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## Chapter 37

### Empire and Natural Law in Dryden's Heroic Drama

Edward Holberton

#### I

According to Dryden's preface to *The Conquest of Granada*, the hero of that play, Almanzor, is modeled on Achilles.<sup>1</sup> When Almanzor first bursts into Granada's wars, he is indeed full of angry disdain, but he channels it through questions about the origins of King Boabdelin's sovereignty.

*Almanz.*

No man has more contempt than I, of breath;  
But whence hast thou the right to give me death?  
Obey'd as Sovereign by thy Subjects be,  
But know, that I alone am King of me.  
I am as free as Nature first made man  
'Ere the base Laws of Servitude began  
When wild in woods the noble Savage ran.

*Boab.*

Since, then, no pow'r above your own you know,  
Mankind shou'd use you like a common foe,  
You shou'd be hunted like a Beast of Prey;  
By your own law, I take your life away.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Works of John Dryden*, ed. H. T. Swedenberg, Jr, et al., 20 vols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1956–2000), 11.14.

*Almanz.*

My laws are made but only for my sake,  
No King against himself a Law can make.  
If thou pretendst to be a Prince like me,  
Blame not an Act which should thy Pattern be.  
I saw th'opprest, and thought it did belong  
To a King's office to redress the wrong:  
I brought that Succour which thou oughtst to bring,  
And so, in Nature, am thy Subjects King.

(1.1.1.203–21)

Almanzor's sense of his own heroic autonomy is based on reasoning so artificial that it approaches comedy. The idea that 'Laws of servitude' have supplanted an original, 'free', natural state points to a basis in contractualist theories of government. Such theories hold that individuals first existed in a state of natural freedom, but then—for reasons of innate sociability, or self-interest, depending on the theory—they agree to adhere to social institutions and government.<sup>2</sup> Readers quickly identified Almanzor with Hobbes's theory of sovereignty, albeit skewed into the kind of interpretation which was identified as 'Hobbian' (or 'Hobbist') at the time, because it tended to

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<sup>2</sup> Victoria Kahn, *Wayward Contracts: The Crisis of Political Obligation in England, 1640–1674* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 11; Richard Tuck, *The Rights of War and Peace: Political Thought and the International Order from Grotius to Kant* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 96–102.

idealize and privilege the freedoms that Hobbes's natural man would surrender.<sup>3</sup> For Hobbes, the condition of nature is characterized as a restless and 'savage' freedom, but the laws of nature lead individuals to make a contract of sovereignty, in which natural liberty is exchanged for the security of subjection under positive laws.<sup>4</sup> Almanzor's Hobbist twist is to claim that the condition of nature is more noble. He alleges that he has never agreed to any surrender of natural liberty, and if not a subject, he retains a natural sovereignty over himself, and can even claim to be the truly natural sovereign over Boabdelin's people, being more able to protect them from one another.

Part of the reason why Almanzor became a notorious character on the Restoration stage is because his challenges to Boabdelin resonate with—and seem very near to satire of—the spread of this way of thinking about states and sovereignty across different cultural spheres. Dryden worked in Cromwell's diplomatic office, so he would have been familiar with controversies about sovereignty and natural law. Grotius's discussion of the natural law arguments of the school of Salamanca, for

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<sup>3</sup> Richard Leigh, *The Censure of the Rota on Mr. Driden's Conquest of Granada* (Oxford: 1673), 3; Jon Parkin, *Taming the Leviathan: The Reception of the Political and Religious Ideas of Thomas Hobbes in England, 1640–1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 302–3; Anna Battigelli, 'John Dryden's Angry Readers', in *Books and Readers in Early Modern England: Material Studies*, ed. Jennifer Lotte Andersen and Elizabeth Sauer (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 267. For 'Hobbism' and its influence, see also Christopher Tilmouth, *Passion's Triumph Over Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 257–314; and Warren Chernaik *Sexual Freedom in Restoration Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 22–52.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 89–92.

example, were key to diplomacy around the Protectorate's conflicts with the United Provinces and Spain.<sup>5</sup> Dryden's early heroic drama shows a repeated interest in theories of sovereignty, and in so doing, it shows continuities with speculative theoretical discussions conducted between Davenant and Hobbes in the 1650s about the relationship between law, heroic poetry, and theatre. But the development of Dryden's engagement with such theories, between *The Indian Emperour* (1665) and *The Conquest of Granada* (1670–1671), also reveals the ways in which his writing was stimulated by what Gary De Krey calls 'the first Restoration crisis'. After the humiliations of the second Anglo-Dutch war, contractual arguments about natural law and sovereignty moved from discussions of civil philosophy and international law, into debates about religious toleration, and the vocabulary of libertinism.<sup>6</sup> They

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<sup>5</sup> Paul Hammond, *John Dryden: A Literary Life* (London: Macmillan, 1991), 16; David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 88, 100–24. Among the books purchased by the Swedish diplomat Peter Julius Coyet in London in the mid-1650s were volumes by Grotius and Selden on natural law and the sovereignty of the sea. See *Swedish Diplomats at Cromwell's Court, 1655–1656: The Missions of Peter Julius Coyet and Christer Bonde*, ed. Michael Roberts (London: Royal Historical Society, 1988), 5.

<sup>6</sup> For the growing cultural importance of Grotius's arguments about the freedom of the seas during 1650s and 1660s, see Armitage, *Ideological Origins*, 100–24, and the detailed reference to Grotius's dispute with Selden in anti-Dutch satire of this period: (for example) Edmund Gayton, *The Lawyer's Duel, or Two Sonnets Composed on Grotius's Mare Liberum and Selden's Mare Clausum* [London?: s.n., 1655]; Elkanah Settle, *Mare clausum: Or A Ransack for the Dutch* (London: 1666); Andrew Marvell, *The Character of Holland* (London: 1665). For the late 1660s resurgence of natural jurisprudence in cultural debate, see Parkin,

framed new ways of reading epic and discussing heroic values, but they also came under suspicion.<sup>7</sup> *The Conquest of Granada* most captures the energy of its moment when—as seen in Almanzor’s challenge to Boabdelin—the heroic genres of epic and romance collide with, and form an unstable compound with, this way of thinking about sovereignty. The hero’s rhetorical excesses, which have divided critical responses to the play down the years, point to the contested role of heroic emulation in contemporary discussions of sovereignty. Dryden places these excesses in a suggestive tension with the kinds of critical interpretation and judgement that are promoted by courtly and theatrical culture. In so doing, *The Conquest of Granada* suggests, theatre might play a constructive role in taming some of Restoration culture’s most disturbing questions about the origins and limits of sovereign power.

