manipulation in these pieces in order to accommodate himself to his audience. Critics have, however, tended to think just the opposite. Arthur Hoffman, for instance, believes that these poems in particular are "characterized by clarity of syntax" and "that for the requirements of the prologue and epilogue, simplicity and directness, a general absence of
ambiguity . . . are actually merits and quite essential."

This kind of response to the poems is based on the assumption that Dryden's main effort was straightforwardly to express his opinions and beliefs, an assumption which has also governed response to *Absalom and Achitophel*, where we have tended to emphasize the political nature of the subject matter rather than the political quality of Dryden's language. But politics in this poem, as we have seen, is defined both by the subject and language. So with the prologues and epilogues where audience response is itself the subject, and where Dryden's method of allowing for a variety of responses defines the very nature of the subject matter.

Dryden was continually complaining in the prologues and epilogues about the difficulty of pleasing the diverse elements of his audience. As he says in the epilogue to *All For Love*, "'Tis more than one Man's work to please you all." And he was continually isolating specific elements of the audience and directing his address to them. In the epilogue to *Tyrannick Love*, for instance, the speaker addresses the "kind Gentlemen," "Sweet Ladies," "Gallants," "Poet," and finally a collective "you" (p. 119); in the epilogue to *Aureng-Zebe* the speaker deals with the responses of two elements of the audience, the
"True English" and the "Bold Brittons," and "your filthy Forreigner" (pp. 156-57); and in the prologue spoken at Mithridates, several elements of the audience are welcomed: "fair Ladies," "kind Men," "He that was the Husbands Friend," "New-Market Brothers of the Switch," and finally "you who never did appear" (pp. 185-86). Often Dryden went out of his way to deal differently with the responses of women and men. In the prologue to Circe he addresses first "the Sex that best does pleasure understand" and then "the Brothers of the Trade"; and in the Prologue to Oxford, 1681, he addresses the ladies and at the same time attracts the response of both men and women: "He makes this difference in the Sexes too, / He sells to Men, he gives himself to you. / To both, he wou'd contribute some delight; / A mere Poetical Hermaphrodite" (p. 485, ll. 32-35). The most common distinction Dryden makes in his audience is that which separates the good critics from the bad critics. In the prologue to All For Love he describes the "Flocks of Critiques" and "those ... whose Wit's so very small" only to contrast them to "you, retiring from much better Cheer" whose critical abilities are obviously superior (pp. 163-64). In the Circe prologue Dryden again contrasts these two kinds of critics: "From these Usurpers we appeal to you, / The only knowing, only judging few" (p. 159). And in the epilogue to Aureng-Zebe
he remarks "Yet scatter'd here and there I some behold, / Who can discern the Tinsel from the Gold" (pp. 156-57). The whole issue of dealing with the audience, in other words, was a major concern in the prologues and epilogues, and involved attracting the responses of disparate elements of that group by specifically addressing them and commenting on them so that they become, at least for a while, the main subject of the poet's attention.

On a technical level, couplet structure in these pieces tends to be extremely tight, so that when Dryden does address or talk about a specific group of people, his comments are commonly enclosed within the couplet or triplet unit. This kind of clarity of structure may be responsible for making these poems seem so plain and direct. But if we keep in mind that the prologues and epilogues were heard rather than read, we can understand why Dryden would have had reason to use a tighter couplet structure, one that might make it easier for an auditor to follow what is being said, but still might allow for flexibility in its implications.³ Verse that is spoken and heard, rather than written and read, can allow for a variety of responses depending on how it is handled by the speaker. In couplet verse, certain half-lines and lines may receive emphasis, and mid-line and end-line pauses can be stressed in different ways, so that meaning is
constantly modified. Syntax thus becomes particularly flexible in verse that is heard: we are not constrained by punctuation or by the tendency to look back over what we read in order to settle on the "correct" syntactic sequence. Listeners, as Empson notes, can be "tempted into the other syntax." 4

Both of these features, then, which are peculiar to the prologues and epilogues—the specific appeal to the audience and the tight structure of the couplet verse—provide the context for the interplay between speaker and listener in these poems. Consider, for example, these lines spoken by Nell Guyn in the prologue to The Conquest of Granada:

This is the hat whose very sight did win yee
To laugh and clap, as though the Devil were in yee.
As then, for Mokes, so now, I hope, you'll be
So dull, to laugh, once more, for love of me
(p. 128, ll. 5-8).

