

## March 1694

THE AMBITIOUS SLAVE; or, A Generous Revenge. [By Elkanah Settle.] Wednesday 21  
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Edition of 1694: Prologue, Spoken by Mrs Knight. King of Persia – Bowman; Tygranes – Verbruggen; Orontes – Powell; Briomar – Freeman; Mirvan – Mrs Rogers; Amarin – Sybars [Cibber]; Herminia – Mrs Knight; Clarismunda – Mrs Bracegirdle; Celestina – Mrs Barry; Rosalin – Mrs Leigh. Epilogue, Spoken by Mrs Rogers.

COMMENT. The United Company. The date of this production is determined by a letter (see below). For a discussion of the origin and development of this play, see Hotson, *Commonwealth and Restoration Stage*, pp. 274–76. A song, “Why shou’d the world mistake,” the music composed by John Eccles and sung by Mrs Hudson, is in *Thesaurus Musicus*, 1695.

An unidentified letter, 22 March 1693/4: We had another new play yesterday, called *The Ambitious Slave, or a Generous Revenge*. Elkanah Settle is the author of it, and the success is answerable to his reputation. I never saw a piece so wretched, nor worse contrived. He pretends ’tis a Persian story, but not one body in the whole audience could make any thing of it; ’tis a mere babel, and will sink for ever. The poor poet, seeing the house would not act it for him, and give him the benefit of the third day, made a present of it to the women in the house, who act it, but without profit or encouragement (Edmond Malone, *An Historical Account of the Stage in Plays and Poems of William Shakespeare* [London, 1821], III, 163–64).

*Gentleman’s Journal*, March 1694: ’Tis not altogether strange for a Play to be less kindly receiv’d, immediately after one that has deservedly ingross’d all the Applause which the Town can well bestow in some time on new Dramatic Entertainments. Perhaps Mr Settle may partly impute to this, the want of success of a new Tragedy of his which was lately acted, ’tis called, *The Ambitious Slave: or, The Generous Revenge*. [This play followed Southerne’s *The Fatal Marriage*.]

COMMENT. An unidentified letter, 22 March 1693/4: There is hardly anything now to make it acceptable to you, but an account of our winter diversions, and chiefly of the new plays which have been the entertainment of the town. Thursday 22

The first that was acted was Mr Congreve’s, called *The Double Dealer* [see October 1693]. It has fared with that play, as it generally does with beauties officiously cried up: the mighty expectation which was raised of it made it sink, even beneath its own merit. The character of *The Double Dealer* is artfully writt, but the action being but single, and confined within the rules of true comedy, it could not please the generality of our audience, who relish nothing but variety, and think any thing dull and heavy which does not border upon farce.—The criticks were severe upon this play, which gave the author occasion to lash ’em in his Epistle Dedicatory, in so defying or hectoring a style, that it was counted rude even by his best friends; so that ’tis generally thought he has done his business, and lost himself: a thing he owes to Mr Dryden’s treacherous friendship, who being jealous of the applause he had gott by his *Old Batchelour*, deluded him into a foolish imitation of his own way of writing angry prefaces.

The 2d play is Mr Dryden’s, called *Love Triumphant, or Nature will prevail* [see mid-January 1694]. It is a tragi-comedy, but in my opinion one of the worst he ever writt, if not the very worst: the comical part descends beneath the style and shew of a Bartholomew-fair droll. It was damn’d by the universal cry of the town, *nemine contradicente*, but the conceited poet. He says in his prologue, that this is the last the town must expect from him; he had done himself a kindness had he taken his leave before.