*The Indian Emperour*, a sequel to *The Indian Queen* (1664) co-written with Robert Howard, represents the conquest of the Aztecs by the Spanish under the command of Hernán Cortés. Bridget Orr notes that one of the interesting features of Dryden’s heroic plays is the way that they addressed Spanish imperial themes exactly at the moment when foreign policy was turning away from the Anglo-Spanish Atlantic conflict of the later 1650s, and towards renewed rivalries with the United Provinces and France.<sup>8</sup> In the history of Spain, and the expansion of its empire, Dryden found rich materials through which to examine England’s own broadening

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*Taming*, 239; and Gary S. De Krey, ‘The First Restoration Crisis: Conscience and Coercion in London: 1667–73’, *Albion*, 25 (1993), 565–80, 571n.

<sup>7</sup> Christopher Warren, ‘John Milton and the Epochs of International Law’, *European Journal of International Law*, 24 (2013): 557–81, 558; Parkin, *Taming*, 239.

<sup>8</sup> Bridget Orr, *Empire on the English Stage, 1660–1714* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 135.

imperial horizons. Arguments about Spain's rights in, and infringements of, the law of nature and nations had long since been familiar elements in anti-Spanish propaganda, and had been rehearsed in the 1650s.<sup>9</sup> *The Indian Emperour* experiments with the dramatic potential of these materials, sensationalizing the flaws in Spain's claims to empire, and testing the ability of an emerging language of international law to project a sense of national difference based not so much on religious difference, but on the superiority of England's claims to empire and colonial practice; these were timely experiments in the heroic mode, because with Anglo-Dutch conflict looming, England's wars could no longer be celebrated as Protestant wars.

Orr shows that two legal 'donations' are at stake in *The Indian Emperour*: the donation of the Americas to the sovereigns of Castile in the Alexandrine Bulls of 1493–1494, and the donation of sovereignty which the historical Cortés claimed to have received directly from the Aztec king Montezuma in 1519.<sup>10</sup> Thus when Dryden's Montezuma asks by what authority Charles V claims suzerainty, Pizarro answers that the 'Sovereign Priest . . . Has this your Empire to our Monarch given' (1.2.282–4). The Spanish have arrived with an evangelical mission (the Alexandrine Bulls awarded *dominium* over lands discovered on the westward route to Asia, on

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<sup>9</sup> See, for example, *A Declaration of His Highnes, by the Advice of his Council Setting Forth, on the Behalf of this Commonwealth, the Justice of Their Cause against Spain* (London: 1655)

<sup>10</sup> Orr, *Empire*, 144; also see J. H. Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World*, 5, 11, 22–3; also his 'The Mental World of Hernán Cortés', in *Spain and Its World, 1500–1700: Selected Essays* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 27–41, 36–8; Hernán Cortés, *Letters from Mexico*, trans. and ed. Anthony Pagden (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 85–6, 98–9.

condition that the indigenous inhabitants of those lands were converted).<sup>11</sup> But in a departure from Dryden's source for the dialogue of this scene, Montaigne's essay 'Of Coaches', Montezuma challenges this claim with a distinction drawn from legal challenges to the Alexandrine Bulls: 'He who Religion truly understands / Knows its extent must be in Men, not Lands' (1.2.297–8).<sup>12</sup> The confrontations which begin here turn on the dubious legitimacy of distributing property on the basis of Papal jurisdiction.

As Anthony Pagden, David Armitage, and other intellectual historians of empire have shown, theoretical discussion of international law had been stimulated by debates about legal claims to sovereignty in the new world. European sovereigns struggled to square the two kinds of legal title that were needed together to legitimize colonization: *imperium* (jurisdiction) and *dominium* (territory). Few jurists by the seventeenth century accepted that the Bulls offered a satisfactory basis for *dominium* (although they continued to be cited in support of Spanish claims to empire, because they created a continuity between Spain and the Roman empire via the Donation of Constantine).<sup>13</sup> If the Pope's claim to jurisdiction over a people (*imperium*) could be used to dispossess them of their property in land (*dominium*), then the radical 'Calvinist theory of revolution', which held that *dominium* was dependent upon grace, was but a short step on from this claim, and might be used to dispossess anybody who was not thought to be one of the elect.<sup>14</sup> Montezuma grasps this implication straight

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<sup>11</sup> Elliott, *Empires*, 19.

<sup>12</sup> Dryden, *Works*, 9.312–13.

<sup>13</sup> Anthony Pagden, *Lords of All the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France c.1500–c.1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 32.

<sup>14</sup> Pagden, *Lords of All the World*, 48–9; Armitage, *Ideological Origins*, 91–2.



away, and identifies Pizarro's claim as a doctrine which will only 'nourish . . . debate' (1.2.286). This is a key instance where Dryden offers an implicit contrast with English colonial practice, because the distinction between claims to *imperium* and *dominium* became the usual point of departure for English claims to a different conception of empire: the 1669 Fundamental Constitutions of Carolina, for example, in which Locke had a hand, were clear on this issue: 'but since the natives of that place, who will be concerned in our plantations, are utterly strangers to Christianity, whose idolatry, ignorance or mistake gives us no right to expel or use them ill'.<sup>15</sup> By the Restoration, mainstream English legal thought on the subject tended to argue that only land which could be deemed 'unoccupied' could be legitimately appropriated.<sup>16</sup> In *The Indian Emperour*, Montezuma is as compromised a figure as Cortez, and sometimes lets his passions cloud his reason. But here however, like a shrewd jurist, he immediately spots the logical leap, and the dangerous consequences implicit in the Alexandrine Bulls.

A second Spanish claim to colonial sovereignty had been found necessary.<sup>17</sup> In his letters, Cortés claimed to have received on behalf of Charles V the *imperium* of Mexico through another donation, this time from Montezuma. In the version of this account known to English readers through the collections of Purchas, Montezuma persuades Aztec assembly-members to 'yeelde themselves Vassals to the

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<sup>15</sup> John Locke, *Political Essays*, ed. Mark Goldie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 178.

<sup>16</sup> Orr, *Empire*, 154.

<sup>17</sup> Orr, *Empire*, 144–8; Pagden, *Lords of all the World*, 51.