The implications of the final line grow as we listen to the sequence of the verse unfold: the speaker hopes the audience will be "So dull," but what she means by dull is that she wants them "to laugh," and when she goes on to say "once more," then it becomes clear that she wants them to be dull and laugh as they had apparently often done before. Then when she finally says "for love of me," the whole tone changes, indeed the meaning changes: she
hopes that they will be dull and laugh not as they had 
previously done for Nokes, but rather out of love for her. 
The iamb's isolate certain syntactic sequences which lead 
the audience to think that their motives derive from their 
behavior at the other theater, "t'other house," where 
Nokes performed, but then undercut this explanation with 
the final half-line "'for love of me," suggesting to the 
audience that their real motives derive from their 
affection for Nell Guyn. To be dull and laugh at the 
silliness of the rival theater is one thing, but to act 
the same way now for love of Nell is quite a different 
story. The syntactic sequence of the verse, which leads 
listeners in one direction only to turn them finally in a 
different direction, has made it possible for the speaker 
both to insult and commend this group at the same time: 
she can be critical of the way they clap and laugh at the 
ridiculous props used by the rival theater, but can ask 
them to respond to her in the very same way. She has 
given the audience, or at least one element of the audience, 
a way out of their embarrassment by allowing them to have 
two explanations for their behavior, the second of which 
soothes the sarcastic implications of the first.

These discriminations in meaning are obviously 
enhanced by the speaker's option to pause at the end of
certain metrically defined segments of verse. The pause punctuates one syntactic sequence before another sequence begins to modify the meaning. By manipulating the pauses in this couplet from the prologue to The Assignation, the speaker can emphasize two different subjects of the action:

Poets, poor Devils, have ne'er your Folly shown
But, to their cost, you prov'd it was their own
(p. 147, ll. 7-8).

If the speaker pauses after the half-line "But, to their cost," the syntax suggests that "Poets" are continually harming themselves when they expose the folly of the audience: "Poets, poor Devils, have ne'er your Folly shown / But, to their cost. . . ." When the speaker, however, goes on to say "you prov'd it was their own," the syntax supports a different meaning: the "cost" is no longer the criticism poets suffer for exposing folly, but rather the very folly of exposing this kind of behavior in the first place, "it was their own." With one reading, poets seem the main subject of the action, causing their situation; with the alternate reading, the audience becomes the subject, causing this "cost" which the poet feels by proving him to be engaged in his own kind of folly. Allowing for these two options is, again,
one way of dealing with the audience, as the message of
the couplet which immediately precedes this one indicates:
"But Priests can treat you at your own expense: / And,
gravely, call you Fooles, without offence." The poet is
unlike the priest because though he tries not to offend
in calling you fools, he inevitably does, and thus suffers
the cost which in one sense is self-inflicted, but in
another sense is caused by the audience. Who is more
foolish: people who act like fools, or the poet who is
foolish enough to expose their folly? Both poet and
audience can share the same feeling. The poet has thus
distanced himself enough so that he can level his criticism,
but has still managed to stay close enough to his audience
so that he can maintain a certain sense of rapport with
them.

This kind of ambivalence about who is and who is not
the fool appears again in the final lines of the prologue
when the speaker says:

But here's my griefe; though Nature joyn'd with art,
Have cut me out to act a Fooling Part;
Yet, to your praise, the few wits here will say,
'Twas imitating you taught Haynes to Play
(p. 148, ll. 42-45).

Pausing after the half-line "Yet, to your praise" makes it
seem as though the speaker has the fool's part for the
purpose of praising the audience; or perhaps "to your praise" might be taken as a direct compliment to the audience, suggesting that they are the ones who best appreciate the "Fooling Part" which the actor portrays. Either the fool praises the audience, or the audience is attracted to the fool. As the verse continues, however, this half-line can be read in conjunction with the following half-line, indicating that it is what "the few wits" say, not what the actor portrays, that is "to your praise." But when we hear the final line, we realize that what the few wits say is after all the same thing which the actor demonstrates by appealing to the audience as a fool: "'Twas imitating you taught Haynes to Play." The audience is once again associated with the fooling part. The verse thus offers three syntactic options: we can understand that the actor plays the fooling part in order to praise the audience; or that it is to their praise, or their credit, that the fooling part is even portrayed; or finally that the few wits compliment and praise the audience by telling them that they are the very model for the fooling part. With each option the audience is simultaneously praised and insulted.

Meaning is modified in both of these passages because of the syntactic ambivalence of a half-line of verse within
the couplet structure: a well placed pause, almost a sort of hesitancy on the part of the speaker, after these half-lines gives a different slant to what precedes and what follows the half-line, and thus makes the couplet rich in its suggestive power. Let me offer one final example of how this process works within the confines of the couplet and in terms of speaker-audience interplay. In these lines from the prologue To the University of Oxford, 1674, the poet contrasts his relationship with the Oxford community to that he has with an audience of lower tastes:

And you have been so kind, that we may boast,  
The greatest Judges still can pardon most.  
Poets must stoop, when they would please our Pit,  
Debas'd even to the Level of their Wit.  
Disdaining that, which yet they know, will Take,  
Hating themselves, what their Applause must make. . . .  
(p. 308, ll. 30-35).

