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# Public poetry, memory, and the historical present: 1660-1745

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**PUBLIC POETRY, MEMORY, AND THE HISTORICAL PRESENT: 1660-1745**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### VOLUME 1

LIST OF TABLES .....	v
ABSTRACT .....	vi

CHAPTER	PAGE
INTRODUCTION .....	1
1. Memory in the Twentieth Century .....	1
2. Figurative and Literal Modes of Memory in the Seventeenth Century.....	9
3. The Purpose of the Present Project .....	26
4. The Origins and Designs of the Present Study .....	27
I. PUBLIC POETRY: A DEFINITION AND HISTORICAL OVERVIEW.....	35
1. Private, Semi-Private, and Public Poetry .....	35
2. Public Poetry in England Before Dryden .....	48
II. PUBLIC POETRY IN THE MIDDLE DECADES OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY.....	84
1. The Triumph of Public Poetry .....	84
2. The Advent of John Dryden .....	131
III. POETRY AND MEMORY IN AUGUSTAN ENGLAND.....	184
1. Classical and Seventeenth-Century "Impact" Models of Consciousness.....	184
2. Poetry and Physiological Memory in the Classical World .....	192
3. The Aesthetics of Memory in the Age of Dryden.....	217
IV. THE EXCLUSION CRISIS AND IMAGES OF ENGLISH PURITANISM: A CASE STUDY OF POETRY AND MEMORY IN AUGUSTAN ENGLAND	262
1. A Vocabulary of Puritan Imagery.....	268

2. The Civil War Figure Articulated and Applied, 1678-1681: The Popish Plot and Exclusion Crisis.....	292
3. Phases II and III: Applying and Extending the Historical Figure .....	354

## VOLUME 2

V. FROM "GREAT ANNA!" TO "GREAT ANARCH!" (I): THE SATIRIST AND PUBLIC MEMORY .....	380
1. The Accession of Alexander Pope .....	380
2. Satire and the Framing of Public Memory .....	412
VI. FROM "GREAT ANNA!" TO "GREAT ANARCH!" (II): BRITANNIA MORIBUNDA: POPE'S EPITAPHIC VISION .....	444
1. Pope's Satiric Persona .....	444
2. Epitaphic Satire and the Foundations of the Epitaphic Vision .....	461
3. Pope's Epitaphic Vision .....	487
4. <i>The Dunciad</i> : Pope's Grand Epitaph for England.....	522
5. Universal Darkness, Poetry, and Public Memory .....	537
VII. CONCLUSION .....	550
1. By Way of Denouement: Pope and Posterity .....	550
2. Pope and the Romantics .....	560
3. Poetry and Public Memory After Pope.....	579
4. <i>The SoHoiad: Or, The Masque of Art</i> .....	597
5. Conclusions .....	613
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	617

## LIST OF TABLES

TABLE	PAGE
I. THE RELATION OF PHYSICAL SENSATIONS TO AUDIENCE AFFECT, WITH POETIC APPLICATIONS .....	218

## ABSTRACT

### PUBLIC POETRY, MEMORY, AND THE HISTORICAL PRESENT: 1660-1745

by

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University of New Hampshire, September, 1997

“Public Poetry, Memory, and the Historical Present: 1660-1745” examines the role public poetry played in the fashioning of social memory during the so-called Augustan age of English literature; further, it traces in the rise and decline of public poetry during this period the emergence and subsequent estrangement of two distinctive modes of public memory: one highly emblematic and allusive in nature, fostering and indeed dependent upon a well-endowed collective sense of historical and literary tradition; the other far more literal and individualistic, fashioning social memory of the historical present—the present moment set against the backdrop of historical consciousness—by encouraging a personal awareness of the immediate, prosaic realities of the everyday world. Both modes of memory, the figurative and prosaic, were made broadly available to English society at large with the rise of public poetry in the years after the Restoration. They are generally united in the work of John Dryden, whose rise as a public figure coincides with the rise of public poetry itself in England, but it was the fate of Dryden’s greatest literary inheritor, Alexander Pope, to preside over—even accelerate—what one might call the divorce between the figurative and literal modes of public memory, the subsequent decline of the commercial appeal and cultural authority of formal verse, and the gradual eclipse of the figurative mode of public memory, which had tended to accommodate the habits of mind and memory inculcated by poetry. This “divorce” coincides with the gradual supplanting of occasional, journalistic poetry (broadsheet ballads as well as formal verse) by prose journalism and the novel, but also at work were the continuing shift from orality to literacy and an evolving sensibility—rationalist, individualist, and mercantilist in nature—in which



the habit of emblematic allusion to a shared historical and literary tradition ceased to be relevant and viable. In tracing the broad cultural effects of an important poetic mode, therefore, I explore an important moment in the evolution of social consciousness, a moment that stands as the proximate origin of our own habits of memory.

## INTRODUCTION

### 1. Memory in the Twentieth Century

The realization seldom comes without a pang: Our lives are largely unintelligible to others. Declare ourselves as we will, exhibit as we will the emblems of our inner selves—the books, the paintings, the music, the layers of bric-a-brac—it is all but impossible to provide others with anything more than a very rough idea of who we are. Indeed, we seldom know ourselves from one decade, one year to the next. We might offer our acquaintances running explications of our experiences, actions, and artifacts, but in our absence—temporary or otherwise—what could our closest friends make of the settings, the trappings of our lives? I survey the clutter of my den: there are too many books for the small room; they are wedged into shelves improvised from coffee cans and discarded lumber; they are piled in small stacks all about the floor, anticipating and intercepting one's every step, like hungry cats demanding attention. The floor is papered with file folders, notebooks, book catalogues, back issues of *Harper's* and *The New Republic*, and fragments of dissertation typescript. A bizarre coterie of knick-knacks has taken up residence in this room: the solid plastic, anatomically correct warthog from China, the Moroccan pencil vase, the pair of glasses for viewing stereoscopic photographs, the semi-melted wax frog, the single English teacup and saucer. But the room, though cluttered, is not a muddle. I know where everything is; I know the history of each book and object, and why it occupies its present space. The untrained eye sees only chaos; my eye sees arrangements whose order, if not rationally executed, may at least be reasonably explained. Sooner or later, however, I must surrender this room and its contents to the scrutiny of untrained eyes. What will they make of it? As those eyes scan the shelves and shelves of books; rifle countless manila folders stuffed with notes, newspaper clippings, and photocopies of comic strips and critical essays; and read through the dozens of spiral-bound notebooks filled with my journals.

reading lists, and occasional jottings—what sense, what possible sense will they be able to make of this jumble of a life? To those who hardly knew me I will seem mildly eccentric; to those who thought they knew me well, I will suddenly become a total stranger. For though others may enumerate the facts and artifacts of our lives, they cannot hope to recapture the ceaseless swirl of our consciousness, which must, if closely scrutinized, appear as chaos, if not outright madness. We are, each of us, alone. Our condition is such that we each may say with John Clare (1793-1864), the nineteenth-century farmer-poet of Northamptonshire who spent his final years in a madhouse, “I am! yet what I am none cares or knows, / My friends forsake me like a memory lost; . . . / And e’ven the dearest—that I loved the best— / Are strange—nay, rather stranger than the rest.”<sup>1</sup>

Human beings have always been alone with respect to the larger world and to one another. Our perceptions, experiences, and consciousness are not quite those of others. From the moment in childhood when we realized that our thoughts and sensations were self-enclosed, unknown to others as theirs were unknown to us, we have been alone in the strictest sense of the word. Alone, in life and in death. But the conscious sense of the absoluteness of our isolation, and of its essential antagonism toward others and the institutions of our society, is a fairly recent phenomenon. Georges Duby writes that for the medieval European “if private life meant secrecy, it was a secrecy shared by all members of the household, hence fragile and easily violated. If private life meant independence, it was independence of a collective sort” (510). The unfamiliar, unlike, or unknowable in other persons, cultures, and peoples—these have always been suspect, their strangeness a catalyst for seeking the reassuringly familiar in groups of people much like ourselves: the family, the clan, the caste, the village, the nation. The long, slow emergence of Western individualism, however, has not only forced us to detach our sense of personal identity

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<sup>1</sup>“I Am!,” ll. 1-2; 11-12.

from that of the larger group, but has left us estranged from it. The larger group cannot exist in the face of unchecked individualism, and therefore seeks to compel obedience in its members; their sense of personal autonomy challenged, individual members seek to undermine the collective authority of the group. Under the best of circumstances, an uneasy balance is achieved. Yet the rise of the modern nation-state has exacerbated the mutual antagonism of society and the individual. In *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975), Paul Fussell notes two lasting psychological effects of the First World War: an ironic (even paranoid) worldview created by the unbridgeable chasm between the war's ostensibly glorious ideals and its grotesque reality (29ff.), and the habit of "gross dichotomizing" (75), "what we can call the modern *versus* habit: one thing opposed to another, not with some Hegelian hope of synthesis involving a dissolution of both extremes, . . . but with a sense that one of the poles embodies so wicked a deficiency or flaw or perversion that its total submission is called for" (79). The carnage of 1914-18 made problematic the traditional obligations of the individual to the state—patriotism, trust, sacrifice—but it also undermined larger cultural notions of virtue and innocence, right and wrong, progress and purpose. The experience of the Great War thus destroyed many of the foundations of communal meaning and identity, intensifying the already immanent sense that such things must be determined individually. And yet, since Freud's splitting of the psyche at the end of the last century, the integrity of the autonomous self has been so insistently challenged that it appears we have at last come full circle: there is now no such thing as the Self, whole and sovereign, only an ever-shifting collection of socially determined attitudes, aspirations, and power roles; the very notion of individualism, we are told, is an ideological ploy to hide from us that there can indeed be no such thing. (But is it not rather the most extreme expression of individualism—or at least of egotism—to suspect that the ultimate threat to one's sovereignty comes from one's sense of being unique? Only the effectively autonomous Self can supply its own worst adversary.)

But if our belief in the autonomous Self has been lost, we have not regained the reassuring sense of collective identity our medieval ancestors enjoyed. Reinforcing both our antagonism toward the larger society and our skepticism about individuality itself is one of the great paradoxes of the modern world: Because of worldwide radio, television, and computer networks, as well as the globalization of the means of production, distribution and consumption, culture (in its broadest sense of acquired knowledge and behavior) has never before been so broadly (and distressingly) uniform. At the same time, however, the choices in information, entertainment, and consumer goods provided by these communication and marketing networks have enabled us to assert our individualities by allowing us to indulge an almost infinite number of minute, idiosyncratic preferences. If our personalities may be said to consist of unique collections of universal traits, as individuals of the late twentieth century we distinguish ourselves by peculiar patterns of choice among goods, services, and information available to every consumer. Thus I can call attention to the eccentricities of my den: probably no other room on the planet contains a pair of stereoscopic glasses, an English tea cup (with saucer), *and* a solid plastic warthog from China; no other library contains precisely the same collection of books. Yet each of the “eccentric” objects in this den and each of the books has been mass-produced in the thousands (if not hundreds of thousands), and made available to anyone with an inclination to purchase it. It might be excessively reductive to argue that in the late twentieth century evidence for our individuality lies not in ourselves—for our society has grown faceless, and we have become largely anonymous to one another—but in the contexts we provide for our purchases, and in the irreplicable arrangements of our personal artifacts. However, there is no escaping the fact that the commodities of our communication and marketing networks have become essential to our personal expositions of ourselves (in our conversation, dens, living rooms, and wardrobes, for example), for we have almost no other way of demonstrating who we are.

The same commodities make up the means by which our societies continually redefine and remember themselves. Paul Connerton argues in *How Societies Remember* (1989) that “the essence of modernity is economic development, the vast transformation of society precipitated by the emergence of the capitalist world market” (64). Such a market, Connerton says, “requires the constant revolutionising of production, the ceaseless transformation of the innovative into the obsolescent. The clothes people wear, the machines they operate, the workers who service the machines, the neighborhoods they live in—all are constructed today to be dismantled tomorrow, so that they can be replaced or recycled” (64). By “generat[ing] an experience of time as quantitative and as flowing in a single direction, an experience in which each moment is different from the other by virtue of coming next, situated in a chronological succession of old and new, earlier and later” (Connerton 64), consumerism has provided us, one might argue, with a uniquely modern form of communal memory. We account for ourselves collectively as we account for ourselves individually, through aggregations of mass-produced commodities and the distinctive materials, design styles, and what we might call the social ambience associated with each successive generation of them. No doubt fashion has always provided a rough guide to the passage of time, but so rapidly have technical and stylistic innovations proceeded in, say, the last century and a half, that the function and form of most of our goods might now be identified not just with a particular decade but with a specific year. So temporal are the characteristics of the things we build and buy that there is no mistaking the goods produced in one decade for those produced in another, allowing us to use period technologies and modes as a ready means of historical reference. Handy as it is, this habit of “consumerist allusion” tends to narrow rather than expand the compass of individual and collective memory. Since the goods we mass-produce are distinctive enough to be precisely referential, each generation will be “locked in,” as it were, not only to an identification with the objects with which it is most familiar, but to the personal and cultural references they embody. Because such objects serve as temporal markers for our personal histories, those

that predate or follow our formative first two decades will likely have little emotional hold upon us, will remain at an unclosable psychological distance. And given the accelerated rates of stylistic innovation and technological obsolescence in the modern marketplace, the frame of historical reference provided by each generation of consumer goods grows narrower, more specific and situational; the connections between these references grow more difficult to make; and as a result it becomes more difficult to imagine just what life was like before one's own historical moment. Consequently, the past grows ever more obscure—and more quickly obscure—even as the present moment and its material trappings assume ever larger proportions in our consciousness. We become aware of the truth of this when, for instance, we look back upon the fashions and music of only thirty, twenty or even ten years ago and are struck by their strangeness, or when such things are “rediscovered” and recycled and successively passed off as absolutely new.

Our communication networks reinforce the habit of consumerist allusion. They do so directly, as when films, news clips, photographs or recordings seem to freeze time in images and sound, forever associating certain groups of objects with particular temporal settings. But these images and sounds are commodities in themselves, produced, distributed, and consumed much like any other—and in their allusive power are as integral to the fashioning of collective memory. In her discussion of a recent German film, *The Promise*, which depicts the fall of the Berlin Wall and the reunification of Germany, Margaret Talbot demonstrates how the marketed image of a significant event becomes part of our “personal” memory of it. Describing the film's version of the Wall's destruction, Talbot observes,

All of the scenes . . . were exact recreations of the familiar television footage of that night—down to the camera angles and lighting, the gestures and facial expressions of the actors playing the real people who had swarmed across the border. There's a way in which those pictures—the indelible images of communism's collapse—crowd the imagination. Certainly they crowded [the director] von Trotta's. It reminded me of an interview I had seen with Günter Gaus . . . . Gaus said that the fall of the

wall and the reunification of Germany had been so mediated by television that no one in Germany could really have his or her own memory of it. He compared the collective memory of 1989 with that of the end of World War II. However hard Germans may have tried in the war's immediate aftermath to repress their memories of it, when they began to remember, at least they summoned up their own pictures, not a TV producer's (43).

So vivid are such images that it is easy to believe that we ourselves have witnessed the events they portray; and so ubiquitous are they, so generally available, that it is literally true that we witness them collectively, and collectively on the broadest possible scale. Thanks to the electronic media, the far side of the globe need not remain obscure to us; images of local, regional, or national events are now quite likely to be incorporated into the world's collective memory.

Yet the practical effect of an electronically miniaturized world has been, perversely enough, to reduce our personal experience of it, for the multiplication of experience (as of sensation or choice) forces our already finite attentions to narrow still further in order to comprehend at least some small part of the whole. In fact, so much of the world has been brought into our view as to erode not only our belief that the whole may be comprehended, but that any "whole" or even a broad swath of it may be captured. For we lose the habit of seeing wholes. The larger our frame of reference becomes, the more bewildering and superficial the panorama before us—and the more problematic the notion that we can ever carve it up for ourselves into discrete, autonomous, fully comprehensible plots. If we can no longer tend our own little gardens, it is not simply because we know that so much lies beyond their walls, but also because the garden itself dissolves before our fragmenting gaze. So little is knowable in relation to what might be known that the former itself comes to seem an impossibility. It is hardly a coincidence that the post-modernist notion of irresolvably disordered experience has evolved in this, an age of pervasive, seemingly all-encompassing electronic media. The sheer volume of experience brought to us by electronically composed and distributed newspaper and magazine stories and photographs; by television images and soundbites; by radio talkshows and popular music; and, more



recently, by CD-ROM technology and on-line information services that stretch across the globe is not only bewildering in itself. Our inability to coordinate what we might know of the world is compounded by the way we have become accustomed to experience it, that is, at second- or third-hand. So little of what we might experience of the world may be experienced directly. We must subject ourselves to what someone else—almost always someone unknown to us and all but incapable of ever being known to us—has selected for us to see or hear or read; we must accept another person's version of experience for our own. This is an inescapable fact of existence (we cannot experience for ourselves everything we know), yet so pervasive is this way of witnessing the important events of our "small" world that we come either to discount our own idiosyncratic experience of things (after all, we cannot individually have the "whole story"), or (at the very least) to measure our experience against what passes for the "official" version of events. In either case, the experiential authority is shifted to another—and not a familiar collective entity with which we personally identify, but a faceless news service, entertainment corporation, or government agency.

As we gather about ourselves unique collections of goods that have been mass-produced, so do our personal recollections of public events tend to consist of a singular assemblage of widely replicated images. And as our personal memories are often embodied—and circumscribed—by the objects with which our personal experience is identified, our public memories are likewise emblemized and restricted by the graphic impressions we store away, for as with physical artifacts, the images of public memory represent specific, discrete things; the narrative and thematic connections between them are not obvious or easily made. We might reduce notable episodes or even whole decades to a series of images, yet have no sense of the flow of events or of the feeling of being alive at that precise historical moment. This might not matter, except that improvements in the technology of "capturing" present experience and the consequent efficiency with which that experience is objectified have tended to heighten rather than alleviate our anxiety that the

historical record be “complete,” that is, truthful to our individual or communal sense of things. Only when the repository for memory passes from the spoken to the written word does it become possible to make oneself aware of inaccuracies or omissions in the cultural record, and in general, the more readily manipulable experience becomes, the more likely a society will see the present and past as fully reconstructable. In turn, as belief in the recoverability of experience increases, so does a fear that significant portions of it will be excluded from what we think will be taken for an exhaustive account of the present moment. Hence our eagerness to recover “lost” or “suppressed” histories; hence our contemporary concern over the “possession” of history, that is, over “whose” history our society “privileges”—and hence our modern conundrum, the problem of personal identity and social memory in the late twentieth century: never before has it been so easy for us as individuals to distinguish ourselves from the larger group, yet never before has the individual been so anonymous to that group; never before have we known so much about ourselves as a society, both past and present, yet never before have we been so skeptical about our ability to define ourselves collectively, to fashion our impressions of the present and our memories of the past into a cohesive, authoritative whole. When the individual members of a society are essentially estranged from one another and the larger community alike, the accumulation of private knowledge brings about the dissolution of public meaning.

## 2. Figurative and Literal Modes of Memory in the Seventeenth Century

The distinctive characteristics of personal and public memory in our time have relatively distant origins. We may, for instance, trace the individualist impulse back to the Protestant Reformation, consumerism to the Industrial Revolution, and the mutual antagonism of individual and state to the ideologies (nationalism, historical materialism, and laissez-faire capitalism) spawned by Darwinism. And these elements are in their turn

the products of yet more distant and diverse forces. However, the manifestations and alignments of individualism, capitalism, and political doctrine with which we are familiar are unique to the twentieth century; consequently, the combined influence of these and other elements upon the matter and manner of public memory is also unique. It follows, then, that since the nature and configuration of the cultural, technological, and intellectual forces that shape social memory differ from age to age, the techniques and ends of memory likewise change over time. Collectively or as individuals we do not—cannot—remember as people did before the advent and spread of literacy, or as they did during the Middle Ages and Renaissance. In fact, whatever their particular approach or argument, historians of social memory tend to place the advent of modern memory at or about the time of the French Revolution. In *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (1982), for example, Walter Ong argues that our modern text-based habits of thought and memory could only arise once technology allowed the spoken word to be captured, replicated infinitely and in inexpensive, easy-to-read editions, and distributed to a wide reading public. Such technology and such an audience emerged, Ong asserts, only during the late eighteenth century, and therefore he concludes that it is only then that literacy may be supposed to have finally supplanted primary orality in Western society. Historians who use public commemoration to study social memory point out that the nationalism and overt socio-political ideology of the Revolution gave rise to the nineteenth-century propensity for rediscovering “centuries-old” traditions and myths that in fact were of quite recent invention. It was in Revolutionary France, Paul Connerton asserts in *How Societies Remember* (1989), that the practice of self-consciously reclaiming public and personal rituals from the ostensibly antique past first emerged as a means of overthrowing the old order and permanently establishing the new (7-10)—an example, Connerton notes, of which the Nazis were to make shrewd and sinister use (41-42). Still other historians base their discussion of public memory on the methods societies have used to preserve or reconstruct the past. In his *History as an Art of Memory* (1993), Patrick Hutton, himself a

specialist in the history and historiography of the French Revolution, traces modern historical method to the nineteenth-century historicists who believed that it was their duty to “reenter the mind-set of the historical actors they would examine” in order to “[recollect] the world as it was once perceived” (xxiii). Hutton indeed argues that the historiographical methods Giambattista Vico had distilled by the third edition of his *The New Science* (1744) composed a prototype of modern historicism, yet Hutton is careful to point out the anomalous precocity of Vico’s ideas in his own time and the profound obscurity into which they fell soon after the philosopher’s death.

Significantly, many of the late nineteenth- and twentieth-century philosophers, social scientists, and historians included in Hutton’s impressive survey of historical method use the French Revolution and its aftermath as a case study for their several theories of personal and public memory. Without doubt the French Revolution is a convenient signpost for demarcating the temporal bound of the Modern Era. It unleashed the forces that overturned not simply the personages and institutions of the Ancien Regime but their philosophical underpinnings as well; it launched Napoleon upon his magnificent and ruinous career of Continental conquest; and when that career had at last run its course, the memory of the Revolution and the upheaval it spawned greatly influenced the blueprint for world order drafted at the Congress of Vienna (1815), an order that would disintegrate only with the conflagration of the First World War. Moreover, the Revolution coincided with—even when it and the reaction to it did not overtly advance—the scientific, technological, political, and economic developments that provide the immediate foundation for the structure of contemporary Western society. And further, the configuration of these and other elements, if not absolutely contemporary, is at least recognizably modern. If the material and cultural trappings of nineteenth-century Western Europe might initially perplex visitors from the late twentieth century, we would nonetheless readily adapt ourselves to the progressive, consumerist, and individualist sensibilities of the age. It is altogether reasonable, therefore, that the French Revolution and the period following it be taken for

the locus of the proximate origins of our own habits of memory. But upon reaching the First Cataract we must not suppose that we have found the source of the Nile. The elements shaping modern social memory traced by Ong, Connerton, and Hutton—technology, commemoration, and acute historical awareness, respectively—remain confluent beyond the escarpment of the French Revolution, and we may push somewhat farther upstream before the course of modern memory disappears into a maze of traceless streams.

For the English-speaking world at least, the components of modern memory begin to emerge and coalesce during the second half of the seventeenth century. England during this time was as yet a pre-industrial society, but the new scientific thinking and methods were making possible the technological advances that would soon make the shift from cottage industry to factory production practicable. Further, Donald Bush notes that the first half of the century saw the establishment of complex networks of trade and commerce that bound the kingdom more securely in economic unity (10-13); these networks provided a solid base for the development of colonial trade as the expansion and consolidation of the empire accelerated after midcentury, making both raw materials and markets—the building-blocks of industry—available to Britain. By century's end the foundations of the Industrial Revolution had been laid.

One consequence of this economic development was the rise of the social and political influence of the trading and monied classes. This rise, combined with the break in England's political and social history occasioned by the Civil War and Commonwealth, reconfigured the relationship of King, Parliament, and People. Charles II had no use for the absolutist posturings of his father, in part because his temperament tended toward pragmatism rather than unbending assertion of royal authority, but mainly out of recognition of new political realities: Parliament and People had deposed one King and recalled another; whatever political theorists such as Hobbes and Sir Robert Filmer might assert, absolutism was dead in England—as James II discovered in 1688. Gone, too, was the old thinking about the commemoration of royal power. The anniversary of Charles II's

restoration was observed as an almost sacred day, yet each May 29 celebration was as much a reiteration of the new contract between King and People as of the Stuarts' right to rule. In fact, given the effective shift in political power, public ceremony in the decades following the Restoration took on a controversialist character. The annual Pope-burning on Queen Elizabeth's Day (November 17), for example, came to have vaguely seditious overtones during the Exclusion Crisis, when Opposition leaders played on Protestant fears of a Catholic resurgence in their attempt to bar James from succeeding his brother; the several progresses of Shaftesbury's creature, the Duke of Monmouth, through the countryside in 1680 likewise constituted a public ceremony that challenged the established order in its mimicking of Charles' own progress from Dover to London in 1660; and many civic rituals in London—the election of the Lord Mayor, for instance, or the appointment of sheriffs, the selection of juries, or the city's reiteration of its sovereignty under its Charter—were during the late 1670's and early 1680's reenacted with an eye toward immediate political effect. In short, because the Restoration Settlement settled little with regard to the political, religious, and dynastic make-up of post-Commonwealth England, the commemoration of important personages and social institutions in the decades after the Restoration had to become, to use Connerton's phraseology, more self-consciously "performative" than previously. In stable, homogeneous, self-enclosed communities, Connerton argues, "the gaps in shared memory are much fewer and slighter" than in large, politically and socially complex urban societies; in these latter, Connerton continues, "we must produce or at least imply a history of ourselves: an informal account which indicates something of our origins" and explains "our present status and actions in relation to that audience" (17).

The necessity for such self-conscious public performance was reinforced by the break in England's constitutional and cultural history effected by the Civil War and eleven years of Parliamentary rule. As popular wisdom would have it, the troubled 1640's and 1650's were God's trials for a sinful nation; now that England had recognized its sins and

restored its true King, it would emerge a cleansed and blessed land and experience a wholly unprecedented era of heaven-sent stability, prosperity, and martial achievement. But if this sense of newness gave England an invigorating confidence, it also lent the nation an intense awareness of its own historical present, and forced it to define itself, its character and destiny, anew against its past. It compelled England to answer in a self-conscious way two fundamental questions: Who are we English to be as a people? How are we to best order ourselves and our society? Though it was natural to seek parallels for this ostensibly new society in Augustan Rome or Elizabethan England, wholly new forces ensured that the past would remain the past and the present, fashioning its own identity, would increasingly look toward the future. The New Science, for one, not only challenged the last vestiges of medieval ecclesiastical and scholastic authority, it enabled the Western mind to reconfigure its cosmology, enabled humanity to manipulate and to some degree liberate itself from external nature to a degree heretofore unknown. And if the scientific method enabled us to shape our physical environment, it could allow us to reshape our society as well—perhaps even the mind itself—according to the prescriptions of a pragmatic rationalism. It was Locke who provided the theoretical structure for the reconfiguration of society when he argued that the mind contained no innate ideas and when he stressed the role of education in the formation of sensibility. According to his doctrines, the proper education and ordering of the mind could remove those obstacles to a just and reasonably ordered society: prejudice, dogmatism, immoderate self-love, even madness itself. Moreover, the careful supervision of human perception and experience could shape consciousness, perhaps even reorder the way we thought about ourselves, and about history and time. Empiricism, in short, made it possible to believe in such a thing as Progress—material, political, social, intellectual, and psychological. Henceforth time would bear us forward to the fullest approximation of perfection that humanity might achieve; precedent need no longer circumscribe us. And anyway, as Paul Hazard observes, a new mindset was taking possession of the Western world at large. History was regarded with increasing skepticism:

“The very notion of historicity was tending to disappear. If, now, men turned their backs on the past, it was because they thought it something evanescent, Protean, something impossible to grasp and reclaim, something inherently and inveterately deceptive” (30); the authority of history was being rapidly supplanted by the new cult of novelty. Paraphrasing Paul Valéry’s pronouncement upon the modern ethos of innovation for its own sake<sup>2</sup> and applying it to the latter half of the seventeenth century, Hazard comments,

Novelty, which in the nature of things must be perishable, fleeting, has assumed such overwhelming importance in our eyes, that, if it is absent, nothing else avails; if it is present, nothing else is needed. If we would escape the the reproach of nullity, if we would avoid being objects of ridicule, if we would save ourselves from utter boredom, we have to be constantly more and more advanced, in art, in morals, in politics, in ideas, and now, such is our nature, all we care about, all that matters to us, is the shock of wonderment and surprise (30).

The presence of acute historical awareness, of politically charged public ceremony, and of the beginnings of industrialism and commercialism in this period should not surprise us, for the mid- to late-seventeenth century is, after all, the threshold to our own modernity, in our habits of memory as well as in our rationalism, skepticism, and sense of progress. But subsuming the bare materials of memory traced by Hutton, Connerton, and Ong, is the *mode* according to which the intellect, psyche, and body fashion cognitive, emotional, and physical experience into working memory. The mode of, say, a literary work is generally determined by three things: the attitude of its author toward its subject matter, the author’s design or intent for the work, and (consequently) the expectations for tone, conventions, and theme the work fosters in the reader. Analogously, the predominant mode of memory in a given society at a given time is largely determined by that society’s relationship to its past, which in turn determines the ends to which the materials of public memory are put, as well as the expectations for the present and future significance of such materials and the memory into which they are fashioned. Out of many possible social

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<sup>2</sup> In *Regards sur le monde actuel* (1931).



attitudes toward the past, two are particularly important for our discussion here. The first regards the past as an integral element of the present: past and present in effect compose a single atemporal moment, atemporal because from this perspective the matter of history—human nature, its perceptions, appetites, and motives; human society, its order and institutions; and human endeavor, whether in statecraft, learning, or the arts—is considered constant and universal. When there is no allowance for rapid, wholesale change, let alone moral and material progress, time itself is more or less fixed. Thus, insofar as the past is distinguished from the present, its patterns and precedents inform contemporary experience, giving society a lens through which to perceive and interpret the elements of its present moment. The lens of the past may be turned on the present day with ironic intent or effect (for instance, to remind us that we are not living up to the example of our predecessors), but because the past is a repository of cultural values and traditions, and as such the source of collective identity, it is itself viewed altogether unironically with regard to the present.

But whereas this perspective emphasizes continuity between past and present, the second looks upon the past and sees differences, discontinuities separating it from the present day. Yet greater here than the real differences in material circumstances, social institutions, and philosophical systems is the psychological distance between past and present, a distance sufficient to encourage a belief in the inevitability of change and progress, and with these, a sense of dramatic irony when one looks back from the present age upon a less advanced, less enlightened past. From the ironic perspective, the past is not a living thing, integral to one's sense of the present, but a thing quite apart from it, because completed—and complete in itself, history comprising but a series of present moments in which the current one must surrender its place to the next, and that to the next, *ad infinitum*. At most the past merely harbors the causes of the conditions now being experienced. And because of its detachment and essential estrangement from the present, the past cannot properly be studied in terms of continuities, lest one lapse into

anachronism, but must be reconstructed, reassembled from painstakingly recovered and sifted evidence, both physical and documentary. History thus becomes a discipline, an occupation for the specialist, and comes to consist of the facts we can establish with certainty rather than those things which we merely believe to have been true.

When a society looks upon its past and sees continuity with the present, its mode of memory tends to be what we might call "figurative." The conditions of the historical present, assessed and interpreted as they are in terms of historical or literary precedent, are thereby endowed with more than their literal significance, for they seem to refer not only to themselves but to all earlier parallels. Indeed, the more connections that can be made (and the more explicitly made) between past and present, the better: such explicit connections channel the often bewildering whirl of the present more securely within the familiar courses of the past. Thus the materials of memory are fitted into existing patterns of narrative and interpretation, as in the practice of typology, making accounts of present-day circumstances highly emblematic and allusive in nature, fostering and indeed dependent upon a well-endowed collective sense of spiritual, historical, and literary traditions. When, however, the past is understood in terms of its differences from the present, the mode of memory tends to be "literal." That is, the historical present, believed to be generally discrete and definable, as any other moment in time, largely in terms of its characteristic material, cultural, and organizational features, invites investigation and description according to minute particularization and categorization of these defining features. An understanding of the present moment, therefore, requires close scrutiny of the immediate, prosaic realities of the everyday world. This self-referentialism encourages a fair degree of historical relativity, for it implicitly acknowledges that age will differ from age; moreover, it allows for and even encourages a personal awareness of the present historical moment, making the literal mode of social memory far more individualistic than its opposite, for each member of society can describe the realities about him. Indeed, it is in the interest of individual members to make themselves aware of these everyday realities, since in societies in which

the present is psychologically detached from the past, political power and influence are derived less from traditional institutions of order and authority, than from the ability to fashion current circumstances into plausible pronouncements upon the defining characteristics—governmental, commercial, and diplomatic strengths and deficiencies, for instance—of the present day. Such definitive assessments, after all, have a good deal to do with shaping administrative, economic, and military policies, as well as with creating a picture of the age that gives its inhabitants a sense of themselves both as individuals and as members of a collective body with a collective purpose—a very necessary orientation for the most part lost once the present has become estranged from any notion of a “living” past.

It is only logical that the figurative mode of memory would tend to flourish in preliterate societies rather than in literate ones. Ong’s description of thought in oral societies—as coming into being in “heavily rhythmic, balanced patterns, in repetitions or antitheses, in alliterations and assonances, in epithetic and other formulaic expressions, in standard thematic settings . . . in proverbs which are constantly heard by everyone so that they come to mind readily and which themselves are patterned for retention and ready recall, or in other mnemonic forms” (34)—might well be a list of the techniques of figurative memory. It is equally logical that highly literate societies would tend toward the literal mode, which stresses the importance of documentation and employs methods of historical inquiry that could not exist without the possibilities for textual retrieval and analysis made available by literacy. However, though a society’s predominant mode of memory may be greatly influenced by its degree of literacy (as well as other, nontechnical factors, such as its system of cosmology), it is not necessarily determined by it. Indeed, as the Western world discovered in the seventeenth century, the Chinese and the ancient Egyptians possessed both highly literate cultures and a profound, even religious sense of continuity with the past. And in this present age of what Ong terms “secondary orality,” when the ubiquitousness of visual media has replicated the power of the spoken word, the “participatory mystique,” “communal sense,” and “concentration on the present moment”

found in primary orality (136), a reconstituted oral culture finds itself isolated from even its recent past, as I have suggested above, by its dependence upon screen imagery, sound-bites, and consumer goods for self-definition.

Mnemonic mode must therefore be considered in any examination of social memory, for it provides the framework for the materials of memory in a given society at a given time. Having briefly traced the materials of modern memory back to the latter half of the seventeenth century, I will now go a step farther and argue that for the English-speaking world it is during this period that our modern mode of memory is established as well. For it is during this period that the two modes of memory I have just outlined, the figurative and the literal, cease to be mutually complementary and emerge as competing modes of social memory. Their coexistence is remarkable not in itself, for there is nothing to prevent several modes of memory from coexisting, especially in such a setting as seventeenth-century England, which witnessed one of the greatest series of cultural transitions to ever occur. At the beginning of the century, England's absolutist bent, its complacent repose upon ecclesiastic and scholastic authority, and its intellectual isolation showed that it had yet to throw off the trappings of late medievalism; by century's end, absolutism had effectively been replaced by constitutional monarchy and relatively broad popular participation in political affairs, the aristocracy of blood by an aristocracy of finance and commerce, the reassurances of faith by the methods of the New Science, and intellectual obscurity by a burst of philosophic brilliance that only France could rival. No, the remarkable thing here is not the presence of two rival mnemonic modes, but that the struggle that developed between them became so openly, so self-consciously contested. By the end of the Augustan period the outcome had been decided: the literal mode had triumphed and the figurative was in ever-deepening eclipse, an obscurity from which it has never significantly emerged. The divorce of these two modes would thus have important consequences for the subsequent evolution of social memory; in fact, as I hope to

demonstrate, it would largely determine the habits of collective memory from the mid-eighteenth century down to our own time.

The literal mode certainly benefitted from the increase of literacy during this period, as well as from political, economic, and social changes that increased popular authority at the expense of the Crown and aristocracy. One must also cite significant shifts in thinking about time and history. As Hazard explains, researches into the histories of the ancient Egyptians and Chinese showed that the world was far older than Christian Europe had supposed (42-44). As the bounds of the human past receded into darkest obscurity, doubt, which typified the temper of the age toward all received knowledge, at last fell upon historical knowledge as well. Not only, as I have noted above, was the reliability of one's information about the past in question,<sup>3</sup> that information, once uncovered, was often treated as if it were the stuff of epic, tragedy, or romance. Was not Clio, after all, the sister Muse of Calliope, Melpomene, and Erato? Hazard sums up the ethos of the "old history" thus:

Drama, pathos—these things are of the stuff of History; therefore she must be allowed a sumptuous setting. Battles, conspiracies, revolutions, schisms—first-rate material, fine subjects these! With her taste for rhetoric, she is akin to poetry, for what is poetry but a form of eloquence, an eloquence controlled by rhyme? Noble herself, she breathes the sublime as her native air. She must, of course, provide a rich assortment of speeches, descriptions, maxims, analyses, parallels (31).

In short, history had been a literary art first, and a professional discipline second. Put another way, it was understood and practiced as a figurative endeavor. This did much to undermine its respectability in a century that, beginning with Bacon, came to believe that the world external to the human self could be objectified, understood in itself apart from

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<sup>3</sup> In *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), for instance, Locke underscores the tenuousness of historical knowledge in his discussion of the unreliability of traditional testimonies: "I think nothing more valuable than the Records of Antiquity: I wish we had more of them, and more uncorrupted. But this, Truth it self forces me to say, That no *Probability* can arise higher than its first Original"—that is, the original testimony upon which subsequent historical accounts are based, [which] though cited afterwards by hundreds of others, one after another, is so far from receiving any strength thereby, that it is only the weaker. Passion, Interest, Inadvertency, Mistake of his meaning, and a thousand odd Reasons, or Caprichio's, Men's Minds are acted by . . . may make one Man quote another Man's Words or Meaning wrong (664).

human prejudices and limitations. The problem, however, was to liberate one's perceptions and assessments from the received notions of the scholasticists and the vagaries of imprecise language. Bacon observes in aphorism LX in Book I of *The New Organon* (1620), for example, "The idols imposed by words on the understanding are of two kinds. They are either names of things which do not exist, . . . or they are names of things which exist, but yet confused and ill defined and hastily and irregularly derived from realities" (342). Similarly, he declares in aphorism LXIX that existing methods of inquiry and demonstration "do little else than make the world the bondslave of human thought and human thought the bondslave of words" (348).

Hobbes is more of a relativist than Bacon, but he, too, believes that absolute fact can be established if we steer clear of linguistic tangles (what he frequently terms "insignificant speech"), of the slough of moral abstraction (what one society calls wisdom, justice, and gravity another may call fear, cruelty, and stupidity), and, especially, of the maze of Fancy, which if unchecked leads us into a kind of madness, "such as they have, that entering into any discourse, are snatched from their purpose, by every thing that comes in their thought, into so many, and so long digressions, and Parentheses, that they utterly lose themselves" (*Leviathan* XIII, 136). If Fancy is to "be more eminent" in poetry, it is because poems "please for the Extravagancy"; but Judgement must predominate in history, "because the goodnesse consisteth, in the Method, in the Truth, and in the Choyse of the actions that are most profitable to be known" (136). But even method, truth, and the proper subject cannot redress the fundamental problem with historical knowledge. Though Hobbes calls history "the Register of *Knowledge of Fact*," that is, of "*Absolute Knowledge*" (IX, 147-8), he also insists that when we cannot verify a fact for ourselves, we must take on faith another's account of it, and, moreover, that all knowledge of cause and effect "is not Absolute, but Conditionall. No man can know by Discourse, that this, or that, is, has been, or will be; which is to know absolutely: but onely, that if This be, That is; if This has been, That has been; if This shall be, That shall be" (VII, 131). Since all or

most historical testimony is provided by others and must be taken on faith, its explanations of cause and effect linking fact with fact must be doubly suspect, making history of a kind with religious belief: we may believe or not, as we choose. As with scriptural history, “so it is also with all other History. For if I should not believe all that is written by Historians, of the glories of *Alexander*, or *Cæsar*, I do not think the Ghost of *Alexander*, or *Cæsar*, had any just cause to be offended; or any body else, but the Historian. If Livy say the Gods made once a Cow speak, and we believe it not; wee distrust not God therein, but Livy” (VII, 133-134). Whatever ideals Hobbes might hold for history as a repository of “knowledge of Fact, which is a thing past, and irrevocable” (V, 115), it seems clear that for him the limitations of historical knowledge induce its compilers to include in their works much that is merely received and repeated from tradition or myth, or that is in itself fantastic, hyperbolic, episodic, and (to use Bacon’s term) “parabolic” (that is, allegorical)—in short, much that partakes of the figurative and cannot be verified either as absolutely or literally true.

If Hobbes’s insistence upon a distinct separation of history and poetry, of the factual (literal) and fanciful (figurative), ends up calling itself into question, his impulse is a common one for his age. So low had the figurative habit sunk in the estimation of many of the age’s leading thinkers that as early as mid-century Hobbes can give a nasty twist to the well-worn truism that, as even the prosaic Bacon had declared in *De Dignitate et Augmentis Scientiarum* (1623), “[S]ince the acts and events which are the subjects of real history are not of sufficient grandeur to satisfy the human mind, Poesy is at hand to feign acts more heroical; since the successes and issues of actions as related in true history are far from being agreeable to the merits of virtue and vice, Poesy corrects it, exhibiting events and fortunes as according to merit and the law of providence” (407). Hobbes turns this on its head. When historical poetry is allowed to pass for history itself, he says, the results may be potentially destructive: young men “nourished by the Histories, or Fictions of Gallant persons” (*Leviathan* VI, 125) are likely to be incited to vainglorious imitation of their

heroes, disrupting the settled order of human society in violation of the first law of nature, which is to seek peace. Early in the century, it was possible to idealize figurative truth; by mid-century such idealization was highly suspect. By the end of the century Locke would go further, and list figurative language, even when used in “Discourses, where we seek rather Pleasure and Delight, than Information and Improvement,” as an abuse of speech: “[I]f we would speak of Things as they are, we must allow, that all the Art of Rhetorick, besides Order and Clearness, all the artificial and figurative application of Words Eloquence hath invented, are for nothing else but to insinuate wrong *Ideas*, move the Passions, and thereby mislead the Judgement; and so indeed are perfect cheat” (*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, III, viii, 508). But in the meantime, at midcentury, so long as the figurative made no pretense to be literal, and the literal avoided the trappings of the figurative, all was well.

But as it happened, poetry did not stay “poetic,” did not isolate itself and its figurative way of representing human experience from the literalism of the everyday world. It did not content itself with fanciful retellings of the martial and amorous exploits of mythological heroes, with closely veiled allegories of the political intrigue of court, with the business of seduction among the aristocratic classes, with the problems of faith for the individual Christian soul, or with the playful distortion of poetic diction and conceit. On the contrary, the political, social, and economic forces unleashed or hastened by the Civil Wars that had effected a slow society-wide shift in the mode of memory were effecting likewise the emergence of a new kind of poetry, occasional, journalistic, satirical in tone and broadly public in its appeal, a poetry that could participate in and to some degree frame the subjects and terms of public debate. The unprecedented influence of poetry in the public sphere is important in itself, but this new public mode of poetry also serves as an apt vehicle for the study of the estrangement of the figurative and literal mnemonic modes during the Augustan period, and for two reasons. First, even as the value and integrity of figurative habit came to be increasingly suspected, public poetry trained the figurative lens



upon the historical present and presumed to encompass and explain everyday political and social experience in a manner that was highly analogical, emblematic, allusive, and rhetorical. It did not claim to present its audience with the literal truth, nor offer itself up as literal truth's pale auxiliary, "poetic truth"; rather, it sought to force its readers to see in the political, social, and cultural events of the day another dimension: a broader historical significance, a greater moral and ethical universality. This dimension is discernible, however, only when one learns to descry the archetypal in the everyday, and the everyday relevance of the archetypal—to see the literal in the figurative and the figurative in the literal. In short, the figurative is not a *substitute* for literal truth; it *reveals* more of literal truth than immediately meets the eye. This combination or blending of the actual with the emblematic, the poetic with the prosaic, allows us to trace in public poetry the complementary and competing claims of figurative and literal mnemonic techniques, but further, the viability of public poetry for the better part of a century, from 1660 to 1745, suggests as well that the figurative might well have maintained its place alongside the literal in the formation of social memory.

That it did not, and was rapidly giving way to the literal by the middle of the eighteenth century, may be attributed to the peculiar rise, evolution, and decline of public poetry from the advent of John Dryden, whose own rise as a public figure coincides with that of the public mode itself in England, through the death of Alexander Pope, whose career as Dryden's greatest literary inheritor witnessed what has proven to be the lasting triumph of the literal mode of social memory over the figurative. Thus the period of public poetry's preeminence in English literary history constitutes, secondly, an important moment in the evolution of social consciousness, a moment that stands as the proximate origin of our own habits of memory. For as it unfolded, the comparatively brief career of public poetry inadvertently helped to ensure the eventual ascendancy of the literal mnemonic mode. In the decades after the Restoration, and even during the first years of the eighteenth century, the two main mnemonic modes remain largely united not only within

public poetry, but to a sufficient degree within the periodical essay (as practiced, say, by Addison and Steele) as well, allowing these potential generic rivals to remain essentially complementary. Ultimately, however, two factors would put these genres at odds with one another. The first is the appeal of the immediacy and specificity of prose journalism and fiction. These not only contributed greatly to the commercial success of prose at the expense of poetry, but sapped the latter's cultural authority as well, for they inculcated habits of reading and of seeing the larger world that depended very little upon the emblem, allusion, and precedential parallels public poetry used to reinforce its readers' sense of participation in their nation's historical and literary traditions. In journalism, the present moment is news; yesterday belongs to the obscurity of the past. And as for poetry's new rival, John Feather points out that, "From the [book-] trade's point of view, the significance of the novel lay not in its literary merit but in its essential triviality. It was seen as an ephemeral production to be read once and then forgotten. This meant that, once the demand had been created, a continuous supply of new novels was needed to fill it" (97). By mid-century, readers had become accustomed to and demanded novelty above all else. As in our own day, the habit of seeing the past in the present ceased to be relevant and viable; explication of the present moment in terms of itself was now what mattered.

The second factor has to do with public poetry itself. Put simply, as the standard-bearer of the figurative mode of social memory, it little by little ceased to adequately illuminate the prosaic realities of the everyday world and thereby gradually lost its credibility as an interpreter of the historical present. Though its primary spokesman, Alexander Pope, would, like Dryden, come to serve his contemporaries and successors as a social emblem, a cultural mnemonic that defined the æsthetic ideals of the age, these ideals were no longer integral to the way the age went about fashioning its definitions of itself. In particular, Pope's attempts to "epicize" his times in increasingly agonistic verse produced some of the most brilliant satirical poetry in the language, but the more forceful his attempts to impose a figurative interpretation of the historical present upon his audience.

the more his work alienated its readers. Its sensibility was at odds with theirs, and seemingly out of synch with the world it purported to describe and define. When Pope in his final years at length claimed that Universal Darkness was about to bury all, and forever, the inhabitants of a economically prosperous, politically stable, militarily potent England probably wondered what on earth the eccentric little man could have in mind. Public poetry had initially recommended itself by appealing to common experience of everyday realities: the poet could blend the figurative with the literal, the poetic with the prosaic, because individual readers could be expected to verify the aptness of his observations for themselves; now common experience had grown independent of the society's poet-prophets.

### 3. The Purpose of the Present Project

Literature, and particularly public poetry, was the last sphere in which the techniques of the literal and figurative mnemonic modes remained mutually informative. But as the preponderance of the literal in prose and of the figurative in poetry effectively segregated these two modes of social memory as well as the two genres, the English-speaking world lost a way of remembering that it had employed for centuries, for the cultural eclipse of poetry and the figurative habits of mind and memory it inculcated would prove more or less permanent. This eclipse would prove to be very important for the evolution of the habits of memory with which we are today familiar, and which seem to be so impervious to alteration. However, if the eclipse of the figurative mode shows us anything, it is that the methods of memory *do* evolve, and thus the struggle between mnemonic modes in the Augustan age provides an opportunity for an investigation of how and why the techniques of social memory change over time, and, more specifically, how the foundations of our own habits of memory came to be laid.

The purpose of this project, then, is to trace in the rise, evolution, and decline of public poetry in England from 1660 to 1745 the estrangement and divorce of the figurative and literal modes of social memory, and to explore the consequences of this divorce for the cultural importance of poetry in the Augustan age, for the age's definitions of itself, for our own understanding of the age, and for our understanding of techniques of fashioning social memory in the late twentieth century.

#### 4. The Origins and Design of the Present Study

An account of the origins of this project will, I hope, go some way toward explaining and justifying its method and structure. I began with an Augustan conundrum that had plagued me almost since my introduction to the literature of the Restoration and eighteenth century: the discrepancy between the temperament of the age as described by its literary successors and historians, and the temperament of the age as manifested in its literature. Received opinion from the time of Johnson until at least 1988, when I was presented with it in graduate school, holds that it was an age of imitation, not innovation; that the Augustan poet had to practice emotional restraint and observe a strict propriety of manner; that the poet and his or her poetry must subscribe to a rigid classification of poetic forms, styles, and subjects, and to a prescribed poetic diction; that it was the business of the poet to make general pronouncements of universal truths, and that this imperative entailed a rejection of the particular and the personal. Useful shorthand, perhaps, but as the young Mary Pierrepont so rightly observed to her future husband, "General Notions are generally wrong"<sup>4</sup>. This is an age, after all, in which existing poetic models (such as verse satire) were so revised as to be in effect remade; an age that saw the emergence of many new literary forms, among them the novel, the periodical essay, and the polite letter. This is

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<sup>4</sup>Letter to Edward Wortley Montagu, March 28, 1710.

an age in which regularity of form and propriety of manner and diction were frequently followed for ironic effect or abandoned altogether; an age in which political and literary controversy often made literature very personal and minutely particular. Could we expect otherwise of the period of Rochester, Dryden, Dennis, Bentley, Swift, Pope, and Lady Mary herself? Still, gratifying as it might be, one cannot wholly attribute the disparity between Augustan reputation and reality to the willful misunderstandings of the Romantics (particularly Wordsworth) or the complacency of literary historians. For often they simply repeated what the age had said of itself. After all, Addison merely echoes Dryden and anticipates Pope when he declares in *Spectator* No. 253 (December 20, 1711),

It is impossible, for us who live in the later Ages of the World, to make Observations in Criticism, Morality, or in any Art or Science, which have not been touched upon by others. We have little else left us, but to represent the common Sense of Mankind in more strong, more beautiful, or more uncommon Lights (253).

Pope's own *An Essay Upon Criticism* (1711) cautions his reader against the impulsive adoption of new or archaic words, against wanton deviation from classical precedents, and against the exercise of the imagination unchecked by judgement. And in Johnson's *Rasselas* (1759) we find Imlac's oft-quoted admonishment to poets, perhaps the very emblem of eighteenth-century literary theory:

“The business of a poet,” said Imlac, “is to examine, not the individual, but the species; to remark general properties and large appearances: he does not number the streaks of the tulip, or describe the different shades in the verdure of the forest. He is to exhibit in his portraits of nature such prominent and striking features, as recall the original to every mind” (527-28).

No wonder that such pronouncements should have prompted successive generations of critics to mine the period's literature for decorous statements of universal truths. It will not do, however, to take Addison, Pope, and Johnson at their word; the form, temper, and subjects of their own works too often belie their theoretical assertions.

Put another way, if we have misrepresented the Augustan age, it is largely because the age misrepresented itself to itself. One might say it misremembered itself, mistaking its ideals, its cherished myths, its favorite images for its realities—or rather, that it came to retain the memory of certain realities and discard that of others, fashioning its identity from what was obvious and easily preserved. There is nothing unique to the Augustans in this; every age does the same. Nor is there anything sinister in the practice. It is merely necessary. For memory is not so much a matter of retention as of propitious forgetting: it is impossible to remember until we have forgotten enough to make manageable what we have known; memory is not the print on a page, but the white spaces between the line and letters. But it is also possible for us to adopt a contrary view and argue that Augustan literature has indeed preserved more of the truth of its times than is apparent at first glance. The trick is to recover, not the bewildering variety of experience of late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century England—we can never know exactly what it was like to be alive during that time—but the components of social memory and, especially, the manner (or mode) of their configuration. Their recovery is essential to making the perceptual, intellectual, and æsthetic idioms of the period more readily accessible, that is, richer and more explicit in their significations. And such access, in turn, allows us to reconstruct the ostensible and implicit motivations informing the habits of social memory with which the Augustans fashioned their historical present into patterns of experience sufficiently coherent and emblematic to serve as plausible definitions of the age and its inhabitants.

Thus what I have labelled the “conundrum” of the Augustan age led me to examine the processes of public memory during the years 1660-1745; further, the vigorousness of these processes as they played themselves out in the public poetry of the period led to my

decision to choose poetry as the best medium in which to examine them. Tracing the rise, development, and decline of public poetry makes a chronological survey only logical, but even if it were feasible, it is well beyond the scope of this study to survey the period year by year or poem by poem. Rather, it occurred to me that by comparing two points in time, related in many respects but sufficiently distant from one another to be readily distinguished, one might more readily discern broad differences of sensibility, worldview, and thereby mnemonic technique by gaining the advantage of retrospective overview—that is, of a before-and-after comparison. It was fortuitous (though, as I hope to show, not wholly coincidental) that the advent of public poetry coincides with the career of John Dryden, and its demise with that of Alexander Pope. Their contrasting portrayals of the historical present, as well as their differences in subject, tone, and method, aptly demonstrate the shifts in sensibility and thereby those in mnemonic modes between 1660 and 1745. The poetic works of Dryden and Pope thus serve as ready case studies for the evolution in mnemonic matter and method during the Augustan age. But in addition, both Dryden and Pope as *public personages* were in their own times recognized as important vehicles for social self-perception as well as indispensable components of their societies' emerging self-definitions; in fact, by virtue of their enduring popularity and the sheer figurative power of their verse, they came to be reconstituted by their contemporaries and successors into cultural mnemonics of a sort, living emblems of a whole complex of æsthetic, philosophical, moral, and political values that in its turn epitomized an important chapter in Britain's literary and social history. It is this consideration that prompts me to choose the careers of these two major figures as the main pillars supporting the arch of my thesis. For the lives, works, and personæ of these two poets, I would argue, not only best demonstrate the immense role poetry had in shaping the historical present and habits of memory in early modern Britain, but also neatly comprehend the struggle between the figurative and literal mnemonic modes during the period 1660-1745.

However, I would not be taken to imply that to support my argument I shall consult only the public poetry of the period, or only that poetry composed by Dryden and Pope. In order to trace the influence of poetry upon the sensibilities of the period, I intend to make frequent reference to contemporary drama, letters, diaries, newspapers, and memoirs, as well as popular histories. And here it might behoove me to point out that I am very much aware that it is one thing to make a case for public poetry's capacity for giving shape to the historical present or to enumerate its efforts toward so doing, and quite another to establish definitively the exact measure either of its impact upon the private understanding of individuals or of its influence upon the work of professional historians. We are unlikely, for instance, to discover diary entries or personal letters that are as highly figurative in their accounts of events as the occasional poetry of the period; nor should we expect that Dryden's treatment of the Exclusion Crisis, say, or Pope's portrayal of the administration of George II should appear undiluted in the writings of professional historians. That is, the test of public poetry's influence is not its being taken for and applied as literal truth. Although, as Roy Porter notes in his biography of Gibbon, the contemporaries of Dryden and Pope quite "self-consciously acted out their lives on a historical stage, fortified by the maxims of the past, playing the parts of ancient soldiers and sages" (30), and the practice of history itself in their time was comparatively figurative in the sense that it often presented the past as an unfolding narrative of Providential design or as a series of morally edifying exempla (24ff.), we must remember that after all the importance of public poetry in this period is its ability to make the significance of the events and personages of the day readily comprehensible, usually by placing them in an immediately recognizable figurative context, be it historical, literary, or typological. Public poetry thus participates in what Connerton labels "communal memory," that is, in the creation and continuation of society's "informally told narrative histories" (17), rather than in the textual and archaeological reconstruction of the past usually associated with the practices of the professional historian. Therefore, the test of public poetry's importance for the shaping of worldview is its



capacity to fashion a plausible present meaning for the present moment, and it does this through the deftness of its figuration, its power to persuade and to provoke in its readers the desired thought and action. As for Dryden and Pope, they are not the only poets of their age who were able to incite, inspire, and, in some cases, indict their public and their society; they are instead starting points for my researches, emblems of the public personages whose works provide the material for my investigations.

I have organized those investigations as follows. Chapter 1, “Public Poetry: A Definition and Historical Overview,” offers a working definition of public poetry and an admittedly brief and selective survey of its history in England, beginning with the oral poetry of the Anglo-Saxons and ending with the death of the first truly public English poet, Ben Jonson. The first half of Chapter 2, “Public Poetry in the Middle Decades of the Seventeenth Century,” continues the history of public poetry in England, exploring the political, social, and cultural forces underlying public poetry’s rise to preēminence at the time of the Restoration. The second half of the chapter looks at the career of John Dryden during the 1660’s and 1670’s, focusing specifically upon his displacement of the courtly wits as literary arbiters. In tracing the particular rhetorical strategies and figures by which Dryden eroded the æsthetic prerogative of the gentleman-amateur, this portion of the chapter incidentally demonstrates how public poetry—in this case, dramatic prologues and epilogues—could effect major changes in the larger society’s assessment of and expectations for its cultural values and identity. Chapter 3, “Poetry and Memory in Augustan England,” provides the classical background for seventeenth-century notions of memory, then examines the late seventeenth century’s own “æsthetics of memory,” which, even as it offered a theoretical explanation for poetry’s impact upon memory, also justified poetry’s participation in public affairs in an age grown skeptical of figurative expression. Chapter 4, “The Exclusion Crisis and Images of English Puritanism: A Case Study of Poetry and Memory in Augustan England,” shows how in practice public poetry worked to shape social memory in the decades after the Restoration. Chapters 5 and 6, “From ‘Great

Anna!' to 'Great Anarch!'" (Parts I and II), discuss Pope's futile attempt to advance both the authority of public poetry and the efficacy of figurative memory. In the conclusion to the study, I survey the immediate and long-term consequences of Pope's peculiar influence upon English poetry, paying particular attention to how one of those consequences, the demise of the figurative mnemonic mode, has shaped the matter, manner, and tone of memory in our own age, and has—at least indirectly—bequeathed to us the anxious, ironic temper of our own solipsistic, slightly paranoid century.

My hope for the present study is twofold. First, I hope to add to our understanding of memory in our own time by plausibly tracing its proximate origins to a time earlier than commonly supposed and to a specific conflict of mnemonic modes, the resolution of which has helped shape our own habits of communal memory. This study is intended, then, as an exercise in "practical" criticism to complement earlier studies of memory, whether theoretical or practical, such as Frances Yates' *The Art of Memory* (1966), Walter Ong's *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (1982), Paul Connerton's *How Societies Remember* (1989), Patrick Hutton's *History as an Art of Memory* (1993), Mary Carruthers' *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (1990), David Cressy's *Bonfires and Bells: National Memory and the Protestant Calendar in Elizabethan and Stuart England* (1989), Jocelyn Harris' *Jane Austen's Art of Memory* (1989), and Paul Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975) and *Wartime* (1989). As even this brief list suggests, in recent years the study of memory has been regularly applied to historical and literary topics; to my knowledge, however, no such study has been undertaken on the years 1660-1745. Moreover, by focusing on the role of public poetry in the shaping of Augustan memory and self-definition, I hope both to add a literary dimension to recent social histories of the period, such as Roy Porter's *English Society in the Eighteenth Century* (1982) and Linda Colley's *Britons: Forging a Nation, 1707-1837* (1992), and to introduce the problem of memory into discussions—such as Howard

Weinbrot's recently published *Britannia's Issue*—of literary history and the emergence of historical consciousness.

My second aim is the more ambitious by far: to give the modern reader an appreciation both for the energy of Augustan poetry and for a world in which poetry had a major part to play in the shaping of social sensibility—a role, sadly enough, that poetry has forfeited in our own time.

## CHAPTER I

### PUBLIC POETRY: A DEFINITION AND HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

#### 1. Private, Semi-Private, and Public Poetry

To argue, as I do, that poetry of the second half of the seventeenth century had an unprecedented influence upon the matter and manner of historical consciousness and therefore upon the fashioning of social memory, one must argue likewise that during this period the relationship between poetry and society at large was equally unprecedented. And to claim that this new relationship between poetry and society constituted a triumph of *public* poetry, I am compelled to do three things. First, I must make clear what I mean by the term “public poetry”; second, I must show how the predominant poetic mode of this age differs from those of earlier periods; and third, I must establish the means by which and the terms upon which poetry in this period became a force for shaping public perception, consciousness, and memory. For if I cannot make a case that such a thing as public poetry exists, and further, that Augustan poetry in particular could (in theory) and did (in practice) play a prominent public role, subsequent demonstrations of the specific effects of particular poems will be spurious. In this chapter, then, I shall offer a working definition of “public poetry” and attempt (by way of historical overview) to contrast the fully public with what might be called the private and semi-private (or semi-public) poetic modes; the following chapter will focus on the rise of poetry to a position of broad cultural authority following the Restoration.

One should begin by observing that though all poetry can be made public, only certain poetry can be public in the fullest sense of the word. Consider, for instance, the following poem, which appeared in 1648:

Display thy breasts, my Julia, there let me  
Behold that circummortal purity:  
Betweene whose glories, there my lips Ile lay,

Ravisht, in that faire *Via Lactea*.

The year 1648 was a decisive one in England's history. Late in 1647 Charles I had escaped from the clutches of the New Model Army; by the end of the year he had made a deal with the Scottish Presbyterians, who had fallen out with both the Army and Parliament. The Royalist cause, crushed two and a half years earlier at Naseby, was given a seeming second life: early in 1648 the Civil War broke out anew. It did not, however, last long. The Royalists, ill-organized and out-generalled, were defeated decisively by Cromwell at Preston, and in Essex by Fairfax; the King was seized on the Isle of Wight; the Army purged Parliament, leaving, as Ashley says, "a sectarian 'Rump'" (89) that in short order tried and convicted Charles for treason. The King was beheaded on January 30, 1649.

This tumult is a world away—at least—from the epigram on Julia's breasts. With the events of 1647-8 in mind, one might, conceivably, be led to argue that the poet, in full psychological retreat from the violence and chaos of the public sphere, seeks out the reassuring, almost maternal embrace of his mistress. Yet, detached from their historical context, these lines suggest nothing beyond the immediate circumstances they portray. Of those circumstances much may be observed. The speaker and Julia are apparently long-time lovers, this being a poem not of seduction, but of consummation. The poet, so bold in his request, can be no bolder than his Julia will tolerate; both must delight in frank eroticism, an eroticism at once heightened and tempered by their easy familiarity. Further, their eroticism is as rational and as spiritual as it is physical. When the speaker refers to the "circummortal purity" of Julia's "glories," and renames them a "Via Lactea," the abstraction of his phrases suggests an intellectual distance between the speaker's apprehension of Julia's beauty and his assessment of it (as does the Latin phrase); his declaration of her beauty's "circummortal purity" recalls the neoplatonic reconciliation of body and soul found in the secular thought of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.

Having inferred this much, what yet eludes us? For one thing, we know few particulars of the poet or his mistress. We would know the poet's name, for it appears on

the title page of the volume in which this poem is found: *Hesperides: or The Works Both Humane & Divine of Robert Herrick Esq.* But who is Robert Herrick? His portrait in the frontispiece shows a burly, double-chinned fellow with a boldly arching nose and a great tempest of bushy hair. Given the prominence of these features, we might suppose that this Robert Herrick is something of an epicure—precisely the person to write a poem about his mistress' breasts. Taking his poem and his portrait together we might infer that Herrick is a Royalist: no Roundhead would strike such a fleshly pose; no ardent Parliamentarian would trifle with sensual epigrams. And presumably by the time we had read through the poems preceding "Upon Julia's Breasts" we would have reached certain tentative conclusions about his education, personal and mental habits, poetic style, and the like. In short, Herrick's volume suggests much to us about its author. But it *tells* us next to nothing. As for Herrick, his character, as opposed to that of his poetic persona, remains elusive; we know nothing of his condition or circumstances. Moreover, we know little of the circumstances of the poem itself, its date of composition, the conditions under which it was composed, and its intended audience. Who is Julia? "Julia" is no doubt a fictional name—and might well be a wholly fictional personage. (Indeed, given the rather intimate nature of much of the poetry in *Hesperides*, we would expect Herrick to be discreet regarding his mistress, lest too many men claim too intimate a knowledge of her.) Without knowledge of the poem's circumstances, our suppositions regarding Herrick himself begin to erode. Herrick *might* be a Cavalier, but if we learned that he composed this piece much before the Civil War we might instead account him an imitator of Jonson's erotic poetry.

Herrick's poem leaves us with such doubts and questions because as readers we are left to look in at this poem, its characters and the drama between them, from the outside. We are mere spectators here, and vulnerable spectators at that: we cannot be sure that we understand the poet's frame of reference, and have no chance either to endorse or to deny his claims. Perhaps Herrick's lines, playful and spry as they are, will trigger the reader's own pleasant recollections, but in general the mind's eye has few imagistic details upon

which to work. As readers we are silent, passive, *aural* witnesses to the poet's exclamation—as if we were hearing him through a thin wall; we must take the poet at his word, or not, as we are inclined.

This is not quite the case with the next poem, the Earl of Rochester's ballad, "Signor Dildo," which was composed around December 1673, but published only thirty years later, in 1703. Whereas Herrick's lines are largely self-contained, Rochester's poem is fully coherent, its humor fully comprehensible, only if the reader can account for the allusions it makes to various contemporary events and personages. The first two stanzas, for example, firmly establish the setting and occasion of the poem's events:

You ladies all of merry England  
 Who have been to kiss the Duchess's hand,  
 Pray did you lately observe in the show  
 A noble Italian called Signior Dildo?

This signior was one of Her Highness's train,  
 And helped to conduct her over the main;  
 But now she cries out, "To the Duke I will go!  
 I have no more need for Signior Dildo" (ll. 1-8).

Why have the ladies of England been to Court to "kiss the Duchess's hand"? What has been the occasion of "the show"'s pageantry? The Duchess has lately come from Italy and has married the Duke. Specifically, Mary of Modena and James, Duke of York have lately wed. Circulating among Courtly circles the month after the November marriage, Rochester's poem could not have baffled his aristocratic contemporaries. It would not have given commoners much confusion, for James' second marriage was an important public event. By 1670 James was known to be an avowed Papist; his marriage to Mary, whom J.P. Kenyon describes as "a bigoted young Italian Catholic whose family were traditional clients of France" (225), worried both ministers and the masses. Should Charles die without an heir, the crown would pass first to James, then to his two Protestant daughters, Mary and Anne. However, should the Duke and Duchess of York produce a son (as they subsequently did in 1688), that Catholic son would succeed his father and reestablish, in

effect, a Catholic monarchy in England. An intricately conditional scenario to be sure, but vexing enough even in prospect to contribute to the breakup of the Cabal ministry. Shaftesbury's violent opposition to the marriage led to his dismissal from Court in 1674. Soon afterward, anxiety over England's future led the other members of the Cabal to turn against one another, and split into mutually hostile camps.

I do not mean to suggest that Rochester's poem hints at all or any of these consequences of James's marriage. Rather, I wish only to point out that "Signior Dildo" makes plain that the catalyst for its composition is a national episode, one with which Rochester's readers, whether actual or hypothetical, would have been very familiar. Whereas Herrick's poem proceeds from a private, publicly unverifiable frame of reference, Rochester's poem begins with a public allusion that every individual may confirm and reflect upon for himself. James, Duke of York did indeed make an Italian noblewoman, Mary Beatrice of Modena, his duchess. The event is one of public record, subject to public scrutiny and comment. Somewhat less public are Rochester's allusions to the women of Court who turn or will likely turn their attentions to the slighted Signior: "My Lady Southesk" (l. 16), "the good Lady Suffolk" and her daughter Lady Betty (ll. 21-2), "the countess of Ralph" (l. 29), "Her Grace of Cleveland" (l. 37), "The countess of th' Cockpit" (l. 45), "Red Howard, red Sheldon, and Temple so tall" (l. 49), "doll Howard" (l. 53), "Tom Killigrew's wife" (l. 65), "fair Madame Knight" (l. 70), and "the good Lady Sandys" (l. 89). Most of these women were at least semi-public figures; if they were not known personally or by sight to the reader, their titles would indicate their general identities. Rochester dispenses with the coy literary pseudonyms that Herrick might have used and "names names." By doing so he greatly heightens his readers' interest: readers can themselves point out any of these personages and declare that this one or that one is given sexual notoriety by Rochester's poem. Indeed, Rochester's poem would lose much of its power to entertain if readers could not, by confirming for themselves the actual existence of these women, participate vicariously in the moral scandals of Charles II's



Court (themselves a matter of public record). His references to the countesses of “Ralph” and “th’ Cockpit” might not be immediately clear, but we are sure, since he has been careful to use real names, that Rochester has particular persons in mind—as it turns out, Elizabeth, wife of Ralph, Earl and Duke of Montagu, and Nell Gwynn, respectively. If anything, this bit of obscurity draws us further into the poem: intrigued, we make inquiries and count ourselves lucky to be among the few “in the know.”

Yet Rochester’s poem is nowhere close to being fully public. For one thing, though it is topical and its frames of reference are public, the poem is not generally available to the public. Its intended and actual audience is Rochester’s own circle of Courtly Wits. As Samuel Hynes has observed, “Good gossip requires a closed society with open mouths” (41). Rochester’s details are explicit enough—the Duchess of Cleveland “has swallowed more pricks than the ocean has sand” (l. 38); “Doll” (Dorothy) Howard, “her teeth being rotten, . . . smells best below” (l. 55)—but given the closed circle of Courtly sexual intrigue, those outside its narrow compass cannot personally verify such details. Outsiders need not verify them for them to be titillating. But the private, unverifiable details of the poem show it to be generally self-enclosed: their full comic and satiric force will be appreciated only by those few who know Rochester’s subjects personally, at first-hand. If Herrick’s lines are comprised of private sentiments uttered privately, Rochester sets private details within a vaguely public framework. And though Rochester’s poem is addressed to “You ladies all of merry England,” the address is no more than superficial. The poem does not continue to address “you ladies all,” but becomes a catalogue of eccentric sexual proclivities. Rochester’s details might invite his cohorts to peer and leer over his shoulder, but his poem acknowledges the reader only slightly more than Herrick’s—and neither poem asks the reader to be more than a spectator to the poet’s revelations. Indeed, the reader-at-large can be no more than a spectator, for though the poem is nominally occasional, it is made available to the general public only thirty years after the events to which it alludes have occurred.

We might, for the sake of rough classification, label Herrick's poem "private" and Rochester's "semi-private." A third example will, I hope, make clear and justify these labels, and establish the distinction between partly and fully public poetry. In June 1668 an actor of the King's Company stepped before the audience and delivered the following lines:

When first our poet set himself to write,  
 Like a young bridegroom on his wedding-night  
 He laid about him, and did so bestir him,  
 His Muse could never lie in quiet for him:  
 But now his honeymoon is gone and past,  
 Yet the ungrateful drudgery must last,  
 And he is bound, as civil husbands do,  
 To strain himself, in complaisance to you;  
 To write in pain, and counterfeit a bliss  
 Like the faint smackings of an after-kiss.

What strikes us about these lines is, first, that the poet makes himself the subject of his poem, and, second, that he compares himself to a husband grown weary of his wife's embraces. Once he had belabored his Muse—but now his Muse belabors *him*, and he is forced to feign an interest in "the ungrateful drudgery" that he does not feel. In plain language, the poet, having set up for a writer, must continue to pursue his craft despite his present inclinations. What may yet baffle us is that "you" in line 8: the speaker seems to say that he embraces his Muse-wife in order to please the playgoers—implying that they are a pack of voyeurs. The next few lines, however, indicate that the poet has been merely anticipating a shift in metaphor. The ill-pleased wife of line 11 is no longer his Muse but his audience—an audience delighted with the embraces of any poet who happens along:

But you, like wives ill-pleas'd, supply his want:  
 Each writing *Monsieur* is a fresh gallant;  
 And tho', perhaps, 't was done as well before,  
 Yet still there 's something in a new amour (ll. 11-14).

As it turns out, the poet continues to address his auditors directly, extending the metaphor of the cuckolded audience throughout the rest of the poem, making it ever more explicit. His general sense is this: Cuckold him as it might with "each writing Monsieur," his audience will find that their lover-poets have not the stamina of "your good man at home"

(l. 20): “Their fine small-timber’d wits would soon decay: / These are gallants but for a holiday” (ll. 21-22). Other gallants, for all their “pomp and glory” (l. 25), will prove outright impotent: “Their useless weight with patience long [is] borne, / But at last you [throw] ’em off with scorn” (ll. 27-28). Pursue “fresh delight” (l. 31) if you must, the speaker admonishes his listeners, but remember that three times a year “he claims in you an husband’s right” (l. 30), and will expect your lovers to make way for him: “That only time from your gallants he’ll borrow; / Be kind today, and cuckold him tomorrow” (ll. 34-5).

Thus does John Dryden harangue his audience in the prologue to his play, *An Evening’s Love or, The Mock-Astrologer*. One sees immediately that this poem is different in kind than those of Herrick and Rochester—and not simply because it is a prologue to a dramatic performance. In the seventeenth century prologues were often published separate from their plays, as broadsides; and though this particular prologue was not published separately, it was to appear in print, available for general purchase, in 1671. So prologues were not necessarily dependent upon the plays they prefaced. And as this particular prologue progresses it soon becomes evident that it is in fact self-contained, independent of the comedy that follows. It does not introduce or summarize the play, nor does it expend much effort cajoling the audience to receive it favorably; rather, it spars with the audience, indicts its morals and æsthetic tastes, and all but dares it to find fault with the playwright and his play. That would seem to be the very purpose of this prologue. It is not set against the backdrop of a national crisis (though Clarendon had fallen the previous year); it makes no direct reference to an important national event. Yet by reason of its awareness of its audience, its manner of address, its subject matter, and the persona it employs, this prologue may be called a fully public poem.

As James Anderson Winn notes throughout his biography of Dryden, Restoration audiences, perhaps taking their cue from the Court, had a great appetite for sexual innuendo and expected bawdy word-play from their dramatists. But Dryden is more than simply aware of the appetites of his audience, and does more here than toss off a risqué metaphor.

Indeed, the equation of poet to weary husband and audience to promiscuous wife is an apt vehicle for the critique of his listeners' æsthetic tastes that Dryden means to deliver. First, and most generally, Dryden draws a parallel between a hierarchy of dramatic merit and one of sexual morality. At the top of the scale are the plays composed by the laboring playwright, whose long association with his craft and audience puts special claims upon the loyalties of the latter; at the bottom are the "writing *Monsieurs*," who please merely by way of their novelty: "This pleases you with some by-stroke of wit, / This finds some cranny that was never hit" (ll. 17-18). Their newness wearing off, they strain after wit but "soon [fall] flat before ye" (l. 26). As the legitimate playwright is cuckolded by pretenders to wit, so is the husband's lawful embrace foregone for the illicit but ultimately unsatisfactory embraces of adulterous rivals. As Winn points out, Dryden has the troupes of French actors (hence "writing *Monsieur*") that had recently become fashionable among London playgoers specifically in mind (193). But in addition to likening foreign dramatic fashions to sexual pathology, Dryden seeks to challenge, even incite, the audience itself. His metaphor implies not only infidelity on its part, but infidelity with thoroughly unworthy partners. In this, Dryden sets up, not a third party, but the audience itself as the object of his satire. In doing so, he forces its members to face the choice before them regarding their dramatists and dramatic values: fidelity or fickleness. And whether or not Dryden's self-portrait is ironic, it is important that he portrays himself at all, and for two main reasons. First, he steps before the public, if not physically, at least before its mind's eye, giving it an image of himself it may easily comprehend and assess. By positing such a persona Dryden can fashion a public ethos and thereby lay direct claim to the attention and fellow feeling of his auditors. Secondly, he can use the persona he establishes for himself as a rhetorical "space" from which he can challenge the assumptions and expectations of the crowd and satirize those he finds unacceptable.

The differences between this poem and those of Herrick and Rochester become particularly clear when one considers the use to which their one common element—sexual

imagery—is put. In Herrick’s poem, as I have noted above, the language or eroticism is muted by its abstraction. At least, it is muted for the reader; for Herrick, no doubt, it is sufficiently vivid, for it serves the purpose of recalling to the poet a series of private associations.<sup>1</sup> For Rochester, sexual imagery and sexually-charged language serve the purposes of Courtly satire—though, as noted, much of that satire is lost on those personally unacquainted with Rochester’s subjects—but also of Courtly reportage. There would seem to be enough literal truth to Rochester’s observations to reinforce what was commonly whispered and believed within his narrow circle. In Dryden’s poem, sexual imagery constitutes neither private allusion nor direct, personal satire. It is instead purely metaphorical in form and in purpose purely rhetorical—on two levels. Dryden’s central conceit is explicit enough to titillate, to excite the imagination of the crowd, even as its analogies convey his critique of its lack of æsthetic judgement. His sexual language is not, as it is for Herrick, a private mnemonic, nor is it, as it is for Rochester, an end in itself; it is a means to an end, that end being the refinement of critical judgement in the Restoration audience.

If I claim that from the foregoing examples one can construct a good working definition of fully public poetry, it may be claimed against me that in choosing these poems I have stacked the deck in my favor. That I have stacked the deck I cannot deny; that I have stacked it in my favor is quite another matter. If anything, I have stacked it against myself. It is no accident that my examples of private, semi-private, and fully public poems have all been more or less erotic in mode and content. The erotic never falls out of fashion; eros is perhaps the one topic of general and perpetual interest. This being the case, eros, if anything, will make a private or semi-private poem seem a public one. I might also point out that though Dryden wrote many politically-charged prologues and epilogues (not to

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<sup>1</sup> Of course, Herrick’s Julia may be wholly fictional. Even so, the fiction is Herrick’s private fiction.

mention his great satires of the early 1680's), the prologue I chose to examine was comparatively void of political or social allusion. It was "merely" the grouching of an underpaid playwright at the fickle tastes of his audience. But even so, it will serve to demonstrate the mode of fully public poetry, as the poems of Herrick and Rochester illustrate, if only emblematically, the modes of private and semi-private poetry, respectively. Proceeding, then, from the examples above, public poetry may be defined by the following characteristics. First, it is poetry that takes for its subject topics of interest to a broad, general audience; this audience, the *public* for the poem, consists of all those who might conceivably read and respond to it, whether in thought, discourse, or action. It follows from this that, secondly, public poetry is addressed to readers beyond the poet's immediate circle of acquaintance, to persons the poet does not himself know, and over whom he has no powers of supervision or coercion. He cannot control the circumstances under which his poem is read; he cannot look over each reader's shoulder and point out that here, here, and here are the key points of the poem; he cannot, in person at least, interpret the poem for the reader. Any control the poet is to have over his readers must therefore come from within the poem itself. Thus the public poem is, thirdly, likely to be rhetorical or persuasive in nature, and to employ forms, diction, imagery, and allusions that are not only broadly comprehensible but designed to manipulate audience response. It follows, fourthly, that the readers of public poetry are not simply spectators, but supposed to be active participants: the public poem is fundamentally provocative—calling for a response, whether emotional, intellectual, or behavioral—and pragmatic, its aim being to educate, reform, incite, or pacify its readers. Fifth, and finally, the public poem self-consciously invokes its own historical moment; it draws attention to its own circumstances (political, social, cultural, economic, and æsthetic), and to those of the reader, in doing so defines not only those circumstances but its reader's perception of them. The occasional, public poem thus creates both its public and its occasion.

The public poem, in its turn, is the creation of the public poet. Here, too, the foregoing poems will give us a good idea of just who is and is not a public poet. For though all poets, like their poetry, might appear publicly, the fully public poet—or, put another way, the poet when adopting a fully public role—is to be distinguished by certain general characteristics. Perhaps most evident is the assumption of an openly public stance. This stance may be either literal and first-hand, as with the poet who reads or recites his poetry in public, or figurative and second-hand, as with the poet who creates for himself a readily recognized public persona. Such a stance must be assumed because by definition public poetry has addressees, and an address, to be effective (that is, attended to, believed, and acted upon), must have a discernible source, a source whose character or ethos the addressees may evaluate for themselves. Thus one may, with Herrick, write of a universal human experience, erotic intimacy, or, with Rochester, fashion an account in verse of public personages and events, without writing public poetry. In both cases the poet's audience is largely himself; consequently, neither Herrick nor Rochester need take pains to define himself. The matter is quite otherwise with Dryden's prologue. Though Dryden does not appear in person, he must give his auditors some sense of who it is that presumes to admonish them. Defining himself and his audience with a bawdy analogy, Dryden establishes with the strength of his wit his prerogative to pronounce upon dramatic values. The reason for Dryden's admonishment suggests a second characteristic of the public poet, namely, that he is likely to be a professional. As a professional playwright, Dryden must concern himself with rivals for the box office take. In a more general sense, he must concern himself with the attitudes and tastes of his society at large; he may try to reform or refine these tastes, but if he is to earn his living he must ultimately defer to them. Thus professionalism in itself forces the public poet not only to address a general audience but to exhibit himself before it. This need for exhibition and the professionalism that entails it mean that the public poet of this period is more likely to be a member of the middle to upper-middle classes than an aristocrat. Few noblemen would scandalize themselves by

plying a trade dependent upon public whim and fashion; few would jeopardize their social standing by subjecting themselves, their person and character, to public scrutiny. There is no such stigma for the poet with roots in the trading and professional classes. On the other hand, public exhibition is at least potentially problematic for the middle-class poet, for he can claim no *a priori* authority to address, much less admonish the public at large. The poet may cite the rank, wealth, and taste of his aristocratic patrons, should he have them; he may cite precedents from classical Greece and Rome for his audacity; he may decry the viciousness of the times and plead that though he would be humble his love of virtue leaves him no choice but to take up his pen in her defense. Such appeals to patrons, precedent, and probity may impress us, but they are really beside the point. For fundamentally the authority of the public poet comes from the frequent general approbation of his poetic performances. This is not to say that all who please the public may lay just claim to its esteem, but to argue, as Sidney did, that an audience may not be effectively admonished or taught unless it first be moved, "For who will be taught, if he be not moved with desire to be taught?" (123). The æsthetic and cultural authority the poet is able to establish for himself has one consequence that rounds off the primary characteristics of the fully public poet, namely, it makes the poet himself a cultural icon, a sort of social mnemonic in which are embedded a great range of collective values, associations, and allusions. "The Age of Pope," for instance, certainly refers to the period and works of Pope's life, but it implies more than Pope's preeminence during those years. It functions emblematically to bring to the mind first Pope's circle, its ideas and works, its allies and foes, then its social and historical contexts. When one says, "Pope," the image of a crook-backed little poet may come first to mind, but soon after come other personages, images and events: Swift, Gay, Arbuthnot, Harley, the ill-fated Tory government under Anne, the subsequent Whig ascendancy, Walpole and the first two Georges, Bolingbroke and the Opposition, the South Sea Bubble, Handel's operas and Hogarth's prints. As I will argue later with regard to Dryden, the "canonization" of writers is more than the reductionism of literary historians:



it is important historical shorthand for the writer's own age, an important component of its ever-evolving self-definition.

## 2. Public Poetry in England Before Dryden

It may be that in pointing out these features of public poetry and the public poet I have merely stated the obvious. Even so, these features, if obvious, must nevertheless be borne in mind if the fully public poem is to be distinguished from those poems that merely appear in public, or that appeal generally to public interest and appetite. They must be kept in mind if we are to distinguish the role and work of Dryden and later poets from those of their predecessors. And they must be kept in mind if we are to have any chance of understanding how and why such poets and their poetry flourished between the Restoration of the Stuarts and the death of Pope. The characteristics of public poetry and of the public poet may seem self-evident, but the fully public mode is not a common one much before the middle of the seventeenth century, nor would it survive the eighteenth century. However, public poetry would have a lasting impact upon English historical consciousness, helping to foster in its readers habits of mind and memory that are near ancestors to our own. Only by closely investigating the backgrounds and methods of this mode of poetry can we can hope to comprehend the shape and content of the self-definitions that emerged from this period of British history and have been handed down to us, often greatly distorted, by the intervening centuries.

But at this point I must make an important qualification. I have just said that public poetry is the product of the mid-seventeenth century. I should have said that the public poetry that flourished at that time was the literate reincarnation of a distant progenitor, Anglo-Saxon oral culture. The foregoing definitions of public poetry and poets would be apropos to an Anglo-Saxon *scop*. In oral cultures poetry is not separate from religion, history, ethics, cosmology, or observation of the natural and human worlds. Poetry

subsumes all these things. As Walter Ong points out in *Orality and Literacy* (1982), “performance of an oral epic, for example, can serve also simultaneously as an act of celebration, as *paideia* or education for youth, as a strengthener of group identity, as a way of keeping alive all sorts of lore—historical, biological, zoological, sociological, venatic, nautical, religious—and much else. Moreover, the narrator typically identifies with the characters he treats and interacts with his real audience, who by their responses in turn help determine what he says—the length and style of his narrative” (161). The Anglo-Saxon poet, like his counterparts in other oral or semi-literate cultures, directed his poetry to broad sections of his society. This society was rather rigidly hierarchical, and its great poetry tended to focus on the deeds and sorrows of its aristocratic members. Yet for all that, each Anglo-Saxon, whether of low or noble birth, could fashion an identity for himself from the heroes and wisdom of his culture’s poetry. These heroes, this wisdom and lore, belonged not to a class, but to a people, to an entire race. Dorothy Whitelock observes, “The Anglo-Saxons regarded themselves as Germans, and continued to repeat the songs and legends which they had brought over with them—including versified catalogues of the kings and tribes of Germany and the North” (18). When, in the dark fastness of winter, the Anglo-Saxon bard sang to the crowded meadhall of Beowulf or Byrhtnoth or the Battle of Brunanburh, kings, retainers, artisans, laborers, and slaves together heard the familiar alliterative rhythms and locutions bring familiar stories to life. And though their names are lost to us, the singers of these songs must have been greatly revered, for as Michael Alexander points out, “In such a society the poet is the keeper of the traditions which hold the *cynn* (kin) together, just as the king (*cyn-ing*) is the keeper of the treasure which is the *cynn*’s only possession and defence. The older a sword was, the older a word was, the more it was valued by the *cynn*. In a primitive society the poet is historian and priest, and his songs have ritual significance” (11-12). The poet’s songs defined the audience, its culture, and its place in this “middle-earth.” Thus the poet himself was in his person and

craft a literal social mnemonic, far more so than would be his seventeenth-century counterparts.

I make this reference to Anglo-Saxon oral culture for three reasons. First, it gives us an absolute archetype against which we can measure the respective relationships of poets to their larger societies in later ages. The Anglo-Saxon poet's audience was the whole of Anglo-Saxon society; his identification with that audience was one-to-one. Never again would poetry and poets have such broad cultural power. Anglo-Saxon heroism was a response to their own profound fatalism. The speaker in "The Seafarer" declares that "the praise of living men who shall speak after he is gone, the best of fame after death for every man, is that he should strive ere he must depart . . . so that the children of men may later exalt him and his praise live afterwards among the angels for ever and ever" (77).<sup>2</sup> But as the Seafarer implies, heroism as a response to fatalism only makes sense if heroic deeds can be translated into heroic poetry, that is, into tribal and cultural history. Fatalism found its antidote in the fame only poets could dispense. Secondly, though the public poets of the seventeenth century could not claim the absolute authority of their Anglo-Saxon predecessors, the manner and methods of their poetry and the public pose they would assume recapitulate in a general way many of the characteristics of Anglo-Saxon oral culture. Though not intentional, this recapitulation is probably inevitable. As I hope to demonstrate in the following sections, the public poet in the seventeenth century could presume to inform, persuade, and shape the memory of his audience only by adapting ancient methods of oral address, instruction, and memorization to their present purposes. By the seventeenth century England had been a literate society for nearly a millennium, but it was far from being fully literate (in several senses of the word), and as Ong notes it would retain a strong residual orality through the Romantic period (133, *passim*). The transition from orality to something like full literacy in this period allowed Dryden, his

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<sup>2</sup> Translated by R.K. Gordon.

contemporaries, and their successors to effectively employ the trappings of orality in literate discourse. Occasional reference to the example of Anglo-Saxon oral culture will, I hope, make clear both the “oral” strategies of the poets under discussion here and the fundamental differences between truly oral and residually oral societies.

Third, the example of the Anglo-Saxons will demonstrate a singular irony in the history of English literary culture: it is not until the advent of print culture in England that formal poetry could again be as public as it had been during the Anglo-Saxon era. Though for many centuries before the introduction of print into Britain (1476) the English had been only semi-literate, it is not until the very specialized skill of literacy had been broadly acquired (at least comparatively so) that formal verse again became an important part of popular culture. There are many reasons for this, but each may be traced back to the social and thus cultural polarization of English society after the Norman Invasion. Stratified as Anglo-Saxon society had been, all levels of that society shared a single tongue and a single tribal and racial heritage that gave each of its members access to the history, myths, lore, and riddles bound up in the specialized language of Anglo-Saxon poetry. The Conquest shattered this unity. The displacement of the Anglo-Saxon aristocracy by William and his followers did not simply split English society into a French-speaking ruling class and an English-speaking underclass. This split in turn created a schism between “high” and “low” culture that has never been fully overcome—even now we speak as if “academic” or “learned” culture and “popular” are irreconcilably antithetical, or, perhaps protesting too much, as if there is no distinguishing one from the other. This present-day anxiety, I believe, is a legacy from a society in which the literary language and traditions of the ruling classes were wholly alien to the native population. Poetic genres have always been ranked from high to low, from, say, epic to pastoral; but after the Conquest the subject matter, genre, form, and language of a poem were closely identified with the social rank of its author. The subordination of English to French from the eleventh to the fourteenth centuries made it all but inevitable that poetry composed (orally) in English would go

unrecorded and be lost to literary history. Indeed, English as a literary language re-emerges only once it began to reclaim its place as the language of Court and of polite society in the middle 1300's.

This re-emergence was requisite to the rise of public poetry. Still, we cannot begin to speak of a true public poetry emerging in England until after the introduction of printing in 1476, and for two reasons. First, print acts as a social and cultural leveller: it makes literary, religious, political, philosophical, and scientific writings available (theoretically, at least) to all who can read, regardless of class or condition, theoretically removing the "natural" bar separating the ranks of the learned and unlearned. (Gerald MacLean notes that as late as the seventeenth century printing was, along with gunpowder, decried for its undermining of social hierarchies (xii).) Second, and more specifically, printing created a reading public before whom the public poet could stand. As John Feather points out, "Late medieval England was certainly not a bookless society"; a commercial book trade had existed since around 1300, making books "not uncommon among the richer classes" (1-2). But as Feather's last observation implies, very few persons could afford to buy or commission works produced manually. Printing, however, meant that books would no longer be produced a few at a time (this would not be cost-effective), but in editions running into the hundreds, requiring publishers to 1) print works that would find a ready audience, and 2) create and service new markets. As it turned out, from the courts of Edward IV and Richard III and "the traditionally literate classes"—the clergy, lawyers, and merchants—books and literacy soon worked their way down the social scale in the form of almanacs, prognostications, sermons and other religious tracts, and practical works (on farming, for example): "The extent of literacy depended on the availability of the means to acquire it, and having acquired it, of both the means and motivation to retain it. . . . The shift from an oral to a printed culture should not be overemphasised, but it was beginning in England in the sixteenth century" (Feather 11-24).

Literacy among the middle and upper classes in England did not create a homogeneous community of readers; one has only to recall that the sixteenth century was a period rife with religious controversies attendant upon the English reformation, with political intrigue accompanying the problematic successions of Edward VI in 1547 and Mary Tudor in 1553, and with the anxiety produced by England's emergence upon the world stage under Elizabeth. In such unsettled circumstances, the levelling power of print is more likely to produce contention than consensus among the literate classes, but consensus is not so important here as the gradual expansion of literacy that such contention (as well as the flourishing of the professional and trading classes)—what Derek Traversi calls “an unprecedented expansion of the appetite for argument and confutation” (100)—effected. Feather estimates that by 1750 the national literacy rate was only 50-60% among men, slightly less among women (95). Working back from this estimate, we would be right to be skeptical of any claims of widespread literacy in sixteenth-century England. However, we must remember that though the rate of national literacy may have been low, the rate in London, hub of government, trade, business (including publishing), and the arts (and the future theatre for public poetry), must have been fairly high, and that despite a low national rate, literacy was growing and would continue to grow. As we shall see, this growth would prove vital to the rise of fully public poetry in the next century.

For the sixteenth century, however, it is important to note that the arrival and establishment of printing coincided—though by no means coincidentally—with the career of England's first major public poet, John Skelton. Skelton's poetry and poetic stance fulfill every criterion for the public label save one: he was not a professional poet, but a poet *in addition* to being a clergyman, scholar, and an agent of the courts of Henrys VII and VIII. Skelton published his poems irregularly, often years after they had been composed (as is the case for *Agaynste a Comely Coystrowne*, *Divers Balettys and Dyties Solacyous*, and *Elynour Rummynge*), but he also had a keen sense of occasion, and his poetry commemorates such public events as the assassination of Henry Percy, fourth Earl

of Northumberland (*Upon the Dolorus Dethe and Muche Lamentable Chaunce of the Mooste Honorable Erle of Northumberlande*, 1489), the accession of Henry VIII (*A Lawde and Prayse Made for Our Sovereigne Lord the Kyng*, 1509), and the defeat of King James IV and the Scots at the Battle of Flodden (*A Ballade of the Scottysse Kynge and Agaynste the Scottes*, 1513). In addition, Skelton engaged in public quarrels with fellow poets, such as Alexander Barclay and George Dundas, with scholars, such as William Lily over the “new grammar,” and with political adversaries, most notably Cardinal Wolsey, the target of Skelton’s best-known satires, *Speke Parott*, *Collyn Clout*, and *Why Come Ye Nat to Courte?*

Certainly much of Skelton’s subject matter is what we would (narrowmindedly) call “elitist,” derived as it is from academic disputes and political intrigues, celebrating as it does Henry VIII and his court—E.M. Forster has called Skelton “a mouthpiece,” the voice of official policy (148). And then there is Skelton’s frequent recourse to Latin in his poems; even the earthy satire *Elynour Rummyng*e concludes with a bizarre Latin colophon:

A couplet in contempt of the wicked by Skelton the laureate poet. Jealous man, however mad you are and however you waste away in your vanity, we sing; these places are full of jests. I recall it well. All women who are either very fond of drinking, or who bear the dirty stain of filth, or who have the sordid blemish of squalor, or who are marked out by garrulous loquacity, the poet invites to listen to this little satire. Drunken, filthy, sordid, gossiping woman, let her run here, let her hasten, let her come; this little satire will willingly record her deeds: Apollo, sounding his lyre, ill sing the theme of laughter in a hoarse song (translated by John Scattergood).

What use this descriptive invitation—“All women . . . the poet invites to listen to this little satire” —in Latin, at the poem’s conclusion, was meant to serve is hard to guess, the *Elynour Rummynges* of the world being notoriously unlearned, illiterate in native as well as learned tongues. Perhaps Skelton is inviting his learned friends to share a jest at the expense of the unlettered poor; perhaps he is only protecting himself from the frowns of the pious—or is implicating the pious and learned for their having doggedly read a 624-line

poem that graphically renders the “Drunken, filthy, sordid, gossiping” persons and pronouncements of the foul, aged Elynour and her customers: “haltyng Jone” (l. 326), “made [mad] Kyt” (412), “crokenebbed” [crook-nosed] Margery Mylkeducke (l. 427), “foggy fat” Maude Ruggy (483), and “whey-wormed” Sybyll (l. 553). Or perhaps here as in his other poems Skelton gives his readers what Shakespeare gave his audience, a double- or triple-tiered work that appeals to every level of moral and æsthetic sophistication. The coarseness of detail and humor would appeal generally, as would the poem’s topicality: its depiction of an actual person, Alianora Romyng, who ran a tavern in Leatherhead, Surrey, and its reference to the “greate war / Betwene Temple Bar / And the Crosse in Chepe” (ll. 358-60)—the “Evil May Day uprising of 1517, when a London mob attacked foreigners in the city whom they blamed for the depressed state of the economy” (Scattergood 451n). The debauchery and abject poverty of the poem’s characters gives moralists ample material for cautionary tales, and social reactionaries sufficient evidence to decry the collapse of the feudal economy and the subsequent rise in peasants’ prosperity. And habitual readers of polite literature, as Scattergood suggests, would likely see the poem as an elaborate inversion of medieval romance and its idealized women (449n). This breadth of appeal in a published poem suggests that *Elynour Rummynge* is indeed fully public. Much of Skelton’s poetry is, and by virtue of characteristics to which his poetic successors could not lay claim. Whether his subject is social, political, academic, or historical, Skelton makes use of “popular” or “native” poetic elements: an oral (not literary) logic that works by aural aggregation—rhymes run on and on until the vein of sound is exhausted—rather than by tight rhetorical or narrative structuring (reinforce the rhyme with a strong beat and heavy base and Skeltonics become uncannily rap-like); rhythms derived from folk-song and folk-dance; short, heavily stressed lines that recall the miracle and mystery plays that enacted Christian scripture and doctrines for their Bible-less audiences; proverbs and colloquial constructions; and dialects taken from many locales and all levels of society—Maurice Evans points out that in Skelton’s poetry are preserved hundreds of



native English words found in no other author (46–48). Moreover, Skelton’s poetry is fully in touch with the realities of its world. Thus Skelton can write a bawdy poem about Alianora Romyng’s tavern; or hastily compose a poem celebrating Howard’s defeat of the Scots at Flodden (*A Ballade of the Scottysse Kynge*), then revise it once he has gathered more information about the battle (*Agaynst the Scottes*), then later still add a reply to those who found his revision too “venemously stingyng, / Rebukyng and remordyng” (“Unto Dyvers People,” ll. 10–11); or over the course of a year produce the three quite dissimilar attacks (given above) upon Wolsey, Henry VIII’s lord chancellor, modulating his attack as circumstance affords—now he is a parrot, now a humble yeoman, now a jaded courtier—for maximum satirical effect

Skelton was himself a very public figure, by temperament as well as tenure. The clergyman who flaunts his illegitimate child before his congregation, the Orator Royal who publicly lampoons his master’s most powerful servant, the scholar who collects honorary degrees from Oxford and Cambridge and styles himself “laureate”—such a man cannot help but become notorious. As Evans observes, “To the sixteenth century Skelton was known as a satirist and, even more, as a jester and buffoon. He was one of those characters to whom all the floating legends of his generation seem to attach themselves, and the *Merry Tales of Skelton* with its accounts of insanity, jokes at the expense of friars and innkeepers was one of the most popular books of the century” (43). But it is dangerous to be famous for being eccentric; it makes one easy to dismiss. And so it proved with Skelton’s poetic reputation. Skelton the buffoon lingered in the public memory long, long after Skelton the poet had been forgotten. Erasmus might have called Skelton “that light and glory of English letters” in 1499 (qtd. in Scattergood, 16), but Sidney does not bother to mention him in his

survey of British literature in *The Defence of Poesy* (c. 1582; published 1595) and Pope could refer to him only as “beastly.”<sup>3</sup>

Skelton’s luck could not have been worse. If at his death in 1529 he had flowed with the mainstream of British letters, shortly thereafter the sudden violent confluence of new linguistic, religious, and political currents were to radically alter the course of that mainstream, leaving Skelton the poet an abandoned, landlocked pool. This confluence, as we shall see, had important consequences for public poetry in Britain. Skelton had been a connoisseur of native words and non-literary dialects; colloquial English and learned Latin often ran together in his poems. Ironic, then, that the language he so loved would “betray” him. During his lifetime, Evans points out, Skelton had himself introduced about 1000 words into English, but had resisted the introduction of words based on the “new” literary Latin, and had doubted the literary value of studying Greek; whenever possible, he had in diction, expression, and subject matter turned to the local, the colloquial (39ff). This left him and his poetry vulnerable, not only because the new learning of the early Renaissance would soon make such notions seem quaintly old-fashioned, but because English itself was changing. Traversi reminds us of the “unsettled” state of the language during the middle third of the sixteenth century:

Poetry, more particularly, was affected by deep-seated uncertainty concerning such matters as the fall of accents, the value of rhyming words, and the state of the final ‘e’, a survival from the earlier inflected language which continued to be written but was becoming obsolete in pronunciation. These changes, together with important shifts in the meaning attached to words, meant that the great achievement of Chaucer was no longer readily available to later writers (99).

If such changes left problematic Chaucer’s East Midland dialect—already the dominant literary language—they would certainly make Skelton’s irregular lines and literarily obscure

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<sup>3</sup> *The First Epistle of the Second Book of Horace Imitated* (l. 38). Pope glosses his antipathy in a footnote: “Poet Laureat to Hen. 8. a volume of whose [Skelton’s] Verses has lately been reprinted, consisting almost wholly of Ribaldry, Obscenity, and Scurrilous Language.”

diction seem absurd. Further, the new learning entering English academic and public life predisposed the generation of poets writing after Skelton to follow Continental rather than native models of prosody—paradoxically enough, a self-consciously nationalist move to allow English to be on a level aesthetically with other vernacular tongues.

This shift in literary allegiance was paralleled by important changes in Britain's religious and political climate. Skelton had only been dead a half-dozen years when Henry VIII declared himself to be Supreme Head of the Church in England. If at first the Church was Catholic in everything but name, it soon began to distinguish itself doctrinally from Rome, and perhaps most importantly in matters relating to the treatment of scripture and to individual conscience. In distinguishing itself from the Church of Rome, the Church of England made available to its congregations the Authorized Version of the Bible (1535) and the *Book of Common Prayer* (1548). Of the populace's newfound access to the scriptures, S.T. Bindoff says that "in England the Scripture's thus early ceased to be the forbidden handbook of the agitator and became, under some light safeguards, the common property of the nation" (109), and of the appearance of the *Book of Common Prayer* that among its effects was the propagation of a "majestic" vernacular prose that helped to unite the kingdom linguistically by "universalizing the dominant language" (155). Scripture and the new church's articles of faith were now firmly in the layman's hands. This, together with the crown's dismantling of the monastic orders and its seizure of their lands and property, left individual English Protestants spiritually vulnerable. If they could at last read and interpret the sacred texts for themselves, they could no longer rely upon Church tradition, or turn to the complex religious infrastructure that had heretofore overseen nearly every aspect of daily life. The result, many historians agree, was a profound "inward turn" of the individual psyche and a consequent spiritual anxiety. Evans puts it this way:

The new protestant had a more difficult path to tread than the medieval Catholic . . . . [T]he protestant had to thread his uncertain way through the world by the light of his own interpretation of the scriptures, no longer sheltered in the bosom of a ghostly community which safeguarded him from

the minute of his birth to the last moment of Extreme Unction and even beyond. The medieval Everyman has the dignity and restraint of basic security; the sins are clearly known, the recognised remedies available at the right time and in the right order. He has no need of Bunyan's agonised question, "What shall I do to be saved?" (22).

This "inward turn" of the conscience was reinforced by the unsettling effect the English Reformation had on the political atmosphere of sixteenth-century England. The 1540's and 1550's were years of problematic successions, ruthless political intrigues, and violent shifts in religious allegiances. The accession of the young, sickly Edward in 1547 was supervised by the Duke of Somerset, who managed to have himself appointed Protector, and who, following Edward's death in 1553, tried to bypass the established succession and put Lady Jane Grey on the throne. His gambit failed: England rose up in favor of Edward's legitimate heir, Mary Tudor—then was thrown into chaos when Mary tried to reclaim her nation for Rome. Only with the accession of the Protestant Elizabeth in 1557, the Settlement of 1559—which established the Queen as the governor of the English Church, and left that Church "Catholic in ritual, Calvinist in doctrine, and royalist in government" (Roberts and Roberts 288)—and the Queen's subsequent longevity and skill in statecraft was England to have a chance of fulfilling the Settlement's "primary purpose, the union of all moderate-minded men behind the throne" (Bindoff 194). But even with this Settlement, Elizabeth's reign was an uneasy one. Plots hatched at home and abroad by favorites and foes alike, the continued machinations of Rome, and almost ceaseless war with the Continent perhaps justified Elizabeth's resolve that discord "Shall reap no gain where former rule hath taught still peace to grow. . . . / Our rusty sword with rest, shall first his edge employ / To poll their tops that seek such change and gape for joy" ("The Doubt of Future Foes," ll. 9-12; 15-16). But nervous monarchs make for nervous Courts. Whether they lived and wrote under Henry, Edward, Mary, or Elizabeth, poets of the Tudor era found themselves increasingly muzzled and menaced. Feather observes that from 1534, when the printing and publishing of books by foreigners was forbidden, the crown's statutory control over the press intensified severalfold (16ff.). In 1538, for example,

publication could not take place unless the Privy Council had given its prior approval; in 1559, Elizabeth revised and tightened this prohibition, charging the Stationers' Company (chartered two years earlier) with its enforcement; by 1586, the Company had proven itself so trustworthy in its regulation of the book trade that it was recognized by the crown as "an equal partner with [it] in the suppression of undesirable books" (Feather 34). But more discouraging than legislation to the rise of a healthy public poetry during the sixteenth century was the precarious life of the courtier, to whom, in the persons of Wyatt, Surrey, Sidney, and Spenser, Apollo's torch had passed following the death of Skelton. As these and other figures such as Raleigh and Bacon found, royal favor was difficult to win and keep, and its loss was likely to entail loss of office and property, public disgrace, imprisonment, exile (real or effectual), and even death.