Emperour'.<sup>18</sup> By contrast, Dryden's Cortez repeatedly attempts to secure such a donation, but the Aztec royals reject Spanish suzerainty, even having suffered irreversible defeat. Montezuma's heir Guyomar chooses rather to go into exile than rule as tributary king. As he does so, he undermines another claim on behalf of the Spanish empire in the Americas, that the Spanish have now effected a title to empire through conquest:

*Cort.* Live, and enjoy more then your Conquerour:

Take all my Love, and share in all my power.

*Guy.* Think me not proudly rude, if I forsake

Those Gifts I cannot with my Honour take:

I for my Country Fought, and would again,

Had I yet left a Country to maintain:

But since the Gods decreed it otherwise,

I never will on its dear Ruines rise.

(5.2.356–63)

Cortez and Guyomar stand before a kingdom which has been devastated by famine and a Spanish 'Massacre' (5.2.107–9). As Guyomar points out, there is little left of the Aztec 'Country' (a word that meant a people as well as a territory) to submit to Cortez; in the end, Guyomar leads the remnant of the Aztec aristocracy to begin a new colony, where there will be no mineral resources to attract the jealous eye of Spain. These Aztecs never submit to the Spanish conquest, preferring a desolate freedom to Spanish rule. The closing tribute of Cortez seals a series of bleak ironies:

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<sup>18</sup> Cortés's claim that Montezuma acknowledged Spanish sovereignty is reproduced in one of Dryden's widely-known sources for the play, the account of Cortés's exploits given in Samuel Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, 4 vols (London: 1625), 3.1121.

First your Great Father's Funeral Pomp provide:  
That done, in Peace your Generous Exiles guide;  
While I loud thanks pay to the powers above,  
Thus doubly Blest, with Conquest, and with Love. (5.2376–9)

Having claimed a right to Aztec territory and its mineral resources on the basis of an *imperium* over people, Cortez is left with territory, but not those people whose submission and conversion might have supported that claim.<sup>19</sup> The Spanish conquest of the Aztec kingdom is emptied of legitimacy.

It is not only the conquistadors, however, who are morally ambiguous. The Aztecs' fraught relationship with natural law gives the play a moral tension that is absent from its Interregnum prototypes, and which transform complex legal debates into spectacular dramatic events and contests. An important question pertaining to the legality of Spanish colonization was whether Aztec and Inca civilizations understood and followed natural law, or whether the indigenes of the Americas were in fact Aristotle's 'natural slaves': barbarians who were born to serve, and—most pertinently in the context of colonization—were incapable of holding property.<sup>20</sup> The

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<sup>19</sup> Anthony Pagden has argued that there was widespread suspicion, among English writers about empire, of claims to sovereignty based on rights of conquest; see his 'The Struggle for Legitimacy and the Image of Empire in the Atlantic to c.1700', in *The Origins of Empire: British Overseas Enterprise To The Close of the Seventeenth Century*, ed. Nicholas P. Canny (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 34–54, 40–1.

<sup>20</sup> Tuck, *Grotius to Kant*, 60–3, 73–4; Anthony Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 117. See also Elliott Visconsi, *Lines of Equity: Literature and the Origins of Law in Later Stuart England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), 48–9; and

ethnographic materials available to English readers were often shaped, implicitly or explicitly, by this question, and both Davenant and Dryden exploited these materials. Davenant's *The Cruelty of the Spaniards in Peru*, for example, apparently draws on the Inca historian Garcilaso de la Vega, as it elegizes a communitarian Inca kingdom which is governed according to natural reason: 'Soft conscience, Nature's whisp'ring orator' (3.54) is the only law needed.<sup>21</sup> *The Indian Emperour* sometimes suggests that the Aztecs have access to a similar 'natural' moral insight, but as the play develops, this idealization of the Aztec social order becomes more and more problematic. Orr draws attention to the way that romance elements of the plot—such as the love affair between Cortez and Cydaria—briefly diminish Euro-American difference, and hint at the possibility of reciprocity between Aztecs and Europeans. In this perspective, the failures of the Spanish gesture towards the possibility of a more just and free set of exchanges between England and those peoples of the New World to whom the English might bring religion and trade. Cortez at first resists the expectation that the Aztecs are a race 'untaught and savage', and idealizes their culture as closer to natural reason:

Wild and untaught are terms which we alone

Invent, for fashions differing from our own;

For all their customs are by nature wrought,

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Mary Nyquist, *Arbitrary Rule: Slavery, Tyranny and the Power of Life and Death* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

<sup>21</sup> Janet Clare, ed., *Drama of the English Republic 1649–60* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 241–61; Garcilaso de la Vega, *Royal Commentaries of the Incas, and General History of Peru*, trans. by Harold V. Livermore, 2 vols (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1966), 262–4.

But we, by art, unteach what nature taught.

(1.1.11–14)

But troubling details are soon introduced, which insist more forcefully on Euro-American difference.<sup>22</sup> The first of the Aztec customs to be presented combines something like an English May Queen celebration with mass human sacrifice.

As the Aztec heroes attempt to construe their obligations, they engage the audience in making some delicate judgements. Guyomar reasons-out his loyalties through natural law's fiction of an original contract of consent, which he likens to an irreversible marriage contract:

But Kings by free consent their Kingdoms take,  
Strict as those Sacred Ties which Nuptials make;  
And what e'er faults in Princes time reveal,  
None can be Judge where can be no Appeal.

(4.2.80–3)

Yet Montezuma in the next scene argues for the legitimacy of human sacrifice through a similar analogy between royal and personal rights, here between his duties as sovereign, and his 'natural' right to self-preservation:

Nor call it Murder, when each private Man  
In his defence may justly do the same:  
But private persons more then Monarchs can:  
All weigh our Acts, and what e're seems unjust,  
Impute not to Necessity, but Lust.

(4.3.46-50)

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<sup>22</sup> Orr, *Empire*, 150–3.