The first couplet, describing the Oxford audience, is generally complimentary in tone. But there are some discriminations in meaning embedded in the meter and syntax. If the speaker pauses after the first line and a half, "And you have been so kind, that we may boast, / The greatest Judges still," it sounds as if he is boasting that at Oxford poets attract what are "The greatest Judges still." The final half-line, of course, modifies this meaning: "Judges" now becomes the subject of the half-
line verb phrase "can pardon most." The speaker has thus first given what seems to be unqualified praise to the Oxford community, but has then modified this praise by stipulating the reason for their greatness, namely that they can "pardon most." Each option enforces basically the same complimentary tone, but at the same time attracts the response of a different aspect of the Oxford group, those who do in fact consider themselves "The greatest Judges still," and those who can better appreciate Dryden's low profile tone in complimenting them for their ability to pardon his imperfections as a writer.

The next two couplets describe the relationship between the poet and a very different kind of audience. His condemnation of this audience is as strong as his praise for the Oxford community, and the syntax likewise offers options which enforce levels of meaning all underscoring the same critical tone. Consider, for instance, how both meter and rhetoric support the ambiguous syntax of the couplet which describes the poet's response to this audience:

Disdaining that, which yet they know, will Take, Hating themselves, what their Applause must make.
Each initial half-line is composed of a participle and a pronoun: "Disdaining that" and "Hating themselves" give the couplet its neat parallel syntactic structure. Enforcing this parallelism is the possibility that both pronouns can have ambiguous reference in terms of the metrical structure of the couplet which allows for a pause at the end of these half-lines. Thus when the speaker momentarily pauses at the end of the first half-line, we hear the sequence: "Poets must stoop, when they would please our Pit, / Debas'd even to the Level of their Wit. / Disdaining that. . . ." At this point, the pronoun "that" seems to refer to several possible objects of the poet's disdain mentioned in the preceding couplet: the fact that "Poets must stoop," or the "Pit" itself, or the fact that he is "Debas'd even to the Level of their Wit," or finally "their Wit" itself. But when the speaker goes on with "which yet they know, will Take," it becomes obvious that what the poet disdains is the very thing he knows the audience will like. All of these options support the sense of what the speaker is saying, but they enlarge the implications of the criticism by offering a variety of explanations for the poet's disdain, and a variety of ways to account for his relationship with his audience.
The pronoun "themselves" in the following line works in a similar way but serves a different purpose. When the speaker pauses after the half-line "Hating themselves," it may seem as though the poets, disdaining the fact that they must appeal to such an audience, end up "Hating themselves" for engaging in such a condescending activity. But again, the final half of the line offers an alternate meaning, and we now hear the verse saying that the poets themselves hate "what their Applause must make." Each option offers a different object for the participle "Hating": the poets can be seen as hating "themselves" and as hating the debased material which attracts this audience's applause.

In just these three couplets Dryden has been able to accommodate his audience in several ways. He has first praised the Oxford community, both for their greatness as judges and for their ability graciously to pardon his literary imperfections; and he has criticized the common audience both for their own debased wit and for forcing him to attract their applause. He has also managed to assume a low profile in his praise and condemnation: he admits that part of his success before the Oxford audience derives from their willingness to excuse flaws in his writing, and that he is in part to blame for the debased
wit of the common audience by bringing his writing down to their level. His address is directed to the Oxford community, and appropriately so; for by implying that lower level audiences bring out the worst in a writer, he ends up making it seem as though the Oxford community itself is responsible for the success of his writing. These kinds of suggestions, subtly enforced by the syntax of the verse, are what make the prologues and epilogues such interesting examples of Dryden's ability to handle his audience.

The Translations

Dryden had for the most part stepped out of the public light after the collapse of the Restoration monarchy in 1688, and until his death in 1700, devoted most of his energies to verse translation. He was still, however, very much a public poet, one who now wrote for an audience different from that which he addressed in his political poems or on the stage. William Frost in his study of Dryden and the Art of Translation explains: "...Dryden was able to take effective advantage of the presence of a new body of readers, and to appeal directly to his public without the mediation of theater manager, patron, or
politician. This was the public that would later grant the young Pope—whom Tories called a Whig and Whigs a Tory—lifelong independence as a reward for translating Homer and editing Shakespeare. It was also the public that ensured the success of the Spectator papers only a few years after Dryden's death; that supported the great novelists of the later eighteenth century; and that ultimately enabled Samuel Johnson to regard patronage as an obsolete institution. Once more, then, Dryden found himself in the position of having to deal with an audience, and once again the flexibility of his verse form enabled him to engage the attention of his readers in a variety of ways.

We have already seen how Dryden in translating Juvenal was able to enlarge the implications of his verse through manipulation of the syntax, meter, and rhetoric of the closed couplet. I want now to reexamine one of these translated passages, this time focusing on how the verse serves Dryden's purposes as a public poet addressing his audience. Two specific questions arise: first, how does the translation differ from the original in terms of the audience-directed nature of the verse; and second, how does this audience-directed verse in the translations differ from that in Dryden's political and
stage poetry. Let us consider the passage in which Juvenal describes individuals who prostitute their wards:

Quid referam, quanta siccum jecur ardeat ira,  
Cum populum gregibus comitum premat hic spoliator  
Pupilli prostantis?