No wonder, then, that the poetic imagination of the leading poets from Wyatt to Donne was dominated by a profound turning inward, away from the public sphere and toward the vicissitudes of the private self, the light and shadow of the private soul. If experience is the fool's teacher, Sir Thomas Wyatt, for one, had no choice but to be Fortune's fool, for the whole of his life was passed at Court—or serving it in distant lands, or languishing in prison under its sentence. His success as a diplomat during the 1520's was countered by unceasing ill fortune during the late 1530's. In 1535 he was knighted for his services to the crown; in 1536 he was imprisoned in the Tower—under no charge and upon no evidence. His release in June 1536 was followed by a series of preferments and royal favors; he was even entrusted, in 1537, with the difficult task of negotiating with Charles V and heading off a Catholic alliance against England. By the autumn of 1538 his lack of success led to his being charged with treason. These charges were set aside at the time, no doubt under the influence of Thomas Cromwell, Henry's chief minister and Wyatt's friend and patron. When, however, Cromwell himself fell from Henry's favor and was executed in 1540, the charges against Wyatt were renewed: he was again imprisoned in the Tower, his lands and goods seized, his family forcibly displaced from Allington

Castle. Wyatt was successfully prosecuted, and if he was not executed it was by reason of the king's current favorite, Catherine Howard, petitioning Henry for clemency. Despite Wyatt's disgrace, the month after his release (March 1541) he was given charge of a light cavalry unit and the responsibility of protecting Calais while the city was being fortified. The next year, when there was talk of war with France, it was whispered that Wyatt was to be made vice-admiral of the English fleet. Such a life required a fittingly ironic end: dispatched by the king to welcome Charles V's envoy at Falmouth, Wyatt rode hard, became overheated, and caught a fever. He died a week later, on October 11, 1542, at the age of thirty-nine. During his short life Wyatt published nothing save his translation of Plutarch's *Quiet of Mind* (1528), which he undertook at the request of Henry's first queen, Katherine of Aragon. But he was a prolific poet and, as literary history remembers him, an inveterate experimenter with poetic form and language. Had he published his work he might also have been remembered as a great public poet: Wyatt had a sharp eye for physical detail and dramatic circumstance, a fine sense of psychological nuance, a deadly ironic edge tending to satire, and a soaring moral idealism that wears the mask of world-weary despair. Had he been born in 1603 or 1653 he might have lashed and dazzled his age. But he was born in 1503. With the public sphere effectively closed to him, he examined the particulars of his own heart and conscience.

At times, it is true, it is difficult to believe that the unceasing, soul-destroying angst of his lyrics is the effect of a love forever unrequited. In fact, Wyatt's love for Elizabeth Darrell was sufficiently requited for her to remain his mistress from 1536 until his death in 1542, to bear him a son, Francis, and to displace Wyatt's legitimate wife, Elizabeth Brooke, from Allington Castle. But to ascribe the disillusionment, the bitterness, the sense of betrayal found throughout Wyatt's poetry to a mere aping of the conventional lover's plaint he found in his great model, Petrarch, is to ignore the significantly close parallels between the lover's suit and the courtier's. Nearly all of Wyatt's erotic poetry rings with the anguished voice of a long-suffering Petrarchan lover protesting the injustice of his

mistress: that she not only disregards but scorns his faithful attentions; that she rewards his unflagging fidelity by giving her attentions to another; that she wrongly accuses him of inconstancy, or of jeopardizing her honor; that she delights in the humiliations he endures in serving one whose beauty of person and spirit compels service. Above all, and in sum, Wyatt's lover complains that he has not been requited as his merit deserves—indeed his very devotion has undone him in body, mind, and soul. In “Ye know my heart, my lady dear,” a poem typical of Wyatt's erotic lyrics, the speaker declares that he is his lady's “thrall” (l. 1), having given himself to her “both whole and clear” (l. 3); yet his “reward hath been but small” (l. 4) for all that he has served “faithfully, / And suffered wrong / How patiently” (ll. 9-11). Pleading that “since that I have never swerved / Let not my pains be undeserved” (ll. 12-13), the speaker complains that he burns in a “fervent flaming fire” (l. 17) that has its source in his lover's “frozen breast” (l. 25). So disordering is his being's “unrest” (l. 26) that he must die unless his mistress relents: “For me and mine / And all I have / Ye may assign / To spill or save. / Why are you then so cruel foe / Unto your own that loves you so?” (ll. 34-39). Against the injustice of his mistress—here or in countless other poems—Wyatt's lover has but one recourse, to scorn love and retire from its lists, as he does, for example, in “Farewell, Love:”

Go trouble younger hearts.  
 And in me claim no more authority.  
 With idle youth go use thy property  
 And thereon spend thy many brittle darts:  
 For hitherto though I have lost all my time,  
 Me lusteth no longer rotten boughs to climb (ll. 9-14).

For Wyatt, the courtier who has served and suffered for no less cruel a mistress—Fortune—has likewise no choice but to retreat, both physically and psychologically, from the circle of Court. At times the speaker in Wyatt's poems voices his disillusionment over unspecified wrongs, as in the sonnet “Caesar, when that the traitor of Egypt”: “if I laughed any time or season, / It is for because I have n'other way / To cloak my care but under sport and play” (ll. 12-14), or in his epigram, “Lucks, my fair falcon,” where he observes

that “they that sometime liked my company / Like lice away from dead bodies they crawl” (ll. 4-5), concluding, “But ye, my birds, I swear by all your bells, / Ye be my friends and so be but few else” (ll. 7-8). In another epigram, “Sighs are my food, drink are my tears,” Wyatt complains a bit more explicitly to his friend Sir Francis Brian that fetters, “stink and close air” (l. 3) are wearing away his life: “Innocency is all the hope I have” (l. 4). And why? Because “Malice assaulted [w]hat righteousness should save” (l. 6)—but did not. As the devout lover suffers unjustly from his mistress’ suspicions, so does the morally upright courtier find himself punished for being an honest man in a world where righteousness is unwilling or unable to discern and reward his merit. More explicit still is a poem apparently written during Wyatt’s imprisonment in 1536, “Who list his wealth and ease retain.” In this, the speaker, languishing in his prison cell, admonishes his reader (even as he reminds himself) to forego ambition and the trappings of Fortune’s favor and live humbly, obscure to the loci of power and fame: “Himself let him unknown contain” (l. 2)—

These bloody days have broken my heart.  
My lust, my youth did them depart,  
And blind desire of estate.  
Who hastes to climb seeks to revert.  
Of truth, *circa Regna tonat* (ll. 11-15).

The references to “these bloody days” and to the sight, seen from the bell tower, “that in my head sticks day and night” (l. 17) are generally taken to allude to Henry’s execution of Anne Boleyn and her several alleged lovers; the poem’s refrain, *circa Regna tonat*, more than seems to indict the king’s sanguinary justice, against which it is bootless “of innocence to plead or prate” (l. 23). The one solution left to the persecuted is to “give God the stern” (l.24)—that is, to resign from public life. This theme of retreat, of retirement, informs Wyatt’s most explicitly “public” poems, the three epistolary satires, in which the poet rather generally deplors the soul-destroying temptations and corruptions of the life spent at court. These, he says, have been the cause of his withdrawal to his own estates, where his actions are unwatched, his pleasures wholesome, his conscience clear:



But here I am in Kent and Christendom  
 Among the Muses where I read and rhyme,  
 Where if thou list, my Poyntz, for to come,  
 Thou shalt be judge how I do spend my time (*Mine own John Poyntz*, ll. 100-103).

So closely indeed does the arc of the courtier's career in his political poetry match that of the lover's in Wyatt's erotic lyrics that one suspects the latter to be the former in disguise, that Wyatt has displaced his anger, anxiety, and disgust from their actual objects, the king and his creatures, onto a far safer equivalent: a series of fictional mistresses no less powerful, capricious, and morally obtuse than those who now rewarded, now reprov'd Wyatt in real life. Such displacements in Renaissance poetry have received their share of critical attention. However, I want to underscore here the circumstantial imperative for poetic displacements: the political (not *ideological*) climate of Wyatt's day simply did not allow for the king, his ministers, or their policies to be brought before the public and critically scrutinized. Wyatt's three courtly satires are generic enough—they name no names, refer overtly to no specific events or circumstances—and yet he dared not publish them, even had he wanted to. Wyatt does not lack a sense of topicality, but his impulse toward it and toward the public exposure of vice and folly must perforce be turned inward, their objects finally transmuted to emblems of the soul's struggle with the world's trappings. It is a struggle with no resolution save death, for in his poetry, as in his love and politics, Wyatt finds he must retreat silently from the public sphere and, "giving God the stern," leave to divine justice all power of reward and redress.

Wyatt's inwardness and his tendency toward displacement are generally typical of Renaissance poetry; they are the two characteristics that preclude the development of fully public poetry in Tudor England. I say this keeping in mind one very important near-exception: Edmund Spenser. It is quite tempting to label Spenser as a public poet. For one thing, he published his work, and, as with his first published work, *The Shepheardes Calender* (1579), seems to have taken great pains that it appeared before his public exactly as he wished. Second, he does not hesitate to use his poetry to comment on public affairs.

For instance, the January and April eclogues in *The Shepheardes Calender* have been read as critiques of Elizabeth's supposed intent to marry the French prince Alençon; the February and May eclogues, as criticisms of Elizabeth's religious policies; the October eclogue concerns itself with the poet's role in society; and another work, *Mother Hubberds Tale* (1591), may reflect Spenser's disillusionment with the Elizabethan court, and particularly his dissatisfaction with Lord Burghley, the Queen's Secretary. Thus Spenser seeks to address a public, to teach it, and to foster in it a moral sense by which it might rightly evaluate matters of public concern. Speaking of *The Shepheardes Calender*, Thomas Cain comments,

Indeed, an inquiring reader of the poem will learn through experience the meaning of the dictum in Renaissance literary theory that poetry must not only delight but teach. And the best teaching is not didactic but heuristic. One is tempted to see the reader's role in each eclogue as a metaphor for man's spiritual situation: above, the orienting zodiacal sign of the heavens and the lucid revelation of the woodcut; below, the invitation to wander offered by an *advocatus diaboli* (9).

As the reader picks his way through the "tricky milieu of temptation and perplexing signs" (Cain 9) in Spenser's work he will ideally become adept at navigating the moral reefs and sandbars of the real world. Third, Spenser attempts to use his poetry to define the historical present—indeed, his very nation—against the heroic classical past: in *The Faerie Queene* (1589-96) especially, Spenser sets out to "epicize" England, that is, to lend the land, its sovereign, its church, its heroes, and its virtues a grandeur and destiny befitting a latter-day Rome emerging from obscurity to military and cultural preeminence. Without doubt, *The Faerie Queene* is, among other things, the greatest expression of nationalism in the language. Moreover, with regard to himself, Spenser very self-consciously modelled his own career after that of Virgil, and had no felt no compunction about setting up as the English Virgil, as England's national poet. It may be said then that Spenser adopted a specifically public stance in his poetry and with his poetic persona; certainly he was regarded by his successors as, in Dryden's words, a poet of verses "so numerous, so

various, and so harmonious, that only Virgil, whom he profess'dly imitated, has surpass'd him among the Romans" (*Discourse Concerning Satire*, 287). Always acknowledged to be one of the greatest English poets, Spenser has long since transcended greatness to become, with Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Milton, a demigod of British literary history.

But having made the case for Spenser's being a public poet, I will now risk the charge of willful perversity by asserting that Spenser is more properly designated a *nearly public* poet. For it is his very approximation of the fully public mode that forces us to make two rather important distinctions that, I hope, will further clarify my sense and use of "public poetry." The first of these distinctions has to do with Spenser's notion of his public, of which we get some clue in his letter to Sir Walter Raleigh prefacing *The Fairie Queene*. Here Spenser declares, "The generall end therefore of all the booke is to fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline", that is, in "the twelve priuate morall vertues" (15): holiness, temperance, chastity, friendship, justice, courtesy, constancy, fortitude, patience, truthfulness, and liberality. We get another clue when we glance over the work's seventeen dedicatory sonnets. Among the dedicatees are Sir Christopher Hatton, Lord High Chancellor of England, Lord Burghley, Lord High Treasurer, the Earl of Oxenford, Lord High Chamberlain of England, the Earls of Northumberland, Cumberland, Essex, Ormond and Ossory, the Countess of Pembroke, the Lady Carew, and "All the Gracious and Beautifull Ladies in the Court." From such hints I think it fair to suppose that the public for a work such as *The Fairie Queene* was not presumed to consist of tradesmen, sea captains, or fishwives. On the contrary, from Spenser's statement of purpose and his list of dedicatees I think it is clear that his epic was intended to take its place among the literature of gentlemanly self-fashioning that enjoyed great vogue during the sixteenth century. This vogue itself may owe a good deal of its power to the political tensions of the Tudor court. Traversi observes that the uncertainties of courtly life, coupled with the rise of the "new men"—the nonaristocratic bureaucrats who increasingly came to oversee the day-to-day administration of the realm—led to a

reduction of real aristocratic power. “The life of a courtier,” he says, “came to be seen as an elaborately formal game, dedicated to the royal fountainhead of favor and expressive of a highly artificial ideal” (105). This “elaborately formal game” is yet another manifestation of the inwardly-turned psyche, and no doubt it informs much of the non-public, “courtly” poetry of the period, the Petrarchan lyrics, the sonnet sequences, the panegyrics dedicated to noble patrons. Thus, while the “private morall vertues”—holiness, friendship, courtesy and the rest—Spenser champions in *The Fairie Queene* may be useful throughout the social hierarchy, they are presented as if they were *objets d’art*, to be collected and cultivated by the genteel largely for their own sakes. And though the attainment of these virtues may prepare one to serve Queen and Country and acquire a sense of *noblesse oblige*, such ends are reserved for a small, self-contained social clique. Certainly, Spenser does not intend to democratize the “aristocratic” virtues any more than he means his critiques of Elizabeth’s policies in *The Shepheardes Calender* and *Mother Hubberds Tale* to inspire the lower orders to claim a share in the country’s governing, to rise up and reform the administration of the state.

In fact, it is very likely that although Spenser took the trouble to publish his poetry, he was not much interested in seeing his work disseminated widely among the various social classes. He was a gentleman, after all, not a peddler of fruit. It would hardly become the English Virgil to cry up his wares in the street. As Feather reminds us, though nondramatic writing at the end of the sixteenth century was becoming “a recognisable occupation,” its professional practitioners were as yet held in low esteem (27); the genteel amateur author did not offer for sale what were in effect pieces of his or her being. Even Ben Jonson, who could not pretend to gentility and who would become a (if not *the*) prototype of the public poet in the seventeenth century, says in “To My Bookseller” (published with his *Works* of 1616), that though his bookdealer is wise to call a book “good or bad, as it doth sell” (l. 2), the dealer must allow it

To lie upon thy stall till it be sought;

Not offered, as it made suit to be bought;  
 Nor have my title-leaf on posts or walls  
 Or in cleft-sticks, advanced to make calls . . . .  
 If, without these vile arts, it will not sell,  
 Send it to Bucklersbury: there 'twill, well (ll. 5-8; 11-12).

If I hesitate to label Spenser a fully public poet, I do so in part because, not being a professional, he cannot claim (even should he wish to) anything like a direct relationship to the broader public. I have said above that a poem may be made public without being fully public in mode. To be fully public, a poem should engage more than its author and his immediate circle. In Spenser's day, the trading classes were acquiring sufficient economic power to make themselves a key part of England's stability and prosperity, and thus constituted an increasingly vital part of "the public." That these classes were not addressed or appealed to suggests that Spenser either bears them not in mind or that he has more or less consciously turned a blind eye to them. This the fully public poet cannot afford to do, for by relegating a significant portion of his potential constituency to the role of spectators, he will circumscribe his own influence and all but forfeit his attempts to effect change or reform. The public, after all, is the public poet's fulcrum; the broader its base, the greater its stability—and the greater will be the poet's leverage, his social and cultural authority.

Thus, though Spenser made his works available to the public, the works themselves are hardly concerned with those beyond his immediate circle who might acquire them; certainly they do not have a broadly public agenda. But there is yet a second distinction we must make between fully public poetry and Spenser's all-but-public works, such as *The Shepheardes Calender* and *Mother Hubberds Tale*. This distinction concerns Spenser's manner of addressing his public. In my definition of public poetry I noted that it is likely to employ forms, diction, imagery, and allusions that will make it readily and generally accessible and that will impress its point upon its readers. At first glance it seems that Spenser meets this criterion in both *The Shepheardes Calender* and *Mother Hubberds Tale*. The former, after all, uses the ancient device of encoding social and political commentary in the "lowly" pastoral mode. It is the pastoral, Sidney asserts in *The Defence*

of *Poesy*, that in the guise of poor shepherds' conversation "can show the misery of people under hard lords and ravening soldiers," or the "blessedness . . . derived to them that lie lowest from the goodness of them that sit highest," or "under the pretty tales of wolves and sheep can include the whole considerations of wrongdoing and patience" (127). Using the conventions and privileges of pastoral poetry, Spenser's "February" eclogue presents the courtly conflict between old favorites and ambitious upstarts: in Thenot's tale of the oak and briar, the former would overshadow the latter, and so kill it, even as the latter would twine itself about the great tree and choke it to death. At least, the parable *could* be read, in Cain's words, as "a broad allegory of competition for power at court, or it may allude to a specific set of events like the displacement of the Roman church by Elizabeth's Religious Settlement" (38). The "April" eclogue celebrates Elizabeth, "the flowre of Virgins" (l. 48) and in doing so cautions her against marrying (or at any rate marrying unwisely) and thereby jeopardizing English sovereignty. When Hobbinol sings the hymn of praise the lovelorn Colin has composed for Elizabeth, the scornful Thenot chides Colin *in absentia* for loving above his station. Yet one wonders: who would be worthy of "Eliza" save the shepherd-poet who embodies the best qualities of the honest English yeoman? Is Spenser warning his Queen against marrying abroad? Or in the "May" eclogue, to what degree is Palinode and Piers' debate of shepherds' duties an allegory of the religious controversies of the time? And with which religious factions are we to identify Piers, Palinode, and the Fox (who in Palinode's tale serves to unite two quarrelling shepherds against a common enemy)? If, as Cain says, the applications of Spenser's allegories and analogies "is no longer clear" (38) to modern readers (or scholars), neither can we be sure that Spenser's meaning was clear to his contemporaries, so oblique are his allusions to current events, and so baffling is the mysterious "E.K."s running gloss on *The Shepheardes Calender*. Indeed, as Cain says, E.K.'s glosses "raise unhelpful assistance to a new power" (6)—so much so that one suspects their purpose to further obscure Spenser's already cloudy intent. *Mother Hubberds Tale* (1591) likewise employs age-old literary devices, the estate satire

and the beast fable, to convey its themes and allusions. In the poem, two imposters, a fox and an ape, take advantage of the newly fallen, newly mutable world to pass themselves off in successive episodes as shepherds, priests, and courtiers. Though they are repeatedly exposed and punished, they at length succeed in ruling (or rather, misruling) in place of the sleeping lion king. Ultimately, however, the god Mercury descends and awakes the true king, who then slays the villains accomplices, strips and banishes the fox, and crops the ape's ears and tail. The work was sufficiently biting to be suppressed by Queen Elizabeth—the character of the fox seemed to glance at Lord Burghley—but as William Oram observes, “the particular political targets of the allegory were obscure even when it was published” (327).

Bearing these examples in mind, we can distinguish between figures and allegories that are designed to disguise or obscure meaning and those that are meant to reveal and amplify it. The difference between them is not so much one of figurative versus literal address as of mode, that is, of the stance the poet assumes toward his audience. A figure of speech may be used either as a “parallel language,” an equivalent to its original more or less complete in itself, or as a sort of adjective that points back to the original it modifies—and here *modifies* does more than complete the grammatical metaphor. The figure-as-modifier truly alters the original even as it brings it to mind, creating not two separate but equivalent ways of naming a thing, but two halves whose values inform one another and combine to make a new, hybrid whole. Spenser's eclogues and his beast fable, for instance, create figurative worlds paralleling but largely independent of the courtly world. The realities of the courtly world certainly moved Spenser to compose *The Shepheardes Calender* and *Mother Hubberds Tale*, and the conventions of reading figuratively compel the reader to look for referents in the everyday world, yet Spenser has left his eclogues and fable so self-contained in their conventions that the bridges crossing from the allegorical to the actual are difficult—if not impossible—to discern. Given Spenser's conception of his public and, more generally, the political climate that fostered the Renaissance tendency towards

“inwardness,” it is likely that the poet did not wish these poems to expose too much to the common gaze or to suggest more than he could personally answer for. Or we might return to Cain’s assertion that Spenser’s tuition is heuristic rather than didactic—that he means to put an instructive puzzle before the reader. Whatever Spenser’s motives, it is evident that he did not take a truly public stance here because he uses the figurative to equivocate rather than modify

The difference in mode effected by a shift from equivocation to modification can be seen when we examine Ben Jonson’s *On the Famous Voyage*, written only twenty years after Spenser’s beast fable. Jonson’s poem is no more literal or any less figurative than Spenser’s, but its manner of yoking the literal and figurative establishes it as fully public. Jonson’s subject is the journey, undertaken on a wager, of William Sheldon and Sir Christopher Heydon from the Mermaid Tavern to Holbern via the Fleet Ditch. However, he makes no attempt to render a literal or realistic account of their voyage; taking his cue from the perilousness of the endeavor (Fleet Ditch, running from Holbern down to the Thames, was little more than an open sewer, its fetid air widely believed to be a source of the plague), Jonson recasts the trip in epic terms, as a latter-day journey to the Underworld, as a feat more than matching the purely fabulous visitations of Hercules, Theseus, Orpheus, and Odysseus to Pluto’s kingdom. When such an event (an insignificant trip taken to win a bet) is modified by the canon and conventions of classical epic, we are forced to see both the event and its modifier in new ways. Fitting contemporary personages, deeds, and their settings into an epic framework, Jonson effectively erases the distinctions between present and past, between reality and myth. One effect of this is to revivify—even redefine—present-day reality as well as the literary past; another is the creation of a new experiential “hybrid” or whole for the reader: in this case, a mock-epic. When, for instance, Sheldon and Heydon set forth upon “that ugly monster / Ycleped mud” (ll. 61-2) they soon find themselves caught between nothing so mundane as stone embankments, but between “Gorgonian scolds and harpies” (l. 69) and anthropomorphic “stench, diseases, and old



filth, their mother, / With famine, wants and sorrows many a dozen" (ll. 70-1). Rowing on, "like Castor brave and Pollux" (l. 77), the intrepid two encounter the giant Briareus;—no, the Hydra;—no, the treacherous Scylla. Actually, this new prodigy is a barge loaded with the collected filth of the city: "The meat-boat of Bear's College, Paris Garden, / Stunk not so ill; nor, when she kissed, Kate Arden" (ll. 117-18). At length they pass from Styx to Acheron, that is, to Fleet Lane, from the cookshops of which "grease, and hair of measled hogs, / The heads, houghs, entrails, and the hides of dogs" (ll. 145-46) pour into the Ditch. Here, among the discarded carcasses of roasted cats, the travellers encounter one living feline, who is no cat at all, but the reincarnation of "Old Banks the juggler" (l. 156), who, as would any self-respecting fiend of Hell, by turns tries to frighten and dismay Jonson's heroes. There is plague here, the cat hisses, and the Fleet's brothel is closed: "You lose your labours quite, / Were you Jove's sons, or had Alcides' might" (ll. 181-82). Nonetheless, "Castor and Pollux" have fulfilled their part of the wager, and call upon three judges, Rhadamanthus (a soap-boiler), Aeacus (a barkeep), and Minos ("an ancient purblind fletcher" (l. 189)) to witness their achievement:

In memory of which liquid deed,  
The city since hath raised a pyramid.  
And I [Jonson says] could wish for their eternized sakes,  
My muse had ploughed with his that sung A-jax (ll. 193-96).

Jonson's achievement here is not simply his inclusion of topical references: to Sheldon and Heydon, for instance, or to the bear-baiting at Paris Garden, or to the notorious slattern Kate Arden, or Banks the juggler. Certainly such local details help the reader, especially the London resident, to follow and "place" the poem in his mind; there is no reference to settings, persons, or Jacobean popular culture that would have been obscure to the reader of *On the Famous Voyage*. I have noted above that one characteristic of public poetry is its offering readily verifiable information to its audience's scrutiny. This the poem does—as Spenser's topical poems do not. However, the more significant achievement of Jonson's poem is that it reconfigures everyday reality for everyday people.

In an age when every street was an open sewer—Robert Gray notes, “An experienced City man could have found his way around London blindfolded simply from the distinctive smells which the various trades gave their districts” (134)—Fleet Ditch was especially notorious for its choking filth. As Jonson enumerates its loathsome elements, he forces the reader to reappraise what he perceives every day. Fleet Ditch ceases to be a vague, noxious stink. The experience of its stink becomes clarified, intensified, particularized; the physical world in general becomes more readily assessable to the “conscious” eye and nose. And to portray Fleet Ditch as a Classical underworld, a short boatride through it as an epic voyage, is to simultaneously heighten and diminish the reality of the landmark. Grafted onto the legends of an heroic past, Fleet offers the passerby a glimpse of a reified Hell, and transforms the witness himself into a modern-day Orpheus or Hercules. But since the use of an exalted style only further diminishes a low or trifling subject and renders it comic, and the comic in turn serves to distance the reader psychologically from its object, Jonson’s poem envelopes the unpleasant and perhaps deadly Ditch in a reassuring atmosphere of insouciance. Laughter, like knowledge, melts fear and superstition.

But if Jonson’s use of classicism changes our experience of the everyday world, so too does it change our experience of classicism itself. For the classical, too, becomes objectified, demystified, rendered practicable once its conventions and myths are dragged before the public gaze and used to modify everyday life. Jonson cannot describe the route of Sheldon and Heydon as one from Avernus to Cocytus to Styx to Acheron without making manifest the world of the Ancients and its “high” culture accessible to the public at large—especially when, as in *On the Famous Voyage*, its conventions are gently mocked. What this public is to do with this culture is an open question, but once we are made to see our world in epic terms, it is an easy step to see the worlds of Homer and Virgil in our terms. Perhaps the final consequence, the “new whole” arising from Jonson’s combining the ancient and modern worlds (in this and other poems), is the creation in the reader of a greater general perspicacity—toward physical and intellectual stimuli certainly, but also

with regard to the capacity of fiction and fact and of past and present to inform one another habitually in our minds. When they do so, we move easily from the literal to the figurative and back again, quadrupling the vocabulary available to our sense of the historical present and to our social memory.

I do not mean to be cavalierly emblematic with this single poem of Jonson's. One poem cannot embody the extensive and diverse output of Jonson's career. *On the Famous Voyage*, however, does neatly embody the mode of the fully public poem, and offers a instructive contrast between such poetry and the topical poetry of Spenser. One further general distinction between these two modes of poetry should be made here before I discuss more specifically Jonson's career as a public poet. I have argued that for Wyatt the complexities of public life are finally reduced to questions for the individual conscience: How is the individual to conduct himself in a corrupt and corrupting world? How is he to reconcile his ethical and spiritual ideals to that world—and to the physical demands of his own body? What must he do to remain sovereign of himself? Spenser, facing many of the same corruptions and temptations, unlike Wyatt fixes his attention on the abuses themselves; much of his poetry is dedicated to defining and exposing them and to offering his readers examples of right behavior. At base, however, Spenser's response to the public sphere is as individualistic as Wyatt's, for Spenser is preoccupied with expositional technique, with the process of rendering experience into figurative representation. This leaves him with poems that, for all their imaginative and formal brilliance, fall short of their public potential because the poet has encoded his experiences within generic conventions. Who are the shepherds in Spenser's eclogues? What specific political and religious positions do they debate, and what is to be made of their resolutions? Who are the targets of *Mother Hubberds Tale*? Spenser knows, and has no doubt expressed his vision in ways that he found apt and poetically pleasing. But his private experience remains private. For Wyatt and Spenser, then, we may say that those circumstances which might have produced public poetry were instead used to examine and explicate the individual conscience.

Public poetry inverts this tendency, transmuting individual experience into public reality, public memory. We see this characteristic at work in *On the Famous Voyage*. Jonson's own experience of Fleet Ditch and knowledge of classical literature are fashioned into a mock-epic that likely alters the general perceptions of both the physical and literary landmarks. This tendency of public poetry is even more evident in another of Jonson's occasional poems, *An Execration Upon Vulcan*. Jonson composed this poem after a fire in November 1623 destroyed his library, and with it several of his unpublished works. The first part of the poem is taken up with Jonson's Job-like apostrophizing of the fire-god: "What had I done that might call on thine ire? / Or urge thy greedy flame thus to devour / So many my years' labours in an hour?" (ll. 2-4). Does Vulcan have it in for poets since Minerva, goddess of wisdom, rejected his love? Has he (Jonson) written libel, treason, gimmicky verse, or execrable drama? Perhaps he has written badly, but he argues, "Thou shouldst have stayed till public fame said so. / She is the judge, thou executioner" (ll. 46-7). And in any event, he continues, there is so much bad writing about that should have "made a meal for Vulcan to lick up" (l. 84). Jonson lists a number of titles—then goes on to list what works he has lost in the fire. At this point, roughly halfway through the poem, Jonson makes a shrewd move and enumerates Vulcan's recent campaign against culture and learning in London. He has burned down the Globe and Fortune theatres (in 1613 and 1621, respectively), the banqueting house at Whitehall, site of dances and revels (in 1618), and has attempted to destroy the records of the Inns at Court (in 1621). Citing these aggressions, Jonson calls for a "writ out of the Chancelry / Against this Vulcan" (ll. 174-75) and offers suitable punishments, concluding with a wish that he be forever exiled to the Low Countries, where the Spanish and Dutch were at war, and there "Make your petards and granats, all your fine / Engines of murder, and receive the praise / Of massacring mankind so many ways" (ll. 206-08). But for God's sake leave England, where "we all love peace / And pray the fruits thereof and the increase" (ll. 210-11).

Jonson is able to make private experience publicly relevant because he is able to equate his loss with London's losses. He achieves this equation first by being so explicit about his own catastrophe (giving his readers a chance to sympathize with him) and then by demonstrating the City's case against Vulcan. In effect, he retells his own plight in terms readily comprehended by the collective memories of recent disasters he evokes. But above all in importance is Jonson's reflexive identification of himself with the public sphere. It simply does not seem to occur to him that the loss of his library is not a public event—or that the loss of the Globe might not affect him personally, does not provide a way to describe the destruction of his books and manuscripts. This comes close to being one-to-one identification of poet to audience, and in Jonson's case such identification carries with it some forceful claims indeed. For one thing, it means that Jonson's equation of his grievances with London's is no idle association: for him his experience really *is* on a level with the larger society's. For another, he implicitly claims for poets, and for himself particularly, a public prominence that is the equivalent of prominent city landmarks. In other words, the loss of his library is a matter of public concern because it is *his*, *Ben Jonson's*. As a poet he is engaged in cultivating for his king and society the fruits of the peace that "we all" love (ll. 209-10). As an agent of the civilized arts, he is, he implies, coequal with the monarch who has kept England out of the slaughter of the Thirty Years' War, in which the arts of war are "massacring mankind in so many ways." This would lend him authority enough, but then he is not any poet, but Ben Jonson: by juxtaposing all the bad writing that should have been burnt with a catalogue of his lost labors—a translation of Horace, a record of his walk to Scotland, his grammar of the English language, several plays, and "humble gleanings in divinity" (l. 102)—Jonson distinguishes himself from the writers of romances, sensationalist news pamphlets, and poetic follies such as anagrams and acrostics. By virtue of his own poetic skill he is entitled to the public's attention and esteem. In sum, Jonson's assumption is that he is, being Ben Jonson, a public icon. He can therefore presume to tell the City of his private misfortunes

because his identity and London's are inextricable. The boundaries dividing public and private identity, individual and collective experience, have been effectively erased.

Such a close identification with one's audience would seem requisite for the public poet, the essential instinct from which proceed all other characteristics of fully public poetry. But Ben Jonson had more than an instinct for the public mode. In 1616 he published *The Workes of Benjamin Jonson*, a collection of his plays, masques, and poetry. Spenser had also published his poetry, and in fact the practice of publishing individual works under an author's name was becoming more commonplace. Jonson, however, presented the world with a weighty and varied body of his literary output and labelled it *The Workes*—as if it were the legacy of some classical author, presuming thereby to bestow a completed canon, a ready-made icon upon the public. Two icons, in fact: his book and himself. Though polite society might raise an eyebrow at such presumption in a bricklayer-turned-dramatist, Jonson's audacity (if that is what it was) was absolutely necessary if he was to lay claim to any broad æsthetic or cultural authority. *The Workes*, as a public document embodying the ambitions of a poet who wanted nothing more than to be esteemed the English Horace, constitutes Jonson's successful attempt to create for himself a "place to stand," so to speak, a public space from which to address his audience. London had for many years received his plays with enthusiasm; now Jonson was in effect asking it to accept him as a poet of sufficient skill and learning to accept him likewise as its arbiter of æsthetic values, as its definitive portraitist. Perhaps in this it helped Jonson that he was not a born gentleman, that he had been acquainted with the halflights and shadows of London life, that he had had to grasp at learning and literature as a means of staying one step ahead of poverty and ill-fame. Such a background gave him a comprehensive view of his world and every order of its citizens; it enabled Jonson to depict them with the authority of first-hand knowledge and the masterfulness of a long-practiced craftsman. It is Jonson's *craftsmanship*, his notion of poetry as a profession, George Parfitt maintains, that allowed him to stake a claim to the public's attention, for this claim "owed less to birth or social

position than to the weight which he gave to the artist's role in society and to the conviction with which he acted out the defined role" (136). That role has been much discussed by Jonson scholars, but nowhere is as forcefully stated as it is by Jonson himself in his 1607 preface to *Volpone*, when he undertakes to defend poetry from its detractors:

For, if men will impartially, and not asquint, look toward the offices and function of a poet, they will easily conclude to themselves the impossibility of any man's being a good poet, without first being a good man. He that is said to be able to inform young men to all good disciplines, inflame grown men to all virtues, keep old men in their best and supreme state, or, as they decline to childhood, recover them to their first strength; that comes forth the interpreter and arbiter of nature, a teacher of things divine no less than human, a master of manners; and can alone, or with a few, effect the business of mankind: this, I take him, is no subject for pride and ignorance to exercise their railing rhetoric upon (400).

Jonson here refers specifically to dramatic poetry, but it is nonetheless worth noting how very different his notions of his audience and the ends of his poetry are from Spenser's. There is no enumeration here of the manners a gentleman must acquire to complete his self-fashioning, no preoccupation with the world of Court, no division of humanity according to social rank. Instead, Jonson divides his audience—humanity at large—by more general delineations: age—youth, maturity, dotage—virtue, and reasonableness. Jonson seems to imply that the values and vices he portrays in his plays (particularly his comedies) and poems are universally accessible, and further, that persons of all conditions may be brought to embrace the former and shun the latter. As Parfitt puts it, Jonson “worked both to convey what the actualisation of human potential would feel like and the horrors of individuals and societies which have abandoned the positive vision, or are in danger of doing so” (136). And in fact Jonson declares a bit later in his preface to *Volpone* that the “principle end of poetry” is “to inform men in the best reason of living” (401). To undertake, then, what amounts to a program of pragmatic self-fashioning is to assume a task far vaster and in its way nobler—because more idealistic—than the inculcation of

gentility. It is a task that can only be undertaken by the poet who takes society at large as his forum.

I do not mean to argue that Jonson was a man of democratic ideals. If nothing else, his own egotism would not permit him to be. Like many a public figure he could “bear no brother near the throne.” Certainly he does not spare his scorn for fellow poets—or for anyone who would presume to condemn *or* acclaim him. As his epigrams, “On Poet-Ape,” “The Old-End Gatherer,” “To Playwright,” “To Censorious Courtling,” and “To Groom Idiot” (among many others) make clear, Jonson will not bear the literary presumptions of inferior talents or being misunderstood by the dim-witted: as he chides his “idiot” groom, “Idiot, last night I prayed thee but forbear / To read my verses; now I must to hear: / For offering with thy smiles thy wit to grace, / Thy ignorance still laughs in the wrong place” (ll. 1-4). Jonson likewise has no tolerance for popular tastes. In *An Execration on Vulcan*, for instance, he offers a lengthy catalogue of what he sees as loathsome poetical growths: riddles, logogriphs, palindromes, eiteostics (chronograms), shaped-poetry, telestichs; in a longish epigram, “To Captain Hungry,” he sneers at those who make their livelihoods from propagating the rumor and braggadacio that passes for news among the ignorant; and in his two odes to himself, Jonson attacks the supposed lack of wit and sophistication that has led to the death of arts: in the first ode he laments that “the greedy fry / Be taken with false baits / Of worded balladry, / And think it poesie” (ll. 18-21), and in the second he wrinkles a lip at Shakespeare’s pandering to the public’s appetite for the hackneyed in his *Pericles*, which Jonson pronounces “stale / As the shrieve’s crusts, and nasty as his fish- / Scraps,” “raked into the common tub” (ll. 23-25). In addition to his aggressively discriminating temperament, Jonson was very much the outsider who made his way into the inner circles of power and patronage. After the publication of *The Works*, James I appointed him Poet Laureate and granted him an annual pension of £100; in 1618 Jonson was made Master of the Revels, and in 1628, chronologer of London. Jonson enjoyed the prolonged patronage of the Sidney family and wrote many poems in its praise, among which *To Penshurst* is



only the most famous. “Such poems,” F. W. Bradbrook comments, “are the natural product of that intellectual, courtly, and refined society where intimacy and friendship naturally express themselves in formal written compliment” (136). Having established himself as an aristocrat of letters, enjoying the favor of his social counterparts, Jonson was perhaps a public poet more in effect than by design.

This being said, it is nonetheless significant that Jonson takes the time to condemn bad poetry and to reprove public taste, for this suggests that in addition to distinguishing himself from poetic rivals and pretenders he had a simultaneous interest in fostering proper æsthetic ideals—if only to make the public all the more receptive to his own plays and poems. Moreover, despite Jonson’s personal and poetical aspirations he was able to keep in view a startlingly wide swath of his society. As Ian Donaldson, editor of the Oxford edition of Jonson’s poems, says,

His poems address, assess, commend, *and* vilify an astonishing range of people. To read through even a single group of poems, such as the *Epigrams*, is to be made vividly aware of the existence of an entire society, headed by the king himself and peopled both by identifiable individuals and semi-fictionalized characters who nevertheless have clear roots in the society of Jonson’s time (xiv).

Though Jonson was not an æsthetic or political democrat, his poetry remains readily accessible to the common reader; in matter and method it is a virtual gazette for his place and time. For example, in his *Epigrams*, published in *The Works*, we find poems on James’s proposed union with Scotland (#5), a new bawdy house (#7), a bloodless court-creature (#11), John Donne (#’s 23 and 96), Parliament (#24), the rumored assassination of King James (#51), a number of noble personages (including King James, Lady Mary Wroth and Lucy, Countess of Bedford), and on a host of explicitly drawn characters familiar to those who know the world: Sir Cod, a would-be dandy (#’s 19 and 20, 50), the depraved epicure Sir Voluptuous Beast (#’s 25, 26), Bank the Usurer (#31), the feminist Fine Lady Would-Be (#62), the impudent and untalented Playwright (#’s 49, 68, and 100),

Prowl the Plagiary (#81), the foppish English Monsieur (#88), the lecher Groin (#117), and Gut the glutton (#118). To consider just this last group for a moment : the delineation of character types is an ancient literary genre, Theophrastus (371-287 BC) its great practitioner; Jonson's characters are general rather than particular, yet they are, like Martial's, fairly specific both in conception and detail. Thus Jonson portrays not simply "a vain man," or "a dandified man," but "an English Monsieur" who so affects French dress (down to the scarf, hat, feather, shoe, tie, and garter), manners ("it doth move, / And stoop, and cringe" (l. 13-14)), and vanity (he attends services in St. Paul's to observe the new fashions), "That he, untravelled, should be French so much, / As Frenchmen in his company should seem Dutch" (ll. 7-8). So particularized are Jonson's characters that one has no difficulty believing that Jonson drew them from the life. Expanding and enriching the topicality of his classical models, Jonson gives his readers pen portraits that anticipate those of Samuel Butler or the citizens of Mr. Spectator's London. And his portraits, like theirs, draw the reader's eye to that which might have been overlooked or only vaguely seen and defined. In this way, Jonson's occasional poetry helps to "fix" the human and moral topography of London for his audience.

As important for Jonson's public mode as the topicality and specificity of his poetry is its style. I have already noted above Jonson's method of merging the literal and figurative, the historical and contemporary. Here it remains to underscore what has probably become evident from the many lines I have quoted from Jonson, namely, Jonson's accessibility, the ease with which his poetry is entered into and comprehended. As Douglas Bush comments, "Reacting against Elizabethan vagaries of matter, form, and style, Jonson demanded, and unceasingly strove for, the ageless classical virtues of clarity, unity, symmetry, and proportion; in short, the control of the rational intelligence" (111). These characteristics, above all Jonson's reliance on the exercise of the rational intelligence—his own and that of his reader—comprise a fair part of Jonson's legacy to later writers. In the spare concision of his verse, which tends toward the epigrammatical

and proverbial; in his development of the couplet as a means of rendering and assessing experience—often, as Bradbrook notes, in “the ironical opposition of the actual and the classical” (136); in his unabashed use of the particular and immediate to portray the universal and timeless; in his moral sense and his practical application of wide learning; in his worldliness and good sense (as, for instance, his eschewing of courtly idealization in favor of a blunt erotic pragmatism, or his skepticism regarding human nature)—in all these things Jonson not only made occasional poetry more broadly relevant than it had ever been before, but also anticipated the great age of English public poetry that begins with the Restoration and ends with the death of Pope.

In his own day Jonson was regarded with veneration; his circle of friends included Shakespeare, Donne, Chapman, Beaumont, Fletcher, and Bacon, and figures such as Carew, Suckling, and Herrick, were eager to style themselves “sons of Ben.” However, though they may have adopted his ideals of clarity and restraint, his easy classicism, and his equally easy cynicism, Jonson’s poetic inheritors did not retain the public mode of their great master. Instead, the Jonsonian model was adapted for use in a revised courtly (or cavalier) verse that largely resumed the erotic preoccupation of Renaissance poetry from Wyatt to Shakespeare. Here and there exceptions crop up, as we shall see in the next section, but in general it may be said that as the nation drifted toward civil war in the late 1630’s and early 1640’s, and then erupted into prolonged conflict, the Cavalier school increasingly identified itself with the royalist cause—and so once again the main line of poetry in England found itself divorced from the everyday world of everyday people, irrelevant—even offensive—to the trading classes, as once more it turned inward, away from the public sphere and toward the gentlemanly pleasures of the court and an idealized past. This would have many consequences: one was the disrepute into which such poetry fell during the years of the Commonwealth and Protectorate; another was that once the arts were restored along with Charles II Jonson’s example had in effect been lost, and could only be followed at second hand, through two minor imitators: even as Dryden’s

generation praised Waller's sweetness and Denham's strength. Jonson's own successful employment of the public mode receded into obscurity.

## CHAPTER II

### PUBLIC POETRY IN THE MIDDLE DECADES OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

#### 1. The Triumph of Public Poetry

“Our condition is best understood,” says Paul Fussell in a recent occasional essay, “by imagining an alternative” (137). With this in mind it might be useful at this point in my (admittedly selective) survey of public poetry in England to jump forward a bit, to the time of the Restoration, and sketch out a likely scenario for politics and poetry under Charles II. After all, there is no such thing as historical inevitability; the ages unfold to no particular end, though we often pretend otherwise, and given the state of poetry at the time of the Civil War—the lyrical inward-looking and conspicuously silent on public affairs, the dramatic preoccupied with pleasing Queen Henrietta Maria’s artsy coterie and flattering Charles I’s notions of divine right and absolutist rule—we should not automatically suppose that the restoration of the Stuarts would not also entail a restoration of the courtly mode eclipsed during the years of the Commonwealth and Protectorate. In short, there was never any guarantee that the public mode would ever emerge predominant from the 1640’s and 1650’s.

One can in fact make a good case for its never reappearing at all. The collapse of the Protectorate in 1658 and of the pretense of Parliamentary rule in 1659 obliged England for the sake of order and security to reconcile itself with monarchy and recall Charles II from Holland. Word of his return, says J.P. Kenyon, was “received with rapture” (193-4): “Charles II [was] recalled with the general approval of the great majority of the nation, and the enthusiastic support of many. He had no visible enemies, nor serious critics” (210). Christopher Hill says that the enthusiasm of the vast crowds cheering Charles II as he made his progress through London May 29, 1660, had been “bought” (*The World Turned Upside Down*, 354); but John Evelyn, though no friend to the Commonwealth, offers a

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convincing portrait of the City's reception of its king—"The wayes straw'd with flowers, the bells ringing, the streetes hung with Tapissry, fountaines running with wine . . . the windos and balconies all set with Ladys, Trumpets, Musick, and [myriads] of people flocking the streets" (182)—and of the rapturous joy that had frenzied the populace:

I stood in the strand, and beheld it [Charles II's procession], and blessed God: And all this without one drop of bloud, and by that very army, which rebell'd against him: but it was the Lords doing, *et mirabile in oculis nostris*: for such a Restauration was never seene in the mention of any history, antient or modern, since the returne of the Babylonian Captivity, no so joyfull a day, and so bright, ever seene in this nation: this hapning when to expect or effect it, was past all humane policy (182).

Evelyn's extravagance only matches that found in the pulp press of the day, perhaps the surest barometer of popular opinion, as Jerome Friedman suggests in *The Battle of the Frogs and Fairford's Flies* (1993). Friedman quotes at length from an anonymous pamphlet of 1660, *The Mystery of Prophecies Revealed*; in this work, the author casts Charles II as "the David of these days, the man spoken of in the Revelation, riding on the clouds of heaven and ordained to have the Government over Nations"; and it is Charles II, "the person most dear in God's eye," who is to lead the three nations (England, Scotland, and Ireland) into a time of unprecedented glories, and restore "the ruined church" (233). The new king's father, in this pamphlet and a good many other places, was portrayed as a royal martyr for his people. At the time of his execution an anonymous ballad, "King Charles' Speech," had depicted a Christlike Charles "cheerfully" going to his death so that his people might be spared the horrors of war: "He wisht what ere was past, / That he might be the last, / No sorrow might we taste, / but wars might cease" (ll. 21-24). With the Restoration came Charles' complete rehabilitation from the Puritans' portrayal of him as a great tyrant whose death was not only deserved, but called for by ancient prophecy for the fulfillment of God's will. Now, as Kenyon observes, "The new cult of monarchy found expression in the near-deification of Charles I. In the new order of service for 30 January [the day the king was executed in 1649], reserved by Parliament as a day of fasting,

repentance and self-abasement in perpetuity, the late king appeared as a saint-like figure of overpowering sweetness, moderation and humility, tormented and destroyed by cruel and bloody men” (209). For a great many in England, it seemed that Charles I’s Christ-like death had but prefigured the Messianic return of his son, Charles II.

Such euphoria could not and did not last. However, the atmosphere in England following the Restoration was such that the forces that had led to and perpetuated the English Revolution—Puritanism, republicanism (whether overt or latent), and the impulse toward religious and Parliamentary reform—were greatly discredited, and gave way, in Kenyon’s words, to a “new cult of monarchy.” As early as the 1660’s Sir William Petty was making a plausible case for the reform of Parliamentary constituencies; yet, says K.H.D. Haley, “After what had happened in 1640-60 [Parliament] saw the best safeguard for social and constitutional stability in the preservation of traditional rights” (29). Such reforms would be postponed until 1832. In the meantime, the Cavalier Parliament moved to revenge itself upon those that had killed one king and driven another from his rightful throne by attempting to nullify the Act of Oblivion (which granted a large measure of clemency to those who had supported the Commonwealth and Protectorate) and passing the Acts of Corporation (1661) and Uniformity (1662), which, respectively, required officers of the government to take oaths of loyalty and non-resistance to the king, and restored the primacy of the Anglican Church, imposing various penalties on ministers and congregations that did not recognize the Thirty-Nine Articles or use the Book of Common Prayer. As Hill points out, these acts among others (notably the 1662 Act of Settlement, which curbed the poor’s freedom of movement in the kingdom; the prohibition against the gathering of petitions; new controls placed on the press; and draconian game laws), had the effects of turning thousands of dissenters out of the government and church and of circumscribing liberties enjoyed under the Commonwealth and Protectorate (348ff). Though Charles and his Lord Chancellor, Edward Hyde, Earl of Clarendon made attempts to mitigate the severity of this legislation, according to Kenyon, Clarendon in fact had



dreams of Charles II as an absolutist king, “with an efficient council, a watchful army and a compliant and infrequently summoned Parliament” (211). In short, only a few years after the Restoration the king was settled firmly on the throne, church and state had been cleansed of dissenting elements, the means of opposition had been proscribed, and a nobility and gentry loyal to the monarch enjoyed once more the property and privileges the Revolution had stripped from them. Given these developments, it is not difficult to grant the seeming plausibility of the absolutist scenario spun by Kenyon:

The Stuart monarchy had been given a completely new start, and there seemed no reason why it should not move with the tide of general European development, which was now firmly in favour of royal autocracy and against the direct participation of elected assemblies in government, a process evident not only in France and Spain but in most of the German states (210).

With the reaffirmation of the primacy of the Crown—and Haley notes that “in the reign of Charles II the royal Court was of greater importance than it has been in any reign since. Most political activities were still conducted in the royal palaces” (8)—came the restoration of the Court and aristocracy as the arbiters of æsthetic tastes. Given the precedent of the previous Stuart administration, it is not surprising that this should be so. Charles I had, claims Sandra Burner, made England “the art center of European civilization in the 1630’s” (91)—the decade before both king and culture were undone by civil war. Charles was able to lure Gentileschi, Rubens, and Van Dyck to England, where they succeeded or joined the Dutch painters of James I’s court—van Blijenbergh, Paul van Somer, and Daniel Mytens—and were kept busy with royal and aristocratic commissions. It was under Rubens’ guidance that Charles acquired the Mantua pictures, a vast collection of paintings gathered by the Gonzaga family over the course of two centuries. Kenyon notes that Charles’ critics denounced this purchase “as nothing but a heap of ‘old rotten pictures and broken-nosed marbles’” (125). However, Charles and Henrietta Maria’s other passion, drama (particularly masques), was shared by the Court. Here, too, the royal taste

was sure, employing as it did the design genius of Inigo Jones and the literary genius of Jonson, James Shirley, and others. But though James Rykwert and other historians credit Charles I with “a genuine understanding and love of art” (28), the king was no Wildean aesthete; he well understood the propagandistic ends to which the visual and dramatic arts may be put.<sup>1</sup> While still Prince of Wales, Charles commissioned Rubens to paint the ceiling of the Banqueting House at Whitehall. One of the three main panels of Rubens’ masterwork portrays James I as an all-wise Solomon, sitting in judgement over two women disputing possession of a child. As John Murdoch explains, “These women are England and Scotland, and James’s wisdom exceeds that of Solomon in that he achieves resolution of the conflict not through division but through unification and peace. . . . The Child is of course Prince Charles” (249-50); a second main panel shows James as “the modern Solomon-Christ” (Murdoch 250); the third and central panel depicts the apotheosis of James I, as if he were a Roman emperor being translated to godhead, or “the Christ returning to his father in heaven” (Murdoch 250). Charles’ patronage of Mytens and Van Dyck was also politically significant. While wife-hunting in Spain in 1623, Charles had been dazzled by the absolutism of the Spanish Court and by the magnificent art of Titian, Velasquez, and Rubens that celebrated its power. Returning to England, Charles began fashioning his own absolutist image, impressing upon Mytens the need to stress, in

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<sup>1</sup> Currently there is a tendency to view top-down (but, curiously, not bottom-up) aesthetic expression as little more than a tool for ideological manipulation, for subliminally encouraging people “to view and judge the world about them unthinkingly, without reflecting upon how they might have come by those views or judgements” (19), in the words of Gerald MacLean, whose own *Time’s Witness: Historical Representation in English Poetry, 1603-1660* (1990) consists largely of explicating the ideological ploys embedded in historical poetry of the early Stuart era. But the social dynamics of public art and literature are too complex to be reduced simply to an invisible power conspiracy. In an article on painting under the Stuarts, John Murdoch notes, “Pictures in the seventeenth century were not part of a closed apolitical discourse of Culture. For monarchs especially the distinction between public and private was either non-existent or indefinite, and it is possible to see in some of the uses of pictures in court circles a movement towards the public advertisement of areas the great man’s life previously concealed” (244). Propagandistic such paintings may have been, but the fashioning of the royal or noble image was very much a public affair; the public exposition of private life and character required both subjects and painters to submit much to the authority of popular expectations, understanding, and approval. In any event, depictions of the king and aristocracy in art or drama were hardly coercive in any surreptitious way, and, should the subject not live up to his or her public portrayal, would have been likely to effect ridicule and a consequent loss of authority.

Murdoch's words, "his personal authority and his membership of the European elite" (249). Van Dyck, too, says William Gaunt, "was ideally suited to express the spirit of an autocratic regime": "Courtly grace and ease, combined with a certain dignified aloofness, decorative splendour" (34)—these were the characteristics a monarch with an absolutist bent would wish to ascribe to himself. It is, after all, to Van Dyck's portraits of Charles I, Kenyon argues, that the king owes his lasting image as a "regal, melancholy and aloof" man (125-126). As for Charles' patronage of drama, particularly the Courtly masques, Burner only underscores what many scholars have pointed out, that "All the elements of the masque are directed towards a statement of the just, wise, and peaceful rule of the king represented by figures of classical myth or personified by the ideal virtues such as love and fame" (92). She cites as examples William Davenant's *Britannia Triumphans* (1637), which defended the wisdom of the king's naval policies, and James Shirley's *Triumph of Peace* (1634), ravishing in its elaborate pageantry (91-93). For Charles, the arts were a private passion, but also an important part of an absolutist program. Rykwert sums it up well: "Whereas James saw the splendour of the court as an adjunct to his Royal state, Charles I had an almost instrumental, or at any rate rhetorical, view of Royal entertainments. He really did believe that harmonious music reconciled discordant hearts; and that masques could be used as declarations of royal policy" (27).

The restored King Charles II had every reason to see himself as he was often portrayed in contemporary poetry, as the restorer of the arts to Britain. In Sir John Denham's "The Prologue to His Majesty" (1660), for example, the poet claims, "They that would have no KING, would have no Play / The *Laurel* and the *Crown* together went, / Had the same *Foes*, and the same *Banishment*" (ll. 6-8). In general, as Hill points out, this is how the restored royalists saw themselves: "Dr. P.W. Thomas has shown us how the classical principles of regularity and propriety had appealed to isolated royalist intellectuals during the decades of defeat. They saw themselves as preservers of literary culture in a time of barbarism" (*World*, 355-56). Though the Puritans were hardly a latter-day manifestation

of the Imperial army that sacked Rome in 1527, ending the Italian Renaissance, they were sufficiently antipathetic toward the arts to close the theatres, destroy religious sculpture and decoration, sell off the deposed king's art collection, and even forbid the singing of street ballads, which, L.G. Salingar notes, they saw as likely to corrupt the public morals (70). Time and again in his diary entries for the Interregnum years, Evelyn notes how Puritan rule has led to the decay if not the outright destruction of England's art, architecture, and landscape. For instance, in an entry for June 9, 1654, he remarks during a stay in Reading upon "my Lord Cravons house at Causam now in ruines, his goodly Woods felling by the Rebels" (153); he notes during a visit to York that its St. Peter's Cathedral "alone of all the greate Churches in England, had best ben preserv'd from the furie of the sacrilegious, by Composition with the Rebels, when they tooke the Citty" (161); and laments the vandalizing of Lincoln's cathedral:

the Souldiers had lately knocked off all or most of the Brasses which were on the Gravestones, so as few Inscriptions were left: They [Evelyn's guides] told us they went in with axes and hammers, and shut themselves in, till they had rent and torne of some barges full of Mettal; not sparing the monuments of the dead, so helish an avarice possess'd them (162).

Thus, his father's example, together with a predictable royal reaction against the anti-aestheticism of his late republican foes, would seemingly have led Charles II to become an advocate of a court-centered program for the promulgation of absolutist art and literature in Britain. Certainly he had before him (as Charles I had had in the persons of Louis XIII and the Philips of Spain) an exemplary model of the autocrat as patron, France's Sun King, Louis XIV. And certainly Charles II had both the taste and temperament to assume the role of England's artistic arbiter. Antonia Fraser details Charles II's fascination and involvement with the arts in Britain: his patronage of the painters Hugh May, Peter Lely, and Antonio Verrio (whose *Sea Triumph of Charles II* (c. 1674) is as grandiloquent as anything painted for James or Charles I), and of the carver Grinling Gibbons; his cultivation of "the French instrumental music he had grown to love in exile" (332), which entailed his sending

Pelham Humfry to France to acquire the knack of it, as well as his close supervision of Humfry's pupil, Henry Purcell, to whom Charles introduced "the delights of Italian music as well as French" (332); his overseeing of the reconstruction of London after the Great Fire, wisely insisting on the appointment of Christopher Wren to be its architect, and, wiser still, clearing all bureaucratic obstacles from Wren's path; his love (again, French-induced) of gardening and landscaping, modelling his redesigning of St. James Park after Le Nôtre's work at Versailles; his hearty backing of the theatre, especially theatre in the French style—when the court was in London Charles went to see plays nearly every afternoon, and he did not hesitate to offer advice about subject and plot to Dryden, Crowne, and Otway (298).

Rykwert argues that "the centre of patronage in the second half of the century shifted back from the royal court to the homes of the great landowners" (4), but it may be said as well that the artistic and literary tastes of the nobility and gentry took their cues from the king's own. Indeed, as portraiture of the royal family in the time of Charles I fostered the notion of the legitimacy of dynastic succession, so, too, did the family portraits commissioned by the aristocracy convey the apparent settledness of the patrons' affluence and power, the sureness of their lineage (Murdoch 242). Though the Civil War and Interregnum interrupted aristocratic patronage of painting (especially portraiture), architecture, and gardening, the Restoration saw a renewed, even heightened patronage of these arts, as England's upper classes sought to re-establish themselves as those best suited by affluence, character, and heritage to govern the nation. The same is true of aristocratic patronage of drama and poetry at the Restoration. The writing coterie of Charles I and Henrietta Maria's court had included Jonson, Shirley, Davenant, Suckling, Carew, Habbington, Lovelace, and Cowley. When the theatres were reopened after the Restoration, the king commissioned the King's and Duke's companies, whose gentlemen-directors, Sir Thomas Killigrew and Sir William Davenant, respectively, divided the dramatic world between them. Aside from the king, patrons of drama such as the Duke and

Duchess of Monmouth, the Duke of Newcastle, Charles Sackville, Earl of Dorset, George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, and Anthony Cooper, Earl of Shaftesbury lent their names, protection and (at times) money to the day's popular dramatists, Dryden, Nathaniel Lee, Nahum Tate, Thomas Shadwell, and Elkanah Settle among them. They also commissioned occasional poems commemorating family marriages, births, and deaths—thereby educating poems and dedications in praise of their characters, taste, and (above all) liberality from poets hopeful of future favor. Patronage of arts and literature not only kept aristocratic patrons abreast of courtly and Continental fashion, it probably served, as Hill suggests (above), to foster class identity and solidarity after two decades of shifting social loyalties and to put behind them the experiments of Commonwealth and Protectorate. The nobility in this period, however, was not content merely to subsidize others; many were dramatists and poets themselves, were, as James Winn says, competitors with the writers they employed (98). Apart from Killigrew and Davenant, Sir George Etherege, Sir Robert Howard (son of the Earl of Berkshire), Buckingham, Newcastle, and Dorset penned plays of varying quality and success. Moreover, the Restoration Court fostered a notable clique of gentlemen-poets, including John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, Sir Charles Sedley, Dorset (again), Buckingham, Wentworth Dillon, Earl of Roscommon, Killigrew, and John Sheffield, Earl of Mulgrave.

In sum, given the primacy of King and Court in politics and the general attitude of reaction pervading England, there appears to have been no reason why the absolutism with which Charles I had flirted could not have taken root and flourished during the reign of his son; and given the centralization of the arts among the king, peers, and upper gentry, no reason why artistic endeavors in England should not have been presided over, as in the France of Louis XIV, by a courtly bureaucracy that controlled and exploited their form and content to promote the glories of an absolutist monarch. More particularly, there is no reason why the Cavalier poetry of the century's middle decades should not have been resumed and re-established as the dominant mode of the 1660's and after. True, these

courtly poets were not generally of the calibre of those writing during the reigns of Elizabeth, James I, and Charles I. But they were competent—often rather more than competent. In his introduction to the Yale edition of Rochester's poems, David Vieth makes the case for giving the laurel to the leader of the Courtly Wits. "In an age when the English aristocracy was still politically, socially, and culturally supreme," Vieth says, "Rochester was socially and culturally potent. . . . In an age when skill in writing verses was a practical asset to a courtier, Rochester became the second-ranking poet, excelled only by Dryden" (xvii). Vieth goes on to pronounce Rochester's lyrics of 1674-75 (among them, "Upon Leaving His Mistress," "Against Constancy," "The Mistress," and "Love and Life") as "the finest of the late seventeenth century and among the best in English literature" (xxxix); he also credits Rochester's knack of engineering the intersection of different planes of experience to heighten dramatic immediacy and ironic effect with creating a new dimension to "the new literary sensibility as it developed from 1670 to 1675" (xxxv-xxxvi), a dimension that would be perfected by Swift and Pope (xxxiii). Keeping in mind (from the discussion of "Signior Dildo" in the first section of this chapter) that when Rochester's poetry is not lyrical and private in the way of, say, Herrick or Carew, it is topical but only semi-public in mode, we might for the moment take Vieth's claims for Rochester at face value and, bearing in mind also the æsthetic primacy of the Court, allow ourselves to extrapolate a bit from the given circumstances: Rochester might well have survived his thirties and continued to write his lyrics and satires into the eighteenth century. If Rochesterian irony added a new depth to satire, and Rochesterian eroticism—sometimes sincere, sometimes salacious and cynical—brought about "the finest lyrics of the late seventeenth century," why do we never read the following sentences in literary histories of the period?:

John Dryden might have been Charles II's Poet Laureate, but it would be erroneous to suppose that he, any more than Laurence Eusden in his day, or Robert Southey in his, was the leading poet of his time. That designation, for good or ill, belongs to John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester. Mindful of

poetry's aristocratic past, Rochester was able to infuse new life into the erotic courtly lyric, grafting a post-Restoration sensibility—pragmatic, unsentimental, libertine—onto a form that had dominated the genre since Wyatt's day and that, because of Rochester's tremendous prestige at the courts of Charles II, James II, and their successors, would dominate English poetry through his innumerable imitators—including two minor poets of note, Alexander Pope and Jonathan Swift, known as George II's "Spaniels" for their spirited defense of his regime—until the Naturalist reaction of the 1730's and 1740's. By then, cynical love poems and scathing court satire had had their vogue. The new school, led by James Thomson and Edward Young, takes its name from its attention to the details of physical nature. It is commonplace to say that this turn from the world of Court to that of woodlands, meadows, and mountains was an attempt to make poetry "matter" to a nation grown giddy with the discoveries, applications, and philosophical optimism of the New Science. Unfortunately, this poetry soon outlived its vogue at Court and proved no more relevant to society at large—as the self-indulgence of two later Naturalist works, Wordsworth's *The Prelude* or Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* makes clear.

The Age of Dryden could have been the Age of Rochester—had certain political, social, and literary forces present at the Restoration aligned themselves in a certain way. Instead, the alignment of these factors was such that the public mode, a subterranean current in British poetry at least since the time of Jonson, found sufficient space to emerge and establish itself as the poetic mainstream until the middle of the next century. Let me be clear: I am saying neither that public poetry did not exist before 1660, nor that its rise after 1660 was inevitable, nor that its appearance muted all other modes, but rather, as Douglas Bush says of historical periods, "While all ages are ages of transition, there are some in which disruptive forces reach maturity and combine to speed up the normal process of change" (1). Because of the forces at work in the years immediately before and after the Restoration, public poetry was brought to a fruitful maturity and became a potent vehicle for and framer of cultural, social, and national self-definition for two successive generations.

Beginning with the politics of the Restoration itself, we have already heard John Evelyn declare it to be "never seene in the mention of any history, antient or modern, since



the Babylonian Captivity, nor so joyfull a day, and so bright, ever seene in this nation.” For all his seeming hyperbole and fervid royalism, Evelyn was absolutely correct: the Restoration was without precedent in English history. Kings had been deposed before, new dynasties had supplanted the old, religious controversy and civil wars had embroiled and exhausted the nation; but never before had the institution of monarchy been seriously challenged, never had “the people” overthrown and executed their monarch, never had the nation had the opportunity to remake itself through constitutional experiment. When one by one the experiments failed—first commonwealth, then theocratic oligarchy, then hereditary autocracy—and England found itself adrift morally and materially, it seemed that all along the cure for its malaise had been the restoration of its rightful king. That the bloody removal of Charles I could end with the not only peaceful but *rapturous* return of Charles II must have seemed a marvel indeed. For an age that saw the hand of Providence actively shaping the course of human events, such a restoration could only portend a time of unprecedented wonders. Tracing the use of “ancient” prophecies in the popular press throughout the 1640’s and 1650’s, Friedman observes that during most of this period prognosticators (particularly William Lilly) writing on behalf of Parliament had used the early sixteenth-century writings of one Ursula Shipton as well as the cryptic fables predicting the fall of a White King and of a Dreadful Deadman to make the defeat and death of Charles I appear inevitable (59ff.). Now that Charles II was to return, a new set of ancient prophecies—incredibly enough—was discovered. These prophecies, such as the one given in *A Prophecy Lately Found Amongst the Collection of the Famous Mr. John Selden* (1659), ostensibly predated those exploited by Lilly and predicted that the English would kill one king, suffer a pretender to rule over them, and at last recall the true king, “under whom,” quotes Friedman, “the whole body (exhausted with long war) shall enjoy a firm and general peace and shall be happy by Sea and land . . . Happy days return” (232). Such apparent vacillations in God’s favor might seem confusing, but not if one took the long view (as did the royalist prognosticators): God had permitted the death of his earthly

representative, Charles I, and the subsequent period of successive monsters, prodigies and disasters in order to demonstrate to the English people that they needed a king, and particularly a Stuart king (Friedman 239ff.). Now that the lesson had been learned, a chastened, loyal England led by its “David of these days” could experience an unprecedented Golden Age. Such was the belief, or at least the hope, of the many thousands gathered to welcome Charles II as he re-entered London May 29, 1660.

Yet if an unlooked-for Restoration fostered expectations of heretofore unknown glories, an equally unfamiliar set of political realities faced King, Parliament, and People, making it unlikely that these glories would be achieved under the aegis of an absolute monarch. For, as Haley says, the Restoration was not a matter “of the old landmarks reappearing after the floods began to recede” (3-4)—“everything would have to be done by manipulation [that is, cooperatively between the Crown and Parliament], not by the enforcement of a policy by the victors upon the conquered” (6). Parliament had overturned the monarchy—only to recall the monarch once more; when Charles II entered London, Fraser writes, “everyone” was a royalist (181)—yet the new king could not afford to become complacent: the crowds that cheered him might very well send him “on his travels” again. The king retained his prerogative; he could still summon, prorogue, and dissolve Parliament; he could still conduct foreign policy and make war. But the highhanded tactics used by Charles I to subdue stubborn Parliaments and peers had vanished forever. Maurice Ashley sums it up: “Unparliamentary taxation, such as ship money and forced loans, stood condemned. The criminal jurisdiction of the Privy Council had vanished. The King could no longer order the arrest of members of Parliament without showing cause. In fact even if it were not as limited as the Roundheads had wanted it to be, the monarchy had become ‘constitutional’” (121). “Constitutional” in practice, that is, though not by theory or design, for the political settlement was a vague, plan-as-one-goes affair. Parliament’s trump-card was its absolute control of the king’s purse, which seemed to insure that the king would have to remain in its good graces and summon it regularly if only to enable it to vote him

the money he desired. Nor did it matter that the new Parliament—the Cavalier or Pensionary Parliament—consisted of a restored House of Lords and a House of Commons that consisted largely of country gentry eager to demonstrate their loyalty to Charles and their loathing of his recent opponents; the Commons soon proved an increasingly independent-minded body, insisting, for example, that it retain control over the levying of taxes and even as early as 1662 opposing the Crown's proposed hearth tax, fearing that such a tax "would make it unnecessary for Charles to meet his Parliament regularly" (Haley 27). The Restoration had indeed ushered England across the threshold of a new political age, but probably not in the way the king's party and its prognosticators had envisioned. The political settlement, argues Fraser, "presented the king with, on the one hand, very wide powers, and, on the other hand, equally wide problems, which he could not solve without the co-operation of almost everyone in the State" (190).

The consequences of such a settlement for poetry were indirect, subtle but nonetheless significant. For one thing, though Charles and his Lord Chancellor Clarendon *might* have attempted to translate the euphoria of the Restoration into a gradual return to absolutism, they were in practice precluded from doing so. Fraser underscores the unsettled nature of England in 1660: any attempt to impose rule by divine right à la Louis XIV would have been disastrous. In fact, she observes, if royalist hopes of massive redistributions of land in their favor were disappointed, it was due to "the innate wish" of Parliament and King not to upset the status quo, "not to disturb England, as she was, more than was absolutely necessary to bring about justice" (192). As it turned out, there never was a design for making England an absolutist state. Kenyon argues that Charles "squandered all his chances" (211), but makes it equally clear that Charles was not by character or temperament an autocrat: "He was glad of any opportunity to enhance the power of the monarchy, but unlike his brother James he gave no continuous thought to it" (212). Easily distracted by his many interests and amours from the discipline of government; chronically in debt and dependent upon Parliament; unwilling to risk a return

of civil strife; self-effacing, ironic, pragmatic to the point of cynicism—Charles was not the king to indulge in fantasies of absolutist grandeur. Consequently, though he was not averse to the praise of his subjects and might hint to Dryden that the latter might compose a satire against his political enemies, he did not surround himself, as his father had, with writers and artists who served mainly as apologists for the regime. This left poetry, as well as the other æsthetic disciplines, to pursue their own course. And even when they enjoyed royal patronage and supervision, the arts and sciences in which Charles interested himself almost always had public applications beyond and even exclusive of service to the Crown. His support of the theatre, for instance, made that venue and that genre once more broadly public and a vibrant forum for social and political commentary. English music was enriched by his encouragement of its incorporating the French and Italian styles, and his overseeing of the reconstruction of London ensured that that city would become not only the nation's jewel but a metropolis suitable for a nation on the verge of empire. Typical of Charles, Fraser says, was his refurbishing of St. James's Park. Having redesigned it according to French and Venetian imperial models, Charles then threw it open to the public and partook himself of the games the public played there: croquet, pall-mall, and bowls (296). Not only this, but those who amused Charles with their drama, poetry, music, and sports, those who built his buildings and his gardens—these existed for him as human beings, interesting in their own right, apart from their entertainment value. It is difficult to imagine Charles I dining with jockeys, or conversing with natural philosophers about oysters and ants' eggs, or confiding to his Laureate that he was poor enough to be a poet. Charles II's personal, generally non-ideological enthusiasm for poetry and its sister arts was very much akin to his non-programmatic politics. Both allowed for the entity in question to shape itself "organically," that is, according to the circumstances of the moment as well as the inclinations and talents of its many, often feuding participants. Antonia Fraser sums up the case well:

The kind of propaganda exercise indulged in by Louis XIV, with every breath he drew every day of his life, was unthinkable to Charles II. The arts, for example, were there for enjoyment: a simple and even laudable view, but not one that has been shared by every monarch in history. The bewigged and padded creatures of his stage, the saucy mistresses in their boys' clothing, the graceful wielders of his garlanded violins, the shepherds and satyrs of his masques: none of these conspired to glorify the monarchy; if they did so, it was purely by accident. Dryden as Poet Laureate was given no great direction for his verse. Satire—often of the monarchy itself—was a far more potent theme in the reign of Charles II than propaganda (466).

The new relationship between Crown and Parliament and the King's disinclination to assume an absolutist stance led to further political developments that would have consequences for post-Restoration poetry. Foremost among these was a change in the role of "the people" in English politics. "The people"—a vague phrase that identifies no particular constituency save the ends of the user—here denotes those outside the corridors of power who nonetheless interested and involved themselves in the workings of their government. The government, for its part, did not at all welcome such attention and participation. In his 1660 address to the Convention Parliament, Clarendon might have appealed for unity under the King by evoking the national traits of good manners, good humor and good nature—"Good Nature! A Virtue so peculiar to you, so appropriated by God Almighty to this Nation, that it can be translated into no other language: hardly practiced by any other People" (qtd. in Ollard, 233)—but apparently did not extend his notion of common cause and character to the ranks of the governed. In his 1661 speech to the Cavalier Parliament, he acknowledged that "the common people of England . . . are in truth the best and the honestest, aye, and the wisest common people in the world," but then declares that "they are not fit to model the government they are to live under, or to make the laws they are to obey"; such responsibilities, he says, are best left to "the greatest and learnedest and wealthiest and wisest persons that can be chose out of the nation"—to think otherwise would be to revive the republican delusions of the late commonwealth (qtd. in Haley, 29-30). To avoid putting such temptations before the people, Sir Roger L'Estrange,

Charles II's Surveyor of the Press, advocated total prohibition on the reporting of Parliamentary business: "I think it [news about the government and its deliberations] makes the Multitude too familiar with the actions and counsels of their superiors, too pragmatic and censorious, and gives them not only an itch but a kind of colorable right and license to be meddling with the government" (qtd. in Friedman, 4). Sir Roger was absolutely right, and despite the limited electorate—Haley estimates it at 300,000 or 20-25% of the adult male population (39)—the restrictions placed upon circulating petitions, and attempts to censor the popular press, "the people" managed to exert an ever-increasing pressure upon Whitehall and Westminster. Ministers, Parliamentarians, and their appointees might affect to slight the political savvy and will of the populace at large, but the fact of the matter was that after the Restoration politicians were more answerable to "the people" than ever before.

There seem to be three main reasons for this. First, the tumults of the 1640's and 1650's had provided a precedent for popular involvement in national politics. The conscription and movements of troops during the fighting, the change of governments, the imposition of Puritan religious and social legislation had broad local consequences throughout England. Most obviously, they brought home the conflict and the principles at stake to many thousands who might otherwise have been content to leave politics to politicians. For example, one anti-royalist ballad—and it is important to note that both the great balladists of this time and their intended audience were commoners—"Thanks to the Parliament" (1642), details the oppressiveness of the King's highhanded extraction of taxes and ship-money and his granting of business monopolies; it goes on to decry the "Catterpillers" and "filthy Birds" (stanza 6) gathered about the court, equating them and all of Parliament's foes with "Papists, Atheists, and the Hirarchie" (stanza 11). Royalist ballads, in addition to attacking the "usurping" Parliamentarians, tended to stress the moral confusion and loss of social cohesion resulting from the revolution. One ballad, one of several titled "The World Is Turned Upside Down" (April 1646), asserts that since the Puritans' decisive victory at Naseby ancient traditions of holiday camaraderie and of

noblesse oblige have been overturned. The balladist calls the Puritans' ban on the celebration of Christmas the work of latter-day Herods: "Command is given, we must obey, / And quite forget old Christmas day" (stanza 3). But the ban has had more sinister effects: "Our Lords and Knights, and Gentry too, / Doe mean old fashion to forgoe: / They set a porter at the gate, / That none must enter in thereat. . . . Hospitality it selfe is drown'd" (stanza 4). Other ballads took no side, but lamented the consequences of the war for the vulnerable poor. "Alas, Poor Tradesman" (1646) calls attention to the many shops closed for want of trade, to small, irregular wages, and to farmers' fields turned into armed camps. Only peace will save the poor from utter ruin. "The Good-Fellow's Complaint" (1647) cites a single specific grievance, the hardship caused by Parliament's 1643 excise tax on a multitude of goods, including food, liquor, and soap. Particularly galling to the author of this ballad is the tax on beer, making the poor man's comrade, counsellor, and narcotic either all but unaffordable or all but undrinkable. The ballad, as both Hyder E. Rollins and Friedman note, was until about 1647 not just a "translator" of upper class learning and culture for the newly or marginally literate (and their numbers and proficiency were increasing rapidly), but *the* major disseminator of news and commentary for a great range of classes. Though the news pamphlet surpassed the ballad in these respects, the emphasis on examining the particular, local consequences of the Revolution was not lost, and the results were seen in the rise of what Friedman calls an "alehouse culture" that was the equivalent of the more polite coffeehouse culture (5). In the January 24, 1649 issue of *The Perfect Weekly Account*, publisher George Horton commented, "In these days the meanest sort of people are not only able to write, but to argue and discourse on matters of the highest concernment and thereupon do desire that such things which are most remarkable may be truly committed to writing and made public" (qtd. in Friedman, 5). Having once encouraged balladists and pamphleteers to arouse popular loyalty to the King (first Charles I, then the exiled Charles II) and antipathy toward the Commonwealth and Cromwell, the restored royalists could not now stifle broad public interest in and comment

on political affairs. The Printing Act of 1662 was designed to restore order—that is, government control—over a press that had long ceased to be effectively regulated. Among the Act's provisions were a tight restriction on the number of masters, apprentices, and presses; the restriction of printing to London, Oxford, Cambridge, and York; and a requirement that all works had to be approved prior to publication by a Licenser appointed by the Secretary of State—transferring the power of supervising the press from the Stationers' Company to Parliament. However, though the Printing Act seemed to give the government a strong grip on the press, in practice the eruption of political controversy, such as that attending the fall of Clarendon or the Exclusion Crisis, made this act, like the 1680 proclamation banning all unofficial newspapers, largely irrelevant (Feather 51-53). Mere legislation could not confound the public's habitual scrutiny of their masters.

This attention intensified what Roy Porter calls the face-to-face nature of British society and politics in this period, the second factor in "the people's" growing influence on government. Porter notes, "People were set into the social strata not primarily by choice, or by 'faceless' bureaucracy and paper qualifications . . . but rather by their personal connexions with others, especially authority figures" (35). This was as true in London itself as it was in the country villages, and probably to greater practical effect. It was forbidden to disclose the contents of Parliamentary debates and before 1680 Parliament was even reluctant to publish a record of its daily votes. But, as Haley observes, it was impossible to prevent most Parliamentary business from becoming known: the houses of Parliament were, after all, adjacent to the law courts, giving lawyers and MP's a perfect place to exchange news and opinion; moreover, he adds, the fact that London was the heart of business and trade made inevitable the rise of close connections between merchants and politicians: merchants had to know enough about foreign policy to conduct their business wisely; politicians had to be sufficiently informed about the needs of England's traders to craft expedient diplomatic, colonial, and military policies (41-44). And such were the political and economic networks that bound the nation that the government's deliberations



and actions were soon known and commented on throughout the kingdom. Moreover, ministers and MP's could not be indifferent to the climate of opinion in London. The City's siding with Parliament during the Revolution had demonstrated as much, but in the years following its orgiastic reception of Charles II, London found itself increasingly at odds with the policies of the Administration, as in its successful call for the removal of Clarendon after the debacle of the Second Dutch War (1665-67), its desire for, then opposition to a third trade war with the Dutch (1672-74), its virulent opposition to the likely accession of James, its repeated refusal to convict Opposition leaders (notably Shaftesbury) charged with suborning the King, and its scrappy though ultimately doomed defense of its Charter in the early 1680's. Fraser notes that, heeding the lessons of the past, Charles II had a marked "preference for Windsor Castle as a royal fortress, not simply because it was [as Pepys described it] 'the most romantique castle that is in the world,' but because it could be properly garrisoned" (186).

Despite the fundamental distrust such actions display, the King, his Administration, and Parliament were quick to encourage popular participation (of a kind) in the business of government. Finding that the Printing Act of 1662 could not effectively control, let alone mute the printed expression of public opinion, Sir Roger L'Estrange, the Surveyor (or Licensor) of the Press, resorted to a wholly different strategy: using the press to put the Administration's case before the public. This was the function of the "official" newspapers, *The Kingdom's Intelligencer* (1660), *The Oxford* (later *London*) *Gazette* (1665), and L'Estrange's own *Observer* (1679). Though the success of these papers and their design was limited, their appearance marked a shrewd and socially significant shift in policy. Shrewd, because it made use of an explosive trend of the previous decade, the rise of coffeehouses as loci of political discussion and organization. Here the newspapers, pamphlets, and satires provided by the proprietors passed through many hands; thus, a single copy of a newspaper or political tract could be read and debated by dozens. According to *The Companion to the Diary of Samuel Pepys* (Ed. Robert Latham), by 1663

there were 82 coffeehouses in the city (and 500 by 1702) (70). Following the return of Charles II, the *Companion* observes, “clubs for political debate were closed or went underground; coffee-houses in a sense replaced them, becoming centres for the political malcontents in Restoration London” (71). At first, Clarendon favored shutting them down, then discovered that they could be used to promote his policies: “Pepys himself was in 1665 asked by Batten [the Surveyor of the Navy] to use the coffee-houses to put about stories of Dutch maltreatment of our seamen. They would there [Batten thought] ‘spread like the leprosy’” (*Companion* 71). The social significance of the shift from trying to proscribe newspapers (or coffeehouses) to employing them to popularize government policies lies in what it reveals about the Administration’s tacit acknowledgement of the role of “the people” in political affairs. Whether Whitehall liked it or not, popular opinion mattered: the days when Elizabeth or James I or Charles I could hope to awe the public with absolutist iconography were long over; as we shall see, during the middle decades of the seventeenth century political and economic power had drifted down the social ladder sufficiently to oblige the government to reason or cajole its subjects into compliance with its aims and means.

Increasingly, however, Whitehall was obliged not only to promote but to defend its policies against the competing, often antagonistic viewpoints of rival political groups, which in their turn had to make their positions clear and convincing to an ever more politically savvy public. Even at the zenith of Restoration euphoria the new government had not been a monolithic entity. Ollard, for example, cites the loathing of the Queen Mother and many royalists for Clarendon, slated to become Charles’ Lord Chancellor (219); the Cavalier Parliament had successfully opposed Charles and Clarendon’s general policies of political and religious toleration; Clarendon’s opponents in Parliament engineered his downfall and exile in 1667; and Parliament forced Charles to make first war then peace with the Dutch 1672-74. Yet it was the Exclusion Crisis of 1678-81 that occasioned the unambiguous appearance on the public stage of the political parties that had been nascent

since the fractious year of 1667. No longer were feuding politicians content to work behind the scenes at court or within Parliamentary parameters; increasingly, they sought to vindicate their positions with power of popular support. Opponents in both houses of Parliament to the Catholic James's likely inheritance of the throne had long tried to pressure the King to exclude his brother from the succession. When in 1678 there came to light a supposed plot to assassinate Charles and make England a Catholic state—the famed Popish Plot—Shaftesbury's so-called Country Party (later the Whigs, opposed by the Court Party—later the Tories—which supported James's succession) brought successive Exclusion Bills before Parliament (1679-81). Each was defeated, either by vote or by prorogation of Parliament, but the fact that the Country Party dared to bring in these bills at all can be accounted for only by its being able to tap the public's strong aversion to the prospect of a Catholic sovereign and its virulent bias against Catholics in general, which Shaftesbury tried to inflame as much as possible. Not only did he encourage a series of dubious witnesses to the ever-widening scope of the Plot (the Duke and Duchess of York were its masterminds; the Papists were planning wholesale massacres of Protestants), he engineered a number of "progresses" through the countryside of the Duke of Monmouth, Charles' illegitimate though personable and *Protestant* son, whom Shaftesbury styled as a plausible alternative to James. Though the Plot would be exposed as largely fraudulent, Shaftesbury imprisoned and ultimately exiled, and the Whigs disgraced and made to suffer for their disloyalty to Charles during the Tory Reaction of 1680-1683, the Exclusion Crisis had three important consequences for politics and political expression in England. First, as Haley points out, the issues it raised and the passions it excited involved unprecedented numbers of people in political processes (especially at the local level, as in the elections of 1679) and established "the principle that politics was a matter of widespread public concern" (45; 48). Second, it made political parties a permanent feature of English life. Since parties by nature derive their power from comparatively broad constituencies, it only follows that the forum for social and political debate would no longer be circumscribed

within the Whitehall-Westminster orbit. Third, with the Tories' inability (together with Charles' unwillingness) to silence Whig dissent even at the nadir of the latter's fortunes, it became apparent that an Opposition of some sort would probably be inevitable. And after all it might not be such a bad thing to have about: those in power would have a ready foil for their own policies, and, should they ever fall from power, they would have a platform from which to voice their own dissent. As Feather says, "Within a surprisingly short time [following the Exclusion Crisis], the idea of the legitimacy of opposition within the framework of the law was to be accepted as a part of the constitution" (Feather 54).

The rise of political parties and, more generally, the increasingly widespread interest and involvement in politics, had profound consequences for poetry during this period. For one thing, even as popular publications helped to create political awareness, broader public involvement in political and social debates created in its turn more opportunities and a greater audience for political statement and analysis. Much of this occurred in periodical publications, such as newspapers and newsbooks (both licensed and illicit). But even these, ubiquitous as they were, did not satisfy the public appetite for news and commentary, and they could not hope to quench its taste for spectacle, scandal, and wit after the culturally "grey" years of the *Interregnum*. This taste in fact worked to the advantage of political apologists for the Administration and its opponents, for people are more easily delighted than reasoned into belief. Thus following the Restoration both drama and poetry not only had unprecedented opportunities for direct public participation in political and social debates, but in fact were encouraged to take advantage of them. Consequently, playwrights and poets quickly became associated with the ideological affiliations of their political patrons: Dryden, Lee, Behn, and Tate generally wrote in support of the politics of the Court Party (later the Tories); Marvell, Shadwell, Settle, and Ravenscroft tended toward Country and later Whiggish circles. It would be wrong, however, to portray party loyalties in these days as either stable or dogmatic; personal connections rather than allegiance to abstract political doctrines (which in any case did not

exist, policy being much more situational than theoretical) determined party platform and membership. We should not be surprised, therefore, by Shadwell's frequent switches in allegiance, or by the Whiggish Earl of Dorset's long patronage and protection of Dryden. Of course, changes in loyalty and affiliation were seized upon as fit subjects for scorn: at the Restoration, for example, the impossibility of finding anyone who had ever been loyal to the Commonwealth and Cromwell was the frequent object of sardonic comment, as were those who defected from Whiggism during the Tory Reaction of the 1680's. But such attacks only throw into relief another effect of party or oppositional politics upon contemporary literature, the chance it gave poets and playwrights to establish distinct public personæ. Not only were men of letters political beings in themselves, they served as convenient targets for those who did not wish to risk attacking their political patrons directly. Why be so foolish as to express one's doubts about the King's Protestant orthodoxy when one could safely attack the religious constituency of the Tory Party—or safer still, the religious views of its literary spokesmen? In this way writers' lives, characters, talents, and opinions became subtly detached from those of their patrons, and they emerged as figures in their own right on the sociopolitical stage. Further, the public, oppositional politics of the age gave poetry and poets two things that they needed to stake a claim to public attention—issues and targets—and thereby encouraged poetry to become topical and satirical. A populace craving the latest news about its latest concerns well rewarded the efforts of balladists and other writers of occasional poetry. So popular was such poetry, Feather observes, that the demand for it in London and in the provinces helped create “what were to be some of the most notable characteristics of the [book] trade in the eighteenth century: national distribution, complex multiple ownership of copyrights, and joint production and wholesaling” (60); and A.N. Wiley argues that the prologues and epilogues written for the theatre in this period were “chronicles of the times with an editorial tone, hectoring comments upon parties and audiences, critical reviews of events and art in relation to the theatre, and discourses upon [political and religious] recantation”

(xxxvii). The hectoring Wiley cites constitutes but one manifestation of the Restoration cult of wit, and it was wit in the form of satire that made poetry politically useful and publicly fashionable. Directed at political enemies, poetic rivals, current events, or popular taste and trends, well-executed satire could skewer an opponent far more effectively than prohibition, violence, or even reasoned response. Moreover, the satirist himself could set up for “a man of parts.” Wiley says, “Scribblers took up the trade, and many a gallant sought a place in the society of wits because he had composed a prologue” (xxviii). This points to the final but by no means least significant consequence of public politics for poetry, that it encouraged more people—and people of more widely varying social origins—to take up the pen. Indeed, it would not be overstating the matter to say that the post-Restoration political scene called for a class of poets yet to be seen in England, one by nature antithetical to the interests, loyalties, and worldviews of the aristocratic amateur.

The emergence of party politics signalled that a new historical moment was at hand, requiring a new poetic response. But the forces behind and unleashed by party politics tended, moreover, to insure that this new response could be achieved: on one hand the new pressures they exerted upon England’s upper classes tended to undermine the traditional structures of patronage; on the other, their consequences for the middling classes changed the way the upper classes—their role in national affairs, their cultural authority, and their æsthetic values—were seen by their social inferiors. Taken together, these political and social pressures would superintend the professionalization of politics and (indirectly) of poetry as well, resulting in the eclipse of the aristocratic amateur in both fields in late seventeenth-century England.

We have already seen that the terms of the Restoration and the precarious position of the King—Fraser notes that the Court was suffused with “the implicit fear of another revolution” (186)—forced Charles II and his Administration to proceed with great circumspection as they moved to consolidate the Crown’s position in English politics and society, and further, that this caution, together with the tactic of taking their case to “the

people” in order to foster support for the Crown, created a political atmosphere in which party (as opposed to merely factional) politics could thrive. If the relation of Crown to Parliament and People was not quite what it had been, neither were the relations of the nobility and gentry to national politics, nor that of the several social tiers to one another. At the Restoration the upper classes resumed their political role, but that role had changed, for the nature of politics itself had changed, inasmuch as the Restoration Settlement pushed Charles and Clarendon toward constitutional rather than absolutist government. The Court was again the center of political culture, but with this difference, that this culture was no longer self-contained, for the expansion of political involvement in the 1660’s and 1670’s meant that the devising and implementation of policy now involved a good deal of personal and public politicking. The complexities of party politics required its practitioners to devote ever-increasing amounts of personal wealth and time to stand for elections and promote the policies they favored; in addition, rhetorical, organizational, and procedural skill and expertise were now more useful to the politician than title, family, or wealth. One consequence of this shift was the rise of what J.R. Jones calls “a new synthetic oligarchy,” that is “an upper class with the capacity to absorb and assimilate the most successful elements and individuals” (71). The success of this new “synthetic” class was often at the expense of the aristocracy’s traditional influence on political affairs; in fact, Jones observes, “the greatest political careers of the period were all of men who did not originally belong to the topmost social section” (83). What is more, this new class of politicians (among them Clarendon, Savile, Osborne, and Clifford) consisted of what Kenyon terms “careerists” (204)—that is, of men who practiced politics as professionals, as advocates for particular policies, rather than as representatives of any single social class, and this is true even for those, like Buckingham, who did belong to the topmost level of society.

Apart from the expansion of political involvement brought about by the rise of parties (and perhaps at the back of this rise), two relatively new developments facilitated the professionalization of politics. The first was England’s increasing role in world affairs. At

the beginning of the seventeenth century, England was, compared to the great powers on the Continent—particularly Spain, Italy, and France—a very minor power indeed, a political and cultural backwater; by the century's end, however, England's influence on Continental affairs had substantially increased; she had emerged, with France, as a major new colonial power, and had eclipsed Holland as the premier maritime and trading power in Europe. England's ruling classes, and especially its politicians and diplomats could no longer be provincial in outlook, could no longer view their estates, let alone their counties, as economically autonomous, self-contained entities. The world had become too politically and economically interconnected. Nor could high-level diplomacy or the administration of trade be left to dilettantes. Whatever their social origins, England's politicians came by necessity to emerge as a professional class and to see themselves as such.

This trend was underscored by a second major development, the accelerating social and political importance of commerce and those who financed and managed it. As a group, Jones says, "the mercantile and urban retailing interests increased in importance, and an entirely new social class, the 'monied interest,' gained in prominence, wealth and influence" (71). Their success came at the expense of the lesser nobility and minor landed gentry, whose property kept them well fed, but comparatively impoverished: because of a depressed land market and a drop in tenants and (therefore) in rents, they could not raise the capital needed to improve their holdings or to increase their local spheres of influence; they could not afford the London houses, the grand tours for their sons, hefty dowries for their daughters, or to stand for Parliamentary elections (Jones 73-75). They would become increasingly disaffected and their disaffection, Jones reports, would make them politically active and, taken collectively, a force to be reckoned with during local elections (73). But they could not hope to compete in influence with the merchants and traders who were the mainstay of English commerce and colonialism, or, especially, with the financiers and bankers—lately emerged from the ranks of the goldsmiths, merchants, and scriveners—whose underwriting of the national debt made their interests a major factor in the shaping of



major government policies (Jones 91). The success of the commercial classes encouraged the professionalization of politics in several ways. Most generally, the “new” ethic of getting and spending fostered an atmosphere of economic and occupational careerism. Government itself was becoming a business. Not only was the acquisition, holding, and transfer of political offices a commercial proposition in itself—many offices and appointments could be made obscenely lucrative and were bought and sold at great expense and profit; with the founding of the Bank of England, which encouraged investment in the national debt, the government in effect became a grand public stock company. There was a consequent shift in its theory of how its subjects might be governed. Whereas heretofore men might be expected to obey either in deference to the divine right of kings or out of fear of the sovereign’s power to compel obedience, the commercial ethic now made obedience largely a matter of economic self-interest. What Jones calls the new “morality of interest” (81) meant that “the traditional values of honour and loyalty, appropriate to castes determined by birth, implicit obedience to legitimate authority, acceptance of an overriding divine providential dispensation of human affairs, could no longer be relied upon” (80). Put another way, politicians were becoming identified with and answerable for the success or failure of the policies they promoted, rather than with (and for) their social class, for politics now turned upon the axis of pragmatism rather than the perquisites of privilege.

The upshot of these developments is that though in theory the professionalization of politics in the decades following the Restoration should have left the upper classes with more time to enjoy the pleasures of rank and to patronize the arts, in practice the lesser nobility and gentry were unable to do this, and those classes which could were by necessity and temperament preoccupied with the business of government and with the governing of their business. Among the ruling classes there was comparatively little time and money for literary patronage of the sort practiced by the Court and the great noble families (such as the Sidneys) in the first half of the century. It is significant, after all, that the most active patrons of poetry following the Restoration were, with the exception of Buckingham (and

perhaps Shaftesbury, if he was ever more than a passive patron), bit players in the political drama unfolding with the Restoration, though as a group they did attempt to play a part as arbiters of literary sensibility. Literary patronage in England had never been fully realized as an institution, as it had been (and still was) in France, where, Rykwert notes, Louis XIV had established an academy for the training of artists (4), and where poets such as the great Boileau were heavily subsidized by the Court. Bush with good reason calls Charles I “the last English sovereign who was a real patron of letters” (29), yet during the reigns of the first two Stuarts, Burner points out, the poet in search of a patron often went begging. The nobleman’s “often half-hearted bequest, appointment, gift, or offer of room and board to the author” was not enough to make the wooing of gentle patrons a gainful pastime; nor did the new gentry recruited from the commerce-generated *nouveaux riches* provide a more stable living—such patrons might commemorate their social ascent by paying poets for one-time dedications, but they seldom patronized one poet over a long period of time (Burner x). Jonson, who secured steady patronage from James I and William Cavendish, Duke of Newcastle, is an exception that proves the rule of literature’s haphazard subsidization before the Puritan revolution.

The political and commercial preoccupations of the patron classes after the Restoration merely made patronage still more haphazard. Charles II was, as we have seen, a friend to the arts and sciences, yet his enthusiasm could not overcome his empty pockets or the distractions of governing a land made restive by plague, fire, war, dissent, and an explosive exclusion crisis. His Laureate, John Dryden, was the leading poet of the day, yet the latter’s pension was frequently in arrears, forcing Dryden not only to seek other sources of income but to postpone and finally abandon the undertaking of an epic that might have been a serious rival to Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. Dryden grouses in *A Discourse Upon Satire* (1692) that “being encourag’d only with fair words by King Charles II, my little salary ill paid, and no prospect of a future subsistence, I was then discourag’d in the beginning of my attempt; and now age has overtaken me, and want, a more insufferable evil, thro’ the

change of the times, has wholly disenabled me” (291b). Only one of Charles’ commissions was paid promptly—the £100 he gave Dryden for “The Medal” (1682). Moreover, though the restored upper classes might have liked to fancy themselves the guardians of arts and culture against Puritan philistinism, Dryden received only one noble commission during his long career: from the Earl of Abingdon, for an elegy, *Eleonora* (1692), commemorating his deceased wife. Compounding the political, commercial, and (for the lesser nobility and gentry) financial distractions of potential patrons was the sheer volume of publication in this period. Bush relates that by 1640 some 600 individual works were being published yearly, and that these numbers “greatly increased” between 1640 and 1660 (27)—as the 23,000 ballads, newsbooks, and pamphlets collected during those two decades by George Thomason (apart from all other publication) would indicate. Even when the numbers of such ephemera declined following the Restoration, the number of plays and poems being written still exceeded the capacity of the patron classes to support them. Given the political nature of many of these plays, it is possible, even probable that the expansion of political interest and the rise of party politics served to glut the patronage “market,” thus undermining the traditional relationship between the individual patron and poet. Now the party, or, more broadly, the public at large would be a more reliable source of income and influence.

This is not to say that literary patronage was dead in England. Far from it; it would in fact survive into the Romantic era: Wordsworth himself was supported by a series of benefactors and even received public assistance as well under the Civil List Act (1837). But the nature of patronage had changed with the temper of the times. It, too, had become almost a wholly pragmatic affair. There was far less inclination now to subsidize literature and art for their own sakes (or rather, for the patron’s second-hand glory of basking in the genius of the writer or painter) or even for the aggrandizement of the patron’s family. In the field of painting, Murdoch observes, there was after the Restoration, particularly after the founding of the Royal Society in 1662, an emphasis on authenticity in the portrayal of the

natural and human worlds (261). The empirical method, applied to drawing and painting, was indispensable for recording “the physical appearance of places, of their flora and fauna,” for “communicat[ing] knowledge about the face and resources of the country,” and for reducing confusion and doubt to order: “The pandemonium of London, the mystery or taint of superstition clinging to the ruined aisle of abbey, the Medusa-like power of the Knaresborough Dropping Well, became accessible to the light of reason when presented with such calm and analytical intelligence” (258-259). Such realism and rationalism were not necessarily the aim of post-Restoration dramatists and poets and their patrons, but their ends—often, the touting of a political figure or policy or the vilification of such—were no less practical. In this age of occasional politics, it only made sense to patronize poetry (or drama) that would serve the cause at hand. Poets were quick to adapt to this new ethic: whereas the patron-poetry of Ben Jonson’s day (for instance, *To Penshurst*) might praise a noble family’s lineage, character (especially its liberality), and wise management of its holdings, the corresponding poems of our period might praise such things, but make a particular point of lauding the political acumen of their subjects, as Marvell does for Cromwell in “The First Anniversary of the Government Under His Highness the Lord Protector” (1655), Denham for Monck in “A Panegyric on His Excellency, the Lord General George Monck” (1659), and Dryden for Clarendon in “To My Lord Chancellor” (1662). In defamatory poems, on the other hand, the subject’s politics become the poet’s butt, as does the Duchess of York’s unscrupulous machinations in Marvell’s *The Last Instructions to a Painter* (1667, published 1689), or the Trimmers’ supposed equivocation in Dryden’s first epilogue to *The Duke of Guise* (1683). Such praise and blame cannot be dismissed as mere sycophancy or malice, for one must remember that poets were themselves increasingly involved in current social and political debates; as such, it was their business to articulate political values and policies they themselves supported. In this sphere as in those of government and commerce, deference to bloodlines and the aristocratic character became subordinate to political and economic self-interest.

We might be justified in raising an eyebrow at the apparent cynicism of such motives were it not for a further consideration that served to alter the traditional attitudes of patron and poet toward one another—the craft of poetry itself. Here, too, the political and social consequences of the “popularization” of politics played an important, if less evident role. In Sidney’s day, a nobleman such as himself could write a treatise on the discipline of poetry with seeming insouciance because the circles of poetry, patronage, and politics more or less coincided with that of the Court. That is, these things were the aristocrat’s prerogative either to practice or support. Sidney himself was proficient in all three, but the fact that his class set the rules for these disciplines meant that he could move with confidence among them without risking his authority as poet, patron, or states-man. And in any case, since he did not style himself a poet exclusively, but as a humanist, soldier, and courtier as well, he could pronounce upon æsthetics with the assured nonchalance of the gentlemanly amateur. Following the Restoration, however, the complexities of professionalized and popularized politics left the relationship between poetry and patronage in something of a muddle. As I have noted above, the business of government increasingly fell to specialists, careerists; in practice, this meant that those among the upper classes who were most active as patrons tended to have relatively minor political roles, for a minor role in government meant that one would have the time and money to devote oneself to the arts. Rochester, for instance, fought bravely in the Second Dutch War and in 1667 took his seat in the House of Lords. But he sought no career in either soldiering or statecraft; Vieth is right to argue that after 1670 “the real story of Rochester’s life becomes increasingly the story of his gradual development as a poet” (xxvi). He was a friend of Buckingham and Shaftesbury and aligned himself with their Country Party, but he never distinguished himself as a forceful spokesman for their ideals (though as a courtier and favorite of Charles II he had no peer.) Much the same might be observed of the circle of courtly wits in Rochester’s orbit: Sedley, Dorset, Mulgrave, and Killigrew among them. Thus there was a good deal at stake for the aristocrat, such as Rochester, who identified himself

primarily as a patron and poet when the rise of party politics encouraged, as we have seen, the greater participation of poets—and of the untitled poets at that—in public affairs. For the matter came down to this: Who now had the authority to define and defend the “proper” mode, manner, and matter of poetry, the aristocratic amateurs whose province poetry had been since the time of Wyatt, or the emerging class of professionals who wrote for the public?

I shall detail the clash of poetic amateur and professional in the final section of this chapter; at this point I wish only to draw attention to this struggle’s consequences for the patron-poet relationship, particularly its consequences for public poetry. Perhaps most important was an estrangement between aristocrat and professional that had its origins in an oblique conflict of class occasioned by the expansion of political involvement. Perhaps threatened by the encroachment of professional poets upon their prerogative, the circle of wits at the court of Charles II turned its back on the “new” mode of public poetry and upon public poets as well. The case of Dryden is especially instructive. Though Dryden enjoyed the patronage of Dorset and Mulgrave and for a time courted Rochester as a patron, when he himself attempted to employ the bawdy mode of courtly wit in his prologues, plays, and conversation, he was rebuked for his presumption. In Rochester’s “An Allusion to Horace” (1675-6), for example, the Court’s leading wit sneers:

Dryden in vain tried this nice way of wit,  
For he to be a tearing blade thought fit.  
But when he would be sharp, he still was blunt:  
To frisk his frolic fancy, he’d cry, “Cunt!”  
Would give the ladies a dry bawdy bob,  
And thus he got the name of Poet Squab (ll. 71-76).

Even Dorset, whom Dryden cherished as a true friend and who several times saved the poet from poverty and the Whig backlash of 1688-89, was not above lampooning his loyal dependent. An anonymous poem attributed to Dorset, “To Mr. Bays” (1686), viciously assaults Dryden’s recent conversion to Roman Catholicism, labelling the poet a “mercenary renegade,” “slave,” “changeling,” and “knave”—in just the first two lines. Like many

others at the time, Dorset apparently thought that Dryden had converted on the accession of James II in order to ingratiate himself with the new, openly Catholic king. It is not surprising, then, that Dorset questions the sincerity of Dryden's conversion; it is somewhat startling that Dorset would link this presumed insincerity with flawed poetic invention: he goes on to assert that Dryden's new faith "suits with thy poetic genius best" (l. 12), for, immersed in the mysteries of Catholicism he may, "[His] mind disused to truth may'st entertain / With tales more monstrous, fanciful, and vain / Than e'en thy poetry could ever feign" (ll. 14-16). In his biography of Dryden, James Anderson Winn provides a plausible explanation for such attacks on Dryden's wit, arguing in the case of Rochester's squib that it is "likely to be a complex example of the class prejudice his friend Buckingham held for both Arlington and Dryden." He continues,

Buckingham, Sedley, and Rochester engaged in acts of public violence, drunkenness, and obscenity and wrote verses that were not merely suggestive but deliberately disgusting. At some level, they evidently believed that they were above the law, which rarely punished them for their excesses, above ordinary morality, above literary criticism. What they may actually have resented in Dryden, then, was not his failure to emulate their literary style but his success. If a plainspoken Northamptonshire squire could write such courtly lyrics as those in *Marriage A-la-Mode*, the claim that the ability to write such lyrics was a matter of aristocratic birth was clearly damaged (226).

These two brief examples demonstrate, I think, that whatever the personal relationship between Dryden and Rochester or Dryden and Dorset, for the two noblemen there were important social distinctions to be maintained between themselves and the poets they patronized. The effect of such rebuffs—certainly in Dryden's case, but probably more generally as well—was to impel the professional poet away from the tight exclusivity of the Court and toward the public sphere. There at least the poet, whatever his condition, could expect to be judged on his merits and his message, rather than his social origins alone.