Here Montezuma's skill is more ambiguous, and suggests the casuistry of a sovereign who is declining towards cruelty and savagery. It mirrors the tendency which Elliott Visconsi finds in the 'equity' falsely offered by the play's Spanish protagonists, who in fact merely ape and undermine the royal justice which they claim to represent, turning equity into a cover for mere violence and venality.<sup>23</sup> On the one hand, therefore, *The Indian Emperour* reveals Dryden experimenting with the dramatic potential of inherited ethnographic materials, and the theories of empire and natural law which had shaped them. His protagonists' dilemmas give the play its heroic scale by engaging the legal languages through which England's growing power and geopolitical influence were simultaneously being asserted. But on the other hand, Dryden leavens with sceptical irony a dramatic inheritance from Davenant which had idealized indigenous institutions in the name of Cromwell's neo-Elizabeth foreign policy. For everyone in this play, Aztecs included, the contractarian logic of sovereignty can quickly become tortive and casuistical.

## II

The tone of *The Conquest of Granada* has proved susceptible to very different readings: it has been argued that the play's elegant structure and psychological insights deserve to be taken seriously, but critics have also found irony and elements of satire in the stylized dialogue and sensational plotting.<sup>24</sup> Its tonal difficulty can be illuminated by the way in which Dryden's sceptical interest in natural law's construction of sovereignty took on new relevancies after the completion of *The Indian Emperour*, and the Restoration political order appeared to be threatened by

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<sup>23</sup> Visconsi, *Lines of Equity*, 52.

<sup>24</sup> Derek Hughes, *Dryden's Heroic Plays* (London: Macmillan, 1981), 79–117; Bruce King, *Dryden's Major Plays* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1966), 59–81.

questions like that demanded of Boabdelin by Almanzor at the opening of this essay. Like *The Indian Emperour*, *The Conquest of Granada* asks how empire is grounded in natural law, but the focus moves closer to home: it represents the foundation of Spain, but in terms that reflect upon the Restoration settlement too. The disappointments and renewed tensions of the late 1660s make themselves felt in this adjustment of focus: as figures that at first seem peripheral begin to unravel the sovereignty of Al-Andalus, *The Conquest of Granada* accurately captures the dangerous political energies of its moment.

Queen Isabel underlines the continuity between the action of *The Indian Emperour* and the progress of the *reconquista* when she prophecies that Columbus (who took part in the Battle of Granada) will shortly discover America and gold; but, she adds, it will be a greater triumph to see Granada ‘to freedom and true faith restor’d: / Its old Religion, and its antient Lord’ (2.1.1.26–7). This trajectory—from the territorial expansion of empire to its cultural foundations—parallels the play’s interrogation of sovereignty, and the reemergence of debate about the toleration of religious dissent in the wake of the disastrous second Anglo-Dutch war. The war had aimed to damage Dutch navigation and trade in the Atlantic, but the humiliating outcome caused the collapse of the Clarendon regime. This upheaval gave religious dissenters opportunities to petition for (and buy) the support of the king.<sup>25</sup> Proponents of toleration including Slingsby Bethel and Sir Charles Wolseley argued that the vigour of Dutch trade was owed to the Dutch Republic’s policies of religious toleration.<sup>26</sup> These arguments that the English should copy the Dutch in matters of

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<sup>25</sup> De Krey, ‘The First Restoration Crisis’, 566.

<sup>26</sup> Steven Pincus, ‘From Butterboxes to Wooden Shoes: The Shift in English Popular Sentiment from Anti-Dutch to Anti-French in the 1670s’, *The Historical Journal*, 38 (1995):

ecclesiastical policy often analyzed the problem through the natural law concept of an original social contract.<sup>27</sup> Wolseley argues that while forms of magistracy came about through such a contract ('a joynt-coalition and agreement of them, dictated by the Light of Nature for general good'), God at no point delegated to magistrates His sovereignty over the conscience; the magistrate's authority concerns the moral and political good only, and should leave the tender conscience unmolested.<sup>28</sup> The aftermath of the second Anglo-Dutch war saw natural law arguments about the limits of sovereign power reemerging in public debate.

*The Conquest of Granada* flags its relevance to Anglo-Dutch rivalry. Like Charles II, Boabdelin, the last king of Granada, struggles to raise money for war from his parliaments (2.1.2.31–4). When King Ferdinand of Aragon opens Part 2 of the play with the prediction that the empire of Al-Andalus will fall to the empire of Spain, his language suggests at once a classical conception of history as a cycle of empires succeeding each other, and emulative individuals elbowing one another out of the way:

At length the time is come, when *Spain* shall be  
From the long Yoke of *Moorish* Tyrants free.  
All causes seem to second our design;  
And Heav'n and Earth in their destruction join.

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333–61; Gary S. De Krey, 'Rethinking the Restoration: Dissenting Cases for Conscience, 1667–1672', *HJ*, 38 (1995): 53–83, 61; Sir Charles Wolseley, *Liberty of Conscience Upon its True and Proper Grounds Asserted & Vindicated* (London: 1668), 58–9; see also Slingsby Bethel, *Present Interest of England Stated* (London: 1671).

<sup>27</sup> Parkin, *Taming*, 243, De Krey, 'The First Restoration Crisis', 571n.

<sup>28</sup> Wolseley, *Liberty*, 12.



When Empire in its Childhood first appears,  
A watchful Fate foresees its tender years;  
Till, grown more strong, it thrusts, and stretches out,  
And Elbows all the Kingdoms round about:  
The place thus made for its first breathing free,  
It moves again for ease and Luxury:  
Till, swelling by degrees, it has possest  
The greater space; and now crowds up the rest.  
When from behind, there starts some petty State;  
And pushes on its now unwieldy fate:  
Then, down the precipice of time it goes,  
And sinks in Minutes, which in Ages rose.

(2.1.1.1–16)

Classical writers, notably Polybius, described Rome's succession to Carthage within similarly cyclical frames, and Dryden's *Annus mirabilis* had already represented Anglo-Dutch rivalry through this historical parallel (ll. 17–20).<sup>29</sup> As the play's hero, Almanzor, enters from, and exits for, the Moroccan kingdom across the Mediterranean, the play's horizons also align with the Atlantic theatre of current Anglo-Dutch tensions: among the relatively few foreign policy successes of the previous decade had been the English Crown's development of the strategic naval colony at Tangiers, which was (in the words of one writer) 'the great passage to the

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<sup>29</sup> Polybius, *The Histories*, trans. W. R. Paton, 2nd edn rev. by F. W. Walbank and Christian Habicht, Loeb Classical Library, 138, 3 vols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 3.425; Dryden, *Works*, 1.60.

wealth of *Affrica* and *America*. . . . [and] like to be that Renowned Scene of Action, which will render us considerable in this last Age to the world'.<sup>30</sup>