Here is Dryden's translation:

What Indignation boils within my Veins,  
When perjur'd Guardians, proud with Impious Gains,  
Choak up the Streets, too narrow for their Trains!  
Whose Wards by want betray'd, to Crimes are led  
Too foul to Name, too fulsome to be read!

Consider the specifics of what each poet is saying. Juvenal informs us that he burns with rage when he observes these individuals crowding the streets with their companions and prostituting their wards. Dryden describes the indignation he feels when he observes the guardians choaking up the streets with their following, when he sees their wards betrayed by their own poverty-ridden condition, and when he thinks of the crimes which these wards are forced to commit. The source of Juvenal's rage, in other words, is "hic spoliator," the behavior of the despoiler. Dryden's indignation derives from several sources: the behavior of the guardians, the
condition of their wards, and the crimes to which these wards are inevitably led.

In one sense Dryden has enlarged the implications of the passage simply by adding more detail. But it is not the additional detail so much as the interplay of syntax, meter, and rhetoric that characterizes his version. We have already seen how several ambiguities of reference allow for different readings of his verse: the possessive adjective "Whose" in the phrase "Whose Wards" can refer to "Guardians," "Streets," and "Trains"; the passive verb "are led" can have "want" and "Guardians" as its implied subject; each half of the final line "Too foul to Name, too fulsome to be read" can have reference to "Wards" and "Crimes." Why would Dryden allow for these multiple references? Do they simply point to the complexity of his couplet technique, or do they serve other purposes?

I want to argue that this interplay of syntax forces the reader to connect these various objects of Dryden's indignation, and forces him to see the relationships they share with each other. There is a semantic and syntactic relationship between "Guardians," "Streets," and "Trains," the "Wards" they corrupt, the "Crimes" to which the wards are led, and the final statement—"Too foul to Name, too fulsome to be read"—indicating the poet's
feelings about the entire situation. The reader must come to terms not merely with the complexity of the verse, but the complexity of the situation itself. After reading Juvenal, it is easy to assign blame, to point a finger at the source of the problem. But after reading Dryden, it becomes difficult to come to grips with the problem: many factors are involved, each having some bearing on the other. Juvenal seems more interested in expressing his indignation; Dryden is concerned with explaining the situation to his reader.

This kind of audience-directed verse in the translation involves neither the political ingratiating characteristic of the syntactic interplay in Absalom and Achitophel nor the appeal for audience response characteristic of the prologues and epilogues. It is instead audience-directed in the sense that it makes certain demands of the reader. It asks us to consider various aspects of the situation described. We cannot leave the verse simply agreeing or disagreeing with what the poet says, or even responding to the intensity of his descriptions. Instead, the verse demands that we respond to the details, and the interplay of syntax forces us as well to respond to the interrelationship of these details. Again, Dryden comes through as a poet who does not say things for the purpose
of expressing his opinion, or in this case, his indignation, but rather as one more concerned with the process of allowing for responses to his verse, and calling his reader's attention to the various aspects of what he is talking about. Critics have, of course, recognized that Dryden and Juvenal, though both are satirists, differ from each other in their verse styles and that this stylistic difference affects the kind of poetry each has produced. But the ways in which syntax shapes a variety of meanings in the verse indicates more than a stylistic difference in the two poets: it explains the different approach each took in addressing his audience.

But what of Dryden's translation of another English poet who also wrote in couplet verse? Unlike the bulk of the Latin translations, Dryden's translations of Chaucer provide particularly interesting grounds for analysis because they show Dryden reworking a different kind of English couplet verse into his own type of closed couplet poetry. And as with the Juvenal translations, these of Chaucer also expose the public nature of Dryden's verse style even as he writes within Chaucer's narrative framework.

The passage I want to focus on is from The Cock and the Fox, Dryden's version of Chaucer's The Nun's Priest's Tale. Chauntecleer has just related the details of his
dream to Pertolote only to hear her retort that his dream is merely the result of his bad humors. When she suggests to him that he take a laxative to purge these bad humors, he replies:

Shortly I seye, as for conclusion,  
That I shal han of this avisioum  
Adversitee; and I seye forthermoor,  
That I ne telle of laxatyves no stoor,  
For they been venymous, I woot it weel;  
I hem diffye, I love hem never a deel! 7

Here is Dryden's version:

Let this suffice, that plainly I foresee  
My Dream was bad, and bodes Adversity:  
But neither Pills nor Laxatives I like,  
They only serve to make a well-man sick:  
Of these his Gain the sharp Phisician makes,  
And often gives a Purge, but seldom takes:  
They not correct, but poyson all the Blood,  
And ne'er did any but the Doctors good.  
Their Tribe, Trade, Trinkets, I defy them all,  
With ev'ry Work of 'Pothecary's Hall.' 8