This estrangement had two other notable consequences for public poetry. For one thing, it hastened the divorce between the Courtly and public modes. Taking Rochester as

an emblem for the former, we can trace in his erotic lyrics a lineage of sensibility that goes back to Wyatt. Much had happened to the erotic lyric since Wyatt's time; that poet's scorn of love's trappings gave way in the sonnets of Sidney and to a lesser extent Spenser to an idealization of love and the loved one. Shakespeare had little truck with neo-Platonism; the tone of his sonnets to his "dark lady" marks a shift toward the erotic pragmatism that would, with the exception of Donne, become characteristic of the Courtly lyric from Jonson onward. This pragmatism could encompass both the warm familiarity of Herrick and the flippancy of Carew. When the Courtly lyric, in eclipse during the Commonwealth and Protectorate years, resurfaced after the Restoration it had become decadent, not so much in form (the fate of the poetry of Donne's imitators) as in its hyperbolic posturing. For Rochester, the pose of extreme erotic cynicism has become an end in itself. Thus in his song, "Love a woman? You're an ass!," Rochester embroiders the traditional lover's farewell to love with a self-destructive resolve that would not have occurred to Wyatt: "Farewell, woman! I intend / Henceforth every night to sit / With my lewd, well-natured friend, / Drinking to engender wit" (ll. 9-12). Wyatt protested that he was weary of love; Rochester's persona has no quarrel with either love or lover, but with the tedium of life itself: once carnal love has become "a most insipid passion" (l. 2), a new pleasure—the mirth of sleepless, drunken men—must be sought out and exhausted. And whereas Wyatt's retreat from woman's love occasioned the embracing of a stoic virtue or the "manly" pleasures of mind, Rochester's only leads him to another fleshly extreme, though it is but the logical end of the Renaissance idealization of masculine friendship: "There's a sweet, soft page of mine," he boasts, "Does the trick worth forty wenches" (15-16). It is rather more than ironic that Rochester's marriage to Elizabeth Malet was a happy one, and his poems to her are touching examples of simple, unequivocal affection. But Rochester's great satires are veined with the disgusted hopelessness of his erotic lyrics. "A Ramble in St. James Park" (March 1672/3; published 1680), for example, reduces the bustle of London to a single wearily predictable motive: "Much wine had passed, with grave



discourse / Of who fucks who, and who does worse" (ll. 1-2); and Rochester's best-known satire, "A Satyr Against Reason and Mankind" (1675/6; 1679), posits worldly pleasure as humanity's end—"Our sphere of action is life's happiness, / And he who thinks beyond, thinks like an ass" (ll. 96-7)—concluding with the shrewd but dead-end observation that "Man differs more from man, than man from beast" (l. 221). Though Restoration playwrights fed a general public appetite for sexual cynicism and naughtiness, in its caustic worldliness and coarse diction Rochester's poetry is really contrary to the ethos of Restoration society at large—not in kind, perhaps, but in degree. It is entirely in synch, however, with the atmosphere of the Court, and in fact its extremities might be accounted for by the audience Rochester intended for it, the closed circle of wits, rakes, and risqué ladies in waiting. As such his poetry is, as I have pointed out above, at most only semi-public in mode. The wit, irony, and keenness of observation that might have been unleashed upon the public realm to devastating effect are thus circumscribed, kept from the public eye, by the aristocratic impulse toward cohesion and withdrawal.

A second consequence of the Wits' inward turning follows closely upon this one—the acceleration of the public's loss of esteem for Courtly refinements. What Jones terms "the cosmopolitan court" and the "unfashionable country" (71) had long been distrustful of another, and at least on the side of the country this distrust deepened as the lot of the lesser nobility and gentry worsened and the excesses of Charles II's court became known. The Court scandalized even the more worldly Londoners. Admirer of Charles II though he was, John Evelyn could not refrain from commenting that although Charles had "brought in a politer way of living," refinement soon "passed to Luxurie and intollerable expense," though he graciously ascribes the decadence of Charles' life to the influence of "crafty men, and some abandoned and prophane wretches, who corrupted his otherwise sufficient parts" (318-19). Certainly the drunken antics of Rochester, Sedley, and the rest did nothing to endear the Courtly circle to commercial, middle-class London: the debauched fop became perhaps the favorite target of scorn and derision for Restoration play-goers. The Anglican

Church, trying mightily to make itself once again relevant to the lives of its congregations, “promoted,” says Rykwert, “a great distaste for court life among the the upright and squires, however loyal they were to the crown” (35). This moral disaffection without doubt diminished what appetite for and emulation of the Courtly mode yet remained. Left over from the Interregnum and the middle-class Puritan impulse to reform education, “to replace the old, abstract, aristocratic, and ‘useless’ studies with the modern, concrete, popular, and useful” (Bush 21), was a pragmatism that revelled at the promises of the New Science and its methods, which might, many believed, be “applied to the study of society and government” (Jones 81). The nobleman’s education, which, Burner claims, emphasized the acquisition of cultural polish over that of “practical” knowledge (9), seemed irrelevant, even antithetical, to a society increasingly preoccupied with the empirical and theoretical knowledge that would help solve the real-world problems arising from the growth of trade, commerce, and empire. In such an atmosphere a decline in the public’s estimation of Courtly poetry was more than likely. Miscellanies of poems by “gentle hands” had been popular since Tottel published his first collection in 1557; it is telling, however, that the series of six miscellanies Jacob Tonson published 1684-1709 tended to feature occasional poetry and translations of the Greek and Roman poets rendered by professional men and women of letters rather than lyrics in the courtly mode, the one major exception being several of Matthew Prior’s love poems. The Courtly mode still rankled, apparently, when Pope wrote *An Essay on Criticism* (1711), for he characterizes the days of Charles II as “the fat Age of Pleasure, Wealth, and Ease”: “*Jilts* rul’d the State, and Statesmen *Farces* writ; / Nay *Wits* had *Pensions*, and *young Lords* had *Wir*: / The Fair sate panting at a *Courtier’s Play*, / And not a Mask went *un-improv’d* away” (ll. 538-41).

As a result, then, of the continued decline of the institution of patronage, or rather, its reconstitution along political lines, and the growing estrangement between noble and professional poets, the latter were given a strong incentive to turn away from the Courtly mode and master the public; further, the disaffection between the Court and the Church and

“people,” undermined the cultural authority of the class that had long defined and superintended the craft of poetry. Perhaps in no way is this shift, and the parallel shifts in political and economic authority, more evident than in the oft-cited replacement of the noble patron by the commercial publisher as the author’s primary means of support. One classic statement describing the patron-to-publisher transition is found in Watt’s *The Rise of the Novel* (1957). Watt has the novel in mind here, but his words apply to the business of literature in general in this period:

By the beginning of the eighteenth century, the booksellers, especially those in London, had achieved a financial standing, a social prominence, and a literary importance considerably greater than that of either their forebears or their counterparts abroad. They had among their number several knights (Sir James Hodges, Sir Francis Gosling, Sir Charles Corbett), High Sheriffs (Henry Lintot) and Members of Parliament (William Strahan); and many of them, such as the Tonsons, Bernard Lintot, Robert Dodsley and Andrew Millar, consorted with the great figures of London life. Together with some of the printers they owned or controlled all the main channels of opinion, newspapers, magazines and critical reviews, and were thus well placed to secure advertising and favourable reviewing for their wares. This virtual monopoly of the channels of opinion also brought with it a monopoly of writers. For, despite the efforts to allow independent access of authors to the public made by the Society for the Encouragement of Learning, ‘The Trade’ remained the only fruitful form of publication for the author (53).

It was the booksellers, Watts concludes, who “[removed] literature from the control of patronage and [brought] it under the control of the laws of the market-place” (55-6). The growth of the book trade in the second half of the seventeenth century was indeed pronounced, as John Feather’s *A History of British Publishing* (1988) makes clear, and as an alternative to the systems of patronage it was to prove, as I have already hinted, a major factor in the rise of public poetry. But it is also important to observe that throughout this century the book trade (and its commercial ethos) was in one way or another at the back of the political and social forces that, coming together when and as they did, created the opportunity for the public mode in poetry to take hold.

To step back for a moment into the sixteenth century, the broad dissemination of printed matter at the time of the English Reformation, the subsequent spread of “practical” literature (such as almanacs, prognostications, and technical manuals), and the Tudor dynasty’s use of printing to promote its policies not only created a perpetually broader reading public (the availability of books and pamphlets reinforcing existing literacy while fostering its expansion as well as the demand for yet more printed matter), but over time made literacy itself necessary and desirable in a nation that, as Feather notes (24), was yet primarily oral in nature. The extent of literacy in the sixteenth and seventeenth (and for that matter the eighteenth) centuries is widely contested, since the definition of “literacy” itself is in question. It has been variously described as the ability to write one’s name, to participate in literate culture (for instance, by comprehending, considering, and acting upon the written word read aloud), to read and write “simple continuous prose,”<sup>2</sup> or, for the educated in this time, the ability to read and write Latin and Greek. But it seems to me that arguments over percentages or broad theoretical definitions of literacy are rather beside the point. Friedman takes the right approach, I think, when he observes of the years 1640-1660 that “the great volume of such publications [broadsides, pamphlets, newsbooks] certainly indicates a larger readership than the smaller amount of fine poetry, drama, and prose published, all of which reached very few people, . . . but which are often used as mirrors of the age” (xiii). For regardless of the exact numbers of men and women who could be considered sophisticated readers, it occurs to me that the heart of the matter lies in the general impact of the published word across the spectrum of a given society. As much as anything, literacy may be considered a habit of mind, a way of recording and organizing one’s perceptions about the world. Literate or generally literate societies differ in this respect from oral ones. In the former it is the printed word rather than the spoken that has authority as a documenting medium, and it is in the middle of the seventeenth century that the sheer

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<sup>2</sup> This is Feather’s phrase (95), but not his definition.

volume of published matter suggests that England had “turned the corner” and become a predominantly literate society. *Predominantly literate*—if Friedman’s study of the pulp press during the 1640’s and 1650’s demonstrates anything, it is the truth of Walter Ong’s observation that members of “functionally oral cultures” do not “feel themselves situated at every moment of their lives in abstract computed time of any sort” (97), nor do they regard the past (or present) “as an itemized terrain, peppered with verifiable and disputed ‘facts’ or bits of information” (98). Hence it was easy for the average Englishman alive during the Civil War and Interregnum years to believe in the veracity of “ancient” prophecies, or reports of the appearance of monsters or prodigies of nature, or more generally that in allowing the murder of one king and the ecstatic restoration of another Providence was fulfilling its special design for England. The habits of belief fostered by centuries of oral tradition die hard. But what we must realize is that for the first time on a large scale, the printed word and image—in ballads, newsbooks, and pamphlets—were used to describe and explain the disturbing, confounding events that were roiling the nation; for the first time, the mass-replicated word put in its bid for historical and interpretational authority; more important, such authority was at last believed to reside in the published account.

This was to have important practical consequences. MacLean is right to underscore the anxiety of the Jacobean and Caroline courts about the levelling power of print (xii), for as Ong argues, one of the many social effects of print is that it “eventually reduce[s] the appeal of iconography in the management of knowledge, despite the fact that the early ages of print put iconographic illustrations into circulation as they had never been before” (130). For all the heroic and absolutist imagery with which Court poets and portraitists garnished the early Stuart monarchs, the printed word (and image) itself was, ironically, to undercut the mysteries of royal power and glory without which absolutism cannot gain acceptance in the popular imagination. “Print,” says Ong, “create[s] a new sense of private ownership of words” (131), particularly after the emergence of a sizable reading public (as in this period) grown sufficiently sophisticated to be able to “deal with certain more or less established

points of view" (Ong 135). In short order this sense of ownership displaces authority from the sovereign to the word itself, meaning that those who write, read, and reflect upon the words before them become in a real sense politically empowered. Surely it is not simply coincidence that the rise of a sizable reading public in the middle decades of the seventeenth century was followed at the Restoration by the general shift of political and economic power away from an "iconographic" sovereign and aristocracy toward, as we have seen, Kenyon's "careerist" ministers, Jones's "new synthetic oligarchy," and the new magnates created by the expansion of finance and trade, from the notion of politics and administration being the prerogative of the Court to their being the product of debate conducted in public via the pamphlet, play, and poem. This shift was probably aided after the Restoration by the New Science, which in effect if not in intention challenged the authority of the Church, thereby eroding in turn much of the authority upon which claims of divine right had long rested. Ong argues that the technology permitting "the new exactly repeatable visual statement" (i.e. printed pictures replicating the natural world in realistically minute detail) was responsible for modern science: "What is distinctive of modern science is the conjuncture of exact observation and exact verbalization: exactly worded descriptions of carefully observed complex objects and processes" (127). He places the perfection of this technology after the Romantic age (127-8), but if we recall Murdoch's point about the empiricism of drawing following the Restoration or take a moment to review the topographical prints and cityscapes of, say, Hollar, dating from the mid-seventeenth century, we know that this technology and the way of seeing it encourages were well developed by that century's end. If, as Bacon asserted, knowledge is power, the popularization of the printed word and image gave the ordinary Englishman unprecedented access to knowledge, and thereby the potential for a social and political influence to which he had been wholly unaccustomed.

So much for the general effects of print. Among its more specific consequences are the possibilities it creates for the rise of a vigorous trade in published matter. "Alphabet

letter-press print, in which each letter was cast in a separate piece of metal, or type, marked a psychological breakthrough of the first order,” says Ong. “It embedded the word itself deeply in the manufacturing process and made it into a kind of commodity” (118). Indeed, as Feather reminds us, publication is only possible if relatively large runs of any single title are undertaken, and large editions are unlikely to be produced unless the publisher can be reasonably assured of a market and of the means of supplying it (15). Put simply, publication means mass production; it means making an author’s work broadly available for purchase by people he or she does not know and will never meet; it means writing for the express purpose of publication, of putting one’s words before as many people as possible; it comes to mean creating a public persona (or public personæ) quite distinct from that one puts on among familiar company, for we are never in our words what we seem when actually present; and it means that the public learns to read an author according to the personæ he or she creates, for we read acquaintances by the light of shared experience, and strangers by their words alone. When literature becomes a commodity, authors as well as their works are brought to market—as, to a large extent, are the tastes and expectations of the audience. This is the power of commerce, its ability to shape, satisfy, and perpetuate the tastes and expectations of its clientele, in whom resides final authority over what sells and what does not, whether the product in question is clothing, furniture—or the words of a poet. The writer therefore must learn to “read” his audience (no longer a nobleman or group of noblemen, but the anonymous ranks of those who buy or read published works), must respond to it even as he teaches its members to read both him and the world about them. In sum, as the spread of print tends to displace (or at least diffuse) political and social power, so does the marketing of literature shift æsthetic authority from narrow aristocratic cliques to the authors themselves, and, more generally, to those who buy and read their works. Such “marketplace democracy” may be obvious to us, but it was not as obvious in the late seventeenth century, well before the advent of consumer culture. Nor was it necessarily the desirable thing, so far as the writers themselves were concerned. None

would have wanted to see himself as a “producer” of a “commodity,” and none would have cherished the notion of writing “for the people”—let alone acknowledge that the book-buying, play-going public had any say in his practice of the poetic craft. Thus Rochester in “An Allusion to Horace” is able to slight Dryden and Crowne with their own popularity: “’Tis therefore not enough when your false sense / Hits the false judgement of an audience / Of clapping fools” (ll. 12-14). In his preface to *The Spanish Fryar* (1681), Dryden himself looks back on some of the bombastic passages of his heroic dramas and says (not quite convincingly), “I knew they were bad enough to please, even when I writ them. But I repent of them amongst my sins . . . and am resolved I will settle myself no reputation by the applause of fools” (276-77). As Kathleen Lynch observes in her biography of the publisher Jacob Tonson, “In Tonson’s lifetime there was an aristocracy of taste as well as an aristocracy of blood” (138). But this aristocracy, unlike its blood counterpart, learned at length that to survive it had to suffer the scrutiny and judgement of “the people.”

The link between author and audience was supplied by the publishers and book dealers (who at this time were usually one and the same, selling books directly to the public from their shops). Watt (above) and others are right to observe that publishers came to replace noble patrons as the mainstay of men and women of letters, and that in this transition the commercial contract between publisher and poet succeeded the personal bond between a poet and his patron. But these observations need to be fleshed out a bit. We are likely at this time of day, when international conglomerates control an overwhelming percentage of the communications industry and publishing houses are mere subsidiaries of subsidiaries, to regard the profit motive with suspicion. It is the lust for profits, after all, that justifies the corporate cynicism behind the “blockbuster” movies and “bestseller” books marketed to our basest appetites. But if we cannot put aside our suspicions when dealing with the publishers of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, we must at least qualify them somewhat, for though profit was indeed their motive, their role in shaping their society and its literature was more complex—and vastly greater—than that of their



modern-day counterparts. The problem of distributing the comparatively large editions that printing forced on them (because of the cost and labor involved in publishing a work it was simply not feasible to produce only a few copies), required them to develop trade networks and markets throughout London and from London to the provinces. Their success in this is seen in the wide distribution of broadsides and pamphlets throughout the 1640's and 1650's and in the nationwide interest aroused by the Exclusion Crisis. Moreover, their success in disseminating the literature of political controversy, from the crudest, most sensationalistic broadside or news-pamphlet to the most sophisticated formal verse satire, points them up as agents in shifting the scene of political debate from Whitehall and Westminster to the public fora of the coffee-house, ale-house, and theatre. One need not ascribe their efforts to high-minded motives of political and social reform or of freedom of speech: the Stationers' Company had been a *de facto* agent of governmental censorship since its inception in 1557. Nonetheless, the distribution of proscribed or politically controversial material continued and was often undertaken at no small risk to publishers' liberty, lives, and personal fortunes. Puritan legislation failed to silence the Royalist opposition because for every balladist and pamphleteer willing to risk imprisonment there was also a publisher who dared to print and sell his work; Court censorship failed during the Exclusion Crisis for much the same reason. The seeming inevitability of there being an opposition press meant that when the Licensing Act lapsed in 1695 there was no real likelihood of its being renewed: Parliament realized that it was not in its members' best interest to quell free speech, since today's Ministry might be tomorrow's Opposition. It might also have taken note of one consequence of Puritan proscription, the emergence of the balladist / pamphleteer as well as the opposition publisher as popular heroes—a status enjoyed, respectively, by Martin Parker and Sir John Birkenhead.

The activities of the oppositionist press during the Civil War and Interregnum were likely to bring literature and its practitioners into public prominence, but the contributions of publishers to the shaping of public poetry after the Restoration may be more particularly

enumerated. First, they provided an alternative to a reliance upon noble patronage. Lynch notes that poets and playwrights continued to write fulsome dedications out of a need to augment the meagre incomes they received from their publishers (151), but Feather counters that even the Grub Street authors who “wrote to order” were generally well paid and well treated (103-104)—and Lynch herself makes much of the fact that among his services to his authors Jacob Tonson “circulated manuscripts, wrote complimentary verses, waited upon writers when summoned, gave them gifts of food and wine, loaned them money, collected rents (for Dryden), and forwarded mail” (96). In any event it soon became clear enough that booksellers provided a more reliable source of income to a greater range of writers than any patron or set of patrons ever could. Poets during this time may have liked to see themselves as craftsmen pursuing an ancient and honored vocation, but few, it is safe to say, regretted the fact that they could make a living with their pens. Second, the fact that publishers were able to keep authors’ names and works before the public eye meant that not only those works but the names superscribing them became marketable “commodities,” ensuring future sales—and also that the author himself would acquire a certain cultural “weight” in the public’s imagination. In fact, as writers became recognizable public figures, their æsthetic and financial independence grew, for both writer and publisher came to recognize that without the former the latter would have nothing to sell (Feather 75-6; 111). Third, the resources of publishers enabled them to influence the context and corpus of literature and to some degree its reception. They encouraged (or at least fed) literary controversy when they could, for then as now controversy breeds interest, and interest, sales. But more constructively, they also fostered the formation of a working literary sensibility, either directly, by encouraging collaboration, or indirectly, by establishing contacts between writers, their shops serving as places for rendezvous and discussion. Tonson would go further and found the influential Kit-Kat Club (c. 1700), the ethos of which seems closely modelled on that of Dryden’s four spokesmen in his *Of Dramatic Poesy* (1667): “As a man of wit, or at least a pretender to wit, one must embark

on literary conversation. One must have literary opinions and be able to support them with references to recognized classical authorities” (Lynch 139). In addition, bookmen created and sustained literary fashions, for historical works for example, or for translations of classical texts (favorites were Virgil, Horace, and Ovid), and retrieved from obscurity authors of merit. From Lynch’s perspective, it was the stubborn efforts of Tonson that brought Milton to posthumous public esteem, both by incessant publication of his works and arranging for Addison to discuss their merits over several issues of *The Spectator* (a Tonson vehicle) (142ff.). In addition, Tonson published a six-volume edition of the works of Spenser (1715) at a time when that poet was held in low regard, and from 1709 to 1712 turned out collected editions of Denham, Suckling, Cowley, Congreve, Beaumont and Fletcher, Waller, and Otway, wishing “to persuade English readers,” argues Lynch, “that their own literary heritage was as valuable to them as the masterpieces of classical antiquity” (141). Publishers were able to take the risk of publishing out-of-vogue writers in part because they had begun to discover the power of advertising and could attempt to create interest where none had been apparent. Fourth, having aroused public interest, say, in histories or translations or occasional poems (or in particular genres, such as the heroic drama, the prologue and the epilogue, or in particular forms, such as the heroic couplet), they could perpetuate the public’s appetite (and of course their own profits) by discovering and encouraging new talent to feed it, as Tonson “discovered” Prior, Congreve, and Addison. Such practices certainly had the effect of expanding the scope of public writing, the more so since Tonson and other publishers regularly solicited the public at large for submissions for their miscellanies. Publishers in the early days of the modern book trade were, therefore, far more than reliable alternatives to intermittent patronage; whatever their motives, they provided a secure social forum for the authors they published, thereby encouraging the rise of the professional poet—answerable to the public’s tastes and attentions—and in the bargain accustomed that public and its government to the advantages of a free press. Feather states the case nicely: “It was no longer assumed that the crown had

sole rights over information, or that the crown or its representatives should involve themselves in every sphere of economic life” (90).

## 2. The Advent of John Dryden

By April 1655 the twenty-five-year-old John Dryden, B.A., had ridden off from Cambridge to London. The ostensible purpose of his journey was to take a position in the Protectorate administration under his cousin Sir Gilbert Pickering, Cromwell’s Lord Chamberlain, and he seems to have ended up as a secretary of French and Latin, serving under Milton and alongside Marvell. The young Dryden’s true object, however, was, according to Dryden’s Cambridge contemporary Robert Creighton, to find “gayer company, & set up for a Poet” (qtd. in Winn, 68). Dryden’s timing was fortuitous, for himself and for public poetry. Although at the time he set out for London no one suspected it, circumstances were already moving toward an alignment that would favor the emergence of a new poetic mode and a new type of poet. The Civil Wars had put in motion the larger forces that were to sustain the emergence of the public mode in the coming decades, particularly the expansion of political involvement and comment (and thus political power) throughout the ranks of society and a consequent shift from a semi-literate to a mostly literate culture, at least in the capital. These forces would gain momentum with the Restoration Settlement, already imminent shortly after Cromwell’s death in 1658. The logistics of reconciling King to Parliament and both to the People forced a reconstitution of the power balance among the three, which in turn occasioned the rise of oppositional (party) politics as well as of the professional political and bureaucratic classes. The continued expansion of England as a colonial and commercial power and the rise of a monied class that was to rival the political, economic, and social authority of the landed aristocracy only accelerated acceptance of the fact that (whatever politicians and political theorists might argue) the debate over administrative policy had its proper forum in the public sphere—if only for the

very cynical motives of gaining popular endorsement for policies already in practice or popular support for ambitious politicians who otherwise held “the people” in contempt.

The political and social controversies of the 1640's and 1650's also pointed toward the future commercial footing of poetry. I am willing to concede to Winn that at the exact moment of the Restoration there was no “sustaining public” upon which professional poets could depend (96); prospects were centered at Court, upon “gentlemen who amused themselves by writing verses” (97). But certainly the enormous traffic in ballads and newsbooks throughout the Civil Wars and Interregnum had demonstrated the potentially extensive, lucrative market for enterprising writers and publishers. And in any case, between his arrival in London and the loss of his position with the collapse of the Protectorate, Dryden augmented his official salary by writing prefaces for Henry Herringman (who would remain Dryden's publisher until 1678), as well as occasional poetry—*Heroic Stanzas* (1658), *Astræa Redux* (1660), and *To His Sacred Majesty* (1661)—that in the case of the last poem sold well enough to be reprinted and translated into French before the end of 1661. Winn himself argues that Dryden was motivated to pursue his vocation because of his “belief that the Restoration would increase opportunities for a professional man of letters” (118). As for literature itself, Winn points out that the great disruption of the arts in England during the 1640's and 1650's left playwrights and poets at the Restoration with the feeling that the continuity of English letters, especially theatre, had been interrupted (136). Drama, after an absence of twenty years, had to be made anew, though at first audiences would have to be satisfied with revivals of Jacobean and Carolinian plays. Nondramatic poetry, too, required extensive recasting. “The Caroline definitions of poetry as hazy mythic propaganda or brainteasing intellectual conceit,” Winn says, as well as “effete Cavalier nostalgia” were moribund, no longer answering society's need for a “manly, urbane, public, persuasive” poetry, “drawing principally upon the real world and aiming to affect moral and political decisions in that world” (74). As much as anything, then, the growing opportunities for the professional poet and the widespread

sense that poetry itself could and should be reordered set the stage for the emergence of public poetry after the Restoration.

But the stage was only set; there was nothing inevitable about what was to unfold once the curtain was raised upon the next two decades. At least from the vantage of retrospect, public poetry needed something more than bare opportunity for it to take root and become the dominant nondramatic mode of the next eighty years—an advocate, perhaps, a forceful personage who could, to use the words of George Parfitt, impose his “coercive vision” of a new role for poetry and the poet upon a society (143), or, less dramatically, a figure about whom the swirl of larger social, political, economic, and æsthetic forces could cohere and take definite shape. The chance to play such a role does not come in every age. World literature would have been immeasurably poorer, for instance, had Shakespeare never existed, yet an Elizabethan and Stuart theatre comprising Kyd, Marlowe, Dekker, Jonson, Webster, and Beaumont and Fletcher would still be one of the wonders of English letters. But had there been no Dryden, the laurel for poetry after 1660, Milton and his great epics aside, would have been contested by Marvell and Rochester; that for drama, by Behn, Etherege, and Shadwell. Whatever the merits of his contemporaries, and they were by no means inconsiderable, without Dryden’s presence English literature would have evolved far differently than it did, and its poetry, drama, and criticism would have been left sickly indeed, their deficiencies manifest through the age of Johnson—at least. Dryden did not possess the genius or facility of a Shakespeare; he had to work hard to make himself a playwright and poet. Nor did Dryden possess the painstaking diligence of a Pope; Dr. Johnson characterizes him as a hasty writer whose disinclination to bestir himself obliged him to make do with what inspiration and material lay at hand (187; 229), and in any event his chronic financial worries did not often allow him to labor lovingly over a poem until it was as perfect as he could make it. But if native genius, a bent for meticulous composition and incessant revision, or the leisure that might have favored either had not fallen to Dryden’s lot, talent and opportunity had. When

Dryden rode into London in 1655 the playhouses were closed; when they opened in 1660, dramatists who had been alive to witness the Armada had to serve as models for the restored theatre. Nondramatic poetry lay largely within the purview of Denham, Waller, and Cowley. Cowley was the leading remaining exponent of the Donne "school" of conceit-ridden poetry that Denham and Waller, making "some advances towards nature and harmony" (Johnson 231), had begun to overturn. Johnson observes further that "[Denham and Waller] had shown that long discourses in rhyme grew more pleasing when they were broken into couplets, and that verse consisted not only in the number but the arrangement of syllables" (231). Nonetheless, by 1660 Waller and Denham's best work was clearly behind them. The way was thus clear for an ambitious young fellow to put his own stamp on contemporary drama and poetry: by 1670 Dryden had established himself as the leading playwright as well as the most considerable dramatic theorist of his day; by 1682 he had made himself the greatest satirist of the age. He had also become a personage of immense cultural authority, though an object of vilification as much as of veneration. But if Dryden had made the most of his opportunity, one could say as well that opportunity made the most of him, for the match between his circumstances, temperament, talents was a close and fruitful one, allowing him to become an icon in his own time and a model for the next. Johnson, seldom extravagant and never mercenary in his praise, says of him:

Perhaps no nation ever produced a writer that enriched his language with such variety of models. To him we owe the improvement, perhaps the completion of our metre, the refinement of our language and much of the correctness of our sentiments. By him we were taught 'sapere et fari,' to think naturally and express forcibly. Though Davies has reasoned in rhyme before him, it may perhaps be maintained that he was the first who joined argument with poetry. . . . What was said of Rome, adorned by Augustus, may be applied by an easy metaphor to English poetry embellished by Dryden, 'lateritiam invenit, marmoream reliquit.' He found it brick, and he left it marble (262).

However, just as the violins swell to bursting and the timpani roll forward to the inevitable cymbal-clash, reality intrudes and we remember that here again nothing was

inevitable; for Dryden as for public poetry itself, between opportunity and triumph lay countless individual moments filled with the decisions and revisions that a moment might have reversed. If, at the time of his death in 1700 Dryden was esteemed as *the Great Man of Letters* and public poetry was firmly established as a dominant mode, it was because of the many “decisions and revisions” Dryden had made between 1660 and 1680—less figuratively, the many personal, poetic, and political battles he had fought and won during that time. If, as I argue, the emergence of public poetry in this period found its catalyst in the presence and career of John Dryden himself, the rise of both mode and man depended in large part upon the latter’s unseating of incumbent literary and cultural authorities and the establishment of his own.

As Dryden embarked in earnest upon his literary career after the Restoration, the most immediate and by far the most important impediment to his progress was what might be called the aristocratic prerogative over literature: literary culture still had its center at Court, and gentleman-amateurs presided over both the theory (scant as it was) and practice of drama and poetry. Winn points out the startling fact that during the 1660’s Dryden was the only professional playwright at work: Shadwell’s first play did not appear until 1668; Behn’s first play debuted in 1670; Crowne and Settle’s, in 1671; and Ravenscroft’s, in 1672 (138). The other playwrights of the time, the Howard brothers (Sir Robert and Sir Edward), Killigrew, Davenant, Etherege, Sir George Tuke, and the Earl of Orrery, were all gentlemen who generally wrote for reputation rather than receipts, though as managers of playhouses Killigrew and Davenant were certainly interested in turning a profit. Nondramatic poetry, too, lacking the forceful public presence of a Ben Jonson, had during the 1640’s and 1650’s fallen within the orbit of gentlemen amateurs whose successors, whatever the experiments of Denham and Waller, were naturally the wits at the Restoration Court, among them Dorset, Sedley, and Buckingham.

I am not arguing that Dryden set out with the design to displace aristocratic authority over literature, but this certainly was what his literary activities helped to effect.



Dryden's talent and his sense of current tastes had as much as anything to do with this. His poems on the death of Cromwell and on the restoration and coronation of Charles, for instance, had shown him to be an occasional poet of considerable power; his *The Rival Ladies* (1663), *The Indian Queen* (1664), and *The Indian Emperor* (1665), though not his best work, had caught the Court's attention and demonstrated the young playwright's popular promise. But apart from the fact of his own skill and success, Dryden's career served to undermine the preeminence of the gentleman-amateur in three ways. First, Dryden uses the theatre itself as a forum in which to attack the tastes and morals of the play-going patron classes, employing the direct address of his many prologues and epilogues to undermine their claims to æsthetic and social authority; second, Dryden—again mainly in his prologues and epilogues—conflates the literary opinions he attributes to his aristocratic opponents with largely discredited political positions, thereby making both their public and poetic values seem dangerous and absurd; and third, Dryden isolates his own patrons within a paradoxical “prison of praise,” making them estimable for their support of professionals (such as himself)—but little else. Taking advantage of the opportunities presented him by the theatre, Dryden was thus able to develop the fully and directly public medium of the dramatic prologue and epilogue into a vehicle for the refashioning of literary sensibilities as well as for commentary upon social and political affairs; that is, he was able to use these poems to establish a cultural “space” for public poetry and the public poet, adding momentum not only to his own literary career but also to the larger political and social forces (described above) already eroding the traditional relationship between poet and patron and with it the æsthetic dominance of the patron class itself.

Dryden's assault upon his audiences' tastes, manners, and morals begins innocuously enough in his early prologues and epilogues. Even if this choice of platform had not been made necessary by Dryden's lack of public stature at the outset of his career,

it would have been entirely logical and appropriate, given the genre's endless flexibility in terms of form, content, and theme and its wholly public mode. Through the Prologue or Epilogue, the poet speaks directly to his audience; his speakers look straight into their faces, speak specifically to them. Since the days of Jonson the prologue and epilogue had offered an occasion for the author to coax playgoers into applauding what was put before them, or to banter them with bawdy innuendo or preëptive admonitions not to be too critical. And here it is worth remembering that Restoration audiences were not what they had been in Shakespeare's day, comprised of groundlings in the pit and the gentlefolk in the gallery and side boxes. Burner notes that seventeenth-century playgoers were a more "socially cohesive" audience than Shakespeare's had been (xi); the boxes were still occupied by the fashionable and wealthy, says Allardyce Nicoll, but the pit was now the place of "minor gentlemen and intellectuals," the middle gallery, of would-be fashionable "tradesmen and their wives" (81-82). In the upper galleries, farthest from the stage—and farthest from the playwright's direct address—crowded "a motley assemblage embracing all ranks from servants to impecunious professionals" (82). Dryden does not, therefore, address his critiques to the tastes of some rude, unlettered "rabble," but to their social betters, the gentries of trade and blood. It is worth noting here as well that Dryden would soon emerge, as Wiley and others point out, as the period's acknowledged master of the prologue and epilogue (xxx), fashioning the precedents of Jonson, Cowley, Denham, and others into a finished vehicle for trenchant æsthetic and social criticism. By the end of the 1670's his prologues and epilogues had attained such a stature in the public estimation that actors fought for the privilege to deliver them (Wiley xxxi-xxxv) and many of Dryden's fellow playwrights courted him for them. Even if such pieces had little or nothing to do with the play itself, Dryden's name was enough to recommend the work and its author. Johnson observes, "His prologues had such reputation, that for some time a play was considered as less likely to be well received, if some of his verses did not introduce it" (201). Wiley quotes Charles Saunders' preface to his play, *Tamerlane the Great* (1681), in

which the author actually *boasts* that his work had little chance of pleasing “untill it had received some Rules for Correction from Mr. Dryden himself, who was also pleased to Grace it with an Epilogue, to which it owes no small part of its success” (xxx). Dryden was thus able to realize fully the potential of the prologue-epilogue form to fashion, address, and retain an audience, in the process establishing himself as an authoritative public persona.

Dryden’s first sally against his audience is, however, rather modest. In the epilogue to *The Wild Gallant* (1663), he has the Epilogue distinguish between the tendentious critics of the pit, for whom the author “has shown today / That which they only like, a wretched play” (ll. 7-8), and his better judges, “true English gentlemen,” to whom “he these ladies joins, / To judge that language their converse refines” (ll. 19-20). Dryden’s deference here may perhaps be attributed to his naiveté as a young playwright and an ingenuous idealization of his audience’s gentility. In future prologues and epilogues, however, Dryden is far less deferential toward his audiences; indeed, his sparring becomes ever more aggressive. I am not sure, despite the recurrence and increasing virulence of these attacks, that Dryden’s design is purposeful enough to properly constitute a strategy, but its effect is to call into question the skill of his noble competitors and the discernment and tastes of his polite audience, to separate both from their traditional pretense to critical sovereignty. In the prologue to *The Rival Ladies* (1663), for example, he has his speaker declare that the “reforming poets of our age” (l. 7) have foisted upon audiences “habits, dances, scenes, and rhymes; / High language often; aye, and sense, sometimes” (ll. 11-12). He is more acerbic in his epilogue to *The Indian Emperor* (1664), a sequel to the Howard-Dryden collaboration, *The Indian Queen*. Here Dryden scornfully enumerates both his critics—the sons of Phoebus (i.e. would-be writers), “by whate’er title known, / Whether of court, of coffee-house, or town” (ll. 3-4)—and their dubious qualifications to render any critical verdict. One of Dryden’s frequent assertions is that only those who write well themselves may judge the efforts of others. Accordingly, those “whose confidence / Is plac’d in lofty

sound, and humble sense" (ll. 5-6) or those "little infants of the time, / Who write new songs, and trust in tune and rhyme" (l. 7-8) are ill-credentialed to pronounce upon the productions of true dramatists (i.e. Dryden himself). What critical liberties Dryden allows them are so meagre as to be damning indeed: the sonneteer may only judge of "song or dance" (l. 14); the writer of burlesque, "all dogg'rel rhyme" (l. 16); the coffeehouse wit, no poetry at all, though he may "damn the Dutch" (l. 20): "For the great dons of wit— / Phoebus gives them full privilege alone, / To damn all others, and cry up their own" (ll. 21-23). However tongue-in-cheek these last lines may be, the timing of this epilogue gives them a quite unironic significance, coming as it does at the moment when Dryden began to remove himself from the influence of his friend, brother-in-law, collaborator, and patron Sir Robert Howard. *The Indian Emperor*, Winn notes, was "written as Dryden broke free from his dependence on Howard" and had begun to establish his own literary principles (153). This epilogue, therefore, while not attacking Howard explicitly or even obliquely—though Dryden may have written it with Howard's *Poems* (1660) and his contributions to their collaborations in mind—nevertheless aggressively distinguishes between the "great dons of wit" and those amateurs who now and then offer up a feeble, ephemeral effort.<sup>3</sup> Dryden renews his attack on untalented amateurs in the epilogue to his recasting of Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* (1678), differentiating true poets from those "to whom the stage does not belong, / Such whose vocation is only to song; / At most to prologue, when, for want of time, / Poets take in for journey work in rhyme" (ll. 15-18). When we recall Wiley's observation that gallants, falling in with literary fashion, took to composing prologues and epilogues in order to pass for wits, we gain a clear notion of Dryden's

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<sup>3</sup> Four years later, however, Dryden would scald Howard in his "A Defence of *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy*" (1668), an answer to Howard's attack upon Dryden and Dryden's championing of rhymed drama. In his "Defence," Dryden sneers at Howard's "reputation of understanding all things" (111), and mercilessly ridicules the flaccidity of Howard's prose and critical principles, puncturing the amateur's presumption to pronounce upon literary matters.

targets in these lines—though here Dryden has the would-be poets farming out the work to hack-writers, thus denying them even the paltry triumph of a well-turned prologue.

Such pronouncements on stage only reinforce Dryden's prose assaults upon the poetic efforts of the gentleman-amateur. In one of his earliest critical pieces, a 1664 letter to Roger Boyle, Earl of Orrery (one of the first proponents of the heroic drama Dryden was shortly to make fashionable) prefacing the first edition of *The Rival Ladies*, Dryden claims that Orrery's "excellent poems" have given the lie to the critics who have proclaimed it "a crime for a man of business<sup>4</sup> to write so well" (3). This is an odd defense of the earl's poetry, for Dryden seems to assume, with Orrery's curiously unnamed critics, that it is indeed unusual to find talent and nobility happily conjoined; phrased as it is, it implies that Orrery is the exception that proves the rule, turning his praise for the man into a slight upon the class. But if Dryden has true esteem for Orrery, he takes less care to spare other aristocrats from his ridicule. In an address to Sir Charles Sedley prefacing his play, *The Assination, or Love in a Nunnery* (acted, late 1672; published, 1673), Dryden defends Sedley, himself a gentleman-amateur poet, from "the ignorant and ridiculous descriptions which some pedants have given of the [Court] Wits" (186). It is not true, Dryden says, that these wits are guilty of the "lewdness, atheism, folly, ill-reasoning, and all manner of extravagances" (186) with which they are charged. In 1673, however, such an assertion would have been absurd, for the antics of Rochester and his circle were already becoming notorious and noxious to London society. Once again speaking in the voice of his ostensible opponents, Dryden (already at odds with Buckingham and Howard and increasingly frustrated in his attempts to court Rochester as a patron) here deftly applies the labels the "pedants" have been too clumsy to make stick. But he goes further: "The wits they describe are the fops we banish: for blasphemy and atheism, if they were neither sin

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<sup>4</sup> That is, a gentleman with an administrative appointment. Under Charles II, Orrery held a military appointment in Ireland.

nor ill manners, are subjects so very common, and worn so threadbare, that people who have sense avoid them, for fear of being suspected to have none” (187). This is a subtle twist of the knife indeed, for though it seems only to make a disinterested distinction between true wits and fops, the fops just happen to be guilty of the very things of which the Courtly Wits (Sedley among them) stood accused. The true wit, on the other hand, shuns such antics, not so much because they are sinful and ill-mannered, but because they expose a lack of invention, a juvenile boorishness at the heart of their practitioners’ sensibilities—a damning accusation to level at a group priding itself on the exclusive refinement and sophistication of its taste. Dryden’s most explicit denouncement, however, comes in the preface to *All For Love* (1678): “We who write, if we want the talent, yet have the excuse that we do it for a poor subsistence; but what can be urged in their defence who, not having the vocation of poverty to scribble, out of mere wantonness take pains to make themselves ridiculous?” (226). It is true, Dryden says, that Roman tyrants “proclaimed themselves poets by sound of trumpet; and poets they were, upon pain of death to any man who durst call them otherwise,” but “[i]n the meantime the true poets were they who made the best markets” (227), that is, who put their poetry and not merely their rank before the public eye and had their efforts vindicated by general acclamation. Poetry, Dryden insists, is rightly the province of the professionals for whom it provides “a poor subsistence,” for these have the greatest incentive and likelihood to perfect the principles and practices of their craft. “Dulness,” Dryden says in the prologue to *Troilus and Cressida* (1668), “might thrive in any trade but this [poetry]” (l. 23):

Dulness, that in a playhouse meets disgrace,  
 Might meet with reverence in its proper place.  
 The fulsome clench [pun], that nauseates the town,  
 Would from a judge or alderman go down,  
 Such virtue is there in a robe or gown!  
 And that insipid stuff which here you hate,  
 Might somewhere else be call’d a grave debate;  
 Dulness is decent in the Church and State (ll. 25-32).

In these few lines, Dryden both separates amateurs from professionals (imposing humiliatingly low standards upon the wit of the former), and casts doubt upon even the administrative competence of the ruling classes. For the most part, however, Dryden devotes his energies in his prologues and epilogues to belaboring his audience with his sense of its deficiencies. In "A Defence of *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy*" Dryden confesses that "my chief endeavors are to the delight the age in which I live" (116): "[t]o please the people ought to be the poet's aim, because plays are made for their delight" (120). The audience, from whom true poets make their markets, seems for Dryden to have the final say about what will or will not pass upon the stage. Far from forfeiting his authorial or critical prerogative, however, Dryden adds that "it does not follow that they [the people] are always pleased with good plays, or that the plays which please them are always good" (120). In fact, we find (not surprisingly) that playgoers' æsthetic sense is dreadful, and is ultimately responsible for the dullness and empty extravagance that have lately taken possession of the stage. Thus Dryden declares in the prologue to *The Rival Ladies* his audience has only itself to blame for the subordination of substance to mere style in the play they are about to see: "Such deep intrigues you're welcome to this day: / But blame yourselves, not him who wrote the play; / Tho' his plot's dull, as can be well desir'd / Wit stiff as any you have e'er admired: / He's bound to please, not to write well" (ll. 17-21). One infers from Dryden's "Defence" that dramatic acumen may be nurtured, but his prologues and epilogues make clear that polite taste must first be chastised, made to doubt itself so that the professional poet might prescribe as he pleases. Aside from the fact that Dryden himself wrote comedies and farces to "delight the age," the great irony of the prescriptions he delivers from the stage is that they are almost wholly negative, leaving the audience to infer "proper" dramatic values from the catalogue of theatrical prohibitions put before it. This gives the authoritative advantage to the playwright: though Dryden eagerly put his literary principles before the public eye in treatises such as *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy* (1667) and *A Discourse Upon Satire* (1692) and in prefaces to his published plays.

his playhouse prescriptions afford no opportunity for contradiction, and, by forcing his auditors to deduce the unstated characteristics of good drama, he teases them into formulating notions sympathetic to his own even as he withholds the particulars that underpin his presumed authority as a professional. For the time being, then, the audience has no choice but to accept the dramatist's word for what is properly to be applauded or scorned.

Instances from the 1660's and 1670's of Dryden's scorn for the faddishness of Restoration audiences might be supplied almost endlessly, so a few major examples must here suffice. In the epilogue to the revived *Wild Gallant* (1667), Dryden's speaker declares that "our dull poet" (l. 37) would gladly offer them better fare, "Would you but change, for serious plot and verse, / This motley garniture of fool and farce" (ll. 41-42), as "tradesmen, by the change of fashions, lose, / With some content, their fripperies of France, / In hope it may their staple trade advance" (ll. 46-48). If the failure of the present farce—apparently revived, despite its early failure, to appease current tastes—means the survival of "serious plot and verse," then so be it, for such a trade off would, Dryden presumes, indicate that the survival of serious drama, his "staple trade," would be ensured. That his hopes have been disappointed is made clear in subsequent prologues and epilogues, in which he taxes his audience with its supposedly inordinate delight in gimmicks, visual stimulation, farcical nonsense, and the cheap exoticism of foreign troupes. Enchanted with the show before them, they seem to give no thought to thematic substance so long as their immediate appetites are indulged. And how easily those appetites are sated: In delivering the prologue to the first part of *The Conquest of Granada* (1670), Nell Gwyn appears on stage "in a broad-brimm'd hat, and waistbelt" (stage direction) and proceeds to rail against the rival Duke's Company for its recent practice of designing plays around costumes: "'I'll write a play,' says one, 'for I have got / A broad-brimm'd hat, and waist-belt tow'rds a plot'" (ll. 9-10). A second playwright replies that he has a larger one: "Thus they out-write each other with a hat," until at last the brims "cover'd all the wit" (l. 14): "Hat was the play; 'twas



language, wit, and tale: / Like them that find meat, drink, and cloth in ale" (ll. 15-16). Gwyn then shifts the target of "her" critique from the Duke's Company to the spectators themselves and their fascination with theatrical gewgaws. "They [the dramatists of the Duke's Company] thought you lik'd, what only you forgave; / And brought you more dull sense, dull sense much worse / Than brisk gay nonsense" (ll. 24-26), she declares, adding, "They bring old ir'n and glass upon the stage, / To barter with the Indians of our age" (ll. 27-28).

Like the "Indians of our age," enchanted by the glitter of the worthless baubles foisted upon them by European traders and colonizers, the audience accepts as valuable the fashionable gimmicks that hold the stage to the detriment of "serious plot and verse." It is true that worth is subjective, both individually and culturally—a mere bauble to one might be priceless to another; still, one wonders if the critical and ethical faculties of a society can long sustain themselves upon the exhibition of large hats—or upon songs, dances, special effects, and scenery. In the prologue delivered at the 1673 Oxford performance of Jonson's *The Silent Woman*, Dryden assures his academic audience (with questionable sincerity<sup>5</sup>) that their judgement is as sound as that of those ancient Athenian judges who awarded prizes at the "annual rites of Pallas" (l. 3): "Here they, who long have known the useful stage, / Come to be taught themselves to teach the age" (ll. 10-11). The situation, he tells them, is far otherwise in London:

There haught dunces, whose unlearned pen  
 Could ne'er spell grammar, would be reading men.  
 Such build their poems the Lucretian way;  
 So many huddled atoms make a play . . .  
 To such a fame let mere town-wits aspire,  
 And their gay nonsense their own cits admire (ll. 30-33; 36-37).

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<sup>5</sup> Both Winn and George Noyes point out that in a 1673 letter to the Earl of Rochester Dryden says of this prologue, "I have sent your lordship a prologue and epilogue which I made for our players, when they went down to Oxford. I hear they have succeeded; and by the event your lordship will judge how easy 'tis to pass any thing upon an university, and how gross flattery the learned will endure" (Winn 252).

These atoms of “gay nonsense,” Dryden explains in the accompanying epilogue, include the French troupe of “hot Monsieurs” (l. 7) that has “left their itch of novelty behind” (l. 10), and the “Italian merry-andrews” (l. 11) who succeeded them: “Instead of wit and humors, your [the audience’s] delight / Was there to see two hobby-horses fight”; “For love you heard how amorous asses bray’d / And cats in gutters gave their serenade” (ll. 13-14; 17-18). “Nature,” the Epilogue declares, now swelling with indignation, has been “put out of countenance, and each day / Some new-born monster shewn you for a play” (19-20). But contemporary audiences have been particularly enchanted (as they are in our own day) by “those wicked engines call’d machines” (l. 22)—that is, by special effects, which replace dramatic skill with technical tricks: “Thunder and lightning now for wit are play’d. / . . . Fletcher’s despis’d, your Jonson out of fashion, / And wit the only drug<sup>6</sup> in all the nation” (ll. 23; 31-32). The attack on the mania for playhouse gauderies continues in the prologue delivered at the 1674 opening of the King’s Company’s new playhouse in Drury Lane. If in a prologue delivered in 1672, just after the company’s first theatre had burned to the ground, Dryden’s tone had been hopeful—“But as our new-built city rises higher, / So from old theatres may new aspire, / Since Fate contrives magnificence by fire” (ll. 20-22)—he is now far less sanguine: “’Twere folly now a stately pile to raise, / To build a playhouse while you throw down plays, / Whilst scenes, machines, and empty operas reign, / And for the pencil you the pen disdain” (ll. 34-7). He concludes this piece with a gloomy prediction: “’Tis to be feared— / That as a fire the former house o’erthrew, / Machines and tempests will destroy the new” (ll. 51-53). True wit died, Dryden says in the prologue to his comedy, *The Kind Keeper* (1678), “When sense in dog’rel rhymes and clouds was lost, / And dulness flourish’d at the actor’s cost. / Nor stopp’d it here; when tragedy was done, / Satire and humor the same fate have run, / And comedy is sunk to trick and pun” (ll. 3-7).

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<sup>6</sup> As used here, “a thing without worth or value,” according to Johnson’s *Dictionary*.

It must be noted that Dryden is not quite the disinterested upholder of standards he would be taken for. Peter Holland observes that though the King's Company (the one for which Dryden wrote) had the better repertoire and the better actors, the rival Duke's Company had the better playhouse of the two, and the better scenery and technical expertise as well (434ff). The Duke's Company was thus better able to put on the farces, operas, and spectacles for which its director, Sir William Davenant, was able to fashion a popular appetite. Initially at a disadvantage, Davenant's company soon was the stronger of the two licensed theatres. Certainly, therefore, professional competition partly accounts for Dryden's attack on the bedeviling novelties that his own company was slow to adopt and profit by. In his autobiography, *An Apology for the Life of Colly Cibber, Comedian* (1740), Cibber (1671-1757) gives a brief history of the Restoration stage, commenting, "This sensual supply of sight and sound, coming in to the assistance of the weaker party, it was no wonder they should grow too hard for sense and simple nature, when it is consider'd how many more people there are that can see and hear than think and judge" (54). It would be easy to ascribe Dryden's hostility toward Davenant's innovations to mere self-interest—or to mere peevishness. In the prologue given at a King's Company performance at Oxford in 1674, Dryden declares, "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" (ll. 32-5). It is difficult not to take these despairing lines as a statement of personal disillusionment; however, at first glance it would seem that Dryden's successful career as a playwright, poet, and critic belies his bitterness. By 1674 Dryden had been made Poet Laureate (1667) and Historiographer Royal (1670); his plays were well attended and sold well once they were printed: so profitable were the successive reprints of Dryden's works for Henry Herringman, his publisher during the 1670's, that they helped to establish what Feather calls "a new kind of publishing, in which the publisher was seeking out works which would be fashionably successful, but would also, he hoped, have a long-term existence"

(57). Put another way, Dryden was being groomed as one of the living greats of English drama. If this was a publisher's cynical attempt to increase sales, it was hardly necessary: Dryden's stature was such that he could usually command the attention and esteem of his audiences. That he did not leave off chastising their follies during the 1660's and 1670's might seem therefore the product of self-pity, affectation, or perversity.

That is, until we remember that for Dryden æsthetic decadence had more than literary consequences; it betokened larger intellectual, social, moral, and even political deficiencies. Cibber inadvertently hints at what these may be when he observes that Davenant's recourse to stage-gimmicks ultimately—and ironically—backfired on him:

Taste and fashion, with us, have always had wings, and fly from one publick spectacle to another so wantonly, that I have been inform'd, by those who remember it, that a famous puppet-shew in Salisbury Change . . . so far distrest [the theatrical companies] that they were reduced to petition the king for relief against it (54).

Having eroded the taste of playgoers, Davenant's company had to face the consequences of a public predisposed to enjoy only the gaudy and trivial. In nearly every discipline, the decline of æsthetic expectations leads almost inevitably to the loss of standards. For an age that ostensibly believed that poetry could inculcate a love of virtue and an abhorrence of vice in its audience, the subordination of well-crafted, "serious plot and verse" to the easy and intellectually empty pleasures derived from broad-brimmed hats, thunder-machines, dazzling scenery, and puppet shows indicates a loss or forfeiture of critical sophistication. It would perhaps be unfair to expect anything else but critical ignorance in the greater public following a twenty-year absence of drama from the stage. In his overview of Samuel Pepys' dramatic sensibilities, Richard Lockett makes clear that even for such an intelligent, reflective fellow as Pepys, sureness of dramatic judgement was a "random phenomenon" (341); for him as for his contemporaries, dramatic principles were amorphous, almost situational: "[M]any of his waverings of opinion come directly out of the conflict between a theoretical notion of what the drama ought to be, and a lively appreciation of what it was"

(340). Like his fellows, Pepys often judged with his senses rather than his mind. Most playgoers, however, were entirely unaware “of what the drama ought to be.” Certainly Dryden did not count upon such awareness: in his preface to *Secret Love* (1668), for instance, he observes of the dramatic unities that they comprise “a beauty which our common audiences do not easily discern” (105). But this ignorance cannot be redressed so long as its appetites are unconditionally appeased. Left unchallenged, those appetites will soon replace higher standards, and those who might be expected to know better will cease to sense that anything is amiss, that they might ask for something better.

Dryden continually reminds his audiences of their extreme vulnerability to literary impostures and impostors. In his prologue to *The Indian Emperor* (1664), he tells his audience to suspend its sharp scrutiny of the play, “For ’tis your business to be cozen’d here” (l. 17). This line recurs at least twice more in these ancillary pieces (and the theme, innumerably), with a range of connotations. Here, Dryden is simply asserting his prescriptive authority at the expense of “these wretched spies of wit” (l. 18): they have no choice but to be “cozened”—that is, accept Dryden’s word that his play suffers only from “light faults” (l. 14)—because they lack the critical principles to arrive at a right judgement of what is set before them. Not much is at stake here, and even when, as we have seen, Dryden refers to his audience as “the Indians of our age,” their uninformed appetites cheated and debased by the sharpers of the stage, the significance of their being deceived is apparently confined to the playhouse. The importance of other cozenings, however, clearly resonates far beyond the world of the theatre. In the prologue he provided for the 1668 revival of Thomas Tomkis’ *Albumazar* (1668), Dryden begins by praising Jonson as “the best” of those who wrote in the previous age, not least because even when working with another’s material, “Ben made nobly his what he did mold; / What was another’s lead becomes his gold” (ll. 11-12). By contrast, “this our age such authors does afford, / As make whole plays, and yet scarce write one word; / Who, in this anarchy of wit, rob all, / And what’s their plunder, their possession call (ll. 15-18). Winn notes that this lengthy

attack on plagiarism (ll. 15–40) was brought about by Howard’s publishing as his own a play (*The Duke of Lerma*) that was the work of another author, the late John Ford, and had been partly revised by Dryden himself (190). Apart from the implications for the by-now rapidly disintegrating relationship between Dryden the professional and Howard the gentleman-amateur, what is most suggestive in this passage is the phrase “anarchy of wit.” It would have been a loaded one in 1668, “anarchy” bringing to mind the political and social confusion of the Civil War and Commonwealth, and, when linked to the next line, “their plunder, their possession call,” the theologically suspect Hobbes’s notion of the state of nature, in which all have right to all. This conflation of literary with political antagonism foreshadows Dryden’s later attacks on his opponents; in its present context, however, it allows Dryden to shift the focus from plagiarists to the audience itself: “But, gentleman, you’re all concern’d in this; / You are in fault for what they do amiss: / For they their thefts still undiscover’d think, / And durst not steal, unless you please to wink” (ll. 41–44). Dryden’s “gentlemen” are “all concern’d in this” because in the theatre as in the “real” world there is a proprietary order that must be observed: should gentlemen, at least the nominal keepers of that order, “wink” at literary theft, they undermine the capacity of the law to protect their own property. More figuratively, by allowing themselves to be put upon by literary frauds these gentlemen of the playhouse demonstrate that they have likewise effectively forfeited their prerogative to decide matters of literary merit and propriety. That prerogative should derive from learning and sound judgement; when those who enjoy its authority lack these qualities, the rules of art break down and nonsense reigns.

Of course, the audience might find itself cozened to its advantage—much as a child may be tricked into taking medicine it would otherwise reject. For instance, Dryden casts his play, *The Conquest of Granada, Part II* (1672), as a vizarded woman. It was understood in Dryden’s day that masked women at the playhouse were either courtesans or women of fashionable society looking for sexual adventure. Whether courtesan or

countess, their masks lent them an air of mystery that almost obliged self-styled gallants to pay them their court. Analogously, this, the concluding half of Dryden's most famous heroic play, is the mask that forces those failed-wits-turned-critics to forego damning the entire work out of hand, as they otherwise would, and instead now play the fawning suitor and "[bear] up to th' prize, and [view] each limb, / To know her by her rigging and her trim" (ll. 17-18):

And as those vizard-masks maintain that fashion,  
To soothe and tickle sweet imagination;  
So our dull poet keeps you on with masking,  
To make you think there's something worth your asking (ll. 25-28).

But the playwright, says the Prologue, will have the last laugh: by the time the playhouse wits discover that the play, a serious drama, does not dissolve into bawdy farce, it will be too late to deny its worth, even though "that which does now delight you / Will prove a dowdy, with a face to fright you" (ll. 29-30). Dryden calls attention to another bit of sexual cozening in the epilogue to *The Assignment or, Love in a Nunnery* (1672). Dryden has his speaker remark that those coming to see a vile anti-Catholic lampoon instead of a legitimate comedy with serious psychological and political themes will no doubt leave disappointed: "Our poet should in some close cell have shown / Some sister, playing at content alone. / This they [the Protestant "zealots" (l. 3)] did hope; the other side [the Catholics] did fear; / And both you see alike are cozen'd here" (ll. 10-13).

Such authorial cozenings obliquely reinforce Dryden's overt point that the audience has no reliable critical faculties, and therefore must leave the determination and maintenance of poetic principles to those who do, professionals like himself. In the cases of *The Conquest of Granada, Part II* and *The Assignment*, Dryden insinuates that his audiences' judgement is only as lively as its libido—and as narrowly self-interested. If in these instances their appetites have made them susceptible to being beneficially cozened, they are far more likely to mislead and debilitate, as Dryden makes clear in the epilogue given before the King and Queen at the first performance of the now-united King's and Duke's

companies (1682). Again using the image of a vizarded woman in “the mid gallery” (l. 12) attracting “the flutt’ring sparks” (l. 13), Dryden this time warns that the attainment of their object will give the sparks short pleasure, but lasting pain: “Fine love no doubt, but e’er two days are o’er ye, / The surgeon will be told a woful story. / Let vizard-mask her naked face expose, / On pain of being thought to want a nose” (ll. 17-20). Only the all-seeing playwright, it seems, can tell which masks hide the dowdy faces of sound bodies and which, the syphilis-ravaged visages of the diseased and depraved.

The painted face, the painted set—both may entice even as they corrupt. But aside from this analogy, Dryden achieves two things with his use of sexual innuendo and imagery by way of open acknowledgement of what Winn calls “an increasing fascination with sex in the theatre” (183). On one level, he establishes the ethical consequences of deficient æsthetic values: such a deficiency constitutes for Dryden no mere peccadillo, but is symptomatic of moral blindness and of a decayed national character—especially among the patron classes. Dryden, notoriously “aware of his audience” (Winn 192), was not above dispensing the risqué banter it wanted in his prologues and epilogues and in bawdy scenes in the plays themselves. However, granting that such fare would have made good business sense, I would counter that Dryden, solidly middle class himself, in fact uses such banter in his prologues and epilogues to turn his audiences’ appetites against them, to call into question—as his middle-class counterparts in trade, Church, and government were beginning to do—the moral soundness of the aristocracy and Court. For Dryden is always careful to draw attention to the fact that he is simply accommodating his audiences’ tastes, implying that they are in no way his own; and over time it becomes clear that he identifies sexual irregularity, immoderate carnal appetites, and boorish behavior almost exclusively with the theatre’s gentle patrons.

In his prologue to *Secret Love* (1667), for example, he tells his auditors, “A civil prologue is approv’d by no man; / You hate it as you do a civil woman” (ll. 37-38); the audience needs its fancy “quicken’d” (l. 40), “Just as old sinners, worn from their delight,



/ Give money to be whipp'd to appetite" (ll. 41-42). At one stroke he assumes and justifies his aggressive posture toward the assembled playgoers, claiming to give them what any sophisticated roué would crave: stimulating abuse. The progress from "raw squire" to rake to roué Dryden traces in the opening lines of the prologue for the revival of *The Wild Gallant* (1667). Here an archetypical "raw squire" graduates from furtive masturbation—"(Pleas'd with some sport, which he alone does find, / And thinks a secret to all humankind)" (ll. 3-4)—to the easy seduction of "the gentle dairy-maid" (l. 6), to "the renown / of Whetstone's Park" (ll. 7-8) (i.e., its prostitutes), and so on to other acts of destructive self-indulgence upon his arrival in London: "He grows to break glass windows in the end: / His valor too, which with the watch began, / Proceeds to duel, and he kills his man" (ll. 10-12). It is the influence of such rakes, the Prologue says, that has corrupted "our unfletch'd author" (l. 14), though he might yet still be too virtuous to please the town. Winn says that this prologue "ultimately reflects upon the attitudes and actions of such courtiers as Buckingham, who had been conducting an adulterous affair with the Duchess of Shrewsbury for several years, and would soon kill her husband in a duel" (184). Dryden could not see so far into the future, but he and his audience would have been well aware of the noblemen—Rochester among them—comprising what Vieth refers to as "the notorious group of young blades known as the 'Ballers'" (xxiii-xxiv), whose whoring, duelling, and vandalism had made them odious to City and Court alike. Dryden's prologue to Thomas Southerne's *The Disappointment* (1684) is another "squire's progress" piece. In this poem the young lad, whose "sucking bottles were well stor'd with brandy" (l. 27), and whose years at school have taught him little more than the "Latin names" (l. 33) for "certain parts of man and woman" (l. 32), comes to town, learns "the virtues of the high dice, and the low" (l. 38), and allows his sexual promiscuity to lead him to marry a broken-down actress, her portion "a twillet, dressing box, and half a crown" (l. 50): "He hires some homely room, love's fruits to gather, / And garret-high rebels against his father" (ll. 46-47). The rebel at last receives his inheritance, only to run through it playing the fine

gentleman: “But while abroad so liberal the *dolt* is, / Poor spouse at home as ragged as a *colt* is” (ll. 54-55). Predictably, self-indulgence leads at length to self-consumption. And it was recognized in Dryden’s day that such self-destruction was far from a merely personal affair. J.R. Jones notes that, at least among the minor gentry, the wastrel squire was fast becoming a hated symbol of the bleeding of England’s material and moral substance; to them, he was to the traditional social order what London was to the nation as a whole: a cancer, a parasite draining away vitality and virtue while “corrupting all classes by the peculiar temptations of metropolitan life” (75-77). The most reviled of these “peculiar temptations” is specifically ascribed to young play-going dandies in a suppressed epilogue to Lee and Dryden’s already controversial *The Duke of Guise* (1682). The female speaker delivering this piece declares that London’s gallants have taken to railing at women instead of courting them for lovers:

Nay, and I fear they worse designs advance;  
 There’s a damn’d love-trick new brought o’er from France.  
 We charm in vain, and dress, and keep a pother,  
 While these false rogues are ogling one another.  
 All sins beside admit some expiation,  
 But this against our sex is plain damnation (ll. 23-28).

Dryden is not suggesting that social rank inevitably corrupts, let alone that an undeveloped æsthetic sense is the first step toward real viciousness—though in pieces such as the prologue to *An Evening’s Love* (1668) he associates sexual promiscuity with a lack of fidelity to proper dramatic values: “Each writing *Monsieur* is a fresh gallant” (l. 12). He is no Roundhead railing against the sinfulness of the theatre or the depravity and parasitism of the aristocracy.<sup>7</sup> But when he taxes his audiences with want of discernment or immoderate appetites for novelty and sexual innuendo, the likely consequences for a society that cannot distinguish merit from nonsense or the substantial from the spurious

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<sup>7</sup> In fact, when the playhouse of the King’s Company burned down in 1672, Dryden’s next prologue labels those who attributed the fire to God’s anger as “blind unmanner’d zealots” (l. 17).

even in the playhouse are not far from his mind. Eyes that are pleased with “all naked beauties but a play,”<sup>8</sup> stomachs that “with long disease oppress’d, / Cannot the cordials of strong wit digest,”<sup>9</sup> cannot be trusted to separate truth from falsehood in the greater chaos of the larger world. “Tell me, you powers,” Dryden’s speaker apostrophizes in the prologue to John Banks’s *The Unhappy Favorite* (1681), “why should vain man pursue, / With endless toil, each object that is new, / And for seeming substance leave the true? / Why should he quit for hopes his certain good, / And loathe the manna of his daily food?” (ll. 13-17). The Prologue for the anti-Dutch *Amboyna* (1672) had declared, “Religion wheedled you [the audience] to civil war, / Drew English blood, and Dutchmen’s now would spare” (ll. 15-16); now, at the height of the Exclusion Crisis, when it seems that Shaftesbury will likely beguile the nation into another civil war, supplanting the nation’s loyalty to James, the rightful heir, with the affection aroused by the handsome and charming Duke of Monmouth, the inability of the English to discern their proper good once more stands forth, threatening to wreak a new Fall upon Charles II’s new-made “Eden” (l. 27): “What civil broils have cost we knew too well; / O let it be enough that once we fell, / And every heart conspire with every tongue, / Still to have such a king, and this king long” (ll. 31-34).

Dryden’s likening of hierarchical social stability to wholesome “manna” in *The Unhappy Favorite* prologue is such a near parallel to that of sound dramatic practice to proper nourishment<sup>10</sup> in the prologue to *The Loyal General*, that his own intellectual and

<sup>8</sup> Epilogue to *Aureng-Zebe* (1675; l. 16)

<sup>9</sup> Prologue to Nahum Tate’s *The Loyal General* (1680; ll. 22-23)

<sup>10</sup> The full passage runs as follows:

They talk of fevers that infect the brains,  
But nonsense is the new disease that reigns.  
Weak stomachs, with a long disease oppress’d,  
Cannot the cordials of strong wit digest.  
Therefore thin nourishment of farce ye choose,  
Decoctions of a barley-water Muse:  
A meal of tragedy would make ye sick,

rhetorical conflation of the political and poetic spheres and their values becomes clear. However, though Dryden might have used such a conflation to hint at the public consequences of the patron class's lack of judgement and self-restraint, I am not at all sure that he meant for the noblemen and -women in the playhouse to reform themselves absolutely, any more than he meant for them to assimilate fully his principles for "serious plot and verse." A debauched aristocracy makes a reliable butt for the professional poet of the middle-class. But I think that Dryden has something more cunning—and effectively more baneful—in mind for his fashionable auditors. Johnson observes in his *Life of Dryden* that in the poet's day "the drama was very far from that universal approbation it has now obtained. The playhouse was abhorred by the Puritans, and avoided by those who desired the character of seriousness or decency. A grave lawyer would have debased his dignity, and a young trader, would have impaired his credit, by appearing in those mansions of dissolute licentiousness" (201). His opinion seems altogether in line with the verdict of John Evelyn, Dryden's contemporary, who in a diary entry for October 18, 1666, remarks that he seldom goes to the theatre, "for many reasons, now as they were abused, to an atheistical liberty, fowle and undecent":

Women now (and never 'til now) permitted to appeare and act, which inflaming severall young noble-men and gallants, became their whores, and to some their Wives, wittnesse the Earle of Oxford, Sir R: Howard, Pr: Rupert, the E: of Dorset, and another greater person than any of these,<sup>11</sup> who fell into their snares, to the reproch of their noble families, and ruine of both body and Soule (216).

But after all Evelyn did occasionally go to the public playhouses, and seems to have allowed his daughter Mary to attend the plays she wished to see. Moreover, as Holland

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Unless it were a very tender chick.  
Some scenes in sippets would be worth our time;  
Those would go down; some love that's poach'd in rhyme (ll. 20-29).

<sup>11</sup> Evelyn no doubt refers to Charles II himself, whose affair with the actress Nell Gwyn was an open secret. In his *Royal Mistresses* (1990), Charles Carlton notes, "Before meeting the king, she had numerous lovers, supposedly seducing the poet John Dryden. . . . Nell became mistress first to [the actor] Charles Hart, and second to Charles, Lord Buckhurst [later the Earl of Dorset]—which prompted her to teasingly call the king 'My Charles the Third'" (75).

points out, not only were the solidly respectable middle classes regular playgoers (though they preferred the spectacles of Davenant's company to the more intellectually demanding fare at the King's Company), but women frequently attended plays with their husbands, and, if the example of the Pepyses is representative, often attended plays alone (443-444). Though not as morally fastidious as his friend Evelyn, Samuel Pepys was a government official with a reputation to consider; yet, Holland observes, "At no time does Pepys give even the slightest hint that the theatre was a dangerously immoral place for his wife to attend. His own scruples over the frequency of his visits to the theatre arose from his fear of wasting money and of neglecting work. More than once he expresses fear of being seen at the theatre in wartime" (444). I have no intention of attempting to resolve these opposing portrayals of the Restoration stage; rather, I would suggest that when we consider the insistence with which Dryden suggests to his audience that it is sexually obsessed, ill-mannered, violent, and crudely outspoken, it seems likely that he not only seeks to effect an almost reflexive association between the patron classes and moral profligacy in the public mind, but also uses the ambiguous reputation of the theatre to cozen his polite auditors into accepting an identity that will undermine their cultural and critical credibility. In short, Dryden's prologues and epilogues help to make fashionable a well-recognized role that has no claim upon literary authority.

Dryden is not the only popular writer in this period to associate moral dissolution specifically with the upper classes. Samuel Butler, whose *Hudibras* (1662, 1663, and 1677), says Winn, was Charles II's favorite book (126), in his *Characters* (composed 1667-1669; published 1759) portrays several social types that might have been drawn from the occupants of the King's Company's pits and galleries, among them "A Duke of Bucks," "A Degenerate Noble," "A Huffing Courtier," "A Squire of Dames," "A City Wit," "A Court Wit," and "A Dueller." John Bunyan, as a Puritan Dryden's temperamental and ideological opposite, includes in *The Pilgrim's Progress* a description of Vanity Fair

that seems to draw directly upon popular perceptions of the Restoration Court and its proclivities:

Therefore at this fair are all such merchandise sold, as houses, lands, trades, places, honours, preferments, titles, countries, kingdoms, lusts, pleasures, and delights of all sorts, as whores, bawds, wives, husbands, children, masters, servants, lives, blood, bodies, souls, silver, gold, pearls, precious stones, and what not. And moreover, at this fair there is at all times to be seen jugglings, cheats, games, plays, fools, apes, knaves, and rogues, and that of all sorts (84-85).

And with particular regard to prologues and epilogues, Wiley notes that the gallant-critic had been an occasional object of satire at least since Jonson's *Cynthia's Revels* (1616), adding, "After 1660 no less than fifty-six per cent. of the characterizations in prologues and epilogues referred to the dress of the man of fashion, forty-two per cent. to his conduct" (173). But if Dryden is very much in tune with his times in his association of dissolution and rank, his portraiture is more detailed than Jonson's, more fully reified than Bunyan's allegorical renderings, and more precisely contextualized than Butler's universal types. Moreover, though he seldom neglects an opportunity to impute to his audiences an unhealthy appetite for sexual titillation, his tone is generally more bantering than scornful, making his indictments seem the result of envy or thwarted desire instead of disgust and contempt, making his depictions of the boorish rake seem slightly more glorious than grotesque. Winn observes of the seventeenth century that "The sexual activities of the aristocracy were a subject of universal fascination" (125), for then, as now, two separate standards of morality prevailed, one for the upper classes and one for the middling rank and below. Among the fashionable and those who would be thought so, who would not secretly bask in an enviable notoriety?

Thus (to add a few brief examples to those given above), when the actresses of King's Company put on a play at the Duke's Company's old playhouse in 1672, the Prologue declares that the theatre is the ideal place for the rendezvous of sophisticated lovers: "Here's good accommodation in the pit; / The grave demurely in the midst may sit. /

And so the hot Burgundian on either side / Ply vizard-mask, and o'er the benches stride" (ll. 11-14). The speaker observes further that gazing from the stage into the upper boxes, "We, who look up, can your addresses mark, / And see the creatures coupled in the ark" (ll. 20-21). Dryden goes still further in making illicit promiscuity seem chic in his prologue to *Marriage A la Mode* (1672). Here the speaker promises that in addition to adopting all the fripperies of the rival theatre, the King's Company will go them one better and turn the playhouse into a brothel: "We'll follow the new mode which they begin, / And treat 'em with a room, and couch within; / For that's one way, how'er the play fall short, / T' oblige the town, the city, and the court" (ll. 36-9). The prologue to *All For Love or, The World Well Lost* (1677) entices the men in the audience to identify with the tragedy's hero, who is "somewhat lewd, but a well-meaning mind; / Weeps much, fights little, but is wondrous kind. / In short, a pattern, and companion fit, / For all the [mistress-] keeping Tonies of the pit" (ll. 12-15). Buried in the seemingly flattering epithet "keeping Tonies" is the fate of the "pattern" for all the gallants of the pit: ignoble death and lasting infamy. One miscellaneous prologue, evidently written (c. 1681) for a first-time playwright, casts the audience in a more specific and supposedly desirable role, likening the young author to a blushing virgin awaiting what he hopes will be a gentle debauching: "E'er you deflow'r his Muse, he hopes the pit / Will make some settlement upon his wit. / Promise him well, before the play begin, / For he would fain be cozen'd into sin" (ll. 7-10). But he is meant for the women as well as the men, for "To both he would contribute some delight, / A mere poetical hermaphrodite" / . . . . With arms offensive and defensive too: / 'Tis hard, he thinks, if neither part will do" (ll. 34-35; 37-38). Dryden repeats the virgin-poet analogy in his epilogue to Thomas Southerne's first play, a tragedy, *The Loyal Brother* (1682), and as in the earlier prologue, seems to hint that the author's favors (and figurative genitalia) are exotically amphibious: "He's neither yet a Whig nor Tory boy; / But, like a girl whom

several would enjoy, / Begs leave to make the best of his own natural toy" (ll. 3-5).<sup>12</sup> These hints at an ambiguous physique and sexuality seem designed to appeal to the jaded sexual sophisticates of the belle monde, those for whom carnal adventure of the Rochesterian sort has made the passion of domestic—or even heroic—love distastefully bland. In his prologue to Lee's *Mithridates* (1678), Dryden notes that "no man dies for love, but on the stage: / And ev'n those martyrs are but rare in plays; / A cursed sign of how much true faith decays" (ll. 5-7); instead, "rich cullies" (l. 20) and women who "fight, like Swizzers, for their pay" (l. 25) have corrupted love itself into "sophisticated ware" (l. 21), that is, prostitution. At the very least, love in polite society has been reduced to a game of cold calculation. Noting "the custom among Restoration aristocrats of keeping a mistress, which should perhaps be regarded as polygyny or concubinage rather than adultery" (xxiii), Vieth recounts a contemporary anecdote that neatly demonstrates the psychological, physical, and social consequences of passionless, chess-match promiscuity. The third Earl of Southesk, believing his wife Anne, daughter of the Duke of Hamilton and "one of the most promiscuous women of the Restoration Court," to be having an affair with James, the heir presumptive, "took revenge by deliberately contracting a case of venereal disease and passing it onto his wife, who then unknowingly infected the Duke" (55n). Southesk's revenge may have exceeded his most extravagant expectations: Maurice Ashley suggests that James's narrow-minded obstinacy as king might be attributable to "a premature mental decline" resulting from "his excesses" (167).

But we need not conjure up images of a syphilis-maddened James II presiding over the Bloody Assizes or skulking into exile to understand that for Dryden those who are dead

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<sup>12</sup> In his article, "The Discourse on Sex—or Sex as Discourse: Eighteenth-Century Medical and Paramedical Erotica" (1988), Peter Wagner notes that early in the following century widespread public interest in the sexually irregular—hermaphrodites, eunuchs, and homosexuals—allowed outright quacks as well as medical men with an eye to profits and fame to publish shoals of semi-pornographic treatises in the name of science. Dryden's "poetical hermaphrodites" might constitute an early recognition of a fashionable but superficial curiosity that dared acknowledge itself only later under the aegis of Enlightenment medicine.



to everyday human feelings, who instead seek out the bizarre and deviant for their own sakes, are lost to nature and to moral truth—and certainly cannot presume to prescribe for the theatre, for they cannot be expected to recognize and advance the wholesome plainness of poetry’s ethical imperative. Dryden declares in his “Defence” that “moral truth is the mistress of the poet as much as of the philosopher: poesy must resemble natural truth, but it must *be* ethical. Indeed, the poet dresses truth, and adorns nature, but does not alter them” (120). The true poet does not put freaks of morality or nature on the stage, and the discerning audience does not applaud them should they appear there. Thus Dryden chastises his audiences for their “unnatural” prurience, as well as for their taste for hypertrophic fashions—“But only fools, and they of vast estate, / Th’ extremity of modes will imitate, / The dangling knee-fringe, and the bib-cravat”<sup>13</sup>—and their demand that “fools out of the common road”<sup>14</sup> be made a staple of the stage. Though Dryden escapes the charge of hypocrisy by dissociating himself absolutely from the appetites of his playhouse patrons, he does entice them into adopting what he later reveals to be indefensible judgements, attitudes, and behavior.

The following example reveals the technique in brief. Throughout the 1660’s and 1670’s Dryden’s prologues and epilogues attack the outlandishness and effeminacy of the traipsing “Monsieurs,” the travelling French troupes that periodically diverted the crowds from the King’s and Duke’s companies, encouraging their auditors to show themselves to be hearty Britons by adopting the boisterousness and toughmindedness that purportedly characterize their race. However, Dryden’s depictions of the hearty Briton almost always end up emphasizing the boorishness among the gallants and dandies of the pits, though these descriptions seem more bantering than damning, as if such behavior were *de rigueur* for the would-be gentleman-playgoer; as if, together with sexual incontinence, such

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<sup>13</sup> Prologue delivered at the opening of the King’s Company’s new playhouse, March 26, 1674 (ll. 25-27)

<sup>14</sup> Prologue to *The Assignment* (1672; l. 23)

behavior were merely part of the role of fashionable rake. Having thus conditioned his audiences over the years to expect certain attitudes from him as well as a certain playhouse comportment from themselves, Dryden suddenly “reverses polarity” in the epilogue to his tragedy *Aureng-Zebe* (1675). At first his speaker appears to lead the audience into familiar pro-British, anti-French territory:

True English hate your Monsieurs' paltry arts,  
 For you all are silk-weavers in your hearts.  
 Bold Britons, at a brave Bear Garden fray,  
 Are rous'd, and, clatt'ring sticks, cry: 'Play, play, play!'  
 Meantime, your filthy foreigner will stare  
 And mutter to himself: "*Ha, gens barbare!*"  
 And, gad, 'tis well he mutters; well for him;  
 Our butchers else would tear him limb from limb (ll. 20-27).

But just as our Francophobia is about to climax, Dryden gives the rug beneath us a good yank: "'Tis true, the time may come, your sons may be / Infected with this French civility" (ll. 28-29). "Infected" matches ill with "civility," so one of the words must bear some ironic weight. But which, and how much? That "civility" seems to refer to "your Monsieurs' paltry arts," and these arts are contrasted with bear-baiting, provides a good clue that "infected" rather than "civility" is meant to raise an eyebrow, but the next few lines clinch the matter. "But this in after-ages will be done: / Our poet writes a hundred years too soon. / This age comes on too slow, or he too fast; / And early springs are subject to a blast!" (ll. 30-33). And what does "our poet" write so far ahead of its time? The Epilogue has already told us in the opening lines to the piece:

A pretty task! and so I told the fool,  
 Who needs would undertake to please by rule:  
 He thought that, if his characters were good,  
 The scenes entire, and freed from noise and blood,  
 The action great, yet circumscrib'd by time,  
 The words not forc'd, but sliding into rhyme,  
 The passions rais'd and calm'd by just degrees,  
 As tides are swell'd, and then retire to seas:  
 He thought, in hitting these, his bus'ness done,  
 Tho' he, perhaps, has fail'd in ev'ry one (ll. 1-10).

That is, the poet has delivered a play constructed according to the principles of French neoclassical drama, and he means for it to be taken as an advance upon not only the “brave Bear Garden fray,” but, given the setting, upon the generic chaos typical of the English theatre. The “true English,” Dryden implies, cannot distinguish between the Frenchman’s “paltry arts” and his sober dramatic prescriptions, and prefer to remain immune from the “infection” of advanced dramaturgy. And so the “true English gentlemen” Dryden had so long ago declared his best judges remain barbarous, ignorant, intellectually backward—and utterly debarred from pronouncing upon literary matters. The professional poet not only sees the difference between sense and nonsense but may, according to the rules he knows and has mastered,<sup>15</sup> “undertake to please” those “who can discern the tinsel from the gold” (l. 39): “To these he writes; and, if by them allow’d, / ’Tis their prerogative to rule the crowd. / For he more fears, like a presuming man, / Their votes who cannot judge, than theirs who can” (ll. 40-41).

Those who possess the “prerogative to rule the crowd” comprise an aristocracy of wit, judgement, and talent with which Dryden would supplant the cultural authority of the aristocracy of blood. Though Dryden never abandons his habit of impugning the taste and morality of the latter, after 1678 he adds another weapon in his assault upon the nobility’s aesthetic credibility: closely conflating his opponents’ poetic values with the politics that once “wheedled” England into Civil War, regicide, and anarchy—and threaten, Dryden believes, to do so again. Whereas the “programme” I have described in the foregoing pages might after all be incidental, however substantial its cumulative effects upon the public mind, this new strategy of conflation is obviously the product of premeditation, calculated to achieve a definite rhetorical end, namely that those who would overthrow poetry’s

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<sup>15</sup> Incidentally, this is the one place in 95 prologues and epilogues written over 40 years wherein Dryden sets forth any constructive rules for good drama.

aristocracy of talent are but one step away from betraying their king and his rightful heir. By associating his poetical opponents with the King's political foes, and both with those responsible for the deposition and execution of Charles I and the establishment of the Commonwealth, Dryden does more than solidify his own position and identification with the popularly restored and therefore legitimate order that has made him Laureate; he taints his rivals and critics—whether noble, like Howard, Buckingham, Shaftesbury, Rochester, and the gallants of the pit and upper boxes, or common, like Shadwell and Settle—with the evocation of an image still widely feared and despised, that of the rebellious, regicidal, philistine Puritan. Linking their literary and critical credibility to largely exploded political and social opinions, Dryden manages to make his opponents seem by turns treasonous, dangerous, and (once their defeat has been assured) abjectly ridiculous—but in any case ill-qualified to assume any measure of public or poetic authority.

Thomas Shadwell, Dryden's rival, antagonist, and occasional butt, claims in "A Lenten Prologue Refus'd by the Players" (but subsequently published as a broadside in 1682 or 1683), that "Our Prologue-Wit grows flat" (l. 1), forcing voguish poets to write explicitly political pieces: "But Plots, and Parties give new matter birth; / And State Distractions serve you here for mirth!" (ll. 5-6). Yet as subsequent lines make clear, Shadwell is less bored with current prologue and epilogue fare than chagrined at the success of Dryden and the Tories in their recent political triumph over the Whigs and their continuing vilification and suppression of the Whig Opposition: "Baye's [Dryden's] crown'd Muse, by sovereign Right of Satyre, / Without desert, can dubb a man a Traitor. / And Toryes, without troubling Law, or Reason, / By loyal Instinct can find Plots and Treason" (ll. 36-39). Shadwell goes on to deride the Tory assertions that the Whigs were behind the Rye House Plot against the King, that Shaftesbury's Protestant Association in fact existed and was a vehicle for sedition, and that London's defense of its charter constituted treason. The political events to which Shadwell alludes had their ultimate origin in the alleged Popish Plot, with which the Opposition had tried to bolster its position during

the Exclusion Crisis (1678-1681); Dryden's claim of the "sovereign Right of Satyre" had its origin in a sinister incident occurring on the evening of December 19, 1679. That night, as the Laureate walked along the narrow Rose Alley, he was confronted by three men bearing cudgels and savagely beaten. The identity of his assailants and the motives for the assault have never been established, but the fact that Dryden was not robbed suggests that the attack was meant to redress some real or imagined offense he had committed against a person of "quality." As Winn observes, "In the violent world of seventeenth-century London, having someone cudgelled by hired bullies was not uncommon; it provided a way for powerful people to deal with their social inferiors, men not sufficiently 'honorable' to be challenged to a duel" (326). Thus in addition to its ferocity, the attack may have carried with it a crude social snub.<sup>16</sup> But whether the Rose Lane beating was arranged by a noble personage or, as some have suggested, by a Whig Opposition hoping to stifle an articulate Administration spokesman, Dryden emerged from that December night with a new energy and purpose. Says Winn,

[I]f those responsible hoped to silence him, they failed. Indeed, the literary and political caution we have noticed in Dryden's work in 1679 vanished in his inventive and partisan work of the early 1680s, in which he responded to the most serious political crisis since the Civil War with an outburst of creative vigor. . . . The final irony thus returned upon those behind the beating: whoever they were, they evidently intended to discourage Dryden's satiric pen by breaking his bones; instead, they unleashed the true powers of the century's greatest satirist (328-329).

Though Dryden's prologues and epilogues turn overtly political only in 1679 and after, a few of his earlier pieces anticipate his later, more explicit conflation of his opponents' poetical and political values. In his prologue for *The Rival Ladies* (1663), for instance, when Dryden refers to the "reforming poets of our age" (l. 7), "reforming" would

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<sup>16</sup> Winn dismisses traditional suggestions that the Earl of Rochester was behind the beating and suggests that the Duchess of Portsmouth might have ordered the ambush through "her violent brother-in-law, Philip, Earl of Pembroke" (326), in response to Dryden's supposed authorship of "An Essay on Satire," which lampooned the royal mistresses.

have brought to mind recent Puritan experiments with the organization of the English Church and Crown. Dryden evokes similar unhappy national memories when, in “A Defence of *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy*,” he mocks Howard’s lament that he (Howard) must now turn from poetry and devote his attention to government business: “the Muses have lost him,” Dryden sneers, “but the Commonwealth gains by it; the corruption of a poet is the generation of a statesman” (118). Again Dryden’s language is loaded: in 1668 “commonwealth” referred not abstractly to a national body, but specifically to the Parliamentary government established after the execution of Charles I; “statesman” might be neutral, but “state” was usually understood to refer pejoratively to a republic such as Holland.<sup>17</sup> Having ridiculed Howard’s poetic ability in the foregoing paragraph—“his thoughts [are] elevated, sometimes above common comprehension; his notions politic and grave, and tending to the instruction of princes, and *reformation of states*” (emphasis added)—Dryden means to imply that the integrity of Howard’s statecraft is as suspect. It was Howard, after all, who the year before had turned against Clarendon, his former benefactor and one of Dryden’s patrons, and joined with those who sought and obtained his resignation as Charles II’s Lord Chancellor. This was a betrayal that Dryden seems to have interpreted as a dangerous circumscription of royal authority, associating it with the abandonment of Lord Strafford to the Long Parliament’s death warrant in 1641—itsself a first step along the road toward Civil War and regicide. The consequences of circumscription and outright usurpation of the rightful monarch are given in Dryden’s prologue to *The Kind Keeper or, Mr. Limberham* (1678). Written just months before the Popish Plot was “discovered,” it seems in its phrasing an uncanny “fore-echo” of the prologues and epilogues he wrote when the Plot and the Whigs were at their height, though it also recalls his prologue for *The Rival Ladies*. Repeating the now familiar assertion that

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<sup>17</sup> Consider Dryden’s assertion in his prologue to his anti-Dutch tragedy, *Amboyna* (1672): “Well monarchies may own religion’s name, / But states are atheists in their very frame” (II. 21-22).

“True wit has seen its best days long ago; / It ne’er looked up, since we were dipp’d in show” (ll. 1-2), Dryden attributes the death of wit and the audience’s insatiable appetite for novelty to those “reforming poets” he seemed to mention in passing in 1663: “Let them, who the rebellion began / To wit, restore the monarch, if they can” (ll. 11-12). Similarly, the prologue to Dryden and Lee’s recasting of *Oedipus* (August 1678) admonishes its auditors not to abandon the rules of dramatic poetry in favor of mere inspiration, for “when you lay tradition wholly by, / And on the private spirit alone rely, / You turn fanatics in your poetry” (ll. 29-31). That is, they will become like those radical Puritans who would overthrow the authority and structure of Church and State and obey instead only the promptings of their consciences, creating social and moral anarchy.

But if these early topical references are generally aimed and obliquely rather than overtly damning, Dryden leaves little room for misconstruction in his prologue to *The Loyal General* (1679)—in fact, Winn suggests that the Rose Alley beating might have been provoked by this piece (325). Dryden scolds the “apostate pit” (l. 8) for neglecting “that which reasonable men should write” (l. 2) (i.e. serious, well-crafted plays) in favor of scandalous “city gazettes,” “factious speech” (l. 5), and “whate’er libel, for the public good, / Stirs up the Shrovetide crew to fire and blood!” (ll. 6-7). We have seen such scolding before, but the specific distractions Dryden cites here make possible a more politically charged and controversial association than when audiences were accused of “apostasy” merely because they patronized the Duke’s Company. This time the “entertainments” drawing off the attention of playgoers—the sensationalist pulp journalism, the oppositional scheming against the Duke of York, the slurs cast against members of the Royal family and household, the Pope-burnings and crude anti-Catholic plays inflaming Protestant bigotry—are far more sinister and are likely to have immediate consequences for social stability; they might, Dryden hints, foreshadow a return to civil war:

The plays that take on our corrupted stage,  
Methinks, resemble the distracted age;

Noise, madness, all unreasonable things,  
 That strike at sense, as rebels do at kings!  
 The style of forty-one our poets write,  
 And you are grown to judge like forty-eight (ll. 12-17).

The final two lines are particularly significant. “[Their] meaning,” says Sir Walter Scott, “is that the poets rebel against sense and criticism, as the parliament, in 1641, did against the king: and that the audience judge as ill as those who, in 1648, condemned Charles to the block” (qtd. in Noyes, 954n). The Popish Plot had yet to be fully exposed for what it was, but even at this early date Dryden seems to have discerned that its prosecution was largely a screen for the political maneuverings of the Opposition. “Despite ample reasons for discretion,” Winn says, “he now dared to compare the Opposition explicitly to the ‘Rebels’ of the 1640s; like those earlier ‘Rebels,’ Shaftesbury’s men were besieging the crown with petitions requesting a meeting of the Parliament” (325). Important in this passage is the twofold conflation, of the “rebels” against wit with would-be usurpers, and of those usurpers with the Parliamentarians who overthrew and executed Charles I. Such associations may excite in the modern reader an intellectual appreciation of Dryden’s rhetorical strategy, but in the poet’s day they were explosive indeed, for not only was treason a capital offense, images of the regicidal Puritan and of the “martyred” Charles I remained searingly alive in public memory and allusions to them had considerable power to excite and disgust. Butler’s *Hudibras*, the zealous, intolerant, and hypocritical Presbyterian Quixote who was one of those “Still so perverse and opposite, / As if they worshipped God for spite” (I, i, ll. 215-216), is a classic composite of all that was seen as hateful in the “typical” Puritan. But his character of “A Fanatic,” is equally pertinent here. The fanatic, says Butler, “chooses himself one of the Elect,” using scripture to justify his own sins; his religion “tends only to Faction and Sedition,” and for his faith he would rather be thought to suffer than to perform good works, for these are “no better than Encroachments upon the Merits of *free believing*”; and naturally he is above civil and religious ordinance, “and being a Freeman supposes him-self at Liberty to set up what Religion he pleases” (127). For



Dryden there is not much in principle or motive to choose between those who would disregard the laws of playhouse church, and kingdom, willfully sacrificing dramatic, ecclesiastical, or political order to satisfy and justify their own individual appetites and ambitions.

Dryden is not alone in making this association. Thomas Durfey's prologue to *The Royalist* (1681), for instance, has its speaker express surprise to find "the House full! and at a *Royal Play!*" (l. 1), though "th' Pit (methinks) looks like a *Commonweal* ; / Where Monarch Wit's baf'l'd by ev'ry Drudge, / And each pert Railing *Brimingham's* a Judge" (ll. 4-6). And Thomas Otway's epilogue to *Venice Preserved or, The Plot Discovered* (1681) identifies those who (literally) defaced a portrait of James, Duke of York with those who killed his father: "A Face [James's], in which such Lineaments they [the vandals] Read, / Of that Great Martyr, whose Rich Blood they Shed, / That their Rebellious Hate they still maintain, / And, in his Son, would Murder Him again" (ll. 31-34). Such associations do double work. In Dryden's case, two old literary adversaries, Shaftesbury and Buckingham, were prominent among the Opposition leaders; Howard and Rochester had Whiggish leanings; and two of his particular literary antagonists, Shadwell and Settle, were spokesmen for the Opposition cause. It is true that in the prologues and epilogues he wrote during the Exclusion Crisis Dryden does not name his targets; and perhaps his intention is not to undermine the Opposition leaders specifically as literary figures. Nonetheless, by appropriating the most incendiary social imagery for his own and his party's purposes he is able to make literary theory largely recapitulate royalist political theory. In poetry as in the kingdom itself order and stability depend upon the existence of a single figure to whose authority all others, whatever their rank, defer; this authority is neither absolute nor tyrannically autocratic, but must not be capriciously subverted lest, as Dryden asserts in *Absalom and Achitophel* (1681), the people lose the security of their "private right" (l. 779) and "are left defenseless to the sword / Of each unbounded, arbitrary lord" (ll. 761-762). His argument recalls the appeal he made to proprietary order in the prologue to *Albumazar*

(1668): without laws and executives to uphold them, society dissolves into Hobbesian anarchy. Thus when Dryden declares in the prologue to Southerne's *The Loyal Brother* (1681), that "Poets, like lawful monarchs, rul'd the stage, / Till critics, like damn'd Whigs, debauch'd our age" (ll. 1-2), he means to evoke in an audience made uneasy by the present turmoil a reflexive acknowledgement not only of the rightness of royalist doctrine in the poetry as well as politics, but, conversely, of the fundamental wrongness of rebellion in either sphere. If the penchant for novelty with which Dryden so often taxes his audiences exposes in them a predisposition to more serious social lapses, so does the constitutional experimentation advocated by the Opposition and its literary spokesmen disqualify from prescribing in the moral world of the theatre.

At the same time, Dryden's conflation of the poetical and political helps to solidify his position as one of poetry's "lawful monarchs." For one thing, he is able to put himself forward as a defender of poetry's right to exist at all, and of its necessary role in the formation of the nation's moral and ethical sensibilities. In a prologue delivered at the Oxford performance of Lee's tragedy, *Sophonisba* in 1680, Dryden lets himself imagine the consequences of an Exclusionist victory. By now the association of the Whigs with the Long Parliament has become so well established as to be a cliché: "But 'tis the talent of our English nation, / Still to be plotting some new reformation; / And few years hence, if anarchy goes on, / Jack Presbyter shall here [at Oxford] erect his throne" (ll. 9-12). If and when this happens, Dryden muses, "Your poets shall be us'd like infidels" (l. 17); "Religion, learning, wit, would be suppress'd, / Rags of the whore, and trappings of the beast" (ll. 23-24). The suppression of poetry and poets is a new twist to the association of the past and present enemies of the King, and provides another justification for the disbarment of his Whiggish opponents from literary authority. But in presenting them as foes to religion, learning, and wit, Dryden can style himself, as a poet and as Poet Laureate, the latest in a long line of apologists, including Sidney and Jonson, who also had to defend poetry against Puritan attacks. Linking wit with religion and learning, Dryden

largely recapitulates the argument of his two great predecessors, that poetry is a necessary complement to one's spiritual and intellectual training. That it is not a frivolous or impractical acquirement is underscored in his epilogue to Banks's *The Unhappy Favorite* (1681). Here, amidst much anti-Whig flak, Dryden attributes low playhouse attendance to the distractions provided by the Opposition press: "Tis not our want of wit that keeps us poor; / For then the printer's press would suffer more. / Their pamphleteers each day their venom spit; / They thrive by treason, and we starve by wit" (ll. 16-19). He declares the parties' rival newspapers, the Whigs' *Democritus* and the Tories' *Heraclitus Ridens*, to be worse than pulp press sensationalism, but far superior to "your lampooning rhymes, / Y' abuse yourselves more dully than the times. / Scandal, the glory of the English nation, / Is worn to rags, and scribbled out of fashion" (ll. 26-29). In addition to scolding his audience for its participation in "the farce of your own age,"<sup>18</sup> Dryden seeks to counteract the encroachment of competing media upon the domain of the formal prologue and epilogue to comment upon and prescribe for the times; at the least, Dryden seeks to maintain his own influence upon public opinion at the expense of other professional writers in other public media. Either way, Dryden's performance here is a practical example of the role of the poet and poetry in public affairs.

But let us assume for the moment that Dryden's motivation in making such statements and in conflating poetic and political values is entirely self-serving, an outgrowth of his ambition and of his loyalty to his royal master. When, for instance, Dryden all but dares his critics to dislike a play and reveal themselves as traitorous Whigs in his epilogue to *The Loyal Brother*—"Tis faction buys the votes of half the pit; / Theirs is the pension-parliament of wit" (ll. 24-25)—we might suspect that Dryden is merely providing cover for himself while bullying the Administration's critics into silence. And we might find our suspicion confirmed by the increasingly virulent abuse he will heap on the

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<sup>18</sup> Prologue to *The Loyal General* (1679; l. 34)

Whigs in his prologues and epilogues of 1682, when they have been beaten utterly and the Tory reaction is in full swing. (See, for instance, his prologues to the King and Queen at the opening of the United Theatre and to *The Duke of Guise*.) However, the fact that Dryden is not at odds with his king does not mean that he is any the less a pioneer of very important public “space.” For he has stepped forward and claimed for the public poet—perhaps reclaimed from the classical past—the right to pronounce upon political affairs. The right to claim such a space provides him not only with a safe place to stand when he disagrees with the Administration, but a reasonably secure right to speak out when, as an old man, weary, poor, and disillusioned, he finds himself in opposition to the Administration of William III. Poor and politically powerless—but nonetheless revered as a great man of letters, and serving as an honored precedent for future poets, such as Pope, who find themselves at odds with their government and society. Moreover, the true significance of the territory Dryden has so laboriously carved out for himself is that it once belonged indisputably to the gentleman-poet and was enclosed by the walls of Court. It is Dryden, the consummate insider, who devises in his prologues and epilogues a journal of the times, making a practical case not only for the possibilities of public poetry, but for the necessity of formal public poetry as an alternative to the sensationalist pulp press as a forum and framer of political and social debate, and to the inward-looking lyrics of the Courtly Wits as an arbiter of literary sensibilities.

Against the proposition that Dryden by effect and design subverted aristocratic authority it may be argued that seldom was any writer more eager to boast of his royal and aristocratic connections, more cloying in his courtship of new patrons, or more sycophantic in his praise of those whose favor he had obtained. Johnson, who famously defined “patron” as “one who looks with unconcern on a man struggling for life in the water, and,

when he has reached ground, encumbers him with help,"<sup>19</sup> speaks contemptuously of Dryden's undignified address of the great: "[I]n the meanness and servility of hyperbolic adulation, I know not whether, since the the days in which the Roman emperors were deified, he has ever been equalled" (219). Johnson might have had in mind Dryden's address to the Earl of Orrery, prefixed to the first edition of *The Rival Ladies* (1664). Having praised Orrery's writing at length, Dryden extols the Earl as a universal paragon and belittles his own understanding:

I can only say, in general, that the souls of other men shine out at little crannies; they understand some one thing, perhaps, to admiration, while they are darkened on all other parts. But your Lordship's soul is an entire globe of light, breaking out on every side; and if I have only discovered one beam of it, 'tis not that the light falls unequally, but because the body which receives it is of unequal parts (5).

Or Johnson might have been thinking of Dryden's poem, "To the Earl of Roscommon, on His Excellent Essay on Translated Verse" 1684). Declares Dryden, "The Muses' empire is restor'd again, / In Charles his reign, and by Roscommon's pen" (ll. 28-29). This is excessive, but worse follows: Roscommon is hereafter to be the model of all translators, Britain and Ireland will quarrel over the privilege of being declared his native land, and his example will bring perfection to the English tongue, ensuring that English letters will now "on equal terms with ancient wit ingage, / Nor mighty Homer fear, nor sacred Virgil's page" (ll. 75-76). In his life of Roscommon, Johnson asserts that he "is perhaps the only correct writer in verse before Addison" (137), but soberly argues that despite the "elegance of the poetry," Roscommon's verse treatise is a hardly a work for the ages, "for when the sum of Lord Roscommon's precepts is collected, it will not be easy to discover how they can qualify their reader for a better performance of translation than might have been attained by his [the reader's] own reflections" (138). But surely Dryden's most embarrassing performance occurs in his *Discourse Concerning the Original and Progress of Satire*,

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<sup>19</sup> Letter to the Earl of Chesterfield, February 7, 1755 (2-3)

prefixed to his translation of the satires of Persius and Juvenal (1692) and dedicated to the Earl of Dorset. Here the author of *MacFlecknoe*, *Absalom and Achitophel*, and *The Medal*, three of the great satirical poems in the language, surrenders the laurel for satire to his patron in the most fulsome terms: “I never attempted anything in satire, wherein I have, not studied your writings as the most perfect model. I have continually laid them before me; and the greatest commendation which my own partiality can give to my productions, is, that they are copies, and no further to be allow’d, than as they have something more or less of the original” (76). After pages of such stuff, Dryden goes on to describe Dorset as “the king of poets” and the undisputed arbiter of wit (78-79), concluding, “Your Lordship’s only fault is, that you have not written more; unless I could add another, . . . that you have written, and out of a vicious modesty will not publish” (80).

Such public deference to the great would seem to solidify rather than undermine the prerogative of aristocratic amateurs to supervise the shape and content of literature as well as oversee the formulation and application of critical standards. But Johnson’s charge of “mean and servile hyperbolic adulation” can and should be challenged. Johnson, a rigidly honest man himself, often seems unable to take others at less than their word, and it may be that there is a significant gap between what Dryden appears to say and what he means to say—or what he ends up saying. In fact, a second look at the passages given above makes one suspect that this gap is more than a mere quibble. For instance, in Dryden’s praise of Roscommon, we should discern beneath the appearance of exuberant, unconditional commendation several problematic particulars. He asserts that “all the needful rules [for translation] are *scatter’d* here” (l. 32, emphasis added), implying that though the truth has been “smoothly told” (l. 33), and the poet’s “art disguis’d” (l. 34), the poem as a *treatise* is less than successful—an inference justified by Dryden’s subsequent assertion that we really have no need of Roscommon’s rules “to give translation light: / His own example is a flame so bright, / That he who but arrives to copy well, / Unguided will advance, unknowing will excell” (ll. 35-38). These lines are meant to be taken as praise, but one wonders why

Dryden phrased them so ambiguously. Roscommon's guide to translation is said to be inferior to his example, but oddly enough his translations of Horace and Virgil leave readers "unguided" and "unknowing." Dryden's opinion of Roscommon's work seems largely to concur with Johnson's, and when we remember that four years earlier Dryden had, in the preface to his translation (with others) of Ovid's *Epistles* (1680), set forth his own principles of translation, we begin to suspect that the Earl's verse essay is but an ornament to the real work of the professional poet.<sup>20</sup> Dryden's later, more general praise of gentlemen-amateurs confirms their wholly auxiliary status. "When authors nobly born will bear their part, / And not disdain the glorious praise of art!" (ll. 55-56), Dryden promises, English as a language will be perfected and "invention and translation [will] thrive" (l. 54). Yet the analogy that follows, of generals who "[descend] from command" and "with their own toil provoke the soldier's hand" (ll. 56-57), makes clear that the exertions of "authors nobly born" might be helpful, but are rather an afterthought to the main effort. They are extra, and essentially extraneous. Referring to the Earl of Mulgrave's translation of Ovid's heroic epistle, "Helen to Paris," Dryden says that the Roman's ghost is "pleas'd to hear / His fame *augmented* by an English peer; / How he *embellishes* his Helen's loves, / Outdoes his softness, and his sense improves" (ll. 59-62, emphasis added). Lines 59-61 suggest that Mulgrave has prettified Ovid; line 62, that he has exceeded his authority as a translator, for Dryden had declared in his preface to Ovid's *Epistles*, "The sense of an author, generally speaking, is to be sacred and inviolable. If the fancy of Ovid be luxuriant, 'tis his character to be so; and if I retrench it, he is no longer Ovid" (272). Mulgrave, like Roscommon, may have produced some enjoyable poetry, but both seemingly lack the

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<sup>20</sup> The following year Dryden observed in the preface to Tonson's second miscellany, *Sylvar* (1685), "For this last half-year I have been troubled with the disease (as I may call it) of translation" (18). It seems that despite the great quality of his translations (especially his Virgil) and the money they brought him, Dryden held the craft to be an art inferior to original composition.

learning, the theoretical sophistication, and the continual practice that distinguish the true proficient from the amateur.<sup>21</sup>

Much of Dryden's fawning, hyperbolic praise ultimately calls itself into question. His encomia upon Dorset in *A Discourse Upon Satire* at length come to very little. Not only is it inherently absurd, to the point of irony, for Dryden to declare Dorset the pattern for satirists, but reading closely we find that Dorset is king of poets because of his position as Lord Chamberlain in the administration of William III. Dorset is the bureaucrat responsible for maintaining "the decency and good manners of the stage" against "the petulant scribblers of this age" (79)—he is, in other words, the government's censor, and happens to be the man who had been cozened by Shadwell (whom he appointed Laureate in 1689) into banning Dryden's prologue to the 1690 revival of Fletcher's *The Prophetess*. Censor-by-appointment is hardly the same thing as monarch-by-merit, and though Dryden later claims that "your Lordship is form'd by nature for this [official] supremacy" (79), he has already made the crucial distinction. But it is with Dryden's two "complimentary criticisms" of Dorset, that the Earl writes little and publishes nothing, that the distinction is driven home. An infrequent writer of competent satires unscrutinized by the public eye, Dorset can hardly claim that he owes his position to his poetry's emerging triumphant from the lists of competitors and critics, as Dryden's own has. Indeed, Dryden's praise of Dorset is followed by Dryden's account of his own career as a dramatist, beleaguered satirist, and would-be writer of epics frustrated by poverty and the need to write to survive. The upshot of the juxtaposition is this: if Dryden claims to be the English Boileau, he has after all paid his dues; Dorset, the courtly wit and sometime poet, owes both his appointment and the praise of professionals entirely to his social rank.