But the pressure of the 'first' Restoration political crisis also makes itself felt in Almanzor's bombastic language, as he flaunts and challenges Boabdelin's authority.<sup>31</sup> Boabdelin's dependence on the warrior proves fatal for the kingdom, as Almanzor switches sides between the rival factions in Al-Andalus, falls in love with the king's betrothed, Almahide, and proves the catalyst for Al-Andalus's collapse from within. As shown in the exchange quoted at the beginning of this essay, Almanzor lays claims to heroic autonomy by invoking the language of the sovereign contract. Though it will later be revealed that Almanzor is in fact the lost son of the Duke of Arcos, he assumes that he was born in the Africa interior, beyond the reach of any recognized sovereignty. A problem exposed in that exchange, which is hardly resolved by Boabdelin's pragmatic climb-down a few lines later, corresponds to what Annabel Brett has shown to be one of the fundamental problems driving early modern discussion of natural law and sovereignty: how to account for the territorial limitations of the civil state.<sup>32</sup> If jurisdictions of positive law arise when people in a state of nature are led by the laws of nature to contract under a sovereign power, then how does one explain the fact that the world contains numerous, distinct sovereign

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<sup>30</sup> Anon., *A Discription of Tangier* (London: 1664), sig. A3<sup>r-v</sup>.

<sup>31</sup> De Krey, 'The First Restoration Crisis', *passim*.

<sup>32</sup> Annabel S. Brett, *Changes of State: Nature and the Limits of the City in Early Modern Natural Law* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 169–94. See also Christopher Warren's discussion of *Paradise Lost* in 'John Milton and the Epochs of International Law', which he finds concerned with the problem of how the law of nature gave way to the law of nations, the process by which nations were first differentiated.

jurisdictions? A universal natural law, one might think, would have led the entire human community to compact together, under a single sovereignty, and a single set of positive laws. Brett highlights the way that this problem surfaces in multiple ways, such as when theorists of the law of nature and nations consider different kinds of travelers. Originating from outside a given jurisdiction, it is not clear how they can be said to have obligations that derive from an original act of consent to the sovereignty of that jurisdiction. Do ambassadors or merchants, for instance, remain subject to the moral codes of their jurisdiction of origin, or do they become subject to the sovereigns whose lands they visit? Almanzor's sense of an honour code grounded in a state of pristine liberty grows from this loophole in natural law's account of sovereignty's origins. He asserts a 'primitive' code of honour, based on the belief that because neither he nor (presumably) his ancestors have ever consented to obey a sovereign, he is obliged only to preserve himself and his honour. Boabdelin is quick to recognize this legal language and its implications. He contends that Almanzor is in fact placing himself in the position of an outlaw. Seventeenth-century responses to the problem of pirates were influenced by the arguments of early modern jurists, prominently Gentili and Grotius, who argue that by recognizing no sovereignty beyond their own will, pirates break the 'treaty of the human race' and exclude themselves from the community of nations.<sup>33</sup> They are the 'common foe' of mankind, and could be punished by any sovereign power at all.<sup>34</sup> Boabdelin thinks in these terms when he argues that Almanzor should be executed by right of 'your own law'; the legal tradition upon which Almanzor bases his dubious claim to autonomy in fact condemns him as an outlaw.

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<sup>33</sup> Quoted in Brett, *Changes of State*, 191; see also Tuck, *Grotius to Kant*, 35.

<sup>34</sup> Grotius, *The Rights of War and Peace*, 1021–4; Tuck, *Grotius to Kant*, 102–3.

The analogy between Almanzor and a pirate returns when he falls in love with Almahide. It illustrates the way in which Almanzor's self-construction as an agent of uncompromised natural autonomy often proves unfortunate and inflexible. Almanzor has rejected the Zegrys and delivered Almahide from their captivity, but he cannot let her go without making his own claim on her, and demands with increasing vehemence that she does him the 'charity' of hearing his suit of love:

*Almah.*

Your way is somewhat strange to ask Relief;  
You ask with threatning, like a begging Thief.  
Once more *Almanzor*, tell me, am I free?

*Almanz.*

Madam, you are from all the World—but me.  
But as a Pyrate, when he frees the Prize  
He took from Friends, sees the rich Merchandize,  
And after he has freed it, justly buys,  
So when I have restor'd your Liberty,—  
But, then, alas, I am too poor to buy!

*Almah.*

Nay now you use me just as Pyrats do:  
You free me; but expect a ransome too.

(1.4.2.397–407)

Almanzor's unfortunate simile shows more than his ineptness with the language of love; it illustrates the way in which the protagonists of this play variously attempt to

construe their obligations and interrelations through analogies of contract which point back, explicitly or implicitly, to the contested foundations of sovereignty and empire. Here Almanzor's simile appears at first to herald his submission to civil norms and mutuality, but it actually then reinforces an apprehension that should he submit to such norms, he would be assimilated and reduced by them, and would thereby lose the heroic charisma that springs from his autonomy. Dryden exploits the ability of contractual metaphors to reveal tension, or to drive the protagonists towards violence instead of consent. By exploring the dramatic possibilities of arguments about sovereignty in this way, he brings into sharp focus the characteristics of seventeenth-century thinking about the social contract which have led Victorian Kahn to call it 'wayward'; namely its potential to question the nature and limits of political authority.

In Kahn's reading of *Leviathan*, Hobbes responds to such radical versions of contractarian civil philosophy as Milton's *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* (which argues that sovereign contracts might be revocable if a sovereign proves unsatisfactory), by taking a literary-critical turn. Hobbes likens radical contractarians to credulous readers of romance: both get carried away with fictions and misled by vainglorious, emulative passions which lead them to privilege a false sense of honour and individual autonomy over the interest of peace. Hobbes thereby develops the acute insight that contractarian theories of civil philosophy, being artifices of language built up through the interpretation, extension and synthesis of metaphors of contract, require careful attention to the linguistic assumptions upon which they are built. This is why in Hobbes's analysis the contract metaphor is a 'matter for the police'.<sup>35</sup> Not only is a contract needed to regulate people's actions, but also a contract is needed to regulate the way that the contract metaphor can be used: Hobbes

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<sup>35</sup> Kahn, *Wayward Contracts*, 137.