What first seems obvious about Dryden's reworking of Chaucer is that he expands a three line commentary on taking no store in laxatives into an extended criticism of physicians. But the bite of his satire is not to be found only in the additional detail, but chiefly in the careful interplay of syntax, meter, and rhetoric. Notice, for
instance, the ambivalence of the half-line "And often gives a Purge" in the couplet "Of these his Gain the sharp Physician makes, / And often gives a Purge, but seldom takes." It can function as an extension of the syntax of the first line so that we hear this half-line as explaining how this doctor makes his profit, by often giving a purge. But the half-line also syntactically refers forward, so that when we complete the couplet and read "but seldom takes," we then understand a very different statement, that the doctor often prescribes what he himself rarely takes. The syntax, working together with the metrical structure of the verse, is suggesting two different verbal sequences, each supporting a different meaning.

The way that syntax works in this couplet and the irony it enforces recall some of the double statements Dryden was able to make in Absalom and Achitophel. There, for instance, he could subtly comment on the fact that the English people are prone to violence by describing them as "They who when Saul was dead, without a blow, / Made foolish Ishbosheth the Crown forgo," and allowing the half-line "without a blow" to refer to both Saul's (Cromwell's) death and Ishbosheth's (Richard's) removal from the throne. Dryden states directly that Cromwell died "without a blow," but states indirectly that the
English people somehow managed to force his son Richard from the throne without engaging in any violence, a compliment filled with associations that are neither flattering nor ingratiating. This same kind of syntactic ambivalence in the Chaucer translation enforces an irony which is, of course, less subtle. But we can see the same process at work: Dryden leads his reader in one direction, and then forces him into another. The interplay of syntax in his closed couplet structure makes demands of the reader that Chaucer's different style of couplet verse does not.

Let me now focus on another kind of syntactic ambiguity in the translation which has this same effect of forcing us continually to shift our understanding of what the verse is saying. In the Chaucer passage, notice the clearly defined reference of the pronouns: "That I ne telle of laxatyves no stoor, / For they been venymous, I woot it weel; / I hem diffye, I love hem never a deel!" Each pronoun, "they" in the second line and the two uses of "hem" in the final line, obviously refers to laxatives. Now notice how in Dryden's development of these lines the pronouns function ambivalently: each couplet has a pronoun, and each pronoun has a double reference. In the
second couplet, "But neither Pills nor Laxatives I like, / They only serve to make a well-man sick," "They" clearly refers both to "Pills" and to "Laxatives": the construction is simple and straightforward, but it sets up a pattern for the ambiguous reference of the pronouns in the couplets which follow. The next couplet, for instance, reads: "Of these his Gain the sharp Physicin makes, / And often gives a Purge, but seldom takes." The pronoun "these" obviously, again, refers to "Pills" and "Laxatives," but it can also refer to "well-man" in the preceding line "They only serve to make a well-man sick": the physician is, after all, making his gain from what he charges this "well-man." In this sense we can understand that the physician is making his profit from both the pills and laxatives he administers, and from the well man to whom he administers them. The next couplet continues: "They not correct, but poysen all the Blood, / And ne'er did any but the Doctors good." The pronoun "They" once again refers to pills and laxatives, but as usually the case in couplet verse, it refers to a noun in the preceding couplet, "Purge," in the line "And often gives a Purge, but seldom takes." It may also recall another noun in the preceding couplet, "Physician," in the line "Of these his Gain the sharp Physician makes," so that we can
understand that both a "Purge" and a "sharp Phisician" "not correct but poyson all the Blood," and also understand that just as "Purges" "ne'er did any but the Doctors good," so "Phisicians" never do any good except for themselves. The couplet which completes the passage appropriately ties all of these pronoun references together: "Their Tribe, Trade, Trinkets, I defy them all, / With ev'ry Work of 'Pothecary's Hall." When we read "I defy them all," the obvious reference of the pronoun "them" is the collective antecedent "Tribe, Trade, Trinkets" in the preceding half-line. But with these words Dryden brings together all preceding references to the "Tribe" of physicians and the "Trinkets" of their "Trade," pills, laxatives, and purges. The final pronoun "them" therefore has multiple reference, and its ambiguity of reference has been anticipated by the double reference of each pronoun in each preceding couplet.

Again we have seen this kind of pronoun ambiguity at work elsewhere in Dryden's verse. This couplet from the Shimei passage in Absalom and Achitophel prompts a similar kind of double reference: "With Spiritual food he fed his Servants well, / But free from Flesh, that made the Jews Rebel." The pronoun "that" may simply refer to "flesh," meaning that "flesh" made the Jews rebel, or it may refer
to the entire preceding half-line "But free from flesh," indicating that what actually made the Jews rebel was that their spiritual food was free from flesh. Just as each syntactic option here gives a different picture of the Jews and their motives, so in the Chaucer translation do the ambiguous pronoun references continually modify our impression of the physicians, and our understanding of the connections between these physicians, their patients, and the "Trinkets" of their practice. As he had done with Juvenal, Dryden extends the implications of the original Chaucer. The complexity of Dryden's satire is unlike Juvenal's direct diatribe; and the tightly structured verse of Dryden is unlike Chaucer's more linear and straightforward narrative style of verse. Both of these characteristics of Dryden's writing make his translations very different from the originals, and his manipulations of syntax in particular help account for a basic source of this difference and a distinguishing aspect of his aims as a poet.