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<sup>21</sup> In his explication of Dryden's commendatory verses upon Sir Robert Howard's *Poems* (1660), Winn explains Dryden's bias against aristocratic amateurs and his consistently problematic praise of them thus, "Because these licentious Cavalier poets failed [during the 1630's and 1640's] to guard 'Poesie' responsibly, the nation has had to endure the corrective rhetoric of the millenarian Independent preachers" (103).



But since Orrery, Roscommon, and Dorset were Dryden's friends as well as his patrons, let us suppose that he praises them with absolute sincerity. The charge of sycophancy might then stand—but the position of the aristocratic amateur is no less undermined. It seems paradoxical, but one may be praised out of credibility. However pleasing it may be, praise is innately problematic for its receiver. Perhaps all declarative speech entails an active speaker and a more or less passive auditor, but praise intensifies the passivity of its object in two ways peculiar to itself. First, it enforces an absolute division between the one acting and the one acted upon. Other declarative speech involves, perhaps requires, a certain amount of speaker-auditor cooperation; when we listen we usually do so actively, our faces and gestures giving clues to the speaker about our reactions and how he or she should proceed. Praise, on the other hand, removes the ability of its object to act on his or her own behalf or on behalf of the speaker, for we cannot participate in someone else's commendation of us. Doing so would be a *faux pas*—it would also be extremely difficult, given that praise is, secondly, invasive and transmutative, occupying and reshaping its object once it has rendered it inert. Like other speech that represents or assesses its object, praise figuratively "commandeers" that object for its own ends, holding up certain characteristics of it as emblematic or definitive of the whole. But unlike such speech, praise defines toward a particular effect or end, for as it defines it rarifies, idealizes, makes its object iconographic. This is what makes praise, especially excessive praise of the sort Dryden offers his patrons, so problematic for its recipient. As a pictorial icon can accommodate only two of its subject's three physical dimensions, so must the verbal or textual icon radically simplify its subject's moral, intellectual, and temperamental complexities. To be made an icon is to be reduced as a human being: even as one is raised above the imperfections of everyday humanity and the niggling circumstances of the everyday reality, one is likewise removed from one's capacity for existing credibly as a physical and moral being. For should one try to step out of one's frame and vivify the icon one has become, one almost inevitably ends up giving the lie to the very characteristics that

had comprised the idealized portrait, for the flaws and ambiguities of a living human being must shatter the illusion of perfection. This is the conundrum of much love poetry, Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella* sequence providing a ready example. Astrophil's praise of Stella's beauty and virtue remakes her—bodily and spiritually—into a neo-platonic ideal of Woman, of the perfected feminine soul. Stella is lovable because she is good, but her absolute goodness prevents her from requiting Astrophil's love: were she to exhibit the affections and desires of a corporeal woman for a corporeal man, her carnality would negate the basis of Astrophil's praise. Perversely, the lover may love only so long as his beloved's beatific perfection makes her incapable of returning love to so mean a creature as himself. As an object of veneration, Stella becomes so isolated from the world of sensation, emotion, and action that she is made *merely* an object of praise, capable of little more than receiving another's abject devotion. Such is the power of praise to nullify with superlatives.

Dryden writes no love poetry, but his "hyperbolic" praise of Orrery, Roscommon, Dorset, and many others is no less effective in negating them as men of letters. On one level, to praise is to assume some superiority with regard to one's object. Otherwise one could not pretend to the authority to assess and commend. But much of Dryden's praise of his noble friends as noblemen and amateur writers recalls the lover's ostensible exaltation of the beloved. Consider, for instance, Dryden's assertion that Orrery's soul is "an entire globe of light, breaking out on every side," or that Roscommon is "first in fields of honor known, / First in the peaceful triumphs of his gown, / Who both Minervas justly makes his own" (ll. 70-72), or that of Dorset,

I can say, you neither have enemies, nor can scarce have any; for they who have never heard of you, can neither love or hate you; and they who have, can have no other notion of you, than that which they receive from the public, that you are the best of men. After this, my testimony can be of no farther use, than to declare it to be daylight at high noon; and all who have the benefit of sight, can look up as well, and see the sun (73).

The globe of light, the paragon of arms and wisdom, the man so exemplary it is impossible for him to have enemies—the hyperbole of these epithets creates a gap between what is claimed and what we know must be true, for we are human beings ourselves, and know that there can be no greater oxymoron in the language than “human perfection.” This gap forces us to make a decision problematic for the object of praise. We can either doubt Dryden’s judgement (these were his friends) or sincerity (he sought favors and protection from them), or else accept the terms of his praise and forfeit any possible belief in the essential humanity of his subjects. For the witness of such praise, these recipients cease to be living, acting men; indeed, Dryden can celebrate their virtues only by reducing them to or associating them with inanimate objects. Orrery and Dorset become suns; Roscommon is epitomized by a field and a gown—and by the abstractions of puissance and sagacity vaguely embodied by a classical goddess. As with the beloved, these objects of praise seem to have become for the one praising an excuse to exercise his linguistic and rhetorical proficiency. I am not suggesting that Dryden is being ironic, but that once he has translated Orrery, Roscommon and Dorset above the merely human world he effectively severs his human relationship with them, and his words cease to have any truly human resonances. Dryden can only compound phrase with mellifluous phrase ad nauseam, until at length we dare to suspect that the language of high praise has come to exist for its own sake, has become an end in itself, each additional word obscuring our view of its putative object, walling that object within a prison of praise.

Thus entombed, the recipients of Dryden’s extravagance find, with us, that it is not only they that have become isolated from the fray of the real world: once an agent has been rendered inert and obscure, the actions or productions with which he or she has been commonly identified are likewise nullified, and in much the same manner. The act or work itself (heroism or brilliant statecraft, for example, or a building or symphony) becomes a sublime thing, each characteristic associated with some aspect of its already rarified executor or creator. (Of course, an act or work may become an icon independent of its

human agent, or through its effectiveness or beauty set that agent above the plane of ordinary humanity. One thinks of Lindbergh's flight, for example, or the epics of Homer.) This observation extends as well to literary endeavors, particularly to those whose rank is likely to elicit the admiration and acclaim of their social inferiors. Dryden's praise of Orrery, Roscommon, and Dorset thus has perhaps unexpected consequences for our assessment of their talents and works. As an extension of himself, the gentleman-amateur's poetry becomes a thing set above the mundane standards and controversies of the literary world. Isolated from the fray, it cannot hope to "pay its dues," to win approval entirely on its own merits. This is made particularly clear when Dryden's compounds his praise of his patrons with hyperbolic praise of their works. Comparing Orrery to Xenophon and Augustus, soldiers who gave the world examples of romance and tragedy, respectively, Dryden continues, "The Muses have seldom employed your thoughts, but when some violent fit of gout has snatched you from the affairs of state; and, like the priestess of Apollo, you never come to deliver his oracles, but unwillingly and in torment" (3). Dryden's reminder to Orrery that he is but a part-time writer who finds his inspiration in gout aside, the general is here figured forth as a vatic poet, a medium of divine revelation. This foreshadows Dryden's praise of Roscommon's artless treatise, which will bring perfection to the language, and make "invention and translation thrive" (l. 54). No wonder England and Ireland will contend for the glory of being Roscommon's native land, "a nobler quarrel for his native earth, / Than what divided Greece for Homer's birth" (ll. 51-52). Inner inspiration and comparison with the giants of literature figure in Dryden's praise of Dorset as well, of whom Dryden makes especial note of "those heights that you possess, from a happy, abundant, and native genius: which are as inborn to you, as they were to Shakespeare; and, for aught I know, to Homer; in either of whom we find all arts and sciences, all moral and natural philosophy, without knowing that they ever studied them" (74). We might notice here that the foundation of each earl's poetry is an inspiration lacking principle and discipline, unaided by art or study. This is how the amateur proceeds—and

the method, if it is that, is also exactly that of the radical Protestants who “on the private spirit alone rely.” Thus these men, like Dryden’s other noble adversaries, seem to have “turn[ed] fanatics in [their] poetry.” But we should also notice that in addition to the wild extravagance of Dryden’s praise, the regularity of its pattern makes it seem almost entirely ritualistic, a matter of form. Their poetry thereby becomes less vital *as poetry*, is rendered inanimate—it may as well be a stylish cravat, or a shapely wig, which one may praise without cost to oneself or any ascription of real merit either to it or its owner.

Dryden’s praise of those such as Orrery, Roscommon, and Dorset, allows him to strengthen his own cultural authority through his association with the great while calling *their* literary credibility into question. His praise thus complements the habitual criticism of the patron classes’ tastes, morals, and manners we saw in his prologues and epilogues, completing a “programme” of condemnation and commendation that effectively undermines the literary prerogative of society’s upper ranks and their more prominent individual members. Laughter or hissing or both would have greeted the delivery of Dryden’s prologues and epilogues. But it is impossible to know, except in a few cases, the lasting effects of Dryden’s blame and praise in the minds of his auditors and readers. Was he able to effect a permanent self-conscious awareness of the amateur’s weaknesses, the professional’s strength, discrediting the former and establishing the latter absolutely? That would doubtless be claiming too much. But surely the same few rhetorical points, reiterated in prologue after prologue, performance after performance, play after play, year after year, did indeed effect three important manipulations of public perception: that there were distinctions to be made between the amateur and professional writer; that the appetites, behavior, and opinions of the upper classes are suspect enough to disqualify them from exercising real authority in literary matters; and that between the audience and the playwright there exist such qualitative differences in taste and judgement that the former must defer to the latter and acknowledge (at least in principle) the right of the learned, practiced professional poet to define and maintain the æsthetic values of society.

In fact, Dryden's prologues and epilogues (and the critical prefaces that reinforce them), exactly recapitulate the larger forces that brought public poetry to the fore during this period, and in form and content might be said to embody its triumph. For the prologue and epilogue—composed to be delivered in public, looked to by the public for news and commentary, used by the poet to establish himself as a authoritative public persona—is in these and other ways a continuation of the topical ballads and broadsides written during the Interregnum. In fact it was not uncommon for such pieces to be published as broadsides, either to advertise the play for which they had been written, to reawaken interest in a play, or, when their content had been deemed scandalous or seditious, to escape the official proscription of the Lord Chamberlain. I think that Wiley is right to imply that the proficiency of Dryden and others in writing them had much to do with their success, but we should remember, too, that by the Restoration the public had become accustomed to receive information and opinion via verse. Thus along with broadsides and ballads (and news-pamphlets), prologues and epilogues comprised a running journal of the times. Indeed, Wiley claims, prologues and epilogues helped to perpetuate and enlarge the widespread "avidity for news" (172) that was one of the symptoms of the increase of popular interest in and influence upon the affairs of state brought about by the Civil War and its aftermath. Whether they concern themselves specifically with the theatre, with manners or morals, or with current events and governmental policy, these pieces reflect both the tone and scope of Restoration politics. They make little pretense to objectivity, but their biases tend to be situational rather than narrowly doctrinal; moreover, their concern is with society at large: the theatre in this period became an acknowledged extension of the party debate beyond the walls of Whitehall and Westminster, and Dryden's playhouse pieces—their example widely imitated—played their part in giving the social and political debate a public "shape."

These pieces reflect as well the middle-class reaction against the excesses of upper class and demonstrate in miniature the displacement of noble prerogative in government and society at large. At the same time that the Church was “[promoting] a great distaste for court life among the upright and squires, however loyal they were to the crown” (Rykwert 35), an “aristocracy” of ministerial careerists was replacing the influence of the aristocracy of blood upon the administration of the kingdom, much as an “aristocracy” of the monied interests was supplanting the blooded aristocracy economically. Dryden’s challenge to aristocratic superintendence of literature is arguably an extension of this society-wide reaction, and is undertaken on much the same terms, for it is essentially an ethical one. Are the patron classes fit overseers of the arts, particularly drama? Merely raising the question is significant, but Dryden (with others) goes further, “creating” a fashionable, but effectively powerless and easily despised social type, the debauched, profligate gentleman. In this, Dryden was perhaps more effective than earlier or contemporaneous portrayals of the type, for his Prologues and Epilogues could exhibit before the assembled playgoers living examples of the character, while helping to define that character and making it seem a fashionable, even enviable manner of comportment. However, Dryden’s moral critique was not an end in itself, but a means of levering the patron classes out of their traditional æsthetic authority. Dryden’s prologues and epilogues were not his first forays into public poetry, but because of their frequent appearance and their recurrent themes were probably more effective toward this end—and toward establishing Dryden’s own authority as a public poet.

The stage in fact gave Dryden the chance to establish himself as an easily recognizable public persona. We must remember that as a professional playwright he had the stage to himself during much of the 1660’s. This gave him a decade to learn and refine his craft before he met with any serious competition from younger playwrights; it also allowed him to emerge as readily marketable writer for his publishers, first Herringman then Tonson. Dryden’s commercial viability, on the stage and in print, in turn helped to

accelerate the development of publishing as a proper business, making writing itself a profession rather than an avocation for the amateur.

But to account fully for the particulars of Dryden's rise to cultural authority and of his later fashioning into a cultural emblem for his age, we need to do more than recount his public displacement of existing social and literary authorities and his equally public assertion of his own æsthetic principles. For there is more involved here than the bare facts of Dryden's life, and more at stake than one poet's career. If as I have argued, Dryden's rise as a public poet coincides with the rise of public poetry itself in England, we must examine how the medium, having emerged and found a powerful practitioner, operated upon public perception and imagination. In examining the uses to which that medium was put, we must examine likewise their ends and consequences. For in this instance ends and consequences are not at all equivalent. Dryden and his contemporaries might have had nothing more in mind than promoting and justifying their personal and political ambitions, but what emerges from their poetry are competing patterns for the definition of the age. This shows us how the public mode of poetry came to seize and shape social memory, but it shows us as well how that memory worked, demonstrates the possibilities of a mode of memory that would soon split against itself and establish two rival modes, one emblematic, allusive, and collective, the other realistic, immediate, and in its individualism recognizably modern.



## CHAPTER III

### POETRY AND MEMORY IN AUGUSTAN ENGLAND

#### 1. Classical and Seventeenth-Century “Impact” Models of Consciousness

The preceding chapters have, I hope, set the groundwork for an examination of how, in practice, the hard-won cultural prominence of public poetry and public poets in the decades after the Restoration was turned to the shaping of specific perceptions and definitions of the historical present. Such an examination must, given the terms I have set forth in the Introduction of the present study, account for the literal and figurative mnemonic elements and techniques such poetry employs and their likely effects upon the collective consciousness. The middle sections of this chapter, accordingly, shall look into the uses to which imagery of the Civil War (and Puritanism in particular) and of epic heroism are put in fashioning perceptions of the Exclusion Crisis and the accession of James II, respectively. However, in order to account for the specific manner and matter of public poetry's attempts to frame definitively the dynastic and constitutional struggles that, as it happened, continued to shape English national self-perception for the next century and a half, we must first understand something of how memory was thought to work in the latter half of the seventeenth century. We must give our attention to contemporary theories of memory, for whether they were conscious of it or not, Dryden and his fellow poets drew heavily upon these theories as they crafted their verse. Indeed, they could hardly avoid doing so: the historically self-conscious, essentially persuasive nature of Augustan public poetry forced it of necessity to incorporate much of both classical and current notions of the processes of memory and of the rhetorical ends toward which the creation of memory via these processes might be directed. And if the public poetry of this period is in fact an apt medium for studying the development of social memory (particularly the divorce

of the figurative and literal mnemonic modes), it is in part because this poetry shrewdly adapts existing models of human physiology, psychology, and intellection to the *aesthetics* of memory—that is, to those principles governing the configuring of imagery, rhythm, diction, and allusion, as well as narrative, thematic, and moral structures in the manner most likely to give a definitive and easily retained “shape” to one’s experience both of the poem itself and of the moment in which the poem is read. Put another way, contemporary theories of memory, based as they were upon little-understood operations of sensation and reflection and upon the still more obscure interactions between them, posited memory as at once a mechanistic process and an act of emblematic intellection, originating in physical and mental processes but a by-product of neither exclusively. Public poetry neatly embodies and exploits this seeming paradox; it would be fitting, therefore, to begin this chapter with an inquiry into the physiological and psychological components of memory: classical and contemporary models of their operations, their relation to the *aesthetics* of memory, and the practical consequences for public poetry of the seventeenth century.

We might expect to encounter a conundrum such as a mnemonic theory based simultaneously upon sensation and reflection during a period of such vast political, social, intellectual, and ecclesiastical transitions as transpired in seventeenth-century England. But in fact the seventeenth century inherited the paradox from the classical world with its rediscovery and “rehabilitation” of Greco-Roman models of the workings of perception and thought. Of particular importance for the mechanistic explanations of human psychology characteristic of the seventeenth century were the materialist doctrines of Epicurus (341-271 BC) as they were set forth in Lucretius’ *On the Nature of The Universe* (c. 55 BC). That Lucretius’ cosmological poem enjoyed a second life during the century owed little to mere chance; the Middle Ages might have had little use for a philosophy that denied the existence of God, the immortality of the soul, and the possibility of an afterlife, but Epicureanism’s rejection of metaphysics and superstition and its assertion that the senses and direct observation were the only sound foundation for knowledge and speculation were exactly

attuned to the temperament of the new age of methodical scientific inquiry. This is not to argue that seventeenth-century materialism is precisely that variety expounded by Lucretius. Lucretian materialism holds, for instance, that it is through the senses alone that we acquire the most accurate, reliable knowledge of the world around us; reason, Lucretius declared, is more likely to be a source of misconstruction and error than of true understanding. Bacon, Descartes, Hobbes, and Locke each rejected this notion, and gave reflection at least equal weight with perception. But Lucretius' exposition of the physiological basis of mental processes (including memory) seems to have been sufficiently compelling to have encouraged the development of similar models of human thought and understanding during the seventeenth century: Hobbes and Locke retained Lucretius' argument that reflection depended directly upon physical sensation, that thought was a mechanical operation. In Book IV of *On the Nature of Things* Lucretius argues that our senses are triggered by "a sort of outer skin perpetually peeled off the outer surface of objects and flying about this way and that through the air" (131); the atoms of these surface films incessantly strike our organs of sense, conveying to us images, sounds, smells, and tastes. Each sense, Lucretius argues, operates much as does touch: what registers upon the eye, ear, nose and palate is the force, texture, and shape of the atoms that strike them. He demonstrates this by observing that when we handle a square object in the dark its squareness is conveyed to us by the impression of its shape upon our fingers; analogously, when we see the object in the light, the film that (supposedly) emanates from its surface retains its squareness and consequently strikes our eye "squarely."<sup>1</sup>

Once the atoms of the surface films of external objects have made impact with our organs of sense, they "set in motion the delicate substance of the mind within and there

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<sup>1</sup> By this reasoning we should, of course, be able to see in the dark, though it seems that visual films need light to travel. Lucretius' notion is not as far-fetched as it might seem, however, if we remember that though we see not the *film* of an object, we neither see the object itself but the light reflected from its surface.

provoke sensation" (153). Lucretius is vague about precisely how the mind is set in motion, but does assert that over time, the paths followed by these atoms as they make their way through to "the delicate substance of the mind" become established channels facilitating the entry of the particles of those films to which we are most regularly exposed. We are thus quite literally the products of our perceptions, of our primary occupations and regular experiences, for sensation and the processes of mind it instigates physically alter the perceiver, predisposing him to the apprehension of certain images and hence certain patterns of thought and action. Thus, explains Lucretius, "Whatever employment has the strongest hold on our interest or has last filled our waking hours, so as to engage the mind's attention, that is what seems most often to keep us occupied in sleep. Lawyers argue cases and frame contracts. Generals lead their troops into action. Sailors continue their pitched battle with the winds" (160). We are not mere automatons, slaves to our senses; as Lucretius delights in pointing out, we all too often recklessly ignore or misconstrue the information that our senses bring us. Yet it would be accurate to conclude that for Lucretius memory largely consists of those well-worn paths made by atoms as they make their way through to "the delicate substance of the mind." For him, memory is very much a function of human physiology, as organic, as responsive to and as easily inscribed by the physical world as, say, our skin, the living parchment upon which are etched the stories of our years.

Lucretius' seventeenth-century counterparts put more emphasis than he upon the mind's ability to organize and reflect upon the perceptions it receives, but their materialism is strikingly similar to his own. Bacon, for instance, was highly doubtful of the reliability of the senses, yet in *De Dignitate et Augmentis Scientiarum* (1623) calls it "the door of the intellect," and with Lucretius asserts that "the images" of the objects about us "fix themselves in the memory, and pass into it in the first instance entire as it were, just as they come. These the human mind proceeds to review and ruminare, and thereupon either simply rehearses them, or makes fanciful imitations of them, or analyzes and classifies

them” (395). Bacon argues elsewhere that it is upon the methodical analysis and classification of these sensual impressions that our understanding depends, but note that, as in Lucretius’ system, individual sensations directly impress themselves upon the memory, and, because the “images” themselves are impressed upon us “just as they come,” their particular shapes will in turn, it seems, physically shape our memories. In Bacon’s system, as in Lucretius’, we are materially altered by experience. For Descartes, however, physical sensations have but a mediated access to our reflective faculties, and instead of impressing themselves directly upon them, they rather trigger the distinct mechanisms making up “the machine of our body” (27). In Articles 12, 13, and 16 of *The Passions of the Soul* (1649), Descartes proposes that our nervous system consists of a spider’s web of tubes running from the brain throughout the body. These tubes contain the “animal spirits, which, carried by these same tubes from the brain to the muscles, cause the filaments therein to remain completely free and extended, in a such a way that the least thing that moves the part of the body where the end of any of them is attached thereby makes the part of the brain it comes from move, in the same way in which, when we pull one end of a cord, we make the other move” (25). When the objects of our “external senses and of our internal appetites” excite these filaments, this occasions “some movement in our nerves, which passes to the brain by means of them” (26). What then registers on the brain is not the object itself or its image, but a replication of the motion it causes along our nerves. Sensation is thus the neurological analogue of its catalyst, etched upon the brain much as sound is registered upon the surface of a record by the pressure of a phonograph needle.

Hobbes seems to have taken from Descartes the cues for his model of mechanical Man as well as his definition of sensation as nervous motion. In his introduction to *Leviathan* (1651), Hobbes asks rhetorically, “For what is the *Heart*, but a *Spring*; and the *Nerves*, but so many *Strings*; and the *Joynts*, but so many *Wheels*, giving motion to the whole Body, such as was intended by the Artificer?” (81). Whereas Lucretius is content to let the specific workings of his itinerant atoms upon the mind remain obscure, and

Descartes' system has recourse to the oblique workings of "animal spirits" Hobbes insists upon explicating the precise operation of physical perception in purely mechanical terms:

The cause of Sense, is the Externall Body, or Object, which presseth the organ proper to each Sense, either immediatly, as in the Tast and Touch; or mediately, as in Seeing, Hearing, and Smelling: which pressure, by the mediation of Nerves, and other strings, and membranes of the body, continued inwards to the Brain, and Heart, causeth there a resistance, or counter-pressure, or endeavour of the heart, to deliver it self: which endeavour because *Ourward*, seemeth to be some matter without. And this *seeming*, or *fancy*, is that which men call *Sense*; and consisteth, as to the Eye, in a *Light*, or *Colour figured*; To the Eare, in a *Sound*; To the Nostrill, in an *Odour*; To the Tongue and Palat, in a *Savour*; And to the rest of the body, in *Heat*, *Cold*, *Hardnesse*, *Softnesse*, and such other qualities, as we discern by *Feeling*. All which qualities called *Sensible*, are in the object that causeth them, but so many several motions of the matter, by which it presseth our organs diversely (I, 85-6).

As the last sentence of this passage suggests, for Hobbes as for Descartes we apprehend not the object in itself, but only those motions in our own organs of sense that its properties trigger. The images created in our minds by these motions constitute Hobbes's notion of the imagination: "For after the object is removed, or the eye shut, wee still retain an image of the thing seen, though more obscure than when we see it. And this is it, the Latines call Imagination, from the image made in seeing; and apply the same, though improperly, to all the other senses" (2, 88). Because we apprehend not the object in itself, but its image, and because that image is a record, not of what we sense at *precisely* the present instant, but what we *have sensed* (though but a fraction of a second ago), it follows that imagination is an impression (again, quite literally) of what once was but is no longer, that is, of the past. Thus Hobbes may declare that imagination is memory, though he draws this distinction in terminology: "This *decaying sense*, when wee would express the thing it self, (I mean *fancy* it selfe,) wee call *Imagination*, as I said before: But when we would express the *decay*, and signifie that the Sense is fading, old, and past, it is called *Memory*. So that *Imagination* and *Memory*, are but one thing, which for divers considerations hath divers names" (2, 89). Memory, then, is decaying sense (or sensation). Whatever we

remember—in fact, whatever we can conceive of, however seemingly unprecedented or outlandish—has at some point been conveyed to our minds, in whole or compositely, by physical sensation. This assertion is important, for it allows Hobbes to distinguish his physiology from that of the word-bound Schoolmen he attacks so frequently and with such gusto. These purveyors of received wisdom, Hobbes sneers, are so foolish as to suppose either “that Imaginations rise of themselves, and have no cause”; or that they are created by the will alone, independent of the senses; or are the implantations of good or evil spiritual beings (2, 93). Such explanations of imagination and memory leave their processes obscure, presupposing that each is an unaccountable and ungovernable phenomenon. The importance for Hobbes of the distinction he makes is that the mind itself may be demystified and made an object of methodical inquiry. But we may observe as well that Hobbes’s mechanistic model, accounting for imagination and memory in a wholly physiological way, implies that the mechanisms of perception, and hence the formation of images and of memory, may be manipulated, which in turn makes possible the development of an art or science of shaping perception, and therefore of inducing certain patterns of imagining and remembering programmatically.

Hobbes leaves this only implied, but Locke, who likewise subscribes to a mechanistic model of perception, thought, and memory<sup>2</sup>, makes the point more overtly. In *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), Locke observes that it is by experience that the mind is able to translate bare perception of appearances into a understanding of what it really beholds. When, for instance, we are presented with “a round Globe, of any uniform colour, . . . ’tis certain, that the Idea thereby imprinted in our Mind, is of a flat Circle variously shadow’d, with several degrees of Light and Brightness coming to our Eyes.” However, “the Judgment,” by “an habitual custom,” is able to alter

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<sup>2</sup> In Book II, Chapter I of *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, “Of Ideas in General, and Their Original” (especially sections 3–4, 8, 15, and 22–25), Locke offers a less detailed version of Hobbes’s model.

“the Appearances into their Causes.” That is, “having by use been accustomed to perceive, what kind of appearance convex Bodies are wont to make in us; what alterations are made in the reflections of Light, by the difference of the sensible Figures of Bodies” (145), we know the object to be a sphere and not a simple circle. Practice has so shaped our habits of perception that we are able to distinguish an object of three dimensions from one of only two—and even to see in three dimensions when, as in a painting, we are shown only a two-dimensional surface variously colored and shaded. To reinforce the point, Locke cites “a jocose problem”<sup>3</sup> posed him by his friend, the philosopher William Molyneux:

Suppose a Man born blind, and now adult, and taught by his touch to distinguish between a Cube, and a Sphere of the same metal, and nighly of the same bigness, so as to tell, when he felt one and t’ other, which is the Cube, which the Sphere. Suppose then the Cube and Sphere placed on a Table, and the Blind Man to be made to see. Quære, Whether by his sight, before he touch’d them, he could now distinguish, and tell, which is the Globe, which the Cube (146).

Molyneux puts it to Locke that the man could not, having had no occasion to become familiar with the interplay of light and color with distance, shape, perspective, and motion that sighted people almost instinctively resolve into intelligible visual patterns. In other words, before the newly sighted man can visually distinguish between the sphere and the cube, *he must learn how to see*. And so must we all, throughout our lives. As Locke concludes, “This [illustration] I have set down, and leave with my Reader, as an occasion for him to consider, how much he may be beholding to experience, improvement, and acquired notions, where he thinks, he has not the least use of, or help from them” (146). Indeed, it is the possibility of manipulating perception and the ideas drawn from them that underlies Locke’s pedagogical theories, expounded in the highly influential *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1690). Given the proper regimen, he declares there, the minds of children, “as easily turned, this or that way, as water itself” (7), may be set “right, that on

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<sup>3</sup> William Molyneux to John Locke, March 2, 1692/3.



all occasions it may be disposed to consent to nothing but what may be suitable to the dignity and excellency of a rational creature” (27).

## 2. Poetry and Physiological Memory in the Classical World

We shall shortly return to Locke and explore more fully his particular notions of memory and their relation to the *psychological* (or *intellectual*) aspects of literary mnemonics. For the present, however, I would like to point out the significance of the “impact” or mechanical model of consciousness for the *physiological* aspects of what I have termed the *aesthetics of memory*. We may conclude, for instance, that if, as Lucretius and Hobbes imply and Locke openly asserts, perception in general is a physical process subject to one’s physical circumstances, and as such may (through incidental stimuli, personal habit or occupation, or even deliberate method) take on distinctive patterns in its operations, it follows that an artist or author may with design so fashion his or her work as to achieve certain perceptual effects and thereby influence an audience’s memory of an event, personage, or the work itself. In short, theories of human physiology and its relation to memory can and in fact did find their way into principles governing poetic practice, both in the classical and early modern worlds. For though both ancients and moderns commonly describe memory as a simple repository of images, experiences, and information,<sup>4</sup> they acknowledge at least implicitly that memory is in fact an active agent in our moment-by-moment responses to the external world, constituting an assertive patterning of present physiological experience based on perceptual precedents and the expectations they instilled. Lucretius, for example, attributes optical illusions to “the mental assumptions which we

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<sup>4</sup> In his monumental *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621; successive editions thereafter until 1651), Robert Burton even presumes to have found the locus of memory: “The fourth creek behind the head is common to the cerebel, or little brain, and the marrow of the backbone, the last and most solid of all the rest, which receives the animal spirits from the other ventricles, and conveys them to the marrow in the back, and is the place where they say the memory is seated” (I, 154). (Significantly, even here memory is held to reside at the conjunction of the areas of intellection and instinct.)

ourselves superimpose, so that things not perceived by the senses pass for perceptions” (144), and argues that when presented with a multitude of images the mind prepares itself to see what it is used to seeing: “You must have noticed how even our eyes, when they set out to look at inconspicuous objects, make an effort and prepare themselves; otherwise it is not possible for us to perceive distinctly” (155). Hobbes, who declares of sense and memory that they “are but knowledge of Fact, which is a thing past, and irrevocable” (5, 115), nevertheless defines the active faculty of prudence as a reliance upon past experience (5, 117). And Locke, describing memory as “the Store-house of our *Ideas*” (II, x, 150), a bit later says that “in an intellectual Creature, [it] is necessary in the next degree to Perception. It is of so great moment, that where it is wanting, all the rest of our Faculties are in a great measure useless” (153). Indeed, if memory were not acknowledged to be an operative rather than merely passive agent, it would have been impossible to devise many of the precepts of poetic theory that classical authors and their seventeenth- and eighteenth-century inheritors accepted as commonplaces.

To speak first of the classical world, the Greeks and Romans derived three sets of such precepts from the “impact” model’s principle that the greater the force with which physical stimuli strike the organs of sense the greater and more lasting the impression made upon the mind. Conveniently, each set may be related to particular sensations. The first has to do with sound and movement, of all physical sensations the best conveyed in poetry because poetry itself has sonance and rhythm. Unlike other tools of poetic effect, such as imagery or metaphor or allusion, the effect of sound and rhythm upon the audience is truly physiological. The spoken word is a composite of distinctly physical properties: volume, of course, but also pitch, duration, and speed; when words are strung together in a poetic line, these properties combine to create rhythms which, whether simple and regular or complex and variable, are readily assimilated into the body’s own. The poet thus has at least a chance of sufficiently replicating, say, the ringing of sword upon shield or the roar of winds at storm, the tramping of a marching army or the pitch and roll of ships at sea, to

give us the illusion that their noise and motion are what we are actually experiencing as the poet's voice rises and falls and our bodies sway this way and that, go rigid or give way in response to the intonations of his verse. For Lucretius, the speaker (or poet) could expect to closely approximate a one-to-one correspondence of sound to the action it represents. When he calls the tongue "the craftsman of words" (147), he means for us to take him literally: the tongue in speech carves up the air into a succession of discrete, distinct shapes that strike the ear and impress meaning upon the mind according to their particular configuration.

It is important, therefore, that the poet strive for harmony of sound and rhythm to action. But the mechanical operation of aural and kinesthetic stimuli upon the human physique also compels the poet to achieve a similar harmony of sound to sound and motion to motion within the descriptive or dramatic passage itself. As Horace observes of the psyche in his *On the Art of Poetry* (1st century BC), "[N]ature has so formed us that we *first feel inwardly any change in our fortunes*; it is she that cheers us or rouses us to anger, she that torments us and bows us to the ground with a heavy burden of sorrow, and it is only afterwards that she expresses these feelings in us by means of the tongue" (83; emphasis added). We feel, says Horace, and feel fully, before we achieve that slight psychological distance that allows us to express *what* we feel. Therefore, the poet who would, like a skillful musician, modulate our affective responses according to his inflections of sound and rhythm, must take care not to disrupt the overall continuity of effect by varying the sensory effects of his verse too abruptly or by yoking together elements that call forth essentially antithetical responses. This resulting clash of affections allows the audience to reflect on what it hears *before* the sounds and rhythm can insinuate themselves into the sensibilities of its members—exposing the poet's craft, destroying the sought-after effect, and leaving the audience suspicious both of the poet's skill and his trustworthiness. Such, says Cicero in *De Oratore*, is the fate of the rhetorician, musician, or poet who, neglecting "the science of numbers and measures," makes a sound "too short

by contraction, or too long by extension”: “For all men, by a kind of tacit sense, without any art or reasoning, can form a judgement of what is right and wrong in art and reasoning; and as they do this with regard to pictures, statues, and other works, . . . so they display this faculty much more in criticising words, numbers, and sounds of languages, because these powers are inherent in our common senses” (III, I, 250). As easily as we are moved “not only by words artfully arranged, but also by numbers and the sounds of the voice,” the more easily still will the mismanagement of these make “whole theatres burst into exclamations” (250). For much the same reason, argues Longinus in *On the Sublime* (mid-1st century BC), low-sounding words must not be suddenly interjected into swelling phrases or elevated passages; the ear would be as offended by the incongruity as would the eye if, as it surveyed a room filled with a vast array of glittering treasures, suddenly fell upon “paltry bags and sacks”: “Well, in the same way the untimely introduction of [low diction] as it were disfigures and debases the description” (155). And if the metrical sway of a passage does not suit its material, or if it is so crudely managed as to conflict with those rhythms to which an audience has become accustomed, the result, notes Longinus, is disastrous: “Where the sublime is concerned,” he declares, “nothing has so debasing an effect as broken or agitated rhythms, such as pyrrhics, trochees, and dichorees, which drop right down to the level of dance-music. For all over-rhythmical styles are at once felt to be cheap and affected; the monotonous jingle seems superficial, and *does not penetrate our feelings*” (153; emphasis added).

That a writer on the sublime would descend to proscribing certain metrical patterns out of hand, or that Horace, without a trace of irony, could endorse the use of spondee in the first foot of a line but not in the second or fourth foot (88), might strike us as quaintly fastidious or simply absurd. But we must remember that as the final phrase of the preceding paragraph suggests, for classical aestheticians our *physical* experience of a poem must fully possess us if we are to arrive at an emotional, intellectual, and moral appreciation of its passions, beauties, and tuition. As Longinus explains in Chapter 39 of

*On the Sublime*, “Composition, or Disposition of Material,” “[M]en find in a harmonious arrangement of sounds, not only a natural medium of persuasion and pleasure, but also a marvellous instrument of grandeur and passion” (150). This being the case, the poet during composition simply cannot afford to neglect even the minutest, most esoteric considerations of sound and meter that might bear upon the impact of a line upon the senses of his auditors, or that might allow him to better match the disposition of his poem’s aural and kinesthetic properties to their physiological constitution:

Now composition [Longinus admonishes] is a kind of harmony of the words which are implanted in man at his birth, and which affect not his hearing alone, but his very soul, and it is my belief that it brings out manifold patterns of words, thoughts, deeds, beauty, and melody, all of them originally born and bred in us; moreover, by the blending of its myriad tones it brings into the hearts of the bystanders the actual emotion of its speaker, and always induces them to share it; and finally it builds up an accumulation of phrases into a grand and harmonious structure (150–151).

Longinus takes it for granted that the speaker should seem to have an emotional stake in the poem and that the audience should partake of the poet’s passion, but he stands upon good authority. Some three centuries earlier, Aristotle had declared in his *Poetics* that “those who can actually make themselves feel the relevant emotions will be the most convincing—agitation or rage will be most vividly reproduced by one who is himself agitated or in a passion” (55)<sup>5</sup>. Such a poet will be most convincing because by “[keeping] the scene before his eyes” and “seeing everything very vividly, as though he were himself an eyewitness of the events, he will find what is appropriate, and will be least likely to overlook inconsistencies” (54). That is, the poet who can match his emotions to the scenes he relates will be able to recognize and discard those elements that might detract from an audience’s sense that it, too, beholds what it hears. But he will be convincing as well because by keeping the scene before his eyes he will be the better able to re-create for

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Horace: “If you want to move us to tears, you must first feel grief yourself” (*On the Art of Poetry*, 82).

himself an immediate experience of the poem's settings, events, and personages—that is, of the circumstances of physical perception that, according to the impact model, underlie his own emotional involvement in the poem's action. The more complete this re-creation is, the greater the poet's chances to resolve the central difficulty in any work of literature (or for that matter, of *any* effort at verbal communication), namely, rendering in the sounds and rhythms of language sensations and experiences that are neither aural nor rhythmic—translating, one might say, from certain modes of perception into others. For one of the great ironies of poetry as a vehicle of communication, tuition, or delight is that though its physical medium is sound, its appeal is primarily *visual*, and it is upon his ability to translate sound into image that the poet's success in making the audience believe itself to be firsthand witnesses to the poem's world largely depends.<sup>6</sup> As Aristotle's admonishment that the poet “keep the scene before his eyes” and “[see] everything very vividly, as though he were himself an eyewitness of the events” would suggest, the classical world accepted as truistic the affective primacy of visual perception, whether actual or imagined. The mind,

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<sup>6</sup> This is true whether a poem is rendered orally or in print, read aloud or silently to oneself, though as we might expect, it is easier to “[bring] into the hearts of the bystanders the actual emotion of its speaker” when a poem is recited, composed impromptu, or read aloud. For one thing, spoken poetry is communal. A living audience gives its attention to a living speaker, and because of this the speaker's choice of topic and supporting detail, his manner of delivery, and the persona he seeks to establish are subject to what he imagines to be the collective knowledge, expectations, and disposition of those gathered before him. Further, the conventions of certain genres may require an audience to answer or aid the speaker, as in responsive prayers, or ballads with regular refrains—or an audience may participate spontaneously, as when, for instance, the speaker arrives at a familiar passage in the narrative. Performance in itself, therefore, tends to draw speaker and audience together, and thereby is the more likely to allow an audience to experience the emotional state of the performer. As Longinus observes in Chapter 26 of *On the Sublime*, “: Variations of Person, or Personal Address,” “When you seem to be addressing, not the whole audience, but a single member of it . . . you will affect him more profoundly, and make him more attentive and full of active interest, if you rouse him by these appeals to him personally” (135). But if we allow that performance enhances an audience's experience of a poem by encouraging an identification with its performer, we must observe as well that it is mainly the *visual element* of live performance that brings this about. During performance, the speaker's facial expressions and body movements almost inevitably reinforce the intonations of his voice and often mimic the action his words describe, helping an audience form a succession of mental images apropos of the poem's storyline and characters. This may be merely *an advantage* of performance: for even when we read silently and in solitude, we find that the words before us escape the narrow confines of their bare significations to sound in the mind's ear and move before the mind's eye. But even so, the advantage provided by performance demonstrates the general rule that the more completely an audience believes itself immersed in the world of the poem, the more likely it will be to share “the actual emotion of its speaker.”

says Horace, “is less actively stimulated by what it takes in through the ear than by what is presented to it through the trustworthy agency of the eyes” (85). Or even, one might add, the agency of the mind’s eye. Ironically, though an audience really does hear the sounds that reach its ear from the poet’s lips, and only thinks it sees those images the poet himself only pretends to see, even this imagined or figurative sight leaves such deep, vivid impressions upon our consciousness that for the purposes of rhetoric and memory no other sense can be employed with greater efficiency or to greater effect. This may be because visual apprehension, even when a product of the mind’s suggestibility, is seemingly immediate and complete, whereas the truly physical properties of language embody abstractions that must be “decoded” to be understood. Whatever the reason, for the Greeks and Romans visual rather than aural or rhythmic cues provided the most expedient means of merging the actual world of the poet and audience with the fictional one they seek to share.

When we note, therefore, that the second set of poetic principles derived from the impact model has to do with re-creating as fully as possible for the audience an immediate physical experience of the world of the poem, we should note as well that these principles are primarily concerned with the poet’s management of the poem’s “visual” elements.

We might observe further the close theoretical parallels between the poet’s craft in managing these visual elements and that of the practitioners of the so-called art of memory, believed to have been invented by the Greek poet Simonides (556–468 BC). As its name implies, the art of memory as practiced from classical antiquity through the Middle Ages consisted of methodizing recollection in order to facilitate the retention and retrieval of large amounts of information. Used primarily by rhetoricians and scholars, the discipline of “mnemotechnics” consisted of assigning what one wished to remember—facts, ideas, even individual sentences and words—to certain emblematic figures (or images), then associating each of these figures to a particular place (or loci) within a larger spatial arrangement (buildings and public areas were popular). Once the information had been

assigned its images, and these images their places, one could then at any time retrieve the facts or ideas one had committed to memory by merely “walking” from site to site in one’s imagined building or common. “We have to think of the ancient orator as moving in imagination through his memory building whilst he is making his speech,” observes Frances Yates, describing the process in *The Art of Memory* (1966), “drawing from the memorised places the images he has placed on them” (3). In effect, one “read” the layout of the emblems as one might read a page of text. The method might strike us as cumbersome, requiring us to remember as it were in triplicate, but those adept at it could with ease commit to memory any amount of information, even lengthy speeches and exhaustive taxonomies. And though the method concerned itself at least as much with fashioning fictional places and scenarios within which to couch memory as it did with preserving in the mind what one had actually experienced, it could be successfully employed only so long as one could revivify the actual or likely physical sensations of being personally present. Here again, the ability to re-create one’s visual perceptions was held by the classical framers of the art of memory—among them, the anonymous author of *Ad Herennium* (c. 86-82 BC), Cicero, and Quintilian—to be particularly important. As Cicero explains in *De oratore* (46 BC),

Simonides, or whoever else invented the art, wisely saw, that those things are the most strongly fixed in our minds, which are communicated to them, and imprinted upon them, by the senses; that of all the senses that of seeing is the most acute; and that, accordingly, those things are most easily retained in our minds which we have received from the hearing or the understanding, if they are also recommended to the imagination by means of the mental eye; so that a kind of form, resemblance, and representation might denote invisible objects, and such as are in their nature withdrawn from the cognizance of the sight, in such a manner, that we are scarcely capable of comprehending by thought we may retain as it were by the aid of the visual faculty (187-8).

Significantly, Cicero’s near-contemporary, Longinus, makes a similar point in Chapter 15 of *On the Sublime*, “Imagery and the Power of the Imagination.” For the purposes of rhetoric or poetry, he claims, so superior is the image to the word that though the latter may



convince the hearer, the former “actually masters him”; when, for instance, images are used to dress out argument, “in all such cases our ears always, by some natural law, seize upon the stronger element, so that we are attracted away from the demonstration of fact to the startling image, and the argument lies below the surface of the accompanying brilliance” (124). If the assumptions about human cognition underlying the art of memory roughly correspond to those informing the craft of poetic composition, it is because both rhetoricians and poets work toward analogous ends: imposing upon their minds and the minds of their audiences the images of things unseen or unseeable for the purpose of shaping understanding—that is, working memory—or of fashioning it wholesale, “from scratch.” After all, argues Longinus, the aim of the poet is to produce a work that will please “all men at all times”: “For a piece is truly great only if it can stand up to repeated examination, and if it is difficult, or, rather, impossible to resist its appeal, and it remains firmly and ineffaceably in the memory” (107).

The rules governing the use of images in the art of memory, then, provide us with a useful backdrop for examining similar rules guiding the poet during composition. Though we might note any number of minute likenesses between rhetorical and poetic prescriptions regarding imagery, three are of particular note. The first derives directly from the familiar notion that the greater the (literal) impact of the image upon the eye, the greater the impression made upon the mind, and, consequently, the more likely the image and its associations will be retained. The best images, therefore, are those that startle by reason of their intensity and their marked deviation from the commonplace. As the author of *Ad Herennium*, the earliest surviving Latin treatise on the art of memory, explains to his pupils, “ordinary things easily slip from the memory while the striking and the novel stay longer in the mind”: we fail to remember the “petty, ordinary, and banal” experiences of everyday existence “because the mind is not being stirred by anything novel or marvellous. But if we see or hear something exceptionally base, dishonourable, unusual, great, unbelievable, or ridiculous, that we are likely to remember for a long time” (qtd. in Yates,

9). The images we choose to represent the ideas we would remember may be easily retained, the author of *Ad Herennium* continues, “if we establish similitudes [between idea and image] as striking as possible; if we set up images that are not many or vague but active [that is, figures engaged in some physical activity]; if we assign to them exceptional beauty or singular ugliness,” provide them with distinct ornamentation, or, in contrast, “if we somehow disfigure them” or assign to them “certain comic effects” (qtd. in Yates, 10). Of these instructions Yates observes, “Our author has clearly got hold of the idea of helping memory by arousing emotional affects through these striking and unusual images, beautiful or hideous, comic or obscene” (10). The affective power of the vivid image lies in its immediacy, its ability to trigger in us instinctive responses to what is pleasing, painful, or ridiculous. In this respect, the operation of images upon our sensibilities is similar to that of the sounds and rhythms of speech: all three engage us bodily, provoke us viscerally, prompt in us feelings of repulsion or attraction that for the moment escape rational scrutiny. Noting that the aim of imagery [in poetry] is “to work upon the feelings,” Longinus unapologetically advises poets to exploit the provocative power of imagery. In fact, he defines “image” not as we usually define things, by comparing it to something similar, but according to its effects. Thus for Longinus “image” denotes not merely “the representation of mental pictures,” but the sum of its effects: “the word is applied to passages in which, carried away by your feelings, you imagine you are actually seeing the subject of your description, and enable your audience as well to see it” (121). Such a passage, he says, might be found in Book Fifteen of *The Iliad*, when Homer compares Hector’s ferocious assault on the Greek lines to a tempest about to rend a hapless ship: “And he fell upon them like a wave which, swollen by the stormwinds beneath the lowering clouds, bursts furiously over a hurrying ship. And the ship is all lost in foam, and the terrifying blast roars in the sail, and the souls of the crew are seized with a fearful shuddering, for barely

can they slip out from under the clutch of death.”<sup>7</sup> Homer has not only captured in his images the terror of the Greeks, but conveys their terror to his audience by giving it the picture of what it knows well and most dreads; he has, says Longinus, “supremely well pictured the disaster and *all but stamped on the diction the very image of the danger*” (116; emphasis added).

Longinus’ reflexive yoking of *image* and *diction* demonstrates yet again the poet’s need to render what is visual in terms of sound and rhythm. But it also points up an important difference in the use of imagery in the art of memory and in the composition of effective poetry. The mnemotechnician, after all, does not concern himself with diction, for he has no need to articulate publicly the images he fashions. They are, rather, personal means to a public end, and though used to keep ideas coming to mind and words rolling off the tongue, need not be—and probably *should* not be—exhibited to the orator’s audience. The images the rhetorician employs, therefore, may be bizarre, extravagant, and darkly arcane, so long as they serve their purpose. Consider, for example, the mnemonic image the author of *Ad Herennium* suggests might be used by a defense lawyer to remember the facts of a case in which one man is accused of poisoning another in order to come into an inheritance:

We shall imagine the man [the victim] in question as lying ill in bed, if we know him personally. If we do not know him, we shall yet take some one to be our invalid, but not a man of the lowest class, so that he may come to mind at once. And we shall place the defendant at the bedside, holding in his right hand a cup, in his left, tablets, and on the fourth finger, a ram’s testicles. In this way we can have in memory the man who was poisoned, the witnesses, and the inheritance (qtd. in Yates, 11).

As Yates explains, “The cup would remind of the poisoning, the tablets, of the will or the inheritance, and the testicles of the ram through verbal similarity with *testes*—of the

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Robert Fitzgerald’s translation (1974) of these lines: “[H]e plunged / the way a billow whipped up by a gale / beneath dark scud descends upon a ship, / and she is hidden stem to stern in foam, / as a great gust of wind howls in the sail and sailors shake in dread; by a hair’s breadth / are they delivered from their death at sea.” I use Dorsch’s prose rendering of this passage because it is the more visually vivid of the two, and thus gives us a better sense of what Longinus claims to admire in it.

witnesses" (11). It is difficult to imagine the circumstances under which a poet might cobble together such an image for the instruction or delight of his audience. In fact, in *Ar̄s Poetica* Horace explicitly warns against using outlandish imagery—and for the very reasons that the author of *Ad Herennium* recommends it: its deviation from the ordinary and reliance on personal association. "Supposing," Horace begins, "a painter chose to put a human head on a horse's neck, or to spread feathers of various colours over the limbs of several creatures, or to make what in the upper part is a beautiful woman tail off into a hideous fish, could you help laughing when he showed you his efforts? You may take it from me, my friends, that a book will have very much the same effect as these pictures if, like a sick man's dreams, the author's idle fancies assume such a shape that it is impossible to make head or tail of what he is driving at" (79). The poet, unlike the mnemotechnician, must render his images publicly, for an audience that has no access to his thoughts or the experiences they emblemize; consequently, the poet must fashion a poem's images from a pool of communally shared notions, impressions, and experiences; the poem's images must recall to the audience what it is already likely to know; therefore, though they must be vivid and evocative, they must also be drawn from life and readily intelligible, their signification self-evident.

Keeping in mind this distinction between the private and public uses of imagery, we might observe that artificial memory and poetry share a second principle in its governance. If an image is to be perceived as if it were experienced personally, it must (as we have seen) be made to have an immediate visceral impact upon the viewer; if it is also to be *invested with meaning*, it must distort everyday experience in a way that transports the perceiver into what is in effect a new world, a world whose contrasts with the old throw the characteristics of both into greater relief and allow for intuitive, potentially instructive comparisons between the two. The power of the distorting image relies not so much upon an overt attempt to persuade or to appeal to the reason, as upon its ability to circumscribe and focus the attention of the viewer upon certain complexes of visual sensations suddenly

intensified. In Homer's description of Hector's assault on the Greek lines, for example, the swelling sea, the angry clouds, the sails stretched to bursting with the roaring winds, the waves clutching at the sailors as if to crush them, only just thwarted by the slender, battered gunwales—these images are affective enough in combination, capable of instilling real terror in the minds of a sea-faring people (or anyone who has seen the ocean when it is restless). Homer's careful selection of visual detail makes us feel what it is to be at the mercy of a tempest, but after a moment we remember that this composite of images depicts not a storm, but a man raging at the utter limits of human fury. Hector is no longer a mortal warrior, but a force of nature infinitely more powerful than any human agent, even an entire army, could ever be: the puissance of the Greeks is diminished at least as much as Hector's is magnified; the Greek lines are as helpless before the Trojan hero as a low-slung barque before the wrath of Neptune. The concentrated intensification of visual impressions thus leads us to extend our belief in the "reality" of what we think we see (the storm's imminent destruction of our ship) to what is patently fantastic (an entire army cowering before the rush of a single man), giving us access to a world very different from our own, one whose heroes we may emulate—but only so long as we believe in them.

Not surprisingly, the disciplines of artificial memory and poetry emphasize different aspects of this distortion. If Homer's images, vivid as they are, use our own experiences of storms to excite our suggestibility, to "fill out" the likeness he draws, those offered us by the author of *Ad Herrenium* startle by their narrow specificity: "[W]e shall place the defendant at the [murdered man's] bedside, holding in his right hand a cup, in his left, tablets, and on the fourth finger, a ram's testicles." Vivid as the image is, there is little here to work upon the imagination, for the combination of images defies our everyday experience. But whereas the mnemotechnician uses the fantastic to recall the banal, the poet must slightly distort the everyday to suggest the extraordinary. It is a difficult thing to attempt, for one must strike a fine balance between making a strong impression and remaining intelligible, between exciting surprise and delight and lapsing into the

extravagant and ridiculous. When the balance has been struck, we say with Horace that that poet has been “true to life” (91), has “as an imitative artist” looked “to human life and character for his models” (90). In other words, the poet has held the mirror up to nature, achieved an oft-prescribed mimetic ideal<sup>8</sup>. Yet at the same time we know the poet has achieved no such thing: once human or physical nature is distorted (whether exalted or debased), made figurative for the purposes of representation, not it but something other than absolute realism becomes the poet’s model. This might lead us to view the mimetic ideal as self-contradictory or even hypocritical, or tease us into embracing a self-indulgent expressivism of the kind that Horace deplored<sup>9</sup>. But if the world we know is to be apprehended, it must be distorted, if ever-so-slightly, as when our attention is directed toward certain parts of it and away from others; and if the poet is to conduct us to worlds far different from our own, we must be made capable of seeing and accepting the figurative truth of emblematic reality, of what might be and what the possible points to beyond itself. For in poetry, the truth is what we are prepared to believe, and mimeticism, rightly conceived, has more to do with affect than representation. When the poet makes us believe in the images imposed upon us, our belief is genuine enough, and our visceral and emotional reactions to what we think we see are no less real or true than they would be if we were actually seeing it. The truly mimetic image is that which calls forth physiological and psychological responses that match the context of its presentation. It is therefore beside

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<sup>8</sup> Longinus: “For art is perfect only when it looks like nature, and again, nature hits the mark only when she conceals the art that is within her” (Chapter 22, “Hyperbaton, or Inversion,” 131).

<sup>9</sup> Of those who neglect the rules of poetry, Horace writes, “If I have not the ability and skill to adhere to these well-defined functions and styles of poetic forms, why should I be hailed as a poet? Why out of false shame should I prefer to remain ignorant rather than to learn my craft?” (82). Unfortunately, lack of real skill does not discourage the impertinent amateur from competing with the professional poet: “A man who does not understand the games keeps away from the weapons of the Campus Martius, and if he has no skill with the ball or quoit or hoop, he stands quietly aside so that the crowds round the side-lines will not roar with laughter at his expense; yet the man who knows nothing about poetry has the audacity to write it. And why not? he says. He is his own master, a man of good family, and above all he is rated as a knight in wealth and there is nothing against him” (92).

the point to ask if the poet has captured reality raw and whole; to demand as much would soon lead us to a sterile literalism that would leave unsated what Longinus terms an innate appetite for “the extraordinary, the great, and the beautiful,” the fulfillment of which constitutes “the purpose of our creation”(146). If, as Longinus says, “the poets display a good deal of romantic exaggeration, and everywhere exceed the bounds of credibility” (123), it is because “in literature, as I have said, we look for something transcending the human” (148); if “men hold cheap what is useful and necessary, and always reserve their admiration for what is out of the ordinary” (147), it is because nature “has implanted in our souls an unconquerable passion for all that is more divine than ourselves” (146).

Dependent as they are upon context, the arrangement of images in a poem, their “spatial” relation to one another and their thematic relation to their narrative setting, is nearly as important as their individual capacity to stimulate us visually and (thereby) excite our sensibilities. For as the practitioners of artificial memory discovered, we remember more reliably, more completely when our images make up a pattern than when they exist singly, independent of a larger configuration. Quintilian makes this point when he explains the need to locate one’s mnemonic images within a spatial scheme, such as a house, public building, roadway, cityscape, or picture, sufficiently familiar and stable in its features to be easily retained, recalled, and mentally negotiated at any given time. Describing the placement of images in a house, for instance, he recommends, “The first thought is placed, as it were, in the forecourt; the second, let us say, in the living-room; the remainder are placed in due order all round the *impluvium*, and entrusted not merely to bedrooms and parlours, but even to the care of statues and the like. This done, as soon as the memory of the facts requires to be revived, all these places are visited in turn and the various deposits are demanded from their custodians, as the sight of each recalls the respective details” (XI, ii, 20; 223). The successful arrangement of images, moreover, heightens the sensation that we have actually returned in person to a certain place. What Quintilian observes of actual locales—“[W]hen we return to a place after a considerable absence, we not merely

recognise the place itself, but remember things that we did there, and recall the persons whom we met and even the uttered thoughts which passed through our minds when we were there before" (XI, ii, 17; 221)—might also be said of well-realized mental *loci*, and in fact is the very rationale underlying the use of memory houses. The foregoing discussion, however, should encourage us to note as well that a skillful disposition of the architecture of memory might allow us to intensify or in some way manipulate our experience of the place, thus making the figurative place itself, as Quintilian observes of the literal place, emblematic of a larger complex of feelings and associations, enabling it thereby to bear not just mnemonic but iconographic weight as well.

The third aesthetic principle relating to vision, then, requires that the arrangement of images in a poem be sufficiently striking, coherent, and durable as an arrangement to make it readily retrievable and reviewable over an indefinite period of time.

In this, the poet is aided by a quality almost unique to visual impressions: the ability to be recalled and reconstituted in the mind long after the initial sensation has passed. We cannot smell, taste, or touch in the imagination; we cannot reimpose upon the mind the initial impressions made by scents, tastes, and textures. A random smell may trigger vivid, specific memories, but none of these senses is properly figurative, because as none may be excited in the absence of actual, immediate sensation, none may be conveyed from one person to another, from poet to audience; it is impossible therefore for what we smell, taste, or touch to represent in any practical way something beyond itself. In short, these senses have no language and thus cannot express abstractions. Sound can not only convey the abstractions of speech but approximate those of vision as well. Thus it is that we can only hear and see what we are not at the moment experiencing. In our imaginations we may replay a speaker's harangue or a movement from a Mozart symphony, walk through the rooms of our childhood homes, conjure up the faces of those long absent, or even see what we could never expect to see in nature: according to Lucretius, the films shed by the familiar objects about us remain in the mind and may combine there, producing "the composite



shapes of Centaurs and Mermaids and dogs with as many heads as Cerberus, and phantoms of the dead whose bones lie in the embrace of earth (153).<sup>10</sup> But though both hearing and sight may be produced in the mind long after the initial sensation has passed or even in the total absence of visual or aural sensation, that which we have seen is more easily and more fully recoverable in the imagination than what we have heard. As Ong observes, “All sensation takes place in time, but sound has a special relationship to time unlike that of the other fields that register in human sensation. Sound exists only when it is going out of existence. It is not simply perishable but essentially evanescent, and it is sensed as evanescent. When I pronounce the word ‘permanence,’ by the time I get to the ‘- nence,’ the ‘perma-’ is gone, and has to be gone” (31-32). Sight, by contrast, having light as its medium, registers not merely degrees of brightness and dimness but those physical properties that exist independently of light: space, dimension, motion, and (consequently) time. Thus as persons, landscapes, and events pass before the mind’s eye in our imaginations or dreams, we are aware that time is passing, even though mental and actual time often have no close correlation. The properties of visual perception thus give visual memory an advantage over the merely aural, for they allow us to insert ourselves more fully into what our minds have retained, into what the practitioners of artificial memory conceived of as a living, panoramic train of past experiences.

The properties of visual memory in fact prompted mnemotechnicians to compare their art to painting, and apply to it some of the same standards. In one place of his *De oratore*, Cicero compares the placement of mnemonic images in the mind to the inscription of characters or symbols upon a blank tablet or canvas; in another, he likens the orator’s practice of committing speeches to memory by “transferr[ing] from particulars to generals,

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<sup>10</sup> Hobbes terms this “compounded imagination”: “as when from the sight of a man at one time, and of a horse at another, we conceive in our mind a Centaure. So when a man compoundeth the image of his own person, with the image of the actions of an other man; as when a man imagins himself a Hercules, or an Alexander . . . it is a compounded imagination, and properly but a Fiction of the mind” (I, ii, 89).

and [taking] the idea of an entire sentence from the symbol of a single word, to “the manner and method of any skillful painter, who distinguishes spaces by the variety of what he depicts” (188). The disposition of the materials of memory must be as considered as that of shapes and figures in a graphic work if they are to be as useful, as coherently emblematic and as unified in effect. The same principle was applied to the fashioning and arrangement of poetic images in the classical world, based upon a similar analogy with painting. Indeed, so closely was poetry identified with its sister art in the classical world that literary theorists were all but incapable of discussing their discipline without resorting to the language of painting and even applying to poetry the criteria by which one would assess its equivalent in paint, whether a landscape, portrait, or historical subject. The most famous and influential likening of poetry to painting (but *only* the most famous and influential) is Horace’s declaration in *Ars Poetica*, “Ut pictura poesis”: “A poem is like a painting: the closer you stand to this one the more it will impress you, whereas you have to stand a good distance from that one; this one demands a rather dark corner, but that one needs to be seen in full light, and will stand up to the keen-eyed scrutiny of the art-critic; this one only pleased you the first time you saw it, but that one will go on giving pleasure however often it is looked at” (91).

From the terms of Horace’s comparison we can observe that painting is more aptly likened to poetry than to artificial memory. As I have noted above, painting and poetry are both primarily public in nature, whereas the art of memory is a personal tool for private retention and recollection. Thus what Horace takes to be the shared characteristics of the best painting and poetry—that both make an immediate impression upon the viewer; that both may withstand, even in “full light,” the close scrutiny of informed critics; and that both please indefinitely—are largely a function of the public audience he assumes for both. But they are also a logical result of a more basic and potentially problematic assumption, that the visual element of poetry must be the near equivalent of that in painting. If we may judge from the number of visual metaphors in *Ars Poetica*, for Horace the poet’s “eye”

must be as developed as his “ear,” and the equal of any painter’s. Consider, for example, his observation in this passage that certain paintings impress<sup>11</sup> one when viewed close-up, in full light, while others must be seen from a distance or in shadow. We should note first that the painting must *impress* us—a seemingly obvious thing for a work of art to do, but if a painting is to have a real chance of making a pleasing (literal) impression upon our senses, we must be able to see it in sharp detail and see it fully. That is, the better painting does not work upon us by intimation or reveal its secrets by degrees, but provides an impression that derives its force from its immediacy (our proximity to the painting gives us a clear, instantaneous apprehension of its details) and comprehensiveness (the “full light” reveals the painting in its entirety). Similarly, the better poem, according to Horace, will not dilute its affective power with excessive ornamentation, but will be “singleminded” and “keep to the point” (79); if dramatic, it will not merely relate the action to the audience, but play it out on stage, that the audience may be more “actively stimulated” by what each spectator “can see for himself” (85); and the really good poem will “be trimmed into shape by many a day’s toil and much rubbing out, and corrected down to the smallest detail” (89). The minutest particulars deserve such attention not only because each in itself creates a separate impression upon the reader or spectator, but because each also contributes to the total impression made by a poem. To achieve the desired totality of effect, the poet must make sure that the details of a poem be not only well drawn, but complement one another in the respective emphasis of their delineation: the poet must not be like a certain craftsman in bronze Horace knows “who will mould fingernails and reproduce wavy hair to the life, but *the total effect of his work is unsatisfactory because he cannot put together a complete figure*. Now if I set out to write a poem, I would no more want to be like him than to have a crooked nose” (80; emphasis added).

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<sup>11</sup> Other translators render the Latin as “please.”

As it is from the immediacy and comprehensiveness of its images that a painting or poem achieves its totality of effect (and thus its force), so it is from the internal coordination of the work that we derive pleasure. The impression a painting makes upon us may be powerful, but it will not please us—and certainly will not endure “the keen-eyed scrutiny of the art critic”—if its elements do not cohere. A painting must not present us with what we have seen Horace ridicule elsewhere: a horse with a human head, a woman with a fish’s tail; neither may the poet, “to vary the monotony of his subject with something out of the ordinary, introduce a dolphin into his woods, or put a boar among his waves” (79-80). “Either follow the beaten track,” he advises, following Aristotle, “or invent something that is consistent within itself”:

If in your play you happen to be representing the illustrious Achilles, let him be energetic, passionate, ruthless, and implacable; let him say that laws are not for him, and think that everything must yield to the force of arms. See to it that Medea is fierce and indomitable, Ino fearful, Ixion faithless, Io a wanderer, and Orestes sorrowful. If you introduce an untired subject to the stage, or are so bold as to invent a new character, be sure that it remains the same all the way through as it was at the beginning, and is entirely consistent (83).

When Horace declares a bit later that “your play should not demand belief for just anything that catches your fancy” (91), he does not only mean that images seemingly drawn from “a sick man’s dreams” will confuse an audience, but that the composition as a whole will be unintelligible because its lack of inner consistency will prevent us from judging its aesthetic integrity. We simply will be unable to say *what* a poem is showing us and *when* it should be showing it to us at any given time. In the absence of such aesthetic intelligibility, standards of poetic expression collapse, and poetry loses its public function. No wonder, then, that Horace in the “*Ut pictura poesis*” passage and throughout *Ars Poetica* emphasizes the need for the would-be poet to conform to established standards regarding the management of genre, structure, characterization, tone, diction, meter, and representation.

But despite Horace's admonition that the poet keep in mind "the keen-eyed scrutiny of the art critic," the emphasis in this passage is not upon theoretical appraisal but upon visceral response. At the end of the passage he cannot help returning to the notion of pleasure: "this [painting] only pleased you the first time you saw it, but that one will go on giving pleasure however often it is looked at." Note that the pleasure given by the best painting or poem, though complete at any single viewing or reading, is not then exhausted once for all, but seems able to renew itself indefinitely. We may return to the work again and again and derive delight from it; put another way, as the best mnemonic scheme will endure and give us access to what we would remember at any time we wish it, so does the ideal painting or poem give us pleasure, transport us, regularly. It is timeless. And because poems and paintings are public works, they must also please universally. Ambitious, certainly—but for Horace timeless universality is the only ambition worthy of a poet. Poetry, he says, is "begotten and created for the soul's delight"; the mediocre performance has no place, can-not be justified: "[I]f it falls short of the top, by ever so little, it sinks right down to the bottom" (92). The power of a poem to transport us, to translate the known into the new, the unknown into the familiar, if allowed to falter, is wholly forfeited, and our admiration turns to ridicule. Though Horace does not say so epigrammatically, a poem may be said to belong to the first rank because it delights universally, and delights universally because it regularly translates us to that figurative world beyond the close-drawn screen of everyday realities.

Longinus, however, is not so oblique in linking the universal to the sublime: "As a generalization, you may take it that sublimity in all its truth and beauty exists in such works as please all men at all times" (107). Conditioned as we are to think of truth and beauty as particularly appreciable by the intellect and spirit, we might easily overlook the physiological basis of the sublime as Longinus conceives of it. Monroe Beardsley rightly points out that Longinus does not care to distinguish the sublime from its effects (77), but Longinus might reply that from his perspective the sublime in fact consists of the sum

of its effects. As the culmination of the physical properties of the poem, both literal and figurative, the sublime is the poet's achievement of complete physiological conquest of his audience, and accordingly constitutes the third æsthetic ideal to be derived from the impact model of consciousness.

From the terms in which Longinus describes the sublime, one might infer that it consists largely in the overwhelming physiological affect a work of literature imposes upon its audience. One could say that the sublime is achieved when the intensity or duration of physical sensation exhausts not only self-conscious reflection, but sensory articulation itself. In the throes of the sublime we are beyond thought, beyond even the meaningful differentiation of our several perceptions; as the adrenalin of imagination rushes through our viscera and limbs, we momentarily lose ourselves in that which we seem to experience. The experience of the sublime, says Longinus, holds us in a kind of rapture; its effect, he argues in the first chapter of *On the Sublime*, is to "entrance" listeners, to "transport them with wonder." He continues, "The extent to which we can be persuaded is usually under our own control, but these sublime passages exert an irresistible force and mastery, and get the upper hand with every hearer" (100). He returns to this point again and again in his treatise. In Chapter 7, "The True Sublime," for example, Longinus declares that, "[B]y some innate power the true sublime uplifts our souls; we are filled with a proud exaltation and a sense of vaunting joy, *just as though we had ourselves produced what we had heard*" (107; emphasis added). We should note here the supposed effects—the uplift, the proud exaltation, the vaunting joy—that attend the audience's close identification with the speaker: so close, in fact, that its members seem to be relating the poem to themselves. That it is the physical element in the fashioning of the image that produces this emotional affect becomes clear somewhat later, in Chapter 22, "Hyperbaton, or Inversion," when Longinus describes the effects of a well-feigned spontaneity upon an audience. The speaker's rush of emotion will make it seem that his words are in fact improvised, "inducing in the hearer the fear that the whole structure of the sentence will fall to pieces, and compelling him in his

agitation to share in the risk the speaker is taking; and then unexpectedly, after a long interval, he will bring out the long-awaited phrase just where it is most effective, at the very end, and thus, by the very audacity and recklessness of his inversions, he administers a much more powerful shock" (132). Certainly the audience's expectation is in part linguistic; "the long-awaited phrase," after all, completes the grammatical structure of the speaker's thought. But it completes aural and rhythmic structures as well, and it is the well-timed closure of these, more than the meaning of the words themselves, that accounts for the "powerful shock" of the speaker's apparent escape from imminent disaster.<sup>12</sup> Longinus underscores this effect at the conclusion of his chapter on composition, when he spells out more particularly "how far the harmony of sound chimes in with the [sublime]" (151). Taking a sentence from Demosthenes, "This decree caused the peril which at that time encompassed the city to pass away just like a cloud," Longinus points out that the transporting power of the likening of peril to cloud is due more to cadence than to the idea itself or the syntax in which it is framed: "For 'just like a cloud' starts off with a long rhythm, consisting of four metrical beats, and if you remove a single syllable and write 'like a cloud,' by this abbreviation you at once mutilate the affect of grandeur. And again, if you stretch the phrase out with 'caused to pass away just as if a cloud,' the meaning is the same, but it no longer falls on the ear with the same effect because, by the drawing out of the final beats, the sheer sublimity of the passage is robbed of its solidity and of its tension" (151).

Elsewhere, Longinus advises flooding the audience with words;<sup>13</sup> employing hyperbole, excited, impassioned speech, or extravagant metaphors;<sup>14</sup> and dazzling listeners

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<sup>12</sup> Everyday experience bears this out. The rhythm and intonation of an orator's address can carry the audience when the words themselves are abject nonsense, their syntax a hopeless tangle; the power of a punchline depends not upon its literal meaning but upon the timing of its delivery: properly prepared, we would laugh at almost any group of syllables concluding a joke.

<sup>13</sup> Chapter 12, "Amplification Defined": "But the right place for the Demosthenean sublimity and intensity is in the passage where hyperbole and powerful emotions are involved, and where the audience

with “high-sounding” phrases.<sup>15</sup> And he advises that the speaker augment the “visual” impact of his words with startling figures of speech<sup>16</sup> and direct address: citing an example from Herodotus, Longinus says,

You see, my friend, how, as he takes you in imagination through the places in question, he transforms hearing into sight. All such passages, by their direct personal form of address, bring the hearer right into the middle of the action being described. When you seem to be addressing, not the whole audience, but a single member of it . . . you will affect him more profoundly, and make him more attentive and full of active interest, if you rise him by these appeals to him personally (135).

But whether the techniques Longinus prescribes have to do with sound, rhythm, or sight, their origins, we notice, are in sensation and the desired end of their combined effect is, as he expresses it in Chapter 39, “Composition,” to “[cast] a spell” on the audience and thereby gain “a complete mastery” over the minds of its members (150).

For Longinus the sublime is the overwhelming composite of physiological sensation, but it also seems to be an auxiliary sense in itself, an innate psycho-physical “organ” for the registering of what he elsewhere calls the soul’s “unconquerable passion for all that is more divine than ourselves,”<sup>17</sup> which the poet can excite and gratify by the apt

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are swept off their feet. On the other hand, profusion [the Ciceronian manner] is in order when it is necessary to flood them with words” (119)

<sup>14</sup> Chapter 32, “Metaphor”: “For the onward rush of passion has the property of sweeping everything before it . . . it does not allow the hearer leisure to consider the number of metaphors, since he is carried away by the enthusiasm of the speaker” (141).

<sup>15</sup> Chapter 30, “The Proper Choice of Diction”: “It is probably superfluous to explain to those who already know how wonderfully the choice of appropriate and high-sounding words moves and enchants an audience.” The right words “[endow] the facts as it were with a living voice. For words finely used are in truth the very light of thought” (139).

<sup>16</sup> Chapter 29, “The Dangers of Periphrasis”: “They [figures of speech] are all means of increasing the animation and the emotional impact of style, and emotional effects play as large a part in the production of the sublime as the study of character does in the production of pleasure” (138).

<sup>17</sup> Chapter 35, “Plato and Lysias,” 146.



management of the poem's sensory effects, both literal and figurative. Like Horace, Longinus sees the sublime as the means by which the world of the poem may be vivified, its audience transported from the everyday to the realm of the fantastic. But for both theorists the sublime is important for two further reasons. Most immediately, the poet who achieves the sublime will be assured of lasting renown. "It is from this source alone," says Longinus, "that the greatest poets and historians have acquired their preeminence and won for themselves an eternity of fame" (100). Moreover—and more importantly—the attainment of the sublime marks the fullest realization of the *æsthetics of memory*. When the poet has achieved the sublime, he not only creates experience but in doing so imposes upon his audience a particular memory of that experience, crystallizing in the poem itself a complex of those ideas, emotions, beliefs, values, personages, and events it embodies. The poem—and its author—become living icons of cultural memory: living, because the elements of memory have been effectively etched upon our active senses and our ever-developing understanding. This is what we must bear in mind when Longinus declares that "a piece is truly great only if it can stand up to repeated examination, and if it is difficult, or, rather, impossible to resist its appeal, and it remains firmly and ineffaceably in the memory" (107). Because the poem is impressed indelibly upon us, and because our memories are active rather than merely retentive, our experience of the poetic sublime must necessarily shape our experience of all other things. This is the all-informing principle of the *æsthetics of memory*.

### 3. The Aesthetics of Memory in the Age of Dryden

The physiological and psychological elements of the aesthetics of memory meet in the experience of the sublime. And so closely does the experience of the sublime intermingle physical with emotional excitements that to separate precisely our bodily sensations from our perceptions of them and these perceptions from our reflections upon them in turn, would be a task akin to that Venus set Psyche, when she poured together the barley, mullet, poppyseed, pease, lentils, and beans and bid her separate them again by morning. But we may at least observe that with the passage of time there occurs a shift in emphasis favoring the study of the emotional (and by extension, the psychological and intellectual) appeal of poetry at the expense of the purely physical.

Beardsley notes that Longinus' treatise on the sublime disappeared soon after its appearance in the first century AD, to be "rediscovered and published only in the sixteenth century" (76). It grew in favor during the seventeenth century, thanks to Boileau's translation and promotion of the work he called "one of the most precious relics of antiquity,"<sup>18</sup> and, in England, to the esteem it excited from John Dryden and John Dennis; at last, during the first decades of the eighteenth century, it reached "its long-delayed peak of popularity and influence" (Beardsley 181). Poets of this time were no less concerned than Longinus for the psychological impact of poetry upon their audiences. And as we shall see when we examine the poetical treatment of the Exclusion Crisis, they advocated and employed many of the same techniques the ancients had used to attain many of the same effects, the ultimate aim as before being to transport the audience, though the poets of the latter period were more purposeful about inculcating specific habits of perception and memory. The chart below (see page 218), matching physical sensation to desired affect and affect to the appropriate poetic application, summarizes the aesthetic principles of inculcating physiological memory derived or derivable from classical and early modern impact

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<sup>18</sup> "Preface to His Translation of Longinus on the Sublime" (1674; 44).

Table 1: Relation of Physical Sensations to Audience Affect, With Poetic Applications

Sensation	Affect Desired	Poetic Application
<b>Sound:</b> ◆ intonation ◆ pitch ◆ duration ◆ speed ◆ texture or "shape"	sonic mimesis: the sound replicates that which it describes	continuity of effect: harmony of sound with sound; fluent transitions between effects; level of diction consistently matches the desired tone
<b>Motion:</b> ◆ movement ◆ rhythm ◆ repetition	kinetic mimesis: poetic and bodily rhythms synchronize; both seem to replicate descriptive and narrative movement within the poem	◆ words placed to maintain fluency, pace ◆ meter coincident with action ◆ regularity of meter, repetition of locutional motifs
<b>Sight:</b> ◆ literal (performance)	identification with speaker	direct address
◆ figurative: —intensity (vividness) —coherence —stability	strong, cohesive, durable mental images the mind's eye sees the image instantly, clearly, completely an image or group of images complement and seem to evoke one another fluently, inevitably the image, simple or composite, stays in the mind	mimetic idealism: the pitch of everyday life raised or lowered via the strikingly beautiful, grotesque, or unusual image to make it more easily discerned the figure or image is matched; fluency among the parts of an images or among the images of a cluster sense of fluency in composite figure an arrangement of images sufficiently striking, coherent, and durable to make it retrievable and reviewable over an indefinite period of time
<b>Sublimity:</b> the sum of physiological and psychological stimuli	exhaustion of both perceptual and reflective faculties, leading to complete identification with the world of the poem	all of the above in this column, plus a delivery (textual or verbal) that heightens the physical and emotional sway of a poem

models of consciousness.<sup>19</sup>

Indeed, if anything during the seventeenth century, the artist's age-old preoccupation with observing and replicating human nature, particularly characteristic responses to given physical and emotional stimuli, was elevated to something of a science. Beardsley traces the emergence in this period of minutely elaborate "affect theories" in painting and music that sought to assign absolute psychological values to particular arrangements of colors, figures, and harmonic relations. As he points out, these affect theories had their origin in "Renaissance speculations about the emotional effects of music" (155), but such speculations were given a great boost by Descartes' *The Passions of the Soul*, in which the philosopher "attempted to give systematic definitions, rational analyses, of the emotions" (152). Beardsley describes Descartes' work as "a theory of expression: an account of how light coming from the object ([a painting of] the Crucifixion, for example) would strike the sense organs, arousing the ever-restless 'animal spirits,' which in turn can activate (1) the emotions of the soul (pity), through the pineal gland, and at the same time (2) the movements of the body that constitute the expression of this emotion (weeping, or paleness, a drawn face, a drooping mouth, a bent head)" (152). As the preceding section has shown, the ancients were well aware that one's physical experience of a work of art greatly affects one's psychological reaction to it. But Descartes' treatise gave impetus to attempts throughout the century and into the next to methodize artistic expression according to, in Beardsley's phrase, "theorems rigorously deduced from self-evident truths" (156) regarding human cognition. Once abstract speculation discovered the "self-evident" truths that informed and harmonized the physical, intellectual, and spiritual worlds, Cartesian rationalists believed, the arts—music and painting especially—could be made more scientific, mathematical in their purity of structure, their effects perfectly predictable

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<sup>19</sup> I have not listed rhyme under the characteristics of sound because rhyme was not common to the ancients and moderns. I discuss rhyme below, starting on page 251.

because perfectly attuned to their design.

Despite affect theory's often painstakingly minute classifications of psychological response,<sup>20</sup> however, it is fairly clear that for the Cartesian, practical application of the categories of affections was wholly subordinate to the impulse to arrange them within rigid taxonomies subsumed in turn by the exigencies of Rationalist notions of ideal clarity, precision, and order. Cartesian Rationalism was at last applied specifically to poetry in the first half of the eighteenth century in two works by Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, *Reflections on Poetry* (1735) and *Aesthetica* (1750, 1758). In these works, says Beardsley, "Baumgarten attempted an æsthetic theory . . . based upon Cartesian principles and using the Rationalist deductive method, with formal definitions and derivations" (156-57). Taking the object of æsthetics to be an investigation of "the kind of perfection proper to perception" (157), Baumgarten defined æsthetics as "the science of sensory cognition" (qtd., in Beardsley, 157), establishing ideals for representation before proceeding to specific prescriptions for poetic practice.<sup>21</sup> The deductive emphasis of French Rationalism was opposed in method and temperament by the induction and practical bent of English empiricism. As Paul Hazard observes, the English did not share the French delight in metaphysics or abstract speculation for its own sake (62ff.); he says, for instance, of

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<sup>20</sup> In addition to detailed descriptions of the causes and manifestations of a seemingly exhaustive range of emotions, Descartes' *Passions of the Soul* contains illustrations depicting the subtle differences in facial expression exhibiting wonder and astonishment, simple love and desire, joy and laughter, sadness and tearfulness, fear and boldness, and different degrees of anger.

<sup>21</sup> Baumgarten insisted, for example, that the sense experience that the "discourse of poetry" exists "to render and realize" (159) be represented clearly and intensely:

In obscure representations there are not contained as many representations of characteristic traits as would suffice for recognizing them and for distinguishing them from others, and as, in fact, are contained in clear representations (by definition). Therefore, more elements will contribute to the communication of sensate representations if these are clear than if they are obscure. A poem, therefore, whose representations are clear is more perfect than one whose representations are obscure, and clear representations are more poetic than obscure ones (qtd. in Beardsley, 159).

We have gleaned similar admonishments for clarity and intensity from Horace, Longinus and the students of artificial memory. But Horace and the rest, as practitioners of their respective arts, clearly induce precept from experience, rather than deduce practice from precept.

Locke, the archetypical empiricist, “His means are urbanity, ease, and an indefinably flowing and limpid style. No Sibylline mysteries for him; no excessive esotericism, no vertiginous profundities. He will have nothing that is not readily intelligible” (243). The English empiricists would never go so far as to say with the French Rationalists that experience can at best serve “as confirmation and illustration of [*a priori*] principles” (Beardsley 156), but even among these seventeenth-century counterparts of Lucretius, we may discern a shift from the particulars of sensation and its affects toward, in George Watson’s words, “such psychological questions as the nature of the creative act. By the eighteenth century, æsthetics is a mania among the English in an age when, as Boswell shows, the theory of beauty formed part of the small talk of polite London drawing-rooms” (14). Watson traces this shift “from Hobbes onwards” (14), but as early as 1620 Francis Bacon was declaring in *The New Organon* that “the sense itself is a thing infirm and erring; nor can instruments for enlarging or sharpening the senses do much; but all the truer kind of interpretation of nature is affected by instances and experiments fit and apposite, wherein the sense decides touching the experiment only, and the experiment touching the point in nature and the thing itself” (I, 1, 339). Turned outward, upon creation, the empirical method promised, said Bacon, to “[build] in the human understanding a true model of the world, such as it is in fact, and not such as a man’s own reason would have it to be” (I, cxxiv, 370), thereby allowing us to “endeavour to establish and extend the power and dominion of the human race itself over the universe” (I, cxxix, 374). But turned inward, focused upon sensation, perception, the passions, and intellectual organization, empirical observation could note the effects of physical and mental experience upon the mind and by working backward, could arrive inductively at their likely causes, whether interior or exterior to the self.

It would be too much to say that empiricism offered the prospect of regularizing sensation and experience, but it did offer the prospect that the agents of sensation, emotion, and thought, once known, could be used to regularize the organization of the mind and its

faculties, including memory. This notion, nascent in Bacon, would gain momentum as the century wore on, finding its fullest expression in John Locke's programme of empirical tuition, related in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1690). But the new interest in the mind's ability to order sensation and reflection—and the assumption that doing so was possible and in fact desirable—also, though inadvertently, called into question several staples of classical literary theory that underlay its idealization of the sublime, leaving the seventeenth-century literary inheritors of Aristotle, Horace, and Longinus in a difficult position indeed, forcing them defend their traditional claim for cultural authority even as they were compelled to establish new grounds for that authority as well as a new social utility for poetry itself. As the preceding chapters should suggest, poetry was able to stay relevant by becoming public to a degree unprecedented in English literary history; but, as I hope to demonstrate, its relevance depended specifically upon its ability to fashion social memory. Having traced the physiological components of memory as they figure in “impact” models of cognition, as well as the poetic principles derived from them, it now remains for me, before I proceed to practical demonstrations of poetry's shaping of the historical present, to examine poetry's response to the new emphasis on the ordering of reflection, of intellection, and in particular its æsthetic applications of the psychological elements of memory.

To begin, we might consider that however closely observant the classical literary theorists were of poetical practice in their own and earlier times, their prescriptive treatises were hardly what one would call methodical. Indeed, by the end of *Ars Poetica* one is left guessing at its central organizing principle, so seemingly random is Horace's arrangement of pointers for the would-be poet. *On the Sublime*, though well-ordered within certain clusters of headings, is as a treatise only slightly better structured than that of Horace. And like Horace, Longinus seems to advocate this or that technique for such-and-such an effect as such prescriptions occur to him. When he and Horace say in effect that the precept must be made to match present circumstances, we cannot be blamed if their advice strikes us as

chaotically situational. And we would be in good company. In *Of Dramatic Poesy: an Essay* (1667), Dryden in the person of Eugenius accuses the Ancients lacking in theoretical and practical consistency; and after him, Addison, in a number of *The Spectator* devoted to wit,<sup>22</sup> asserted that the ancient authors (he names Isocrates, Plato, and Cicero), lacking any systematic classification of true, false, and mixed wit—“according as they were founded in Truth”—were guilty of “such little Blemishes as are not to be met with in Authors of a much inferior Character, who have written since those several Blemishes were discovered” (188).

Such an apparent lack of method would hardly suit well with a temperament, emerging at the outset of the seventeenth century in the writings of Francis Bacon, that chafed at the very randomness of experience. In his preface to *The New Organon* (1620), Bacon enjoins his reader not to accept or reject a proposition on its apparent merits or the antiquity of its advocates, but to “examine the thing thoroughly,” and to “make some little trial for himself” (330). But he also makes clear that conclusions drawn from haphazard observation of occasional phenomena are as undesirable as proofs spun by scholastic logic or those reached by “the most ordinary method” (still a favorite among graduate students in literature): “When a man addresses himself to discover something, he first seeks out and sets before him all that has been said about it by others; then he begins to meditate for himself, and so by much agitation and working of the wit solicits and as it were evokes his own spirit to give him oracles—which method has no foundation at all, but rests only upon [received] opinions and is carried about with them” (I, lxxxii, 355). Scarcely less futile, Bacon continues, is simple experience—that is, experience unmediated by method. Simple experience, Bacon says,

if taken as it comes, is called accident, if sought for, experiment. But this kind of experience is no better than a broom without its band, as the saying is, a mere groping, as of men in the dark that feel all round them for the

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<sup>22</sup>No. 61: Thursday, May 10, 1711.



chance of finding their way, when they had much better wait for daylight, or light a candle, and then go. But the true method of experience on the contrary first lights the candle, and then by means of the candle shows the way, *commencing as it does with experience duly ordered and digested, not bungling or erratic, and from it educing axioms, and from established axioms again new experiments* (I, lxxxii, 355; emphasis added).

For Bacon, experiment cannot be made useful until experience itself is ordered, which requires in turn the right ordering of our mental faculties. This ordering requires purging the several causes of intellectual disorder, which Bacon elsewhere in *The New Organon* groups under the headings of the Idols of the Cave (individual self-interest), Market Place (the misuse of language), and Theatre (philosophical dogma). But as insidious as any of these is the mind's tendency to make hasty conclusions and from them draw untenable generalizations: "[I]ndeed through the premature hurry of the understanding to leap or fly to universals and principles of things, great danger may be apprehended from [false natural] philosophies of this kind, against which evil we ought even now to prepare" (I, lxiv, 347). Thus, Bacon admonishes, "The understanding must not therefore be supplied with wings, but rather hung with weights to keep it from leaping and flying. Now this has never yet been done; when it is done, we may entertain better hopes of the sciences" (I, civ, 364). The "weight" with which Bacon would laden the understanding is an exhaustive cataloguing of the mind's faculties, which, as the means by which we frame our investigations and the most mysterious of natural processes, are both the primary and ultimate object of Bacon's empirical method: "For I form a history and tables of discovery for anger, fear, shame, and the like; . . . and again for the mental operations of memory, composition and division, judgement, and the rest" (I, cxxvii, 371).

Though Bacon does not specifically refer here to the experience of poetry and the mental operations poetry excites, one can easily imagine that the uncertain and seemingly unquantifiable effects of the "extremely free and licensed" craft he likens in Chapter 13 of *De Dignitate et Augmentis Scientiarum* (1623) to a weed among the cultivated flowers of science—"I can report no other deficiency in Poesy, for being as a plant which come from

the lust of the earth without a formal seed, it has sprung up and spread abroad more than any other kind of learning" (408; 410)—would arouse his well-known antipathy to the art. Bacon in this work does credit poetry with "refreshing" the everyday world "by reciting *things unexpected and various and full of vicissitudes*" (407-408; emphasis added), and claims that it "conduces not only to delight but also to magnanimity and morality. Whence it may be fairly thought to partake somewhat of a divine nature because it raises the mind and carries it aloft, accommodating the shows of things to the desires of the mind" (408). However, as Beardsley rightly points out, Bacon does not so much elevate poetry as segregate it and its governing faculty, the imagination, from more legitimate intellectual endeavors (170), namely, philosophy (both natural and speculative) and history, governed respectively by reason and memory. Unlike poetry, philosophy and history can be turned to pragmatic and measurable ends; they can be assessed according to strictly empirical criteria. Poetry, partaking "of somewhat of a divine nature," and offering us "the shadows of things when the substance cannot be obtained" (407), would seem by nature to be beyond the application of such standards: being "divine," or at least the product of the imagination, it owes more to ungovernable and enigmatic inspiration than to science (in its larger sense of a regular method practically applied); trading in the "shadows" of things not to be found in nature, it works upon auditors not by analyzable demonstration but by raising the mind and carrying it aloft, by "accommodating *the shows of things* to the *desires* of the mind" (emphasis added): "Nay, it has been regarded by learned men and great philosophers as "a kind of musician's bow by which men's mind's may be played upon" (408). In other words, poetry works by rousing in the audience the very passions and figures inspiration has roused in the poet. Poetry (dramatic poetry especially) might incite to virtue, but unlike reason and memory it has an equal capacity to corrupt—and in any event, for the good empiricist both its agent and its manner of operation must be suspect.

Consider that in *The New Organon* Bacon boasts that “my way of discovering sciences goes far to level men’s wits, and leaves but little to individual excellence, because it performs everything by the strictest rules and demonstrations” (I, cxxii, 369). Among the advantages of empirical method is that it liberates society from the authority and unreliability of genius, eccentricity, and chance. The acquisition of knowledge henceforth could proceed across a comparatively broad swath of the social spectrum, could proceed almost at will, via the conscientious application of inductive methods. Longinus and Horace had indeed scoffed at the poseurs and madmen pretending to inspiration, but each had also declared that true poets are born, not made. As the seventeenth century progressed, such pronouncements seemed too reminiscent of the Scholastics’ erstwhile mystification of the arts and sciences, their confinement of them within the narrow circuit of an esoteric fraternity, hedged about with obscurantist language few laymen could hope to penetrate. And in consequence, claims of innate talent and genius were made less and less assertively, even when there could be no doubt about the matter. It is telling, for instance, that by 1668 Dryden could have Neander declare in *Of Dramatic Poesy*. “Shakespeare was the Homer or father of our dramatic poets; Jonson was the Virgil, the pattern of elaborate writing; I admire him, but I love Shakespeare” (70)—then launch into an examen of the model English drama: Jonson’s *The Silent Woman*. When the works of the “naturally learned”<sup>23</sup> Shakespeare are something of a guilty pleasure and those of more methodical but more circumspect design held up for emulation in their place, the very desirability of genius seems called into question.

Certainly by mid-century the cultural authority of genius and inspiration, as well as their manner of operation upon poet and audience alike, were under increasing attack. We might remember Longinus’ insistence that the object of the poet aiming at the sublime was to so excite an audience physically and emotionally as to master it, to impose upon it

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<sup>23</sup> *Of Dramatic Poesy*, 67.

howsoever he chooses. "I would confidently maintain," he declares in Chapter 8 of *On the Sublime*, "Five Sources of Sublimity," "that nothing constitutes so decisively to the grand style as a noble emotion in the right setting, when it forces its way to the surface in a gust of frenzy, and breathes a kind of divine inspiration into the speaker's words" (109). Hobbes does not have Longinus in mind specifically—or even at all—when he attacks Christian poets' invocation of a pagan Muse in his "Answer" to Sir William Davenant's preface to *Gondibert* (1650), but the points he makes against the practice constitute a refutation of the idealization of the sublime. Though Hobbes does not forbid modern invocations outright, he declares the custom insipid. It is true enough, he says, that "the Antiquity of Verse it is greater than the antiquity of Letters" (46), and that at the dawn of civilization poets were indeed the priests and legislators for their peoples—for which reasons religious doctrine and civil laws were encoded in "measured Sounds . . . easily committed to the memory" (47); still, it would be presumptuous of poets to pretend to the same authority as their ancestors: "For their Poets were their Divines; had the name of Prophets; Exercised amongst the People a kind of spirituall Authority; would be thought to speake by a divine spirit; have their workes which they writte in Verse (the divine stile) passe for the word of God, and not of man; and to be hearkened to with reverence" (48). But since poets of the Christian era know there is no such thing as an actual Muse, they can no longer pretend to speak directly to such divinities. Thus, Hobbes concludes, there are now no grounds for using invocations, save "a reasonlesse imitation of custome; of a foolish custome; by which a man enabled to speake wisely from the principles of nature, and his owne meditation, love rather to to be thought to speake by inspiration, like a Bagpipe" (49). Hobbes, writing in exile in Paris in 1650, has Puritan claims to inspiration and personal revelation very much in mind, and here uses a critical pronouncement to assail the sectarian struggles that have disordered England with civil war, regicide, and the chaos of a commonwealth. For when these "unskillfull Conjurers," these pretenders to inspiration, call unseasonably for *Zeale* there appears a spirit of *Cruelty*; and by the like

error instead of *Truth* they raise *Discord*; instead of *Wisdom*, *Fraud*; instead of *Reformation*, *Tumult*; and *Controversie* instead of *Religion*" (48). But the secondary implications of Hobbes's argument do not detract from its primary thrust: the poet's authority for expression and his claim upon the attention and estimation of his audience should derive from "the principles of nature, and his owne meditation" upon them. That is, as Hobbes explains elsewhere in his "Answer," from what is observable and demonstrable in human and physical nature, and from what one may reasonably infer from such observations and demonstrations: "That which giveth a Poeme the true and naturall Colour consisteth in two things, which are; *To know well*, that is, to have images of nature in the memory distinct and cleare; and *To know much*," which allows for "novelty of expression, and pleaseth by excitation of the mind," feeding curiosity, "which is a delightfull appetite of knowledge" (52). To feed this appetite, the poet may go "[b]eyond the actual workes of nature . . . but beyond the conceived possibility of nature never" (51).

To rightly observe the principles of nature and meditate reasonably upon them, however, one must have access to language that at once allows for a minutely particular examination of the thing observed and an orderly, logical progression of analytical reflection upon it. When lacking such language, one is tempted, says Hobbes in his "Answer," into "the ambitious obscurity of expressing more then is perfectly conceived; or perfect conception in fewer words then it requires. Which Expressions, though they have had the honor to be called strong lines, are in deed no better then Riddles, and not only to the Reader, but also (after a little time) to the Writer himselfe darke and troublesome" (52). Hobbes speaks here of poets, and indeed, after the seeming randomness of experience offered by poetry and its reliance upon genius and inspiration and nonrational means to excite the passions of the reader or hearer, the characteristics of poetic language—metaphor, allusion, parallel, rhetorical figures—make up the third traditional element of the poet's craft to be called into question during the seventeenth century. Or rather, the language of poetry came under attack as the authority of the Schoolmen was challenged by

proponents of the New Science, who often argued that it was solely in what Hobbes calls the “palpable darkness” (“Answer,” 52) of esoteric and unsignifying language that the power of the Schools truly resided. The Idols of the Market Place Bacon assails in *The New Organon* are those linguistic and consequently intellectual chimeras “which have crept into the understanding through the alliance of words and names. For men believe that their reason governs words, but it is also true that words react on the understanding” (I, lix, 341)—to the extent that among scholastic philosophers “vicious demonstrations are as the strongholds and defences of Idols; and those we have in logic do little else than make the world the bondslave of human thought, and human thought the bondslave of words” (I, lxxix, 348). Hobbes takes up this line of attack in the first part of *Leviathan* and makes what he calls the insignificant, nonsensical speech of scholastic pedants a frequent butt of his scorn. More than mere folly, it is a dangerous form of madness, Hobbes argues, “when men speak such words, as put together, have in them no signification at all; but are fallen on by some, through misunderstanding of the words they have received, and repeat by rote; by others, from intention to deceive by obscurity. And this is incident to none but those, that converse in questions of matters incomprehensible, as the Schoole-men; or in questions of abstruse Philosophy” (I, viii, 146).<sup>24</sup> Such absurdity in learned language is *dangerous* for Hobbes because obscurantism too easily passes for real knowledge in the world, and thereby conveys too much power to those “Egregious persons” who fashion its terms and account the plain-speaking, “common sort of men” ignorant and vulgar (146); it is *madness* for Hobbes because linguistic imprecision, equivocation, and insignificance undermines humanity’s already tenuous understanding of the world about it, leaving it

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<sup>24</sup> Should any doubt his point, Hobbes dares him to “take a Schoole-man into his hands, and see if he can translate any one chapter concerning any difficult point,” such as the Trinity, the nature of Christ, transubstantiation, or free will. “What,” he challenges the reader, “is the meaning of these words” [taken from Suarez’ *Of the Concourse, Motion, and Help of God*]: ‘The first cause does not necessarily inflow any thing into the second, by force of the Essentiall subordination of the second causes, by which it may help it to worke’ . . . . When men write whole volumes of such stuffe, are they not mad, or intend to make others so?” (I, viii, 146-147).

enmazed in abstractions that correspond to nothing found in the physical or moral spheres. Consequently, says Locke in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, it is not to “these learned Disputants,” but to “the unsholastick Statesman, that the Governments of the World owed their Peace, Defence, and Liberties; and from the illiterate and contemned Mechanick, (a Name of Disgrace) that they received the improvements of useful Arts”:

Nevertheless, this artificial Ignorance, and learned Gibberish, prevailed mightily in these last Ages, by the Interest and Artifice of those, who found no easier way to that pitch of Authority and Dominion they have attained, than by amusing the Men of Business, and Ignorant, with hard words, or imploying the Ingenious and Idle in intricate Disputes, about unintelligible Terms, and holding them perpetually entangled in that endless Labyrinth. Besides, there is no such way to gain admittance, or give defence to strange and absurd Doctrines, as to guard them round about with Legions of obscure, doubtful, and undefined Words. Which yet makes these Retreats, more like the Dens of Robbers, or Holes of Foxes, than the Fortresses of fair Warriours: which if it be hard to get them out of, it is not for the strength that is in them, but the Briars and Thorns, and the Obscurity of the Thickets they are beset with. For Untruth being unacceptable to the Mind of Man, there is no other defence left for Absurdity, but Obscurity (Book III, Chapter X, 495).

For Locke, as for Bacon and Hobbes, the language of poetry is implicated with scholastic disputation and rhetoric insofar as it partakes of, in Locke’s phrase, “the Arts of Fallacy” (III, x, 508); but we can invert this and observe that for these men the integrity of disputation and rhetoric is suspect insofar as these disciplines partake of the figurative language of poetry, which, says Locke, does “nothing else but to insinuate wrong *Ideas*, move the Passions, and thereby mislead the Judgement” (508). For this reason Bacon scorns all poetry except “feigned history,” referring satires, epigrams, and odes “to philosophy and arts of speech” (407); Hobbes admits that “sometimes the understanding have need to be opened by some apt similitude,” but repeatedly insists that metaphors have no place in the “rigorous search of Truth”: “For seeing they openly professe deceit; to admit them into Councell, or Reasoning, were manifest folly” (I, viii, 136-137). One of the better known exclamations against the extravagances of baroque discourse is to be found in

Thomas Sprat's *The History of the Royal Society* (1667). Taking "Nullius in Verba" for its motto, the Royal Society (chartered by Charles II in 1662) had as its declared mission "the Advancement of Experimental Philosophy." In an eloquent fulmination against eloquence—"the luxury and redundance of *Speech*"(111)—Sprat brings us full circle, back to the ancients' original rationale for the several figures and ornaments of speech: "They were at first, no doubt, an admirable Instrument in the hands of *Wise Men*: when they were onely employ'd to describe *Goodness, Honesty, Obedience*; in larger, fairer, and more moving Images: to represent *Truth*, cloth'd with Bodies; and to bring *Knowledg* back again to our very senses, from whence it was at first deriv'd to our understandings" (111-112). To represent the social virtues "in larger, fairer, and more moving Images"; to represent truth "cloth'd with Bodies"; to bring knowledge "back again to our very senses, from whence it was at first deriv'd to our understandings"—these, as we have seen, were the means by which Aristotle, Horace, Longinus, Cicero, and others sought to translate the sounds and rhythms of poetry and rhetoric into visual terms, the better to convey a complete and immediate apprehension of the scene or argument in question. But of late, laments Sprat, the figures and ornaments of eloquence have been put "to worse uses: They make the *Fancy* disgust the best things, if they come found, and unadorn'd: they are in open defiance against *Reason*; professing, not to hold much correspondence with that; but with its Slaves, *the Passions*: the give the mind a motion too changeable, and bewitching to consist with *right practice*" (112). Previously agents of clarity and truth, "these specious Tropes and Figures" now have obscured knowledge with so many "mists and uncertainties" (112), that Sprat wishes heartily he might banish eloquence "out of all *civil societies*, as a thing fatal to Peace and good Manners" (111).

Swift's account in the third book of *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) of a project afoot in the Academy of Lagado to abolish language entirely and, replacing words with the actual



items they represent, require people instead to carry about them “such *Things* as were necessary to express the particular Business they are to discourse on” (159)<sup>25</sup>, has made Sprat’s remedy for the excesses of eloquence nearly as notorious as the abuses he would redress:

[The Royal Society] have therefore been most rigorous in putting in execution, the only Remedy, that can be found for this *extravagance*: and that has been, a constant Resolution, to reject all the amplifications, digressions, and swellings of style: to return back to the primitive purity, and shortness, when men deliver’d so many things, almost in an equal number of words. They have exacted from their members, a close, naked, natural way of speaking; positive expressions; clear sense; a native easiness: bringing all things as near the Mathematicall plainness, as they can: and preferring the language of Artizans, Countrymen, and Merchants, before that of Wits, or Scholars (113).

Of course, the inhabitants of late seventeenth-century England—and especially the professional poets among them—were not reduced, as were the hapless sages of Lagado, to lugging about great sacks of miscellaneous objects (“like Pedlars among us”) on the chance of meeting a fellow sage and having to “lay down their loads, open their Sacks, and hold Conversation [literally] for an hour together” (158). Nevertheless, as the foregoing enumeration of specific challenges to specific affective elements of the poet’s craft should make clear, poetry now faced, at least potentially, the stiff intellectual resistance it had largely side-stepped since Plato’s excoriation of seer-poets in *Ion* and his outright banishment of poets in *The Republic*. Citing the newly emerging concept that there were really “two distinct languages, the metaphysical language of poetry and the literal language of science,” Beardsley neatly expresses the dilemma in which poetry found itself: “The

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<sup>25</sup> Swift also has the projectors of Lagado devising entirely mechanical methods of generating speech and hence “Books in Philosophy, Poetry, Politicks, Law, Mathematics and Theology, without the least Assistance from Genius or Study” (156)—reducing the empiricists’ apparent bias against claims of innate individual talent to its logical, if absurd extreme. Regarding Sprat’s resolution, itself, I find it somewhat uncanny that 130 years hence Wordsworth will propose a like-sounding solution for the reform of poetic diction in his Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1800). I suppose, however, it is almost inevitable that would-be reformers frequently begin their efforts with proposals to simplify and thereby revivify language, perhaps the easiest and most obvious way of appearing to clear the slate and begin afresh.