‘elaborates a metalinguistic critique of his opponents, in part by arguing that consent to the political contract involves consent to a linguistic contract, that is, to the sovereign’s determination of linguistic usage’.<sup>36</sup>

Hobbes’s thinking about this ‘metalanguage’ of contracts of sovereignty is especially relevant to heroic drama, because there is a direct line of influence running between Hobbes’s discussion of romance with Davenant in the latter’s *Preface to Gondibert*, which Kahn argues is important to the development of Hobbes’s thinking about the interpretation and misinterpretation of political contracts, and *The Conquest of Granada*, which cites that discussion in its preface.<sup>37</sup> In between, stand Davenant’s interregnum ‘moral representations’, which were successfully revived in the Restoration.<sup>38</sup> *Gondibert* is in many respects an epic romance which accommodates some of Hobbes’s criticisms of the deleterious effects of romance: the hero retreats from martial rivalry to contemplation, and Davenant represents ‘the Spenserian synthesis of love and a quest for glory as a pernicious mistake’.<sup>39</sup> Davenant’s original proposal for his ‘moral representations’ justifies them in Hobbesian terms: they will enhance the stability of the commonwealth by representing the passions lucidly: ‘The

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<sup>36</sup> Kahn, *Wayward Contracts*, 137.

<sup>37</sup> Kahn, *Wayward Contracts*, 143; Dryden, *Works*, 11.9–10; James A. Winn, ‘Heroic Song: A Proposal for a Revised History of English Theater and Opera, 1656–1711’, *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 30 (1996): 113–37.

<sup>38</sup> [Sir William Davenant], *A Proposition for Advancement of Moralitie, By a New Way of Entertainment of the People* (London: 1653), 22. See also James R. Jacob and Timothy Raylor, ‘Opera and Obedience: Thomas Hobbes and A Proposition for Advancement of Moralitie by Sir William Davenant’, *The Seventeenth Century*, 6 (1991), 205–50.

<sup>39</sup> Colin Burrow, *Epic Romance: Homer to Milton* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 241.

people will ever be unquiet whilst they are ignorant of themselves, and unacquainted with those Engins that scruce them up, which are their passions, in true characters of the beauties and deformities of vertue and vice.’<sup>40</sup> Productions such as the *Cruelty of the Spaniards in Peru* will lead the people to ‘Obedience to Authority’ and will ‘warne and incite them to Heroicall Attempts, when the State shall command them’.<sup>41</sup> Dryden’s preface to *The Conquest of Granada* defends his play against the *Preface to Gondibert*’s argument against supernatural intervention in the action, but there are strong continuities, nevertheless, between Davenant’s and Dryden’s dramatic theory, particularly in their shared awareness that debates about the propriety and efficacy of dramatic forms were entangled with theories of sovereignty.

So the preface to *The Conquest of Granada* acknowledges a debate in which those who desired to emulate the actions of heroes were likened to wayward theorists of sovereignty.<sup>42</sup> Almanzor joins both of these roles together too: he is indeed a wayward interpreter of social obligation, and his language of contract is an aspect of his violence, which must be tamed if he is to avoid tragedy. He is not alone in this respect. The ambitious Lyndaraxa is especially adept at using the language of contract to unpick the fabric of social obligation in Granada and inspire rebellion. Seeking to seduce Almanzor to her political designs, she persuades him that he is obliged not to the ‘faithless’ king, but to Almahide, and that the queen is not giving him a fair return for his military trophies; when he vows his constancy to Almahide nevertheless, she argues that such vows were fraudulently instituted among the transactions of love by deformed wits and decayed beauties (2.3.3.88–182). Lyndaraxa has more success

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<sup>40</sup> [Davenant], *Proposition*, 11–12.

<sup>41</sup> [Davenant], *Proposition*, 22.

<sup>42</sup> Kahn, *Wayward Contracts*, 137.

with Abdelmelech and Prince Abdallah, whom she plays off against one another until she very briefly becomes queen of Granada. Her skill with the rhetoric of contract and obligation reduces all social relations to a binary contest to be on top. She urges Prince Abdallah to rebel against his brother Boabdelin accordingly: ‘Princes are Subjects still:— / Subject and Subject can small difference bring: / The difference is ’twixt Subjects and a King’ (1.2.1.118–20). An emulative pursuit of distinction in such a world points to regicide, as the events unfolding from this scene demonstrate. The representations of society offered by Lyndaraxa and Almanzor are versions of the tendencies that worry Hobbes when he discusses vainglory and the dangers of romance: the contractual metaphors through which natural law constructs the foundations of social order can become in themselves a dangerous art.

But in the *Conquest of Granada*, emulation is not an unequivocally destructive force. The epigraph to Part 2 of the play—‘*Stimulos dedit æmula virtus*’ (‘Vying with excellence gave the spur’)—is taken from Lucan’s *Pharsalia*. In its original context, it describes the destructive forces driving Rome’s descent into civil war, but here it becomes more ambiguous, as the play recuperates for emulation and romance a potentially constructive energy in the rise of the Spanish empire. The Moorish and Spanish soldiers are spurred on by the evaluative gaze of courtly women. Ferdinand reports that ‘The valiant *Moores* like raging Lyons, fight; / Each youth encourag’d by his Ladies sight’ (2.5.3.134–5), provoking Isabel to lead the ladies of her court to watch the battlefield, that they too might inspire their warriors to contend in greater feats of valour in the ladies’ sight. This move, an act of emulation in its own right, produces ‘such a shining train, / That *Moorish* beauties shall oppose in vain’ (2.5.3.136–7). These dramatic rhythms are consistent with Ferdinand’s earlier speech on the cyclical progress of empires in history—the *translatio imperii*—which he



personifies as the arrival of a pushy youth on the scene. And of course, Dryden's own attempts to create a dramatic form of epic-romance are another strand in this cycle of cultural emulation: theatre rises to the occasion, as England's empire vies with that of the Dutch to supplant Spain in the Americas. But these symmetries serve to focus attention on the question of what separates positive emulation from negative, and what channels it productively in the culture of an emerging Spanish empire, and disastrously in the case of the Moors. Is there anything in Dryden's dramatic world which 'polices' (to use Kahn's metaphor) those potentially wayward mimetic desires which make people construct, question, and reconstruct compacts of sovereignty?

