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"Heroic Tragedy"

It is very surprising that the tragedy of this period has not received as serious an attention as the Comedy has. The tragedy of this period has some relation with the French tragedy though the relation is deeper in case of Comedy. The tragedy of this period is called 'heroic tragedy' which was originally meant for the King's players to be played before fashionable audience and not for the groundlings. It was marked by the unreality of emotion. In these tragedies love and emotion have taken the place of pity and terror. During this period passionate love became a necessary part of the tragedy. The important tragedians of this period are John Dryden, Nathaniel Lee, Thomas Otway and Nicholas Rowe.

John Dryden - John Dryden who remained "one of the most abundant purveyors of

the stage" for forty years had been attracted to the stage not because of any inclination but because of the great favour which it enjoyed after the Restoration. 'Heroic' plays flourished during first twenty years of Restoration when Deane with his 'Siege of Rhodes' and Sir Robert Howard with his 'Indian Queen' had opened the way. The first thing that Dryden did was to retouch Howard's verse and write a sequel to the play entitled 'The Indian Emperor' or 'The Conquest of Mexico by the Spaniards'. His other dramatics were 'Tyrannic Love', 'The Conquest of Granada', 'Amboyna', 'Aureng-Zebe', 'All for Love', 'Don Sebastian' and 'Cleomenes'. Dryden had no message to give, nor he had any especial attitude. If this is a defect with him, the same is true with Shakespeare also. Both of them have approached life in many ways. The difference lies in the wholeness of their

attitudes. Dryden is undoubtedly the purest artist of all the tragedians of the period. He is the most accomplished craftsman also. Nathaniel Lee - He is popularly known as Nat Lee. He is famous for his declamatory passages. He is unbalanced and his sensual imagination loses itself in verbal fury. He is the most completely 'heroic' of all the outstanding heroic writers. According to Addison, as quoted by Dobree, "Among our English poets there was none who was better furnished for tragedy than Lee. His thoughts are wonderfully suited to tragedy, but frequently lost in such a cloud of words that it is hard to see the beauty of them, there is an infinite fire in his works, but so involved in smoke that it does not appear in half its lustre." His dramas are 'Hero', 'Sophonisba', 'Gloriana', 'The Rival Queens', 'Mithridates', 'Caesar', 'Borgia', 'Theodosius', 'Lucius Junius Brutus', 'Constantine the

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'great' and 'massacre of Paris'.
'The Rival Queens' is his most popular and many ways his best play.

Thomas Otway - He was very much the child of his own age so far as the general attitude to life is concerned. He adhered to the classical training wanted to follow the great figures of his day and tried to please his patrons. But the first thing that he did was to "bind his too profuse emotions into the fashionable formulas". His tragedies helped him to remain popular throughout the succeeding century. In spite of the immaturities and defects, the greatest quality of Otway is the reality of passion in which he had surpassed all his contemporaries. According to Bonamy Dobree his 'Venice Preserved' must rank second on the list of Restoration tragedies. His other plays are 'Alcibiades', 'Don Carlos', 'Titus Berenice', 'Caius Marius' and 'The Orphan'.

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Nicholas Rowe - He is a tragedian who had, as opined by Dobson, no real tragic sense, he could feel the pity but had no boldness to the terror of tragedy. As for poetic justice, it was too easy for him "the principal contrivers of evil" are punished with death. There is love in the plays of Rowe but it is not heroic love but domestic love of high level which is true to life. His tragedies have been termed as "domestic tragedies". His dramas are 'The Ambitious Stepmother', 'Tamerlane', 'The Fair Penitent', 'Ulysses', 'The Royal Convert', 'Jane Shore' and 'Lady Jane Grey'.

The end.

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