Horatian injunctions, that poetry should please and instruct, now for the first time seem in danger of being split apart: for if the language that serves one of these ends best is destructive of the other, it would seem that they cannot both be done (well, at least) by the same discourse" (176).

It is usual, among those citing rationalism's antipathy toward wit, fancy, and inspiration, to say, with Clayton Roberts and David Roberts in their textbook, *A History of England: Prehistory to 1714* (1980), that the New Science "weakened the appeal of poetry. In literature the age of poetry gave way to the age of prose, the age of Milton to the age of Dryden. . . . To the Elizabethans the poet was a seer and prophet, and metaphor a revelation of the truth. To Dryden and his contemporaries, metaphors were an adornment to language and poetry an entertainment" (388). Paul Hazard likewise declares the late seventeenth century in England to be "essentially an age of prose" (335), but his eloquence carries him further in a chapter of *The European Mind, 1680-1715* appropriately entitled "The Muses are Silent." Here he asserts that the very heart of the nation had lost its passion, had become bleakly prosaic: "If poetry is prayer, [the people] they never prayed; if it is a reaching out reaching out towards the ineffable, they would not hear of the ineffable; if it is to hesitate on the delicate line betwixt music and meaning, they never hesitated; no, not they! They aimed at being just so many proofs and theorems. When they did write verse, it was merely a vehicle for their ideas on geometry." We can almost see him removing his hat and letting his chin sink into his chest as he concludes, grandly, "And so poetry died; or at least seemed to die. Strictly logical and matter-of-fact, machine-made, sapless, it lost sight of its true mission" (336). One of the classic studies of the period's poetry, James Sutherland's *A Preface to Eighteenth-Century Poetry* (1948), seems to counter such pronouncements, declaring defiantly if prosaically, that "the prestige of literature never stood higher" (43). However, citing several of the same rationalist antipathies toward poetry that I have given above, Sutherland essentially agrees with Hazard, arguing that to survive poetry made itself appreciably rationalistic, curbing the

excesses of wit, fancy, and individual eccentricity, as well as the expression of personal emotion; in doing so, Sutherland says, poetry became noticeably removed from everyday experience, a thing rarified, elegant, “fundamentally aristocratic” (50), the equivalent in words of the “dignity and restraint of Georgian houses and public buildings” (39): “Why,” asks Sutherland, “should the aristocratic taste that produced Bedford Square be so widely approved, and the aristocratic taste that produced Pope’s *Eloisa to Abelard* be so often ridiculed and condemned? Have we one set of values for architecture and quite a different set for poetry?” (49).

We do, and we should. Buildings and poems both may testify to the sensibility of their designers, but poetry is far more revealing of the intellectual and psychological lives of those who left it behind: once erected, the building’s static, silent, passive utility quickly pushes it into the background of everyday life; on the other hand, it is all but impossible to read a poem and not hear and see and feel the voices, scenes, and rhythms that made up that everyday life. To suggest that poetry is just another physical artifact of a given era—and especially *this* era, when poetry was so much a part of public life—is to embalm it in quaintness, to wrap it away from the human conditions that gave it existence at all, that made it matter. It is to surrender poetry to the past, to make it a period piece, an abstract caricature of what it once was to those who wrote and read it. Consequently, I think it rather beside the point to proceed from an account of the intellectual challenge to poetry during this time to broad characterizations of what poetry became in response, whether an entertainment (Roberts and Roberts), or a machine (Hazard), or a uniform row of elegant townhouses (Sutherland 41).

Certainly we might observe in brief that, responding to the temper of the times composing and analyzing poetry became more methodical and more practical. A whole taxonomy of narrowly defined poetic genres took shape during this time, each genre having its own set of conventions governing subject matter, operative mode (heroic, tragic, romantic, comedic, etc.), structure, tone, rhyme scheme, meter, diction, verbal locutions

(the epic simile, for instance, or the *cano*, *dixit*, and *fuit* formulæ found in heroic verse), meter, and the types of permissible allusions, similes, and metaphors. For the reader aware of these rules and conventions, watching them at work in a given poem, recognizing the patterns of expression and theme they imposed upon the work, marking the patterns of emotional and intellectual response they predictably elicited in oneself—the expectations they raised would in effect “forearm” one against the affective designs of the poet and lend the experience of reading poetry an orderly, rational pleasure that would counteract the supposedly debilitating effects of the sporadic sub-rational delights objected to by Bacon, Hobbes, Sprat, and Locke. We might further observe, secondly, that this new emphasis on compositional and critical method constituted a leave-taking from the now-suspect cult of genius. On the one hand, the existence of widely discussed and well known rules made the successful application of these rules (or the successful deviation from them) more important than the poet himself; on the other, it created a new-found sense of poetic decorum among poets and readers alike, and in consequence helped turn the poet’s attention more generally toward public decorum, and hence the public welfare, which made practical demonstrations of and exhortations to right action and thought more relevant than mastering the souls of one’s readers. The vaguely distasteful “wildness” of Abraham Cowley’s quest for the sublime in his imitation of Pindar’s *Odes* in his *Poems* (1656), for instance, seemingly ensured that such efforts would give way to works such as John Gay’s *Trivia or, The Art of Walking the Streets of London* (1716). And if the poet’s ostensible aim was no longer to catch the reader up, ravish his soul, leave him physically and psychologically spent; if the end of poetry was no longer the ecstatic sublime but the warm thrill of generic, topical, and preceptive recognition, then, thirdly, the poet had no need for the supposed extravagances of the last age’s figures, metaphors, and turns of wit. These could be retrenched, the transmutative potential of poetry foregone, and its design, matter, and end made immediately intelligible to the average reader.

These things being observed, we might take them together and observe of them in turn, that if they rightly describe characteristics poetry adopted in response to the emergence of the New Science (and the second and third seem to me especially open to extensive qualification), the potential challenge of rationalism to the craft of poetry as traditionally practiced simply accelerated the emergence of the art into the public sphere. But poetry's hastened emergence left it "schizophrenic," Janus-faced, an irregular bundle of often contrary impulses, principles, and formal alloys. If any single characteristic may be said to be truly emblematic of Augustan poetry, it is this one. Consider: a private act of individual imagination, the poem was now expected to leave the drawing room and boudoir and make the rounds of public thoroughfares and coffee-houses; a public entity, it had to concern itself with public matters, yet it was often prompted by fierce personal rivalries and the most virulent pecuniary and political self-interest; its eye on the present and the local, it sought to voice timeless and universal truths; occasional, journalistic, and topical, it made use not only of the latest learning and by-words, but of antiquity's vast store of myth, history, and literature.

The language of Augustan poetry neatly demonstrates several of these confluent oppositions. In the introduction to his translation of Lucretius, Ronald Latham makes the intriguing observation that the twentieth-century translator of the Roman poet-philosopher, unlike his seventeenth-century counterpart, must often "choose between an archaic expression with pleasing associations and a baldly scientific one":

The distinction was not so clear-cut in the seventeenth century, when the adjective 'massy,' for instance, was equally at home in the languages of Milton and of Newton. But since then poetry and science have gone different ways, and recent attempts to reunite them have not yet been wholly successful. So, where Lucretius could so wield his limited vocabulary as to combine the Biblical stateliness of 'every beast of the field after his kind eating green herb' with the scientific precision of 'every species of herbivorous mammal,' the [modern] translator often finds it hard not to sacrifice one or the other" (16).

The separation of scientific and poetic languages, then, was not—at least not yet—as absolute as Beardsley, for one, would have it (see above), though certainly, as the natural sciences developed a language that would become so specialized as to be generally unsuitable for everyday speech, and poetry, seeking for effects beyond the reach of ordinary discourse, would fashion its own distinctive vocabulary (which has since the appearance of Wordsworth’s “Preface” been characterized as stilted, artificial), the terms of the two endeavors, as Latham notes, were to become estranged, perhaps permanently. But in the meantime, Dryden, an early member of the Royal Society, did not hesitate to combine the language of naval warfare, shipbuilding, trade, manufacture, geopolitics, and astronomy with the more traditional conventions of heroic verse—personages of superhuman stature, historical and literary allusion, epic locutions, metaphor, and “elevated” diction—in *Annus Mirabilis* (1667), which celebrates English valor during the Second Dutch War and the Plague and Fire of London. In a preface to *Annus Mirabilis* addressed to Sir Robert Howard, “An Account of the Ensuing Poem,” Dryden declares, “I have never yet seen the description of any naval fight in the proper terms which are us’d at sea. . . . We hear indeed among our poets, of the thund’ring of guns, the smoke, the disorder, and the slaughter; but all these are common notions. And certainly as those who, in a logical dispute, keep in general terms, would hide a fallacy, so those who do it in any poetical description would veil their ignorance” (24a).<sup>26</sup> Dryden would have his language be precisely descriptive, because the events he describes are recent and well-known to his contemporaries; their importance in determining the fate of England in the 1660’s and beyond makes them of a kind with the events treated in classical epics (in his preface, Dryden cites Virgil as his principal model), but require by reason of their specifically

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<sup>26</sup> Dr. Johnson, for one, was skeptical about the success of Dryden’s use of technical language: He descends to display his knowledge with pedantic ostentation; as when, in translating Virgil, he says ‘tack to the larboard’—and ‘veer starboard’; and talks, in another work, of ‘Virtue spooming before the wind.’ His vanity now and then betrays his ignorance: ‘They Nature’s king through Nature’s optics viewed: / Revers’d, they viewed him lessen’d to their eyes.’ He had heard of reversing a telescope, and unluckily reverses the object (258).

English significance a fresh treatment achievable only with the incorporation of the several argots of the statecraft, sciences, and technologies that have made possible England's emergence as a world power and given it its sense of unique national destiny. Prosaic and poetic, fabulous past and heroic present, are thus united in *Annus Mirabilis*—as are Dryden's private and public motives: a celebration of English character in the face of adversity, the poem singles out the King and his brother the Duke of York for especial praise, earning Dryden the Laureateship in 1668, when Davenant's death left the post vacant.

To remark upon this melding of patriotism and personal ambition, and more generally upon the pronounced duality in Augustan poetry, is hardly to concede that poetry has died or been mortally compromised by its acknowledgement of the world beyond the Self. To the contrary, the "schizophrenia" of Augustan poetry is analogous to the confluent oppositions in our everyday lives. Each morning when we step out of doors we take with us into the public sphere our personal histories, our trains of sensations, associations, experiences; often we have nothing "in mind" but a succession of mental images representing to us our moods, expectations, and impressions of the present moment. It is only when we have put ourselves in the midst of other people that we force ourselves to order our thoughts, to think in language, to order our demeanor, our facial expressions, our movements according to our circumstances. We put on our well-defined public personæ, accommodate ourselves to the expectations of others in a succession of given situations, and try to speak intelligibly in a common tongue. In a word, we become social creatures. And yet, beneath—or alongside, or intermingled with—the elements of our public selves are all the elements of our inner, private lives. The inner life has not been quelled or rendered quaint, self-ironic, but informs the public self, which in turn allows its counterpart a practical articulation of its perceptions, appetites, and reflections. Neither is endangered by the other's existence, but enriched, and perhaps to the degree that we can integrate our private and public selves can we be said to fashion a viably *human* being. For,

as Bertrand Russell has observed, “Man is not a solitary animal, and so long as social life survives, self-realization cannot be the supreme principle of ethics” (684).

Neither can it be the supreme principle of poetry. Indeed, for Augustan poetry as for ourselves, the melding of contrary impulses enhances rather than impoverishes. For the poetry of this period, left richly paradoxical by its hastened emergence into the public sphere, forced to incorporate and cultivate the sensibilities and languages of two sets of selves, the intellectual challenge posed by the New Science proved, not a death-blow, but a valuable catalyst indeed. Not only was the newly public poetry left perfectly equipped—in outlook, purpose, and vocabulary—for integrating two opposed modes of social memory, the literal and figurative, but it was also provided the means of going about it, of fashioning a social memory combining the ostensibly subjective, emblematic truth of poetry and the objective, tangible truth of science. Put another way, poetry was now able to answer its intellectual challengers on their own terms by way of its discovery, development, and incorporation (albeit informally: incidentally and incrementally) of a sound philosophical foundation for the physical and psychological elements of the aesthetics of memory.

Convenient as it would be for our present purposes, no poet of the period, alas, has left behind a cohesive treatise expressly outlining and defending the intellectual—that is, philosophical or epistemological—foundation for the aesthetics of memory. It is therefore agreeably ironic to find the justification for the affective and figurative truth of poetry best delineated and expressed by one who scornfully banishes wit and fancy from the heartier, more wholesome realm of “dry Truth and real Knowledge.”

“I confess,” says Locke in section 34 of Book III, Chapter X of *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, “Of the Abuse of Words,” “in Discourses, where we seek rather Pleasure and Delight, than Information and Improvement, such Ornaments as are borrowed from [wit and fancy], can scarce pass for Faults. But yet, if we would speak of Things as they are, we must allow, that all the Art of Rhetorick, besides Order and Clearness, all the artificial and figurative application of Words Eloquence hath invented, are



for nothing else but to insinuate wrong Ideas, move the Passions, and thereby mislead the Judgment; and so indeed are perfect cheat” (508). And yet, in the following chapter, “Of the Remedies of the Foregoing Imperfections and Abuses [of language],” Locke lays out the case for the epistemological legitimacy and unsurpassable utility of those schemes of perceptual and intellectual organization he terms “mixed modes” of thought and (hence) speech. Such modes he defines as those “Combinations of simple *Ideas*, as are not looked upon to be the characteristical marks of any real Beings that have a steady existence, but scattered and independent *Ideas*, put together by the Mind”; these include “the Complex *Ideas*, we mark by the names *Obligation*, *Drunkenness*, a *Lye*, etc.” (II, xxii, “Of Mixed Modes,” 288), and may in short be thought of as those notions not derived from sensual but from reflective experience, from comparing and combining any number of distinct ideas already in the mind. The complex idea of *drunkenness*, for example, might consist in the separate ideas of a redness of the face and eyes, slurred speech, imprecise movements of the arms and legs, and a marked joviality or querulousness. These have no inevitable connection, but when we put with them the further idea of the consumption of much liquor, we group them together under the abstract term “drunkenness.” Corresponding to no specific things in nature, these compound abstractions are, “as it were, *Patterns lodg’d in my Memory*, with names annexed to them, to denominate Actions and Relations by, as they come to exist” (507; emphasis added). These denominations may be precisely established, Locke argues, even when they represent notions of morality: “I am so bold to think, that *Morality is capable of Demonstration*, as well as *Mathematicks*: Since the precise real Essence of the Things moral Words stand for, may be perfectly known; and so the Congruity, or Incongruity of the Things themselves, be certainly discovered, in which consists perfect Knowledge” (516). Yet as patterns of human experience, these complex ideas, “having no external Beings for *Archetypes* which they are referr’d to, and must correspond with” (517), comprise not rigid absolutes, separate from our consciousness and

therefore essentially unknowable, but flexible, fluid entities, knowable according to collectively acknowledged criteria and capable of being purposefully created and revised.

Locke would no doubt wince at our labelling such patterns as figures of speech or emblematic images, yet it is in their independence from the tangible world about us that the utility of these complex ideas lies. "It is far easier," Locke declares, "for Men to frame in their Minds an *Idea*, which shall be the Standard to which they will give the Name *Justice*, with which Pattern so made, all Actions that agree shall pass under that denomination, than having seen *Aristides*, to frame an *Idea*, that shall in all things be exactly like him, who is as he is, let Men make what *Idea*, they please of him" (517). Because *Aristides* is an actual physical and rational entity distinct from our own self-enclosed systems of perception and consciousness, we cannot have more than a superficial sensual impression what *Aristides* is; we cannot deduce from our sensual apprehension of him those properties and characteristics of *Aristides* that do not appear immediately to view. Because of this, descriptions of him will likely vary a good deal from person to person, leading to some confusion about just what it is that is signified by the name "*Aristides*." But Locke goes further, and asserts that we cannot trust our senses to give us accurate, comprehensive ideas of even simple materials:

Therefore, in the signification of our *Names of Substances*, some part of the signification will be better made known, by enumerating those simple *Ideas*, than in shewing the *Substance* it self. For he that, to the yellow shining Colour of *Gold* got by sight, shall, from my enumerating them, have the *Ideas* of great Ductility, Fusibility, Fixedness, and Solubility, in *Aqua Regia*, will have a perfecter *Idea* of *Gold*, than he can have by seeing a piece of *Gold*, and thereby imprinting in his Mind only its obvious Qualities (520).

Nearly two millennia earlier, Lucretius, distant forbear of the seventeenth century materialists, had declared that the senses were supreme in creating our knowledge of the world external to ourselves; if we did not understand what our senses conveyed to us, the fault lay not in our eyes and ears, but in our reason, which either could not or would not

process our sensual perceptions properly. Locke's argument turns Lucretius' doctrine on its head. We can never apprehend the external world, fully, in itself, whereas our complex ideas of moral or of abstract notions generally, can be demonstrated with a mathematical certainty because they originate in our own minds. Our complex ideas are their own archetypes; as such, the working patterns of experience that they subsume have a much closer correspondence to their original than our notions of what we think of as materially real.

Though Locke's argument is open to second-guessing, its (admittedly inadvertent) importance for the vindication of poetry and poetry's claim upon social memory in the second half of the seventeenth century is immense. First, and most obviously, it asserts the philosophical validity of the intangible, the abstract, the figurative. For Locke, as for Bacon and—especially—Hobbes, the practical reality of an object or idea seems proportional to the clarity and integrity of its definition, rather than its actual physical existence or capacity for such. (It is possible, for example, to see someone drunk yet have no clear notion of *drunkenness*, which, on the other hand, we might understand quite well without having seen someone drinking heavily and stumbling about.) Second, because our ideas depend on their definitions, and these definitions upon the demonstration of innate qualities, those who by their efforts add clarity to our ideas either of simple substances or of complex ideas, such as *justice* or *gratitude*, have a powerful claim upon our deference. Locke incidentally supposes that spiritual intelligences exceeding our own might very well “have as clear Ideas of the radical Constitution of Substances, as we have of a Triangle, and so perceive how all their Properties and Operations flow from thence”; such understanding, he concedes, “exceeds our Conceptions” (520), but he asserts with pride immediately afterward that investigations in the natural sciences will greatly add to our ideas of the “Properties and Operations” of the animate and inanimate natural bodies being scrutinized. The power to define is thus power itself. Power, though, of a moral rather than coercive nature. For is it not to be desired, Locke asks, “that the Use of Words were made plain and

direct; and that Language, which was given us for the improvement of Knowledge, and bond of Society, should not be employ'd to darken Truth, and unsettle Peoples Rights; to raise Mists, and render unintelligible both Morality and Religion?" (III, x, 497). And finally, as this last passage should suggest, the importance of precise, collectively acknowledged definitions has very little to do with satisfying the fastidiousness of word-obsessed pedants or vindicating an eccentric metaphysical scheme, but *everything* to do with public utility. Language matters because it is through language that "the precise real Essence of the Things" and "the Congruity, or Incongruity of the Things themselves, be certainly discovered, in which consists perfect Knowledge"; and language is a moral matter because it is through language that we arrive at stable, workable understandings of those impalpable ethical notions that hold human society together and make it worth holding together: order, law, justice, virtue, gratitude, obligation.

If we would only trouble ourselves to be clear and consistent in our use of words, says Locke at the conclusion of his chapter on redressing the imperfections and abuses of language, "many of the Controversies in Dispute would be at an end; several of those great Volumes, swollen with ambiguous Words, now used in one sense, and by and by in another, would shrink into a very narrow compass; and many of the Philosophers (to mention no other,) as well as Poets Works, might be contained in a Nut-shell" (523). Despite this hostility to poetry, and despite the obvious fact that Dryden and his contemporaries of the 1660's and 1670's could have no premonition of what Locke would write many years hence, Locke needs to be cited here because he fully and concisely expresses the effective case for poetry that Dryden would make by fits and turns as he established his own dramatic and critical authority during these decades.

We should first consider Dryden's rejection of "realism" in poetry. Locke's assertions that our senses, incapable of giving us sufficiently adequate conceptions of substances, such as gold, or of persons, such as Aristides, are better supplemented with an enumeration of the properties of their objects than with exposure to the objects themselves.

and that moral terms, existing nowhere in physical nature, have necessarily to be understood solely by definition—these have their equivalent in Dryden’s first critical pieces. In his preface to *The Rival Ladies* (1664), for example, Dryden declares flatly that what transpires upon the stage cannot hope to pass for what we know to be real, “For the stage being the representation of the world, and the actions in it, how can it be imagined that the picture of human life can be more exact than life itself is?” (2). And in “A Defence of *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy*” (1668), he says further that the stage should not attempt to render everyday experience to the life. “’Tis true,” Dryden concedes, “that to imitate well is a poet’s work; but to affect the soul, and excite the passions, and, above all, to move admiration (which is the delight of serious plays), a bare imitation will not serve” (114); and a bit later he adds that “one great reason why prose is not to be used in serious plays is because it is too near the nature of converse: *there may be too great a likeness*” (114; emphasis added). It might seem that a great likeness is *exactly* what neoclassical mimeticism would require, but one must remember what we have observed above, that mimeticism has more to do with affect than with physical similitude. Further, and perhaps more to the point here, the true aim of “serious plays” is not an exact reconstruction of particular persons, speeches, actions, and events but rather the ideas—in Locke’s sense of “whatsoever is the Object of the Understanding when a Man thinks”<sup>27</sup>—each is made to represent, and, ultimately, the controlling idea or theme of the drama that the poet seeks to impart to the understanding of the audience. Thus Dryden has Lisideius assert in *Of Dramatic Poesy: An Essay*,

The words of a good writer, which describe [a scene] lively, will make a deeper impression of belief in us than all the actor can persuade us to when he seems to fall dead before us; as a poet in the description of a beautiful garden, or a meadow, will please our imagination more than the place itself can please our sight. When we see death represented, we are convinced it is

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<sup>27</sup>“Introduction.” *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 47.

but fiction; but when we hear it related, our eyes (the strongest witnesses) are wanting, which might have undeceived us, and we are willing to favour the sleight when the poet does not too grossly impose on us (51).

To this, Neander, Dryden's alter ego in the discussion and an advocate of dramatic representation over mere narration, replies, "For my part, I can with as great ease persuade myself that the blows which are struck are given in good earnest, as I can that they who strike them kings or princes, or those persons which they represent" (62). But the disputants' arguments are more complementary than mutually opposed: Lisideius rightly points out that the realism of the stage always calls itself into question, and never more than when it makes its closest approach to reality;<sup>28</sup> Neander, that what is presented to our senses from the stage is material for the imagination, for our ideas of heroism and battle and death. The same applies to the representation of particular historical personages. In his preface to *All For Love* (1678), for instance, Dryden says that he consulted Plutarch, Appian, and Dion Cassius the better to depict Antony and Cleopatra; yet he makes no claim of exacting similitude for his portraiture, offering instead "famous patterns of unlawful love" (22). To demand an historically accurate depiction of these ill-fated lovers would be not simply to miss the point, but to diminish the moral power of the play. Distracted by the task of checking the principals against an exhaustive list of historical and biographical minutiae, poet and audience alike would soon lose sight of the moral end for which they have been portrayed.

The authenticity of dramatic portrayals should be sufficient to allow the audience to suspend its disbelief and accept the dramatist's operative premise that what we are shown is Alexandria and that the two lovers are Antony and Cleopatra: the particular truths of history

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<sup>28</sup> In several numbers of *The Spectator* (nos. 42 and 44 come readily to mind), Addison mocks the attempts at hyper-realism made by the stage managers of his day. In *Spectator* No. 5, Tuesday, March 6, 1711, for example, he relates how he recently came upon a man "carrying a Cage full of little Birds upon his Shoulder." These birds, it turned out, were not destined for the dinner table, but for the opera: "I perceived that the Sparrows were to act the part of Singing Birds in a delightful Grove: though upon a nearer Enquiry I found the Sparrows put the same Trick upon the Audience, that Sir *Martin Mar-all* practised upon his Mistress; for, though they flew in Sight, the Musick proceeded from a Consort of Flagellets and Bird-calls which was planted behind the Scenes" (17).

present particular moral problems made compelling precisely because they were faced by specific personages in specific circumstances. The dramatist aims to impose patterns of ethical order and interpretation upon these personages and events, but without the proper human context (whether historical, mythological or literary), drama could never do more than paint in the broad, rough lines of allegory. The balance is a fine one: if the drama pretends to stark realism, it invites doubt and distracts from the moral; if it veers too into the realm of moral abstractions, it loses its power to move us.

To understand the balance Dryden was to achieve in theory, we might draw an analogy between the performance of a play and that piece of gold Locke uses to show the enigmatic nature of material substances. The sets, the costumes, the bodies, movements, and speeches of the actors—these correspond to the gold that might rest in our palm: we see its color, feel its weight and texture, but can make no guess at its other, less obvious properties, its “great Ductility, Fusibility, Fixedness, and Solubility.” Similarly, the physical sensations we receive from a stage performance might hold our attention, excite our passions, our sympathy, or our laughter, but in themselves they offer nothing like a complete idea of the theme controlling yet beyond the scope of the action. Rather, this theme or controlling moral pattern is conveyed by the play’s several characterizations—their development, juxtapositioning, and the distinct arcs of their individual fortunes—as well as by what is said in the play and how it is said: how the lines are delivered, but also those properties (generally figurative in nature) that allow them to suggest more than what they say literally and to satisfy more than situational utility. When the playwright has been successful, the presentation of “serious plays” suggests more to the reflecting mind than is presented to the eye and ear.

Perhaps Dryden’s most explicit statements regarding this optimal balance between tangible presentation and intangible pattern, between the real and the ideal, occur in his frequent comparisons of painting and poetry. In his ode, “To the Pious Memory of the Accomplish’d Young Lady, Mrs. Anne Killigrew” (1685), for example, Dryden cites his

subject's ability as a gifted amateur painter to surpass on canvas the representational skill of poets in capturing the beauty the pastoral world. Whereas these poets "frequent inroads there [in pastoral] had made, / And perfectly could represent / The shape, the face, with ev'ry lineament" (ll. 100-102), Killigrew's "pencil drew whate'er her soul design'd, / And oft the happy draught surpass'd the image of her mind" (ll. 106-107). Anne Killigrew was likewise able in her portraits of James, Dryden says, to see and convey more than what merely appeared to view: "For, not content t' express his outward part, / Her hand call'd out the image of his heart: / His warlike mind, his soul devoid of fear, / His high-designing thoughts were figur'd there, / As when, by magic, ghosts are made appear" (ll. 129-133). Catching the mere likeness of one's subject in verse or paint is not enough; one must capture and convey in the sound, rhythms, and imagery of poetry and in the arrangement, colors, and shadings of painting those intangible qualities of one's subject that cannot be detected readily by the senses; one must suggest to the mind ideas that have no truly isolatable or identifiable existence in the sensations or materials used in the representation of one's subject. We cannot say, for instance, that the idea of chastity in Killigrew's painting of two of Diana's nymphs—"Though *Venus* we transcend in Form / No wanton Flames our Bosomes warm!"<sup>29</sup>—resides in the hunting posture of one, or in the other's bathing; nor can we say that James's martial prowess is to be discerned in the shadings of his face, or his "high-designing thoughts" in the brush strokes that compose his eyes. Dryden offers similar praise on similar grounds to his friend, the fashionable portrait painter Sir Godfrey Kneller, in a 1694 verse epistle in which he draws parallels between their respective careers. Nature lives in Kneller's paintings, Dryden says, "and wants but words to speak her thought. / At least thy pictures look a voice; and we / Imagine sounds, deceiv'd to that degree, / We think 'tis somewhat more than just to see" (ll. 11-13). This is

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<sup>29</sup> Lines 19-20 of Killigrew's "On a Picture Painted by her self, representing two Nymphs of Diana's, one in a Posture to Hunt, the other Batheing" (1686).



an eloquent way of saying that Kneller's work is lifelike, but here again, that lifelikeness is important for what it suggests beyond itself. As Dryden observes in a later passage of the mimetic quality of Kneller's portraits:

Likeness is ever there; but still the best,  
 Like proper thoughts in lofty language dress'd:  
 Where light, to shades descending, plays, not strives,  
 Dies by degrees, and be degrees revives.  
 Of various parts a perfect whole is wrought:  
 Thy pictures think, and we divine their thought (ll. 65-72).

The likeness, accurate as it is, pleasing as it is, must convey to us the idea that informs it, that unites its several parts into "a perfect whole"; we must, as it were, see that the picture—or poem—thinks, and be able to "divine" its thought.

That thought (or, keeping Locke in mind, that pattern of moral understanding lodged in the memory), is, as I have suggested, the poet's true object as it is the painter's. If it is neither possible nor desirable to convey it in through a meticulous realism, neither is it all necessary to attempt to do so. To stay with "To Sir Godfrey Kneller" for the moment, Dryden delivers in that poem a thumbnail history of painting that traces in the evolution of the art the simultaneous advancement of human consciousness: "By slow degrees, the godlike art advanc'd; / As man grew polish'd, picture was inhanc'd" (ll. 35-36). In short, the increasing regularity and sophistication of the rules of art attended the development of intellectual order and sophistication. Thus, says Dryden, though crude daubs in coal and chalk once sufficed for likeness in barbarous times, it was not until "Greece added posture, shade, and perspective" (l. 37) that "the mimic piece began to live" (l. 38). Eclipsed (with poetry) by the violence of the "Goths and Vandals, a rude northern race" (l. 47), painting was reduced to "Flat faces, such as would disgrace a screen, / . . . Unrais'd, unrounded, were the rude delight / Of brutal nations, only born to fight" (ll. 53; 55-56). Awakening at last from their "iron sleep" (l. 57) in the age of Raphael, the graphic arts have since seemingly achieved the apex of coloring and design (both realized in Kneller's work which, as noted, seems to think as well). Remarkable in Dryden's 38-line history is the implicit assumption

that the more sophisticated the intelligence that views the painting and the greater its knowledge and appreciation of the rules of artifice, the more subtle its use of the physical stimuli it receives and the more understated those stimuli may be. Not only are Kneller's lines more delicate than their two-dimensional Gothic counterparts, they suggest more to the mind that can combine the effects of perspective, foreshortening, shading, coloring, and the adumbrated figure into an ordered whole that is not merely a near physical likeness, but a near likeness to abstract notions and ideals as well. Put simply, with intellectual sophistication comes a more highly ordered pattern to perception, a pattern that creates in turn the capacity to discern in what is before us that which we do not physically see, to acknowledge the literal, yet see in addition the steadier idea held in the mind's eye.

This outline of the progress of consciousness recaps what Dryden had said years earlier in his "Defence of the Epilogue [to the second part of *The Conquest of Granada*], or An Essay on the Dramatic Poetry of the Last Age" (1672). In this essay, Dryden makes the provocative assertion that if "the language, wit, and conversation of our age are improved and refined above the last" (170), it is largely because of a newly heightened degree of self-awareness. If diction in the age of Shakespeare and Jonson was crude and harshly knitted, if its wit was often improper, if its conversation was vulgar and superficial, these deficiencies are owing to the period's inability to perform the rather complex mental feat of standing outside itself in order to see, assess, and amend its manners and its literature. The present age, says Dryden, has its "imperfections and failings. But I may safely conclude in the general, that our improprieties are less frequent, and less gross than theirs. One testimony of this is undeniable, that *we are the first who have observed them. And certainly, to observe errors is a great step to the correcting of them*" (171; emphasis added). Noting, for instance, that the refinement of language principally consists in "*either rejecting such old words or phrases which are ill sounding, or improper, or in admitting new, which are more proper, more sounding, and more significant*" (171), Dryden remarks that the "Well placing of words, for the sweetness of pronunciation, was not known till Mr. Waller

introduced it" (175), and that the disciplined introduction of new words into the poetic vocabulary and the "heightening [of the] natural signification" of existing words were largely the business of Suckling and Waller, refining upon the efforts of Shakespeare, Fletcher, and Jonson (177). As for wit, that "of this age is much more courtly," because the age itself is more gallant: "I have always acknowledged the wit of our predecessors, with all the veneration which becomes me; but, I am sure, their wit was not that of gentlemen; there was ever somewhat that was clownish in it, and which confessed the conversation of the authors" (180). Of this conversation itself, it is owing to the example of the present King, who upon his restoration "found a nation lost as much in barbarism as in rebellion" (181), that "the dull and heavy spirits of the English" have been awakened from "their natural reservedness," making discourse "easy and pliant" (181-182).

If we are to believe Dryden, the English, lately an uncouth, clownish, and barbarous people, ignorant of the proprieties of deportment and of letters, have recently, from the example of "so great a pattern" as Charles II (181) and the advancement of poetic principle and craft, entered into a new era of refinement and sophistication. Such a claim allows Dryden to claim further that poetry has not "[gone] backward, when all other arts and sciences are advancing" (169): given the intellectual and technological progress of the present age, "it would be a wonder if the poets, whose work is imitation, should be the only persons in three kingdoms who should not receive advantage by it" (182). Indeed, we can infer that what is true for painting is true for poetry: if, as Dryden asserts, the artifices have grown more subtle, so too has the understanding that perceives and interprets them. It might have been the case in the former age, when "the want of education and learning" (172) made audiences "content with acorns before they knew the use of bread" (173), and therefore easily imposed upon, such artifices might have been dangerously suggestive. But in the present circumstances, poets may without danger avail themselves of those figurative techniques inherited from the classical world: Horace, Dryden observes, "had a particular happiness: using all the tropes, and particularly metaphors, with that grace which is

observable in his Odes, where the beauty of expression is often greater than that of thought" (177). Rejecting the false wit of the last age, which, Dryden maintains in *Of Dramatic Poesy: An Essay*, "perpetually pays us with clenches upon words, a certain clownish kind of raillery," and now and then "offers at a catachresis or Clevelandism, wresting and torturing a word into another meaning," Dryden does indeed insist throughout his critical writings upon the contemporary poet's right to the technical legacy of the classical masters, particularly Virgil and Horace, and insists especially upon the poet's recourse to an artifice of comparatively recent origin: rhyme.

This is not the place to recount the seventeenth-century controversy over the propriety of rhyme in heroic drama, one that took up much of Dryden's critical attention and made the poet himself a controversial figure; nor do I intend trace how Dryden's early championing of rhymed drama ultimately gave way to his rejection of it in the late 1670's. But the topic of rhyme does nicely encapsulate the poet's case for rejecting realism, for instead positing and appealing to truths beyond the ken of the material world, and for claiming an intellectual and moral authority sufficient to justify prescribing patterns of moral knowledge to society at large. Rhyme, says Dryden in his preface to *The Rival Ladies* (1664), is not merely euphonious, but an aid to memory and clear thinking. It "knits up" the memory "by the affinity of sounds that, by remembering the last word in one line, we often call to mind both verses" (8). And rather than being an excrescence ("an embroidery of sense"), or worse, a means of cozening the hearer, impeding critical reflection with "the affinity of sounds," rhyme's value, to the contrary, "is that it bounds and circumscribes the fancy" (8): "[C]ertainly that which most regulates the fancy, and gives the judgement its busiest employment, is like to bring forth the richest and clearest thoughts" (9). True enough, no one speaks in rhyme, least of all when he or she is in the midst of some great passion or action—but, again, the poet's object is not realism but the presentation of moral truth, and we should remember Dryden's admonition in "A Defence of *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy*" that prose is too great a likeness to reality to be appropriate

for “serious plays.” Given the poet’s moral object, Dryden observes in “Of Heroic Plays: An Essay” (1672), the play’s “thoughts may be exalted,” its “images and actions may be raised above the life” (157), for “an heroic poet is not tied to a bare representation of what is true, or exceeding probable: but . . . he may let himself loose to visionary objects, and to the representation of such things as depending not on sense, and therefore not to be comprehended by knowledge, may give him a freer scope for imagination” (161). Prose or blank verse might begin to serve the poet’s ends, but rhyme is “the last perfection of art” (157), and as such offers the poet not only the greatest degree of independence from the confines of “realistic” speech and action, but also, by reason of its ability to heighten thought and expression, the most efficient way to depict with propriety those ideas that lie behind and inform apparent reality. “A play,” says Neander in *Of Dramatic Poesy: An Essay*, “as I have said, to be like nature, is to be set above it; as statues which are placed on high are made greater than the life, that they may descend to the sight in their just proportion” (88). So it is with rhyme. At a far remove from everyday speech, enchanting the soul with its sweetness and cadence (*Of Dramatic Poesy*, 89) even as it matches sound to thought, rhyme can induce in the listener a clearer conception of the poet’s “visionary objects,” and, owing to its ability to “knit up” the memory, it helps the hearer to retain these objects easily and for a longer period.

The difficulty of rhyming well, of intelligibly yoking sense with sound, certainly extends to the poet a large degree of technical authority. But it is in rhyme’s ability to impose particular patterns upon cognition, thought, and memory that gives the poet the more important authority of determining the terms or “shape” of moral definitions. In his preface to *The Rival Ladies*, Dryden observes that in rhymed poetry “the first word in the verse seems to beget the second, and that the next, till that becomes the last word in the line” (7). Dryden is speaking here of the process by which couplets are stitched together by the poet’s pen, but the patterns that circumscribe composition likewise circumscribe comprehension. Rhyme thus imposes a seeming inevitability upon the unfolding of a

listener's thought and upon the formation of his or her understanding. For this reason, concludes Dryden, "The scenes which in my opinion most commend it, are those of argumentation and discourse, on the result of which the doing or not doing some considerable action should depend" (9).

Dryden makes no apology for wishing to impose upon the listener. Indeed, even before he had discovered Longinus for himself he was declaring, in "Of Heroic Plays: An Essay" (1672), "The poet is, then, to endeavour an absolute dominion over the minds of the spectators; for, though our fancy will contribute to its own deceit, yet a writer ought to to help its operation" (162). Once he had discovered Longinus, in the mid- to late 1670's, he could assert with complacency, in "The Author's Apology for Heroic Poetry and Poetic Licence" (prefixed to *The State of Innocence*, 1677), that because of the nobly affective power of its figures heroic poetry "has ever been esteemed, and ever will be, the greatest work of human nature" (198). "Are all the flights of heroic poetry to be concluded bombast, unnatural, and mere madness, because [its critics] are not affected with their excellencies? 'Tis just as reasonable to conclude there is no day because a blind man cannot distinguish of light and colours" (199); therefore, Dryden resolves, "I will presume for once to tell them that the boldest strokes of poetry, when they are managed artfully, are those which most delight the reader" (200). Thus he favors "the hardest metaphors" and "the strongest hyperboles" used by Virgil and Horace (200), and the "tropes and figures" of rhetoric, which have had such a long-lasting currency "because it was observed they had such and such effect upon the audience" (201); the poet must even be prepared to "put on [feign] the passions he endeavours to [represent]" (203). Such artifices are to be "placed in poetry as heightening and shadows are in painting, to make the figure bolder, and cause it to stand off to sight" (200), and, as his comparison with painting suggests, Dryden believes with his classical forbears that the (figuratively) visual element of poetry is all-important: "Imaging is, in itself the very height and life of poetry. It is, as Longinus describes it, a discourse which, by a kind of enthusiasm, or extraordinary emotion of the

soul, makes it seem to us that we behold those things which the poet paints, so as to be pleased with them, and to admire them" (203).

Dryden's emphasis here on poetry's capacity to sway us sub-rationally, via "a kind of enthusiasm" or an "extraordinary emotion of the soul," would seem to reinforce the philosophical case against it, particularly when he says in addition that "the boldness of the figures are to be hidden sometimes by the address of the poet, that they may work their effect upon the mind without discovering the art which caused it" (203). A poem's subliminal appeal, after all, is by nature opposed to the open, forthright methods of empiricism, and may work to impair the mind's faculty of purposeful self-reflection. But we must observe, first, that Dryden does not endorse every poetic artifice. He remarks in this essay that "there are limits to be set betwixt the boldness and rashness of a poet" (199), and the previous chapter has given us ample evidence of Dryden's virulent antipathy toward cheap theatricality. Moreover, to use artifice effectively is no simple thing; in addition to poetic skill, it demands as much study and knowledge of human nature as the most exacting empiricist could expect. "It requires philosophy as well poetry," says Dryden, "to sound the depth of all the passions; what they are in themselves, and how they are to be provoked; and in this science the best poets have excelled" (200). Second, we must consider the distinction Dryden makes between figure and fiction. In heroic poetry, he argues, "You are not obliged, as in history, to a literal belief of what the poet says; but you are pleased with the image, without being cozened by the fiction" (202). If the image is not historically factual, neither is it merely spurious, for it serves the ends of a greater Truth, that is, of the larger pattern of moral verity that informs the work as a whole. Indeed, it is the moral aim of the poem that lends its artifices, its figures, its rhetoric their authority. As Dryden had argued as early as 1668 in "A Defence of *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy*," "I am of the opinion that they cannot be good poets who are not accustomed to argue well. False reasonings and colours of speech are the certain marks of one who does not understand the stage; for moral truth is the mistress of the poet as much as of the philosopher: poetry must

resemble natural truth, but it must be ethical. Indeed the poet dresses Truth, and adorns nature, but does not alter them" (120). If the poet must fashion these moral patterns from similitudes, it is because "we have notions of things above us, by describing them like other beings more within our knowledge," the sublimest subjects requiring the "sublimest" and "the most figurative expressions" ("Apology for Heroic Poetry," 204; 207). When, for instance, such figurative expressions, are used to frame "patterns of piety, decently represented and equally removed from the extremes of superstition and profaneness," Dryden argues in his preface to *Tyrannic Love* (1670), they "may be of excellent use to second the precepts of our religion":

By the harmony of words we elevate the mind to a sense of devotion, as our solemn music, which is inarticulate poesy, does in churches; and by the lively images of piety, adorned by action, through the senses allure the soul; which while it is charmed in a silent joy of what it sees and hears, is struck at the same time with a secret veneration of things celestial, and is wound up insensibly into the practice of that which it admires (139).

To be sure, the poet's artifices operate "through the senses" and through our emotions to prepare us psychologically for the moral notions we are to be shown. But note also in the above passage Dryden's insistence that when the soul is struck with "secret veneration" and brought "into the practice" of the sublimest of sublime truths, it is moved by something like direct and total comprehension of the object of its contemplation, in this case, "lively images of piety." The mind, elevated "to a sense of devotion" and shown as well as told what it is meant to apprehend, perchance is brought to a better understanding than if the moral notion set before it were instead defined hypothetically, or, as Locke would have it, demonstrated mathematically. Near the end of his chapter on remedying the imperfections and abuses of words, Locke wishes aloud for a dictionary or encyclopedia of natural history that would minutely enumerate "those simple *Ideas*, wherein [scientists] observe the Individuals of each sort constantly to agree" (522). Such a volume, he admits, would be all but impossible to assemble, and yet, he allows himself to hope, "it is not unreasonable to propose, that Words standing for Things, which are known and



distinguished by the outward shapes, should be expressed by little Draughts and Prints made of them. A Vocabulary made after this fashion, would, perhaps with more ease, and in less time, teach the true significance of many Terms, . . . and settle truer Ideas in Men's Minds of several Things, whereof we read the Names in ancient Authors, than all the large and laborious Comments of learned Critics" (522-523). The stage serves the playwright for the naturalist's "little Draughts and Prints"; the writer of epic or occasional verse must use artifice and figure exclusively. But both dramatic and nondramatic poet alike in effect take intangible patterns of moral truth—such as piety, or, more ambitiously, "the highest pattern of human life"<sup>30</sup>—and, couching the ineffable in terms we might understand, disclose aspects of them that would otherwise remain obscure or inexpressible.

In this, the poet is akin to Locke's "Spirit of a higher rank" (520) that sees through external appearances to the hidden properties of things. But the poet need lay no claim to divine inspiration. Rather, the authority of the poet's figures and indeed his own derive from the practical and public nature of his calling. If, as Dryden says, the poet's material—his knowledge of the passions and of human nature and psychology—is the product of close, extended study of all ranks and conditions of society, then the moral patterns the poet fashions must not be pedantic or idiosyncratic, but readily and broadly applicable. For as the business of Locke's ideal naturalist is to investigate and make generally known "the Nature and Properties of the Things themselves, and thereby perfect, as much as we can, our Ideas of their distinct Species" (520-521), so the poet's business is to give us illustrative definitions of moral truths, to establish in our collective memories timeless, living patterns of virtue and vice, sense and nonsense, and it is the successful realization of this role—of moral investigator, definer, and shaper—that gives the poet his cultural authority. For it is with ethical propositions as with physical substances: for all practical purposes, the truth is what we know and are prepared to expect of them.

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<sup>30</sup> "Of Heroic Plays: An Essay" (1672; 162).

Though Dryden's case for the poet as legislator is made most often on behalf of dramatic and epic poetry, it is equally if not *especially* apropos of occasional poetry, for the latter is by nature caught up more than any other poetic genre in the larger society's attempts to define its moral and cultural sensibility and thereby the notions of reality subsuming its ever-unfolding historical present. Insofar, then, as the poet's object is the investigation and explication of historical, social, and moral truths, what Dryden says of heroic poetry in his preface to *Annus Mirabilis*, "An Account of the Ensuing Poem, in a Letter to the Honourable Sir Robert Howard" (1666), that its "descriptions or images . . . beget admiration, which is its proper object" (101), is applicable as well to topical satire. For such satire, Dryden would argue late in his career, in *A Discourse Concerning the Original and Progress of Satire* (1693), is a species of heroic poetry, and in the hands of a modern master such as Boileau, is capable of achieving "the majesty of the heroic, finely mix'd with the venom of [the lampoon]; and raising the delight which otherwise would be flat and vulgar, by the sublimity of the expression" (149). Couched in heroic verse, a meter at once "roomy" (147) and elevated enough to accommodate its "sublime and lofty" thoughts (130), topical satire has as its object to give the reader "some one precept of moral virtue, and to caution him against some one particular vice or folly" (146). When we consider that the precepts and cautions found in occasional poetry and topical satire are closely linked to broadly observable personages and events and debates, we find that public poetry adds not simply a figurative element to the definition of moral concepts, as do dramatic and heroic poetry, but, through the ability of its figures to point again to their originals in the real, the everyday world, heightens our practical understanding and application of such concepts. It is in its power to refer to the immediate and local that public poetry attains its superior definitional faculty: the public poem leads us from the actual political, social, and cultural backdrops of everyday existence through figurative portrayals of the same to a new actuality, one now informed by the moral implications of what might otherwise escape our notice or consideration. Melding the actual with the artificial.

empirical fact with poetic fiction, an individually verifiable picture of the historical present with collective historical mythologies and literary traditions, the public poem achieves an alloy of modes that resolves, if anything can or does in this period, the supposedly irreconcilable antipathy between the scientific and poetic mindsets, between the literal language of the one and the figurative language of the other. And it is in the realization of this alloy that poetry was able to answer the potential scientific challenge it faced during this period and maintain its cultural relevance and authority.

If this alloy proved an unstable one in practice, it was likewise often as suspect among poets themselves as it was among philosophers such as Hobbes and Locke. We might, for instance, be brought up short by Dryden's assertion in his preface to *Religio Laici* (1682),

The expression of a poem design'd purely for instruction ought to be plain and natural, and yet majestic; for here the poet is presum'd to be a kind of lawgiver, and those three qualities which I have nam'd are proper to the legislative style. The florid, elevated, and figurative way is for the passions; for love and hatred, fear and anger, are begotten in the soul by shewing their objects out of their true proportions, either greater than the life, or less; but instruction is to be given by shewing them what they naturally are. A man is to be cheated into passion, but to be reason'd into truth (162a).

Winn rightly points out that even early in his career Dryden was suspicious of poetic figures that passed for truth; he was aware of how the poetic figure fell short of reality, and often left it impoverished, diminished, through facile and superficial comparisons with things fundamentally unlike (112). Nonetheless, Dryden is being overly fastidious here in distinguishing rigidly and absolutely between the plain and natural "legislative style" and the florid and elevated "figurative style." Aside from the rather problematic distinction between the "majestic" and "elevated" styles and the baffling opposition (given Dryden's earlier assertion that sublimity of style might lead open our souls to the contemplation of the divine) of passion and truth, Dryden himself, as we have seen, has been a champion of the figurative over the literal, arguing that the poet, to convince, must move, and to move.

must distort his objects, if ever so slightly, to capture and direct our attention. And the preceding chapter should remind us that at least so far as the dramatist is concerned we may be cheated as well as reasoned into truth. But in any event, whether “cheated into passion” or “reason’d into truth” our passions and minds are moved (at least ideally) for the same end: a better apprehension of moral truth. That Dryden makes this distinction between the figurative and literal styles here is due, I suspect, to his wish that we read *Religio Laici*, his personal manifesto of religious belief, as a straight-forward, unambiguous statement of fact. Dryden would have us know that he intends to convince us of the reasonableness of his pronouncements by means of the soundness of his argument, rather than by the sublimity of his figures and metaphors. Still, Dryden’s implication that he means to reason his readers into truth underscores for us that *Religio Laici* is, after all, a rhetorical poem, and one has scarcely begun the poem before one realizes that not only has Dryden not foregone the figurative—“Dim as the borrow’d beams of moon and stars / To lonely, weary, wand’ring travelers, / Is Reason to the soul” (ll. 1-3)—but has designed the poem to take its place in the debate over religious orthodoxy and individual conscience that preoccupied Augustan England. That the poem was greeted with yawning indifference does not change the fact that its disparagement of deists, Catholics, and (especially) Dissenters—whom Dryden taxes with despoiling the “tender page” of Scripture with “horny fists”: “While crowds unlearn’d, with rude devotion warm, / About the sacred viands buzz and swarm, / The fly-blown text creates a crawling brood, / And turns to maggots what was meant for food” (ll. 404; 417-420)—marks it out as a controversialist piece in which Dryden plainly seeks to reason us into passion.

However, more important here than the dissolution of Dryden’s theoretical distinctions under the exigencies of poetic practice, is what that dissolution tells us about the figurative-literal alloy forged by public poetry in the mid- to late seventeenth century. Its very rapidity tells us, first of all, that in practice it is difficult if not impossible to segregate

the “plain and natural, yet majestic” legislative style from the “florid, elevated, and figurative.” And this tells us in turn that the melding of these two modes is the necessary, perhaps inevitable result of the emergence of poetry into the public sphere during this period. For *Religio Laici*, is a public poem, and if its author truly means for it to be “design’d purely for instruction” and himself “presum’d to be a kind of lawgiver,” it must offer to its readers a topic whose terms, whether couched in the literal or figurative mode, are readily, broadly, and durably intelligible; must offer them patterns of moral definition that enhance their understanding of the ethical questions the given topic involves; and make those patterns socially pragmatic, readily and lastingly applicable, capable of imposing order not only upon current but future experience. It must, in short, partake in the æsthetics of public memory.

And in what does the æsthetics of memory consist during the latter half of the seventeenth century? To answer this, we must remind ourselves that memory is not simply what we have stored away, but the ways in which we organize our perceptions and reflections. Our memories are not simply a record of our experiences, whether, physiological, psychological, or intellectual, but operative mental habits that determine the ways in which we will experience the world about us. Thus, in addition to the many techniques the Augustan poet inherited from his or her Greek and Roman forbears for heightening the physio-psychic impressions of a poem (culminating in the sublime) that it may remain with us on a physiological level, they found that they must also employ those elements of their craft that make a poem or its parts intellectually durable as well. For the purposes of making the poem itself memorable, it was enough to establish within the work easily recognizable patterns of structure, theme, characterization, and allusion, as well as patterns recognizable by the particular genre of a piece, including conventions of narrative, prosody, and verbal formulæ. Certainly the intellectual appeal of a work, like its physiological appeal, might exist for its own sake. We might admire the sound of a phrase, for example, or an apt metaphor, or appreciate the sleek thematic structuring of a work,

without making a conscious mental note to ourselves that we will remember this or that detail, or that the experience of physically perceiving a poem and reflecting upon its form and interpretation has necessarily altered our patterns of ordering sensation and thought. Aesthetics need not involve mnemonics overtly. But the mnemonics of public poetry in the Augustan age certainly depend upon the aesthetic impact of a work, and the poets of this period not only sought in general to capture and focus the public's attention upon themselves to enhance their personal reputations, but upon the varied features of the historical present as well. Pleasurable as they might be in themselves, the aesthetic features of Augustan public poetry became, in the hands of Dryden and his contemporaries, an important part in the formation of working social memory and hence of national identity in the final decades of the seventeenth century. The aesthetics of memory, therefore, consists, not in the mere existence of its physiological, psychological, and intellectual elements, or in their *potential* power to inculcate in us certain patterns of cognition, experience, and reflection, but in their successful application. To their application, then, we must now turn, *Religio Laici* providing us a ready entry into the subjects of the following "case study," the Exclusion Crisis and images of English Puritanism.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE EXCLUSION CRISIS AND IMAGES OF ENGLISH PURITANISM: A CASE STUDY OF POETRY AND MEMORY IN AUGUSTAN ENGLAND

When we consider that Dryden's *Religio Laici, or A Layman's Faith* is intended as an explication of the poet's personal religious convictions, we might expect that Dryden, at least a nominal Anglican at the time of the poem's publication, would throw the principles of his private faith into greater relief by contrasting them with what he took to be the intellectual errors of deism and the doctrinal errors of Roman Catholicism and Protestant Dissent; and the poem indeed goes two-thirds of the way toward fulfilling our expectations. Dryden takes the time (over a third of the poem) to demonstrate for the deist reason's dependence upon belief—"Reveal'd Religion first inform'd thy sight, / And Reason saw not, till Faith sprung light" (ll. 68-69)—and to draw from the examples of Greek and Roman civilization and its philosophers, "Those giant wits, in happier ages born" (l. 80), the dangerous materialism and amorality of any philosophical system for which rational expediency is the sole source, end, and test of ethical Man. And it is with no small degree of professed respect for the learning and piety of the Church Fathers that he sets about to counter Rome's insistence upon the infallibility of its authority and traditions, concluding that Scripture alone, though "not everywhere / Free from corruption, or intire, or clear" (ll. 297-298), is sufficiently coherent, complete, and comprehensible "in all things which our needful faith require" (l. 300): "For MY salvation must its doom receive, / Not from what OTHERS but what I believe" (ll. 303-304).

But when he comes to speak of "that other extreme of our religion," as he terms it in the poem's preface, "I mean the Fanatics, or Schismatics of the English Church" (160B), Dryden expends neither reason nor respect upon his foes, and instead of seriously refuting their errors, is content with defaming their adherents. These he describes in his

preface as a many-headed herd of self-elected, rabble-baiting sectarians determined to undermine the established order in religion and government; in the poem itself, his treatment of Dissenters may be far shorter than that of deists and Catholics, but it is perhaps all the more savage for the compression of its scorn. The triumph of the Protestant Reformation, he argues, is that it made the Scriptures broadly available: “The book ’s a common largess to mankind, / Not more for [priests] than every man design’d” (ll. 364–365). But one unfortunate effect of “the book thus put in every vulgar hand” (l. 400) was that now “[t]he common rule was made the common prey, / And at the mercy of the rabble lay” (ll. 402–403). The consequences for Scripture, religion, social discourse, and the stability of English institutions at large as Dryden enumerates them provide us a catalogue (ll. 404–426)—comprehensive, yet brilliant in its concision—of a century’s worth of anti-Puritan iconography, culminating, as we saw near the end of the last chapter, with perhaps the most grotesque image of Dryden’s career, that of the Bible’s “fly-blown text” (l. 419) crawling with maggots. I shall shortly return to the individual brushstrokes of this hostile portrait; for the moment, however, I would suggest that we have some reason to be surprised at the violence of Dryden’s attack, and on two counts. First, Dryden was raised in a Puritan household and was educated at Cambridge by Puritan masters; second, the abuses with which he taxes “the Fanatics, or Schismatics of the English Church” appear to have already had their day: the tumult occasioned by religious faction has apparently been long since resolved; the Civil War is over; the King has been restored, and, with him, the Church of England. This verse paragraph might have been more to the point if it had appeared in the early 1640’s, or, with Butler’s *Hudibras*, soon after the Restoration, but twenty years have passed now since the true blue Protestant Quixote rode out with his faithful squire, Ralpho. Our puzzlement, however, should last only as long as it takes us to recall the date of the poem’s appearance: November 30, 1682.



In November 1682 England was in the midst of a major shift in the collective national mood, having recently emerged from a brace of controversies that indeed *had* threatened to thrust it once again into the chaos of open civil war. The Popish Plot to assassinate the king and reintroduce Roman Catholicism as the official religion, supposedly discovered in October 1678, had been exploited by Shaftesbury and the Whigs for leverage during the Exclusion Crisis of 1679-1681, when Parliament had thrice submitted bills to exclude the openly Catholic James from the throne. Charles obstinately refused to sacrifice his brother to political expediency, and dissolved these exclusionist parliaments in May 1679, January 1681, and March 1681, but anti-Catholic hysteria among the populace had also forced him on three occasions to send James into a Scottish or Continental exile. With the dissolution of the Oxford Parliament in March 1681, however, the King and the Tories at last felt strong enough to go on the offensive. Shaftesbury was arrested for treason in July, and though acquitted in November by a Whig jury packed by a Whiggish London Mayor, his acquittal was the catalyst for the Administration's redoubled effort, Kenyon notes, "to secure a Tory Lord Mayor in 1682, and with him Tory sheriffs and Tory juries" (236), and to revoke the municipal charter that had underpinned London's political independence of the Crown during the King's battle with Parliament. London lost its charter the next year, but by the time Dryden's poem appeared the so-called Tory Reaction was already nearing the apex of its strength. It had brought with it an especially virulent persecution of Whig leaders, as we would expect—but also of Dissenters. Kenyon observes that while "lower-class Dissenters were blamed—probably quite wrongly—for the undermining of vested political interests in so many localities" (236), simultaneously "the personnel of county government, the Lord Lieutenants, deputy lieutenants and justices of the peace, was comprehensively purged [of Dissenters]. With the vigorous support of the bishops, these new Tory spokesmen now attempted, arguably for the first time, the full enforcement of the [anti-Puritan] Clarendon Code" (237).

To understand why Dissenters merited the especial wrath of the momentarily triumphant Tories, and why, so late in the day, Dryden would bother to direct at them the very aspersions that had been aimed at their Puritan fathers and grandfathers, we must consider the terms in which the constitutional struggle between Parliament and King had been cast—by politicians, certainly, but also by legions of pamphleteers and (more particularly for our purposes) poets who undertook to explicate the episodes of the struggle to the public at large. A constitutional battle the Exclusion Crisis was, but those living through it could hardly be expected to view it so coolly. Their memories, both individual and collective, would not let them. Personal memories of the Civil War and Commonwealth were still very much alive during these years, and because memory, as we have observed, is active, carrying forward images of the past to explain the present, and framing the present in ways that influence one's perception and interpretation of the future as it unfolds, recollections of that earlier contest over executive authority inevitably shaped the ways in which the current one was seen and portrayed. The connection was indeed one the poets and pamphleteers of both sides sought to exploit in their attempts to reawaken the nation's psychological past by infusing the issues, events, and personages of the present day with the images, passions, and prejudices England had inflicted on itself during the 1640's and 1650's—materiél now all the more potent because it was so familiar and came ready-laden with decades of conditioned associations. Those writers supporting Shaftesbury and the Whigs, for instance, were likely to revive pre-Civil War fears of Stuart absolutism, arbitrary rule, and the perennial bogies of Roman Catholic resurgence and the suppression of Protestantism. By doing so, however, they played into the hands of those loyal to Charles II and favorable to James's succession, who tended to cast the Whigs as opportunistic Puritans eager to overturn a settled Crown and Church, and who made use of the fact that the Puritans opposed to Charles I were equally notorious for their resistance to authority and their habit of labelling "papist" any who dared disagree with them. Dryden's point in rehearsing anti-Puritan jibes in the preface to *Religio Laici* and in the poem itself is

therefore to recall to his readers the Puritans as they were at the height of their political power and social appeal, implying that the current Whig Opposition is nothing other than a revisitation of a dangerous national madness. “[T]he seeds were sown,” he reminds his readers in the preface, “in the time of Queen Elizabeth, the bloody harvest ripen’d in the reign of King Charles the Martyr; and, because all the sheaves could not be carried off without shedding some of the loose grains,” he warns darkly, “another crop is too like to follow; nay, I fear ’tis unavoidable if the conventiclers be permitted still to scatter” (161). Reason enough, we are to infer, for vigorously prosecuting the ongoing Tory Reaction against Whig leaders and their Non-Conformist allies.

Were Whigs the defenders of traditional liberties and true Protestantism? Were Tories truly the keepers of constitutional and civil order, a bulwark against mob-rule? Curiously, it was often the case that both parties left their own agendas vaguely defined, to be inferred from the particular features of their opponents they chose to attack. And because those attacks, as I have hinted, frequently tended to combine the literal (or actual) traits, actions, and persons of the opposing side within a figurative framework, the controversialist literature of the Exclusion Crisis and its aftermath affords us a rich opportunity to examine how during this period these distinct mnemonic modes were in practice interwoven to fashion working social memory. So varied and voluminous was the literature relating to the Exclusion Crisis that it would be impossible in the relatively few pages available to me here to survey the whole of the propaganda war between 1678 and 1683; it is no less impossible to survey the whole of a single genre or medium; impossible even to cover the poetic output of a single side in the contest. Further, it would not do for me to imply that poetry was the most prominent, the most sizable, or the even most respected vehicle of debate. Nonetheless, public poetry did play an appreciable role in shaping individual and collective perceptions of and responses to the Crisis, and in the following pages I hope to demonstrate how the several elements of poetic memory

enumerated in the previous chapter were likely to operate upon English sensibilities to create mnemonically viable representations of the historical present.

My decision to examine the Tories' use of anti-Puritan imagery in representing their Whiggish opponents may seem wholly arbitrary. Space forces me to be highly selective, but my choice will, I hope, be deemed an apposite one if I point out that despite the comparatively poor showing those supporting the succession of James made during the 1678-1681 war of the presses,<sup>1</sup> they were after all victorious, at least in the short-run: the exclusion bills were defeated, popular opinion turned against the Whigs, the Crown gained power at the expense of the party and its sympathizers, and, above all else, James succeeded his brother in 1685. Poetry obviously had its share in the general role Tory publications played in effecting this triumph and the shift in the national mood that made it possible to prosecute the Tory Reaction. But I would suggest that the specific manner or terms in which the Opposition was portrayed in loyalist poetry would prove significant in readily identifiable ways during the months and years after the Exclusion Crisis had peaked and the scales momentarily inclined in the Tories' favor. For one thing, the summer after *Religio Laici* appeared saw the discovery of the so-called Rye House plot, an ill-contrived (if not wholly apocryphal) scheme of several radical Whigs to assassinate Charles and James as they rode from London to the Newmarket races. Precisely the thing Dryden had predicted in the preface to *Religio Laici* when he warned that another "crop" of bloodthirsty "conventiclors" would sprout from this latest rebellion. And as Winn says, news of the plot

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<sup>1</sup> In his book, *Politics and Opinion in Crisis, 1678-1681*, Mark Knights observes that "loyalists wrote and published less" than the Opposition (166): "Generally, . . . ministers were cautious about employing authors to defend the government, and the Court seems to have been more concerned about keeping an eye on pamphlets printed by the opposition, than on promoting its own" (165). Not only did loyalists writers believe that "their publication were either not bought or not read in the quantities achieved by their rivals" (Knights 166), they were reluctant to "be branded with the infamous Names of Jesuit, Papist, or Popishly affected" (John Nalson, *The True Protestant's Appeal* (1681), qtd. in Knights, 165). Furthermore, J.R. Jones points out that "once the whigs had lost control over London (September 1682) such activism became unnecessary and undesirable, since it maintained an atmosphere of political excitement. For contemporaries, party politics and divisions were abnormal and dangerous; the tories, therefore, were now encouraged to assume a more passive role, primarily supportive of legally constituted authority" (218-219).

“neatly confirmed the Tory view of the Whigs as unreconstructed rumpers and regicides, and completed the destruction of the already weakened Whig party” (389); not surprisingly, it also accelerated the growing ferocity of the Tory Reaction. But this was in the near-term. In the long run, the Tories would suffer from the very success of their own propaganda. Having so closely identified themselves with James’s succession, they could not sufficiently distance themselves from him once events had forced him from the throne in 1688 and brought the Whigs into a new ascendancy under William III. Indeed, aside from a brief period of favor under Queen Anne, it was not until the decisive defeat of James’s grandson, Charles Edward Stuart (the Young Pretender), at Culloden in 1746 that the Tories would at last begin to live down suspicions of lingering Jacobitism and emerge from the political wilderness.<sup>2</sup>

### 1. A Vocabulary of Anti-Puritan Imagery

Though the parallels Tory propagandists drew between the Whig exclusionists and the Puritan regicides of the 1640’s are frequently overt and unambiguous enough, it would be useful nevertheless to have in mind a working “vocabulary” of anti-Puritan imagery as well as some notion of their “learned” and “popular” manifestations and rhetorical uses when they made their first deep impressions upon the national psyche. Our first step, then, is to return to *Religio Laici* and take stock of the individual images Dryden has composited there. The passage describing the causes, manner, and consequences of the Dissenters’ promiscuous interpretation of Scripture runs in full as follows:

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<sup>2</sup> R.C. Richardson’s *The Debate on the English Revolution Revisited* (1988), a useful survey of Civil War historiography from the mid-seventeenth century to the present, demonstrates how easily discernible the royalist or parliamentary biases of Civil War historians were—and how politically charged they remained—throughout the eighteenth century among a wide swath of the social spectrum. That the conflict between Charles I and Parliament remained so explosive was due in no small part to the continued associations between its principles (and principals) and those of the protracted ideological battles between contemporary Whig and Tory partisans. See especially Chapter 2, “The Eighteenth Century: The Political Uses of History” (36-55).

The book thus put in every vulgar hand,  
 Which each presum'd he best could understand,  
 The common rule was made the common prey,  
 And at the mercy of the rabble lay.  
 The tender page with horny fists was gall'd,  
 And he was gifted most that loudest bawl'd:  
 The spirit gave the doctoral degree;  
 And every member of a company  
 Was of his trade and of the Bible free.  
 Plain truths enough for needful use they found,  
 But men would still be itching to expound:  
 Each was ambitious of th' obscurest place,  
 No measure ta'en from knowledge, all from GRACE.  
 Study and pains were now no more their care;  
 Texts were explain'd by fasting and by prayer:  
 This was the fruit the private spirit brought,  
 Occasion'd by great zeal and little thought.  
 While crowds unlearn'd, with rude devotion warm,  
 About the sacred viands buzz and swarm,  
 The fly-blown text creates a crawling brood,  
 And turns to maggots what was meant for food.  
 A thousand daily sects rise up and die;  
 A thousand more the perish'd race supply:  
 So all we make of Heaven's discover'd will  
 Is, not to have it, or to use it ill.  
 The danger much the same; on several shelves  
 If others wreck us, or we wreck ourselves (ll. 400-426).

The undesirable traits catalogued here may be grouped under five general headings: willful misinterpretation of Scripture, the sectarianism and self-election attendant upon it, anti-intellectualism, and a demagoguery tending toward violence. The first heading actually comprehends two distinct characteristics: the Puritan tendency to assign to oneself the authority and wherewithal to interpret Scripture—"the book" being available to all, "each presum'd he best could understand" it (ll. 401-402)—and an eccentric manner of explicating Scripture once he had claimed it for his own. Either lacking the requisite common sense to understand the "plain truths" (l. 409) he finds before him, or, more likely, prompted by his individualist tendencies to impose himself on what he reads, the Puritan will insist on satisfying the "itch" to "expound," that is, to impose wholly

idiosyncratic, wholly unnecessary constructions upon Scripture. It is likely a similarly egotistical impulse leads him to explicate the “obscurest places” (l. 411) for the comparative lack of interpretive tradition attaching to them allows him to presume first, that he and he alone has been able to recognize their heretofore unseen significance, and second, that he, as their “discoverer,” may interpret them as spirit, bent, or whim inclines him—which brings us to the Puritan’s eccentric method of expounding. Lacking (or disdaining) formal training in Scriptural exegesis, the Puritan must rely on “GRACE” (l. 412), a spiritual state to which he is either brought by God or (if the Deity prove backward) by his own efforts: “by fasting and by prayer” (l. 414). And once hunger and prolonged supplication have caught him up in religious ecstasy, the self-authorized reader of Scripture need now only surrender his understanding to the promptings of “the private spirit” (415), subject his chosen text to the “great zeal” (l. 416) he has induced in himself.

That this enthusiasm is indeed true grace he has no doubt; his reliance on the authority of conscience, private revelation, and zeal to the exclusion of all others presupposes that he is indeed among God’s elect. Of course, when the criteria for election are of a kind that makes them obvious only to the Self, others may doubt the veracity of one’s protestations of divine favor, or, looking inward, discover that they enjoy an equal share of the same. And these others, prompted differently as their differing constitutions or revelations may determine, may well find themselves in a like state of grace. No wonder, then, that rampant sectarianism is one consequence of explication by private spirit, that “A thousand daily sects rise up and die; / A thousand more the perish’d race supply” (ll. 421-422). No wonder, that to ensure the continuance of his own sect and his own authority within it, each would-be prophet is impelled toward the demagogue’s time-tested tactics. Prominent among these (then as now) is the disparagement of formal learning, setting at naught the “doctoral degree” (l. 406) earned with “study and pains” (l. 413) and the insights “ta’en from [the] knowledge” (l. 412) gained thereby. In doing so, one not only calls into question the qualifications of one’s potential critics, implying the foundations of

their authority far inferior to one's own, one also plays shrewdly upon the anti-intellectual prejudices of the demagogue's traditional constituencies among "the rabble" (l. 403) and the "crowds unlearn'd" (l. 417). It is natural that the Puritan demagogue frame his appeal to such as these; their inferiority of rank and education makes them particularly vulnerable to the brazen, visceral rhetoric—the loud bawling (l. 405)—of one who, despite his own membership among only the (lower) trading classes (ll. 407-408), can yet inspire in them a frenzy of "rude devotion" (l. 417) and thereby lay claim to special election. But having loosed the coarser passions of an ignorant, unsophisticated rabble, the demagogue, Dryden implies, is perforce more an agent of destruction than of truth. Scripture is the first object of the crowd's violent zeal, "the common prey" (l. 402) of "horny fists" (l. 404), a heavenly food reduced to a "fly-blown text" crawling with maggots. A greater violence, however, is brought to bear upon a collective understanding led to confound "plainest truth," and a greater still, ultimately, upon social order when "Heaven's discover'd will" (l. 423) is put to ill use (l. 424), and "we wreck ourselves" (l. 426) with the effects of extreme individualism: the muddle of moral and ethical self-indulgence, the chaos of religious and cultural fragmentation.

Dryden could count on his composite of Puritan traits and their consequences to be recognized and accepted as accurate and "definitive" by a large proportion of his readership because over the previous eight decades precisely these characteristics had through endless reiteration and vivid specificity in learned and popular literature alike come to define Puritanism in the national imagination.

Since the return of Protestant exiles from abroad under Elizabeth, quarrels over religious doctrine and trappings had brought Puritans to the pass of branding the rituals, vestments, and icons of the Church of England as popish, which afforded the Church and its head the opportunity for charging these would-be reformers with a dangerous disobedience to ecclesiastic authority, a disobedience ultimately deriving, it seems, from a willful aversion to the Church's traditions and guidelines regarding the reading and



interpretation of Scripture, a perverse insistence upon an excessively narrow personal autonomy in the explication and application of Biblical texts—an autonomy made truly dangerous by being answerable only to itself, its immediate inclinations, appetites, and ambitions. In the preface to his *Basilikon Doron* (1603), for example, King James I accuses the Puritans who were even then challenging Anglican orthodoxy of “leaning to their own dreams and revelations,” of “making the Scriptures to be ruled by their own conscience, and not their conscience by the Scripture” (220-221), and of “making their own imaginations (without any warrant of the word) the square of their conscience” (222). This wrong-headed independence and self-serving use of Scripture is remarked upon as well by the Cambridge ecclesiast David Owen in *Herod and Pilate Reconciled* (1610), a pamphlet refuting Puritan arguments for the justifiability of regicide. To “maintain their late, and lewd opinions,” Puritans must, Owen asserts, “kill the Scripture to serve their turns: and pervert the holy word of the *eternal God*, by strange interpretation, and wicked application against the meaning of the *Spirit*, by whom it was penned; the doctrine of the *Church*, to whom it was delivered; and the practice of all the *Godly*, . . . that did believe, understand, and obey it” (258). Such contrariness—against the authorities of State and Church, against “the meaning of the Spirit,” against common sense itself and what would apparently tend to their own ease and comfort—is for Sir Thomas Overbury, diplomat and courtier under James I, the Puritans’ definitive trait. In his character sketch of “A Puritan” (1614), Overbury defines his subject as “a diseased piece of Apocrypha, bind him to the Bible, and he corrupts the whole text . . . for he never keeps near his Text: anything that the Law allows, but Marriage and March beer, he murmurs at: what it disallows, and holds dangerous, makes him a discipline” (276). Then, with an observation anticipating Dryden’s remark that the non-conformist intent on his own idiosyncratic expositions will likely overlook the “plainest truth,” Overbury continues, “*Where the gate stands open, he is ever seeking a stile: and where his Learning ought to climb, he creeps through*” (276: emphasis added). Indeed, says Overbury, so proud and jealous is the Puritan of his personal

sovereignty, that, against all reason and self-interest, “should the Church enjoin clean shirts, he were lousy” (276).<sup>3</sup>

But then, it is the Puritan’s very contrariness and obstinacy that give him his sense of vocational identity and mission, for insofar as his deficiencies of character may be made to seem the promptings of a conscience uncontaminated and uncompromised, they may be cited as evidence of his personal election. Of course, this pretense to election reciprocally justifies not only the Puritan’s eccentric readings of Scripture, but the no less eccentric *manner* of exposition as well: the heretical reliance on “dreams, visions, and revelations” (249), for instance, that Oliver Ormerod observes in *The Picture of a Puritane* (1605), or the dubious tendencies, cited by the pseudonymous Antibrownistus Puritanomastix in his *Three Speeches* (1642), to “pray himself four hours with more vehemency, than the best Divine in Christendom that prays but a quarter” (305), to work himself into raptures and ecstasies via “extemporary preaching and spiritual blasphemy” (306). The pretense to election likewise undergirds much of the Puritan’s personal appeal and authority among his followers or confederates, not least because it encourages these to recognize in themselves and one another the manifestations of grace exhibited by their leader. In *The Schysmatical Puritan* (1630), Giles Widdowes, sometime chaplain to Katherine, Duchess of Buckingham, hints that encouraging such self-election is in fact part of a conscious fraud perpetuated by the Puritan upon those sufficiently simple or seditious to make themselves parties to his “seducing profession” (288). The Puritan is “a kind of Protestant,” Widdowes argues, and so “will be tried by the Scriptures concerning his faith, and his

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<sup>3</sup> The poet and essayist Owen Felltham notes similarly in his *Resolves* (1628) that the Puritan’s erroneously eccentric approach to Scripture, coupled with his seemingly innate spitefulness, inevitably leads him to “spurn at the grave Authority of the *Church*,” and in doing so, prove “a Thief to himself, of those benefits which GOD hath allowed him: or out of a blind and uncharitable *Pride*, censure, and scorn others, as *reprobates*: or out of obstinacy, fill the World with *brawls*, about *undeterminable Tenets*” (283). Remarking specifically on the Puritan’s rejection of the more mundane delights — “to eat, and to drink, and to take pleasure in all his labour wherein he travaileth under the *Sun*”—in spite of Scriptural injunctions to the contrary, Felltham concludes, “Methinks the reading of *Ecclesiastes*, should make a *Puritan* undress his brain, and lay off all those *Fanatic toys* that jingle about his *understanding*” (283).

Christian moral life, so far as his Spirit will endure the text”; however, when the “deducible sense” of the text conflicts—as it must—with his tenets, when it “confounds this Professor and overthrows his Chair[,] . . . he [being] ashamed to forsake his seducing profession a long time vehemently clamorous, taketh fast hold only on the letter, and a chapter of the text” (287-288). The Puritan, Widdowes insinuates, is well aware of his deviation from the purportedly plain meaning of the Scriptures, but he is also well aware that he may continue in his vocation only so long as he can entice others to accept, replicate, and perpetuate his error in their own understandings; his charisma—being “vehemently clamorous”—is one means to this end; encouragement to self-election another. “The *Presuming Predestinist* is he, whose pureness is an inspired knowledge, that he shall be saved by God’s absolute election. He is so sure of his salvation, as if he were now in heaven: as if there were no life in him, *but God’s essential glory*” (295).

Policy of deliberate fraud or not, this propensity to self-election was one of the most cited and probably the most reviled of Puritan traits. James I sets the terms and tone of anti-Puritan feeling on this point when in his *Basilikon Doron* he observes that “as to the name of Puritans, I am not ignorant that the style thereof doth properly belong only to that vile sect amongst the Anabaptists, called the Family of love; because they think themselves only pure, and in a manner, without sin, the only true Church, and only worthy to be participant of the Sacraments; and all the rest of the world to be but abomination in the sight of God” (219). We should note that James’s objection to the tenet of election is two-fold. On the one hand, it angers him that a group would dare claim its members to be “without sin, the only true Church”; such a notion not only defies the teachings of the New Testament, it would seem to encourage spiritual complacency and hypocrisy. On the other hand, the narrow exclusivity of election allows the elect to hold “all the rest of the world to be but abomination in the sight of God.” James well understood what we shall soon see, that “all the rest of the world” included the King himself and the established Church, and that the upshot of the Puritans’ scorn of it and its institutions was that before they would

allow “any of their grounds” (or principles) to be “impugned,” they would first “let King, people, law and all be trod under foot” (220). At first a bid for sectarian legitimacy, self-election ultimately becomes a justification for seeking and seizing political, religious, legislative, and social power.

Though James here initially<sup>4</sup> restricts his criticism to the Family of Love, whose members, as Christopher Hill notes, “held their property in common, believed that all things come by nature, and that only the spirit of God within the believer can properly understand Scripture” (27), other commentators ascribe self-election to other sects, or, like James’s semi-official controversialist William Covell, use its distastefulness to impugn dissenters generally. Surely, argues Covell in *A Modest and Reasonable Examination, of Some Things in Use in the Church of England* (1604), “it is no great error to apply that name [of Puritan] to a number amongst us, who are ever ready to boast of their innocency, and in respect of themselves, to account all of a contrary faction unholy, and profane” (233). Then, going on the offensive, Covell points out the “strange presumption to *Improprate Conscience, Holiness, Innocency, and Integrity* only to some few, as if all the rest who have severed themselves from the Church of *Rome*, were no better than Atheists, time-servers, profane, and irreligious, only in this respect because by their authority and learning, they have resisted this unreasonable desire of a new discipline” (234). Though Oliver Ormerod’s *A Picture of a Puritane* of the following year is levelled mainly against the Brownists,<sup>5</sup> Ormerod, too, seeks to apply the offending trait of a single group rather broadly, that the credibility of all those antipathetic to the Church might be called into question. Unlike Covell, however, for Ormerod the presumption necessary for electing oneself and condemning all others is not at all strange, but has a Biblical precedent—in the

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<sup>4</sup> I say “initially” because by the end of his discussion of the “Puritan,” the term for James has come to connote a member of almost any dissenting sect that seeks to curtail royal and ecclesiastical power upon religious grounds.

<sup>5</sup> Followers of the separatist Robert Browne (c. 1550-1633).

damning example of the Pharisees. “And do you not,” he asks his imagined Puritan interlocutor, “come near the Pharisees herein, when you despise all those that be not of your sect, as polluted, and not worthy to be saluted?” (248); be assured, he concludes, that if “we call you Puritans,” it is “not because you are purer than other men are, no more than were the Puritans in ancient time [that is, the Pharisees]; but because you think yourselves to be purer than others, as the old Puritans did” (254). In *The Schysmatical Puritan*, Giles Widdowes likewise terms the imagined pureness of the Puritan (in this case, the Separatist) to be “Pharisiacal. He commends himself in the Temple to be far above all others for holiness . . . His opinion is, that only he is the Elect, the Regenerate, and faithful child of God. And that all others are reprobates, the wicked, the unregenerate, and the damned” (291). Such an identification is shrewd rhetorically, for it associates dissenters with a group easily recognized and for whom it would be easy to excite an intense loathing and disgust (foreshadowing the use to which anti-Puritan feeling would be put in later decades), and has the further advantage of turning the very grounds of Puritan self-validation against themselves.

James was not alone among contemporary writers in noting the amount of brass required to claim election. It is with exasperation, for instance, that John Earle—future tutor to Charles I’s eldest son and an adviser to that prince when civil war had driven him into exile—observes of a “she-Puritan” or “she precise Hypocrite” in his *Micro-cosmographie. Or, A Peece of The World Discovered; in Essayes and Characters* (1628), that though she “doubts of the Virgin Mary’s Salvation, and dares not Saint her,” she “knows her own place in heaven as perfectly, as the Pew she has a key to” (279). Nor was James alone in citing the more ominous implications of translating oneself to the celestial sphere and damning “all the rest of the world.” As *Antibrownistus Puritanomastix*, author of *Three Speeches*, understood well, the exigencies of finding oneself among the elect demand more than simply reorganizing Heaven, replacing the most hallowed of canonical saints with those drawn from the ranks of one’s fellows: on earth, the elect must be

advanced and the non-elect made to know their place—and this made for bigotry, sectarianism, power-lust, and violent demagoguery. Accordingly, the triad of ostensibly personal, ironically pro-Puritan testimonies that make up his tract—“by Master *Warden* to the fellowes of his Company, touching the Affaires of the Kingdome” (302), “Mrs. Wardens Observations Upon Her Husbands Reverend Speech In the Presence of certaine Gentlewomen of Ratliffe and Wapping” (309), and “A Speech made by Mistris Wardens Chambermaid”(313)—hint at self-election’s darker consequences for the world at large. In the first speech, for example, the boisterous, malaprop-plagued tradesman proposes with chilling heartiness to raise a Puritan militia both to seize power and to expedite the desired “extirpation of the Papists” (304):

Let us heap up so many crosses upon them till they be afraid to cross the way on us, or to cross the proverb or to cut any cross Capers, lest we interpret every such act to be direct Popish superstition. And to perfect this extirpation let all men whosoever that are not directly and absolutely of our opinion mind habit, (if it had been possible I would have said wisdom) be reputed *Papists*. (And so they are already) but I mean let them fall within the limitation and censures of all laws established against Popery and popish innovation (304).

If the resolution to exterminate Catholics *en masse* can be given a yet more horrific turn, it is by the scope of the promised violence, justified as it is here by the self-sealing premise that all who are not Puritans and “absolutely of our opinion mind habit” are in fact Papists, necessarily enemies to the state as they are enemies to Protestantism, and therefore subject to every sort of persecution: “And therefore let him that honors the name of *Jesus* be reputed a Jesuit, him that takes degrees at the *universities* be held a *Seminary*, and so consequently let them both be hanged, drawn, and quartered for high Treason, for that’s the doom my charity can afford them” (304). Such habits of mind and the sentiments they produce have been thoroughly absorbed by the tract’s third speaker, Mrs. Warden’s chambermaid Abigail. Upbraided by her mistress for using the Romish-sounding oath, “by the Mass,” the maid replies in her defense, “I was bred as well as any of the elect Maids

here in London, so that I had rather you had called me a zealous dissembler (as some of our Sisters be) than a Papist. For I am so absolutely against them, that if all Papist's heads were on one neck I would cut them all off with one blow, that so in Country Towns I might be drawn in the painted cloth like *Judith* cutting off Holfernes' head" (314). As the necessity of the maid's defense implies, Mrs. Warden is particularly fastidious in distinguishing between friend and foe—more so, it seems, even than her husband, for she declares that "although we cannot endure a Surplice, or Cross, the Pope's Bulls, his fiercer beasts the Jesuits, yet we hold it lawful by the same virtue of equivocations and mental reservations, *to cheat, swear, and lie with any that is not one of us, nay even among ourselves, if there be an holy cause*" (312; emphasis added).

The author of *Three Speeches* would have us infer from Mrs. Warden's declaration that the centripetal force of the Puritan sects' fervid opposition to royal and ecclesiastical authority is woefully insufficient to counteract the fractious centrifugal impulses unleashed by self-election's appeal to a narrow exclusivity. The observation was a common one among anti-Puritan writers of the period. George Wither's *Abuses Stript, and Whipt, Or Satirical Essayes* (1613), for instance, makes the connection between self-election and sectarian controversy quite clear, citing as it does "our busy-headed sect, / The hollow crew; the counterfeit elect: / Our Dogmatists, and ever-wrangling spirits, / That do as well contemn good works as merits" (274). Indeed, in its sectarianism Mrs. Warden's embodies much that anti-Puritan tracts portrayed as ridiculous in non-conformity, their authors seeming to take a particular delight in enumerating the bewildering number of self-authorized, self-determined sects that the tendency to self-election had spawned. In *The Picture of a Puritane* (1605), for instance, Oliver Ormerod offers up a running dialogue between an Anglican and a Puritan, the former taking the occasion to match the several doctrines of dissenting to those of a dizzying array of heresies ancient and modern. The very title of Giles Widdowes' *The Schysmatical Puritan* (1630) implies what Widdowes declares in the body of his work, that the Puritan's religion is nothing but faction (289),

and foreshadows the taxonomy of mutually hostile Puritan sects that makes up a large part of his tract. Widdowes cites and defines ten—the Perfectist, the factious Sermonist, the Separatist, the Anabaptist, the Brownist, the Loves-familist, the Precisian, the Sabbatarian, the Anti-disciplinarian, and the Presuming Predestinatist (290-295)—while the more thoroughgoing anonymous author of *Religion's Lotterie, or, the Church's Amazement* (1642), in addition to these, remarks upon the Arians, Arminians, Adamites, Novolists, Time-servers, Canonists, Lutherans, Puritans, Rattle-heads, and Round-heads. Though the author of *Religion's Lotterie* condemns each of these groups according to its particular eccentricities, the real criticism here and in similar taxonomies is implicit in the occasion of such lists themselves, and may be made out in *Religion's Lotterie's* final epigrammatical plea, “Praying to God the Author of true peace, / That truth may flourish and dissension cease” (334): sectarianism challenges Divine prerogative to dispose of worldly affairs, weakens the Protestant Church, promotes ecclesiastical and civil discord, disturbs the peace, and allows self-interest and opportunism to obscure the desire for and the pursuit of truth.

Given this, however risible Mrs. Warden, her pretensions, her cynical justification of her own ethical lapses may appear, the consequences of self-election and the sectarianism it inspired elicited something quite other than mirth among anti-Puritan propagandists. For even if her resolution “to cheat, swear, and lie with any that is not one of us, nay even among ourselves, if there be an holy cause,” had not appeared on the eve of civil war, one might yet detect in it several agents of social corrosion: scorn for and self-segregation from the bonds and values of the larger community; an aggressive moral hubris answerable only to itself; a willingness to subordinate public to private interest; and, in its appeal to an arbitrary and bigoted self-indulgence, a contempt for authority, tolerance, and self-restraint. If sectarianism could make non-conformity ridiculous, the violent demagoguery sectarianism inspired could likewise make it very dangerous—not least in the sort of people it attracted and in the nature of its appeal to them.



William Covell had hit upon the motives, methods, and menace of the Puritan demagogue forty years earlier in *A Modest and Reasonable Examination*. There he observes that religious dissent tends to attract young men “of the meanest sort” who are “in themselves naturally” predisposed “to reprove wherein their own innocency is thought greatest when they dare in unseemly terms take upon them to control others” and “to seem of some account, which, in an ordinary course without great labor is not easily to be attained, whereas evil speaking and unseasonable railings (Commonly called *Zealous* preaching) bringeth them (at least among their partial followers) into an opinion of learning, innocency, and purified *Zeal*” (236). And Covell takes care to remind these would-be prophets that “*that cause cannot be good which hath not other patrons to support it, than those who have learned nothing, but only to speak evil*” (236). An easy authority, a cheap celebrity and esteem may be readily elicited from one’s “partial followers” when their ranks are made up of those sufficiently unsophisticated and ignorant to be grossly imposed upon.

However, the pretensions and designs of the Puritan-demagogue would seem to depend upon attracting and maintaining just such a constituency. Hence, apparently, the anti-intellectual strain widely ascribed to non-conformists. As Oliver Ormerod’s true Protestant disputant observes in *The Picture of a Puritane* (1605), the Puritans, like the detested Brownists, argue that “‘degrees in Theology, enforcement to single life in Colleges, and the study of heathen Writers, with other like corruptions,’ (as they term them) in Schools and Academies, should be removed and redressed” (252). By questioning the propriety of formal training and thereby subverting the authority of the nation’s educational institutions, the demagogue at one stroke discredits his establishment critics, empowers himself, and deepens his visceral appeal among his followers, exciting both the anti-academic prejudices of the minimally educated classes and the anti-aristocratic snobbery of society’s lower orders. Secure in the safety of retrospection, we might observe that in their antipathy toward “degrees in Theology, enforcement to single life in Colleges, and the study of heathen Writers” the Puritans were exactly in step with the reform-

mindedness of such figures as Sir Francis Bacon, whose iconoclastic *The Advancement of Learning* and *Novum Organum* appeared in 1605 and 1620, respectively. Moreover, Douglas Bush points out, the Puritans' anti-academic impulse could be attributed to "a logical if extreme development of Protestantism[']s hostility to theological, scholastic, and classical learning as the corrupter of the simple Gospel and the religion of the spirit" (20). Such learning, furthermore, "as a symbol of class privilege, authority, and intolerance, could be attacked also from the political and social standpoint by the Levellers [William] Walwyn and [Richard] Overton"—and in any event, the trading ranks from which radical Protestantism overwhelmingly drew valued a "practical and scientific education on a broad basis" (20) far above the humanistic educations the universities furnished the sons of gentlemen.

Needless to say, anti-Puritan writers of the day likely could not and in any case did not treat the matter so dispassionately. For them, Puritan anti-intellectualism was an encouragement to the willful, self-deluding benightedness that fuels the ambition of self-serving contrarians. "Ignorance, and fat feed, are his Founders," declares Sir Thomas Overbury of his subject in "A Puritan," "his Nurses, Railings, Rabbis, and round breeches: his life is but a borrowed blast of wind" (276). And in *Three Speeches Antibrwnistus Puritanomastix* has Mr. Warden aver that once the Puritans seize power they will be resourceful in devising "inventions to plague these lukewarm Locusts, these Mercurials of Religion that stand upon Philosophy, Reason, Sense and *I* know not what; as if reason and sense, and such fooleries, were pertinent to religion and the graces of the Spirit" (306). Indeed, as Mrs. Warden "reasons" a bit later to her dissenting sisters, not only is learning "a mere trouble and vexation to Religion," ignorance is all but a precondition of election:

It is nothing what language their [a congregation's] *Liturgy* is in, for they [the established Church] confess the most unlearned may know enough to be saved by: *Ergo*, Learning is needless, and if needless, why not *profane*? Nay I gather further thus: If learning were either necessary or convenient, the *Scriptures* would enjoin it as it doth other things that are so, but the most unlearned may be saved, nay are saved; *Ergo*, Learning is neither necessary

nor convenient: and so from the *major* consequently to the *minor*; if not Learning, neither Reason nor Sense. For as that man of Revelations Mr. Greene<sup>6</sup> proves it fully, *Ignorance* and *Noise*, are marks sufficient enough whereby to know our Election (311).

Mrs. Warden's chambermaid seconds both her views and her curious manner of thought; in fact, her apologia for ignorance is a marvel of unreason. "If Master Warden would but play the Devil's part in punishing and plundering, and plaguing these Papists," Abigail declares, "I myself when I come amongst any of them am fully resolved to scratch out their eyes, for it is a proper sign of an elect young man or maid to condemn that we understand not, and to be furiously obstinate in our zealous anger" (314). We should not be surprised, then, to learn that her rationale for rejecting learning is (quite fittingly) prompted by the consequences of her own moral obtuseness and turns on mistaking two very different meanings of the word 'sense.' "I never loved Learning nor learned men," Abigail continues, "[for] sir Roger our Curate deceived me in a deep point, therefore learning is no Religion nor learned men are not always zealously religious, and learning Mistress (as you say) is profane, and sense and reason in Religion are unnecessary, for though we can have feeling other ways, yet we can have no sense of Religion" (315). The entire Warden household, from master to maid, seems intent upon vindicating an anonymous poet's "The Round-Head's Character," appearing the same year as *Three Speeches* (1642): the Puritan "cries down learning, 'cause the simple spirit / Doth him inspire with all things against merit. / Who hates a Papist, yet approves this notion, / That ignorance is mother of devotion" (ll. 9-12; 326).

But if Puritan anti-intellectualism nurtured an unfortunate self-delusion among the nonconformist leadership, it left society's lower orders vulnerable to their own ignorance—and to the predations of what James I termed "some fiery spirited men in the ministry" (*Basilikon Doron*, 221). Thus ignorance, when coupled with an appeal to the basest instincts and prejudices of the lowest orders of society, threatened to beget a more

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<sup>6</sup> A dissenting haberdasher who preached to a London congregation in the 1630's and 1640's.

immediately dangerous progeny: civil unrest; destruction of persons, property, and institutions; mob rule; political and moral anarchy. And so the popular element in Puritanism would remain suspect—even when harnessed for the praiseworthy task of overthrowing “the Popish Church.” James I’s experiences in Scotland had taught him that ambitious or unscrupulous leaders might turn a crowd against *any* established authority; hence his observation in *Basilikon Doron* that though the Scottish Reformation was “extraordinarily wrought by God,” its achievement was accompanied by “many things . . . inordinately done by a popular tumult and rebellion, of such as were blindly doing the work of God, but clogged with their own passions and particular respects, as well appeared by the destruction of our policy” (221). And reviewing the Reformation in northern Europe at large, James notes that many Protestant zealots “got such a guiding of the people at that time of confusion, as finding the gust of government sweet, they begouth to fantasy themselves, a Democratic form of government,” and “fed themselves with the hope to become *Tribuni plebis*: and so in a popular government by leading the people by the nose, to bear the sway of all the rule”<sup>7</sup> (221-222). If at first monarch and subjects had a common enemy in Rome, soon enough (as they had in Scotland) seditious ministers were busy “informing the people, that all Kings and Princes were naturally enemies to the liberty of the Church, and could never patiently bear the yoke of Christ,” the “turbulent spirits among [these ministers] . . . maintaining their plots, as parity in the Church, whereby the ignorants were emboldened (as bayards) to cry the learned, godly and modest out of it:

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<sup>7</sup> Some twentieth-century historians of the English Civil Wars (Christopher Hill perhaps the most prominent among them) have suggested that the struggle between Parliament and King was prompted largely by class conflict. Such claims are, of course, open to question, and must answer for, among other things, the highly problematic relationship of the Puritan rank and the Puritan file. As with many “popular” movements today, the leadership seemed to be out of touch with the very people they claimed to be representing, and in whose name they had taken up arms. It was an irony not lost upon contemporaries and later commentators. In his poem, “Abuses Stript, and Whipt” (1613), George Wither takes care to differentiate between what for him are the real puritans—those who “have the greatest care / To know, and please their maker” (274)—and those who would display their superior piety and moral understanding by pretending to be scandalized at the harmless diversions of their social inferiors, “those all whose Religion doth depend, / On this, that they know how to discommend / A Maygame, or a Summerpole defy, / Or shake the head or else turn up the eye” (274).

parity the mother of confusion, and enemy to Unity which is the mother of order” (222).

James’s fears of the disruptive power of such Puritan demagoguery were echoed right up to the actual outbreak of hostilities between Parliament and King, in 1642. In *A Modest and Reasonable Examination* (1604), William Covell, for one, faults radical Protestant reformers—among them Calvin, Knox, and their many English adherents—for what he describes as

[a] bitterness of speech [not] much inferior to the Heretics of former times, and of whose followers I may say, with Saint Chrisostom; ‘In age they are younger but in malice Equal; the Brood of serpents are of less stature, but have not less poison. The Whelps of Wolves, though they cannot hurt so cunningly, yet will hurt with biting, and desire to suck Blood’ . . . [T]he Authors of this evil-speaking, made Religion to be a warrant to speak evil; and whilst they offended upon this ground, others were desirous to offend, that they might not differ, from their example so that a double fault lieth upon the first Author; one that they offended in their own person, the second that they were examples to others to the like offense” (230).

Examples, that is, of civil as well as ecclesiastical disobedience. Answering the ostensible scruples of the Puritan conscience regarding adherence to temporal law—“‘We cannot tell whether we might by the laws and order of this Realm subscribe, although it were otherwise lawfully by God’s word,’”—Covell scoffs, “As if the Laws of this Land could be a restraint for subscribing being warranted in God’s word” (231). Covell here answers learned, if in his view erroneous, arguments concerning Protestant doctrine and the autonomy of individual will; however, as we have already seen, for many if not most anti-Puritan writers the problem with self-authorized departures from civil and religious law was not primarily an academic one—did not lie in subtle deviations in abstruse points of theology—but rather a practical matter of maintaining the most elemental components of social order. Among these are a recognition of the many hierarchies giving shape and definition to society; an acceptance of one’s place within them; deferring to the political, ecclesiastical, and domestic authorities above one; fulfilling the particular demands of one’s own station and occupation; and maintaining the all-important trust in the social bonds

dignifying the mutual dependencies among the several classes, between the rulers and the ruled. When Sir Thomas Overbury observes in "A Puritan," that "women and Lawyers are his [the Puritan's] best Disciples, the one next fruit, longs for forbidden Doctrine, the other to maintain forbidden titles, both which he sows amongst them" (277), he seems to treat as absurd the unseemly appetites quickened by nonconformist agitation. The consequences of disseminating ambition, discontent, and fears of persecution among the middling and lower classes are taken more seriously, however, in the *Three Speeches of Antibrownist Puritanomastix*. Concluding his address to his fraternity, Mr. Warden congratulates himself upon "my *ultimum*, my *nil ultra*, the very Garland of my good Will to the Public; and that is the fears and jealousies which do now possess the Kingdom" (308). These jealousies and fears, Warden solemnly assures his listeners, "are of a most dangerous nature and high consequence, the greatest that ever was in any Time or Nation," and yet, he confesses, "neither I nor any man living can tell what they are, or from whence they should arise: but without all doubt there is great cause, or else there would not be such talking of them" (308). In fact they *are* quite real—but as Warden continues, we see that they are the jealousies and fears of everyday life,<sup>8</sup> elevated by the knowledge of his own animosity toward and subversion of civil and religious authorities, as well as a not unfounded anxiety that his sedition will be discovered and punished, into a shapeless, all-informing persecution mania, a paranoid conviction that he and the members of his company will "be hanged for speaking high treason against the King" (308). Rambling and absurd his discourse may be, but in resolving that "since there is no remedy; we will fear still, and be jealous still" (308-309), Warden lights upon the surest catalyst of social disintegration: sustained mutual suspicion between the government and people. We discern in the words of one of Mrs. Warden's partisans, for instance, the prerequisites for just such a

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<sup>8</sup> As given by Warden, these consist mainly of finding oneself a cuckold or of being taken *flagrante dilecto* in one's own sexual improprieties.

breakdown: scorn for the prevailing order, the classes upholding it, and the loyal citizen's due allegiance to both it and them; an implacable, demonizing antipathy toward one's foes; and the self-righteous resignation to one's harboring such a virulent enmity. Declaring herself to be "Religiously angry with the King and a Malignant party of Nobility, Clergy, Judges, Gentry, and Reprobate Cavaliers," the "gentlewoman" from Wapping scoffs splenetically that "in truth it is feared . . . that three parts of the Kingdom have their eyes blinded with a kind of Duty and Conscience, and what is the root of all this unrighteousness, but that abominable Profane, Superstitious, Idolatrous, Babylonish, and conjuring book of Common [Prayer]" (309).

Suspicion fosters estrangement; estrangement, preemptive hostility; hostility, a posture of aggressive self-defense; self-defense, a resort to arms—to civil war.

As it happened, war was to break out the very year *Three Speeches* appeared. For Antibrownist Puritanomastix and his fellows, it was only the realization of their worst fears about the power of militant Puritan demagoguery and of their long-held suspicions of Puritanism's fundamental and ultimate aims. In fact, so long and so closely had Puritanism been identified with political, religious, and social revolt, that is, with revolt generally, that despite attempts—sincere and ironic alike—to define the puritan according to strictly doctrinal criteria, "Puritan" came to be used more broadly as a synonym for the radical iconoclast, and applied to all those who would overturn the ideologies and institutions of the established order. Here again, the *Basilikon Doron* of James I proved the model for other anti-Puritan writers of the early seventeenth century. Though, as we have seen, James initially defines the puritan narrowly, as a member of "that vile sect among the Anabaptists, called the Family of love; because they think themselves only pure, and in a manner, without sin," a few lines later he expands his "style" to include those "brainsick and heady preachers[,] their disciples and followers" who share with the Familists a "contempt for the civil Magistrate," and like them rely upon "their own dreams and fantasies," and hold "all men profane that swears not to all their fantasies" (219). And by

the end of his discourse he has made it clear that his main apprehension from religious dissenters has little to do with theology and very much to do with their political programme, which, seemingly, is to traduce kings, encourage their overthrow as enemies to the Church, and promise to replace them with “a Democratic form of government.” At present, James warns his son, these “pests in the Church and commonweal: whom no deserts can oblige; neither oaths nor promises bind; breathing nothing but sedition and calumnies, aspiring without measure, railing without reason,” would have it believed they desire only a greater voice in Anglican affairs, or, bating that, liberty of conscience for themselves. And yet, he cautions, once these “pests” are “established in the Ecclesiastical government, the Politic and civil estate should be drawn into the like,” bringing all to “great confusion” (222).

Other anti-Puritan writers recognized with James that the main danger of dissenting demagoguery lay in its secular rather than its religious appeal: whatever their pretenses of defending Protestantism and the sovereignty of the individual conscience, relatively few would be moved to revolt by theological arguments alone, unsweetened with the prospect of political and material advantage. They also echoed the king’s argument that whatever the gains radical Protestantism made within the Church and among the people, the most serious consequences would be felt within the “politic and civic estates.” For they, too, looked upon Puritanism as, fundamentally, a challenge to royal authority, and saw—rightly, as it turned out—that left unanswered and unquelled, that challenge would lead to a violent confrontation between king and people, perhaps even the displacement of monarchy by theocrats, oligarchs, or republicans. In *The Picture of a Puritane*, for instance, Oliver Ormerod warns that if “the Doctrine of your consistories and disciplinarians might take place, our Kings of England (I fear) would in short time be brought to the like slavery: for do not they teach that Princes ought to submit themselves to the Seniors of the Church, and that they ought to be ruled and governed, to be punished and corrected, to be excommunicated and absolved by their discretion, and at their pleasure?” (244). David



Owen was another who, as Lawrence Sasek puts it, “saw a grave threat to the monarchy in much protestant political theory and as early as 1610 suspected the people called puritans of tending toward regicide” (256); in fact, Sasek notes, Owen had the rather idiosyncratic notion of a Puritan as “any member of the reformed churches who will argue for the disposition of the king upon any grounds or by anyone, especially by the nobility, by statesmen, or by the general population. And any puritan appears to be a potential regicide” (257). Indeed, one gathers from Owen’s depiction of Puritanism in *Herod and Pilate Reconciled: Or, The Concord of Papist and Puritan (Against Scripture, Fathers, Councils, and other Orthodoxall Writers) for the Coercion, Deposition, and Killing of Kings* (1610) that its doctrinal aberrations are to be quelled for no reason so much as their inevitably ruinous political consequences. As dangerous as the popishness it pretends to detest, the presbytery must needs be “quenched by the power of Majesty” lest it “set the Church on fire, and the state in an uproar” (258). Exciting admiration in the ignorant and unsophisticated with feigned piety and false learning,

[Puritan demagogues] have not only *robbed widows’ houses* under pretense of prayer, and ransacked their *seduced disciples* by show of devotion, but also battered the *courts of Princes*, by animating the *Peers* against *Kings*, and the *people* against the *Peers* for pretended *reformation*. And whereas God hath inseparably annexed to the *crown of earthly majesty*, a *supreme ecclesiastical sovereignty* for the protection of *piety*; and an absolute *immunity* from *judicial sentence*, and *Martial violence*, for the preservation of *policy*: These sectaries bereave *Kings* of both these their *Princely prerogatives*, *exalting themselves . . . above all that is called God*: Lest they might seem *sine ratione insanire*, to sow the seeds of sedition without show of reason (258).

Appearing two years later, *The Schismatical Puritan* of Giles Widdowes is if possible even less oblique in conflating the Puritans’ religious and political programmes. After listing at length the non-conformists’ deviations from orthodoxy, an exasperated Widdowes demands of the reader, “And what then is his religion, but faction?” (289). For, he continues, “the eye that beholds their daring opposition in the Church, may very well believe, that [political] Rebellions are taught in their *Convenicles*”: “What Rebellions?