MacFlecknoe

Dryden described both *Absalom* and *Achitophel* and *MacFlecknoe* as Varronian satires, so called because Varro
was, as Dryden explained, "studious of laughter" and his "business was more to divert his reader than to teach him." Syntax is a basic source of such diversion in both poems, but of the two, MacFlecknoe is more generally associated with ridicule and laughter for the simple reason that its main intention is to criticize dull poets by ridiculing them. Earl Miner calls it Dryden's "gayest" poem, one in which "laughter rules." Thus when syntactic manipulation enhances this ridicule in MacFlecknoe, Dryden uses it not to ingratiate or flatter his audience, but rather to make them laugh: he makes us laugh once, and then by giving syntax a twist, he makes us laugh again. And the more he does this, the more he succeeds in his ridicule.

The poem is filled with ambiguities of syntax which enhance the ridicule, ambiguities of the same kind Dryden relied on elsewhere for other specific purposes. By way of summary, then, I want to deal with them in MacFlecknoe according to their types, thus focusing attention on the basic variations he employs on the technique. Probably the most common type, perhaps because it works so well with the metrical structure of the closed couplet, involves the ambivalent reference of a half-line of verse. Consider these
two examples. In the first, the poet describes the scene of Shadwell's coronation through the town; in the second, Flecknoe gives advise to Shadwell:

No Persian Carpets spread th' Imperial Way,
But scatter'd Limbs of mangled poets lay (ll. 98-99).

Let Virtuoso's in five years be Writ;
Yet not one thought accuse thy toyl of wit
(ll. 149-50).

When we pause after the half-line "But scatter'd Limbs," the implication seems to be that no Persian carpets spread the imperial way, but scattered limbs did. Such limbs call to mind the tree limbs or branches which traditionally cover the route of a procession. But when we continue to read the final half-line, the shock at realizing that these limbs are actually the mangled arms and legs of poets is intensified since another meaning has already been anticipated. Syntax has thus led us in one direction, and then turned us in another. Similarly, when we pause after "Yet not one thought" in the second couplet, it sounds as if Flecknoe is saying that plays like Shadwell's Virtuoso may be written in five years, which is ridiculous enough, and "Yet not one thought" be written in that same amount
of time, which doubles the ridicule. Then when we go on to complete the couplet, we realize that this meaning is slightly modified: what Flecknoe now seems to be saying is that not a single thought should accuse Shadwell's toyl of wit. Several points of antithesis enforce this ambivalence: "five years" and "one thought" are juxtaposed; the affirmative tone of the first line contrasts with the negative tone of the second, as do the initial words "Let" and "Yet." Each of these kinds of antithesis derives from a contrast between words in the first line and those in the first half of the second line; that is, the antithesis functions in the line and a half wherein syntax becomes ambivalent. Dryden seems to do everything he can to have us read the line and a half as a syntactic unit before he allows for another reading by completing the couplet.

A different type of syntactic ambiguity arises from the ambiguous grammatical function of a word. Consider this example of subject-object reversal in a couplet where Dryden describes the "Nursery," the school for actors:

Where Infant Punks their tender Voices try,
And little **Maximins** the Gods defy (11. 77-78).
It seems that the "infant Punks" are trying their "tender Voices," but, understanding the verb "try" in another sense, it could be that the voices are trying the actors. Similarly, the "little Maximins" may be defying the "Gods," or those gods defying the little actors. Inversion of normal word order allows for the ambiguity; the parallel syntactic structure of the two lines enforces it. And once again, Dryden is able to double the effect of his ridicule. It is ridiculous enough that these actors should try their voices and defy the gods, but Dryden adds another dimension to the humor when he suggests that the exact opposite of their actions may also be happening.

This kind of ambiguity appears again as the poet describes the crowd's response to Shadwell:

Th' admiring Throng loud acclamations make,
And Omens of his future Empire take (ll. 132-33).

Is the throng making the acclamations or the acclamations making the throng? And since there are two possible subjects in this first line of the couplet, the question then arises as to who or what is taking the omens of Shadwell's future empire. Each syntactic option shapes a different aspect of the poem's ridicule.
Word class can generate ambivalences in the same way. A word may fit into two or more classes—noun, verb, or adjective, for instance—as when Flecknoe says to Shadwell:

Let Cully, Cockwood, Fopling, charm the Pit,  
And in their Folly shew the Writers wit.  
Yet still thy fools shall stand in thy defence,  
And justify their Author's want of sense (ll. 153-56).