In his discussion of *Gondibert*, Hobbes recommends for an heroic poem the neoclassical virtues of 'perspicuity, property [propriety], and decency' in expression.<sup>43</sup> In *The Conquest of Granada*, the theatricality of the Spanish court, particularly its culture of appreciation for gallant speech and committed action, exerts a pressure towards these qualities of refinement in the elucidation of passion and obligation. Emulation brings out the best in the play's star-crossed lovers, Ozmyn and Benzayda. Met with a series of seemingly impossible conflicts of obligation, their attempts to outdo one another in generous casuistry makes them into a foil for the more destructive forms of emulation which tear Al-Andalus apart. In a scene in Part 2 of the play, Ozmyn and Benzayda enter midway through discussion of a dilemma: they have incurred an obligation to the Spanish court, which has granted them sanctuary from Benzayda's vengeful father, Selim, who is bent on Ozmyn's destruction.

*Ozm.*

'Tis true that our protection here has been

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<sup>43</sup> Davenant, *Gondibert*, 51.

Th'effect of Honour in a *Spanish* Queen.

But, while I as a friend continue here,

I, to my Country, must a Foe appear.

*Benz.*

Think not my *Ozmyn*, that we here remain

As friends, but Pris'ners to the Pow'r of *Spain*.

Fortune dispences with your Countryes right;

But you desert your honour in your flight.

(2.2.1.1–8)

Benzayda's legal fiction is typical of the couple's elegant collaboration in working out solutions to seemingly impossible problems of obligation. Ozmyn tries to rise above a factional vendetta which he has unintentionally exacerbated by killing Benzayda's brother. But Benzayda's companionship often assists him in this: it inspires him to construe the obligations of honour as generously as she does. Ozmyn gladly accepts Benzayda's reinterpretation of their situation as captivity, only for Selim to enter, pursued by soldiers. Ozmyn risks his life to defend his former tormenter, and it is Benzayda's instinctive pity that prompts his own noble response:

*Ben.*

It is my father; and he seems distrest:

*Ozmyn.*

My honour bids me succour the opprest:

That life he sought, for his I'll freely give;

We'll dye together; or together live.

(2.2.1.18–21)

Benzayda and Ozmyn become a microcosm of the court's ability to constrain and channel casuistry towards acts of 'honourable' generosity and chivalry. Where Hobbes's sovereign regulates the metalanguage of contract, determining what constitutes a legitimate interpretation of obligation, *The Conquest of Granada* points to different kinds of regulation: a culture of courtly taste which applauds (and rewards with sexual desire) the most noble performances of obligation. It inspires others to emulate such performances, and throws into relief the excesses and contradictions of Almanzor's bombast.

The relevance of this strand of the plot to the consolidation of empire is demonstrated in a scene at the beginning of Part 2 of the play. The couple's gallantry inspires an extraordinary artifice of judgement by Queen Isabel, after the fleeing lovers are captured between the warring camps. Ozmyn first kills a Spanish knight, whose soldiers demand that Ozmyn be executed for murder. Ferdinand agrees. But Isabel intervenes, in response to the lovers' story and mutual vows of love, with a more equitable sentence:

*Qu. Isa.*

Permit me, Sir, these Lovers doom to give:

My Sentence is, they shall together live.

The Courts of Kings,

To all Distress'd shou'd Sanctuaries be:

But most, to Lovers in Adversity.

*Castille and Arragon*

Which, long against each other, War did move,

My plighted Lord and I have joyn'd by love:

And, if to add this Conquest Heav'n thinks good,  
I would not have it stain'd with Lovers blood.

(2.1.1.127–36)

Isabel's intervention extends the rhythm of decorous emulation which has characterized the casuistry of Benzayda and Ozmyn. Her sentence is guided by pity, the generic response of romance, but it is also invested with a strong sense of renewal. It breaks with the universality of the vengeful natural justice demanded by the soldiers, and the impassioned tyranny of Moorish rule. In the iconography of the reign of Charles I, which would have been familiar to at least some of Dryden's audience, the marriage of Charles and Henrietta Maria had been idealized as an epic romance, and an ideal of love which patterned the love of subject for king.<sup>44</sup> So one might even see here the royal marriage functioning as a different kind of original contract, a pattern of reconciliation which guides the subsequent interpretation and discovery of positive law. The romance plot of the royal marriage forms a different kind of contract metaphor, which differentiates the new Spanish kingdom as an emerging empire of positive law.

Hobbes's compact of sovereignty, motivated by the recognition of a common interest in the rule of law, has been called a 'counterplot' of law's origins: it contests the revolutionary interpretation of the social contract which argued (often with reference to equity) that subjects could withdraw obedience to the king where he had infringed that contract.<sup>45</sup> What is seen here, then, might be called a counter-counterplot, which takes issue with Hobbes's wariness of romance as a creator of

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<sup>44</sup> Lois Potter, *Secret Rites and Secret Writing: Royalist Literature, 1641–1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 77; Kahn, *Wayward Contracts*, 10–11, 102, 139.

<sup>45</sup> Kahn, *Wayward Contracts*, 134–5.

dangerous delusions. Dryden suggests that forms of critical judgement associated with the appreciation of romance narrative can have their own force in constructing legitimacy, precisely at that most contested point in theories of sovereignty, where the universals of natural law give rise to differentiated polities of positive law. Isabel's elegant legal artifice begins to foster a culture of consent, in that not only do Ozmyn and Benzayda then feel obliged to the Spanish Crown, but Benzayda (at least) begins to recognize Isabel's justice as a manifestation of a more benevolent providence: 'The frowns of Fate we will no longer fear: / Ill Fate, Great Queen, can never find us here' (2.1.1.139–41). So even though in Almanzor's self-fashioning as a 'noble Savage' (1.1.1.210), Dryden seems to share some of Hobbes's suspicion of the way in which the metaphor and logic of the social contract can foster self-importance and rebellion, by so elegantly accommodating romance's dilemmas of love and honour, and the generic romance response of pity, within the process of consolidating a new jurisdiction, *The Conquest of Granada* also redeems romance from its association with the misinterpretation of passion and interest in Hobbes's writing.<sup>46</sup> This rehabilitation of romance goes some way beyond that attempted by Davenant in his interregnum *Proposition*. In *The Conquest of Granada*, romance is not merely a form to supplement law and divinity, to inspire audience-members to martial exploits 'when the State shall command', but rather a condition for refined law-making, providing a culture of propriety and discrimination which supports the artifice of empire. The response to refined passions in these lovers thereby becomes the

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<sup>46</sup> For a complementary discussion of romance's role in mediating between traditions of law during an earlier period, but also in the context of imperial expansion, see Brian C. Lockett, *Law and Empire in English Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

constitutive moment in the reintegration of Granada within the empire of Spain, creating new precedents that distinguish Spain as a place of positive law.