Their teaching against the King's Supremacy, a rejecting of our Reformed faith, a refusing of God's holy worship written, which is the Common Prayer-book; a despising of Canonical obedience; a repugning against our Reformed Church" (290). And thus the Puritan only fulfills his essential nature when he "studies Confusion of Church, and Commonwealth" (290); the Brownist pulls down the churches in order to baffle popish idolatry (292); the Anti-disciplinarian—"he, whose pureness is above the King's supremacy"—believes nothing so strongly as that "*kings must be subject to the Puritan-Presbyter's Censure, submit their Scepters, throw down their Crowns, and lick up the dust of their feet*" (294). Insisting upon the autonomy of his own conscience and his independence of central ecclesiastical authority, the Antidisciplinarian—or rather, Puritanism at large—implicitly denies that "*Princes in their Dominions have supreme Authority to gather together General Councils*" and that "*the King is supreme Governor of Church and Commonwealth next, and immediately under Christ in his Dominions; in all causes, and over all Persons Ecclesiastical and Civil*" (294). A born rebel breeding rebellion, the Puritan may be defined by the ultimate consequences of his beliefs. Hence Widdowes' blunt conclusion: "The Puritan is an Arch-Traitor" (294).

Hence a highly similar conclusion for the anonymous author of *A Puritane Set Forth in His Lively Colours* (1642), a tract which brings us neatly full-circle: appearing on the eve of Civil War, it closely recapitulates the *Basilikon Doron*—so closely that it often appropriates James's words verbatim. The author is bold enough, however, to risk redundancy by recasting his own arguments in prose into a set of verses titled, "The Round-Head's Character." The Puritan, he argues, is one whose pretense of holiness only disguises his worldly ambitions, one who "utterly detests strange innovation, / Yet daily schisms doth procreate in our Nation: / Who hates, yet makes division, 'cause the sway / Of this our Kingdom should be ruled his way: / Who's never well employed, yet still in action, / Loves outward peace, but inward's lined with faction: / That is religious, will oppose nothing / But what's authorized by the Church and King" (326-327).

“For my own part,” declares the royalist and Jonson-satellite Owen Felltham in his *Resolves or, Excogitations* (1628), “I think the World hath not better men, than some, that suffer under that name [of Puritan]: nor withal, more *Scelestic Villainies*. For, when they are once *elated* with that *pride*, they so *contemn* others, that they infringe the *Laws* of all *human society*” (283). Two things should strike us about Felltham’s statement. The first is the sheer elasticity of the term “Puritan.” It could refer to the moral exemplar, one notable for his or her goodness, his or her purity of spirit—one, as Felltham notes a bit earlier in his tract, “that lives religiously, and will not revel it in a shoreless excess” (282). But when understood to mean those “men which *would be Puritans*,” those whose self-ascribed moral superiority and aggressive claim of God’s special favor justified their “sullen segregation from all society” (282), the word conveyed only the darkest connotations: “As he [the Puritan] is more generally in these times taken,” Felltham tells us, “I suppose we may call him a *Church-Rebel*, or one that would exclude *order*, that his *brain* might rule” (282). Second, we should note the actual use to which that elasticity allowed the term to be put. As we have just seen, by the time of the Civil War the association of Puritanism with the violent overthrow of social authorities and institutions had become so absolute that it was supposed inevitable that Puritanism unchecked could only lead to rebellion and chaos. Indeed, we might even detect in Felltham’s warning that the Puritan’s militancy will erode “the *Laws* of all human society,” extinguishing order itself “that his *brain* might rule,” a hint of the apocalyptic strain: Puritanism is to be the agent of England’s dissolution. No need, however, to search David Owen’s *Herod and Pilate Reconciled* for mere hints. The subtitle of his tract makes it clear that for Owen the ultimate aim of Puritanism was self-evident: “the *Coercion, Deposition, and Killing of Kings*”; and inasmuch as regicide, the murder of God’s anointed proxy and instrument, threatened to throw Providential order into confusion, the spread of dissent could—must—be understood as a harbinger of the world’s final days: “It is most true that as sick men, near their death, have many idle

fancies, so the world before the end thereof shall be troubled with many errors. In these declining days of the world, many countries, Cities, and Cantons, renounced their old government, and submitted themselves to such a new government as they best liked: for confirmation of which practices, there wanted not politic Divines . . . to invest the people and Nobles with the power over Kings, to dispose of their kingdoms” (264).

Though Owen is perhaps more explicit, more emphatic than other anti-Puritan writers of the first half of the seventeenth century, his vision is that toward which his fellows, such as Felltham, tend in their own writings; it is the vision embedded in James’s warning to Henry, the Prince of Wales, about those among his subjects who, convinced of their exclusive claim to God’s favor, hold “all the rest of the world to be but abomination in the sight of God,” and for the sake of their own shifting consciences—and ambitions—are willing to set at nought all persons besides themselves, all institutions besides their own. It is the vision that would come horribly true for James’s second son, who, made heir to the throne at the sudden death of Prince Henry in November 1612, became King in 1625; vainly attempted to suppress an ever more sizable, powerful, and restive body of Puritan subjects; fell out with a Presbyterian Parliament; went to war against an army of Independents generalled by an erstwhile brewer; was defeated, dethroned, tried, and executed by those for whom kings were an “abomination in the sight of God,” and who would be ruled instead by an oligarchy of the Elect. The fact that the nightmare prophecies of Owen and others did in fact come to pass meant that in addition to a flexible anti-Puritan vocabulary allowing for the easy conflation of religious and political, spiritual and secular rebellion, and an explicit identification of Puritanism and Puritans with such rebellion, later writers were bequeathed a discernible, reliably predictable pattern of historical denouement into which similar circumstances might be ar-ranged and by which the present moment might be explicated and woven into living cultural memory.

## 2. The Civil War Figure Articulated and Applied, 1678-1681: The Popish Plot and Exclusion Crisis

A little after ten o'clock on the morning of January 30, 1649, the condemned Charles Stuart mounted a scaffold that had been erected "between Whitehall Gate and the gate leading into the gallery from St. James's" (140).<sup>9</sup> The king "looked very earnestly on the Block" upon which he was shortly to lay his head and asked if a taller one could not be found (140). Addressing those about him on the scaffold, he maintained that he had never intended to encroach upon the rights of Parliament, let alone make war upon it. For all that, he declared himself resigned to the will of Heaven—"God forbid that I should be so ill a Christian as not to say that God's judgements are just upon me"—and vouchsafed that he had "forgiven all the world and even those in particular that have been the chief causers of my death" (141). He twice admonished those on the platform not to touch the waiting axe, lest its edge be blunted and a second stroke be needed to carry out its mortal charge. Then, when the moment for speech had passed, "the King called to Dr. [William] Juxon [Bishop of London] for his nightcap, and having put it on, he said to the Executioner, 'Does my hair trouble you?' who desired him to put it all under his cap, which the King did accordingly by the help of the Executioner and the Bishop" (143). "I go," said the King, "from a corruptible to an incorruptible crown, where no disturbance can be, no disturbance in the world" (143), then took off his cloak and gave the insignia from his Garter to Juxon, that it might be conveyed to the young prince Charles. As he did so, the King used his final word to lay one last duty upon the Bishop—and the nation.

"Remember."

England did indeed remember. The public beheading of God's anointed was

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<sup>9</sup> Passages quoted in this paragraph are taken from the excerpt of *King Charles his Tryal at the High Court of Justice* (2nd ed., 1650) given in *The Trial of Charles I: A Documentary History*. Eds. David Lagomarsino and Charles J. Wood. Hanover: UP of New England, 1989. 138-144.

horrific enough in itself to be etched indelibly upon the nation's consciousness and conscience. But the execution of Charles I would also give England a particular way of remembering the events leading up to and following the spectacle of that January morning. As we have seen, royalist writers had warned for half a century that it was precisely to this pass that radical Protestantism, given its head, would bring the nation: the fact of regicide was therefore the seemingly inevitable climax to Puritan agitation and defiance, the requisite preliminary to the fulfillment of the dissenters' ultimate objective, the establishment of a commonwealth. As such, though it would be absurd to see Charles' death as a mere trope for ideological conflict, as Gerald MacLean would have it (25), the sacrifice of the King to Parliamentary expediency would serve to crystalize and throw into relief a certain, clearly identifiable pattern of political cause, effect, and consequence—a pattern that subsequent commentators and controversialists could evoke to perceive, configure, interpret, and fix in public memory the events of their own times. In fact, this particular historical pattern would prove especially easy to carry forward and impose upon the conflict between King and Parliament during the years of the Popish Plot and Exclusion Crisis. For one thing, a civil war, revolution, and restoration had done little to resolve the original, fundamental struggle for acknowledged political supremacy between Charles I and his Parliamentary adversaries; it was likely, therefore, that sooner or later under the restored Charles II Court and Commons would again find themselves at daggers drawn. For another, the single group most widely identified with and held responsible for the events of the 1640's and 1650's, dissenting radical Protestants,<sup>10</sup> remained a prominent presence in English society. Indeed,

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<sup>10</sup> Despite the political rather than strictly religious origins of the Civil War, the extent to which pre-war propaganda of the kind we have seen in the preceding section (as well, of course, as the *actual* establishment of a theocratic Commonwealth after the deposition of Charles) had succeeded in identifying Puritanism with sedition, rebellion, and regicide may be judged by the amount of Restoration legislation that aimed directly or indirectly at the suppression of dissenters. The Corporation Act (1661) required government officials to abjure the Solemn League and Covenant of 1643 and to take the Anglican Communion; the Uniformity Act (May 1662) obliged the clergy, in Kenyon's words, "to accept the Book of Common Prayer and the Thirty-Nine Articles in their entirety, plus ordination by a bishop" (198); and the Conventicles Act (1664) and Five Mile Act (1665) were designed to limit the popular influence of dissenting ministers. Other legislation, such as the Act to

as I hope to have intimated in the foregoing section, so closely were the Puritans (or nonconformists, as they came to be styled after 1660) associated in the national psyche with rebellion, regicide, and England's consequent regression into chaos, that years after the Restoration it was all but impossible to employ Puritan imagery without likewise bringing to mind the specific sequence of events that made a martyr of the first Charles and an exile of the second.<sup>11</sup> In other words, merely to employ Puritan imagery was to impose a certain preconfigured pattern upon the events one was describing. For the loyalist pamphleteers and poets who would seek to counter and defeat Opposition tactics during the critical years of 1678-1681, when the constitutional struggle resurfaced in the guise, first,

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Preserve the Person and Government of the King (which forbade any hindrance of or encroachment upon the king's powers) and the Act Against Tumultuous Petitioning (1661) undercut the tactics used by Puritans and Republicans to foment unrest against Charles I. As Jones points out, "on the premise that the Civil War had been caused by the factious and seditious practices of [Puritan and Parliamentary John] Pym and his demagogic associates . . . was expressly intended to prevent any repetition of the agitational techniques that had been used in 1640-42" (142). If, as Kenyon argues, Puritanism after 1660 was in fact a spent, dispirited force (196-97), it was given no quarter on that account. Indeed, he says, "the fatal association of Puritanism with regicide in the public mind" was so strong that "the idea of a radical Nonconformist plot to overwhelm the establishment continued to be a factor in politics at least up to 1688" (200). Just or not, association would soon pass from popular prejudice into established historical fact: the anti-monarchical zealot figures prominently, A.C. Richardson notes, in Hobbes' *Behemoth, or the Long Parliament* (written in the 1660's, published 1682) as well as in Clarendon's *History of the Rebellion and Civil Wars in England* (1702-04) (23-35).

<sup>11</sup> Thus Henry More in his *Enthusiasmus Triumphatus* (1662) suggests that the Puritan's inner light is actually a dangerous madness antipathetic to reason and learning, its high-flown language likely to beguile the gullible from their duty to God, their prince, and their society (38-40). Thus in his character sketches of the several varieties of dissenters (1667-1669), Samuel Butler says of the Fanatic that he "outgrows Ordinances, as a 'Prentice that has served out his Time does his Indenture, and being a Freeman supposes himself at Liberty to set up what Religion he pleases," though his religion "tends only to Faction and Sedition" (127); of the Silenc'd Presbyterian, that he is "pernicious to the government," a contagious demagogue whose gifts ought to be "shut up, that they might not infect others" (312); and of the Hypocritical Nonconformist, that he is so insensible "of God's Mercy and the King's, for his Pardon and Restoration to a better Condition than he was in before he rebelled, that his Actions make it plainly appear that he accounts it no better than an Apostacy and Backsliding; and he expects a Revolution of Rebellion as obstinately, as the Turk does Mahomet's Coming" (48)—but then "he has always appeared true and faithful to all tyrannical Usurpations, without the least Reluctancy of Conscience" (49). (Significantly, there is little to choose between Butler's political and religious grotesques. The Republican, the State-Convert, the Factious Member, the Leader of a Faction, the Seditious Man, and the Rebel, like their nonconformist brethren, are a pack of demagogues, hypocrites, and shameless opportunists exploiting the gullible and overthrowing social order for their own private ends.) Thus, as we have seen in Chapter 2, even before Puritan and Whig imagery were being conflated in earnest, Dryden was using the former to discredit those who would usurp his dramatic and critical authority. And thus, as we saw at the outset of this chapter, Dryden uses the occasion of his *Religio Laici* to predict that the continued presence of nonconformists means that England will again experience unrest—and possibly armed rebellion.

of thwarting a Catholic conspiracy, and then of securing protestantism and English liberties by excluding James from the succession, it was a shrewd, if obvious move to point to the many superficial parallels between the 1640's and the present day and suggest that the Good Old Cause had been revived, that the unrest of the former decade was being revisited upon the nation—and hurtling toward the same grisly end. That their ploy was ultimately effective—and highly, devastatingly so—demonstrates the power of the historical figure of the Civil War to reawaken the past, configure the present, and shape expectations for the future.

Given the nation's lingering distrust of dissenters, it is not surprising that despite the very real, very widespread fear among Protestants that all Titus Oates and Israel Tonge had sworn to in the late summer and early fall of 1678—about a Catholic plot to assassinate Charles, invade England with 60,000 troops, slaughter Protestants by the thousand, set James upon the throne, and reclaim England for the pope—was true, there was yet a strong, if vague identification of the nonconformists with the present unrest. If they were not yet believed to have cynically engineered the crisis, it was observed nevertheless that they were likely to turn it to their advantage. The prologue to John Crowne's *The Ambitious Statesman; or, The Loyal Favourite* (March 1679), containing, as Pierre Danchin notes, “[some] of the earliest clear references to the disturbances caused by the Popish Plot” (148), provides one of the blunter, more explicit statements of Anglican suspicions: “But now the Nation in a tempest rowles, / And Old St. *Peters*, justles with St. *Pauls*, / And whilst these two great Ladys fight and braule, / Pick pocket Conventicle Whore gets all” (ll. 5-8). Other popular pieces, such as the ballads “Good Subjects' Delight: Or, True Love in its Proper Colours” and “Unfeigned Friendship” (c. late 1679-early 1680), if more temperate, are no less earnest in admonishing their readers to resist those unscrupulous zealots who would use the current anti-papist hysteria to foment divisions among high- and low-church Protestants, or to advance the nonconformist agenda. “Who seeks Division, all that's good defaces,” declares the epigraph of “Good



Subjects' Delight," "And for his pains may he ware Hempen Tresses"; now is not the time. asserts the author of "Unfeigned Friendship" for the "*Conventicle* to baulk their obedience, / Nor at Ceremonies where decency shown is / Cavell and Carp, and yet give us no reason" (stanza 5). Nor, says William Whitaker in the prologue to his *The Conspiracy* (March 1680), does the present unrest give license to the impertinent, deep-throated murmurings of the zealous that the Court's dilatory prosecution of the Plot prefigured a betrayal of Protestantism and liberty. Let these factious men instead "learn all due *Allegiance* to the King," he advises. "Let *Politicians* too not be so hot / To swear that a *Spring-tide's* a *Popish-Plot*" (ll. 22-24). Should they "too eagerly that scent persue," their lust to discover "an *Old Plot*" might well drive the papists to new measures—or beguile the Protestants into forming one of their own (ll. 25-26).

However, despite this early anxiety over the use dissenters might make of the Popish Plot, it would take time for the association of religious with political dissent to emerge fully, for the identification of latter-day nonconformists with their Puritan forbears to become explicit, and, most broadly, for the historical figure of the Civil War and its aftermath to become fully articulated and used to configure the events of present day. Before any of this could occur, the distracting belief in the Popish Plot as a purely Catholic conspiracy would have either to play itself out or be actively dispelled, and it was not until the late spring of 1679, when the controversy over succession had emerged as a central issue dividing Court and Opposition, that the Whigs' cynical use of the Plot to justify their programme of exclusion was at last becoming evident. Moreover, it was only after Parliament's passage of the first Exclusion Bill (May 1679) was answered first with prorogation and then with outright dissolution (May 27 and July 12, respectively) that the true nature of the conflict between Crown and Parliament stood forth unmistakably, and only then that the life-or-death stakes of their power struggle could be fully appreciated: either Charles would forfeit his royal prerogative, or the MPs, their ancient check upon arbitrary rule. Accordingly, it was only at this point, during the late summer and early fall

of 1679, that a compelling occasion for the emergence of the implicit parallels between the constitutional crises of the 1630's and 1670's presented itself. Now that it had, however, these parallels began to suggest themselves forcefully to Whigs and Tories alike—so forcefully, in fact, that, as Mark Knights observes, soon both sides were not only recycling arguments from pamphlets first published during the earlier crisis but sometimes reprinting the very pamphlets themselves, changing only the dates (189-190). The Opposition generally took care not to attack Charles directly; however, if it thrice sought to exclude James from the succession (in May 1679, November 1680, and March 1681), if it petitioned the King to call for Parliament to sit or to allow prorogued Parliaments to meet (during the winter of 1679-1680 and again before the elections of 1681), if it questioned the doctrine of divine right and advocated government by consent of the governed, if its Parliamentary majorities stinted the King's requests for money and passed provocative, defiant resolutions asserting its prerogatives, it did so, its apologists in prose and verse maintained, only in defense of itself and of the subject. That the Court had once again grown politically and morally corrupt, that it had once more fallen under the sway of popish agents and interests, and that Charles' frequent prorogations and dissolutions of Parliament, his maintenance of a standing army, and his ministers' secret dealings with the papist, absolutist French Crown were but a shift to extend his power at the expense of traditional English liberties and institutions was merely self-evident. The Opposition's recourse to Civil War imagery was necessarily limited, however; to pursue the parallels between past and present too closely would mean identifying themselves with those who made war upon and finally murdered Charles I—as the Whigs would discover periodically throughout the Exclusion Crisis. Loyalist or Tory writers, on the other hand, were under no such restraint, though initially fear of Parliamentary prosecution and a reluctance to take their case to the people, to make the broadly popular appeal an effective propaganda campaign would entail, inhibited their exploitation of the inherent rhetorical advantage the Civil War figure gave them. With increasing deftness and vigor, however,

they made the most of the parallels between the old and new Opposition as these became apparent roughly from the late spring of 1679 through the spring of 1681, when Charles' dissolution of the third Exclusion Parliament at Oxford broke the power of his opponents and brought an end to the succession crisis. For example, during the spring 1679 elections, the first in which clergy could vote, it was noted that the nonconformists were becoming particularly active politically, and there were vague fears that Parliament would fall under the sway of dissenters (Knights 195-6). This nascent identification of religious and political opposition was only strengthened during the second general elections of 1679 (August and September), when Tory pamphleteers observed that non-conformists tended to back opposition candidates, and seemed to make a candidate's opposition a condition of their support. In his newsbook of July 6, 1679, the loyalist publisher Henry Muddiman observed uneasily of the dissenters' efforts that "No sooner were the writts sealed for calling of a new Parl[liament] than the busy Fanatic had put forth in Print his Directory of what manner of men they ought to be who are sent forth on that great work" (qtd. in Knights, 208). The result, as Knights notes, was that "religious division became much more evident in the election propaganda" (214)—and slowly the old polarities began to re-emerge: "*London's Choice [of Citizens, 1679]* remarked that for the loyalists the dispute was 'no longer [between] Papist and Protestant, but Fanaticks and Church of England Men'" (215). Nor did Tory propagandists fail to underscore other echoes of the 1640's crisis, namely the openly hostile political atmosphere and the opposition's cynical use of "crowd politics," particularly in London (Knights 223). The Opposition's petitioning campaign following Charles' immediate prorogation of Parliament when it met on October 1679 provided the Tories with further ammunition. Not only, as Knights observes, would petitioning "appear factional to a nation which 'naturally loves a parliamentary cure, but is jealous of other methods'"<sup>12</sup> (238), but it called to mind Parliament's militant pre-war

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<sup>12</sup> Knights quotes from the second volume of Gilbert Burnet's *History of My Own Time* (published

petitioning, particularly the Grand Remonstrance of 1641. In turn, this forceful reminder of the late strife made the petitioners' strong insistence upon exclusion seem not so much a safeguard of English Protestantism, but an invasion of the royal prerogative, an attempt to secure the power to remove the present king if it was deemed necessary, a turning against monarchy itself. And the loyalists were quick to point out that prominent in the petitioning campaign were many unrepentant Republicans. The author of *An Apostrophe from the Loyal Party* (1681), for instance, warned Charles that "those men by whom your Royal Father fell, and pursued you to Banishment . . . are the men, Sir, who strike so boldly at your crown" (qtd. in Knights, 240). Thus, says Knights, "Alongside the idea that the country was drifting towards civil war came the belief that the good old cause had been revived in terms of personnel as well as tactics and principles" (240). And we might emphasize here that through 1680 and into the early months of 1681 the increasingly explicit identification of the character and methods of the present Opposition with those of the Roundheads served more generally to associate the Whigs with a particular pattern of history now believed to be playing itself out inexorably. Sooner or later, dissent would become armed insurrection. As the writer of *A Letter to a Friend in the Country Touching the Present Fears* (early 1680) admonished his readers, "I desire you only to peruse the records of 40 and 41 and thereby you will plainly see their pretence to religion and reformation, and their intention to rebellion" (qtd. in Knights, 262). Nor did the Opposition's seemingly implacable aggression do anything to dispel such fears. Shaftesbury's extreme, single-minded pursuit of exclusion, Parliament's growing solidarity with a City that in July 1680 had elected a brace of radical Whig sheriffs,<sup>13</sup> "the

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posthumously, 1724-34) (249).

<sup>13</sup> Knights observes of one of the sheriffs, Slingsby Bethel, that "with his history of activity under the Commonwealth and abjuration of the Stuarts, symbolised the loyalists' greatest fears of a resurgent republican-dissenting alliance that would turn all to confusion" (272).

resolution of many addressers to support MPs [as opposed to their monarch] with their lives and fortunes” (Knights 302), and the arrival of the Whig MPs at the Oxford Parliament (March 1681) in the company of what Maurice Ashley describes as “armed bands” (149) (protection against the King’s troops positioned throughout the city) made it seem that “the struggle between Parliament and the King [had] resolved itself into an armed contest similar to that of the 1640s” (Knights 303). Indeed, by this point the identification of 1681 with 1641 was all but absolute. A *Seasonable Address to both Houses* (1681) “insisted that instead of running into popery and arbitrary government, the country was heading for presbytery and a commonwealth” (Knights 311), and in his reply to an Opposition pamphlet, *Vox Populi*, John Nalson described the tract provocatively as “merely a compendium of the trial of Charles I ‘beaten a little thinner,’” and concluded that “the poysonous dregs and lees of the late horrid and unnatural rebellion begin again to rise” (Knights 313).

“Once the loyalists could insist that the opposition aimed not at the security of the nation, but at the overthrow of monarchy and at rebellion,” Knights concludes, “they had effectively won the argument about the succession” (314). As Knights’s statement suggests, the propaganda contest between Whigs and Tories was as important in determining the outcome of the succession crisis as any amount of political maneuvering. One might even say that rhetorical supremacy made it possible for the Tories to gain and retain the upper hand politically, for what Knights says elsewhere of the struggle between the opposition petitioners and loyalist abhorers during the winter of 1679-1680 and the early months of 1681—that at root it was a struggle “to represent the national will” (280)—is true of the paper scuffle as a whole. Unless that national will could be plausibly articulated, it could never be made manifest. But we might observe further that to depict a collective sensibility, to portray the national interests and purpose, to set forth and enact ideological and bureaucratic agenda, the lay of the nation’s social, political, and (above all) historical topography must be made discernible and intelligible. For England to have had

any notion of what it was to be, it had first to understand what it now was, which became clear only by reflecting upon what it once had been. If, in the individual, memory is the active patterning of present according to prior experience, at the national level memory consists of the fashioning of an historical present, that is, of configuring the present moment according to and setting it against the familiar patterns of the past. In both cases, we tend to see what we have seen. I would not imply, however, that either the past or the present remains inert during this process. As the slow emergence and application of the Civil War figure in the Tory-Whig pamphlet war suggests, the ordering of experience is refluent as well as progressive: if our perception of the present is shaped by the past, our notion of the past is influenced by what we meet with in the present. Each configures the other. Thus, as it became recognized that the constitutional questions of Charles I's reign had resurfaced in the reign of Charles II, opposition and loyalist writers alike turned to historical precedent to explain what was unfolding before them and to foreshadow what the likely consequences would be; but in reconstructing the past from those select features that seemed to correspond to their current circumstances and anxieties, they gave it a particular shape that indentured it to the present. Ultimately at stake, then, in the pamphleteers' struggle to represent the national will are the precedents that could throw the historical present into clear, meaningful relief, and thereby yield up the materials from which national memory could be fashioned.

The struggle and stakes are the same for the Tory poets, and in the relevant works appearing from the fall of 1678 to the early winter of 1681 the articulation of the historical figure of the Civil War and application of this figure to the events of the Exclusion Crisis generally proceed much as it does in the pamphlets, tracts, and journalism of the period. An exposition of the terms of political debate gives way, via the resurrection of Puritan imagery, to an increasingly explicit, increasingly lurid identification of the current Whig Opposition with the regicides of 1649. The exigencies of poetic composition and (in the case of prologues and epilogues) dramatic presentation sometimes effected delays between

an event and its depiction in verse. However, what the medium exacted in immediacy it more than remitted in its peculiar appeal and strength as a political weapon, namely, the power of its sensual dimension to realize the past and to reify it in the present—an indispensable capacity if pertinent elements of the past are to be recovered and revived during this, the first phase of the poetic treatment to the events of 1678-1681 and their aftermath. Once articulated, the Civil War figure and its trappings would continue to be applied emphatically to the events of the succession crisis. Yet this very boldness, together with an ever-so-subtle shift in perspective from anticipation to retrospection, tells us that we have entered a second phase of poetic response, one in which the attempt is made to speak definitively about the recent past, to establish just what has happened and what it has meant. Accordingly, during this second phase the Civil War figure is employed, seemingly, not so much to incite as simply to confirm its viability as an operative cultural mnemonic, an objective largely achieved by its generally successful application to the significant partisan events of 1682-1683: the discovery of the Protestant Association, the battle over London's Charter, and the Whiggish Rye House Plot to assassinate Charles and James. This second phase is reinforced by a parallel, then succeeding third phase. In this final phase, a response to the reversal of political fortunes after the dissolution of the Oxford Parliament, the figure of the Civil War is extended to accommodate the ultimate historical outcome of the war and commonwealth years: the restoration of monarchy and the king. Reclaiming the language and imagery that had celebrated the return of Charles II, the loyalist poets cast the triumph of their party in analogous terms: with its King once more secure in his prerogative, England may now, as then, expect the blessings of a new Golden Age. Applied to the present reign and projected for the next, this attempt to give the future a familiar shape would make available to later poets—and particularly the next century's greatest public poet, Alexander Pope—a new or at least revitalized figure, the cycle of chaos and order, exile and restoration.

At the close of the epilogue to his play, *The Misery of Civil War* (December 1679 or January 1680), John Crowne seems unable to contain any longer his bewilderment at the religious and political strife that has maddened England, his fear that this strife will soon boil over into civil war. Better, he exhorts the audience, to lose your wealth at dice, your time at plays, and your health with “punks” (l. 38) than “by damn’d senseless bloody strifes, about / No one knows what, be trod on by the Rout, / Have your wealth plunder’d, and your brains beat out, / And dye like Jesuites to be thought devout” (ll. 39-42). We have no call to second-guess Crowne’s anxiety; given the events of the winter months of 1679-1680, it was well founded. Parliament had been prorogued in October, and by the following January the petitioning and abhorring campaigns had dramatically raised the political temperature in the capital; November had witnessed first a raucous display of radical Protestant militancy during the Queen Elizabeth’s Day celebrations,<sup>14</sup> then outraged Protestant demonstrations when their hero, the Duke of Monmouth, returning unbidden from his exile in Holland, was punished for his brazenness by being stripped of his offices; in December, MPs had indicted the Duchess of Portsmouth, Charles’ favorite mistress and an avowed Catholic, for plotting against the King, and had demanded her immediate deportation; and on the night of December 19 Dryden had been beaten in Rose Alley, possibly at the behest of Whigs upset by his characterization of the Opposition as libelous, factious rebels in his prologue to Nahum Tate’s tragedy, *The Loyal General* (1679).<sup>15</sup> All the same, it was rather late in the day to throw one’s hands up and declare the “bloody strifes” then roiling London to be about “no one knows what,” or to admonish the town, as Edward Ravenscroft would in his epilogue to William Whitaker’s *The Conspiracy* (March 1680), to “be mute till the whole truth comes out, / Not like the Rable that at Execution shout” (ll. 10-11). For the exposition of the issues over which the nation was becoming

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<sup>14</sup> Observed November 17, the day of her coronation.

<sup>15</sup> One of the explanations James Anderson Winn offers for the assault (325-329).



increasingly polarized had been going on for some time, and was even then proceeding with increasing urgency. Between the Whig and Tory controversialists in prose and poetry who, as J.R. Jones observes, had flooded the town with political propaganda during the fall 1679 elections (210) and the boisterousness of the petitioning and abhorring campaigns, it would have been very difficult to remain ignorant of the arguments about what was at stake in the debate over succession and the right of Parliament to meet.

The loyalist poets' exposition of the issue of succession and more generally of the new struggle between King and Parliament for political primacy had in fact been underway at least since the spring of 1679. In *The Character* (late January-early March 1679), for instance, the anonymous author of this portrait of the so-called Cavalier Parliament, which had been sitting since the Restoration and had been recently charged with investigating the Popish Plot, counters whispers that its dissolution on January 24, 1679, owed to the Court's attempt to hide its members' complicity in the conspiracy or to Charles' intent to impose arbitrary rule. If anything, he argues, the reverse is the case: "Had you been wise and giv'n the King a sum, / Thou might'st have had thy swinge at bloody Rome. / Finding no coin, we cannot find the Plot" (ll. 36-38). This self-spiting niggardliness, however, has done more than derail the inquiry into the Plot; it has exposed in Parliament a willfulness, a lust for absolute power that forced the King to dissolve it in self-defense. In effect, Parliament has dissolved itself by "Contending with the King, his laws and pow'r, / Entrenching on's prerogative each hour, / Flying in the face of his supremacy / With saucy privilege and liberty" (ll. 29-33). The author goes so far as to liken Parliament's attempts to "assume at once, and at one hour, / The royal office and the supreme pow'r" (ll. 55-56), to reduce the King and peers to mere "ciphers in the state," and to make the Commons the only "pow'rful figures of debate" (ll. 59-60) to the actions of "Great Hell's Long Parliament" (l. 44), which sat from November 1640 to March 1660 and made itself notorious by warring against Charles I, imposing a commonwealth, then acquiescing in Cromwell's assumption of the Protectorship. The poet does not scruple to invoke the

spectre of that “black rebellion” (l. 45), hint at the recent Parliament’s potentially regicidal blood-thirstiness—“Danby’s the *first* shall to the *slaughter* go” (l. 57; emphasis added)<sup>16</sup>—and conclude emphatically that, like its infamous predecessor, “The House of Commons is the rabble’s god, / The courtier’s scourge, the bishops’ iron rod, / The Lords’ vexation, and the King’s, by God!” (ll.100-102). If, however, the poet claims to take the words “parliament” and “traitor” for equivalents (ll. 61-62), his extended revisitation of the topic of the late Parliament’s denial of money to the King (ll. 62ff), and his obvious pleasure in scolding the body at length (ll. 86-99) for behaving like “senseless stones and stocks. / Flying at each other like to dogs and cocks; / To satisfy your pride” (ll. 89-91), show that despite the intensity of his exasperation he here evokes the Long Parliament and its denizens more to serve an immediate rhetorical end than to establish an *essential* antipathy between the MPs and the Crown. Nonetheless, appearing when it does, the analogy is remarkable in its anticipation of the use loyalist poets would make of the Long Parliament once succession had emerged as a specific central issue—as it would in a few short weeks, when the Commons of the next Parliament, overwhelmingly Whig, would pass the first Exclusion Bill.<sup>17</sup>

By the fall of 1679, loyalist poets, true to the mission of the public mode of poetry, had expressly joined the debate over exclusion and were busy explicating its essential constitutional significance to their reading and playhouse audiences. The “cheap laurels” (Kenyon 230) the Duke of Monmouth had earned in putting down a minor Scottish rebellion in June had made him a Protestant hero, and soon the Opposition was promoting him as a plausible rival to the Catholic James for the throne. The author of “A Ballad Called Perkin’s Figary,” however, will have none of it: “We English will ever be just to the

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<sup>16</sup> In December 1678 Parliament had voted to impeach Lord High Treasurer Thomas Osborne, Earl of Danby for financial mismanagement and for secretly negotiating with Catholic France.

<sup>17</sup> The first Exclusion Parliament met on March 6, passed a bill excluding James from the succession May 22, was prorogued May 27, and finally dissolved July 12.

crown, / No bastard succession with us shall go down” (ll. 48-49). His indignation at the thought even leads him to ascribe the Popish Plot to the cynical machinations of Monmouth’s handlers: “Though plot upon plot / Has kept our brains hot, / Yet the cheat’s now discover’d, ’twill serve thy turn not” (ll. 50-52). Aphra Behn takes a more oblique, but no less effective tack in presenting the loyalist position on succession and hereditary right in her epilogue to *The Young King; or, The Mistake* (September 1679), a piece provoked by James’s second flight into exile under Whig pressure.<sup>18</sup> After a play “of mighty Pains” (l. 1), the audience is offered by way of antidote a sketch of an idyllic pastoral world which knows “no dispute for Empire” (l. 15), no “Rivals . . . for Crowns” (l. 18), “no sedition hatcht, no other Plots” (l. 32). Rather, “the humble Swain his Birthright here enjoys, / And fears no danger from the publick Voyce” (ll. 16-17); here he will meet with “No wrong nor insolence from busie Powers” (l. 18); and from hence the swain will not be “forc’d by Arbitrary Votes to fly / To forein Shores for his security” (ll. 22-23). By conflating the just claims of crown prince and cottager, Behn shrewdly turns against the Whigs their own frequent assertion that an arbitrary government under James would effectively void the subject’s proprietary rights. It would indeed be wrong, Behn implies, for an excited mob, or a malicious conspiracy, or the threat of violence to deprive a “humble Swain” of what is his by right of birth; but surely that same right of inheritance prevents the seizure via “Arbitrary Votes” of the lands, powers, and crown that are the birthright of a prince. Deny this right in James, and one denies it in the subject. But there is more at stake in this than rights in property and title. When, in his prologue to *The Conspiracy*, Whitaker advises the “Men of Business in the Nation” (l. 17), “Leave your provoking Caesar and his frowns, / Leave crossing Birth-rights and disposing Crowns” (ll.

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<sup>18</sup> James had first been forced into exile in March. He was recalled when Charles suddenly fell ill in late August, returning September 2, but was asked to leave again near the end of the month. He went first to the Low Countries, then, in October, to Scotland, where he served as High Commissioner until March 1682.

27-28), he intimates, as does Behn here, that the people's presumption to interrupt or emend at will the established line of succession—to award or reclaim the crown as it suits them—is nothing less than the obviation of divine right and the subordination of King to subject. It is revolution—a point reinforced by loyalist playwrights in drawing their favorite analogies of poet and king, audience and populace. In his prologue to *The Loving Enemies* (January 1680), for instance, Lewis Maidwell has the poet's perennial butts, the fop and clown, petition against satire and “bold truth” (l. 19), the former's supposed instruments of “arbitrary Government” (l. 24). Should the dramatist appropriate folly and knavery for his own use, they reason, “we lose our property” (l. 22), and so they resolve to “pound the Poet up in small extent” (l. 23) to “make him leave his best prerogative” (l. 34). Under threat of violence, the playwright's only recourse is to emasculate his artistic sovereignty, his ethical authority: “So the poor Beaver lest he prove a prey, / Bites off his dearest part, and throws away” (ll. 35-36). The analogy is pursued more thoroughly in Behn's epilogue to *The Second Part of the Rover* (January 1681). “Poets are Kings of Wit,” the speaker (Elizabeth Barry) tells the audience, “and you appear / A Parliament, by Play-Bill, summon'd here” (ll. 1-2). The “scanted Tribute” of the play-goer parliament, however, has been so grudgingly and “so slowly paid” (l. 6), that the poets have been forced to “[part] with their prerogatives: / Their Birth-right Satyring, and their just pretence / Of judging, even their own Wit and Sense” (ll. 9-11). Yet, though they have “flatter'd all the Mutineers i' th' Nation” (l. 14) and “pleas'd your sick Palats with Fantastick Wit” (l. 16), the audience will “come but once, unless by stealth. / Except the Author be for Commonwealth” (ll. 22-23). No wonder, then, that “the King of Poets” and “His Peers secur'd beneath his Laurels Shade” (ll. 43-44) have been “Driven to the last and worst Extremity” (l. 46). The public's encroachment upon the royal prerogative does not merely inconvenience the King (whether of poetry or the realm); forcing him to cast away “his dearest part,” it renders him a nullity, and at last drives him and the institution of monarchy to their respective “last and worst extremities”: death and obsolescence.

Note that when Behn declares that the playhouse “Parliament” will hardly endure a play unless *its author* “be for Commonwealth,” her metaphorical conceit at once becomes an assertion of political divisions in the real world. The spheres of imagination and actuality are thus collapsed, as, for their part, are the motive, agency, and aim of the Opposition. Here the challenge to the poet’s sovereign authority or prerogative comes from a figurative Parliament of spectators whose supposed bias toward playwrights predisposed toward the establishment of a literal Commonwealth suggests that in the political theatre beyond the playhouse walls the reduction of royal prerogative is not simply a consequence or by-product of the Opposition’s programme of exclusion, but in fact a premeditated means toward its ultimate end: representative government. This specific identification of the institution of Parliament with the political Opposition imposes not merely a doctrinal but a constitutional dimension upon the immediate controversy over James’s fitness for the throne and Charles’ staunch support for his brother: either the Crown or Commons will emerge the prime political power in England. Such an identification and the absolute, essentialist terms in which it was increasingly cast had begun to emerge about a year earlier, in response to the petitioning campaign by which the Opposition attempted to pressure Charles to allow the Parliament elected the previous October to sit. In *The Wiltshire Ballad* (February 1680), for instance, the anonymous author warns his readers that despite their protestations that it is “a thing / Which only can preserve the King” (ll. 18-19), those gathering signatures to demand that “the House may sit” (l. 18) know full well that “nothing / destroys him more, for should he give / Consent he’d never that retrieve / But part with his prerogative, / A low thing / Make himself by’t, the rabble get into his high imperial seat” (ll. 20-26). Indeed, Parliament’s supporters secretly “long to see / A monarch in effigie” (ll. 33-34); they aspire “at the helm . . . to sit, / There govern without fear or wit, / King or unking when they think fit” (ll. 37-39). And this the people would indeed be able to do if once they gained at the monarch’s expense the “pow’r to call / Parliaments and dissolve them,” for then they would “all / Regalia possess” (ll. 65-67); that

is, their authority would have supplanted the King's, making them effectively absolute in his stead. The prospect naturally appalls the ballad's hero, loyalist musician and composer Michael Wise; resisting the petitioners' siren song, he offers them instead a loyal madrigal "fetch't from Forty-One withal" (l. 95) and, to complete their consternation, a defiant toast: "We'll leave the rule unto the King, / Pray for his health, a loyal thing. / Let great Charles rule! who won't this sing / 's lunatic" (ll. 117-120).

The identification of Parliament with the Opposition and the characterization of its conflict with the King as winner-take-all would become more emphatic in the coming months, as when it is taken up by Wentworth Dillon, Earl of Roscommon, in *The Ghost of the Old House of Commons to the New One Appointed to Meet at Oxford* (February 1681). Between the appearance of *The Wiltshire Ballad* and Dillon's poem, the Parliament elected in October 1679, having been prorogued seven times in succession, had at last been allowed to sit the following October. Before it was prorogued again and finally dissolved in late January 1681, it had prosecuted those who had organized abhorring campaigns to counter the petitioners; had caused Sir Roger L'Estrange, the Tories' premier pamphleteer, to flee to Scotland lest he be prosecuted for being a papist (October); had presided over the trial and execution of William Howard, Viscount Stafford, who had been implicated in the Popish Plot by the false testimony of Titus Oates (December); and had passed the Second Exclusion Bill (November 11; rejected by the Lords November 15). During the first weeks of January 1681, Parliament had responded to Charles' expressed resolution never to consent to exclusion with their own ultimatum: "They warned [the King] that no supply would be voted until Exclusion had passed, and on 10 January, having notice of an imminent prorogation, they passed a series of intransigent resolutions to show that they accepted the king's challenge, and were ready for a final, all-out offensive in new elections" (212-213). This is the Commons personified in Dillon's poem, dragging itself from "deepest dungeons of eternal night, / The seats of horror, sorrow, pains and spite" (ll. 1-2) to warn its successor not to repeat its mistakes. The ghost confesses that it had tried to

thwart, then eclipse the power of the monarch: “The busy subtle serpents of the law / Did first my mind from true obedience draw; / While I did limits to the King prescribe, / And took for oracles that canting tribe” (ll. 17-20). Admitting that it “grew seditious for variety” (l. 22), the spectre goes on to describe its favorite tactics and agents. As it vindictively persecuted those loyal to the King—“All that oppos’d me were to be accus’d, / And by the laws illegally abus’d” (ll. 23-24)—it exploited the fears raised by the Popish Plot, putting itself forward as the champion of true Protestantism even as it pursued its real objective of striking at the monarch’s supreme authority: “But while the Triple Mitre [i.e. the Catholic Church] bore the blame, / The King’s three crowns were their rebellious aim” (ll. 37-38). And though it made a great show of professing “to fear the Guards” (l. 39), that is, to declare that the King was about to raise a standing army to make war upon the Parliament and its members, the legislature was all the while enlisting its own ruffians—“the Bethels and the Wards:<sup>19</sup> / Anti-monarchic heretics of state, / Immoral atheists, rich and reprobate” (ll. 39-42)—and would-be despots, the “little guide” (l. 43) Shaftesbury preëminent among them: “None knew so well the old pernicious way / To ruin subjects, and make kings obey; / And my small Jesu, at a furious rate, / Was driving Eighty back to Forty-Eight” (ll.45-48). Royalist allusions to the Long Parliament are always rhetorically potent, as we saw in *The Character*; but here, with nearly two years’ worth of intense, usually bitter constitutional wrangling in the immediate background, the conflation at last has a real chance of success, of characterizing the late Parliament as sufficiently militant to depose and kill its sovereign. To draw the analogy now, in February 1681, on the eve of Parliament’s sitting at Oxford, when tensions are so high that, as noted above, loyalist and opposition MPs would arrive in the city in the company of armed retinues, is to insinuate

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<sup>19</sup> Slingsby Bethel (1617-1697), whom Noyes describes as “a consistent republican” (961n), was, with Henry Cornish, elected sheriff of London in July 1680; “Sir Patience Ward (1629-1696) was Lord Mayor of London in 1680. In his election speech he strongly maintained Protestant principles. He sided with the opposition, and directed the ultra-Protestantism of the City” (Mengel, 409n).

unmistakably that the showdown between King and Commons has become very literally a life-and-death struggle.

For analogies between the present circumstances and the Long Parliament, Civil War, and Commonwealth to achieve their greatest possible impact, however, one final element must be incorporated. We find that element in “The Parliament Dissolved at Oxford” (May 1681), a poem commemorating, as its title suggests, Charles’ dissolution of the Oxford Parliament (March 28), but also his subsequent vindication of this move in *His Majesty’s Declaration to All His Loving Subjects Touching the Causes and Reasons That Moved Him to Dissolve the Two Last Parliaments*, issued April 8. As one would expect in a piece taking its cue from an official account of the recent struggle and its significance (and in which Charles himself is the putative speaker), “Parliament Dissolved” neatly encapsulates what we have seen to this point: the exposition of succession as the central issue separating the Administration and its political opposition; the absolute identification of Parliament with that Opposition; and the supposition that the present contest between the institutions of monarchy and parliament would leave England either an absolutist or a republican state. The first nine lines, for instance, offer perhaps the most concise, forceful rationale of rule by divine right we have yet encountered, while clearly defining the threat posed to it by the popular voice as embodied in the House of Commons:

Under 500 kings three kingdoms groan:  
 Go Finch,<sup>20</sup> dissolve them, Charles is in the throne  
 And by the grace of God will reign alone  
     What would the Commons have? The royal line  
 Heav’n does dispose of: ’Tis not theirs nor mine,  
 But His by whom kings rule and are divine.  
     I represent the King of Kings, who gave  
 The crown, the sword, the scepter, what I have;  
 I am God’s servant, not the people’s slave (ll. 1-9).

From this, the patriarchalist perspective, the designs of Parliament’s “500 kings” upon

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<sup>20</sup> Lord Chancellor Heneage Finch.



Charles' authority are at best simply moot. Charles is king "by the grace of God": it is the manifest will of Heaven that Charles wear the crown, wield the sword, uphold the scepter, and, as a representative of "the King of Kings," enjoy a sovereignty as absolute and unquestioned in its sphere as that God holds over Creation itself. Thus it is to God alone that he must answer, though as "the people's father" (l. 28) he must promote and maintain the well-being of his subjects. This he does largely by ensuring their recourse to justice, ruling according to law instead of by fiat. As "Parliament Dissolved" would have it, however, Charles does not merely "govern only by the laws" (l. 23), he is the law's very embodiment: "For where Charles commands there must justice reign" (l. 27). To stand against the king, therefore, to dispute or encroach upon his power, or to disobey him outright is to place oneself outside both temporal and divine law. The implication here is that by their fractiousness, by setting themselves above the law (ll. 25-26), and by putting unlawful proposals (for exclusion, that is) before the King (ll. 31-33), the recently dissolved opposition Parliaments made themselves extra-legal entities. And worse: "When the people's father does espouse the law," Charles declares, "All those [who] subjects from their duty draw / Do viper-like through the parent's bosom gnaw" (ll. 28-30). Putting itself in opposition to the King, Parliament has pursued a course tending not only toward treason, but toward parricide as well.

Now for the all-important "final element" that would allow (and in fact was allowing) the Civil War figure to be fully articulated and effectively applied to the historical present: the identification of religious with political dissent. With the greatest complacency, as if by reflex or instinct, as if the point were too self-evident to admit of explanation or defense, the Charles of the poem (unlike the actual Charles in *His Majesty's Declaration*) ascribes the late Parliament's "frantic votes and mad resolves" (l. 10) to the efforts of *Presbyterians*, thereby collapsing into a single highly familiar, readily recognizable, and widely detested group the Opposition, the Commons, and the nonconformists. "The Presbyterians, sick of too much freedom, / Are," he declares, "ripe for Bethle'm. It's high

time to bleed 'em: / The second Charles does neither fear nor need 'em" (ll. 16-18). It is, we are left to suppose, a sign of his exceeding clemency that instead of "bleeding them" he chooses instead merely to "dissipate / These impolitic mushrooms of our state" (l. 19-20), an earlier crop of which proved sufficiently toxic to the *first* Charles. But if the king's mindfulness of his father's fate makes his present restraint somewhat surprising, his matter-of-fact indictment of Protestant dissenters is not at all puzzling. Indeed, given the loyalist poets' resurrection of Puritan imagery since the petitioning campaign of the previous year, the growing hostility of this imagery, and the increasing association of Puritanism with Whiggism, we could hardly expect any other inference to be drawn. It was, after all, an inference then being drawn throughout England, an inference whose promotion at large via these steps would prove to be quite possibly the shrewdest rhetorical move the Tory poets could have made.

We should note for the purpose of contrast that at the outset of unrest in 1678 and for some time afterward, the Opposition was generally not treated and characterized as a group; instead, poets loyal to the Court tended to attack its major leaders singly, caricaturing them as their individual personalities and careers allowed. These caricatures proved fairly stable, and would become almost proverbial. The Torys' depiction of Shaftesbury, for instance, may be guessed from the title of John Caryll's "The Hypocrite" (late fall 1678). "Plain band and hair and clothes disguise the man," Caryll observes, "All but his dealing and his heart is plain" (ll. 15-16). Responding to the earl's aggressive anti-Catholic posturing in the months immediately after Oates's revelations, Caryll accuses Shaftesbury, "this floating mercury of sin" (l. 10), of pursuing self-interest in the guise of public service, exploiting Protestant fears of "Pop'ry's growth" (l. 27) to build a constituency and fuel his no doubt dangerous political ambitions. For religion, says Caryll, is ever the pretext "when great men fall, or pop'lar men would rise" (l. 44): "Then, like Achilles in his fate-proof arms, / They boldly march, guided with holy charms, / And brow-beat Caesar, and defy his laws— / Who dare resist the champion of God's cause?"

(ll. 47-49).<sup>21</sup> The Duke of Buckingham, for his part, is typically pilloried as a debauched egomaniac, a noxious if pathetic figure. In "The Litany of the Duke of Buckingham," a broadside published in early 1680, the duke is taxed with leading "a sensual, proud, atheistical life" (l.1), his desperate, thoroughly dissipated existence consisting of little more than wild prodigality and fruitless political scheming. Cheated still "by th' same undertakers, / . . . Levellers, bawds, saints, chemists and Quakers" (ll. 28-29), Buckingham's aim of "reform[ing] kingdoms as a sanctifi'd peer" (l. 15), of being "made ducal peer of a new commonwealth" (l. 51), can never, given his violence, volatility, and vulgarity, be more than a cheat upon himself. He may well have hoped "to be made the citizen's gem" (l. 44), yet as *The Cabal* (February 1680) tells it, "rather than not be popular," he has chosen to "be base" (l. 91); courting the rabble, he has only made himself "the City's cully": "The City's minion, now their scorn and sport, / There more despis'd than once ador'd at Court" (ll. 80-81). Having "lost himself in infamy," he can do little more now than expose his impotence to the world, "Revile the state and rail at monarchy" (ll. 84-85). If the Duke of Monmouth escapes the labels of hypocrite, plotter, and traitor, it is largely because Tory writers portrayed him as too stupid to be capable of such offenses. "He aims at a crown for his noddle unfit / As Howe<sup>22</sup> for a duchess, or he for a wit." Or so

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<sup>21</sup> *Saryr Unmuzzled* (1680) likewise portrays Shaftesbury as a shameless opportunist, a ruthless engineer of treason, casting him as an Achitophel nearly two years before Dryden would do so. Here as in Dryden's better-known poem, Shaftesbury is a demonic arch-tempter of the hapless young Monmouth: "Thou weak Achitophel, to undertake / By thy wise counsels a false king to make!" (ll. 93-94). Shaftesbury is likened to Cataline rather than Achitophel in *The Cabal* (February 1680), but his supposed hypocrisy, duplicity, and treachery are still the targets of the poet's attack. "'Tis strange," the poet wonders, "that human wisdom ever should / Err most under pretense of doing good" (ll. 43-44); but then, possessed of a "double heart" (l. 58), as shifting as a "weather-cock" (l. 54), Shaftesbury lacks the moral and ethical wherewithal to serve anything but his own self-interest. Thus "at the Council table" (l. 62) he rails "'Gainst Charles and the succession" (l. 63): "Like a vile sculler he abjures the realm, / And sinks the bark 'cause he's not chief at helm" (ll. 65-66). Let him, the poet advises, retire among the rabble and there dwell in "his own element" (l. 74): "There let him plot, and ne'r behold the sun, / Till he has through all seas of folly run, / Under pretext of wit to be undone" (ll. 75-77).

<sup>22</sup> "John Grubham Howe or How (1657-1722), commonly known as 'Jack Howe,' a politician. In 1679 he brought an accusation against the Duchess of Richmond, which on investigation proved to be false, and he was forbidden to attend the Court" (Mengel 123n.)

claims “Perkin’s Figary”<sup>23</sup> (ll. 11-12), later asserting that the noddle in question is indeed quite “empty” (l. 24). And *Rochester’s Farewell* (c. summer 1680) commends Monmouth’s bravery at the siege of Maestricht (1673), only to observe,

He with that thick impenetrable skull  
 (The solid harden’d armor of a fool)  
 Well might himself to all war’s ills expose  
 Who (come what will) yet had no brains to lose.  
 Yet this is he, the dull unthinking he,  
 Who must (forsooth) our future monarch be (ll. 76-81)

As for Monmouth’s many handlers, Sir Thomas Player, Sir Robert Peyton, Francis Jenks, Sir Thomas Armstrong, James Vernon, and Thomas Ross among them, they are but a “pack of senseless rascals” (l. 85), much of a kind with their protégé. Of such men, sneers the author of *The Cabal*, are the ranks of the Opposition comprised. These are the self-styled guardians of Protestantism, the self-professed champions of Constitution and Country; these, the poet concludes sardonically, “are the men that all the bustle make, / And empire check merely for empire’s sake” (ll. 162-163).

Yet it would take more than charges of opportunism, knavery, and dullness to turn the public against political opposition. If such charges are not potent enough to rouse public indignation sufficiently, neither are they capable of harnessing the power of public memory and bringing it to bear upon the present circumstances. Is Shaftesbury ambitious? Buckingham profligate? Monmouth obtuse? To label them so is to specify narrowly the flaw within the man and, rhetorically at least, thereby circumscribe the power of the man himself to do harm. As events would demonstrate, it was only when the Opposition, melted down into a faceless amorphous entity, came to be associated with the nation’s most visceral hatreds and fears, identified with its worst collective nightmare, and fitted with the fright-mask of those anxieties that its spectre could be raised to evoke true dread in the

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<sup>23</sup> Tradition has it that Nell Gwyn gave Monmouth the nickname Perkin, from Perkin Warbeck (c. 1474-99), a Fleming who from 1490 claimed to be Richard, Duke of York, the younger son of Edward IV, and therefore the rightful king of England. In 1498 he attempted to take “his” throne by force; he was taken prisoner and hanged the following year.

English soul. The summoning of this apparition—the historical figure of the Civil War—is completed, as I have hinted in the paragraph before last, with the revival of Puritan imagery, a development as requisite for the subsequent conflation of religious and political dissent in Tory propaganda as it was inevitable, for, as we saw in the first section of this chapter, to no other group did the associations of rebellion and regicide attach themselves so essentially.

Though in “The Hypocrite” Shaftesbury is likened to “a stark Quaker” (l. 20), Buckingham linked to the self-elected saints in “The Litany,” and Monmouth made the darling of the proverbial “Presbyter John and his fanatic crew” in “Perkin’s Figary” (l. 30), properly speaking, the revival of Puritan imagery begins in the early months of 1680 (finally running its course in the late fall of 1681). Perhaps the timing is owing to the petitioning and abhorring campaigns, when highflown passions may have induced loyalist writers to reach for the next logical rhetorical weapon; or to renewed Tory confidence during what Knights calls 1680’s “loyalist spring” (261), when the failure of petitioning had become clear. Perhaps the exposition of the current institutional struggle between King and Parliament, combined with the perception that nonconformists were becoming increasingly involved in the Opposition, suggested to Tory writers that once again radical Protestants were the cause of the nation’s intestinal broils. Whatever the case, the revival of depictions of the Puritan physique, character, agenda, and constituency dates from this period, and, with some notable exceptions, is carried out mainly in dramatic prologues and epilogues, the theatrical venue itself playing an important role in the successful reintroduction of the cultural archetype into the national psyche.

The resurgence begins by reacquainting audiences with comparatively benign stereotypes relating to Puritan appearance, religious mannerisms, and moral hypocrisy. In its evocation of the “Phanatic Knave” (l. 18), for example, Nathaniel Lee’s prologue to *Theodosius; or, The Force of Love* (September 1680 or earlier) bids those assembled to call to mind the Roundhead’s characteristic “short hair, large Ears, and small blue Band” (l.

17). Puritan affectations and pretensions are, however, more frequently held up for ridicule. In Thomas Otway's epilogue to *The Orphan; or, The Unhappy Marriage* (late February 1680), the actress who had played Serena wonders what would become of her if she, like Monimia, the tragic title character, should be left an orphan. She could, she supposes, "Quit the lewd Stage, and its prophane pollution" (l. 9), seek out "the Godly," and "go a Conventicling twice a Week" (ll. 7-8), for like them she could "Affect each Form and Saint-like Institution, / [and] So draw the Brethren all to Contribution" (ll. 10-11). Taking it for granted that she can impose upon "the Godly" by feigning moral indignation at the stage's lewdness and profanity, appearing at their meetings twice weekly, and adopting a pious demeanor, the Epilogue implies that the brethren's devoutness is after all no more than the careful observance of "form" and "institution" (or ritual). Moreover, if by such behavior she can "draw the Brethren all to Contribution," the godliness they themselves affect is by implication nothing but a shift to profit from hypocrisy. Piety for pay is spiritual prostitution—and indeed the hint here is that the brethren's reward of her sanctity is only the remittance of her keeping fee. Otway again draws attention to the very earthy appetites of the godly in his (attributed) "Epilogue at the Theatre in Drury-Lane" (1680). Lamenting the ill luck that has befallen modern lovers, the speaker there observes that soon female "Toyes will not be had for Love nor Money" (l. 28); instead, "The Brethren will monopolize the Game, / And th' ablest Holder-forth shall win the Dame. / They will not whore according to the Letter, / But in a Corner mumble Sister better" (ll. 29-32). Inspired oratory, it seems, feeds the body no less than the soul. Lee is more explicit in the prologue to *Theodosius*. Describing a godly brother's preferred method of seduction, the speaker relates that he first fortifies himself with "Possets and Christian Caudles" (l. 24), then with "groans, and hums, and ha's, and gogling eyes" (l. 27) he exhorts "each Female Saint" (l. 26) "To rub him down, and make the Spirit rise" (l. 28); at last, "with his zeal transported, from the ground / He mounts, and sanctifies the Sisters round" (ll. 29-30). But if here the guise of holiness disguises (or even excuses) the basest sensual

appetites, an equally false pretense to ecclesiastical independence is belied by a cynical pursuit of material self-interest. Does the godly brother refuse “the wealthiest Livings,” “the fattest Bishopricks” (ll. 19-20)? He does so not because he cannot reconcile himself to the trappings of a corrupt Church or to the trappings of this world, but because he has found far more profitable “ways of getting” (l. 17). And so, as Otway reminds his audience, undercutting another Puritan tenet in the process, the short-haired, big-eared, blue-banded crew “True Rogues, their own, not Gods Elect, command” (l. 22).

This stage in the reintroduction of Puritan imagery gives way to a second, somewhat more pugnacious one in which the dissenters’ increased involvement in political affairs is attacked. Nahum Tate observes wryly in his prologue to *The History of King Lear* (c. New Year 1680/1), that now more than ever the stage must undertake the task of moral instruction, “must take the Churches Teaching Trade, / Since Priests their Province of Intrigue invade; / But We the worst in this Exchange have got, / In vain our Poets Preach, whilst Church-men Plot” (ll. 21-24). This reversal of social roles involves more than dilettantism or even patriotic fervor on the part of the dissenting clergy, a point Behn drives home in her prologue to *The Second Part of The Rover* (January 1681). There she identifies the “Disease o’ th’ Age” (l. 2) with the “Pest” (l. 3) now epidemic among “the pious Mobily” (7), that “*Of not being quiet when they’r Well, / That restless Feaver, in the Brethren Zeal: / In publick Spirits call’d, Good o’ th’ Commonweal*” (ll. 3-5). Their restlessness is not so feverish as to lack method and aim, however; the Prologue notes that in presenting a sequel to a popular play, the playwright now does “as all new Zealots do,” and because “the first Project took, is now so vain, / To Attempt to play the old Game o’re again” (ll. 10; 12-13). Passing off “old Politics for new and strange” (l. 17), these statesmen impose upon “the unthinking Crowd” (l. 19), upon the rabble, “those powerful things, / Whose voices can impose even Laws on Kings (ll. 20-21). Yet, unlike “the dull State-Cullies of the Pit, / Who have much Money, and but little Wit” (ll. 29-30), the poet is not deceived by what she sees and what is shown her. She discerns in the raucous muddle

of contemporary politics “the old Game” playing itself out again, sees the “new Zealots” using the same specious agitprop as their forbears to exhort the same mobs to an antimonarchical fervor that, presumably, the same ends may be revisited: the King deposed and a theocratic commonwealth established. The author of the epilogue to the anonymous *Mr. Turbulent; or, The Melanchollicks* (October 1681) likewise declaims against the “*Fanaticks of this Age, / Who trouble both the Church, the State and Stage*” (ll. 13-14), against the “*Lay and Frantick Widgeon[s], / Who coble, botch, patch, and translate Religion*” (ll. 19-20)—and by way of counteracting crowd politics proposes that good use be made of Bedlam, that “*Blessed Hospital*” (l. 9): “*Send thither,*” he suggests, all “*Who leave their Awles, their Needles, Hammers, Shears<sup>24</sup> / To meddle with, and prate of State Affairs*” (ll. 19; 21-22).

Having revived Puritan stereotypes and inveighed against the nonconformists’ participation in politics, the loyalist poets’ next step, logically enough, is to conflate the Crown’s political and religious opponents, or, more specifically, to identify the Whigs of the present day with the radical Protestant regicides of 1649.<sup>25</sup> This identification intensifies

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<sup>24</sup> Accompanying the resurrection of imagery narrowly evocative of militant Puritanism is a resurgence of imagery depicting the Roundheads’ popular constituency. Here the mention of awls, needles, hammers, and shears implicates tradesmen and laborers of the lowest order. An earlier poem, *The Essex Ballad* (April 1680) has the Presbyterian signers of the Essex petition seconded by the likes of milkmaids, “*butchers, tinkers, ostlers . . . / Tapsters and broom-men all a-row*” (ll. 85-86), “*carters, Scotch-cloth men, / Taps, sieves, chairs, and cony-skin, / Beggars and boys all throng’d, and then / Egyptians*” (ll. 88-91). Stanza 12 of *A Ballad Upon the Duke of Monmouth’s Reception [at Oxford]* (September 1680) has an “*ale-inspir’d bargeman*” boast that in a fortnight Monmouth will be “*Jemmy the Second*” (l. 125). Upon which the balladeer reflects ironically, “*Now it was a sad thing / Thus to King our poor King / When he was well as e’er he had been. / But alas! we must pardon the heat of his zeal, / Thus doubly inflam’d with religion and ale*” (ll. 126-130).

<sup>25</sup> The loyalists’ presupposition of the connection was no doubt aided by the curious etymology of the term “Whig.” As a political term, “whig” was the loyalists’ answer to the Opposition’s “tory,” a derisory name derived, according to *The Wordsworth Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, from the Irish *toiridhe* or *toruide*, “a pursuer, plunderer”: “The name applied to the 17th century Irish Roman Catholic outlaws and bandits who harassed the English in Ireland. In the reign of Charles II, the name came to be applied as an abusive term to the supporters of the Crown and its prerogatives at the time of the struggle over the Exclusion Bills” (1093). “Whig” (from *whiggamore*) had rustic as well as criminal associations. A Scottish word, it referred to the concoction of water and sour milk poverty had made a staple of the poor, and perhaps because of this came to denote “a yokel, country bumpkin” (OED). At some point it came to be “applied to Scottish cattle rustlers and horse thieves” (*Phrase and Fable*, 1150), and the word’s connotation of poor, outlandish scoundrels seems to be the immediate inspiration



during the fall of 1681. In his epilogue to *The London Cuckolds* (October 1681), Edward Ravenscroft makes no distinction between Cit, Whig, and Conventicler. Affecting wonder at the poet's arraignment of "the noble City" (l. 13) for its cuckoldry, he protests that surely "There are many Honest Loyal Witty, / And be it spoke to their eternal Glory's, / There's not one Cuckold amongst all the Tory's" (ll. 14-16). Then, directing his gaze at select groups in the audience, he reflects that the "Cloven Foreheads" he sees must belong exclusively to the Whigs, "who send / Their Wives a Bulling to their *Morefields* friend. / The Doctrine put into 'em does so tickle / They'r pleas'd with nothing like a *Conventicle*" (21-24). A bold, crude taunt, but one that "you, the Bully's of a Commonwealth," fully deserve for "breaking Windows for a Loyal Health" (ll. 19-20): betrayers of the King, they are well repaid by the exposure of their wives' infidelity with their religious co-conspirators. The speaker of the prologue to Thomas Durfey's *Sir Barnaby Whigg; or, No Wit Like a Womans* (late October or November 1681) also addresses the audience directly, and like the Epilogue for *The London Cuckolds* confronts certain of his listeners with their complicity in perpetuating "the follies of this Plotting Age" (l. 2):

When shall we see an Audience in the Pit,  
Not sway'd by Factions, that will silent sit,  
And friends to th' Poet, calmly judge his Wit?  
Or when a Noble, Royal Party view,  
That dare to mighty *Caesar* give his due,  
Spite of the Numerous, Buzzing Crop-ear'd Crew?" (ll. 7-12)

It is a commonplace of the period that a faction is always the group to which one's political opponents belong. Here, as we have seen in other prologues and epilogues, a loyalist poet characterizes as factional those who hector Tory dramatists and chafe at plays that show monarchy or the King in a good light. But note that Durfey takes the further step of

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of the party nickname. However, as reported by the OED, "whig" had also a quite independent and highly specific historical application of "an adherent of the Presbyterian cause in Scotland in the seventeenth century; applied originally to the Covenanters in the West of Scotland who in 1648 wrested the government from the Royalist party and marched as rebels to Edinburgh." Owing to its revival by loyalist writers during the Exclusion Crisis, by 1682 "whig" had become synonymous with "rebel."

ascribing the existence and maintenance of faction to the militancy of the “buzzing, crop-eared crew.” If “Like *Lunatics* ye roar and range about; / Frame Plots, then crack your brains to find ’em out; / Like *Oliver’s* Porter, but not so devout” (ll. 17-19), it is because the audience—much like the mob in Behn’s prologue to *The Second Part of The Rover*—has been duped and intimidated by the religious zealots whose machinations have made the town “frantick” (l. 15) and “a very *Bedlam*” (l. 16):

*Brumicham*-Protestants,<sup>26</sup> that rail and grieve ye,  
With names of *Masquerader* and *Tantivy*:  
That, Plagu’d with natural and subtil fears,  
Think all the Loyal Party Dogs and Bears,  
Run mad with Pious Zeal for th’ good o’ th’ Nation,  
And how to fix a godly Reformation (ll. 22-27).

It would be entirely understandable had the audience thought itself suddenly transported back in time a full four decades, for concentrated in these few lines are the staples of prewar anti-Puritan propaganda. The “natural and subtil fears” ascribed to the “*Brumicham-Protestants*” recalls the tag-phrase “jealousies and fears,” closely associated with the Dissenters before the war. The phrase, as we saw in the *Three Speeches of Antibrownist Puritanomastix* (1642), was then emblematic of the Puritans’ largely self-imposed misgivings about the designs of the government against them, misgivings that would prove self-fulfilling as the disaffection, sedition, and armed resistance they were used to justify at last brought about the open warfare that seemed their only resolution. In the designation of their opponents, “the Loyal Party,” as “Dogs and Bears” we see another of the Puritans’ justifications for rebellion: since they themselves were the Elect, and all besides were

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<sup>26</sup> Danchin, quoting from the NED, reports that “the word ‘*Brumicham*’ or ‘*Brumigham*’ meant a ‘counterfeit Protestant (alluding to the counterfeit groats made at Birmingham a few years before). A nickname given to supporters of the Exclusion’”; of “*tantivy*” and “*masquerader*,” he relates, “The word ‘*tantivy*’ was a nickname given to the High Churchmen and Tories. According to NED, it ‘arose 1680-81 when a caricature was published in which a number of High Church clergymen were represented as mounted upon the Church of England and “riding *tantivy*” to Rome, behind the Duke of York.’ The word ‘*Masquerader*’ . . . had obviously a parallel meaning” (333). Johnson defines “*tantivy*” as “to ride at great speed”; the word derives, he says, “from the note of a hunting horn, so expressed in articulate sounds.”

damned, they were right to see their foes as wicked, even, as here, inhuman, as so many obstacles to the realization of their most cherished objective: fixing “a godly Reformation.” Long before the Civil War, radical Protestants had argued for the necessity of purging Popish trappings from the Church of England with a second reformation; note that now, as then, the purpose of political agitation (and of taking up arms against the established governmental and religious institutions, if we may suppose they were willing to so exercise their “Pious Zeal for th’ good o’ th’ Nation”) was to effect this ecclesiastical agenda. Thus, using decades-old anti-Puritan imagery, Durfey wholly transmogrifies contemporary political opposition into the religious opposition of the 1630’s and 1640’s.

Durfey’s prologue is, however, neither the most explicit nor the most forceful conflation of Whigs and Roundheads. That distinction must go to Aphra Behn in her prologue and epilogue to *The Roundheads; or, The Good Old Cause* (December 1681 or slightly earlier), for which her prologue to *The False Count; or, A New Way to Play an Old Game* (October 1681) provides an apt preliminary. The premise of the latter piece, as the speaker tells the contending factions of the pit—who “for the Cause and crimes of Forty one / So furiously maintain the Quarrel on” (ll. 3-4)—is that the playwright, once “a most wicked Tory” (l. 6), has lately converted to the Whig cause: “[N]ow to th’ joy o’ th’ Brethren be it spoken, / Our Sisters vain mistaking eyes are open” (ll. 7-8). If Behn’s feigning to become a “sister” among the Whig “brethren” somehow leaves the conflation of the political and religious in doubt, subsequent lines resolve any remaining difficulty. Once, the speaker confesses, Behn the Royalist “charg’d you all with your fore-fathers crimes” (l. 14); she “Rais’d horrid scandals on you, hellish stories, / In Conventicles how you eat young Tories” (ll. 17-18). How misguided she was then! “When this is all malice it self can say, / You for the good old Cause devoutly eat and pray” (ll. 21-22). Now, repentant, she will turn proselytizer and enumerate the advantages of Whiggery. For one thing, the Whigs, bounded only by self-interest, are free to “write, invent, and make what Plots you please” (l.26); for another, “Your Conventicling miracles out doe / All that the

Whore of *Babylon* e'er knew" (ll. 30-31). Referring to the Whigs' response to the Popish Plot witnesses whose initial perjured testimony had implicated prominent Catholics but who were now beginning to recant, exposing the Plot itself as the deadly cheat of dangerously cynical men, the speaker observes ironically:

By wondrous art you make Rogues honest men,  
 And when you please transform 'em Rogues again.  
 To day a Saint, if he but hang a Papist,  
 Peach a true Protestant, your Saint's turn'd Atheist . . .  
 Who wou'd not then be for a Common-weal,  
 To have the Villain cover'd with his Zeal? (ll. 32-35; 38-39)

Having here set forth the design and characters of the men who have revisited upon England "the Cause and crimes of Forty one," Behn's prologue and epilogue to *The Roundheads*, appearing only weeks after this piece, expose their methods and consequences. Once more, the identification of political with religious opposition, of present with past, is absolute—and Behn emphatically underscores the association in the dedicatory preface appended to the play when it was published in 1682. Addressing the Duke of Grafton,<sup>27</sup> Behn notes that the Whigs,

coming the first day to a new Play with a Loyal Title, and then even the sober and tender conscienc'd, throng as to a forbidden Conventicle: fearing the Cub of their old Bear of Reformation should be expos'd, to the scorn of the wicked, and dreading (tho' but the faint shadow of their own deformity) their *Rebellion, Murders, Massacres* and *Villanies*, from 40 upwards, should be Represented for the better undeceiving and informing of the World, flock in a full Assembly with a pious design to Hisse and Rail it as much out of countenance as they would *Monarchy, Religion, Laws*, and *Honesty*, throwing the *Act of Oblivion* in our Teeths, as if that (whose mercy can not make them forget their Old Rebellion) cou'd hinder honest truths from breaking out upon 'em in Edifying Plays, where the Loyal hands ever out-do their venom'd Hisse. . . . [The play has] drawn down Legions upon its head, for its Loyalty . . . as if twere all a Libel, a scandal impossible to be prov'd, or that their Rogueries were of so old a Date their Reign were past Remembrance or History: when they take such zealous care to renew it daily to our memories (qtd. in Danchin, 343-344).

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<sup>27</sup> Henry Fitz-Roy, Charles' son by Barbara Villiers.

I think it is clear that in Behn's mind those "legions" flocking to the theatre to hiss her play are not made up exclusively (or at all?) of wizened, grey-bearded Hudibrases, but consist almost entirely of the new rebels—the Whigs, of course, whose recent "Rogueries" are sufficiently of a kind with the "Rebellion, Murders, Massacres and Villanies" of those "from 40 upwards" to "renew [the Civil War] daily to our memories." The implication is that if the Whigs recoil with hatred and disgust from this depiction of the "Old Rebellion," it is because they discern in it the visage of the New, and they are loath to see "the Cub of their old Bear of Reformation" thus exposed and "Represented [or delineated] for the better undeceiving and informing of the World." Behn would have us believe, in short, that the Whigs are scandalized by the power of her drama to explicate the succession crisis of 1678-1681 according to the pattern of events of the 1640's. The prologue to *The Roundheads* would throw those parallels into relief, first by having its speaker—ostensibly the ghost of John Hewson, a sometime shoemaker and prominent regicide—endorse the new "Villanies" of the present rebels, then by having "Hewson" conflate the religious ends of 1642 with the political means of 1681. Introducing himself as "a true Son / Of the late *GOOD OLD CAUSE*" (ll. 1-2), Hewson declares with pride that, whatever the Plot might suggest, papists cannot "Act mischief equal to Presbittery?" (l. 7), and he looks back fondly upon "our success in Forty One[:] / Was ever braver Villanies carryed on / Or new ones now more hopefully begun[?]" (ll. 9-10). As this last line would suggest, for Hewson (as for Behn herself in the play's dedication), the rebellion of 1641 is but a type of the rebellion underway in the present day. And in fact he admonishes his living compatriots not let "our unsuccess" of the earlier campaign dispirit them or "make us [now] quit the Glory of Our Cause" (ll. 11-12). But if that Cause would be fully and lastingly realized, they must take care to heed his advice:

Hire new Villains, Rogues without remorse  
 And let no Law Conscience stop your course.  
 Let Politicians order the Confusion  
 And let the Saints pay Pious Contribution.

Pay those that Rail, and those that can delude  
 With scribbling Nonsense the Loose Multitude.  
 Pay well your Witnesses . . .  
 . . . that they may ne'r Recant  
 And so turn honest meerly out of want.  
 Pay Juries that no formal Laws may harm us  
 Let treason be secur'd by *Ignoramus*.  
 Pay Bully Whig, who Loyal writers bang  
 And honest Tories in Effigie hang . . .  
 Pay all the Pulpit knaves that Treason brew  
 And let the zealous Sisters pay 'em too; . . .  
 Nor let the Reverend Rabble be forgot  
 Those Pious hands that crown our hopeful Plott (ll. 13-19; 21-26; 29-30; 34-35).

The audience is meant to recognize that Hewson's prescribed course of future action had been pursued by groups within the Opposition for many months. From this, in turn, the audience is meant to infer—given that the law is openly flouted, cheated by hand-picked juries that will not convict fellow-travellers, disregarded by the ruffians hired to beat Tory writers (such as Dryden); that from the pulpit dissenting ministers preach the overthrow of Crown and Church; and that the street mobs, stirred by seditious propoganda, now stand ready to boil over into full revolt—that the next Great Rebellion (“our hopeful Plott”) actually walks abroad in the land. The epilogue to the play does nothing to dispel the illusion. There, the speaker (reversing the conceit of the prologue to *The False Count*) claims that she has been converted from the Whig to the Tory cause.<sup>28</sup> Having been intimate with the aims and methods of the Opposition, she can expose the “pious Cheats” (l. 7) of her erstwhile comrades, that “Race of Hypocrites, whose Cloak of Zeal / Covers the Knave that cants for Common Weale” (ll. 11-12), as well as enumerate the likely consequences of their sedition<sup>29</sup>: the Church and State brought “to ruine” (l. 13), the King

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<sup>28</sup> I was once, the speaker says, “as true a *Whig* as most of you, / Cou'd Cant, and Lye, Preach and dissemble too” (ll. 3-4). Now even the habitudes of Whigs and Puritans are identical.

<sup>29</sup> On this point the speaker treats as established fact much of what was merely prescribed in the prologue:  
 You thought to Play the Old Game ore again,  
 And thus the cheat was put upon the Nation,  
 First with long Parliaments, next Reformation:  
 And now you hop'd to make a new invasion,

held in subjection (l. 14), wholesale ruination and destruction throughout the land (l. 15)—but then, she observes with bitter irony, “all’s good that you decree / By your Infaillible Presbitery” (ll. 15-16). And what would the Presbytery deem good? Adopting the character of an unreconstructed Cromwellian and lapsing, per stage direction, into “a Preaching Tone,” she looks back to the Puritan heyday in order to make out a dissenter’s best-of-all-possible futures. When “Sacred *Oliver*” (l. 29) was “Head” (l. 30) of the nation, the “cursed Tories” (l. 25), “those Pimps to Monarchy” (l. 26), dared not, as they do now, “Exclude the Saints” (l. 27) and “introduce the *Babylonian Whore*” (l. 28):

Yet then they rail’d against the *Good Old Cause*,  
 Rail’d foolishly for Loyalty and Laws;  
 But when the Saints had put them to a stand,  
 We left them Loyalty and took their Land:  
 Yea, and the Pious work of Reformation  
 Rewarded was with Plunder, Sequestration (ll. 31-40).

About just what it is the Opposition has unleashed to regain its lost paradise Nahum Tate is unequivocal, though in the prologue to *The Ingratitude of a Commonwealth; or, The Fall of Caius Marius Coriolanus* (December 1681) he speaks through the familiar poet-king, audience-anarch analogy. The “Wit-dissenters of the Age,” declares the speaker, “*in a Civil War do still Engage, / The antient fundamental Laws o’ th’ Stage: / Such who have common Places got, by stealth, / From the Sedition of Wits Common-Wealth*” (ll. 3-7; emphasis added).

It is not difficult to discern in Tate’s evocation of armed conflict and the overthrow of the kingdom’s “fundamental Laws”; in Behn’s easy conflation of Opposition militancy with the “Rebellion, Murders, Massacres and Villanies” of the Roundheads; and in her exposition of Whig character, tactics, and objectives according to the example of Hewson

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And when you can’t prevaile by open force,  
 To cunning tickling tricks you have recourse,  
 And raise Sedition forth without remorse” (ll. 18-24).

and his ilk, the rhetorical end to which the Tory poets were steering. As Knights makes clear in his chapter-by-chapter breakdown of public opinion 1678-1681 (and as other historians, such as Kenyon, Jones, and Ashley assert more generally), whenever civil war appeared to be imminent, public opinion turned against the Opposition and in favor of the Court. For at heart, it seems, the greatest bloc of the populace feared the return of civil war far more than popish intrigues or even the imposition of arbitrary rule. Therefore, in the debate over succession, in the struggle for political primacy between King and Parliament, and, most broadly, most fundamentally, in the contest to determine the “shape” and significance of the historical present, it was for the Royalist poets only the obvious thing to summon from 1642 and 1649 the twin spectres of war and regicide, then flesh them out with contemporary parallels to make it seem they enjoyed a second reincarnation. The identification of Parliament with the Opposition puts in place the first element of this new configuration; the images of violence and conquest—of warfare—in these last pieces by Durfey, Behn, and Tate intimate the third and final element. The second element is what we have just seen, the association of political and religious dissent, and more specifically, the revival of the Puritan as both a social type and the prime agent of opposition. And if I say that the Tory poets’ resurrection of Puritan imagery from early 1680 onward was perhaps the shrewdest rhetorical move they could make, I do so because this element does not simply occur between the first and third chronologically, but is in fact an active conduit between them, making possible the Tory propagandists’ move from one to the other. An examination into why and how this should be so will take us a good way toward understanding how poetry itself was uniquely able to reify the past in the present, to articulate and apply the historical figure of the Civil War, and thereby to set the terms upon which public memory of the Exclusion Crisis would be established.

My analogy of revivifying the past with fleshing out a ghost was not a random one. To reify an element of the past is to reawaken our memory of it so vividly that it effectively lives again, dressed out in what we can actually see and hear and touch in the present



moment. What I have in mind is something very much akin to the effect by which Longinus defines “image” in *On the Sublime*. Recall that for Longinus, poetry’s “powers of persuasion are to a very large degree derived from images . . . the representation of mental pictures,” pictures so vivid that, “carried away by your feelings, you imagine you are actually seeing the subject of your description, and enable your audience as well to see it” (121). There is, however, this qualification, that whereas Longinus’ image conjures a mental representation for the moment only, the poet who would for political purposes reify an element of the past hopes to transfigure our perception of the everyday world as well. To do this, the poet must not only offer us vivid images that strike the mind’s eye, but images that provoke a reaction pervading viscera, psyche, and mind alike and at once—a diffused, systemic reaction that carries over into our daily affairs, conditioning our response to its real-world equivalent. Hence the political poet leans more heavily upon affective rather than physical mimesis, hoping to achieve not so much a one-to-one correspondence of sensible detail as a near alignment of emotional impression and reflex.

Looking back over the foregoing (admittedly selective) survey, we see that, in general, *representative* images are used to resurrect the Puritan as a social fixture, while *affective* images are employed to achieve the conflation of Puritan and Whig. In his prologue to *Theodosius*, for example, Lee offers up three highly concrete characteristics by which the Puritan may be known: short hair, large ears, and a blue band. The details are stereotypical, but playgoers might well identify a dissenter by them. More powerful, because more suggestive to the imagination, is Otway’s image of a godly brother sitting apart in a corner “mumbling” a sister—or Lee’s own depiction of the Puritan seducer enticing his harem of “Female Saints” with “groans and hums and ha’s, and gogling eyes” to “rub him down, and make the Spirit rise” that he might achieve the wherewithal to “mount” and “sanctify” them. The details here are specific enough to bring certain particular scenes explicitly to mind: no doubt many audience members were ogling, pinching, and petting one another as these lines were delivered; they would, therefore, have had little

difficulty visualizing the situation being described. The specification that the persons to be imagined are Puritans, reinforced by the depiction of characteristically “Puritan” behaviors (orating, preaching, canting) and by diction—saint, brother (for man), sister (for woman), spirit, sanctify, zeal—identified almost exclusively with dissenting sects, cues the auditors to clothe the human figures before the mind’s eye according to personal and received notions of Puritan dress, mannerism, and speech. Individual stereotypes, therefore, are quite likely to summon up the stereotypical whole, the Puritan *type*.<sup>30</sup> Something of the kind occurs when the epilogue to *Mr. Turbulent* characterizes the traditional (or at least proverbial) Puritan constituency by assigning to the “Fanaticks of this Age” the tools of proletarian craftsmen: “Awles, Needles, Hammers, and Shears.” Images of the tools themselves are conjured easily enough, and the tool in turn suggests a fairly complete, coherent image of the person likely to use it. Told that such persons are the very “Lay and Frantick Widgeons” who “cobble, botch, patch, translate Religion,” and that these persons (to graft an image from Behn’s prologue to *The Second Part of The Rover*) make up “the unthinking Crowd,” “the Rabble . . . whose voices can impose even Laws on Kings,” the audience (patrons as they were of the rowdy Restoration playhouse) would have little difficulty fashioning mental images of what its members had probably seen for themselves several times over the past months: an unruly mob incited by a charismatic “Zealot” to cast execrations against the King and Court. Once called to mind, such scenarios are readily enough entered into; having entered into them, the audience has been “cozened” (to use a word prominent in the last chapter) into accepting their *aesthetic* veracity—and is thus

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<sup>30</sup> And the type, placed in such scenes as these, gives the audience a clear mental picture of an abstraction it could never literally see: hypocrisy—and that of the unmistakably “Puritan” variety. This and similar passages might qualify as instances of poetry’s power to define abstract and physical entities as Locke would have them defined, i.e., illustrating the complex idea (hypocrisy) with “little Draughts and Prints” (the scene of the supposedly godly man seducing his parishioners), and defining the observable object (the man known as a Puritan) by enumerating its innate but intangible properties (here, hypocrisy).

prepared to admit the possibility that such scenes actually exist just beyond the walls of the theatre.

In resurrecting the Puritan as a social figure and establishing him as a very real menace to social order, the Tory dramatists were without doubt greatly aided by the playhouse venue and the conventions of the prologue and epilogue. Indeed, it is surely not happenstance that (again, with important exceptions) this resurrection is effected largely in the theatre, for there the Loyalist poet could make shrewd use of the performative element in the delivery of his or her poem. The speaker of the prologue or epilogue could, for instance, appear before the audience as a living embodiment of the very type the writer would evoke, as when the prologue to *The Roundheads* is delivered by the notorious regicide "John Hewson," or when the actress giving the play's epilogue speaks it in character, as Lady Desbro, a one-time supporter of the Whig-dissenter Opposition. Or the speaker could be made to speak as if in his or her own words, independently of the playwright. This device enables the speaker to seem omniscient and absolutely trustworthy: the dramatist as well as the dramatic fiction are within the compass of his or her gaze, and the intimate knowledge gained by such a perspective allows the speaker to show the audience the "real truth" at back of the façades the writer and his or her work present to the public. The actor delivering the prologue to *The False Count*, for example, discloses Aphra Behn's ostensible conversion to the Whig cause, giving an overview of anti-Whig "libels" she perpetuated while a Tory, then offers a number of ironic reasons (damning to the Opposition) for other writers to follow Behn's lead. Or the speaker can offer the audience personal testimony, as in the prologue appended to Duffey's *Sir Barnaby Whigg* when that play was acted before the King (November 1681). The speaker declares he has come directly from "a Coffee-house, just now among the Rabble" (l. 1), where he sat at the "Treason-Table" (l. 2) listening to "two hard'ned *Brumicham Rascals* prate" (l. 4): "[They] very busie were in Disputation, / And settling with great vehemence the Nation; / Aiming at Politicks, though void of Reason, / And Lacing Coffee with large Lumps of Treason" (ll.

4-8). Finally, the very gestures, movements, facial expressions, and vocal intonations required to *perform* a poem publicly would tend to reinforce the succession of mental images suggested by the words themselves. The instance found in Durfey's epilogue to *The Virtuous Wife; or, Good Luck at Last* (September 1679)—in which the speaker, “Mr. [James] Nokes, Representing my Lady *BEARDLY*,” suddenly removes his feminine disguise, reveals his true sex, then declares, “Soe State-Fanaticks change to the Party-Royal, / And when they dare Rebell, noe more turn Loyal” (ll. 21-22)—may be an extreme example, but certainly demonstrates the potential of live performance to re-create a compelling representative reality for its audience.

The possibilities of the playhouse also aided Royalist dramatists in their use of affective imagery. As the aim of such imagery is to elicit a visceral and emotional response—a *powerful feeling*—rather than acute (virtual) perceptions or a vivid mental picture, the poet using it seeks to associate a particular person (or type of person), object, or circumstance to a particular psycho-physical state. Whereas the representative image objectifies its subject, and by providing a primarily visual experience invites deliberate, even rational scrutiny of its parts, the affective image operates at a sub-rational level, relying for its effectiveness upon the force of our instinctive reflexes (as when we wrinkle our noses at graphic scatological references) and conditioned responses (as when we are confronted with a site upon which a notably shameful or glorious incident has occurred). The two categories are not necessarily mutually exclusive; often the same image can operate either representationally or affectively. Thus while the reintroduction of the Puritan-as-type put a familiar face upon the Opposition and civil unrest, it also (as intended) tapped into the great reservoirs of anti-Puritan feeling built up by decades of negative Puritan portrayals in the learned and popular press before and during the Civil War, by the war itself, and by the political, religious, and social reforms carried out under the Commonwealth. The scorn a Restoration audience might have for the dissenter's odd appearance, the disgust it might feel at seeing depictions of Puritan moral hypocrisy, its anger at cant and sedition, are,

however, compounded by imagery that is primarily affective in its appeal. Whereas the representative imagery employed by Tory poets tends to render physical detail precisely, their affective imagery shows us very little, seeking instead to provoke an intense reaction fueled by anxiety over what is left unshown, allowing (where necessary) our personal hatreds and fears to add the particulars.

In the prologue to *The Second Part of the Rover*, for example, Behn attempts to arouse her audience's fear of contagion by citing only the "Disease o' th' Age," "that Pest," "that restless Feaver." She offers no extended sketch or metaphor—but then, an audience whose members had lived through the Great Plague would need very little to excite in them the horror of those months. Similarly, in the first prologue to *Sir Barnaby Whigg*, Durfey observes that the town has turned "frantick," has become "a very *Bedlam*," peopled with "*Lunatics* [that] roar and range about." No graphic depictions of madness, just enough to arouse fear of and revulsion at the "terrifying, catastrophic" malady that made its victims "familiar figures in the early modern physical and mental landscapes."<sup>31</sup> Consider the chaos evoked by Behn's references to "the Mobily," "the unthinking Crowd," and the "Almighty Rabble" in her prologue to the second *Rover*, or the violence suggested by the mention of those who "trouble both the Church, the State and Stage" in the epilogue to *Mr. Turbulent* as well as by the allusion to Commonwealth bullies who "[break] Windows for a Loyal Health" in the epilogue to Ravenscroft's *The London Cuckolds*. But note the pattern at work here. Having confronted their audiences with the threats of disease, madness, chaos, and violence generally (though for all that no less and perhaps even the more menacingly), the writers of these prologues and epilogues take care to provide a specific focal point for the vague terrors they have awakened. Behn's images of illness attach themselves to zealous brethren and Commonwealth men; Durfey's images of madness, to those who

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<sup>31</sup> Roy Porter. *Mind-Forg'd Manacles: A History of Madness in England from the Restoration to the Regency*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1987. 17; 14.

*“Run mad with Pious Zeal for th’ good o’ th’ Nation, / And how to fix a godly Reformation”* (emphasis added); Behn’s unstable, inflammable “mobily” consists of the “pious”; the violent in the *Mr. Turbulent* epilogue are the “*Fanatics of this Age,*” those who “coble, botch, patch, and translate Religion,” while their brethren in Ravenscroft’s piece are “pleas’d with nothing like a Conventicle.” In this way, a group already widely suspected and detested is identified explicitly with the most fearsome social ills, is not simply invested with the potential to overturn order, stability, and public institutions, but is actually made both the First Cause and final embodiment of national dissolution.

This same pattern obtains in our final set of poems, in which, as we saw, an unequivocal and unquestionable conflation of Puritans and Whigs is attempted through explicit allusions to the Civil War and the murder of Charles I. There is no need to restate at length either the relevant imagery or the equation itself as these occur in the prologue to *The False Count*, the prologue and epilogue to *The Roundheads*, and the prologue to *The Ingratitude of a Commonwealth*; instead, we may observe generally that as these Tory poets reawaken the yet profoundly disturbing memories of the *Puritans’* “Rebellion, Murders, Massacres, and Villanies,” the *dissenters’* late assault upon “Monarchy, Religion, Laws, and Honesty,” they mean to project the past designs and deeds of radical Protestantism onto the current Opposition, and by doing so, focus the pathos, alarm, and wrathful patriotism aroused by recollections of the Civil War and Commonwealth years upon a proximate, visibly manifest group—the Whigs. In this, they are assisted by a second element peculiar to the playhouse venue: direct address. Longinus had argued that, by seeming to address the reader, the writer “transforms hearing into sight. All such passages, by their direct personal form of address, bring the hearer right into the middle of the the action being described. When you seem to be addressing, not the whole audience, but a single member of it . . . you will affect him more profoundly, and make him more attentive and full of active interest, if you rouse him by these appeals to him personally” (135). Such personal appeals are bound to reinforce the affective power of a poem insofar

as they establish an essential human bond between speaker and listener, but Tory dramatists were able to exploit direct address in another important—and wholly contrasting—way.

Consider Durfey's prologue to *Sir Barnaby Whigg*. The speaker begins by speaking *to* the audience, lamenting "the follies of this Plotting Age" (l. 1) and their consequences for the loyal playwright, who now can scarce get a fair hearing from playgoers intimidated into factiousness (read, "Whiggishness") by "the Numerous, Buzzing, Crop-ear'd Crew." Any commonality of interest this manner of address might have fostered, however, is seemingly forfeited when, midway through the piece, the speaker abruptly leaves off speaking of hypothetical audiences and begins to speak to the group ranged directly before him *about itself*: "Like *Lunaticks* ye roar and range about; / Frame plots, then crack your brains to find them out; / Like *Oliver's Porter*,<sup>32</sup> but not so devout" (ll. 17-19). Suddenly, the audience is confronted with its own complicity, its own culpability in promoting the Opposition programme. This strategy of direct indictment is employed more emphatically in Behn's prologue to *The False Count*. Here the audience is absolutely and unremittingly implicated in the Whigs' ostensible adherence to the Good Old Cause, their hypocrisy, subversion of law, and radical Protestantism. It is *you*, he insists, "who for the Cause and crimes of Forty one / So furiously maintain the Quarrel on" (ll. 3-4); it is to *you*, the "All powerful Whiggs" (l. 10), that she who once "charg'd *you* all with *your* fore-fathers crimes" has been converted; hence the author can now, like *you*, invent what plots she pleases, and like *you*, can "make Rogues honest men, / And when [she] please[s] transform 'em Rogues again"; and when the Tories "resolve to hiss" (l. 52) and indict her, "shee'll throw her self on *you*, / The grand Inquest of Whiggs, to whom shee's

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<sup>32</sup> George de F. Lord offers a straightforward explanation to a similar allusion in "Vox Clero, Lilliburlero," a broadside ballad of 1689: "The porter of Oliver Cromwell went mad and was confined to Bedlam" (502n). Yet Galbraith M. Crump treats references to Oliver's porter more figuratively: "The origin of the character is obscure, but he more than likely signifies the fanatical Puritan" (80n).

true. / Then let 'em rail and hiss and damn their fill, / *Your* verdict will be Ignoramus still" (ll. 53-56; emphasis added). The speakers of the prologue and epilogue to *The Roundheads* likewise assume an audience comprised wholly of Whig-Dissenters. Hewson's ghost, remember, advises the house as if it were a Parliament of old compatriots; Mrs. Desbro confesses that she was "once as true a *Whig* as most of you, / Cou'd Cant, and Lye, Preach and dissemble too," intimating that, like them, she once wished to ruin the Church and State and clip the King's prerogative, leaving all to be decided by "your Infaillable Presbitery." And the speaker of the prologue to Tate's *The Ingratitude of a Commonwealth* charges those in the pit who would cavil with the play to be "Wit-dissenters" engaged in a Civil War.

Such finger-pointing might ultimately derive from the long tradition of prologue raillery; however, the nature of these particular accusations and the tone of their delivery make it clear that—unless these playwrights are gratuitously antagonizing their audiences—something much more purposeful is going on here. The conclusion to the *Sir Barnaby Whigg* prologue gives us a clue: the speaker declares that the poet shall "know both [political] Parties" by their responses to the play—the Whigs will hiss, the Tories will clap (ll. 33-34). The extortion is admittedly waggish (and fairly common), but the design behind it, to identify and isolate the agents and supporters of an Opposition that only minutes before had been charged with faction, treason, and the promotion of a new Reformation, is earnest enough. If anyone dares to hiss Durfey's play, the hateful designs ascribed to the Opposition attach to him personally. The free-floating social and political anxieties provoked by events within and beyond the playhouse are thus suddenly objectified, given flesh as well as focus in the person of this or that distinct individual. And if no one hisses? Or if, as in the other pieces just surveyed, the whole house is assumed to be in on the Whig conspiracy to inflict a new civil war upon the land? Rhetorically, nothing is lost, for the existence of rebel fanatics is still treated as self-evident, a given; and a good bit might actually be gained. Indicted with the rest, the loyal, moderate, or only vaguely



Whiggish playgoer—(Are there ever more than a handful of self-declared extremists?)—clears himself mentally from the charges, then lets his suspicions fall upon his neighbors. But because he cannot say precisely which of those at his elbow, or in the pit, or in the gallery might harbor rebellion at heart, the anxieties roused as the playwright strikes the mournful chords of memory are given no outlet, and are therefore likely to increase, intensify: few things foster phobic dread as readily as the imminent but unrecognizable threat, and nothing fuels hatred like fear. Allowed no resolution or catharsis in the theatre, the emotions raised by the imagery of militant Puritanism are the more easily carried over into the real world, and directed against those whose actions are most clearly reminiscent of the Old Rebellion. The conflation made explicitly on stage is thus born out in the mind of the playgoer as he goes about his everyday life: the Puritan is reborn as a Whig; the Whig recast as a latter-day Puritan.

And so whether the “hard’ned Brumicham Rascals” are explicitly identified or not, the fact that the supposedly defining images of the 1640’s come to be projected onto living human beings means that the poet has not only returned his or her audience to the past psychologically, but has been literally able to reify it for them.

One might object that I have taken too great a liberty in presuming to enter the mind of a Restoration playgoer, or, if my speculation is to be allowed for the sake of argument, that a few prologues and epilogues could hardly have exercised the broad influence I seem to ascribe to them. I would answer the first objection by observing that the reintroduction of Puritan imagery into controversial poetry corresponds exactly to an increase in the virulence of such poetry, suggesting that the revival of the Puritan as a social figure did indeed touch off a heretofore unseen depth and violence of feeling. In *The Wiltshire Ballad* (February 13, 1680), for example, a poem appearing at the very outset of this revival, the author’s equation of religious with political dissent introduces a heightened rhetorical urgency, a new ferocity of tone to the poetic exposition of the constitutional implications of

the Exclusion Crisis. The petitioning campaign, the poem's stanzaic subtitle insists, is part of the Devil's strategy "to raise a rebellion," and his agents, the gatherers of petitions, are, we learn soon after, the very religious fanatics who divided Charles I from his prerogative—and his head from his shoulders. As before, "the saints" will use the "crop-ear'd trick" (l. 111) of parlaying "the humble holy guise / Of the religiously precise" (ll. 73-74) into a pretext for "steer[ing]" religion (l. 69) and seizing "the power of peace and war" (l. 70). But the "saints" of 1680 hunger for more than power. The poet warns that once "Geneva Jack" (l. 42) "lord[s] it in our British isle" (l. 43), he will "pulpit cuff us till we fight, / Lose our estates and lives outright; / And when all's done, he gets all by't" (ll. 45-47). And to the new Puritans' lust for slaughter, conquest, and despoliation add an unslaked thirst for royal blood: having "serv'd his [Charles II's] father so before, / These saints would still increase the store / Of royal martyrs" (ll. 29-31). Though *The Wiltshire Ballad* is, as we have seen, essentially concerned with questions of prerogative and succession, the overlay of anti-Puritan imagery has so inflamed royalist rhetoric as to transform the issue of institutional sovereignty into one of civil war and regicide. Not the King's authority but his life is now at stake.

But even in poems not distinguished by a pronounced anti-Puritan theme, the resurrection of the dissenter as national bogey seems to have made the rhetorical temperature soar. Take the Duke of Monmouth's rivalry to James. If Monmouth and his pretensions to the throne had been regarded largely with condescension and ridicule in "A Ballad Called Perkin's Figary," "Letter of the Duke of Monmouth to the King" (1680), "The Obscured Prince, or, The Black Box Boxed" (August 1680) and "A Ballad Upon the Duke of Monmouth's Reception [in London]" (September 1680), among other pieces, both are now treated rather more seriously. *A Canto on the New Miracle Wrought by the Duke of Monmouth* (January-March 1681), citing an episode of the previous August in which

one Elizabeth Parcet was apparently cured of scrofula<sup>33</sup> by touching Monmouth's wrist, ironically takes the young woman's recovery to mean that the Duke is a true royal, and labels him the "Great mountebank of our sick state" (l. 81). Playful enough, but Monmouth's political quackery—aligning himself with a Parliament that would vote "no King, no God" (l. 42), subverting the established succession—promises a cure for England worse than any disease. For in touching "a kingdom for King's evil. / He means to make it (for his health) / A common whore, a commonwealth" (ll. 66-69). "The Club of Royalists"<sup>34</sup> (1681) is more explicitly ominous in depicting what Monmouth's rule would mean for England, likening the prospect to Phaeton's ill-fated trek across the sky in the chariot of the sun: "What? Though the world once more were set on fire, / Shall his young hero balk his great desire? / No, let the headstrong youth his steeds drive on, / Tread on his father's councils and his throne" (ll. 23-26). The Opposition in general also comes in for worse treatment. If previously the Tory poets had ascribed any number of damning personal flaws to its leaders, those leaders are now crudely demonized, cast as essentially evil beings deserving only the most ignominious of deaths. In the present poem, for example, Buckingham and Shaftesbury are termed "the only honest men of th' age: / The truest patriots England e'er did breed, / Who, viper-like, on their own mother feed; / Tear up her bowels with a base pretense / Of feigned piety and conscience" (ll. 34-38). Alexander Radcliffe's *The Lawyers' Demurrer Argued* (summer 1681; subtitled, "To the Tune of Packington's Pound, or the Roundhead Revived") characterizes the "parcel of Whigs" (l. 2) now challenging the King as the "spawn of some rebels in year Forty-One" (l. 3); pursuing the same intrigues (presumably toward the same ends) as "their damn'd sires" (l. 4), they deserve being labelled "a Satanical tribe" (l. 57). Given the diabolical

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<sup>33</sup> Also known as the King's Evil, so called because it was believed that the monarch's touch could effect a cure.

<sup>34</sup> The poem is ironically titled, as it is actually a roll-call of the Opposition leaders.

nature of the King's political foes, it is no surprise that the author of "A New Ballad of London's Loyalty" (July or August 1681) matter-of-factly recommends that Shaftesbury be hanged, or that the author of *A Vision in the Tower To the Lord Howard in His Contemplation* (c. late July 1681) is more than a bit gleeful at the prospect of William Howard—a prominent member of the Green Ribbon Club who had implicated a relative, William Howard, Viscount Stafford in the Popish Plot—meeting with the same fate his false testimony had imposed upon Stafford. But if the loyalist poets have grown bloodthirsty, it is only in response to the sinister and equally sanguinary designs they now ascribe to the Opposition. In *A Vision*, for instance, the Whig-engineered execution of the innocent Stafford is held to foreshadow what Howard has in mind for Charles himself (ll. 18-20); Matthew Taubman, author of "Philander" (c. early August 1680) has "the loud Parliament thunder[ing] / Against both miter and crown" (ll. 13-14), even as the City sits plotting "who next shall reign" (ll. 17). This image of London's impending overthrow of the government recurs in "A New Ballad." Here a London poised on the edge of rebellion prompts the poet to exhort Charles, "Rouse up, great monarch of this potent land, / Lest traitors once more get the upper hand; / The rebel rout their former tenets own, / And treason, worse than plagues, infects the town" (ll. 1-4). The mayor, for one, "hopes to see a Commonwealth again" (ll. 10), and the sheriff, Slingsby Bethel, "suppos'd his [Charles II's] father's murderer to be," has ominously "abjur'd the King and all his sacred line" (ll. 15; 14).

It would seem that with their resuscitation of the Puritan, the Tory poets have prepared the public to accept a reduction of the Opposition programme to armed insurrection and regicide. We have only to review the foregoing survey of prologues and epilogues to see that the more closely religious dissenters are identified with the political opposition, not only does the anti-Puritan imagery become more malignant, but the more closely the Opposition is linked to imminent warfare. In fact, in the last few prologues and

epilogues, Civil War is taken for granted: Behn and Tate would even have us believe that it is going on at the very moment the pieces are being delivered.

This brings me to the second objection. Though I cannot pretend that a dozen prologues and epilogues were alone able to bring about the melding of Whig and Puritan in the nation's collective psyche, I can offer them as emblems of this identification as it was made at large in the body of Tory poetry. Further, I might observe that as a group they demonstrate how the first two major elements of the Civil War figure—the equation of Parliament with political opposition and the conflation of political and religious opposition—suggested the third and final element, the supposition that such a constitutional struggle, prosecuted by an Opposition made up ostensibly of reheated or unreconstructed religious fanatics answerable only to their own bellicose, self-serving, self-justifying consciences, made inevitable a return to open warfare. And, as these pieces are fond of pointing out, the two projects most dear to Puritan hearts, reviving the Good Old Cause and bringing about a second Protestant Reformation (to purge the Anglican Church of popish elements)—both depicted in these prologues and epilogues as being actively afoot—could be realized only by a violent overthrow of the existing governmental and ecclesiastical order: that is, by civil war.

Further still, I might observe that at almost the very moment the Civil War figure had been fused together in these playhouse pieces, the complete historical figure made possible by this fusion was being propagated in non-dramatic poetry as well—and on much the same terms. We can see an early alignment of the figure's three major elements in *The Waking Vision* (late March-early July 1681). Using the Shaftesbury-Achitophel, Monmouth-Absalom analogy Dryden would make immortal later in the year, the poem opens with the “snake-like” (l. 18) Achitophel<sup>35</sup> addressing the “murm'ring rout” (l. 3) that

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<sup>35</sup> Achitophel's characterization and the logic of his rhetoric owe more than a little to Satan's address to his legions in Book II of *Paradise Lost*.

makes up his constituency. The present moment, he explains, is ripe to recapitulate their glory days of the 1640's, when monarchy had been extinguished and Puritan-Parliamentary power was supreme:

I need not tell you of the case betwixt ye,  
 If you remember Forty-Eight and Sixty.  
 How happy we were in the first of those,  
 When no man durst our laws or wills oppose,  
 Wills as obliging as the Persian laws.  
 We fought and prosper'd in the Good Old Cause;  
 None durst oppose our faction, or appear  
 In vindication of a Cavalier.  
 Then all our Party in one humor stood  
 To bleed the nation, tap the royal blood (ll. 19-28).