Consider the various ways in which the second line can be read when word class changes: if "folly" is a noun, it becomes a trait which the actors "shew"; but "folly" can also, at least for a moment as we follow the sequence of the verse, function as an adjective describing the "shew" put on by the actors. Such an ambivalence, of course, cannot be sustained since the clause needs a verb in order to complete the thought, but it does suggest itself, and furthermore, is enhanced by a similar word class ambivalence at the end of that same line. If "Writers" is a noun, then it provides an object for the verb "shew" and would seem to refer to the other writers who, by observing such characters on stage, can learn what wit is. But "wit" may also function as the object of the verb "shew," which thus makes "Writers" a possessive adjective modifying "wit."
In this case, "Writers" would refer to the creators of the characters on stage. The word "still" in the following line is likewise ambivalent. That entire half-line "Yet still thy fools" can refer both backward and forward. If we read through "And in their folly shew the Writers wit, / Yet still thy fools," the implication is that the folly which the characters portray can show some writers what wit is, but only has the ability to "still" Shadwell's fools since they are, as we are told in the following couplet, in Shadwell's "own model made / Of dullness." The word "still," then, becomes a verb. When the first half of this line moves forward, however, "still" functions as an adverb modifying the verb "stand." Although this function seems to be its proper one, when "still" does function as a verb, the syntactic structure of the first half of this line parallels that of the first half of the following line: conjunction--verb--possessive adjective--noun. These kinds of ambiguity in particular show how metrical structure and rhetorical parallel can tempt the reader into following an alternate syntactic sequence despite the fact that this syntax is not sustained. Again, Dryden seems to be making a special effort to lead us away from a straightforward reading of the verse in order to enlarge the implications of the meaning.
One final type of syntactic ambiguity that consistently appears in MacFlecknoe, as in Dryden's other poetry, involves the double and sometimes multiple reference of a word. The opening lines of the poem are an example:

All humane things are subject to decay,
And, when Fate summoned, Monarchs must obey:
This Flecknoe found . . . .

The pronoun "This" is ambiguous: what exactly does Flecknoe find? Obviously, "This" can refer to either or both of the preceding lines; it may even refer to only the last half of the second line, "Monarchs must obey." A similar instance of this kind of ambivalence appears in Flecknoe's advice to Shadwell:

And when false flowers of Rhetorick thou would'st cull,
Trust Nature, do not labour to be dull (ll. 165-66).

The adjective "false" seems to modify "flowers," yet it can also modify "thou," namely Shadwell, so that Flecknoe instead seems to be saying that when you are false, you should cull flowers of rhetoric. This reading works against meter in one sense by upsetting the balanced metrical structure of the line in calling for a pause after "false,"
that is, after only three syllables. But such is the metrical structure of the second line of the couplet, "Trust Nature, do not labour to be dull," where the mid-line pause again falls after the first three syllables. Parallel metrical structure helps enforce this ambivalence of the adjective which itself doubles the impact of Dryden's satire.

The ambivalent reference of half-lines of verse, the ambiguity of grammatical functions of words and classes of words, the double reference of words, phrases, and clauses—all these types of syntactic ambiguity make it possible for Dryden to present his reader with a variety of syntactic options, each modifying the meaning of what he seems to be saying. The final lines of *MacFlecknoe*, often noted for the way they bring together all of the characteristics associated with Flecknoe and Shadwell throughout the poem, serve as an excellent example of how syntax can enhance the suggestive power of the verse. Flecknoe's speech is brought to an end as he falls through a trap door, with the narrator concluding:

He said, but his last words were scarcely heard, For Bruce and Longvil had a Trap prepar'd, And down they sent the yet declaiming Bard. Sinking he left his Drugget robe behind, Born upwards by a subterranean wind. The Mantle fell to the young Prophet's part, With double portion of his Father's Art (11. 211-27).
The position of the verb "prepar'd" at the end of the second line makes it possible to read "Bruce and Longvil" as the ones who actually prepared the trap for Flecknoe, or to read these characters as having had the trap prepared by someone else. In other words, the verb "had... prepar'd" may simply function as a past tense active verb, or it may be part of an implied passive voice construction. What finally is the situation is that we are not sure who prepared the trap for Flecknoe: if the characters Bruce and Longvil are responsible, then the blame falls on Shadwell, the author who created them; but since Shadwell is so like his father, then perhaps we can understand that Flecknoe prepared his own trap; or finally, it could be that Bruce and Longvil are simply the instigators, and that the trap might have been prepared by any number of individuals who are suitable for such a job. We can begin to sense how all sorts of possibilities derive from the ambiguity of the verb.