As contractarian models of sovereignty were again becoming wayward, and satires on the failures of the Second Anglo-Dutch war lampooned the court's taste for chivalrous spectacle, *The Conquest of Granada* shows a reciprocal relationship between the empire of Spain, in the sense of a supreme power of jurisdiction, and what Dryden's *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* referred to as the 'empire of wit': the most authoritative and refined judgement in matters of heroism. The ending of *The Conquest of Granada* reveals that Providence and religion must also play their part in this ideal relationship between different 'empires'. The dénouement begins when Almahide is falsely accused of infidelity with Abdelmelech. Her honour is defended in a trial by combat, which pits Almanzor and Ozmyn against her Zegry accusers (organized by Lyndaraxa) Hamet and Zulema. This trial vindicates Almahide, and begins to show the hand of Providence in her convoluted political fortunes: swearing on the Koran, the combatants refer their cause to God, but Almahide also offers up a prayer to the Christian God, having been secretly converted by her servant Esperanza. When the defeated Zulema confesses to his fraud, Almahide's new faith is vindicated.

Almanzor, on the other hand, must wait until the final scene of the play to undergo the decisive revelation. Love increasingly draws him to compromise his autonomy and submit to the institutions through which Granada's regeneration is being worked: he joins Ozmyn in championing Almahide's ancient right to trial by combat. But if love prevails over jealousy to draw him in, his attempts to construe his conflicts of passion with metaphors of sovereignty become ever more strained and bombastic. He himself at first seems to doubt Almahide, but nevertheless champions her cause for fear that Ozmyn will 'Intrench upon my Loves Prerogative' (2.4.3.387).

He then argues still more absurdly that the infallibility of this natural sovereignty commits him to combat: 'She must be Chaste, because she's lov'd by me' (2.4.3.398).

When Almahide expresses her indebtedness to him for his actions, he again attempts to articulate through the language of natural obligation the passion which ties him to her, but demonstrates only his continued indecorousness: 'Born to be yours, I do by Nature, serve, / And, like the lab'ring Beast, no thanks deserve' (2.5.3.7–8).

Almanzor's role as an instrument of Providence becomes more apparent as the authority of law (the trial by combat is an ancient right reasserted by Ozmyn) and Christianity re-emerge through the wreckage of Boabdelin's despotism, but the residual language and analogical logic of natural obligation becomes an obstacle to his perception of these events. It delays Almanzor's integration with the Restoration-like regeneration of Granada (if Ferdinand views events as the translation of empires, Isabel sees Granada returning to its ancient religion and law).

It is only following the second intervention of his mother's ghost, that Almanzor's real identity and destined role are revealed. In combat, his father the Duke of Arcos recognizes symbols of Christianity on his body—a crucifix on bracelets left by his mother, and a birthmark in the shape of a bleeding heart. Arcos delivers a romance narrative of shipwreck and loss, which clarifies the sense of autonomy which Almanzor has interpreted so problematically up until now.

Almanzor, it turns out, is partly royal himself, and this realization brings him to the verge of accepting the sovereignty of his cousin Ferdinand. Almanzor begins to understand the divine symbols—symbols of Christ's sacrifice and a debt that cannot be repaid—which hold the key to his identity. As for the play's other young heroes, Almahide, Ozmyn and Benzayda, it is the asymmetrical Christian covenant which defines their new obligations within the kingdom of Spain, but which they are yet

fully able to comprehend. The necessity of a religious education to complete their conversion defers complete renewal: after Isabel confers on Almahide her own Christian name, Benzayda also asks for religious tuition: ‘This blessed change, we all with joy receive: And beg to learn that faith which you believe’ (2.5.3.302–3). If the language of contract has been tamed, and anchored in a covenant with God (‘heav’n has joyes in store / To recompense those losses you deplore’ (2.5.3.294-5)), it is also part of the monarchy’s role to oversee the exposition of this covenant. Almahide contributes to the deferral of the play’s conclusion, in that she insists—against Isabel’s wishes—that she should be free to give due rites of mourning to Boabdelin. These processes of realignment are suggestive in the context of challenges to Charles II’s ecclesiastical jurisdiction. The heroic monarchy of Spain accommodates Almahide’s scruples; the Crown’s religious responsibilities, however, are never in any doubt, and a full restoration is felt to depend still upon Granada’s future integration in religion. For all the promise of the play’s ending, it reflects the mood in Charles’s kingdoms that they were not yet unified in religion either. So the turn of empire’s wheel in Granada becomes more clearly a Restoration too, in which the hand of Providence manifests itself. In this sense, the play stays true to some of the most common motifs in the drama of the time, civil war and Restoration, but illuminates these processes anew by dramatizing them as crises in the language of sovereignty.

Dryden’s early heroic plays explore the dramatic potential of that language, and they show the development of an interest in its moral and cultural implications which would return in *Absalom and Architophel* against the background of arguments over the Exclusion Crisis, and in *Fables Ancient and Modern* (1700), where a different kind of sceptical questioning adds layers of moral complexity to Ovid’s



‘Cinyras and Myrrha’.<sup>47</sup> *The Indian Emperour* reveals continuities between Restoration culture and the upheavals of the 1650s, as it explores and tests the ability of natural law arguments to speak to England’s swelling foreign policy ambitions. But Dryden’s heroic drama is perhaps most of its moment when it pursues connections between imperial expansion and domestic disorder, and explores the instability of these arguments. In *Almanzor*, Dryden represents a figure who appropriates the language of sovereignty to contest and divide. In some respects he is an early portrait of the disaffected, almost libertine Hobbist, scaled up to monstrous proportions. But his excessive self-justifications and labile allegiances also reflect the perceived energies and dangers of questions that continued to spill backwards and forwards between spheres of natural and international law, and matters of obedience and conscience. Yet finally, by exploring the ways in which the legal artifice of sovereignty and empire might be supported and supplemented by other cultural institutions—the church, the court, and Dryden’s ‘empire of wit’—the *Conquest of Granada* shows not merely how the themes of his plays were suggested by the legal debates of the Restoration, but also how his thinking about the cultural influence of drama could be stimulated by those debates too.

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