"[I]f we could but still have been obey'd," Achitophel sighs, "No Stuart e'er had England's scepter sway'd" (ll. 43-44). But if Cromwell's sudden death allowed General Monck "[a]gainst our wills" to restore "by force" the King "to that which was his right before" (ll. 33-34), neither the rebels' hatred of monarchy nor their resolve to overturn it once for all has abated in the least. In-deed, the crafty demagogue exhorts his listeners to not let slip the opportunities offered by the immediate circumstances: "Let's try our wits and plot for to obtain / And play the Old Game over once again: / Do as our fathers did, come play your parts . . . . Eighty-One offers us a mark as fair / As ever Forty did. Come—strike—prepare!" (ll. 47-49; 52-53). Once more, he says, they shall be able to play upon anti-Catholic bigotry—"Persuade 'em [the mob] that the Pope and Popish train / Are just returning to the land again" (ll. 60-61)—to justify their taking "oaths of secrecy and covenant / To ease the nations of her groans and want" (ll. 54-55). Once more, the English fear of arbitrary rule will aid their nurturing a poisonous mutual distrust between King and People: "Right and religion, liberties and laws / Will make the rout quickly espouse our Cause. / Tell 'em if they don't stir they're quite undone, / Religion's ruin'd, liberties are gone" (ll. 56-59); "Tell them the King's a tyrant and oppressor, / And that we have a damn'd Popish successor. / The Parliament's dissolv'd, and we must be / Govern'd by

arbitrary tyranny" (ll. 74-77). Cynical as this strategy is, more cynical still is Achitophel's prescribed answer to loyalist challenges of their means and ends: "If any senator against you sit, / Be sure to call him Papist, Jesuit, / Mac, Tory, Protestant in masquerade / That would your liberties and rights invade" (ll. 80-83). But then, the defense of liberty and conscience is a mere sham, a guise under which the Opposition may make a play to sate its blood- and powerlust by retaking the absolute, tyrannical authority their Puritan fathers enjoyed under Cromwell. This, the true design of Achitophel's programme, is revealed in the follow-up speech of his protégé and designated puppet-ruler, Absalom, who not only vows that "good old David soon shall know that I / Will be his heir, or else I'll bravely die" (ll. 92-93)—implying that open war will be a matter of course—but hints that, if necessary, he will depose his father and seize the throne by force: "I am of royal blood, and will be King. / Do you but help me to obtain the crown, / I'll rule by law, and all your foes put down . . . If once I can but the throne attain, / I'll grant new charters and the old maintain" (ll. 97-99; 102-103).

As explicated here, the succession issue has been stripped down to its raw essence, resolving itself into a contest of armed might, retaining its constitutional trappings only in Achitophel's avowed hatred of kings. Indeed, much like the sectarian implications of the supposed Popish Plot, the Exclusion Crisis' constitutional ramifications (for the right of Parliament to meet, the maintenance and defence of the Church, the liberty of the individual and his freedom of conscience) are here regarded as so many pretexts for the assertion of a political supremacy gained and retained by the exercise of martial force.

This characterization of the design (or agenda) of the Opposition is reinforced by the poet's (by now wholly predictable) conflation of religious with political dissent in his characterization of the Opposition's constituency as a reincarnation of Cromwell's Roundheads. Once the poet's vision fades—"suddenly the rout did disappear, / And all the coast was in an instant clear" (ll. 106-107)—he is left to reflect upon what his fancy has shown him. He concludes that though the "Popish curse" may seem on par with the

“Fanatic blessing” (ll. 108-109), when put in the scale of sober consideration, “the balance equiponderate” (l. 111) of the two at length gives way as the danger of Protestant fanaticism “hoist[s] up” the papist threat while its own gravity makes it “[kiss] the ground” (l. 113). “Then suddenly I found the meaning out: / This [the popish threat] ruins quickly, but that [from dissenters] roundabout” (ll. 114-115). To ensure that the person most concerned in this revelation does not mistake its significance, the poet takes the liberty of addressing the final three dozen lines of the poem to the King himself. If “Rome leads the van,” he says, “Geneva brings the rear. / If you’ll be safe, you must expel them both, / The Roman gnat and the Dissenting moth” (ll. 123-125). But it is the moths, pretending to uphold established institutions even as they gnaw at the civil and religious fabric, that must be most vigorously counteracted:

Learn by your father not to trust to those  
That in the end will prove confiding foes.  
Consider on’t, you’re in a woeful strait;  
Think but on Forty-One and Forty-Eight.  
I only speak this for a precedent,  
For Heav’n, I hope, will all such things prevent (ll. 132-137).

As the poet’s explicit acknowledgement that his vision takes cue from proximate historical precedent would indicate, the allusions to Charles I and to the fateful years 1641 and 1648 are intended to impose the pattern of the past upon the events of the present. By doing so, he more than hints that the events of 1681, paralleling those of the 1640’s, are building toward an identical outcome. You must “ruin the Fanatics,” the poet admonishes his sovereign, “For know one nation can’t hold them and you. / Those men I fear against your life combine / That strive to cross you in your good design; / And those men sure would yield to put you down / That tell the people you are not their own” (ll. 146-153). Indeed, the poet all but takes a new civil war for granted: given the design of the Opposition and the essential character of its members, either Charles or his regicidal opponents will survive the impending clash—survive *personally*, that is, not just politically. If the king would learn from his father’s tragic example, he will “ruin” his foes before their conspiracy against his



life comes to fruition. Of course, by treating the outbreak of civil war and the execution of the monarch—that is, the sequence of events, 1641-1649—as all but unavoidable in the present day, and by encouraging Charles to take the offensive against his foes, the poet himself effectively promotes the opening of armed conflict. But by overlaying the historical present with historical precedent, the poet also would lend Charles and the nation the comprehensive view and understanding of current events necessary if England is to be diverted from a second national apocalypse. Perhaps the paradox is inescapable: for the past to be forestalled, it must first be realized in the present.

The basic rhetorical structure of *A Waking Vision*—an exposition of the aims, then the character of the Opposition, culminating in a vision of the war (or at least widespread violence) these make inevitable—reurs in many later renderings of the Civil War figure. This is not to imply that these later poems are of a piece. Far from it: that the same figure could be given so many nuances, inflections, distinct shapes says much about the imagination and skill of the Tory poets and goes a good way toward accounting for their ultimate victory in the propaganda war—and therefore in the struggle over the fashioning of national memory. In an ironically elegaic piece, *The Whigs' Lamentation for the Death of Their Dear Brother [Stephen] College, the Protestant Joiner*<sup>36</sup> (August-Nov. 1681), for example, the dead man—"Brave College" (l. 1)—is made the epitome of the Whigs' designs and constituency, his death giving the poem's persona the occasion to exhort his compatriots to redouble their efforts. College, the speaker notes, was "the chief of our hopes, / For pulling down bishops and making new popes" (ll. 1-2), an exemplary "carver of laws, / Who dies undaunted, and stuck to the Cause" (ll. 7-8), and a framer of "a new model to limit the King, / In hopes the crown and scepter might truckle to him" (ll. 29-30).

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<sup>36</sup> In his headnote to the poem Mengel relates that when the Parliament met at Oxford in March 1681, College, a dissenter and Whig, "went up on horseback, ostentatiously displaying weapons and wearing defensive armor, speaking threateningly against the King and advocating resistance" (448). Arrested in June, he was indicted in July "for seditious words and actions" (448), and executed by hanging and quartering August 31.

College's political activism, we learn, was but an extension of his nonconformist beliefs. His dissenting credentials, hinted at by the reference to his zeal for pulling down [Anglican] bishops and by the speaker's boast that "Great Britain ne'er bred such a brother as Colledge, / He made [i.e., burned in effigy] seven popes in his time to our knowledge" (ll. 31-32), are firmly established by his being labelled "a third savior of the nation" (l. 43)—the other two being the false witness Titus Oates and the no less fanatical William Bedloe—and by the observation that Colledge was the "head of *our* Church" (l. 41; emphasis added). In fact, so zealous was Colledge to serve the interests of "his dear Church" that "he renounced salvation" (l. 44), forswearing his native Presbyterianism (and with it, his claim to election) to take Anglican communion, a move that enabled him (so the speaker implies) to subvert the Church of England from within. Having "di'd for King Jesus, / Defying church idols enough to amaze us" (ll. 45-46), Colledge is "a good martyr" (l. 25) of the revived Good Old Cause, his memory a catalyst for the Whigs to defy the stiffening royalist resistance and undertake all-out pursuit of their by now familiar political and religious agenda:

Our Common Council let's summon together;  
 To panel-pack'd juries let's make't our endeavor  
 For an habeas corpus: insist on our power  
 To fetch our great patriots out of the Tower.  
*And then we'll dispute the case for reformation,  
 And make the proud Tories resign us the nation* (ll. 67-72; emphasis added).

In his prologue to Thomas Southerne's *The Loyal Brother; or, The Persian Prince* (published as a broadside in February 1682), by contrast, Dryden evokes and aligns the elements of the Civil War figure through images of Whigs acting *en masse*. Using an extended version of the familiar poet-king, audience-anarch analogy to establish the Opposition's design to invade then nullify the royal prerogative,<sup>37</sup> Dryden then merges

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<sup>37</sup> The passage runs in full:  
 Poets, like Lawfull Monarchs, rul'd the Stage,  
 Till Criticks, like Damn'd Whiggs, debauch'd our Age.  
 Mark how they jump: Criticks wou'd regulate

metaphor with a matter of public record,<sup>38</sup> characterizing the Opposition and foreshadowing the consequences of its militancy by drawing upon the actual events of November 17, 1679, when the annual Queen Elizabeth's Day pope-burning took on ugly, anti-royalist overtones. In Dryden's account, as the crowd of radical Protestants—grown rabid from a zeal fanned into mad, unthinking hate—pulls the effigy of the “Miter'd Moppet from his Chair” (l. 36) and falls upon it, one among them “for fashion” cries, “*God save the King*” (l. 40). “A needful Cry,” Dryden reflects, “in midst of such Alarms: / When Forty thousand Men are up in arms” (ll. 41-42), and particularly when the 40,000 are made up of “Praying Saints” (l. 50) and “*Presbyterians*” (l. 53). Having fleshed out a stock playhouse analogy with precisely detailed allusions to an episode no doubt still fresh in the minds of his audience, Dryden's intimation that the pope-burning crowd is made up of frenzied Puritans allows him to suggest much about the Opposition's means to its ends. He puts the question squarely before his audience: “What if some one inspir'd with Zeal, shou'd call, / ‘Come let's go cry, “God save him” [the King] at *White-half?*’ / His best friends wou'd not like this over-care: / Or think him e're the safer for that pray'r” (ll. 46-49). And why?: “Should heav'n all the true Petitions drain / Of *Presbyterians*, who wou'd Kings maintain; / Of Forty thousand, five wou'd scarce remain” (ll. 53-54). The implication is clear: so strong is the “Church-Militant's” (l. 51) antipathy toward the person of the monarch and

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Our Theatres, and Whiggs reform our State:  
 Both pretend love, and both (Plague rot 'em) hate.  
 The Critick humbly seems Advice to bring,  
 The fawning Whigg Petitions to the King:  
 But ones advice into a Satyr slides;  
 T'others Petition a Remonstrance hides.  
 These will no Taxes give, and those no Pence:  
 Criticks wou'd starve the Poet, Whiggs the Prince.  
 The Critick all our troops of friends discards;  
 Just so the Whigg wou'd fain pull down the Guards.  
 Guards are illegal, that drive foes away,  
 As watchfull Shepherds, that fright beasts of prey.  
 Kings, who disband such needless Aids as these,  
 Are safe—as long as e'er their Subjects please (ll. 1-19).

<sup>38</sup> Danchin notes that Dryden describes the episode “exactly as it appears in contemporary accounts” (361).

the institution of monarchy that, left unchallenged, the fanatic crowd now content with burning the pope and damning the King's friends (l. 44) would not scruple to turn their fury upon Charles himself.

Appearing the same month as Dryden's prologue is Thomas Durfey's *The Whigs' Exaltation: A Pleasant New Song of 82 to an Old Tune of 41*. As Howard Schless points out, the tune to Durfey's song is taken from "Cuckolds All A-Row," and its lyrics are designed to recall those of Francis Quarles' famous anti-Puritan ballad of 1646 (9). Fittingly, the Civil War figure is a prominent feature of the piece, and its exposition falls roughly as it does in the previous three poems. The design of the Opposition is given straightaway in the first stanza—

Now, now the Tories all shall stoop,  
 Religion and the laws;  
 And Whigs on commonwealth get up  
 To tap the Good Old Cause.  
 Tantivy boys shall all go down,  
 And haughty monarchy;  
 The leathern cap shall brave the throne;  
 Then hey boys up go we (ll. 1-8)

—and in subsequent stanzas the speaker vows that the "anti-Christian crew" (l. 9) at court will be "crush'd and overthrown" (l. 10), that the Whigs will "teach the nobles how to bow" (l. 11), that they shall make "[t]he name of lord . . . abhorr'd" (l. 17), overturn existing political and ecclesiastical authority, and, once they have "pil'd and plunder'd all, / And levell'd each degree" (ll. 21-22), fall to levelling of another sort: "We'll make their plump young daughters fall, / And hey boys up go we" (ll. 23-24). Once again the conflation of Whig and Puritan is absolute. The speaker revels in the "sunshine weather" (l. 28) occasioned by the quarrel between King and Parliament—for if "they should both agree, / 'Dzowns, who'd be in a Roundhead's case, / For hey then up go we?" (l. 30-

32)—expresses the virulent distrust of learning traditionally ascribed to the Puritan,<sup>39</sup> resolves to replace formal education with extemporaneous preaching “in every grove” (l. 37) from tubs-turned-pulpits, and exults at the prospect of smashing stained-glass windows (ll. 57-58), pulling down the Anglican bishops (l. 59), and sainting dissenting elders in their stead (l. 60). The necessary outcome of such designs prosecuted by such a constituency as this are spelled out with equal frankness. “The Whigs shall rule” (l. 41), the speaker declares in the sixth stanza, and shall, in a move reminiscent of the Long Parliament’s February 1649 prohibition of monarchy, “such laws invent / As shall exclude the lawful heir / By act of parliament” (ll. 42-45). Moreover, they shall make sure of their grip on the town they have “enslav’d” (l. 61) by “cut[ting] His Royal highness down, / E’en shorter by the knee, / That he shall never reach the throne” (ll. 45-47). These lines allude immediately to the mutilation—ostensibly by the supporters of Stephen College—of a portrait of the Duke of York hanging in the Guild Hall, the vandals having (so reports Nathaniel Thompson in his journal, *The Loyal Protestant*) “cut off [the figure’s] legs a little below the knees, and departed” (qtd. in Schless, 13). But they allude more generally, and therefore more ominously, to the violence the Opposition is willing to unleash upon the nation to achieve its ends, the nature and scope of that violence being clearly foreshadowed, given the identities of the supposed vandals (sectarian commonwealthmen) and of their victim-in-effigy (the heir apparent): civil war, culminating in regicide. Precedent would admit of no other signification. The speaker’s vow to “smite the idol in Guild Hall” (l. 49) is thus likely meant to suggest to the reader that the days of open warfare between the House of Stuart and the House of Commons have returned—much as the act itself brought vividly to Thompson’s mind the execution of Charles I. No doubt, he speculates in his journal, the destroyers of James’s portrait left their work “much troubled

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<sup>39</sup> “We’ll down with all the versities, / Where learning is profess’d; / For they still practice and maintain / The language of the beast” (ll. 33-36)

that they had not his person within their power to act as the same malice upon as they did upon his royal father of ever blessed memory” (qtd. in Schless, 13).

Durfey’s ballad puts us onto a perhaps unexpected nuance of the Civil War figure. To this point, the poems we have examined have generally either drawn parallels between the agents and events of past and present, giving equal weight to each, or have attempted to revivify the past in the present, showing the Old Rebels and their Rebellion at work in the guise of their latter-day equivalents. By contrast, Durfey—in his music, metrics, lyrics, and the explicitness with which his ballad alludes to the historical precedents of the present political crisis—makes a greater effort to recreate the past on its own terms for his readers, to return them to its circumstances and sensibilities. *The Loyal Scot* (April 5, 1682) seems to aim at much the same effect. The premise of this anonymous poem is that a Scot last in England in 1643 as part of the Scottish army then engaging Charles I’s Cavaliers ventures south of the border once again in 1682. Wishing “to’l see our gracious King” (l. 6), he sees instead only a mad and maddening incarnation of the cause for which he fought so long ago, for “nene but knaves and perjur’d loons do rule the roast” (l. 2), and where he had hoped to find “mirth and merry glee, / I find aud sniveling Presbyter is coming in” (ll. 7-8). The old (“aud”) Presbyter indeed: the old Scot’s impressions of England having been formed by circumstances as he found them forty years ago and held ever since in the suspension of expectation, he is dumbfounded to see that matters are almost exactly as he left them:

For they talk of horrid Popish Plots, and Heav’n knows what,  
 When au [all] the wiser world knows well what they’d be at;  
 For with sike like seeming sanctity the geudest King  
 They did to death and ruin bring.  
 When on the civil broils they first did enter in,  
 (As well ye ken) with Popery they did begin;  
 And with Liberty and Public Geud was muckle din,  
 When the deel a bit they meant the thing (ll. 9-16).

What innovations he does see only dishearten him further. In 1643 he and his fellow Covenanters pursued a cause of which they could be justly proud; now Shaftesbury, the “voice of all the Geudly rabble mobile” (l. 19), “traitor [both] to Commonwealth and King” (l. 23), “pimps for au [all] the loose rebellious fops in toon” (25-26), and “with high debauchery they carry on the Cause, / And Geudly Reformation is the sham pretense; / And religiously defy divine and human laws, / With obedience to their rightful prince” (ll. 29-32). Nevertheless, the sham goes largely undetected, for, taking “the laws [or pattern] of forty-ene” (l. 46) as his master script, each of the Opposition’s major players “does begin to play his part, / And, too, so well he cons [learns] his geer and takes his cue, / [That] they learn to play the rebel so by rote of heart, / That the fictitious story seems as true” (ll. 57-60). The claim that contemporary history is unfolding according to a script drafted by the events of forty years earlier reinforces the poem’s admonishment—implicit in its showing us the year 1682 through the eyes of one whose perspective is a time-capsule of 1643—that to understand the present unrest rightly we must set its elements in their original or native context: we must weave our perceptions and understanding of the moment before us directly from the text of precedent if we would prevent its “fictitious story” from becoming true once more—that is, if we would forestall the revisitation of Civil War.

Other poems making prominent use of the Civil War figure take a more direct approach in transporting us to the near past. Nahum Tate’s *Old England* (May 1682; published 1685), for instance, is a nostalgic advice-to-the-painter piece that takes as a given that the best days in England are over, the once-heroic English character in rapid decay. If once “Britain did another world appear; / Gave laws to all the land, and then with ease / Their triumphant flag o’er all the seas” (ll. 46-48), now, thanks in no small part to the influence of the religious and political Opposition, there is occasion only for disgust and disillusionment:

What crowds of pimps and parasites are here!  
Ha! what a politic fop drinks coffee there!

See how th' apostate plies his trait'rous text,  
 The Gospel wrack'd, and Church-historians vex'd.  
 Look, look, the sovereign people here dispense  
 The laws of empire to an absolute prince;  
 Their will is law divine, themselves being own'd  
 To the Almighty in the spiritual fund.  
 Religious rogues! (ll. 19-27)

Yet despite his contempt for what he sees about him, the poet-painter must neither gloss over “all that's stain'd with zealot, villain, Scot” (l. 52) nor pretend that England is still at the zenith of its power and glory, but to “Draw as it is, if't can't be as it was” (l. 54). Significantly, as rendered by Tate, *England as it is*—“When thus the kingdom's by confusion rent” (l. 73)—is a good deal like England as it was during the 1640's—at the height of Civil War:

First let Confusion her dear self display,  
 To whom th' unthinking crowd obedience pay;  
 Next Horror, who the flying standard bears,  
 Deck'd with this motto, *Jealousies and Fears*;  
 Here let the rabble in allegiance meet,  
 With lives and fortunes at their idol's feet;  
 Arm every brigadier with sacred sword,  
 Inscrib'd, *Come fight the battle of the Lord!*  
 Let trumpets now proclaim immortal hate  
 Against all order in the Church and State.  
 Show not the victim [Charles I] that did lately fall  
 By fool or rogues, the sons of Belial;  
 But let a curtain of black murder hide,  
 Till time, or kinder fate, shall draw't aside (ll. 55-68).

In these lines Tate's readers—many of whom, remember, had seen and heard such things for themselves—are thrust into the midst of the Puritans' clash with the late King. About them swirls the chaos, the clamor of warfare: Parliament's banners blaze before their eyes; rebellion's sword rings as its metal and mission are unsheathed; trumpets and battle-cries fill their ears as Church and State are overturned, toppled onto the dust. But perhaps the most affecting of all these images is the one not shown. Tate's hand lets the curtain fall before the doomed Charles is made to ascend the scaffold, to put his neck on the block, leaving the reader's imagination—by this time well primed by what it has been shown—to



horrify itself with what it cannot see but must fashion for itself from the dark terrors unleashed within it by the phrase “black murder.” Nor does Tate ever fully allay the storm of 1642’s rebellion and release his readers from their forced return to England’s collective nightmare. Several hundred lines later, near the poem’s conclusion, the poet admonishes the present Charles, “Awake, great sir, thy guardian prays thee wake, . . . See the globe reels, the scepter’s tumbling down; / One such another nod may lose a crown” (ll. 293, 295-296). Clearly, the moment of rebellion has yet to pass; England has yet to know a kinder fate; the tempest rages on—and the curtain must remain drawn.

*Old England* would not be published until 1685. However, *The Second Part of Absalom and Achitophel*, which Tate wrote with Dryden, would appear November 11, 1682. There, as in *Old England*, an overview of contemporary circumstances—in this case, a survey of the events of the Exclusion Crisis down to the end of May 1682—suggests and gives way to a detailed evocation of the Civil War years. Having cited the fight over exclusion, the larger constitutional struggle subsuming it, Shaftesbury’s cynical manipulation of Monmouth and of the crowds that turned out to cheer the Protestant hero’s semi-royal progresses through the west country, the melding of the political and religious Opposition, the arc of historical exposition takes us—back to the past, or rather to the present as it was forty years ago. The speaker warns that, having been seduced by the Whigs’ “specious cry” (l. 695) of “sacred rights and property” (l. 696), “we groundlessly complain, / And loathe the manna of a gentle reign:

Thus our forefathers’ crooked paths are trod,  
 We trust our prince no more than they their God.  
 But all in vain our reasoning prophets preach  
 To those whom sad experience ne’er could teach,  
 Who can commence new broils in bleeding scars,  
 And fresh remembrance of intestine wars;  
 When the same household mortal foes did yield,  
 And brothers stain’d with brothers’ blood the field;  
 When sons’ curst steel the fathers’ gore did stain,  
 And mothers mourn’d for sons by fathers slain!  
 When thick as Egypt’s locusts on the sand,

Our tribes lay slaughter'd thro' the promised land,  
 Whose few survivors with worse fate remain,  
 To drag the bondage of a tyrant's reign:  
 Which scene of woes, unknowing, we renew,  
 And madly ev'n those ills we fear pursue (ll. 699-716).

As with the passages taken from *The Loyal Scot* and *Old England* (and we might include *The Whigs' Exaltation* as well), these lines from *The Second Part of Absalom and Achitophel* attempt more than to draw parallels between the present and the past. In their use of explicit physical detail and in their strong emotional appeal they likewise attempt both to reconstruct the pertinent episodes of past and to recreate the affective experience of those episodes and, more generally, of what it meant to have been alive at a particular time in history. Such attempts to revivify the past in the imagination of the reader effectively complement their performative counterparts, the dramatic prologues and epilogues. But they also impose new demands upon the reader. The playhouse pieces invite us to see in the present moment manifestations of the Civil War years—to see the Exclusion Parliaments as the Long Parliament, for instance, or the Whigs as Puritans, or exclusion itself as regicide. These latter pieces, by contrast, ask us to accept not merely the veracity (physical and affective) but the thoroughness of their reconstructions as well, for they would explicitly lay before us the historical events and sensibilities upon which the *historical figure* of the Civil War has been based. But once they return us to the past, what do these reconstructions show us of it? We see rebellious Parliaments, zealous and seditious Presbyterians, short-fused crowds under the sway of fiery demagogues, political and social levellers, war (sometimes actual, sometimes imminent), and regicide. The elements almost constitute an equation. In fact their configuration is most familiar—and if the depiction of the “literal” past has come to resemble closely the Civil War figure used to represent it, we are reminded that memory is as refluent as it is progressive. The identification of historical precedent is, to an appreciable degree, an act of creation; in their recovery of a usable past, the Tory poets projected the circumstances of the present onto the past perhaps as much as the reverse. For if we see according to what we have seen, our

recollections—individual and collective—likewise bend to accommodate what we are seeing. Over time, then, the Civil War figure, pieced together bit by bit from the superficial parallels between two distinct constitutional struggles, became something more than a partisan expedient during a propaganda war. It effectively became history itself, as it really was. Or if this is to claim too much, we might say that by appearing to confirm one another, fact and fable between them created a stable, objective historical pattern that could be lifted from its immediate contexts and fitted to new circumstances as they seemed to warrant, allowing their nature, alignment, end, and import to be readily apprehended and acted upon.

### 3. Phases II and III: Applying and Extending the Historical Figure

The test of such a pattern is not so much its historical authenticity as its utility, determined in turn by its adaptability and durability. In the event, the Civil War figure did prove itself sufficiently flexible to endure and thus remain useful to Tory poets as new partisan controversies arose in the aftermath of the Exclusion Crisis. Indeed, Nahum Tate, for one, believed so strongly in the permanence of the figure that he makes it the basis for assigning immortality to the political verse of his compeer and collaborator John Dryden. In his apostrophe to “Asaph” (Dryden) near the end of *The Second Part of Absalom and Achitophel* (November 1682), Tate exclaims, “With wonder, late posterity shall dwell / On Absalom and false Achitophel” (ll. 1043-1044), adding that the Laureate’s “fierce satire” (l. 1049) on Charles’ behalf exceeds any praise “for such rich strains” (l. 1059) and any rewards bestowed by “the grateful crown” (l. 1060). Beyond mere praise and gratitude, Dryden’s partisan works have so aptly captured their times for later ages—frequently, as we have seen, by making prominent use of the Civil War figure—as to secure for their author a glory long-lived as time itself: “While bees in flow’rs rejoice, and flow’rs in dew,

/ While stars and fountains to their course are true, / While Judah's throne and Sion's rock stand fast, / The song of Asaph and the fame shall last" (ll. 1061-1064). But perhaps more compelling testimony to the success of the Civil War figure comes from a spokesman for the Whig Opposition, Dryden's poetic and political rival Thomas Shadwell, who by April 1683 had had enough of the Laureate and his fellow Tories' exploitation of Civil War imagery. In *A Lenten Prologue Refus'd by the Players*, Shadwell ridicules the amazing (almost Oates-like) ability of Dryden, "the mad Prophet" (l. 18), to discern against all sense, evidence, and reason plots, traitors, rebellions, and Whig armies poised to seize and kill the king. No doubt, he wryly observes, "[The] Toryes, without troubling Law, or Reason, / By loyal Instinct can find Plots and Treason" (ll. 38-39). But as Shadwell continues, his exasperation rising with each successive line, it becomes clear that the Tories' "loyal Instinct" has been roused, shaped, and perpetuated by their favorite rhetorical weapon, that in fact their "Instinct" consists simply of perceiving and explicating the political world according to the habits inculcated by the sustained imposition of the Civil War figure upon the historical present. Would the Whigs dare to protest the Administration's effectively permanent dissolution of Parliament? "Petitioning disturbs the Kingdom's Quiet; / As choosing honest Sheriffs makes a Ryott" (ll. 55-56). "Then Pray'r, that Christian Weapon of defence, / Gratefull to Heaven, at Court is an Offence, / If it dare speak th' untamper'd Nations sence" (ll. 50-52):

To love the King, and Knaves about him hate,  
Is a Fanatick Plot against the State.  
To Skreen his Person from a Popish Gun  
Has all the mischief in't of *Forty One*.  
To save our Faith and keep our Freedom's Charter,  
Is once again to make a Royal Martyr (ll. 60-65).

Shadwell's impatience is not only understandable, it is arguably justified, for by the time he published his "Lenten Prologue" the Tories' habitual use of the Civil War figure during the Exclusion Crisis and their unremitting application of it upon the discovery of the

Protestant Association and the struggle between the Crown and City over London's municipal charter<sup>40</sup> had made it something of a cliché.

Certainly the figure could still be employed with skill, conviction, even passion, as the example of Dryden's *The Medal* (March 1682) demonstrates. Composed (perhaps at the suggestion of Charles himself) in response to the Earl of Shaftesbury's supporters striking a medal to commemorate his November 21, 1681, acquittal on charges of treason<sup>41</sup> by a London jury packed with ideological comrades, Dryden's poem is prefaced by a lengthy and pugnacious "Epistle to the Whigs." Here the poet answers those who have attacked him for *Absalom and Achitophel* (November 1681) and sets forth the royalist case against the Whiggish Protestant Association, at that time believed (or purportedly believed) to be a dangerously far-flung, highly secretive conspiracy to thwart the legal, political, and dynastic order. As it is argued in the preface, much of this case rests upon Dryden's recourse to the Civil War figure, the prose rendering of which closely anticipates its manifestation in the poem itself. Remarking upon the essential illegality and innate subversiveness of such covert political societies, Dryden gives the lie to the Whigs' claim that "all this while [they have at heart] not only zeal for the public good, but a due veneration for the person of the king" (126). He grants that it is in their interest to make such claims, "But I would ask you one civil question, what right has any man among you, or any association of men, (to come nearer to you,) who, out of Parliament, cannot be consider'd in public capacity, to meet as you daily do in factious clubs, to vilify the government in your discourses, and to libel it in all your writings? Who made you judges

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<sup>40</sup> Shadwell alludes to the Association in lines 53-54: "Nay Paper's Tumult, when our Senates cease; / And some Men's Names alone can break the Peace"; as Antonia Fraser explains, the Association, discovered upon Shaftesbury's arrest for treason in July 1681, was "a list of people who were to be invited to protect [that is, secure the person of] the King and prevent the Catholic succession" (409). The phrase, "Freedom's Charter," just quoted, is an allusion to the latter conflict.

<sup>41</sup> As Fraser points out, "Shaftesbury was accused of treason because he had conspired to levy war against the King at Oxford" [that is, at the Oxford Parliament the preceding March], and more particularly, because of his involvement with the Association (409).

in Israel?" (126). The Whigs would justify their Association by citing the precedent of an organization formed in Queen Elizabeth's reign to protect the sovereign and avenge her death on the Catholics in the event she was murdered by them; but Dryden, echoing the belief cited by Bishop Gilbert Burnet that "there were many republicans still in the nation, and many of Cromwell's officers were yet alive, who seemed to repent not of what they had done; so some of these might by this means [the Association] be encouraged to attempt on the king's life,"<sup>42</sup> gives the "true" inspiration for the confederacy as follows:

Anyone who reads Davila<sup>43</sup> may trace your practices all along. There were [among the Holy League, a secret alliance of French Protestants that ultimately assassinated Francis, Second Duke of Guise in 1563] the same pretences for reformation and loyalty, the same aspersions of the king, and the same grounds of a rebellion. I know not whether you will take the historian's word . . . that it was a Huguenot minister, otherwise call'd a Presbyterian . . . who first writ a treatise of the lawfulness of deposing and murdering kings of a different persuasion in religion; but I am able to prove from the doctrine of Calvin, and principles of Buchanan that they set the people above the magistrate; which, if I mistake not is your own fundamental, and which carries your loyalty no farther than your liking. When a vote of the House of Commons goes on your side, you are as ready to observe it as if it were pass'd into a law; but when you are pinch'd with any former, and yet unrepeal'd act of parliament, you declare that in some cases you will not be oblig'd by it. . . . [So] now, when your affairs are in a low condition, you dare not pretend that [Association] to be a legal combination, but whensoever you are afloat, I doubt not but it will be maintain'd and justify'd to purpose. For indeed there is nothing to defend it but the sword; 'tis the proper time to say anything, when men have all things in their power"(127).

The Whigs have ostentatiously appointed themselves "the trustees of the public liberty" against the (illusory) prospect of arbitrary rule by a future Catholic despot, but this is a mere cloak for the religious fanaticism that—according to recent French and English precedents—has set them upon a path of political, social and ecclesiastical sedition that will

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<sup>42</sup> *The History of My Own Times* (1724-34; qtd. in Noyes, 965).

<sup>43</sup> Enrico Davila (1576-1631), author of *Storia delle guerre civili di Francia* (1630).

ultimately make it necessary for the Association to take up a “defensive” sword against their present King.

The poem itself is no less elaborate or emphatic. The standard elements of the Civil War figure are given early on, with Dryden reiterating the republican arguments ascribed to Shaftesbury and the Opposition he leads, that “pow’r is lent, / But not convey’d to kingly government; / That claims successive bear no binding force, / That coronation oaths are things of course” (ll. 82-85); depicting the republican programme as one that would “[set] the people in the papal chair” (l. 87); characterizing its main prosecutor, Shaftesbury, as an unreformed Cromwellian (ll. 30-49) who learned his demagoguery and fraud at the hands of Puritan masters during “his fanatic years” (l. 59); identifying Shaftesbury’s supporters, who willfully misapplied and subverted the law by acquitting him, with those who “rack ev’n scripture to confess their cause, / And plead a call to preach in spite of laws” (ll. 156-157), though obviously “[t]he text inspires not them, but they the text inspire” (l. 166); putting it to his readers that in appealing to the power of the “Almighty crowd” (l. 91) to overturn the stays against civil war—“inherent right in monarchs” (l. 114), a “secur’d succession” (l. 116), and a balance between “property and sovereign sway” (l. 117)—Shaftesbury would plunge England down the “headlong steep of anarchy” (l. 122)—again. “God tri’d us once,” Dryden reminds his audience, “our rebel-fathers fought; / He glutted ’em with all the pow’r they sought, / Till master’d by their own usurping brave, / The freeborn subject sank into a slave” (ll. 127-130). And Civil War is exactly the pass to which the Association would bring the nation. “What means their trait’rous combination less,” Dryden demands, “Too plain t’ evade, too shameful to confess!” (ll. 205-206). “Join’d in a mutual cov’nant of defense, / At first without, at last against their prince” (ll. 211-212),

[the conspirators] from pretended grievances . . . rise,  
 First to dislike, and after to despise;  
 Then, Cyclop-like, in human flesh to deal,  
 Chop up a minister at ev’ry meal;

Perhaps not wholly to melt down the king,  
 But clip his regal rights within the ring;  
 From thence t' assume the pow'r of peace and war;  
 And ease him by degrees of public care.  
 Yet, to consult his dignity and fame,  
 He should have leave to exercise the name,  
 And hold the cards, while commons play'd the game (ll. 224-234).

But the Association would not stop even there. Pretending to “make his [the King’s] cause their own,” they would “for God’s cause” their monarch dethrone (ll. 199-200), and whether “the plotting Jesuit laid the plan / Of murth’ring kings, or the French Puritan, / Our sacrilegious sects their guides outgo, / And kings and kingly pow’r would murder too” (ll. 201-204). Should “true succession from our island fail, And crowds profane with impious arms prevail” (ll. 289-290), it takes no gift of prophecy to “foreshow / What all but fools by common sense may know” (ll. 287-288). Victory shall give way to savage infighting among the triumphant sectarians, until a Cromwellian warlord (Monmouth is likely meant) emerges to crush his rivals: “The presbyter, puff’d up with spiritual pride, / Shall on the necks of the lewd nobles ride, / His brethren damn, the civil pow’r defy, / And parcel out republic prelacy” (ll. 298-301). His “rigid yoke” (l. 302) and “tyrant pow’r” (l. 303), however, shall at length the “puny sects provoke” (l. 304), and in the resulting turmoil either the general will dispense with the Commons and “force the crowd to arbitrary sway” (l. 314) or else the Commons, “suspecting his ambitious aim, / In hate of kings shall cast anew the frame; / And thrust out Collatine that bore their name” (ll. 315-317). More wars “of exil’d heirs, or foreign rage” (l. 319) will follow, until at last God’s “halting vengeance over[takes] our age” (l. 320).

Dryden was not always so painstaking and thoroughgoing in his characterization of the Association as an incipient Puritan Revolution of the 1642 variety. In his prologue to *The Duke of Guise* (November 1682), he gives a cursory reiteration of the Civil War figure, to which he merely adds tag phrases relating to the current scandal. Noting, for example, that “Our play’s a parallel: the Holy League / Begot our Cov’nant: Guisards got



the Whig" (ll. 1-2), he asks incredulously if "the same trick, twice play'd, [could] our Nation gull" (l. 7)—if "[t]wice in one age" (l. 21) England could be brought to "Cry Freedom up with Popular noisy Votes" (l. 30), "Lop all the rights that fence your monarch's throne" (l. 32), "expel the lawful heir" (l. 21), "decide religion by the sword, / And purchase for us a new tyrant lord" (l. 22-23). One would think, the speaker admonishes the crowd, that the "fulsome Cov'nant . . . / Had giv'n us all our Bellys-full of Treason: / And yet, the Name but chang'd, our nasty Nation / Chaws its own Excrement, th' Association" (ll. 11-14). Such foreshortening of the Civil War figure when applying it to the Association controversy is typical among Tory poets. Its appearance in Durfey's prologue to *The Royalist* (January 23, 1682) and Behn's prologue to *Like Father, Like Son* (March 1682), for instance, is even more attenuated. Having observed that "th' Pit (methinks) looks like a *Common-weal*; / Where Monarch Wit's baf'l'd by ev'ry Drudge, / And each pert Railing *Brimingham's* a Judge" (ll. 4-6), the speaker of Durfey's prologue cautions the "Opposition" critics, "The Dice now give kind chances on our side; / *Tories* are upmost, and the *Whigs* defy'd. / Your Factious Juries and Associations / Must never think to ruine twice Three Nations" (ll. 8-11). In Behn's piece, the speaker (Mrs. Butler) remarks upon the paucity of playgoers and likens it to thinness of church attendance "'ere Conventicling was put down" (l. 2)—or to the abandonment of "Declining States-men" whom "scarce a Heartless Whigg will Visit now: / Who once had Crowds of Mutineers in Fashion, / Fine drawn in Cullies of th' Association: Sparks, Justices and Jurymen by Dozens, / Whom his perverted [tale]<sup>44</sup> betrays and Cozens" (ll. 4-9).

The Tories' recourse to the Civil War figure had become habitual, reflexive by the time of the contest over the London charter (1682-1683), when Charles, seeking to undermine a perennial Opposition stronghold, sought to, in Schless's words, "rescind the franchises and liberties of London" (421). As Schless explains, "the very nature of

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<sup>44</sup> Danchin's suggested emendation for the text's "late."

corporation and the body politic was at issue”: on one side, the Crown “saw the municipal government both as an extension of the central monarchy and as an incorporation representing and involving all its members by its actions”; on the other, the City “conceived of the corporation (though not its real holdings) as immortal, and of the office (though not the officeholder) as unpunishable” (421-422). The struggle could be seen, and was seen, as an extension of the earlier contest between royal prerogative and parliamentary right, and the fact that London had become identified as the center of Whig and Dissenter activism certainly facilitated the application of the Civil War figure to the contest. In *Old England* (May 1682), for instance, Nahum Tate argues that “Indentures give no right to shake a throne” (l. 92), resolving that “If large concessions from successive kings / Be such desirable, such pow’rful things, / Pity that e’er to cities they were made, / Whose charter dares prerogative invade” (ll. 98-101). And he notes that those whose “coffee-drums beat *Privilege* aloud” (l. 104), are the very same who have flown “disgrac’d from Court” (l. 119) to woo the mob, taking up refuge in the City among the “blackest traitors” (l. 121). “Poor loyal hearts,” he intones ironically, “they plot no other thing / Than first to save, then *make* a glorious king” (ll. 109-110; emphasis added); surely they would turn the force they threaten to use only “against evil counsellors” and “against the Pope” (ll. 111, 112). But then, Tate reminds us, “That was the word, when once, for public good, / Three kingdoms innocently flow’d in blood” (109-114). A second instance of the figure’s application, *The Charter* (fall 1682), is singularly explicit. To Whig complaints that “We are all grieved with extremities, / And Pharaoh’s [Charles’] deaf to all our plaints and cries! / Our wills with bridle, and our mouths with bit, / Are held by force: our Sanhedrins [Parliaments] shan’t sit” (ll. 208-211), and that “Saints that have right / To judge the earth are ravish’d of their might: / Our hands are fetter’d, and our hearts complain / That free-born spirits should be thrall’d in chain” (ll. 212-215), the author opposes an appeal to public memory of the Civil War. “Have you forgot,” he asks the corporation, how once before “you the Queen did force, / And high-born issue, to a sad divorce / From their royal father?” (ll. 69-71). Have

you forgotten how “clamor, then petition” (l. 73) at last brought “Rebellion, a complete sin-offering” (l. 74)? “Had you,” he demands, “a charter for such tricks as these?” (l. 76):

Once more, beloved: Have you forgot when drums  
 Beat up for bankrupt and religious thrums?  
 When hungry Levites and starv'd 'prentices  
 Salli'd from their dark cells and penthouses,  
 And like the plagues of Egypt spread all o'er,  
 Some for to stench us, all for to devour?  
 Have you forgot how you did stab the King  
 And Church with bodkin, thimble, spoon, and ring,  
 And like the Indians, prostitute yourselves  
 For th' devilish idol of your Cause and elves? (ll. 77-86)

By all means, he defiantly exhorts the new rebels near the poem's end, “Keep to your gods; on damned Bradshaw<sup>45</sup> call, / Implore the shades of Ireton and Noll / To come improv'd from Hell and be so good / To set crack'd men with plunder up, and blood” (ll. 410-413). For in the end, even if they could revisit the very Civil War itself upon the land, “The rabble shall no longer rule this town; / Rebellion's Charter now must go down, down” (ll. 414-415).

But if *Old England* and *The Charter* offer examples of elaborate, impassioned applications of the Civil War figure to the contest between municipal and royal sovereignty, much more typical of the figure's application is Dryden's prologue addressed to the King and Queen at the opening of the United Theatre (May 1682). Citing the late rebelliousness of the Whigs and “Saints,” Dryden remarks, almost reflexively now, that such as these are forever bestirring themselves with “new fears and Jealousies” (l. 17), until, as before, “topsy-turvy they had turn'd the State” (l. 18). And if “Plain sense, *without the talent of foretelling*, / Might guess 'twould end in downright knocks and quelling; / For seldom comes there better of rebelling” (ll. 19-21; emphasis added), it manages so well without prophetic powers because it may look to the precedent of the *past* to discern the future of

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<sup>45</sup> John Bradshaw (1602-1659) was president of the trial of Charles I; Henry Ireton (1611-1651), a Parliamentary general, was a signatory of the warrant for Charles' execution; Noll is Cromwell.

the present. Then, seemingly put in mind of London's rebellion in the present, Dryden allows himself to editorialize, "When men will, needlessly, their Freedom barter / For lawless Pow'r, sometimes they catch a Tartar"—adding as an afterthought in an awkward parenthesis, "(There's a damn'd word that rhymes to this call'd Charter)" (ll. 22-24). However awkward, the minimalism with which Dryden identifies the Charter crisis with the English Civil War may be found in any number of such pieces, including the prologue spoken by Mr. Powell at Oxford (July 10, 1682), Dryden's own prologue to *The Duke of Guise* (ll. 41-47), John Crowne's prologue to *City Politiques* (January 19, 1683), and Ravenscroft's epilogue to *The Cunning Woman* (May 31, 1683). It would appear that at this point in the life of the Civil War figure, it is necessary only to associate—however loosely—the name of the controversy of the day with the most adumbrated rendering of the figure's defining, or at least most frequently drawn features.

There are several reasons for this. For one thing, by the time of the Charter crisis—and probably by the time the Whig Association had been discovered—the figure's frequent use had made it familiar to the popular mind. Though, as we have seen in the last few pages, some poets were occasionally willing to do so, there was simply no reason to rehash in painstaking detail parallels that had become almost second-nature to the great bloc of readers. For another thing, though loyalist poets were quick to make use of the figure as partisan conflicts arose in the aftermath of the Exclusion Crisis, it was evident to even the most ardent Tories that the period of greatest danger had passed, and that their side had emerged from it victorious. Even Aphra Behn herself, at the very climax of her most virulent anti-Whig invective in her dedicatory preface to *The Roundheads*, is yet shrewd enough to discern that "The Clouds already begin to disappear, and the face of things to change, thanks to Heaven his Majesties infinite Wisdom, and the Over-Zeal of the (falsly called) *True Protestant Party*: Now we may pray for the King and his Royal Brother, defend his Cause, and assert his Right, without the fear of a taste of the Old Sequestration call'd a Fine" (qtd. in Danchin III, 344). Similar statements abound in the occasional poetry

of late 1681 and early 1682. Among the pieces just surveyed, for instance, Behn observes in her prologue to *Like Fathers, Like Sons* that conventicling has “been put down” and that the Whigs have abandoned the exploded intrigues of “Declining States-men,” Durfey declares in the prologue to *The Royalist* that “The Dice now give kind chances on our side; / Tories are upmost, and the Whigs defy’d,” Dryden asserts in his prologue to the King and Queen at the opening of the United Theatre that “Faction ebbs, and rogues grow out of fashion” (l. 1), and Crowne concurs in his prologue to *City Politiques* that “the frenzy of the Nation / Begins to cure, and Wit to grow in fashion” (ll. 1-2).<sup>46</sup> In addition to inculcating a retrospective rather than anticipatory outlook on the constitutional, partisan, religious, and personal conflicts of the day, this sense that the worst was behind them inclined the Tory poets—to cite still another thing—to turn the Civil War figure toward a wholly new and different use. The graphic imagery of war and regicide in poems such as *The Medal*, *Old England*, and *The Charter* might occasionally arouse fear and anger in their readers, but the elements of review and summary of the near past in each ensure that the historical pattern itself rather than its consequences for the present moment will be the most affective feature of the work. This is especially true of the foregoing prologues and epilogues. Remember that when the figure of the Civil War was first being articulated, such playhouse pieces exploited their performative possibilities in order to so excite the passions of their auditors as to reify—literally—the most dreaded aspects of the past. By contrast, the abbreviated, almost stylized renderings of the figure in these last prologues and epilogues cannot be hoped to rouse the same powerful emotions. Indeed, that seems no

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<sup>46</sup> Elsewhere, Behn declares in her epilogue to Thomas Randolph’s *The Jealous Lovers* (March 22, 1682) that the audience saw in the foregoing play “no Reflections on Damn’d Witnesses” (l. 11), “No *Salamanca* Doctor-ship abus’d, / Nor a Malicious *States-man* here accus’d” (ll. 14-15), but rather “fools of every sort and Fashion, / Except State-Fools, the Tools of *Reformation*” (ll. 18-19). As she explains, “We scorn such out-of-Fash’on’d-things as these” (l. 12). Durfey observes in *The Whig Feast* (April 1682) that though London must ever guard against being undone by the Opposition’s treachery, the Whigs are sufficiently in eclipse that the Duke of York once more dares to “dine in the City, / And muckle they fear his power” (ll. 7-8)—and Dryden notes in the forbidden second epilogue for *The Duke of Guise* that “our Discords and Divisions cease” (l. 4).

longer to be their purpose, for the sparseness of these poems, assuming in the audience an existing knowledge of the figure and the configuration of events it purports to describe, makes an essentially intellectual or æsthetic appeal to a newly established convention of poetic historiography. That is, audiences are now asked to recognize the figure's use, appreciate the facility of its application, and remark upon the aptness thereof. Once a vehicle by which the past could be realized in the present, the Civil War figure is now something of a rhetorical template according to which events of the present moment may be perceived, organized, understood—and remembered. As such, it has become an emblem of the peculiar pattern of history and collective affect traced out during the Exclusion Crisis, a concise cultural mnemonic capturing both the events of those years and the nation's experience of them.

We can observe the fashioning of the historical pattern of the Exclusion Crisis itself into a ready cultural mnemonic in an anonymous prologue delivered at Oxford in July 1683. Opening with an image of Deucalion breasting the "wide Deluge" (l. 1)<sup>47</sup> and at last grounding his boat on Mount Parnassus, "above the vain attempts of the insulting flood" (l. 4), the poet then offers a capsule history of Britain's own near apocalypse during the succession struggle, when "wild Faction all our Land alarm'd, / Our Land by the prevailing Jugglers charm'd. / When pregnant with dire seeds the Clouds did rise, / Presaging Civil Tempests in our Skies" (ll. 7-10). Menaced then by "threats of daring sin" (l. 12), "the popular Deluge as it came rowling in" (l. 13), "perjur'd Bog-trotters" (l. 14), "Meal-tub Plots & Armies under-ground" (l. 15), it was here at Oxford, the poet relates, alluding to Charles' abrupt dismissal of the Parliament that met there in March 1681 (and, by extension, to the King's subsequent seizure of the political initiative as well), that "God-like *Charles* did a safe Harbour win" (l. 11). Against this familiar exposition of a highly

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<sup>47</sup> In a Greek myth closely prefiguring the biblical story of Noah's ark, Zeus sends a flood to punish Mankind's wickedness; warned by his father, Prometheus, Deucalion builds a boat in which he and his wife Pyrrha escape the general devastation.

familiar sequence of events, the poet immediately juxtaposes an account of the current uproar in London occasioned by the Charter crisis. Oxford may be loyal and peaceful, “But we are still alarm’d with senseless noise, / *Guildhall* Elections, and leud frantick crys. / Tir’d with dull Managers of duller Plots, / And free-born Slaves, and *Magna-Charta*<sup>48</sup> Sots” (ll. 24-27). The alignment implies that the two periods of unrest are at least parallel if not identical in scope, arc, and import. Certainly they are sufficiently of a kind that the immediate difficulties may be dispelled according to the resolution achieved at Oxford years before. If the capital would but “a pattern take from you, / Whom the worst times still found to *Caesar* true[,] / Discords wou’d cease, ill-natur’d jars retire, / And every Muse in *Charles*’s praise conspire. / Peace with her train wou’d guard our Halcyon shore, / And *Britain* envy *Saturn*’s Age no more” (ll. 28-33). In any event, the assumption that present controversy parallels the former—that the historical template of the Exclusion Crisis may be relied upon to intimate the course of the near future—allows the poet the emotional luxury of weary exasperation (as opposed to the fear, anxiety, and anger excited by the much more ominous prospect of the Civil War figure playing itself out during the original succession struggle), for it allows him to presume that the “senseless noise” and “frantick crys” will be muted, the rebellion of the “*Magna-Charta Sots*” will be thwarted—and thwarted sooner rather than later. If the poet evokes with confidence visions of Halcyon days and a new Saturnian age to come, he may do so because the Exclusion figure as mnemonic gives him a foreknowledge that seems not simply to guide him through the maze of the historical present, but to lend him the power to shape it as well.

Shadwell might ridicule the blitheness with which the Tories invoked the Civil War figure to demonize and stifle the Opposition, but almost no sooner had his “Lenten prologue” appeared than events confirmed its validity and vindicated loyalist complacency. June 1683 saw the discovery of the so-called Rye House Plot to assassinate the King and

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<sup>48</sup> “*Magna-Charta*” was the rallying slogan for defenders of London’s municipal autonomy.

the Duke of York. Ashley describes the plan to kill the royal brothers at Rye House in Hertfordshire as they rode from the races in Newmarket as wholly “imaginary,” “as much a fabrication as Oates’s Popish Plot had been,” though at last “a couple of rusty cannon were discovered in a London cellar” (152); Kenyon accepts the plausibility of “a conspiracy by a few radical ex-Cromwellians” and notes as well the existence of “a much less substantial plot for an aristocratic coup d’état which [however] had never got beyond the stage of talk” (237). But Ashley and Kenyon agree that, feasible or not, credible or not, the Rye House Plot (in Kenyon’s words) finally “delivered the remaining Whig leaders into the government’s hands” (237) and thus (in Ashley’s words) “enabled the Tories to complete their revenge and their opponents,” who “were thrown out of all their offices whether in the municipalities, in the militia, or on the magistrates’ bench” (152). In short, the Rye House Plot allowed the Tories to claim what they could be forgiven for believing was final victory in their hard-fought struggle over public perceptions and hence public memory of the historical present: *the Whigs really were the regicidal Roundheads the Civil War figure had all along made them out to be.*

The fact was now so “obvious” that, at least for the anonymous author of *Algernon Sidney’s Farewell* (December 1683), applying the historical figure to the latest Whig enormity was only a matter of letting one of those arrested, indicted, and executed for his involvement in the Rye House Plot<sup>49</sup> confess as much for himself. As he delivers his own summing up, the Sidney of the poem remains wholly unrepentant, welcoming the “kind

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<sup>49</sup> Grandnephew of Sir Philip Sidney, Algernon Sidney (1622-1683) was born at Penshurst. An ardent republican, he fought for Parliament during the Civil War and occupied a number of official posts during the Commonwealth, though his opposition to Cromwell’s assumption of power led him to withdraw to Penshurst for the duration of the Protectorate. Though he was not directly involved in the trial or execution of Charles I, like Milton he defended the regicide on theoretical grounds. Upon the Restoration he fled to the Continent; pardoned in 1677, he returned to England. He remained politically active, twice running (unsuccessfully) for Parliament, taking subsidies from France to finance the republican cause in England, and (possibly) helping William Penn, a Quaker, frame the constitution for Pennsylvania, whose features—including the ballot, universal suffrage, the abolition of the property qualification, religious equality, prison reform, and the abolition of capital punishment except in cases of murder and treason—embodied many of Sidney’s personal ideals (*Chambers Biographical Dictionary*).



Death" that will soon waft his "long tir'd spirit" far from "hated monarchy's detested air" (ll. 1-2) "safe to th' happier Stygian land" (l. 3), where his shade will be seated "high at Shaftesbury's right hand" (l. 5).<sup>50</sup> In fact, being done to death by such hated enemies is, for Sidney, to enjoy the martyr's apotheosis, the glorious reward bestowed by a sympathetic (if infernal) deity for a life devoted to militant republicanism. At any rate, he vows that when at last he meets with the "mighty Prince of Darkness" (l. 14) he will with joy bid his Tartarean master to "[v]iew my hack'd limbs, each honorable wound, / The pride and glory of my numerous scars / In Hell's best cause, the old republic wars" (ll. 15-17), bid him

Behold the rich, grey hairs your Sidney brings,  
 Made silver all in the pursuit of kings.  
 Think of the royal martyr, and behold  
 This bold right hand, this Cyclops arm of old,  
 That labor'd long, stood blood and war's rough shock,  
 To forge the ax and hew the fatal block.  
 Nor stopp'd we here. Our dear revenge still kept  
 A spark that in the father's ashes slept,  
 To break as fiercely in a second flame  
 Against the son, the heir, the race, the name (ll. 18-27).

There are, he admits, those who would "Blast the renown of our illustrious cause" (ll. 32-33), but they are mere "Christian ignorants," "conscientious fools," and "dull preaching dotards" (ll. 31; 34) who would scruple at "Heaven's forbidding laws" (l. 32) and prostrate themselves before "that big name" (l. 43) of "the poor viceregent of a God" (l. 42). Let these "soft fools" "tremble at the guilt" (l. 41) of regicide: they do not understand that in demolishing the rotten edifice of "Curst monarchy" (l. 56) "[a]ll arts, all means, all hands are sacred still. / No play too foul to win the glorious game" (ll. 50-51), that "[i]n holy wars 'tis all *True Protestant* / Kings to dethrone, and empires to supplant" (ll. 53-54); they are too weak to undertake the "sublime rebellion" (l. 59) necessary to effect a second Reformation and establish a Commonwealth of saints (ll. 60-62).

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<sup>50</sup> Shaftesbury had died in Holland January 21, 1683.

Having delivered his personal apologia—and the now-manifest *raison d'être* of the Whig Opposition—Sidney boldly commands Charon to land him “on th’ Elysian coast, / With all the rites of a descending ghost” (ll. 63-64). A great cleft opens in the earth. Down plummets Sidney, leaving the poet to pronounce above him, “Methinks I saw him, saw the yawning deep. / Oh! ’twas a bold descent, a wondrous leap! / More swift the pointed lightning never fell. / One plunge at once t’ his death, his grave, his Hell” (ll. 69-72).

If the reality of Sidney’s end was somewhat less dramatic than its poetic treatment here, it was no less rich in symbolism. As Gilbert Burnet reports in his *History of My Own Times*, on the morning of his execution, December 7, 1683, Sidney “sent for some Independent preachers, and expressed to them a deep remorse for his past sins, and great confidence in the mercies of God” (205). He would not, however, abjure the tenets and aims of his republicanism. “He was,” Burnet writes, “but a very few minutes upon the scaffold at Tower Hill, where he delivered a paper to the Sheriff, in which he showed his own innocence and Lord Howard’s infamy [in perjuring himself to obtain his conviction] vindicated the subject of the book<sup>51</sup> at large; and concluded with a prayer that the nation might be preserved from idolatry and tyranny. After that he spoke but little, prayed very short, and his head was cut off at one blow” (205-206). When the executioner’s ax fell, history had come full circle: a man who had in his thought, life, works, and actions embodied the religious and political movement that had brought Charles I to the scaffold had met with the very fate of the Royal Martyr. But a further irony lies in the fact that by the time Sidney had put his head on the block, the historical figure by which the nation had preserved the memory of the man his beliefs had killed had achieved such currency and cultural authority that Sidney himself and the cause that yet animated the Opposition had

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<sup>51</sup> His notes for a treatise he was contemplating in answer to Robert Filmer’s *Patriarcha, or, The Divine Right of Monarchy Upon the Son’s Succeeding to the Authority of His Father*. There, we learn from Burnet, Sidney “had asserted that princes had their power from the people, with restrictions and limitations, and that they were liable to the justice of the people if they abused their power to the prejudice of the subjects, or against established laws” (205).

been reduced to mere devices in a pattern that had long since passed from trope to truth. In transubstantiating the past, the Tory poets had made spectres of their present foes, meting out to them a truly poetic justice.

The success of their Civil War figure had also, we should note, demonstrated for an age growing skeptical of poetry and figurative expression in general that these were altogether appropriate—and highly useful—vehicles for the public conduct of political and social debate. In addition to this essential legacy, the Civil War figure would leave to later generations of public poets another, more specific bequest whose influence would give a distinctive shape to the life's work of the age's greatest literary inheritor.

So well had loyalist poets reified the historical pattern of the 1630's and 1640's that when at last they had come to regard the Exclusion Crisis retrospectively they seemed to believe that the early 1680's truly had witnessed another civil war. Their visions of national apocalypse immediately before and after the perceived resolution of the succession struggle were certainly vivid enough to foster the illusion. Recall, for instance, the nightmare scenario Dryden paints in *The Medal* of Monmouth's seizure of the throne; or consider a similar passage in *The Second Part of Absalom and Achitophel*, in which David (that is, Charles) delivers his vision of England's fate should the established succession, "the kingdom's bar" (l. 773), be thwarted and Monmouth thrust into James's rightful place. The usurper, he warns, will be "Condemn'd for life the murd'ring sword to wield, / And on [his] heirs entail a bloody field" (ll. 769-770), his subjects consigned to self-cannibalization: "Waste, rapine, spoil, without th' assault begin, / And our mad tribes supplant the fence within" (ll. 775-776). But whether or not the Tory poets had actually imposed upon themselves with images inspired by their own poetic analogy, once Charles' resumption of the political initiative in the spring of 1681 and the subsequent continued reversal of Whig fortunes had effected in them a shift from fearful anticipation to confident retrospection, the psychological transition they experienced seemed to describe an historical

demarcation—a before and after—as well. This conceptual illusion made the “before” seem, if anything, worse than it actually was (much as the sudden alleviation of pain exaggerates our memory of discomfort), contributing to the feeling that England had in fact just emerged from a virtual civil war. When Tate looks back upon the recent crisis in his *Old England*, for instance, he sees the ship of State and Church careening madly between the rocks of popish intrigues on one side and the reef of Protestant radicalism on the other. But while England’s institutions and citizens prepare “to perish in one common fate” (l. 261), complacent slumber has “lock[ed] Caesar’s temples fast asleep” (l. 262). And though Tate would mitigate this image of royal negligence by likening Charles’ repose to that of Christ in Luke 8: 22-25<sup>52</sup>—“So slept the almighty pilot on the deep / When wind and waves the sacred vessel toss’d, / When faith was sinking, the ship almost lost” (ll. 263-265)—his picture of a somnolent king abandoning his people to the “raging storms” (l. 266), “fresh alarms” (l. 267), and “politic fright[s]” (l. 269) is, even after the storm has abated, far from reassuring. Indeed, it is likely to alarm all the more for showing the nation how needlessly close it came to utter ruin.

Fostered by many, many images akin to Tate’s, the supposition that England had just emerged from national catastrophe made it logical—inevitable, really—that the Tory poets would continue or extend the parallel between past and present to include the corresponding instances of national recovery; that the collapse of the Puritan rule and the return of Charles would suggest their respective equivalents in the Opposition’s disarray and the King’s successful reaffirmation of his prerogative; that, in short, from their original

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<sup>52</sup> “One day he got into a boat with his disciples, and he said to them, ‘Let us go across to the other side of the lake.’ So they set out, and as they sailed he fell asleep. And a storm of wind came down on the lake, and they were filling with water, and were in danger. And they went and woke him saying, ‘Master, Master, we are perishing!’ And he awoke and rebuked the wind and the raging waves; and they ceased, and there was a calm. He said to them, ‘Where is your faith?’” (Revised Standard Version) This would seem to be flattery of the highest sort; and yet, oddly enough, Tate would not have Charles wakened just yet, but bids “the Cyllenian god [Mercury] / Stroke both his temples with his charming rod” (ll. 270-271).

Civil War figure the Tory poets would fashion another for the new Restoration a benevolent Providence had seen fit to bestow upon the English people.

Not surprisingly, the political and poetical terms of the new Restoration are all but identical to those of its original and model. If in *Astræa Redux* (1660) Dryden characterizes Charles as Aeneas, driven from his land by the storms of war, “toss’d by fate, and hurried up and down, / Heir to his father’s sorrows, with his crown” (ll. 51-52), in *The Second Part of Absalom and Achitophel* he and Tate remind us that “the godlike David” (l. 1116) whose “sudden beams dispel the clouds” (l. 1117) of civil broils has been formed, tested, and found worthy by trials such as those endured by the Roman hero. Fate has not “sooth’d [Charles] with soft delights,” nor “stretch’d [him] on roses in the myrtle grove,” nor “crown[ed] his days with mirth, his nights with love” (ll. 1104-1106), but has “toss’d [him] in storms” (l. 1104), forced him to remove to “thund’ring camps,” to sleep upon “the herbless ground,” “feed from the hedge, and slake with ice his thirst” (ll. 1107-1110): “Long must his patience strive with Fortune’s rage, / And long opposing gods themselves engage, / Must see his country flame, his friends destroy’d, / Before the promis’d empire be enjoy’d” (ll. 1111-1114). Never mind that Charles’ recent struggle with the Whigs has been political rather than martial; by reiterating the privations endured by the king during his “travels” of the 1650’s Dryden and Tate would carry forward the “epic” context of Charles’ earlier heroism, reanimate in his readers the fervent admiration they had for the young king, recapture the joy and wonder they once felt at his return—and thereby entice them into implicitly equating defeat in battle, extended exile, and the loss of a crown with a brief period during which the Opposition held the political initiative. To reinforce the equation, Dryden and Tate here liken the order achieved by Charles’ restoration to the throne with the peace “David’s” reaffirmation of the monarch’s rights and prerogatives has restored to Israel (l. 1139)—an echo of the parallel Dryden had drawn in the first *Absalom and Achitophel* between Charles’ reinstatement and his reassertion of authority in *His Majesty’s Declaration*, by means of which “Once more the godlike David was restor’d, /

And willing nations knew their lawful lord" (ll. 1030-1031). This last line suggests that with the restoration of the King and his prerogative—and with these, order, peace, and law—England itself has been restored to a sense of the right relation between king and kingdom. As the conclusion of *Absalom and Achitophel II*, with its image of heretofore Whiggish London crowds' mourning their error and their resolution henceforth to obey their lord (l. 1140), suggests, such a moral restoration is possible only when the nation acknowledges and is truly remorseful for its lapses of duty and obedience toward its sovereign. This insistence upon national penance likely takes its cue from poems commemorating the original Restoration. In *Astræa Redux*, for example, Dryden tells the returning Charles that Dover, his point of arrival, has dressed its cliffs in the white "of penitence and sorrow" (l. 255), observing as well that "as those lees that trouble it, refine / The agitated soul of generous wine: / So tears of joy, for your returning spilt, Work out and expiate our guilt" (ll. 272-275). Robert Wild, too, in his *Iter Boreale* (April 23, 1660), promises the King that "England her penitential song shall sing" (l. 386), adding the prayer, "May we all live more loyal and more true, / To give to Caesar and to God their due. / We'll make his father's tomb with tears to swim, / And for the son, we'll shed our blood for him." (ll. 382-385). Painful as this atonement may be, once achieved, the cleansed land shall enjoy a new Golden Age. Dryden assures his readers in *Astræa Redux* that "now Time's whiter series is begun, / Which in soft centuries shall smoothly run" (ll. 292-293)—much as two decades later in *Absalom and Achitophel* the reconciliation of king and people stands fair to usher in "a new series of time" (l. 1028), and, in the anonymous Oxford prologue of July 1683, the resolution of their differences shall ensure that "Peace with her train [will] guard our Halcyon shore, / And Britain envy Saturn's Age no more" (ll. 32-33).

Restoring Charles a second time, and with him not only England itself but the glorious future predicted for it in 1660, this new figure seeks also in a sense to prefabricate, to secure that future by projecting upon James and his imminent reign the

character, circumstances, and expectations historically attaching to the present king. It was not lost upon the Tory poets of the day just how closely James's experiences during these years of anxiety and crisis replicated those of his brother. Thrice Opposition pressure had forced the Catholic Duke of York into exile; thrice the Whiggish Commons had passed bills of exclusion, effectively depriving James of his native and (to royalists) his sacred right to succession—much as the Long Parliament's abolition of monarchy had debarred Charles from the throne. Thus, when at last Charles' "restoration" to full exercise of his prerogative secured the succession for James and allowed him to return to England for good in March 1682, his homecoming is depicted much as his brother's had been twenty-two years earlier. As Charles' restoration was frequently said to have allayed the storm of rebellion, so in Tate and Dryden's *Absalom and Achitophel II* does York's return to England promise to bring peace to "A realm that long with civil discord mourn'd" (l. 794). Having vowed "Authority and force to join with skill, / And save the lunatics against their will" (ll. 779-780), David's resolution to shower "Impartial justice from our throne" (l. 789) begins to be realized with the recall of his banished brother, who "like some arriving god, / Compos'd and heal'd the place of his abode; / The deluge check'd that to Judea spread, / And stopp'd sedition at the fountain's head" (ll. 795-798). Similar claims for James's power to compose a disordered land are made in Otway's epilogue to the April 21, 1682, performance (attended by the Duke of York) of his *Venice Preserv'd*. There, Otway casts James as the agent of "Our Great Physician" (l. 5) to cure the land of its latest "Distemper" (l. 6). In his capacity of High Commissioner, James has been ministering to Scotland: "Where so Your Goodness, so Your Justice sway'd, / You but appear'd, and the wild plague was stay'd" (ll. 12-13); now, for England, "He only brings a *Medicine* fit to aswage / A peoples folly, and rowz'd Monarch's rage" (ll. 51-52). As Charles' mildness of temper—his "forgiving mind," "long-suffering, goodness, mercy"<sup>53</sup>—once interposed between strict justice and

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<sup>53</sup> *Astræa Redux*, ll. 261; 265.

his subjects' guilt, so now does the restored James act as intercessor, an agent of reconciliation between king and people—and in nothing so much as serving as the vehicle of England's atonement for its misdeeds. Not only does James provide a ready object for national contrition—"See, see, the injur'd PRINCE, and bless his Name, / Think on the *Martyr* from whose Loynes he came: / Think on the Blood was shed for you before, / And Curse the *Paricides* that thirst for more" (ll. 17-20)—his choice of exile over some bloodier resolution to the political crisis of 1678-1681 offers his future subjects an example of Christian humility, patience, and sacrifice: "His *Duteous Loyalty* before you lay, / And learn of him, *unmurm'ring* to obey. / Think what he 'as born, your Quiet to restore; / Repent your madness and *rebell* no more" (ll. 27-30).

As once Denham had declared upon the restoration of Charles, Dryden in his "Prologue to the Duchess on Her Return from Scotland" (May 1682) avers that now the royal couple is united again, their example of harmony and their patronage of letters shall revive a wan and drooping English poetry: "The Muse resumes her long-forgotten lays, / And Love, restor'd, his ancient realm surveys, / Recalls our beauties, and revives our plays" (ll. 30-32). But elsewhere Dryden assures us that James shall achieve much more for England. As once he predicted that an epoch of martial glories lay in store for the newly restored Charles—

Our nation, with united int'rest blest,  
Not now content to poise, shall sway the rest.  
Abroad your empire shall no limits know,  
But, like the sea, in boundless circles flow.  
Your much-lov'd fleet shall with a wide command  
Besiege the petty monarchs of the land;  
And as old Time his offspring swallow'd down,  
Our ocean in its depths all seas shall drown (*Astræa Redux*, ll. 296-303)—

so in *Threnodia Augustalis* (March 1685), composed upon the death of Charles and the accession of James, Dryden predicts that the new king—his mettle tempered by "His father's rebels, and his brother's foes" (l. 460)—shall at last lead England into that age of



unprecedented triumphs long prophesied by poets but somehow never quite realized. James “the drowsy genius wakes / Of Britain long entranc’d in charms, Restiff and slumb’ring on its arms: / ’Tis rous’d, and with a newstrung nerve, the spear already shakes” (ll. 470-473). If only his still doubting, “wond’ring senate” (l. 492) could glimpse, as the poet has, Heaven’s “adamantine book” (l. 491 in which is written the fates of nations, it would not then “be obstinately blind, / Still to divert the good [Heaven] hast design’d, / Or with malignant penury, / . . . sterve the royal virtues of his mind” (ll. 496-501), but would allow James to restore England to her rightful destiny. For Dryden declares that he already sees, beyond the “amended vows of English loyalty . . . The long retinue of a prosperous reign, / A series of successful years, In orderly array, a martial, manly train” (ll. 505; 507-509). These years, he concludes, will witness such a display of English might, even unto the world’s “remoter shores” (l. 510), that, “starting from his oozy bed, / Th’ asserted ocean rears his reverend head, / To view and recognise his ancient lord again; / And, with a willing hand, restores the *fascēs* of the main” (ll. 513-517).

Recasting the Restoration figure to accommodate James’s present circumstances and future reign, the Tory poets managed to create a great deal of good will for the royal brother. Alas, it was insufficient to overcome the new king’s bigotry and brutality; three years later he was driven from his throne. Yet James’s personal ill-fortune notwithstanding, the Restoration figure begotten by the Civil War figure had created—or at least revived—an historical pattern by which public poets could hope both to impose coherence upon the near past and present and to “shape” the near future. Chaos gave way to order; dissolution made way for reintegration; apocalypse prefigured apotheosis. As we shall see in the next chapters, such prefabricated patterns informed the respective poetic visions of Alexander Pope’s two major public personas. Fashioning himself as the English Virgil during the reign of Anne and the early years of George I, Pope would trace recent history to demonstrate the pattern fulfilling itself in a new Golden Age; then, as political, professional, and personal disillusionment led him to refashion himself as the English

Juvenal, he would turn this new historical figure upon its head: chaos, dissolution, apocalypse—these prefigured no rebirth, only the full, final, and everlasting restoration of Nothingness.



**PUBLIC POETRY, MEMORY, AND THE HISTORICAL PRESENT: 1660-1745**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### VOLUME 2

V.	FROM "GREAT ANNA!" TO "GREAT ANARCH!" (I): THE SATIRIST AND PUBLIC MEMORY .....	380
	1. The Accession of Alexander Pope .....	380
	2. Satire and the Framing of Public Memory .....	412
VI.	FROM "GREAT ANNA!" TO "GREAT ANARCH!" (II): BRITANNIA MORIBUNDA: POPE'S EPITAPHIC VISION .....	444
	1. Pope's Satiric Persona .....	444
	2. Epitaphic Satire and the Foundations of the Epitaphic Vision .....	461
	3. Pope's Epitaphic Vision .....	487
	4. <i>The Dunciad</i> : Pope's Grand Epitaph for England.....	522
	5. Universal Darkness, Poetry, and Public Memory .....	537
VII.	CONCLUSION .....	550
	1. By Way of Denouement: Pope and Posterity.....	550
	2. Pope and the Romantics .....	560
	3. Poetry and Public Memory After Pope.....	579
	4. <i>The SoHoiad: Or, The Masque of Art</i> .....	597
	5. Conclusions .....	613
	BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	617

## CHAPTER V

### FROM "GREAT ANNA!" TO "GREAT ANARCH!" (I): THE SATIRIST AND PUBLIC MEMORY

#### 1. The Accession of Alexander Pope

When Dryden rode into London from Cambridge in 1655, the social, political, and economic conditions he found there were just beginning to be favorable for the emergence of a fully public poetry. These conditions would prove increasingly favorable to public poetry in the decades after the Restoration, but in themselves they could not have produced the triumph of public poetry that followed; neither, for that matter, as the example of Ben Jonson demonstrates, could Dryden have effected the emergence of public poetry in their absence. It is clear, I think, that the public mode of poetry owed its ascendancy in the latter half of the seventeenth century to the fortuitous convergence of favorable circumstances with a talented, forceful advocate. Similarly, we might observe of the social, economic, and literary developments outlined in the preceding chapter that however they may have predisposed the figurative and literal mnemonic modes toward eventual estrangement, this estrangement, if not inevitable, was set in motion—or, if inevitable, was hastened—by the poetic career of another talented, forceful personality, Alexander Pope.

That Pope was Dryden's successor to the laurel was acknowledged early in the poet's career, and has been a truism of literary history ever since, together with the fact of Pope's lifelong habit of obsessive self-fashioning. What concerns us here, however, are two particulars of Pope's accession: *the role* of Dryden's successor as Pope envisioned it, and the specific *poetic persona* he adopted in order to fulfill it. These particulars largely determined the course of Pope's career, and in doing so proved greatly significant for the part poetry would play in public affairs both during Pope's reign as England's *de facto* laureate and in the decades following his death. As I hope to demonstrate in this chapter,

Pope's conviction that the role he was to undertake was to be shaped by the exigencies of epic rather than occasional verse altered the nature and direction of public poetry as well as the public poet's claim upon the attentions and esteem of the larger society; further, though the peculiar public stance Pope assumed during the 1730's and 1740's—that of chronicler and commemorator of England's decline and fall—increased the cultural authority of the poet and his poetry in the short run, over time it had the effect of diverting the mainstream of poetry from the mainstream of society. This divergence would alter the arc of literary history, but also that of mnemonic history: as poetry lost its power to frame the historical present authoritatively, the union of figurative and literal habits of memory within the collective mindset was likewise forfeited—more or less permanently, as the event has proved.

In January 1743, Alexander Pope wrote a long, melancholy letter from London to his friend John Boyle, 5th Earl of Orrery. "All your Lordship tells me of your Enjoyments at Marston, truly pleases me," he writes, "but with the alloy, of finding it will be long before I shall be happy in yours and Lady O.'s company" (*Correspondence*, IV, 437). Much as he might have felt the absence of good friends, however, or the general lack of companions suitable to his tastes and temperament, Pope acknowledges that his despondency has a yet more profound origin. "I have seen and heard, what makes me shut my Eyes & Ears, and retire inward into my own Heart; where I find Something to comfort me, in knowing it is possible some men may have some Principles. I wish I had been no where but in my Garden; but my weak frame will not endure it; or no where but in my Study; but my weak Eyes cannot read all the Evening" (437). He employs poor scholars to read to him, he says, and pays them in drink, drinking too much himself, further weakening his already fragile constitution. Cold weather was always hard on the frail Pope, and the physical infirmities, loneliness, and world-weariness occasioned by the winter of 1742-43 may have brought to Pope's mind the conviction—more debilitating than

any disease—that his life's work had come to nothing, that he now pursued his vocation of public poet in vain: "As to any thing else I shall write, it will be very little, and very faint. I have lost all Ardor and Appetite, even to Satyr, for no body has Shame enough left to be afraid of Reproach, or punish'd by it" (437).

Could we put ourselves at Pope's elbow, we might remind him that even as he wrote these words he was perhaps the best-known personage in England. Certainly he was its most renowned (and notorious) poet. His image was seemingly everywhere. Voltaire had remarked in his *Letters on England* (1734), "What most encourages the arts in England is the consideration they enjoy; the portrait of the Prime Minister is over the mantel-piece of his [own] room, but I have seen Mr. Pope's in a score of houses" (112). Voltaire's impression was correct: William K. Wimsatt observes that "Pope was probably the most frequently portrayed English person of his generation, perhaps of the whole eighteenth century. He was surely the English poet most often portrayed before the romantic era" (xv). Moreover, his images had, in his own lifetime, become valuable trophies for the connoisseur; the year before Pope penned his despairing letter to Orrery he had had what must have been the singular experience of seeing three portraits of himself auctioned off in London. James Northcote relates in his *Memoirs of Sir Joshua Reynolds* (1813) that "Reynolds was at the upper end of the room, near to the auctioneer, when he perceived a considerable bustle at the farther part of the room, near the door. . . . he soon heard the name of Mr. Pope, Mr. Pope, whispered from every mouth. . . . Immediately every person drew back to make passage for the distinguished poet, and all those on each side held out their hands for him to touch as he passed" (qtd. in Wimsatt, xviii). If Reynolds' memory and Northcote's rendering of it are accurate, this is a revealing episode indeed: the talismanic power of Pope's name, whispered from mouth to mouth, to part the throng of spectators and reduce it to reverential silence; the hands extended in breathless hope for the poet simply *to touch*—it would be difficult, I think, to note these details and not conclude that the great and powerful gathered that day saw in the bent figure passing before them not



an object of pity or scorn or indifference, but one of veneration, the living icon that had inspired those painted ones they had gathered to admire and exchange. How apparently foolish, then, for Pope to lament the futility of his life and vocation. After all, if Pope could claim a wide acquaintance among the peers of the realm (he had even dined with Frederick, Prince of Wales), if he was materially comfortable and comfortably affluent, if he had been courted by the Opposition to be its spokesman, and if his circle of intimates had included the leading writers, painters, architects, and composers of the day, he owed these marks of favor to the very success of his career as a public poet.

But it is seldom reasonable to second-guess another's despair. The previous year, 1742, had seen Pope embroiled in a copyright controversy with his publisher, Bernard Lintot, over his revision of *The Dunciad*; he had grown disillusioned with the prospects and designs of the Opposition; he had entangled himself in an humiliating war of slanders with Colley Cibber, his rival, butt, and foil, who, together with Lord Hervey and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, had circulated pamphlets and poems exposing Pope's physique and sexual prowess to very public ridicule, portraying his morals and temperament as those of a being scarcely human; lastly, Pope's health, impaired since childhood, had declined rapidly: his frame, left stunted and twisted by Pott's disease, had now begun to collapse upon itself. As Samuel Johnson records in his *Life of Pope*, "When he rose [in the morning] he was invested in [a] bodice made of stiff canvas, being scarce able to hold himself erect till they were laced, and then he put on a flannel waistcoat" (202). The decay of his ribs and spine had left him a near-invalid—his stockings, says Johnson, "were drawn on and off by the maid; for he was not able to dress or undress himself, and neither went to bed nor rose without help. His weakness made it very difficult for him to be clean" (202)—and had so compressed his internal organs that he was left perpetually short of breath. Pope writes to Hugh Bethel in March 1743 that "I have these 3 months or more, been advancing to an Asthmatic Complaint . . . . It is now at such a height, that I can scarce walk, or go up a pair of Stairs, or move much in my bed, without quite losing breath" (IV,

445). Pope's ill-health in January is thus a portent; by year's end, he will write to Ralph Allen, "I have nothing to do but to remove from one warm Fireside to another . . . . My Asthmatic Complaint necessitates me to this Confinement, for I can neither bear Cold nor Motion" (IV, 486). And his despondency, instead of abating as 1743 drew on, would intensify, fed by continued conflicts with his foes, quarrels with dear friends, and the seemingly deathless religious controversy sparked by the doctrines of his *Essay on Man*. In the preface to his *Works* of 1717, Pope had written, "The life of a Wit is a warfare upon earth; and the present spirit of the learned world is such, that to attempt to serve it (any way) one must have the constancy of a martyr, and resolution to suffer for its sake" (xxvi-xxvii). Perhaps during the decade leading up to his letter to Orrery, Pope had been all too ready to antagonize the "learned world" and play the martyr for poetry, but those years had also spawned enough political, social, and literary debacles to turn Pope from an English Virgil to the English Juvenal. His satires, however, seemed to draw more contempt upon his own head than upon his targets. Increasingly, Pope seemed at odds with an age in which "no body has Shame enough left to be afraid of Reproach, or punish'd by it," an age in which, Pope concludes to Orrery, "Cibber himself is the honestest Man I know, who has writ a book of his *Confessions*, not so much to his Credit as St. Augustine's, but full as True, & as open. Never had Impudence and Vanity so faithful a Professor" (437-438). Given this profound malaise, it is perhaps all the more curious that during this year of 1743 Pope would pen the first eight lines of an epic, *Brutus*, he had long planned but now knew he would never live to complete:

The Patient Chief, who lab'ring long, arriv'd  
On Britains Shore and brought with fav'ring Gods  
Arts Arms and Honour to her Ancient Sons:  
Daughter of Memory! from elder Time  
Recall; and me, with Britains Glory fir'd,  
Me, far from meaner Care or meaner Song,  
Snatch to thy Holy Hill of Spotless Bay,  
My Countrys Poet, to record her Fame.

In his biography of Pope, Maynard Mack calls “touching” that “at his late stage of literary history, to say nothing of this late stage in his career” Pope could yet entertain epic ambitions, could yet, despite “the political and social criticism of the satires and epistles,” foster within himself “a dream for England: the dream of a regenerated land” (773-774). But it is tempting to put an altogether different construction upon these lines, to view them not as a dream of what could be, but as a final glimpse, coming very late in a life slowly eroded by disease, controversy, and the strains of a problematic success, of what so long ago Pope had set out to become: “My Countrys Poet”; and what he had set out to do: “record her Fame.”

Pope’s sense of poetic mission had been as precocious as his temperament and talent. The companions of his youth and early maturity—Sir William Trumbull, William Wycherley, Henry Cromwell, William Walsh, and Samuel Garth among them—were men of middle age or beyond who had occupied the outer circles of Dryden’s coffee-house coterie. They encouraged the verses that the young Pope seemingly could not keep from writing—as he would explain in his *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot* (1735), “As yet a Child, nor yet a Fool to Fame, / I lisp’d in Numbers, for the Numbers came” (ll. 127-128)—and carried his *Pastorals* to London, where they were circulated among those, such as Congreve, who had known Dryden more intimately, securing for Pope in 1706 a request from Jacob Tonson, Dryden’s publisher and still the leading publisher of the day, for permission to publish them in his next miscellany. One friend had even carried the twelve-year-old Pope himself to Will’s so that he might catch a glimpse of the aged Dryden, “the greatest of living poets,” as Peter Quennell describes him, “who sat there amid his courtiers and companions, in winter months next to the hearth, and on a balcony above the street in summer” (8). The impression that brief glimpse made upon Pope was indelible. Thirty years later he would tell his occasional Boswell, Joseph Spence, “I saw Mr. Dryden when I was about twelve years of age:—this bust is like him.—I remember his face well; for I

looked upon him, even then, with the greatest veneration, and observed him very particularly” (194). The features of the old poet and his brooding prominence amidst a circle of acolytes became emblematic for Pope. Quennell notes that Dryden “typified genius, integrity, fame, breadth of accomplishment and strength of purpose—all the attributes that, as a man and an artist, the adult Pope would most value,” and further, that “like some high-arched Roman bridge, Dryden’s work had carried on the Elizabethan genius across from the Giant Age ‘before the Flood’ into the later seventeenth century” (8). But Dryden represented more to Pope than the genius of a former age; his achievements and status suggested to Pope that he had imposed a particular pattern upon the course of literary history, a pattern that his own nascent poetic career might be made to fulfill.

Quennell calls the time that passed between Dryden’s death and Pope’s final emergence as his greatest literary inheritor an “interregnum” (38). Obvious as this “interregnum” is to us, and as obvious as Pope’s accession to Dryden’s seat was even to the later eighteenth century—it never occurs to Johnson, for example, to compare Pope’s work to any poet’s save Dryden—the remarkable thing is how obvious this interregnum was to the sixteen-year-old Pope, how obvious to him that Dryden had no self-evident successor. In his first extant letter, written to Wycherley December 26, 1704, Pope declares, “I think with you, that whatever lesser Wits have risen since his [Dryden’s] Death, are but like Stars appearing when the Sun is set, that twinkle only in his absence, and with the Rays they have borrowed from him. Our Wit . . . is but Reflexion or Imitation, therefore scarce to be call’d ours” (*Corr.* I, 2). Pope’s consciousness of the absence of a greater genius presiding over English poetry led to a subsequent awareness of what the master had left unfinished at his death: “I learned versification wholly from Dryden’s works; who had improved it much beyond any of our former poets,” Pope told Spence in 1742 or 1743, “and would, probably, have brought it to its perfection, had not he been unhappily obliged to write so often in haste” (169). Though Pope’s biographers frequently cite Walsh’s admonishment to his young friend that, as Pope would relate to

Spence, “there was one way left of excelling: for though we had several great poets, we never had any one great poet that was correct; and he desired me to make that my study and aim” (169), Pope’s correspondence with Walsh and Cromwell in the century’s first decade makes clear that Pope sought to improve upon other aspects of Dryden’s craft as well. Pope’s October 22, 1706, letter to Walsh, for instance, outlines seven general prescriptions for good versification; the first, “It is not enough that nothing offends the Ear, but a good Poet will adapt the very Sounds, as well as Words, to the things he treats of” (I, 22), readers of Pope will recognize as the germ of one of his most famous dicta: “’Tis not enough no Harshness gives Offense, / The *Sound* must seem an *Eccho* to the *Sense*” (*An Essay on Criticism*, ll. 324-325). And the quest for a truly “representational metre,” as Johnson terms it, would become closely identified with Pope (and such a point of pride with him that Johnson, in his *Life*, would go out of his way to debunk it as a chimera<sup>1</sup>); but Pope in fact takes the hint for this “wonderful force” for “imprinting the Image on the reader” from Dryden: “We have one excellent Example of it in our Language, Mr. *Dryden’s* Ode on St. *Cæcilia’s* Day, entitled, *Alexander’s Feast*” (23). In the same letter, Pope taxes Dryden with excessive use of alexandrines and triplets (and elsewhere, with an overfondness for the hemistich in his dramatic poetry). However, Pope’s criticisms of Dryden’s stylistics, here and during his 1710 correspondence with Henry Cromwell, are not meant to undermine Dryden’s stature as an arbiter of poetic practice; on the contrary, several passages in *An Essay on Criticism* (which was to appear seven months hence) are but renderings in verse of Dryden’s prescriptions in *Of Dramatic Poetry: An Essay*. Rather, Pope means to establish for himself what remains to be done to advance English versification; Dryden’s shortcomings set the agenda for his own poetic project. Thus the

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<sup>1</sup> “This notion of representative metre, and the desire of discovering frequent adaptations of the sound to the sense, have produced, in my opinion, many wild conceits and imaginary beauties. . . . The fancied resemblances, I fear, arise sometimes merely from the ambiguity of words; there is supposed to be some relation between a *soft* line and *soft* couch, or between *hard* syllables and *hard* fortune” (*Lives of the English Poets*, II, 219).

preoccupation of the Pope-Cromwell correspondence with establishing rules governing the matter and diction in epic poetry takes its cue from the two men's vivisection of Dryden's translation of *The Aeneid*. In a letter of October 28, for example, Pope agrees with Cromwell's censure of "the use of Sea-Terms in Mr. Dryden's Virgill . . . because no Terms of Art, or Cant-Words, suit with the Majesty and dignity of Style [which] Epic Poetry requires" (I, 101), and subsequent letters exchanged by Pope and Cromwell are often taken up with such topics as heroic phraseology and the propriety of incorporating into an epic allusions to contemporary politics and learning. Pope had no doubt already learned much about such matters from translating passages of Homer and Statius as an adolescent, but his epistolary tutorial with Cromwell would prove fruitful when, five years hence, he would turn his hand to translating the whole of *The Iliad*.

In addition to suggesting to Pope that there should be such a thing as a successor to the last century's literary colossus, and suggesting as well the specific refinements requisite for continuing the advancement of English prosody, the career of Dryden as Pope discerned it likewise intimated an ideal governing pattern for his own poetic career. No doubt certain circumstantial parallels between himself and Dryden were evident enough: Pope knew many of the literary men Dryden had known, and on occasion participated in the culture of coffee-house debate that Dryden had reinvented after the Restoration; he had been published by Dryden's publisher—and in the same series of miscellanies that Dryden's work had made profitable; moreover, Pope knew enough about Dryden's business dealings with Tonson (including his earnings on various projects) to benefit when it came time to make his own terms with Bernard Lintot, and as he formulated a proposal for publishing an English *Iliad* by subscription, was well aware that he could cite the success of Dryden's Virgil—"one of the first books that had any thing of a subscription," he told Spence (160)—as justification for his own undertaking. But even before Pope had, like his predecessor, brilliantly translated one of the great figures of classical literature (he published the last volume of his Homer in 1720, to wide acclaim), he had been mindful of

Dryden's example as he imposed a shape upon the poetic career opening up before him. Before he was out of his teens, Pope had executed several imitations of Cowley and Waller, poets contemporary with Dryden and acknowledged influences upon him. The adolescent Pope also composed verse "paraphrases" and imitations of episodes taken from classical mythology, from the *Metamorphoses* and *Heroides* of Ovid, and from *The Canterbury Tales* of Chaucer. In this exercise, Pope took for his inspiration and model Dryden's final work, *Fables Ancient and Modern; Translated into Verse from Homer, Ovid, Boccace and Chaucer* (1700), a book, Johnson notes, "much in the hands of poetical readers" (II, 146)—a book whose subjects Pope's own compositions were meant to complement, and, he implies, upon whose versification he hoped to improve.

However imperfect our own literacy in Greek and Latin, however meager our skill in versification, it might not occur to us that Pope's efforts were necessarily extraordinary in an age when the study of classical authors was a major component of a young gentleman's education, and when translations of Greek and Roman works, as Lynch observes, tumbled in "shoals" from the presses (114). But we should remember, first, that Pope was largely self-educated, and second, that the program of study and composition he imposed upon himself had but one end: to make himself a poet. Quennell supposes that once, when the fifteen-year-old Pope lay near death, it was "an intense natural vitality and a resolute, ambitious character" that fueled his slow recovery: "[A]lready he was laying his plans—not haphazard, vaguely and fancifully, as most adolescents do, but with an exact appreciation of the task that he had set himself" (7). That task, if we may judge from Pope's *Pastorals* (1709; his first published poems), was to recapitulate the career of Virgil, who had progressed from the writing of eclogues and georgics in imitation of Theocritus to composition of *The Aeneid*, celebrating the founding of Rome. Spenser, too, had begun with pastoral, *The Shepherdes Calender* (1579), and progressed to epic, *The Faerie Queene* (1590-96), but it seems likely that despite Pope's admiration for Spenser, he eagerly adopted Virgil himself for his model—in part because of Dryden's massive and

much acclaimed translation of the Roman's complete works, finished in 1697. "The expectation of his work," Johnson notes in his *Life of Dryden*, "was undoubtedly great; the nation considered its honour as interested in the event" (II, 250). And, at least as much as to replicate the phases of Virgil's career, it was some feeling of national pride that Pope undertook, as he asserts in the opening lines of "Spring. The First Pastoral, or Damon," to show the virtues of the English countryside—and more specifically, of his own beloved Windsor Forest—to be in no way inferior to those celebrated by Theocritus and Virgil: "First in these Fields I try the Sylvan Strains, / Nor blush to sport on *Windsor's* blissful Plain: / Fair *Thames* flow gently from thy sacred Spring, / While on thy Banks *Sicilian* Muses sing; / Let Vernal Airs thro' trembling Osiers play, / And *Albion's* Cliffs resound the Rural Lay" (ll. 1-6). At the very least, Pope could look back upon these poems with a double sense of accomplishment. For himself, he could take pride in remarking, in a note accompanying a later edition of his *Pastorals*, that among the many who had approved of his efforts in this genre was William Walsh, "whom Mr. Dryden, in his Postscript to Virgil, calls the best critic of his age"<sup>2</sup>; but he could also share his success with the nation at large: in the same note, he goes on to cite Lord Lansdown's 1705 letter to Wycherley, in which, "mentioning the youth of our Poet, he says 'that if he goes on as he has begun in the Pastoral way, as Virgil first tried his strength, we may hope to see English Poetry vie with the Roman'" (123).

We might blush (or worse) at such self-congratulation, but cognizant as he was of his skill as a poet, and basking in the approval of those whom *Dryden* had esteemed for their literary judgement, Pope had good reason to be boundlessly confident, and to presume that he had all but realized his ambition of gaining *Dryden's* chair. It was this

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<sup>2</sup> For as much emphasis as Pope gives it, we should expect to find *Dryden's* commendation of Walsh almost anywhere but in a brief, literally parenthetical aside. In a "Postscript to the Reader" (1697) appended to his translation of *The Aeneid*, *Dryden* tells us that Walsh, "(who has so long honoured me with his friendship and who, without flattery, is the best critic of our nation)" (261), has given him word that the Duke of Shrewsbury has read and commended his work.



confidence that allowed Pope to publish *An Essay on Criticism*—a poem that sets up to be a definitive, latter-day equivalent of Horace’s *Ars Poetica*, Longinus’ *On the Sublime*, Dryden’s *Essay of Dramatic Poetry*, and Boileau’s *Art Poetique*—on May 15, 1711, six days before the poet turned twenty-three. Quennell describes the poem as “above all else, a young man’s book—confident, assertive, dogmatic, as ambitious in its critical generalizations as it is uninhibited in tone and sharp in utterance” (32); and Mack ascribes the “continuing vitality” of the poem to “the felt presence in almost every line of a spirited performer who has at last found himself, exulting like a dancer or skilled gymnast in the fascination of what’s difficult” (176). For our present purposes, we may set to one side the specific principles of composition and criticism the poem propounds, as well as its many successes, ambiguities, and outright defects<sup>3</sup>; I wish instead to draw attention to two more general characteristics of *An Essay on Criticism*, its pervasive optimism and the forward-looking perspective such optimism nourishes. The first we may discern in Pope’s outline of intellectual and literary history from ancient Greece and Rome down to the present day (ll. 643-734). Configuring the very topic Dryden addresses in “To Sir Godfrey Kneller” in terms highly similar and in language that seems an echo of Dryden’s, Pope traces the fate of the arts from their classical zenith (ll. 643-684) through their near-obliteration at the hands of the Goths and the medieval Church (ll. 685-693), to their rebirth during the “Golden Days” (l. 697) of Pope Leo VI. And like Dryden, Pope claims that whatever the glories of antiquity or the Renaissance, Britain in the present age shall achieve yet greater triumphs, for English literary culture, learning from the example of French neo-classicism and “the *juster Ancient cause*,” has “here restor’d Wit’s *Fundamental Laws*” (ll. 721-722). Thus the rules Pope sets forth in this poem are meant to constitute not so much the end of poetic evolution, but the governing laws by which future literary endeavors will be

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<sup>3</sup> Mack sums up the poem’s strengths and weaknesses concisely in *Alexander Pope: A Life*, pp. 167-177.

undertaken and assessed. Pope humbly presents himself as the unworthy pupil of the latest arbiter of literary taste—William Walsh, “the Muse’s Judge and Friend” (l. 729), (and, we remember, the critic Dryden most esteemed)—and thereby shrewdly takes his place at the vanguard of England’s poetic progress. Referring to himself first as “a grateful Muse” (l. 734; emphasis added) and then more boldly as “the Muse” (l. 735; emphasis added), thus identifying himself with the semi-divine, generally immanent “Muse” of line 729, Pope assures his countrymen that though he is untouched by either their praise or blame, he will confront and amend his faults even as he will teach them to recognize their own merits, deficiencies and failings:

Content, if hence th’ Unlearn’d their Wants may view,  
The Learn’d reflect on what before they knew:  
Careless of *Censure*, nor too fond of *Fame*,  
Still pleas’d to *praise*, yet not afraid to *blame*,  
Averse alike to *Flatter* or *Offend*,  
Not *free* from faults, not yet too vain to *mend* (ll. 739-744).

We should recognize these lines for what they are, Pope’s declaration of the conditions and aims of his tenure as England’s leading public poet. To this point in his career, Pope has more or less privately recognized and drawn implicit parallels between himself and Dryden; here he openly commandeers Dryden’s critical and cultural authority as he conceived them. But the extent to which Pope saw himself actually walking in Dryden’s footsteps, composing a career parallel to Dryden’s under conditions closely identical to those that witnessed Dryden’s emergence during the 1660’s, can be fully seen in his first public poem on national affairs, *Windsor-Forest*, begun, Pope says, in 1704 and published in 1713 in observance of the final signing of the Treaty of Utrecht, ending the War of Spanish Succession. For with *Windsor-Forest*, Pope goes beyond even the assimilation of Dryden’s public posture: he appropriates for his own purposes the specific circumstances, narrative outline, and sensibility of Dryden’s early public poetry,

particularly *Astræa Redux*, "To His Sacred Majesty," and *Annus Mirabilis*.<sup>4</sup>

We may briefly recall that in each of those poems—the first two written to commemorate the Restoration; the third, the heroism of London (and especially of the royal brothers, Charles and James) during the war and fire of 1665-1666—Dryden attempts to express the nation's sense of relief at having come through some great trial and predicts that, having proven itself worthy, England shall henceforth experience a period of unprecedented greatness. Each poem, accordingly, employs a three-part structure: a graphic, at times hyperbolic exposition of the national catastrophe; an account of the character and actions of the royal personage, whose superintending presence catalyzes and directs the nation's recovery; and a concluding vision of an impending Golden Age. In "Astræa Redux," for instance, Dryden likens the chaos of the Civil War and Interregnum to a destructive tempest—"The rabble now such freedom did enjoy, / As winds at sea, that use it to destroy" (ll. 43-44)—but also, and less predictably, calls the overthrow of monarchy a willful return to the barbarity of a Hobbesian state of nature: "Blind as the Cyclops, and as wild as he, / They own'd a lawless salvage liberty, / Like that our painted ancestors so priz'd / Ere empire's arts their breasts had civiliz'd" (ll. 45-48). Dryden carries the imagery of national desolation to its logical zenith in "To His Sacred Majesty," opening the poem with a picture of the Great Flood, "that wild deluge where the world was drown'd, / When life and sin one common tomb had found" (ll. 1-2). The Civil War and its aftermath are thus placed on a level with global apocalypse; but if England's culpability for the murder of Charles I has invited Heaven's obliterating stroke, that obliteration has, as the second line of the couplet implies, left England purged and purified, set to begin anew.

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<sup>4</sup> I am not suggesting that the pattern of "restoration panegyric" Pope apparently adopts from his great forbear is in any way unique to Dryden. As Howard Erskine-Hill observes in *The Augustan Idea in English Literature* (1983), Dryden's restoration poetry was much of a kind with the flood of similar efforts by far inferior hands, and its structure, themes, and tropes were already well worn by the time he had occasion to apply them to Charles II (see Chapter VIII: "Dryden and the Augustan Idea," 213-233). I mean only to draw attention to the similarities between Pope's own "restoration panegyric" and what in his day was probably the best-remembered example of such poetry in order to point out the later poet's appropriation of the trappings of a distant historical moment.

Extending his metaphor, Dryden casts Charles as the sun that comes to dry and warm the land after the deluge (ll. 13ff.), and a bit later as the restorer of harmony to the jangled spheres of state and church: “He that brought peace, and discord could atone, / His name is music of itself alone” (ll. 57-58)—much as in “*Astræa Redux*” Dryden had portrayed the restored Charles II as an all-pervading genius presiding over the reawakening land: a ruler made benevolent, wise, and just by his Aeneas-like wanderings and his Christ-like sufferings; a second and greater Augustus under whom “Time’s whiter series is begun” (l. 292): “O happy age! O times like those alone / By fate reserv’d for great Augustus’ throne! / When the joint growth of arms and arts foreshew / The world a monarch, and that monarch you” (ll. 320-323). Dryden’s predictions of England’s renewed martial prowess here (ll. 292-311) are tempered in “To His Sacred Majesty,” and, as the basis for the coming Golden Age, all but abandoned in *Annus Mirabilis*, where trade and the sheer magnificence of a resurrected London rather than force of arms will make Britain the perpetual mistress of a suppliant world:

Our pow’rful navy shall no longer meet,  
The wealth of France and Holland to invade;  
The beauty of this town, without a fleet,  
From all the world shall vindicate her trade (stanza 301, ll. 1201-1204).

But if anything, Dryden’s gilded vision of England’s future is all the more glorious for being founded upon means of ascent far more civilized and civilizing than war and conquest. For one thing, England shall first renew *itself*, spiritually as well as materially, and only once it has done so shall it be worthy of the world’s estimation. “Before, she [London] like some shepherdess did show” (stanza 296, l. 1181), uncouth and unkempt, “Not answering to her fame, but rude and low, / Nor taught the beauteous arts of modern pride” (ll. 1183-84). But now, acknowledging her destiny or “fame” and embracing the arts—technical, economic, and governmental—by which she may achieve it, London (and by extension, England) is at last ready to become the arbiter of nations. Further, the roles to be played in the creation of this new England are rather broadly apportioned among the

several ranks of its citizens. Having earlier paid tribute to Charles II's leadership and bravery during the Great Fire, to James' admirals, and to the gallantry and resourcefulness of the navy generally during its engagement with the Dutch fleet, Dryden in these closing stanzas of *Annus Mirabilis* makes it clear that it is ultimately to the energies of her traders, merchantmen, and artisans that England will owe its new-found ascendancy. Trade will make England a "fam'd emporium" (l. 1205), will turn the world's seas into a "British ocean" (l. 1206), will make England so wealthy that its arts will flourish and its political weight will increase severalfold at the expense of her current rivals, Spain, Holland, and France: the Tagus and Rhine, Dryden exults, "The glory of their towns no more shall boast; / And Seine, that would with Belgian rivers join, / Shall find her luster stain'd, and traffic lost" (st. 299, ll. 1194-1196). The arts of order and peace and the vigor of a free and enterprising people shall thus inevitably accomplish what the outcome of the present war—still in doubt at the time of the poem's appearance—might in the short run leave open to question.

Pope employs the same three-part formula of national apocalypse, restoration, and apotheosis-in-perpetuity in his *Windsor-Forest*. It may be that a writer celebrating the circumstances of the present will instinctively seek to contrast them with less agreeable conditions of the past and interpret them as portents of an even more glorious future; and having prophesied such a future, the poet will hardly allow himself to foresee a time when its glories will pass away. But as I hinted above, the significance of Pope's appropriations from Dryden is their specificity: he borrows the narrative outline from Dryden's early public poetry, but also the proximate events that gave it life, as well as its animating spirit or sensibility. In short, he identifies his historical present so closely with Dryden's that as one reads *Windsor-Forest* one might in certain places easily imagine that Pope is actually commemorating the restoration of the true monarch, the rebuilding of London, the original embarkation of English mercantile enterprise, and the universal Golden Age that will attend England's unprecedented yet predestined rise to global preëminence.

Pope introduces each of these themes briefly in the poem's opening lines. So idyllic are the wealds of Windsor Forest, for instance, that they replicate the paradisaical "Groves of Eden," and would, "were my Breast inspir'd with equal Flame, / Like them in Beauty, . . . be like in Fame" (ll. 9-10). And like their prelapsarian archetype, the woods and fields of Windsor are remarkable for their bounty and variety, which not only sustain their inhabitants, but provide them the means of extending a benign dominion over far-flung regions of the world: no need, the poet declares, for England to envy the exotic, amber- and balm-yielding arbors of distant lands, "While by our Oaks the precious Loads are born, / And realms commanded which those Trees adorn" (ll. 31-32). Yet despite its glories, Windsor Forest as Pope depicts it is an emblem not so much of an unsullied Eden—a paradise preserved—but of a paradise reclaimed and regained, recently brought to final restoration by the informing genius of its superintending mistress, Queen Anne: "Rich Industry sits smiling on the Plains, / And Peace and Plenty tell, a STUART reigns" (ll. 41-42).

The full thematic significance of this couplet, and indeed the entire section of exposition it brings to a close, is made clear once we are shown how things stood before a restoration of peace, plenty, and the richness of industry had been achieved by the requisite "restoration" of the Stuart dynasty in the person of Anne:

Not thus the Land appear'd in Ages past,  
A dreary Desart and a gloomy Waste,  
To Savage Beasts and Savage Laws a Prey,  
And Kings more furious and severe than they:  
Who claim'd the Skies, dispeopled Air and Floods,  
The lonely Lords of empty Wilds and Woods (ll. 43-48).