The line "Sinking he left his Drugget robe behind" can be read straightforwardly in terms of the line unit, or read in terms of each half-line unit. When we pause mid-line after "Sinking he left," for instance, the implication is that Flecknoe left the scene by sinking, a description which recalls the very first lines of the poem, "All humane
things are subject to decay." We can now be sure that if the pronoun "This" in the third line of the poem, "This Flecknoe found," did not then refer to the maxim stated in the first line, Flecknoe has surely "found" it out by now. It is as if what syntax made ambiguous in the opening of the poem becomes quite unequivocal in the poem's final lines.

By emphasizing the fact that Flecknoe disappears by sinking below the stage rather than ascending to the heavens, Dryden has his syntax enforce the notion of inversion which he has continually used elsewhere in the poem for his satiric gibes. Michael Wilding explains, for instance, how "The art of Shadwell and Flecknoe inverts the values it might be expected to aim for. The poetry comes out back to front--tragedy provokes smiles, satires cause no offence." Several words in the final lines of the poem are associated with this process of inversion, words like "behind," "subterranean," and "fell." One critic suggests that the "subterranean wind" that bears Flecknoe's robe upwards becomes a "monstrous flatus." Wilding focuses on a similar association when he notes: "The proper alliteration to balance and rhyme with 'Prophet's part' is, of course, 'Father's fart'; the alliterative play
within the couplet emphasizes this—'Fell . . . Prophet's part' is neatly varied into 'portion . . . Father's fart.'"\(^1\) And all of these associations, in turn, enforce the final and perhaps most ridiculous kind of inversion in the poem, that of Shadwell turning bottoms up to receive the falling mantle on that part of his body "with double portion," or as Dryden expressed it elsewhere in the poem, his "Arse."
The reading suggests itself because of the syntactic ambivalence of the half-line "With double portion" which can refer to either "Father's Art" or "Prophet's part."
Syntax leads us in this direction when we pause after reading "The Mantle fell to the young Prophet's part, / With double portion," before the completion of the couplet suggests a different meaning. The point is that both Flecknoe and Shadwell literally deviate: the father turns downward as he sinks away from his throne, and the son, though ascending the throne, turns bottoms up to receive the falling mantle. Indeed, the picture suggested by the syntactic ambivalence is that of Shadwell leaning over the trap door, watching his father descend, and at the same time inheriting the mantle. The picture would have been ridiculousness enough without this final suggestion, but again we can see Dryden drawing on several aspects of the
verse, especially syntactic manipulation, in order to engage his reader's attention, to "divert" him, and thus attract his laughter.

How then does syntactic ambiguity alter our perspective on Dryden's poetry? It tells us, first, that he is far more fluid and flexible in his verse form than we have before recognized. Eliot and Van Doren were surely correct in describing Dryden's ability to state things with clarity and directness. But he could also suggest things indirectly: the variety of syntactic options in his verse continually modifies meaning and adds complexity to the argument. This particular kind of complexity is similar to what Irvin Ehrenpreis has recently spoken of as "discontinuity" of genres and styles in Dryden, the way comic style, for instance, may undercut the serious feeling of a work. Ehrenpreis goes so far as to suggest that Dryden "had an essentially dualistic genius" and that "the happy discontinuities of his mind and art reflect the two-sidedness that fed his taste for ambiguous forms."15

Syntactic ambiguity and the modifications in meaning which it enforces are surely in line with Ehrenpreis' suggestions, but if such discontinuity and ambiguity are indeed "happy," that is, if they account for what otherwise might seem
inappropriate or flawed aspects of Dryden's writing, then they must serve a particular function in the poetry.

This function, I think, concerns Dryden's public voice as a poet. It tells us that Dryden is far more public in the language of his address than in his subject matter. And if Dryden's genius is dualistic, then syntactic ambiguity helps explain why he might have been less concerned with straightforwardly speaking to his audience, expressing points of view, arguing certain positions, and more involved in the process of communicating with his audience, establishing rapport with them, and engaging their responses. Dryden's audience, whose presence the verse often suggests quite strongly, is a basic part of the kind of poetry he writes, and his concern for their attention is embedded in its very syntax. It should not be surprising that a poet so aware of the presence of his audience could express himself, directly and indirectly, in such a variety of ways on such a variety of issues.
Notes to Chapter IV

1 John Dryden's Imagery, p. 22.

2 All references to the prologues and epilogues, for convenience, will be to the Kinsley edition of The Poems and Fables of John Dryden (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1970), and will be noted parenthetically by page and line number.

3 Arthur Hoffman notes that Dryden occasionally had his prologues and epilogues printed for friends, and suggests that "the reader might be rewarded with implications beyond those which the auditor could be expected to gather" (John Dryden's Imagery, p. 53, n. 4).

4 Seven Types of Ambiguity, p. 75, n. 1.


6 For my initial discussion of these passages, see Chapter II, pp. 35-38.


10 Dryden's Poetry, p. 77.
11 All references to *MacFlecknoe* are to *Works, II*, and will be noted parenthetically by line number.

12 "Dryden and Satire" in *Writers and their Background: John Dryden*, p. 193.