With these lines Pope begins to sketch an altogether different picture of Windsor Forest, and more generally, of England itself, throwing the blessings of the present into clear relief by returning his readers to an apocalyptic past now all but unimaginable. His ostensible subject, of course, is the Conquest and the ensuing reign of the first William, "our haughty Norman" (l. 63), whose despotism brought about the utter desolation of the human and

animal worlds, thwarting even the balance and rhythms of nature: "In vain kind Seasons swelled the teeming Grain, / Soft Show'rs distilled, and Suns grew warm in vain; / The Swain with Tears his frustrate Labour yields, / And famish'd dies amidst his ripen'd Fields" (ll. 53-56). Enslaving the populace, levelling cities, despoiling churches, the despotic William soon reduces England to "a Waste for Beasts" (l. 80). The "broken Columns" now supporting only the "clasping Ivy" (l. 69), the "Heaps of Ruin" frequented by the stately Hind" (l. 70), the "gaping Tombs" haunted by "the Fox obscene" (l. 71), the "sacred Quires" now filled with "savage Howlings" (l. 72)—more than simply the aftermath of war's fury, these broken remains in their silence offer an eloquent intimation of the vitality, prosperity, and purposefulness of a civilization reduced to *nothingness* by the mad appetites of a tyrant.

Pope passes quickly over the centuries separating the reigns of William and Anne, noting almost in passing that "Succeeding Monarchs heard the Subjects Cries, / Nor saw displeas'd the peaceful Cottage rise" (ll. 85-86), and that at length "Fair Liberty, Britannia's Goddess, rears / Her cheerful Head, and leads the golden Years" (ll. 91-92). For his intent, beyond his obvious object of celebrating Windsor Forest as Jonson had Penshurst or Denham Cooper's Hill, is to place the characters and rule of the Conqueror and Anne in such close juxtaposition that the former might be made to seem Anne's immediate predecessor, allowing Pope thereby to insinuate any number of rough parallels between the foreignness, militarism, and autocratic predisposition of William of Normandy and those of the William Anne actually succeeded, William of Orange, King William III of England. In sharp contrast to the rapaciousness of those "furious and severe" kings who governed before her, Anne is portrayed throughout *Windsor-Forest* as a loving caretaker of her lands, a wise nurturer of her people. The couplet in her praise concluding the poem's opening section (above, ll. 41-42) foreshadows the more extended complement that punctuates the closing of a panoramic survey of Windsor in its seasonal variations (ll. 93-158):

Let old *Arcadia* boast her ample Plain,  
 Th' Immortal Huntress, and her Virgin Train;  
 Nor envy *Windsor!* since thy Shades have seen  
 As bright a Goddess, and as chaste a Queen;  
 Whose Care, like hers, protects the Sylvan Reign,  
 The Earth's fair Light, and Empress of the Main (ll. 159-164).

The lines are a rhetorical masterstroke. Pope has just exhibited the passing of seasons in the Forest through a series of vignettes depicting the taking of the game afforded respectively by autumn (pheasants), winter (doves, woodcocks, and larks), spring (various fishes), and summer (deer). But though Pope, always tender-hearted toward animals, describes their deaths here with real feeling, he is careful to distinguish the limited predations of local sportsmen from the wanton slaughter visited upon the land by William and his Normans. These hunts are strictly regulated by the calendar, and, more important, are here vaguely implied to be supervised by a huntress (Anne was an accomplished rider) whose governing instinct is to “protect the Sylvan Reign.” William’s coursing “dispeopled Air and Floods,” leaving him a “lonely Lord of empty Wilds and Woods”; Anne’s, like Diana’s, maintains nature’s balance of these habitats. But Pope’s likening of Anne to Diana (the homophony of the two names would not have escaped him) allows him to make the further claim that, like the goddess of the moon, Anne, too, is an agent of elemental order. Figured here as the moon, Anne’s “fair Light” illuminates the dark earth even as her presence regulates the tides; Anne is thus Nature’s mistress of land and sea, an all-composing immanence lending a rhythmical coherence to the physical world that reliably and richly sustains its inhabitants, both human and animal.

As Pope shall demonstrate, Anne is “Empress of the Main” in more than one sense, but for the moment Pope leaves the phrase to linger in the ear, preparing us for his final identification of Anne with a newly refulgent London and the global domain it superintends. However, when he next returns to his refrain of praise—following the myth of the nymph *Lodona* (ll. 165-218), a catalogue of the poets *Windsor* has inspired (ll. 259-298), and brief accounts of the kings especially associated with the Forest (ll. 299-319)—



he exploits instead what he has implied in these lines, that Anne is an agent of harmony and concord, this time in the sphere of human affairs. Pope concludes his musings on Windsor's royal visitants, among them Edward III, Henry VI, and, lastly, Charles I, by bidding the Muse to "Make sacred *Charles's* Tomb for ever known, / (Obscure the Place, and uninscrib'd the Stone)" (ll. 319-320). The thought of Charles' ignominious death puts the poet in mind of England's many recent calamities:

Oh Fact accurst! What Tears has *Albion* shed,  
 Heav'ns! what new Wounds, and how her old have bled?  
 She saw her Sons with purple Deaths expire,  
 Her sacred Domes involv'd in rolling Fire,  
 A dreadful Series of Intestine Wars,  
 Inglorious Triumphs, and dishonest Scars.  
 At length great ANNA said—Let Discord cease!  
 She said, the World obey'd, and all was *Peace!* (ll. 321-328)

Two things are particularly significant here. The first is that Pope attributes to Anne not only the power to resolve the discords of her own time, specifically the "Inglorious Triumphs, and dishonest Scars" gotten in the artificially protracted War of Spanish Secession, but to induce as well a healing oblivion in a national psyche still troubled by the images of Civil War, plague, and the Great Fire still painfully alive, apparently, in England's collective memory. By doing so, Pope has, secondly, carried forward the crises faced by Charles II into the reign of his own queen, as if they had yet to be resolved. He thereby attempts to recapture for Anne the acclaim Dryden had secured for Charles upon the successful reintroduction of order, peace, and prosperity at the Restoration—and for himself, Pope seeks to commandeer Dryden's historical moment, his role of chronicler of his country's reconstitution after great trial and hardship, and, perhaps above all, the cultural authority that accrues to the poet who fulfills this public function.

We should note as well that when Pope has Anne bid "Let Discord cease!" the instantaneous realization of peace marks her mandate as a moment of creation: the tumultuous past is cast into oblivion; order is brought forth from chaos, and time begins

anew. Pope is thus able to turn a complacent back upon what has gone before and give his full attention to the glories yet to come, lending the conclusion of *Windsor-Forest* the same forward-looking quality we saw in Dryden's *Astræa Redux*, "To His Sacred Majesty," and—especially—*Annus Mirabilis*. Indeed, the Golden Age over which Pope imagines Anne presiding is strikingly similar to that Dryden fashioned in the latter poem:

Behold! *Augusta's* glitt'ring Spires increase,  
 And Temples rise, the beauteous Works of Peace.  
 I see, I see where two fair Cities bend  
 Their ample Bow, a new *White-Hall* ascend!  
 There mighty Nations shall inquire their Doom,  
 The World's great Oracle in Times to come;  
 There Kings shall sue, and suppliant States be seen  
 Once more to bend before a *British QUEEN* (ll. 377-384).

Lines 381-384 in fact closely echo a corresponding stanza in the latter poem: "Now, like a maiden queen, she [London] will behold, / From her high turrets, hourly suitors come: / The East with incense, and the West with gold, Will stand, like suppliants, to receive her doom" (stanza 297, ll. 1185-1188). And here again we see London gloriously rebuilt, with international trade again the supposed foundation of London's new-found beauty, wealth, and power. Pope has the personified River Thames declare, "The Time shall come, when free as Seas or wind / Unbounded Thames shall flow for all Mankind, / Whole Nations enter with each swelling Tyde, / And Seas but join the Regions they divide" (ll. 397-400). As in Dryden's poem, the world's seas shall become "a British ocean," and where Dryden had declared that "the vent'rous [foreign] merchant, who design'd more far, / . . . Charm'd with the splendour of this northern star, / Shall here unlade him, and depart no more" (stanza 300, ll. 1197; 1199-1200), Pope asserts that "Earth's distant ends our Glory shall behold, / And the new World launch forth to seek the Old" (ll. 401-401). Where Pope allows himself to differ from Dryden, the contrast is one of degree, not of kind. Dryden had envisioned an England so grand within her borders and so strong in terms of trade and arms beyond them that the rest of the world will be forced to forego all rivalry and resign

itself to envious awe of the resurrected nation; Pope sees the inaugurating words of England's new apotheosis, Anne's commandment that discord cease, echoing across the face of the globe, until the Golden Age England enjoys has become a universal condition: "Oh stretch thy Reign, fair *Peace!* from Shore to Shore, / Till Conquest cease, and Slav'ry be no more" (ll. 407-408). "Exil'd by Thee from Earth to deepest Hell," he continues, "In brazen Bonds shall barb'rous *Discord* Dwell" (ll. 413-414)—and with it, Pride, Terror, Care, Ambition, Vengeance, Envy, Persecution, Faction, and Rebellion (ll. 415-422).

Pope insists at this point that it is not for his humble muse, his "unhallow'd Lays," to do what they have in fact just done, "Touch the fair Fame of Albion's Golden Days" (ll. 423-424). It is enough for him, he says, that "My humble Muse, in unambitious Strains, / Paints the green Forests and the flow'ry Plains" (ll. 427-428), "Enough for me, that to the listning Swains / First in Fields I sung the Sylvan Strains" (ll. 433-434). The poetical performance Pope has just concluded, however, belies his professed humility. In *Windsor-Forest* he has presumed, first, to adopt the circumstances, themes, vision, structure—even, in places, the language—with which the nation's last great Laureate sought to impose an intelligible contour upon the recent history of his country, to commemorate its present, and, by articulating the pattern of its ideal future, to *create* the age to come. Pope makes Dryden's project his own in order, second, to figure himself in his own time as the spokesman for what he here terms "the Thoughts of Gods" (l. 425)—the Omniscience beyond human ken that sees and shapes the destinies of nations. But moreover, for all its apparent humility, the poem's final couplet (ll. 433-434) is not only self-allusive, bringing to the reader's mind Pope's early *Pastorals*, it also reminds the nation's literary cognoscenti—the critics, the poets, the wits of Court and coffee-house—and those who simply knew their Virgil, of the greater composition he has declared himself in *The Temple*

of *Fame*<sup>5</sup> and *An Essay on Criticism* to have undertaken: that of his own career as England's effectual laureate. At the conclusion of his fourth and final georgic, Virgil explains that while Augustus "[o]n the glad earth the Golden Age renews / And his great father's path to heav'n pursues" (ll. 813-814), "I at Naples pass my peaceful days, / Affecting studies of less noisy praise; / And, bold thro' youth, beneath the beechen shade, / The lays of shepherds, and their loves, have play'd" (ll. 815-818; Dryden's translation). The arc of the Roman poet's career was sufficiently well known to make the hint embedded in Pope's allusion unmistakable: having exercised his fledgling muse in the journeyman *Pastorals*, and having, in the present poem, modulated his public voice by the example of Dryden's early public poetry, Pope was now ready, as the Virgil of the *Georgics* had been, to take his place as "My Countrys Poet."

We might discern in *Windsor-Forest* one further appropriation of Pope's—this time, of the technique used by Dryden and others during the Exclusion Crisis (among many other instances), that of carrying the circumstances, personages, and import of past events forward in order to frame social perception of the historical present within a specific mnemonic context. But what worked for the generation of poets that conflated the characters, means, and ends of the Parliamentarians of 1678-81 with those of the 1640's is not quite successful here; for all its poetical brilliance, the reclamation of Dryden's

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<sup>5</sup> Pope presents himself in this poem as a youthful "Candidate for Praise" (l. 500): "'Tis true, said I, not void of Hopes I came [to Fame's temple], / For who is not so fond as youthful Bards of Fame?" (ll. 501-502). He then sets out the rather narrow conditions upon which he will seek and accept fame:

But if the Purchase costs so dear a Price,  
As soothing Folly, or exalting Vice:  
Oh! if the Muse must flatter lawless Sway,  
And follow still where Fortune leads the way;  
Or if no Basis bear my rising Name,  
But the fall'n Ruins of Another's Fame:  
Then teach me, Heaven! to scorn the guilty Bays;  
Drive from my Breast that wretched Lust of Praise;  
Unblemish'd let me live, or die unknown,  
Oh grant an honest Fame, or grant me none!" (ll. 515-524)

historical moment at the Restoration in *Windsor-Forest* is not wholly convincing. Appearing in 1713, the poem cannot pretend to commemorate a true restoration, either of Anne herself (crowned in 1702) or the Stuarts generally: they had been absent from the throne for a mere eight years, 1694-1702, and only because Queen Mary (daughter of James II) had the misfortune of contracting smallpox; moreover, the Revolution Settlement of 1689 had assured Anne's succession. Further, though the peace Pope celebrates was overdue and long-awaited (Anne's own administration had prosecuted the war for eleven years), it did not follow a destructive civil war and an extended period of social upheaval presided over by a usurping ruler with autocratic tendencies. It is true that the English had not taken to William III, and some drew parallels between him and Oliver Cromwell; many resented his foreignness and what Kenyon terms his "inner junta of Dutchmen" (290), and some implied that one of his intimates, Arnold Joost van Keppel, was more than a *political* favorite. Most suspicions, however, were fed by the potential threat to traditional liberties William's wealth and military power represented. Kenyon observes, "He now commanded military forces and supplies of money beyond the dreams of his less able Stuart predecessors and he could plead 'war emergency' for almost any action. . . . Moreover, there was little in the Revolution Settlement to curb this new-style, militaristic monarchy; Parliament had been too busy burying the old-style, divine-right paternalistic monarchy of the Stuarts" (290). And we might recall Henry Hall's epigram, "Upon the King's Return From Flanders" (1695): "Rejoice you sots, your idol's come again, / To pick your pockets and kidnap your men. / Give him your moneys, and his Dutch your lands. / Ring not your bells, ye fools, but wring your hands" (*Anthology of Poems on Affairs of State*, 544). Nonetheless, William was hardly the tyrant William the Conqueror could be made out to be—and in any event, whereas the first William had taken England by conquest, and Cromwell had triumphed in civil war, William of Orange had been invited by the English to replace the despotic Stuart they had driven from the throne. Figuring him forth as a conquering tyrant, a desolator of England's lands and people, may have given some

satisfaction to the Tories who had found themselves in the political wilderness during his reign and were now flourishing under Anne, but was hardly credible as a reconstitutive alloy of the literal and figurative in the representation of recent history.

This gap between figure and reality in *Windsor-Forest* is important because it foreshadows Pope's later difficulties in adequately aligning the two mnemonic modes in his framing of the historical present (see Chapter VI, section 4). For the moment, however, the specific discrepancies between the circumstances of Dryden and Pope's respective "restoration" poetry should put us in mind of the more fundamental differences between the respective constitutions, characters, conditions, and circumstances of the two men to which the qualified success of Pope's appropriation of Dryden is in part due. We should consider first that the literary life led by Dryden in the theatres and coffee-houses of London was, generally speaking, as impossible for the frail Pope as his family's modest affluence made it unnecessary. Both men set up for professional poets, but on greatly different terms. Dryden wrote for sustenance, and because of this, Johnson observes, "[His] performances were always hasty, either excited by some external occasion, or extorted by domestic necessity; he composed without consideration, and published without correction" (I, 214). By contrast, he notes,

[Pope's] effusions were always voluntary, and his subjects chosen by himself. His independence secured him from drudging at a task, and labouring upon a barren topic: he never exchanged praise for money, nor opened a shop of condolence or congratulation. His poems, therefore, were scarce ever temporary. He suffered coronations and royal marriages to pass without a song, and derived no opportunities from recent events, nor any popularity from the accidental disposition of his readers (II, 212).

As Johnson's reflections hint, the differences in their conditions meant not only that the two poets would have varying styles of composition—one hasty, the other slow, deliberate—but that they would write different types of poetry. Dryden might have been a dramatist in any event (though his surest talents seemed to lie in formal satire, criticism,

translation),<sup>6</sup> but certainly the fact that the dramatic poetry paid determined him to write for the theatre, and we should note that the bulk of his occasional poetry is contained in the prologues and epilogues he wrote to frame his own and (for a fee) others' plays. Pope's comparative financial independence meant that he did not, like Dryden, have to conform his genius and temperament to a genre not perfectly amenable to them, that he could remain at Binfield (and later, at Twickenham) and write what and when he wished.

It is ironic, therefore, that though Pope is often cited as the first poet to make poetry a gainful profession, he wrote largely for pleasure, and disdained to serve the whims of the marketplace, creating instead his own demand and supply among the reading public, as he did when he published *The Iliad* by subscription. Thus he wrote little occasional poetry, and his theatrical output consists of five prologues,<sup>7</sup> an epilogue, and infrequent contributions to the plays of others. Pope is teasing his friend John Caryll when he writes to him in February 1717/18 that he shall not compose a poem in celebration of Lady Caryll's giving birth to twins: "But you are sensible 'tis not the task of an Heroic Poet like myself, to sing at marriages, burials, and Christenings; Besides that every song relating to christenings may be thought satirical in this age" (*Corr.* I, 465). His actions, however, bear out his half-facetious assertion. Though Pope's moral essays, satires, imitations, and even his philosophical poetry draw heavily upon current events, trends, and personages, and make frequent use of minutely local allusions, such material, as we shall see in this chapter's final section, is usually adapted into a thematic scheme that raises it far above its immediate significance. Johnson errs, therefore, when he says that Pope "derived no

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<sup>6</sup> Dryden declares as much when, in *A Discourse Concerning Satire*, he relates to Dorset "a rude draught" of the epic he was always too busy and too poor to write, concluding that had he been able to undertake such a project, he would "have left the stage, to which my genius never much inclined me" (91).

<sup>7</sup> Pope wrote prologues for Addison's *Cato* (1713), a benefit performance of Thomas Durfey's *A Fond Husband* (1713), Gay's *Three Hours After a Marriage* (1717), Thomson's *Sophonisba* (1730), and a 1733 benefit performance of John Dennis' *The Provoked Husband*; he also wrote an epilogue for Nicholas Rowe's *Jane Shore* (1713).

opportunities from recent events”; yet he is on target when he remarks that Pope’s poems “were scarce ever temporary.” Pope’s material circumstances allowed him to attempt to write for posterity rather than the present moment, and in the phrase, “’tis not the task of an Heroic Poet like myself,” we might detect more than a whiff of scorn for those poets—eventually immortalized in *The Dunciad*—whom need and dullness compelled to write for hire upon “marriages, burials, and Christenings.” Or even to oblige the importunity of friends: in a letter to William Broome dated September 18, 1722, Pope cites his “inability from some circumstances, of writing anything like a prologue” for Elijah Fenton, even though Fenton had (apparently) promised to keep the author’s identity a secret. “I have learnt by experience,” Pope continues, “nothing of the kind is ever kept a secret; and therefore I must not delude Fenton, though at the same time I faithfully assure him, I would most gladly make the prologue tomorrow, could it be done without any man’s knowing it. I have actually refused doing it for [the re-publication of] the Duke of Buckingham’s play,” *The Tragedy of Brutus* (*Corr.* II, 134). Years later Pope would rebuff Aaron Hill’s request for an epilogue for his play, *The Tragedy of Caesar*. “I have often wished,” Pope writes to Hill early in September 1738, “to live to see the Day when Prologues and Epilogues should be no more. I wish a great Genius would break thro’ the silly, useless, Formality. But at least I would have one try, to leave the Audience *full* of the *Effects* of a good Tragedy, without an Epilogue” (*Corr.* IV, 127); at month’s end (September 29), Pope finds he must make his refusal yet more explicit: “You will, I am sure, be so candid, and so reasonable, as to conclude I would not decline writing your Epilogue on any but a just Reason, and indeed (for me) an invariable Maxim, which I have held these Twenty Years. Every poetical Friend I have, has had my Word, I never would; and my Leave to take the same Refusals I made him, ill, if I ever wrote one for another” (IV, 131-132).

Pope’s reluctance to write the kind of ephemera that had helped bring Dryden to prominence may be attributed in part to pride in his independence, his desire to avoid the partisan controversy that occasional verse (such his first prologue, for Addison’s political



tragedy, *Cato*) tended to attract, and to the likelihood that if he once made it his practice he would be endlessly plagued with requests for songs, panegyrics, prologues, and epilogues. But we should also consider his conception of himself as “an Heroic Poet” and his notion of just what that entailed. From what we have already seen, we may say in general that Pope was highly selective in adapting the features of Dryden’s career to his own, retaining those that tended to increase the dignity, independence, and cultural authority of the poet’s craft, and letting pass those that smelt too strongly of hack-work. Thus Pope saw his mission as Dryden’s successor to be one of making English versification more “correct,” of making its rhythms smoother and more adaptable to the rhythms of the action it portrayed, of making its diction at once more polite and timeless—this, in an effort to make public poetry more durable in its construction and thereby better able to support indefinitely the enduring themes he took to be its task to articulate.<sup>8</sup> More than an attempt to arrest the decay of the material of poetry and thereby extend as well the longevity of his own productions and reputation, however, Pope’s project of bringing English prosody nearer to perfection is also, one suspects, an implicit attempt to establish an evolutionary, progressive path for poetry akin to that Dryden had posited in “An Essay on the Dramatic Poetry of the Last Age” (1672). As (Dryden asserted there) the Elizabethan

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<sup>8</sup> We see these several concerns at work, for example, in Pope’s highly complimentary (and highly selective) appraisal of Dryden’s career in *An Essay on Criticism*. Pope first compares Dryden to the Greek poet Timotheus—“*The Pow’rs of Musick all our Hearts allow; / And what Timotheous was, is Dryden now*” (ll.382-383)—then draws parallels between his greatness and Homer’s, and the persecution each suffered at the hands of spiteful, dull-witted contemporaries:

Parties in *Wit* attend on those of *State*,  
 And public Faction doubles private Hate.  
*Pride, Malice, Folly*, against *Dryden* rose,  
 In various shapes of *Parsons, Criticks, Beaus*;  
 But *Sense* surviv’d, when *merry Jest*s were past;  
 For rising Merit will *buoy up* at last.  
 Might he return, and bless once more our Eyes,  
 New *Blackmores* and new *Milbourns* must arise;  
 Nay shou’d great *Homer* lift his awful Head,  
*Zoilus* again would start up from the Dead (ll. 456-465).

And yet, having here compared Dryden with one of those “*Patriarch-Wits*” whose fame “surviv’d a thousand Years” (l. 479), only a few lines later Pope is sighing over his impending obscurity: “Our Sons their Fathers’ *failing Language* see, / And such as *Chaucer* is, shall *Dryden* be” (ll. 482-483).

and Jacobean dramatists lacked the self-awareness necessary to mend their works, so, we remember, does Pope assert to Spence that Dryden, “who had improved [verse] much beyond any of our former poets, . . . would, probably, have brought it to its perfection, had not he been unhappily obliged to write so often in haste” (169). And so now Pope, removed from the hurly-burly of theatrical composition and insulated from the mercenary hurry and diffusion of the occasional writer, may presume to direct the channel of poetry’s mainstream to its proper end, that is—at least at the time of *An Essay on Criticism*, *Windsor-Forest* (1713), and the translation of *The Iliad* (1715-1720)—to instruct and improve the age, to celebrate the glories of its peace and prosperity, and, by means of its poetical accomplishment, to leave posterity a lasting monument to its greatness of mind, learning, and taste.

Thus it is ironic only in retrospect that the year after *Windsor-Forest* appeared, Pope wrote the following to Caryll describing his stay at Bath with one of his fellow Scriblerians, Thomas Parnell:

We have scarce any company of figure, no lampoons dispersed, and not a face that promises any. As for my own part, my own genius was never turned to that sort of satire, and if I had never so much natural malice, a laborious translation, would extinguish all such impetuous emotions. I should be in Dryden’s case, of whom it was said:

He turned the malice of a spiteful satire  
To the safe innocence of a dull translator.

So that, upon the whole, I walk about here as innocently, and as little dreaded, as that old lion in satire, Mr. Wycherley, who now goes tame about this town. I named you to him, and [he] speaks such things of you (to give him his due) as may be heard by your friend with satisfaction. He that dares to despise the great ones of this age, to deny common sense to the ministers of state, their small portion of wit to the poets who live by it, and honesty to the maids of fourteen, dares not refuse Mr. Caryll his due. (September 25, 1714; *Corr.* I, 255-256)

Not only does Pope here disavow any inclination in himself toward one of satire’s least respectable forms, his condescending indulgence of “that old lion in satire, Mr. Wycherley” renders the man ridiculous, and the ire he expends impotently upon the same few habitual

targets—the great ones of the age, the incompetence of ministers of state, the dullness of hack poets, feminine promiscuity—merely tedious in its flaccid predictability. This pen-portrait of a writer who has outlived his times and his talents does more than make Wycherley a figure of pathos; Pope seems to roll his eyes at the prospect of satire itself as a worthy and proper pursuit for the serious (that is, “heroic”) public poet. Our foreknowledge may make us gape in ironic disbelief at Pope’s complacent scorn of the very subjects (save for female promiscuity) that would provide him the material for his greatest public poetry and the justification for his later carefully crafted public stance as England’s Juvenal. However, though by nature skeptical and sardonic, a close friend of Swift, Gay, and Arbuthnot, and with them a member of the Scriblerus Club (dedicated to the exposure and ridicule of pedantry, false learning, and quackery), Pope in fact had to this date written little that might be called satirical, and, other than the infrequent epigrammatical squib, would not do so until the first appearance of *The Dunciad* in March and April of 1728.

When, however, he at last turned from translating Homer and editing Shakespeare to the poetry of social criticism, his generally acknowledged succession of Dryden and the self-imposed terms of that succession had important consequences for the capacity of what was now taken to be the true mainstream of public poetry to accommodate the elements of the figurative and literal mnemonic modes in its representation of the historical present. For one thing, as Pope began to voice openly his antipathy toward professional writers and their productions,<sup>9</sup> the aesthetic legitimacy of purely occasional poetry was put in question. Ballads, broadsides, prologues, epilogues, and poems on state affairs continued to be composed, of course; however, the social authority once accruing to their timeliness and

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<sup>9</sup> Johnson, who did not suffer pretentiousness gladly, later observed, “In the letters of both Swift and Pope there appears such narrowness of mind as makes them insensible of any excellence that has not some affinity with their own, and confines their esteem and approbation to so small a number, that whoever should form his opinion of the age from their representation, would suppose them to have lived amidst ignorance and barbarity, unable to find among their contemporaries either virtue or intelligence, and persecuted by those that could not understand them” (II, 208-209).

their broad and ready intelligibility, already being usurped by newspapers and the novel,<sup>10</sup> would be weakened still further by the effectual separation of poetry into “high” and “low” categories. But formal verse would also suffer, having lost a certain flexibility of response to its immediate circumstances, removed as it now was from the widest possible circle of potential readers. Perhaps the comparative distance of formal verse from everyday events would have inevitably raised the stakes for such poetry and its portrayal of the historical present: each production, aiming for cultural longevity, would tend to fit its subject into the broadest possible historical and thematic contexts. This would naturally entail elevating the matter, form, and significance of one’s subject above the particular, the immediate, and the local, widening in the process the gap between a poem’s literal materials and its figurative recombination of them.<sup>11</sup> But Pope’s personal tendency toward the heroic would lead him to cast the social, political, and cultural affairs in truly epic terms, with the fate of the English nation itself in the balance, all but ensuring the greatest proportional predominance, short of allegory, of figurative elements over literal, with the consequent representation of an historical present at the farthest possible remove from the familiar, the commonplace. Moreover, Pope’s predisposition to see himself occupying a definite poetic niche—and, particularly, that of an heroic poet—led Pope to develop a more stylized and in some ways more restricted public role than Dryden had ever felt compelled to adopt for himself. Dryden’s public persona had after all been fairly amorphous and largely situational, adapted to the exigencies of the theatre in his dramatic prologues and epilogues, of literary theory in his critical essays and prefaces, and of formal verse satire in his few, though distinguished

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<sup>10</sup> Feather notes, “From the [book-] trade’s point of view, the significance of the novel lay not in its literary merit but in its essential triviality. It was seen as an ephemeral production to be read once and then forgotten. This meant that, once the demand had been created, a continuous supply of new novels was needed to fill it” (97).

<sup>11</sup> Dryden had chided the French for their timid approach to versification in his preface to *The Aeneid*: “I said before, and I repeat it, that the affected purity of the French has unsinewed their heroic verse. *The language of an epic poem is almost wholly figurative*: yet they are so fearful of a metaphor that no example of Virgil can encourage them to be bold with safety” (247-248; emphasis added).

compositions in that genre. For despite their brilliance, *Absalom and Achitophel*, *The Medal*, and *MacFlecknoe*, are really anomalies in Dryden's *oeuvre*, and thus he never had occasion to fashion for himself the full-blown persona of the public satirist that Pope's extended foray into the genre during the 1730's and 1740's lead him to reclaim from the classical past. And because that persona came to Pope ready-made, its features and functions more or less clearly defined and regular, the mask he fitted to his face would over time impress its fixed expression upon the living flesh beneath it, leading him to perceive, reflect upon, and respond to his circumstances in certain predetermined ways. Indeed, for Pope the satirist poetic persona would become inseparable from poetic form; in fact, one might say without much exaggeration that the poetic identity Pope fashioned so publicly during the 1730's was *in itself* an intended social corrective, was in itself a satire upon the age.

As we shall see in the final section of this chapter, the rigidly patterned interpretation the constraints of Pope's public posture imposed upon the significance of public affairs, would, when combined with the epic tenor Pope used to frame contemporary English history, and the increasing estrangement of heroic poetry from its more literal occasional counterpart, all but guarantee that the new mainstream of public poetry would become increasingly figurative. This tended to diminish the overall cultural authority of poetry in an age beginning to value greater realism in art. But when we add to the mixture Pope's liberal indulgence of his personal disillusionment and pessimism it is not at all surprising that from the early 1730's Pope's productions increasingly tended to reverse the habitual operative "direction" of poetic memory. That is, instead of carrying the mnemonic structures of the past forward, refitting them with present-day particulars, and projecting the resulting blend of figurative and literal into a pattern for the future, as he attempts to do in *Windsor-Forest*, Pope habitually portrays England, its redeeming values, ideals, personages, and institutions as already moribund; by doing so he effectively

suspends historical and cultural time, making the present moment and all it contains seem already part of the irrecoverable past—and the future an impossibility.

This peculiar manner of representing the historical present, what one might call Pope's "epitaphic vision," momentarily increased the cultural prominence of public poetry, but would lead to its effective exile from the mainstream of society and social memory. To understand why this should be so, we need to examine more particularly the medium of formal verse satire: the public stance it enforces on the poet, the special demands it places on its readers, and (especially) its operations upon their perception and understanding of the world about them. Therefore, before discussing the characteristics and specific mnemonic claims of Pope's epitaphic vision, we need to examine the more general consequences of using satire as an agent of fashioning social memory.

## 2. Satire and the Framing of Public Memory

As I suggested in the first section of Chapter 2, satire emerged as a preëminent form of public poetry in this period because of the alignment of a number of discrete factors: the very public nature of the business of governing; increased political participation and comment among "the people"; the rise of parties and the need for partisan propaganda; the comparative liberty of the press, especially after the expiration of the Printing Act in 1695; the continued symbiotic growth of the book-trade and popular literacy; the consequent professionalization of poetry and the potential prominence it lent to the individual poet fortunate enough to be distinguished by talent or audacity; and, if one might cite something as problematically general and vague as "temper" or "atmosphere," the skepticism and secularism of an age made morally weary and wary from its experience of civil war, its disappointed hopes for a new Golden Age attendant upon the Restoration, and its shifting cosmological perspective, now, under the influence of empirical philosophy and the New Science, turning inward, toward the nature, capacities, and deficiencies of humanity and its

institutions. We should also cite factors specific to poetry, such as the refinement of the heroic couplet (credited to Waller and Denham, and advanced further still by Dryden) into a highly flexible medium as appropriate for counsel as for caricature; a growing sophistication among poets and readers alike regarding the manner, matter, and ends of the several poetic genres; and the wide availability of the great classical satirists—Horace, Persius, and Juvenal—in the original and in translation, as well as a growing body of critical comment upon them, their work, and the essential nature of satire itself.

By far the most important English treatise on the genre to appear during the Augustan period was Dryden's elaborate *A Discourse Concerning the Original and Progress of Satire*, a lengthy historical, critical, and theoretical examination prefixed to his 1692-1693 translation (with others) of the satires of Persius and Juvenal. Satire—and, more specifically, Roman satire—was not unknown in England before the appearance of Dryden's *Discourse*. Far from it. By the time of its publication, imitations and translations of Horace, Juvenal and Persius had been appearing for nearly a century. In his essay, "Dryden's Theory and Practice of Satire," William Frost points out that English imitations of Roman satire began appearing in the 1590's, its early practitioners including Joseph Hall (credited with introducing Juvenalian satire into England), John Marston, Thomas Lodge, and John Donne (190). The government soon suppressed such satire; however, occasional verse satires continued to be published, and adaptations (as well as direct translations) of the Roman satirists appeared throughout the seventeenth century. In *Roman Satirists of Seventeenth-Century England* (1985), William Kupersmith traces the many manifestations and innumerable echoes of Horace, Juvenal, and Persius from the time of Jonson, through that of Rochester and Dryden, and into the first years of the eighteenth century. Kupersmith's book makes it abundantly clear that Dryden's *Discourse* appeared at the end of a century saturated with satirical poems, plays, and narratives deriving from Roman models. Nevertheless, it is Dryden's work on satire that would, as Howard Weinbrot observes in *The Formal Strain: Studies in Augustan Imitation and Satire* (1969), influence

the form and theme of English verse satire for the next century (60; 67), for it is the first comprehensive statement in English on the genre's origin and nature. It is his *Discourse* that gives definition, shape, and purpose to what had been an undisciplined, largely occasional genre, his *Discourse* that methodizes verse satire and sets the stage for his literary successors—including Alexander Pope.

A large part of Dryden's *Discourse* is taken up with tracing the origins of Roman satire and with ranking its three greatest practitioners: Persius, Horace, and Juvenal. This background is important, for as Weinbrot rightly argues in *Alexander Pope and the Traditions of Formal Verse Satire* (1982), contemporary notions of the genesis and etymology of satire not only informed the critical appraisals of these poets, but greatly influenced the age's determination of the proper subjects, tone, and objectives of the genre, as well as the relation of the satirist to his society (12, *passim*). Thus a brief review of Dryden's researches<sup>12</sup> is in order here.

Though the earliest forms of satire were dramatic, Dryden notes, it has since the time of Ennius (239-169 BC), Rome's first true satirist, been written to be read, not acted, and has typically employed a blend of raillery, venom, and "witty pleasantry" to expose and attack vice and to recommend virtue (110; 115). (This variety of tone, and the fact that satire originally employed a mixture of verse forms—and sometimes a mixture of verse and prose—have given satire its name, derived from *satūra lanx*: "a full platter.") The two main traditions of satire Dryden traces, however, retained from their dramatic origins their respective tempers and characteristics. Native Roman satire, he says, descended from the dramatic verses called Saturnian ("from their ancientness, when Saturn reigned in Italy") and Fescennine ("from Fescenina, a town in the same country, where they were first

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<sup>12</sup> Dryden acknowledges his liberal borrowings from Isaac Casaubon's *De satyrica græcorum poesi et romanorum satira* (1605), and from the scholarly prefaces and commentary accompanying the several translations of the Roman satirists undertaken during the seventeenth century by André Dacier, Nicholas Rigaltius, Daniel Heinsius, and Barten Holyday.



practiced”), with which the actors, “with a gross and rustic kind of raillery, reproach’d each other with their failings; and at the same time were nothing sparing of it to the audience” (107). A second strain of dramatic satire was brought to Rome by Livius Andronicus, a freed Greek slave, who introduced the “fine raillery” (110) of Greek Old Comedy. As adopted by Ennius into non-dramatic satire, the Greek manner, “which was to call some persons by their own names, and to expose their defects to the laughter of the people” (108), tempered somewhat “the coarseness of his old countrymen, in their clownish extemporary way of jeering” (110). Though Ennius, with his extensive knowledge of Greek, was able to refine satiric expression somewhat through the introduction of “fragments” of Greek literature into his verses, it was left to his successor, Lucilius, to give “a more graceful turn to the satire of Ennius,” by grafting still more “Grecian beauties” into his works (111). But then Lucilius had the advantage over Ennius of living in an age when the Roman language, having grown more refined, was better able to adopt and adapt the older culture’s more sophisticated and graceful turns of thought (111). Thus we would expect that Horace, Lucilius’ greatest successor, “who writ when the the language was in the heighth of its perfection” (118), would in turn be able to add “much more of beauty and polishing to his own poems than are to be found in those before him” (113), and thereby “complete” satire (109).

We might notice that Dryden traces the history of satire so as to demonstrate that it indeed undergoes what he claims for it in the title of his dissertation, a *progress*: that is, satire evolves. Further, we should remark that the engine of its evolution is an increased linguistic sophistication at once drawing on and enlarging a concomitant advance in human consciousness of the kind Dryden describes in “An Essay on the Dramatic Poetry of the Last Age” (1672). Accordingly, he can assert that the true difference between Horace and his immediate predecessor is to be found in “[t]he polishing of the Latin tongue, in the succession of the times,” and observe with approval that “Horace himself, in two of his satires, written purposely on this subject, thinks the Romans of his age were too partial in

their commendations of Lucilius; who writ not only loosely, and muddily, with little art, and much less care, but also in a time when the Latin tongue was not yet sufficiently purged from the dregs of barbarism” (112). Dryden (with his contemporaries) can therefore commend Horace for the civilized quality of his satire, its polish, clarity, and urbane humanity: “Horace laughs to shame all follies, and insinuates virtue rather by familiar examples than by the severity of precepts” (129); he can praise Horace’s worldliness, that broad acquaintance with human life and nature that allows him to expound “not only all the rules of morality, but also of civil conversation” (128). In sum, in his subject matter, manner, and tone, Horace has “completed” satire in the comic mode, as it has come down to him from the Old Comedy of the Greeks through Ennius and Lucilius. And as Weinbrot relates, many commentators of the period, especially in France, thought that the Horatian strain of satire was the more proper because of its adherence to satire’s distant comedic origins, and because its topical variety and apparent informality of structure suited better with the multiform repletion suggested by satire’s etymology (*Traditions*, 14ff.). However, the principle of linguistic, intellectual, and generic evolution to which Dryden subscribes compels him to argue that though Horace has brought satire to a certain plateau of stylistic and modal perfection, he cannot be credited with bringing it to its potential apex of theme, structure, and temper. For as the comic temper of Horace’s satire inclined him to treat of “those little vices which we call follies, the defects of human understanding, or at most the peccadillos of life, rather than the tragical vices, to which men are hurried by their unruly passions and exorbitant desires” (129), so does it dictate that his style remain of a kind with his subject, “that is, generally grovelling” (130):

He was a rival to Lucilius, his predecessor, and was resolved to surpass him in his own manner. Lucilius, as we see by his remaining fragments, minded neither his style nor his numbers, nor his purity of words, nor his run of verse. Horace therefore copes with him in that humble way of satire, writes under his own force, and carries a dead weight, that he may match his competitor in the race. This, I imagine, was the chief reason why he minded only the clearness of his satire, and the cleanness of expression,

without ascending to those heights to which his own vigour might have carried him. But limiting his desires only to the conquest of Lucilius, he had his ends of his rival who lived before him; but made way for a new conquest over himself by Juvenal, his successor (130-131).

Juvenal, living at the end of the first century AD, had the disadvantage, so Dryden observes, of using Latin after it had passed its zenith of refinement and grown decadent. However, he did reclaim from the native dramatic satire the vigor and temper of its invective, and, conflating satire's innate motives of moral reform and tuition with their analogues in tragedy and epic—spiritual catharsis and instilling patterns of virtue and right action—was able to lend satire a dignity of purpose and tone comparable to those found in the two genres commonly held to reside at the top of the generic hierarchy. He was thereby able to “give the last perfection to that work” [to satire] (139), for as the comedic mode yields in gravity, import, and instruction to the tragic in drama, so too is Horace's “comical” satire surpassed by the “tragical satire” of Juvenal (140). Dryden concedes that Horace's “urbanity, that is his good manners, are to be commended, but his wit is faint; and his salt, if I may dare to say so, almost insipid. Juvenal is of a more vigorous and masculine wit; he gives me as much pleasure as I can bear; he fully satisfies my expectation; . . . his spleen is raised, and he raises mine; I have the pleasure of concernment in all he says” (130). As a poet, Horace may have had the advantage of a more mellifluous Latin, but Juvenal, living under the reign of the infamously depraved and cruel Domitian, had, so far as satire is concerned, the advantage of his times. For whereas Horace's times allowed him to remain “a mild admonisher, a Court satirist,” Juvenal's “was an age that deserved a more severe chastisement. Vices were more gross and open, more flagitious, more encouraged by the example of a tyrant, and more protected by his authority” (135). Adversity, then, provided Juvenal the occasion to raise the “stakes” of his satire and to sharpen its edge,

so that, granting Horace to be the more general philosopher, we cannot deny that Juvenal was the greater poet, I mean in satire. His thoughts are sharper; his indignation against vice more vehement; his spirit has more of

the commonwealth genius [i.e. “more political concern”—Watson’s note]; he treats tyranny, and all the vices attending it, as they deserve, with the utmost rigour: and consequently, a noble soul is better pleased with a zealous vindicator of Roman liberty than with a temporizing poet, a well-mannered Court slave, and a man who is often afraid of laughing in the right place; who is ever decent, because he is naturally servile (131-132).

Accompanying the greater themes, the more exalted temper of Juvenal’s satire is a corresponding heightening of thought and expression; Dryden claims for Juvenal that though “his thoughts are as just as those of Horace,” they are “much more elevated. His expressions are sonorous and more noble; his verse more numerous, and his words are suitable to his thoughts, sublime and lofty” (130). “[W]hen there is any thing deficient in numbers and sound,” Dryden continues, “the reader is uneasy and unsatisfied; he wants something of his complement, desires somewhat he finds not: and this being the manifest defect of Horace, ’tis no wonder that, finding it supplied in Juvenal, we are more delighted with him” (131). This might bring to mind Longinus’ observation that “men find in a harmonious arrangement of sounds, not only a natural medium of persuasion and pleasure, but also a marvellous instrument of grandeur and passion” (150), and his insistence that this appetite for the sublime is whetted by an innate, “unconquerable passion for all that is great and for all that is more divine than ourselves” (146). Dryden does not here explicitly link satire to the sublime, but we should note yet again the close association he assumes between linguistic facility and formality and poetry’s potential for expressing significant truths and effecting true changes in a society’s collective understanding and action. Because sublimity in language unlocks that which is divine in ourselves, it would seem that the regular realization or near-realization of the sublime by a society’s poets is requisite for moral and intellectual progress. Having praised Juvenal’s sonorous and noble expressions, his sublime and lofty thoughts, Dryden hypothesizes that “as versification and numbers are the greatest pleasures of poetry,” Virgil, who “practised both so happily” and is all but perfect in his diction, “could have written sharper satires than either Horace and Juvenal, if he would have employed his talent that way” (131). Living when Latin was at its zenith,

having achieved technical perfection, his epic predisposition affording him a panoramic view of his time and nation and inclining him to raise his subject and theme to the greatest possible levels, Virgil might have been the greatest of all satirists.<sup>13</sup> Such are the immediate implications of Dryden's notions regarding the general progress of sensibility and its specific terms, sublimity of thought and technical proficiency; but the very notion of poetic progress and the belief, widely held among Dryden's contemporaries, that Juvenal through elevation of thought and expression had brought satire itself to its perfection—these would make it all the easier for a would-be epicist of the first third of the eighteenth century, having raised English versification to its supposed apex, to survey his society and, choosing to believe that his nation's soul was as imperilled as Rome's under Domitian, turn his pen to Juvenalian satire and assume without hesitation or apology a public posture of supreme moral wisdom and authority.

Though the formal definition of satire Dryden at last appropriates from the contemporary Dutch classicist Nicolas Heinsius is general enough to describe both the Horatian and Juvenalian branches of satire—

Satire is a kind of poetry, without a series of action, invented for the purging of our minds; in which human vices, ignorance, and errors, and all things besides, which are produced from them in every man, are severely reprehended; partly dramatically, partly simply, and sometimes in both kinds of speaking; but for the most part figuratively, and occultly; consisting in a low familiar way, chiefly in a sharp and pungent manner of speech; but partly, also, in a facetious and civil way of jesting; by which either hatred, or laughter, or indignation, is moved (143)—

in deference to Juvenal's assumed superiority in mode and manner Dryden is careful to make one important qualification: that the "low familiar way," so characteristic of Horace, be replaced by the more elevated and dignified style of Juvenal. And accordingly it is from the example of Juvenal, the completer and perfecter of the genre, that Dryden abstracts his

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<sup>13</sup> Though Virgil, the epicist of Augustus' Rome, would presumably have labored under the same disadvantages of the times as his contemporary, Horace.

five general principles for the composition of modern satire. The modern satire, he says, “ought only to treat of one subject; to be confined to one particular theme; or at least, to one principally. If other vices occur in the management of the chief, they should only be transiently lashed, and not be insisted upon so as to make the design double” (145). It is a flaw in Horace’s satires, he notes, that in each his subjects are so many, his theme so diffuse.<sup>14</sup> Second, the poet must give the reader “some precept of moral virtue, and to caution him against some one particular vice or folly” (146). For every vice that is lashed, the opposing virtue must be praised: “In general, all virtues are everywhere to be praised and recommended to practice; and all vices to be reprehended, and made either odious or ridiculous; or else there is a fundamental error in the whole design” (146). Third, the proper human targets for it must be chosen. These are not ever to include the virtuous—be they ever so poor or out of favor—nor, Dryden implies, anyone with whom one merely has a quarrel. In fact, on two occasions in the *Discourse* Dryden proudly points out that he has refrained from answering attacks on his poetry and character; to answer them would prolong the public life of both the slanders and their authors and demean Dryden himself. However, it is “an action of virtue to make examples of vicious men” and public nuisances: “They may and ought to be upbraided with their crimes and follies; both for their own amendment, if they are not yet incorrigible, and for the terror of others, to hinder them from falling into those enormities which they see so severely punished in others” (126-7). Fourth, it is ideal to adopt “that sharp, well-mannered way of laughing a folly out of countenance” (147)—a blend, it seems, of Juvenalian asperity and Horatian polish: even

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<sup>14</sup> It is important for verse satire’s place in the generic hierarchy that Dryden imposes on it an ideal, regular form and an “elevated” manner. He claims, as noted, to derive this form—the so-called bipartite structure, in which an attack on a particular vice is followed by praise of its opposing virtue—from Juvenal. As Randolph points out, however, it is only with great difficulty that such a structure may be imposed on Juvenal’s satires (382). The notion is in fact largely Dryden’s own. He insists on it for the same reasons he insists that satire employ dignified diction and versification, for the same reasons that he asserts that the composition of satire may be methodized at all: to establish the formal viability of the genre and thus demonstrate that the Juvenalian satire he champions is a fully developed genre whose inherent rules and aims have reached maturity.

Dryden concedes that Juvenal is “sometimes too luxuriant, too redundant; says more than he needs” (130), and further, that “this way of Horace was the best for amending manners, as it is the most difficult. His [Juvenal’s] was an *ense rescindendum* [hacking with the sword]; but that of Horace was a pleasant cure, with all the limbs preserved entire” (138). A rebuked offender is more likely than a slaughtered one to reform, and so while “Juvenal always intends to move your indignation, and he always brings about his purpose” (138), Juvenal’s manner is sometimes too piquant to achieve the ostensible ends of satire. Thus sharpness must be tempered with understatement, subtlety: “Let the chastisements of Juvenal be never so necessary for his new kind of satire,” Dryden declares, “let him declaim as wittily and sharply as he pleases; yet still the nicest and most delicate touches of satire consist in fine raillery,” adding a bit later in a now-famous passage, “How easy it is to call rogue and villain, and that wittily! But how hard to make a man appear a fool, a blockhead, or a knave, without using any of those opprobrious terms! . . . [T]here is still a vast difference betwixt the slovenly butchering of a man, and the fineness of a stroke that separates the head from the body, and leaves it standing in its place” (136-137). And finally, as we have just seen, the dignity of the genre should be matched by dignified versification. To avoid the burlesque rhythms of Samuel Butler’s *Hudibras*, for example, Dryden recommends that the satirist compose in heroic verse, that is, iambic pentameter. This meter is more dignified than tetrameter, Dryden argues, because it is “more roomy: the thought can turn itself with ease in a larger compass. When the rhyme comes too thick upon us, it straitens the expression; we are thinking of the close, when we should be employed in adorning [i.e. giving the best possible expression of] the thought” (147-148).

As Weinbrot asserts in *The Formal Strain: Studies in Augustan Imitation and Satire* (1969), and as his survey of eighteenth-century satiric theory and practice in *Alexander Pope and the Traditions of Formal Verse Satire* (1982) makes clear, Dryden’s *Discourse* was the formative document of English satire, and for a century after his death would retain a prestige in kind and degree comparable only to that long accruing to the treatises of

Aristotle, Horace, and Longinus. Though Dryden's etymological scholarship, his criticism of the Roman satirists, and his prescriptions regarding the composition of satire were almost wholly derived from Continental models, the *Discourse Concerning Satire*, Weinbrot says, made the genre newly "popular, gave it an English dress," and with it "an immense new authority" (*Formal Strain*, 67).

This authority largely derives from the particular public role Dryden's genealogies, definitions, and guidelines for the genre establish for satire and the contemporary satirist. For above all else, satire is a public genre, a forum for the exposure and humiliation of the wicked or foolish. In *The Art of Satire* (1940), David Worcester suggests that in its earliest forms, satire was the "ally of brute force," a type of sorcerer's spell resorted to when all else had failed to achieve one's ends: "If an enemy is beyond the reach of persuasion, bribery, or physical compulsion, magic offers the only hope of controlling him" (148). But even in its more mundane manifestations satire remains an essentially coercive force. Matthew Hodgart observes that exposing miscreants to public scorn has been used universally among 'civilized' and 'primitive' peoples alike as a means of reinforcing social norms (14-15). Ideally, the shame arising from such exposure reinforces in the transgressor of moral or legal order an intellectual realization of the inappropriateness of his behavior. In this way, the guilty are turned from vice, and those inclined to transgress are deterred from doing so for fear of being similarly exposed. Dryden makes much the same claim in his *Discourse* when he approves Horace's choice to desist from writing lampoons against personal enemies and instead undertake "to correct the vices and follies of his time, and to give the rules of a happy and virtuous life" (125). The lampoon, in which a particular person is made publicly ridiculous, often in the coarsest and most scurrilous terms, Dryden pronounces "a very dangerous sort of weapon, and for the most part unlawful. We have no moral right on the reputation of other men. 'Tis taking from them what we cannot restore to them" (125). And yet, he continues, "when we have been affronted in the same nature" it is permissible to answer in kind—and when the wicked



have become public nuisances, noxious to ethics and morality, lampooning satire is not merely permissible, but the poet's duty: "'Tis an action of virtue to make examples of vicious men. They may and ought to be upbraided with their crimes and follies; both for their own amendment, if they are not yet incorrigible, and for the terror of others, to hinder them from falling into those enormities which they see are so severely punished in the persons of others. The first reason [is] only an excuse for revenge; but this second is absolutely of a poet's office to perform" (126-127).

It is this innately public function of satire to punish vice and encourage virtue that justifies the satirist's public stance. But the impulses of satire toward correction and instruction put the modern satirist in a problematic position. For it is one thing to enforce norms of socially acceptable behavior in small, self-enclosed communities of the type Hodgart cites, comparatively homogeneous as they are in worldview and moral sense, and quite another to attempt to correct and instruct the population of a metropolis, composed as it is of persons likely to be mutually anonymous and highly unlikely to share identical notions of ethical propriety. But if the satirist's rebuke of vice and the vicious—or commendation of virtue and the virtuous—is to be intelligible, let alone cogent and authoritative, he must portray broadly recognizable personages or types and appeal to just such communal standards of right and wrong. Dryden's praise of Juvenal—"his spleen is raised, and he raises mine; I have the pleasure of concernment in all he says" (130)—reminds us that the satirist must make us feel that we are personally concerned in his satire, that our own sense of social propriety has been affronted. We are not likely to be moved by his fulminations if the target of his satire is obscure or too far removed from our everyday experience, or if the target's purported transgressions are of a kind wholly unfamiliar or not something we usually consider vicious. And yet these difficulties of addressing an unseen, greatly individuated audience may after all be turned to the satirist's advantage, may in fact enhance his authority. For when a sense of communal norms is lacking, or perceived to be lacking, it is easier for a moralist to put forth ideals of private and public virtues ostensibly

recovered from the original ethical “templates” of a nation’s golden age; and these ideals are the more likely to be accepted precisely because they *are* ideals, timeless abstractions unencumbered with the innumerable minute qualifications and equivocations that immediate, local circumstances impose on the situational application of moral principles. (Human nature being what it is, we are willing enough to acknowledge our own misdeeds if we are convinced that society as a whole has fallen into error.) Further, by putting forth such ideals, the satirist can attract a good deal of cultural esteem to himself—not simply because (the implication goes) he alone has been able to recover and articulate them, but because by doing so he is made at once a definer and defender of the values of his society. Ostensibly, he is personally disinterested in his targets and their particular vices, except insofar as they appear to threaten the social and moral order. Or the rational order. As Mary Claire Randolph says, “the essential function of Satire is ever by Ridicule to recall Man from the byways of Unreason to the base line of Reason, that is, to present Rational Man as the norm or standard” (374). This is why Dryden is so careful to argue in his *Discourse* that public, not private interest obliges the satirist to compose and publish, for it is only when he can propose his moral prescriptions as the simple, self-evident givens of a healthy civilization—impartial, non-partisan, and beyond question—that the satirist can properly claim a significant degree of cultural authority for his poetry and himself. When the satirist fails to do this, or when, in his role of social conscience, he asserts moral ideals that conflict with those held by figures and institutions of social authority, or by a large number of his fellow citizens, the satirist finds himself at odds with society at large; he becomes an outsider, and is likely to be thought of as seditious, a disturber of the social order—or worse still: simply irrelevant. But these circumstances, too, may be turned to the poet’s advantage, for they allow the satirist to transcend his usual role of defender of norms circumscribed by their particular place and time and assume a truly heroic stance as the sole upholder of those absolute, universal truths impervious to change and compromise, truths that give no quarter to considerations of rank, condition, and power. And these truths in

their turn embolden and protect the satirist; beneath their aegis, he may dare to give the lie to the world's wickedness.

Such at least is the posture and temper adopted by the practitioner of Juvenalian satire. Perhaps it is ironic that Dryden would so enthusiastically promote this strain in a treatise written long after he himself had retired from the public eye to enjoy, as Pope says, "the safe innocence of a dull translator." In fact, not long after the appearance of the *Discourse*, Dryden would formally renounce satire altogether. In a postscript to the reader appended to his translation of Virgil (1697), he declares that the deficiencies of contemporary poets leave "a field of satire open to me: but, since the Revolution, I have wholly renounced that talent. For who would give physic to the great, when he is uncalled? To do his patient no good, and endanger himself for his prescription." He concludes, almost abjectly, "'Tis enough for me, if the Government will let me pass unquestioned" (II, 259). But if we may judge by the enduring influence of his *Discourse*, Dryden's personal inclinations and actions did not undermine the force of his argument. On the contrary, the treatise gave formal verse satire a lasting definition, shape, and purpose, and positively established the satirist as the conscience of his time and people. And the irony of Dryden's retirement is compounded when we consider that his *Discourse* does not vaguely prescribe some merely theoretical public role for the modern satirist—in the way, for instance, that Neander had made a generally hypothetical case for rhymed drama in *Of Dramatic Poesy: An Essay*—but rather advocates a very specific, pragmatic role for the satirist as moral activist, as fearless opponent to the seemingly unopposable forces that would enslave a people and subvert their sense of virtue. Having argued that the Juvenalian mode marks satire's fullest structural, thematic, and tonal development, Dryden is almost compelled to argue as well that if the modern satirist would realize the genre's noblest capacities, he *must* be moved to Juvenalian indignation by the social and political conditions he finds about him. He *must*, in short, imitate Juvenal's fury as well as his form.

As if to facilitate this, Dryden goes so far as to detail, in his contrasting of Horace and Juvenal's careers, the particular circumstances in which the satirist-as-activist has historically thriven, as well as the appropriate Juvenalian responses to them. We have already observed that for Dryden "Horace had the disadvantage of the times in which he lived; they were better for the man, but worse for the satirist" (132). Augustus was a moderate ruler, after all, and one might argue that Horace thus had no justification for turning from his preoccupation with the peccadilloes of human nature and unleashing satire's harsher sting. But Dryden condemns just as he seems about to exonerate. Horace's preoccupation with folly, he argues, is due to his personal lack of moral integrity. Recounting Horace's background, character, and role at Augustus' court at some length, Dryden concludes that "though his age was not exempted from the worst of villainies," "Horace, as he was a courtier, complied with the interest of his master; and, avoiding the lashing of greater crimes, confined himself to the ridiculing of petty vices and common follies" (134-5). Almost as an afterthought, Dryden supposes that "he was not the proper man to arraign great vices, at least if the stories which we hear of him are true, that he practiced some," adding with ironic grace, "which [vices] I will not here mention, out of honor to him" (135). Horace thus cannot aspire to satire's highest rank, for he wallows in the very vices he has not the moral courage or credentials to condemn. Dryden admits that an edict of Augustus had banned satires and lampoons. But this does not excuse Horace; it only indicts him further—at least it does once one considers the example set by his successor, Juvenal. For whereas Horace flourished under the comparatively benign Augustus, Juvenal composed under Domitian, a ruler renowned for his despotism, lasciviousness, and arbitrary cruelty. As Dryden observes, "Little follies were out of doors, when oppression was to be scourged instead of avarice: it was no longer time to turn into ridicule the false opinions of philosophers, when the Roman liberty was to be asserted" (132). Juvenal saw the vices practiced and encouraged by Domitian and attacked them openly; and though to screen himself from persecution he makes Nero the villain of his

satires, it is plain that Domitian and his court are meant. In perilous times, Juvenal dared to assert a moral law higher than that of mere force, which had grown despotic, or custom, which had become debased; Juvenal, therefore, deserves to be ranked as the greatest of classical satirists.

In *Eighteenth-Century Satire*, Howard Weinbrot suggests that Juvenal was so dear to Dryden because he, like Dryden, was a political and social outsider (3). But, he observes further, such admiration was not unique to Dryden; for Dryden's age, "To be Juvenalian . . . is to resist oppression, to punish those who aid corruption of manners, virtue or politics, and to embody high standards of bravery in the face of the enemy's hordes" (134). To be Horatian was to be something else entirely, for Horace, being Augustus' court poet, was suspected by the age as well as by Dryden of flattery and "moral equivocation" (29; 133). Curiously, such appraisals have less to do with Horace than with contemporary views of Augustus himself. Augustus is generally known for finally restoring political and civil order after a generation of uneasy political alliances, bloody interfactional feuding, and outright civil war; he is known also for being a patron of the arts and of learning, for under him flourished not only Horace, but Virgil, Ovid, Strabo, and Livy. But in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries a different image of Augustus prevailed. Augustus, conventional wisdom went, had restored order, but at the expense of the Republic; he encouraged poetry, but simultaneously weakened it. Weinbrot sums up these notions: "In short, in France as well as England several major authors and commentators believed that by encouraging flattery, servility, and tyranny, and discouraging free and just evaluation of all aspects of the state and its leader, Augustus lowered the quality of letters" (*Eighteenth-Century Satire*, 26). Though Augustus was no Caligula or Nero—nor even a Tiberius, for that matter—he was seen as proto-tyrant, as a ruler who set himself above the law, gathered into his hands absolute power, and in so doing set for Rome a dangerous precedent: later cæsars would wield his authority but not exercise his self-restraint; they would indulge themselves, and forget the good of Rome. Augustus liked to claim that he

found Rome a city of bricks and left it a city of marble; his successors would find Rome marble, but leave her brick again. From the Restoration through the time of Gibbon's *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776-88) the period following the fall of Republican Rome was seen as an age characterized by the rapid expansion of tyranny and the equally rapid decline of letters and liberties. Juvenal, says Weinbrot, saw in his own day that the hordes of Virtue's enemies had triumphed; accordingly, "his tones became not only biting but 'epic' or 'tragic' and thus more sublime and compelling" (*Eighteenth-Century Satire*, 133). In saying this, he but echoes Dryden, who would likely have accounted for the "epic" quality of Juvenal's verse by pointing out that satire is the obverse of epic: whereas Virgil had depicted the heroic rise of a people, Juvenal portrayed its slow, sordid fall.

In celebrating the achievements of Juvenalian satire, Dryden historically links that strain of the genre to political opposition to a decadent Establishment, and thereby implicitly invests Opposition in general with an *a priori* moral authority that validates its indignation and resorts to literary attacks on those in power. This is a shrewd move, for it fashions a universal law from historically specific circumstances: real or perceived, tyranny merits satire. The modern would-be satirist, thus encouraged to realize the genre's noblest capacities, is also subtly encouraged to see about him the trappings of tyranny, subtly coaxed to unsheath the weapon forged for the defense of truth and virtue. Moreover, the modern satirist is encouraged to read contemporary history—the historical present—in terms of those archetypal scenarios, especially from classical antiquity, into which may be fitted and against which may be measured the mazy topography of present-day events and personages. Drawing parallels between present and past was then a common feature of British historiography, but we should recognize that also at work here is the predisposition of contemporary public poetry to unite in its fashioning of social memory immediate literal realities with framing devices that are clearly non-literal and therefore function figuratively. Here the framing device has to do with a figurative *context*, that is, when actions,

circumstances, or historical figures are placed in settings recognizably distinct from their original backdrops, or when the mode or tone of their presentation is at odds with what such subjects would seem “naturally” to elicit. But Dryden’s discussion of satire also allows for the figurative use of *content*, *cast*, and (to complete the alliteration) *continuity*: as when, respectively, things normally considered unrelated or incongruous are brought together, usually for the purpose of ironic juxtaposition; when the poet eschews drawing absolute likenesses and instead uses hyperbole, diminution, caricature, or idealization to make the poem’s objects (whether human, institutional, or thematic) more grotesque or more beautiful than their originals;<sup>15</sup> or when the components of a poem are arranged to form either a static paradigm (such as the carefully cultivated association of Puritanism and political dissent) or a narrative progress (as in *MacFlecknoe*) ostensibly deriving from the materials as the poet found them, though each is the poet’s invention.

We should consider then, that, having established satire as a definitively public genre, one habitually—necessarily—blending literal and figurative elements, Dryden’s essay likewise imposes certain implicit demands upon those whom satire pretends to serve and protect, those who, sheltering beneath the satirist’s moral shield, by so doing transfer to the poet the public voice and the cultural authority they could not as individuals assert to full effect. Many of the demands satire places upon its readers follow logically from those of public poetry in general, but both the common and peculiar requisites of understanding satire are worth enumerating here. Beginning with the literal elements of the genre, we should note that because satire is usually topical, frequently to the point of being journalistic, its readers must be competent observers of the world about them; they must be

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<sup>15</sup> Dryden argues in “A Defence of an Essay of Dramatic Poesy” (1668), “Were there neither judge, taste, nor opinion in the world, yet [tragedy and comedy] would differ in their natures; for the action, character, and language of tragedy would still be great and high, that of comedy low and familiar; admiration would be the delight of one, and satire of the other” (I, 119). By the time Dryden came to write his *Discourse* his views had apparently changed a great deal, for, as we have seen, he here declares satire—at least its Juvenalian mode—to be of sufficient dignity in theme and expression, of sufficient importance in its ends, to be classified as a species of heroic poetry.

broadly though not deeply knowledgeable of the public figures, events, trends, fashions, moods, and catchwords of their times and locales. Only then will they be capable of catching and making sense of the poet's allusions to circumstances of the present day; only then will they have a notion of what is being attacked and what (by implication) is being held up for admiration. More important, only then will they have a desire to attend to the satirist at all, for as Worcester rightly points out, satire is distinguished by the indispensability of its readers in the creation of meaning (29-31). If we find a satiric work intriguing, provocative, or witty, it is in good part because we have (or imagine we have) first-hand knowledge of its subjects. And even if we are vexed to find ourselves, our pet ideals and follies pilloried, when we have our own images and experiences to compare with those the satirist puts before us, we are nonetheless gratified by the feeling that we form with the satirist, in Worcester's phrase, "a small superior audience of cognoscenti" (165). Our knowledge of the everyday world in effect supplies the satirical poem with much of its raw material, but the reward is the perceived compliment the poet pays to our perspicacity; conversely, the satirist's pay-off for obliging our vanity, apart from being understood, is our own increased appetite for that esoteric "insider" knowledge he trades in. Controversy and scandal excite, magnetize our attention. The more we know, the more we want to know; the more we want to know, the more attentive and inquiring we become, hence the more knowledgeable; the more knowing we are, the greater the potential range and depth of the satirist's topical allusions; the more successfully this potential is exploited, the greater the satirist's credibility as observer and commentator—and the greater his social authority.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> In the "Advertisement" for *The Dunciad Variorum* (1729), Pope would write of the elaborate "Commentary which attends the Poem" that "the reader cannot but derive one pleasure from the very Obscurity of the persons it treats of, that it partakes of the nature of a *Secret*, which most people love to be let into, tho' the Men or the Things be ever so inconsiderable or trivial" (317).



Along with this knowledge of the everyday, the readers of satire must have a certain degree of cultural knowledge. This knowledge includes at least a passing familiarity with literary genres and their conventions as well as with the classic works of literary history. Such familiarity enables us to trace a satirist's use of literary allusions; of ironic yokings of subject, genre, and mode; and of the archetypal or fabulous plots into which discrete contemporary details and episodes have been woven. Broad literary knowledge thus affords us glimpses into the design (structure), methods (machinery), and ends (moral purpose) of a poem that enrich our experience of it. To take an obvious example, our appreciation of *The Rape of the Lock* as social satire is enhanced if we know something of its forebears in the genre of mock-epic, notably Boileau's *Le Lutrin* and Garth's *The Dispensary*, and enhanced still further the greater our acquaintance with epic conventions, especially as they occur in *The Iliad* and *The Aeneid*. Familiarity with Boileau and Garth will help us recognize the species of Pope's poem and read it with expectations appropriate for the characteristic features of the mock-epic, and at the same time set off Pope's deviations from established practice, his innovations and embellishments; familiarity with Homer and Virgil will give us the wherewithal to read the poem not just as an amusing attack on affectation, idleness, and superficial values, but with a proper irony and an appreciation of the ominous moral failings of a society whose leading inhabitants' attentions and actions so little merit the heroic trappings with which the poet has adorned them.

But apart from literary or, more broadly, æsthetic knowledge, cultural "literacy" consists in an awareness of the formal and popular institutions of one's time, place, and society—and in something rather more than that: a depth and facility of comprehension regarding the political and social history of one's nation, as well as a ready physical and psychological participation in its religions, civic and folk traditions, worldviews, popular beliefs, mores and manners (both ideal and actual), manias, and amusements. One must also have some sense of what it is that distinguishes one's own community from others—

even if the features one cites are in fact common to several communities or are even wholly illusory, for without practical, day-to-day notions of communal identity and those things in which it consists, it would, paradoxically, be difficult if not impossible to know oneself fully as an individual integral to, yet distinct from the whole. As our knowledge of the topical enables us to carry on the everyday business of keeping life going, so does our more deeply rooted sense of collective cultural continuity allow us to make ourselves ethically, morally, æsthetically, referentially, and thereby *personally* intelligible to one another. This makes it possible for the satirist to appeal to shared assumptions of right and wrong, virtue and vice; to shared expectations for the conventions of artistic expression; and to shared habits of historical and social allusion. But further, our sense of collective cultural continuity makes us *desire* such mutual intelligibility, and this desire, in turn, underlies our capacity for tolerance and compassion—and our appetite for square-dealing, liberty, and justice.

This communal perspective might be entirely chimerical, at best a hypothetical proposition. For instance, in her *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (1992), Linda Colley makes the point that after the 1707 Act of Union, the notion of “Britain” in practice connoted very different things to the islands’ many constituencies, who were, she says, “infinitely diverse in terms of [their] customs and cultures of [their] inhabitants” (17). And yet, Colley continues, these inhabitants “came to define themselves as Britons—in addition to defining themselves in many other ways—because circumstances impressed them with the belief that they were different from those beyond their shores, and in particular different from their prime enemy, the French” (17). The awareness of these differences, together with the nation’s increased internal physical and economic cohesion, and its continued emergence on the international stage, forced Britons of every stripe to accept that a “Britain” did indeed exist, if “only” as some abstract entity or ideal. Analogously, though a society at large may share no single set of values, no single sense of history and culture, in practice its members often assume that just such a unified (and unifying) moral and social

identity in fact exists—or should. The satirist, as I have suggested above, is all but obliged to posit and appeal to such assumptions as if they were self-evident, givens. Yet in doing so, the satirist depends not only upon his readers' desire for mutual cultural intelligibility, but upon their capacity to receive and entertain ideas of things that occur nowhere literally in the world about them.

Put another way, the satirist demands of his readers that they be able to read a text the way they “read” their society and its institutions, as operative confluences of the actual and the ideal, and that they be able to read literally and figuratively at the same time. Worcester calls satire “a game of wits” (29) between poet and reader. More than any other mode, he argues, satire makes use of what he calls the cognitive “time-lag” in communication, “that is, the interval between the perception of the printed or spoken words and the full comprehension of their message” (29). That interval is greatest in this genre, presumably, because of the ironic gap satire typically opens between what is said and what is meant, but also because of the figurative framing devices satire employs. The readers of satire must be able to read ironically, against the apparent meaning or significance of what is set before them; further, they must also be able to “triangulate”: to recognize the poet's model or original, but also the particular distortions of setting, make-up, paradigm, fable, and appearance effected by the satirist's several figurative apparatus (context, content, continuity, cast, and their many combinations) upon the object in question—and beyond both, what neither a literal nor a figurative portrayal of the object conveys in itself, but only when alloyed with the other: that subsuming moral or ethical ideal embodied in a particular person, action, or circumstance. That these moral and ethical ideals are the true and ultimate aim of the satirist is implied in Dryden's admonition in his *Discourse* that a satiric work should treat of a single vice and a single opposing virtue. “If other vices [or virtues] occur in the management of the chief,” his argument continues, “they should only be transiently lashed [or praised], and not be insisted on so as to make the design double,” for a doubling of design would divide the reader's attention, hindering the apprehension of the desired

precepts, and thus leaving the reader unclear about the moral significance of the poem—  
 “As in a play of the English fashion, which we may call tragi-comedy, there is to be but  
 one main design; and tho’ there may be an under-plot, or second walk of comical characters  
 and adventures, yet they are subservient to the chief fable, carried along under it, and  
 helping to it; so that the drama may not seem a monster with two heads” (145). Further,  
 what variety of topic Dryden does allow in a satiric work (“if variety be of absolute  
 necessity in every one of them, according to the etymology of the word”) is to “arise  
 naturally from one subject, as it is diversely treated, in the several subordinate branches of  
 it, all relating to the chief. It may be illustrated accordingly with variety of examples in the  
 subdivisions of it, and with as many precepts as there are members of it; which altogether  
 may complete that *olla*, or hotchpotch, which is properly a satire” (145-146). In other  
 words, the satirist is to give us a complete picture—that is, a composite *idea*—of a single  
 vice (or virtue) by putting before us its various inflections or manifestations.

If this sounds familiar, it is because Dryden has said much the same thing in his  
 many discussions of dramatic representation, where, as we have seen, he anticipated  
 Locke’s notion of the *complex idea*, that object of the understanding existing nowhere but  
 in human thought, and best imparted to the mind by practical illustrations of its observable  
 properties, supplemented by enumeration of those properties not obvious to the senses.  
 Keeping this in mind, as well as the several constraints Dryden’s directions for the  
 composition of modern satire place upon satirist and reader alike, one gains a fairly clear  
 notion of how satirical presentation and representation work upon individual and public  
 memory.

Breaking down the mnemonic operations of satire according to the categories used  
 in Chapter 3 to describe the workings of images in general upon the sense, psyche, and  
 intellect, we might recall, to begin with, Dryden’s criteria for Virgil’s hypothetical  
 preëminence among satirists. As with public poetry in general, satire must leave a deep  
 sensual impression upon the reader, beginning with the ear. Here the sensation must be a

pleasing one: unacceptable is the “scabrous,” “hobbling” verse of Persius, whose diction is “hard,” his words “not everywhere well chosen” (118). Rather, as satire at its noblest seeks to instill in its readers an abhorrence of vice and a love of virtue, its “versification and numbers” must be of sufficient smoothness and regularity, its diction of sufficient elevation and dignity not simply to give us pleasure, but to answer our innate sense of aural propriety. For, as Dryden warns, “when there is any thing deficient in numbers and sound, the reader is uneasy and unsatisfied; he wants something of his complement, desires somewhat which he finds not” (131). And thus Dryden scorns Hudibrastics and recommends heroic verse as the proper medium for satire: its “roominess” allows for “sublimity of expression” (149); its rhyme knits up the memory. It is important that the satiric poem be aurally pleasing, for as in other modes of poetry, the appropriate sound and rhythm incline the other portals of perception and feeling to admit those impressions that move us most readily and powerfully: the images that play before the mind’s eye. As with the imagery of public poetry in general, satiric images, whether as wholes or in their several components, must be broadly recognizable to their potential public, yet distinguished by their intensity, cohesion, and durability from the stream of visual impressions washing over us every day. And here, too, the poet must strike a balance between the ephemerally commonplace and the perversely idiosyncratic confabulation. Dryden faults Horace, for instance, because the “lowness” of his subjects forces him into correspondingly low locutions, and Persius, because “his figures are generally too bold and daring, and his tropes, particularly his metaphors, insufferably strained” (118). But the satirist has the additional labor, first, of making his images recognizable not *in spite* of the effects of their physical distortion or the unexpected combination of their discrete elements, but *because* of them, for, second, these unfamiliar manifestations of familiar persons, objects, or settings must, unlike merely illustrative images, convey a fairly self-evident moral significance to the reader. This moral tendency is the main difference between the satiric and the primarily descriptive image; the former may describe and the latter may be

put toward a satiric end, but whereas the descriptive figure—a metaphor, simile, or an image designed to aid memory—works by making the unfamiliar better known, the satiric figure seeks to make the known at least momentarily unfamiliar, as it must if it is to induce in the reader the habit of triangulating en route to the controlling idea behind the image. It follows that, as the same difference holds between larger arrangements or configurations of satiric images and their descriptive counterparts, the same variances in mnemonic operation will recur as well, even (and perhaps especially) when, to use Worcester's term, the cognitive "time-lag" is greatest, the figurative framing apparatus at its most elaborate, its operations upon the senses and understanding most oblique, subtle.

The additional burden satiric imagery must bear points up the special claims of satire upon the intellect and memory. For one thing, the public nature of satire forces the satirist to show us what we know, or what we might be expected to know, about our times and culture. Familiar faces, settings, events, and customs are set before us, and we are implicitly asked to recognize our collective portrait, and by doing so, add our presence to the satirist's in the public sphere he fashions on the page before us. But, because satire has as well a moral function (to expose vice and exalt virtue), and because, as poetry, it must please as it teaches, or teach by pleasing, the poet must proceed from exposition to tuition indirectly, via delight. Mere railing against wrongdoing and wrong-doers is not satire, but invective; and it is the lot of the parson, not the poet, to induce right action by bare prescription. As he takes his leave of Dorset near the end of his *Discourse*, Dryden spends a moment to underscore the teaching power of satiric delight: "They who will not grant me that pleasure is one of the ends of poetry, but that it is only a means of compassing the only end, which is instruction, must yet allow that, without the means of pleasure, the instruction is but a bare and dry philosophy: a crude preparation of morals, which we may

have from Aristotle and Epictetus, with more profit than from any poet" (153).<sup>17</sup> Attracted to the poem by its topicality, amused by the distortions effected by its figurative apparatus, we are then seemingly left to infer the poet's precepts for ourselves.

*Seemingly*—for the satirist carefully engineers the process of our self-instruction. Having enticed us into the world of the poem, a world familiar to us as a reflection of our everyday experiences and received knowledge, the poet goes about making the familiar appear foreign (and sometimes, the foreign familiar)—not at random, but according to cues inherent in the satire's objects and themes, and according to recognizable patterns of figurative representation. Thus, for example, in *Absalom and Achitophel* Dryden sets the Shaftesbury-contrived struggle between Charles II and the Duke of Monmouth in the context of the Biblical story of the evil counselor Ahithophel's beguiling Absalom into rebellion against his father, King David; thus, in the same poem, he juxtaposes a roster of the unambiguously villainous with one for their unambiguously heroic opponents, all the while telescoping the progress of current events for maximum dramatic effect; thus he recasts the major players in the drama—Oates, Shaftesbury, Buckingham, Charles himself, and many others—as Biblical personages, and as exemplars of particular traits of character; and thus he arranges his reconfigured circumstances, episodes, and caricatures into a loose narrative that lends the coherence of archetype to current events, yet is left incomplete, Dryden says in his preface to the poem, so that the unfortunate ending of the Biblical parallel may be averted: "Were I the inventor, who am only the historian, I should certainly conclude the piece with the reconciliation 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

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<sup>17</sup> Pope was of a mind with Dryden on this point; he would write to Arbuthnot on July 26, 1734, "To attack Vices in the abstract, without touching Persons, may be safe fighting indeed, but it is fighting with Shadows. General propositions are obscure, misty, and uncertain, compar'd with plain, full, and home examples: Precepts only apply to our Reason, which in most men is but weak: Examples are pictures, and strike the Senses, nay raise the Passions, and call in those (the strongest and most general of all motives) to the aid of reformation" (*Corr.*, IV, 419).

seems yet to be room left for a composure; hereafter there may be only for pity" (189).<sup>18</sup>

Other literary forms use illustrative parallels, but as satire reconstitutes the familiar, it does not so much fashion parallels to everyday reality as effect changes in its originals and then merge these "inflected" elements inextricably within its figurative apparatus. These changes or distortions affect social memory of the historical present in three ways. First, the reconstitution of form, whether in terms of context, content, cast, or continuity, tends in itself to operate as a mnemonic device, as an *aid* to memory: the complexities and minutiae of current events are simplified and set within an easily retained narrative scheme, the personages made memorable by their exaggerated features. Second, by being conventional, that is, clearly deriving from the peculiarities of the historical present, the distortions or figurative apparatus the poet imposes upon his materials tend to follow certain foreseeable patterns, with the resulting reconstitutions also assuming readily anticipated "shapes." In this way, the satirically focused eye (of poet and reader alike) can train itself upon literal realities and discern in them their logical figurative analogues—much as Dryden (and many others) saw in Shaftesbury's machinations or in Charles' promiscuity and love of ease latter-day exempla of Scriptural types, and in their Biblical struggle, a recurring historical pattern. This pattern is inflected, to be sure, by immediate and local circumstances, but useful nonetheless as a moral "text" from which to cull examples of villainy, folly, and virtue sufficient to warn readers against the wickedness of sedition—and to remind Charles that if he was to be revered as a monarch he must comport himself with a king's discretion and dignity. In short, the satirical habit tends to incline our experience of the historical present toward certain perceptual and interpretive prefabrications. Third, and perhaps less obviously, the experience of momentary disorientation that sweeps over us as our world is made suddenly unfamiliar throws into relief those features of it that we had perhaps taken for granted, forcing us into a new

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<sup>18</sup> From James Kinsley's edition of Dryden's poetical works (Oxford: Oxford: UP, 1970).



recognition of them, fixing in our understanding a heightened sense of their practical and (especially) ethical significance.

This last consideration takes us from the influence of satiric reconstitution upon memory to the complementary influence of satiric indirection, for the reconstitution of the familiar and the underscoring of its moral import is fixed in the mind of the reader by the process of closing the ironic and figurative gaps inherent in satiric representation. Satire is by nature rhetorical, persuasive, to some degree coercive; as Worcester observes, its “preconceived purpose [is] to instill a given set of emotions or opinions into the reader” (8). But unlike other rhetorical forms, satire leaves its auditors or readers to make the connections between utterance and intent, figure and reality, exposition and theme—to fashion the meaning for themselves. Worcester argues sensibly that the greater these gaps, the more the audience is forced to participate in the satirist’s “game of wits,” and further, that the longer the “time-lag” between perception and comprehension, the greater the impact of the sudden recognition of unlooked-for truth upon the understanding (30-31)—the greater, one should add, because the readers have apparently *brought themselves* to that sudden discovery; it is thereby more immediate, complete, and *personal*. Though Dryden uses different terms, it is the rhetorical effectiveness of indirect tuition he asserts when he declares in his *Discourse* that to “spare the grossness” of name-calling is “to do the thing yet more severely, is to draw a full face, and to make the nose and cheeks stand out, and yet not to employ depth of shadowing” (137). We are left to finish the adumbrated picture in the mind’s eye. The resulting portrait may be exactly what the satirist has meant for us to see, but we are likely to take the features we imagine we see as true or justified, for we ourselves have sketched them. Similarly, a bit later in the same passage, Dryden makes his famous analogy between satire and decapitation: satire at its most artful, its most effective, delivers what seems to be a glancing blow that however it may “separate the head from the

body,” yet “leaves it standing in its place” (137).<sup>19</sup> For the time being, anyway: when the head finally rolls off its perch we realize just how lethal the ‘glancing’ stroke has been; but even before then, once we have seen the axe itself and the force of the swing we are likely to guess, long before the clueless victim has, the true consequences of the encounter—and thus the satirist makes us accomplices to his attack.

The satirist must do this, Worcester argues, in order to make “his readers comprehend and remember [his social] criticism and adopt it as their own. Without style and literary form, his message would be incomprehensible; without wit and compression it would not be memorable” (13). Worcester’s “style and literary form” correspond roughly to the figurative apparatus I have outlined above; his “wit and compression,” to the trappings of satiric indirection as Dryden, for one, treats of them. But we should go a bit further and observe that though wit and compression may serve epigrammatically as a mnemonic, the underlying influence of satiric indirection upon memory occurs during the process of our personally closing the ironic and figurative gaps between what we are told or shown and are meant to hear or see. For one thing, this process helps to fix in our minds the literal and figurative terms of the satirist’s production, as well as the controlling idea subsuming them; for another, it helps cement the connection between these three things specifically (whatever they may be), even as it encourages the satiric habit in general: as the particular “shape” or configurative habit of our memory is determined by the way we are asked to remember, the mental task of closing the gaps between utterance and meaning, between figure and reality, and between both and the ethical principle they involve, may well become its own primary object of memory. But moreover, and more important, this habit of reading against appearances, when combined with the habit of reconstituting the familiar, has the further general effect of inducing us to *misremember* with regard to the

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<sup>19</sup> Dryden means to point out that fine raillery is less likely to give needless offense than gross invective, yet as Weinbrot points out, “The malefactor may ‘die sweetly,’ but the satirist has beheaded him nonetheless” (12).

literal realities of the historical present, because it inculcates the practice of emending our perceptions and interpretations of physiological, psychological, and intellectual experiences with non-literal overlay. It may in any event be impossible to know things as they are in themselves, but by encouraging us to recall the literal through the figurative, satire designedly imposes upon us a certain brief suspension of our belief in what lies observable before us and within us, and hence a certain dissociation of sensibility, a certain displacement of Self from the social panorama.

Thus, although satire might seem an ideal vehicle for combining the literal and figurative habits of memory in an age when these modes existed side by side, satire is and would remain a problematic framework for social memory. For if its union of the literal and figurative lends it great currency and a great capacity for exposition and tuition, it is, first of all, by no means a reliably stable configuration of elements. For satire to remain viable as a mnemonic device, the topical and cultural allusions it makes must be broadly clear and important for the reader; if they are not, the satirist has little chance of invoking among his readers a sense of communal being; and without this, the satirist cannot hope to break down and reconstitute the social conditions, customs, and institutions that make up the experience of living. Further, its figurative apparatus must be capable of bearing the literal "weight" fitted within it; if it cannot, not the satirist's object, but the satire itself will seem absurd, and lack credibility. Unbridgeable gaps between the literal and figurative are the bane not only of elaborate ironic fictions, but of all figures of speech, such as similes and metaphors. But the moral element of satire means that the stakes for its figures are far higher than for other figurative utterances. When, say, a metaphor fails, the image it produces may be misshapen, self-contradictory, and therefore unilluminating; we may laugh at it and say the poet has miserably botched the central task of close observation. But when a satiric figure fails, far more than the image is called into question: not just the credibility of the satire itself, but most likely a whole moral and ethical scheme. The consequences for the satirist's credibility are also greater, for the moral dimension and the

satirist's public persona (the third and fourth quantities, respectively, in the alignment of elements comprising formal verse satire) are inextricably linked. In non-satirical poetry, the failed metaphor may excite ridicule, but the poet can hardly be charged with bad faith, for though he or she is asking us to view a thing a certain special way, we are not asked to extend our belief to anything of abiding importance. Satire, being rhetorical, seeks to persuade, seeks to compel belief in a certain (reconstituted) cultural continuity, compliance with a certain system of ethics, and deference to the authority of a certain person (or persona) to explicate these things to us. If the satiric figure fails, we feel taken, betrayed, humbugged. "Fool!" we might exclaim at the clumsy poet; "Fraud!" we exclaim at the failed satirist.

Unfortunately, the persona of Juvenalian satirist as Dryden fashions it in his *Discourse* is beset by internal contradictions that make it a difficult matter indeed for the modern satirist to remain simultaneously credible as poet, social observer, and moralist. Dryden bequeaths to his contemporaries and successors a satiric role fairly well-defined in terms of its ideal temper, subjects, and poetic forms, but by linking satire's highest strain with fury and indignation, and this particular stance with political Opposition, Dryden all but ensures that the modern satirist, whatever assurances given to the contrary, will be by definition self-interested, biased—or at least merit our suspicion that he is no high-minded moralist, but a political opportunist. But this practical difficulty is only a symptom of a larger one, one that gives rise as well to the cognitive dissonance inherent in the experience of formal verse satire: the genre's simultaneous operation within and beyond real cultural time, that is, its being at once topical and timeless. Faced with the difficulty of articulating in figurative terms the universal ideals and moral truths suggested by or applicable to the circumstances of the present-day, and then, to remain relevant, returning those ideals and truths in realizable forms to the everyday world—faced with this difficulty, the satirist is understandably tempted in practice to favor one side of the equation or the other in any one work, as Gay, for instance, in *Trivia* offers minutely situational advice, and, in his *Fables*,

precepts bound by no fixed time or place. The modern satirist, however, who attempts to realize the Juvenalian stance fully and treat equally of the timeless and the topical risks, on the one hand, sinking into cynical self-interest, and, on the other, making the features of the historical present mere props for his figurative apparatus, effectively freezing cultural time within the fiction he has created for its betterment.

During the 1730's and 1740's Pope would try to assume just such a Juvenalian posture. His stance, the fiction he fashioned, and their consequences for public poetry and the viability of the figurative as an element in public memory are traced in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER VI

### FROM "GREAT ANNA!" TO "GREAT ANARCH!" (II): BRITANNIA MORIBUNDA: POPE'S EPITAPHIC VISION

#### 1. Pope's Satiric Persona

Tracing the influence of Dryden's treatise on satire upon his most famous literary inheritor, William Frost argues that "Pope in his imitations of Horace and original poems similar in method is the greatest exemplar of satire as discussed in the *Discourse*; the greatest exemplar in English, if not also (as I believe) the greatest of all time. When Dryden writes the *Discourse*, satire is still more or less a theoretical possibility—achieved in France and Rome, yes, but only foreshadowed as yet in England" (205). However, of equal importance to the theoretical form of satire and the ideal role of the satirist Dryden established in his *Discourse* was his bequeathal to his successors in satire (in his essay, but also in the translations that followed it) of what one might call a Juvenalian worldview, that is, the habit of seeing about one the telltale signs of civilizational decay; of ascribing this decay to corruption among the powerful, decadence in the affluent, and a dullness in the arts that implicitly supports and is supported by the viciousness of the times; and of insisting on the moral obligation of aligning oneself against these forces of national decline and with their political, social, and ethical opposition.

Certainly the first half of the eighteenth century provided ample material for the Opposition satirist who would affect a Juvenalian stance. When George, Elector of Hanover succeeded Anne in 1714, the Whigs assumed absolute political hegemony. Tory power and spirit were broken; their leaders, Robert Harley, Earl of Oxford and Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke, were in disgrace or exile; their supporters and friends among the leading writers of the day—the Scriblerians prominent among them—were out of favor and dispersed. We might expect that with their access to the circles of power gone, their

chances of preferment and patronage forever blighted, Swift, Gay, Arbuthnot, Pope, and others would turn readily to attacking the new regime. But their antipathy to the Hanoverian administration was at least partly justified. In *The First Four Georges*, J.H. Plumb characterizes the early years of George I's reign as being poisoned by incessant in-fighting and scheming in both court and ministry (47ff.). The king feuded with the Prince of Wales (while flirting with his daughter-in-law, Princess Caroline), Whig factions fought among themselves for the opposing favors of the king and prince, and the Secret Committee of the Commons was busy ferreting out Tories it could prosecute for treason. Relative order was achieved, oddly enough, only with the failure of the South Sea Company in August 1720, for the crisis propelled to prominence the ambitious, though heretofore politically marginal Robert Walpole, who was able to screen the government from scandal. For his services he was rewarded with the Prime Ministership, a position he held for two decades and in which he gained power, wealth, and a title. Walpole secured and enhanced his position by creating a bureaucratic machine controlled exclusively by him, and by making an elaborate show of protecting the kingdom from its many "enemies," actively persecuting Tory leaders and suspected Jacobites, and pushing through legislation that significantly abridged the rights of England's Catholics.

When George II succeeded to the throne in 1727, Opposition leaders hoped that, given his violent enmity to his father, their new king would break with George I's favorites, the Whigs, and restore the fortunes of the Tories. They had no such luck. Indeed, their fortunes declined further. Walpole's hold on the machinery of government became more absolute, and his influence over the throne's occupant increased, for though the new George disliked Walpole, the king depended on the counsel of Caroline, his Queen—and Caroline, in turn, found a favorite and confidant in Sir Robert. In retrospect, it seems foolish for the Tories and former Scriblerians to have hoped for a restoration under George II of those golden years they now claimed England had enjoyed under Good Queen Anne. The new monarch was not simply neglectful of the arts, as his father had been; he

allowed Walpole to exploit them callously to further the Administration's ends. Moreover, the atmosphere at court was polluted by cynical political toadyism and by equally cynical sexual intrigue. Both George II and Caroline, Plumb notes, were notorious for their excesses of the flesh; moreover,

their strength was so great that they grew to resent with all the bitterness and fury of their natures the slightest attack on their greatness. They hated the challenge of men of ability; disliked criticism; enjoyed sycophancy and thought it truth. Gradually, as they destroyed those friends and allies who were proud enough to maintain an attitude of independence, they reached a lonely and dangerous eminence (*First Four Georges*, 73).

An historian writing from the safe vantage point of the twentieth-century discerns in Walpole's rise the emergence of Parliamentary preeminence—and thus more fully representational government—and in the limited political, moral, and cultural chaos under Hanoverian rule the inevitable fitfulness of a nation undergoing tremendous economic and social change. Needless to say, the Opposition saw these developments quite differently. It seemed to them, as Louis Bredvold notes in "The Gloom of the Tory Satirists" (1949), that England had reached an historical moment of crisis, that its virtues and glories were faced with extinction (7). Indeed, the true shape and import of the current national crises could, it seemed, be understood by consulting the historical precedents of ancient Greece and Rome, whose cultural decline and ultimate fall were presaged by the advent of tyranny and moral decay. Classical literature and history, in short, provided the Opposition and the writers supportive of it with the framework and terms in which they were to cast the social and political struggles they saw unfolding before them. For example, as Augustus, restorer of order and culture, patron of the arts, had given way to a line of corrupt, despotic Cæsars, so now, it seemed, had the benevolent Anne given way to the unscrupulous Georges and their grafting, power-mad prime minister, Robert Walpole. And whereas Charles II had had the good sense to make Dryden Poet Laureate, and Anne, to favor the Scriblerians, it



was for those poets out of favor a sign of the Administration's moral deficiency that the compliant and fawning Laurence Eusden and Colley Cibber had been made Laureates.<sup>1</sup> It indicated at least a nascent tyranny, when true artistic genius was neglected and the arts became mere propaganda for the ruling clique. Bought out, manipulated, shorn of their power to ennoble and instruct, the arts under Walpole would become, in the eyes of the most eminent poet associated with the Opposition, both symptom and cause of ethical decadence—as they had been under the Cæsars.

Of course, the fact that Pope was by no means alone in attacking the deficiencies of the Hanoverians and their Prime Minister should in itself prompt one to raise a skeptical eyebrow at the effulgence of Frost's pronouncement that he was "the greatest exemplar of satire as discussed in the *Discourse*." But even if such assertions could be objectively demonstrated once for all, they are ultimately more pernicious than helpful: too often, thinking of something as the "greatest" of its kind leads us to neglect the very real merits of its possible competitors; and toward that work or author designated "the greatest of all time" we tend to adopt either a jealous resentment or a thoughtless admiration. Both mindsets are unreasonable; both preclude the rewards of a more disinterested scrutiny. In the present case, the influence of Dryden's *Discourse* upon later generations of formal verse satirists was widespread, and as Weinbrot's researches into the place of Juvenal and Juvenalian satire in early eighteenth-century England make clear, many were the Opposition writers who between 1726 and 1742, when Walpole's power as Prime Minister was at its height, sought to assume the defiant stance, the lofty strain that Dryden had established as an ideal. Weinbrot points out that Horace's growing Continental popularity as a model for the satirist was in England "blocked by the opposition's ploy of painting the court of Walpole and George Augustus [George II] with the dark colors of Augustus Cæsar"

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<sup>1</sup> Eusden served from 1718-1730; Cibber, appointed in 1730, would hold the office until his death in 1757.

(*Traditions*, 40). Such a court merited not the polite admonitions of a Horace, but the outraged lashing of a Juvenal; and it was Juvenal, Weinbrot says, who gave Opposition writers a useful prototype of the pose appropriate for their “resistance to tyranny”: “the bloody but unbowed soldier in a small army fighting the good fight against a horde of powerful and unscrupulous brutes wishing to destroy the remnants of national virtue” (40):

Juvenal was the sublime or tragic satirist appropriate for the worst of times, when the nation and its government were in decline and oppression was rampant; he was appropriate for an audience seeking sublimity in poetry and unified structure in satire; he therefore was closer both to what many regarded as the “true” satire and to the free, rough, and even bloody nature of the British nation staunchly refusing to be ‘polish’d into Slavery’; he would attack even the most exalted of governors if they deviated from public morality; and, together with his ally Persius, he was easily drafted into the opposition to Walpole during the 1730s, when Horace was regarded as one of the “*flattering, soothing, Tools*” of that great man (43).

As Weinbrot argues, “By 1739 such replacement of Horatian sense, method, and outlook with Juvenalian outrage and hostility was commonplace, especially among opposition authors. Equally commonplace was the view that though Pope was sometimes Horatian, he was also, qualitatively, the chief native architect of such satiric displacement and of mingling of modes. These efforts sometimes won praise and sometimes condemnation; but they were never ignored” (139). Indeed, though Pope’s assumption of this widely recognized Juvenalian stance was neither original nor unique, Pope was generally credited with having best realized the satirical ideals Dryden’s dissertation had crystallized decades earlier. In fact, he was regarded by many of his contemporaries as he came to regard himself, and as he demanded the age regard him—as the living Muse of English satire.<sup>2</sup> If

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<sup>2</sup> During the 1730’s, Opposition poets, emboldened by his example, borrowing heavily from his compositions, attacked with increasing vigor and outrage the perceived corruption of the Hanover-Walpole Administration (Weinbrot 123; 128). “Pope,” Weinbrot says, “was often invoked by other satirists as the lonely writer defending decency against its powerful enemies” (128n), as in Benjamin Loveling’s “The First Satire of Persius Imitated” (1740), where the poet “echoes” Pope’s satires and “[celebrates] that satirist as ‘sworn Foe to Knave and Fool,’” recounting the many conquests of his pen; as Weinbrot observes, “[Loveling’s] heroes are not Lucilius and Horace, but Dryden and the hostile Pope, and his poetical enemies are all those, including Boileau and Prior, who praise kings” (127-128). And lest we think extravagant or too absurd to be credited Pope’s assertion in his “Epilogue to the

Pope's claim to such deference was more successful than that of others who pretended the wickedness of the times had moved them to Juvenalian indignation, it was largely because by 1740 Pope had spent the better part of a decade very carefully and very publicly fashioning an ever-more-elaborate, ever-more-recognizable satirical mask. So closely, in fact, was Pope able to associate his public persona himself with the Juvenalian mode of social criticism that the two would become all but inextricable, both in his own mind and in the mind of his public.

This would prove important in two ways. First, the closeness of Pope's personal identification with the heroic public stance he assumed would greatly influence the specific terms of the figurative apparatus he came to impose on his age: the operative satiric fiction he developed little by little in poem after poem during the 1730's drew heavily from the arc of his poetic career as he came to see it, but also from the slow evolution of his own sensibility—from that of self-confident moralist prescribing to reasonable contemporaries (as in *An Essay on Man* and the four *Moral Essays*) to the self-consciously strident scourge grown so disillusioned he seemed to believe more in the inevitability of vice than in the viability of virtue. Second, so successful was Pope in establishing his satirical persona and framework in the public mind, that both over time became part of the social landscape, became recognizable institutions. This seems ideal, the most for which any poet in any age could hope. But perversely, the more reified his persona and fiction became, the more easily detachable from the arena of public debate they seemed to be. Make no mistake: Pope

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Satires: Dialogue II" (1738), "Yes, I am proud; I must be proud to see / Men not afraid of God, afraid of me" (ll. 208-209), at least one contemporary attributed to Pope the broad reforming power he had presumed to claim. In "The First Satire of Juvenal Imitated" (1740), Thomas Gilbert boasts on Pope's behalf that "Gay modern *Atheists* kiss the Poet's Rod, / Reform their Lives, and tremble at a God" (qtd. in Weinbrot, 41). Other poets showed their obeisance to Pope by defending him as the touchstone of wit and righteous satire, their diffidence sometimes extending to wholesale adoption of his characteristic conceits. The anonymous author of *The Scribleriad* (1742), for example, "borrows" the central fiction of the later *Dunciad* (down to appointing Cibber chief Dunce) in his attack upon those vexing Pope with their squibs. Not that he would have them desist: Write on, write on, he bids them ironically, and claim "the Privilege to be his Foes," for in this, "my Sons, is all your living Hope, / To be immortal Scriblers, rail at POPE" (6).

never became the toothless “old lion in satire” Wycherley had been in his dotage; to the end, his verse had the power to expose, embarrass, make ridiculous, and wound, to excite outrage and calumny, to make the Administration sufficiently nervous to retain its own hacks to write satires upon *him*. However, we might say that the more elaborate and well-defined the fictions of Pope’s persona and satire became, the more their existence seemed to run *parallel to* rather than *within* the course of their cultural milieu—with the effect, ironically, of deepening Pope’s disillusionment, confirming his belief that the age was past hope of redemption, prompting him to lash it still more vigorously. The futility of this cycle may be attributed in part to the inherent limitations of formal verse satire itself, particularly its tendency to stress the figurative over the literal; but much is attributable as well to the peculiar satirical framework Pope employed, what I call his “epitaphic vision”: his habit—so generally, so frequently occurring as to constitute a controlling idea in his poetry of the 1730’s and 1740’s—of portraying not an imperiled Britain, but a Britain already moribund, its best qualities beyond all possibility of resuscitation.

Given Pope’s intense personal identification with his Juvenalian mission, it is not surprising that his vision for England would have its roots in his fashioning of a suitable public persona. One might even say that for Pope the terms of that persona are in themselves a large part of the poet’s satiric arsenal. We have already seen the young Pope first fashioning the role of Dryden’s successor, then styling himself to fill it. From the mid-1730’s onward, he undertakes a similar project of self-creation, melding his epicist mask with that of the moral philosopher he had but recently worn to devise one appropriate for the new role he had set himself. A new role it was. Aside from the first *Dunciad* (1728), its immediate successor, *The Dunciad Variorum* (1729), and the ironical treatise, *Peri Bathous: Of the Art of Sinking in Poetry* (1728), Pope’s forays into the genre had been infrequent, incidental. Thus in *An Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot* (written 1731-34; published 1735), Pope’s fullest account of his early career and its subsequent redirection, Pope sets

about laying anew the foundations of his credibility while justifying and setting the terms of his comparatively recent vocation. Portraying himself in the poem's early sections as a figure whose literary fame has made him the perpetual object of bad amateur poets begging his imprimatur, of fawning place-seekers who would tap his influence with the great, of tasteless patrons offering to buy his praise, and, of course, of the unrelenting squibs from literary hacks left smarting by his early *Dunciads*—Pope at last pushes aside his exasperation and reflects soberly upon how it is that he finds himself in this position. He starts with the most basic question: “Why did I write? what sin to me unknown / Dipt me in ink, my Parents’, or my own?” (ll. 125-126). Part of his answer we have seen before: “As yet a Child, nor yet a Fool to Fame, / I lisp’d in Numbers, for the Numbers came” (ll. 127-128), but he continues, “The Muse but serv’d to ease some Friend, not Wife, / To help me thro’ this long Disease, my Life” (ll. 131-132). Note that the impulse toward poetry is something inevitable, undeniable—the Heaven-imposed burden that seems to be his personal version of the Ruling Passion, whose doctrine he had already expounded in *An Essay on Man* (1733-34) and his *Epistle to Cobham* (1734). But if poetry is his congenital obligation, it is also the main solace for a life made difficult by crippling infirmities, and is thus essentially an invalid’s innocent comfort and occupation. In pursuing his vocation, then, Pope has only done Heaven’s bidding—and anyway, who could reasonably deny the sick man his medicine, the lame man his cane? “But why then publish?” (l. 135). Again, Pope denies that he ever exercised any volition in the matter, shrewdly laying the “blame” at the feet of those—“*Granville* the polite,” “knowing *Walsh*,” “well-natur’d *Garth*,” *Congreve*, *Swift*, “the Courtly *Talbot*, *Somers*, *Sheffield*,” “mitred *Rochester*,” and “*St. John*’s self” (ll. 135-141)—who were, he slyly lets drop, “great *Dryden*’s friends before” (ll. 141). These men (so labelled here as to exemplify a good many noble attributes) pushed him into the public sphere. “Soft were my Numbers, who could take offence / While pure description [as in his *Pastorals*] held the place of Sense?” Yet once before the public eye, Pope claims, his work has been unaccountably and bewilderingly assailed by critics

prompted not so much by a genuine love of the poet's craft, but by peevishness, poverty, and mere madness. This might be borne—"Did some more sober Critic come abroad? / If wrong, I smil'd; if right, I kiss'd the rod" (ll. 157-158)—but his critics did not stop there. His physique, morals, parents, friends, condition—all have been publicly slandered in the cruelest, crudest ways. And so, much against his temperament and will, the rules of engagement had to change, for patience and resignation are hardly attributes in the face of an active viciousness intent on libelling the good and virtuous and thereby subverting right notions of goodness and virtue generally. Pope is therefore *obliged* to assert poetry's moral imperative and disabuse the public on the matter of society's true rogues and villains: "Curst be the Verse, how well soe'er it flow, / That tends to make one worthy Man my foe," that affronts virtue, innocence, or "from the soft-ey'd Virgin steal[s] a tear" (ll. 283-286):

But he, who hurts a harmless neighbor's peace,  
 Insults fall'n Worth, or Beauty in distress,  
 Who loves a Lye, lame slander helps about,  
 Who writes a Libel, or who copies out:  
 That Fop whose pride affects a Patron's name,  
 Yet absent, wounds an Author's honest fame . . .  
 Who reads but with a Lust to mis-apply,  
 Make Satire a Lampon, and Fiction, Lye.  
 A Lash like mine no honest man shall dread,  
 But all such babling blockheads in his stead (ll. 287-292; 301-304).

With this assertion, Pope redefines the nature of his compulsion to write, as well as the sort of poetry he must write. Whereas innate predisposition had previously guided his efforts, that instinctive impulse has now been supplanted (or at least given direction) by a self-consciously moral one, one that requires him to compose something other than pastorals or translations. *An Epistle to Arbuthnot* thus establishes the tripartite apologia that underlies Pope's subsequent self-fashioning in his *Imitations of Horace*, his 'versifications' of Donne's satires, and his *Epilogues to the Satires*: nature compels him to write; the maliciousness of the times compels him—much against the softness and humility

of his temper (ll. 366; 372)—to publicly defend the worthy and expose the wicked by writing satire; and the moral ideals he seeks to define and defend compel his satire to respect no rank, condition, or power. And so when Pope has Arbuthnot ask, “But why insult the Poor, affront the Great?” (l. 360), Pope’s answer is unambiguous and uncompromising, as it must be:

A Knave’s a Knave, to me, in ev’ry State,  
 Alike my scorn, if he succeed or fail,  
*Sporus* at Court, or *Japhet* in a Jayl,  
 A hireling Scribler, or a hireling Peer,  
 Knight of the Post corrupt, or of the Shire,  
 If on a Pillory, or near a Throne,  
 He gain his Prince’s Ear, or lose his own (ll. 361-366).

The last two elements of his self-definition—disgust with the times and an aggressive willingness to attack vice whenever and wherever he finds it—are especially prevalent in Pope’s subsequent satires. In “The First Satire of the Second Book of Horace Imitated” (written about the same time as *Arbuthnot*, published in 1733), for example, Pope’s tone on these points is, if anything, more strident, more defiant than in *Arbuthnot*. Retaining from Horace’s original the device of a friendly, if ethically obtuse interlocutor to act as a rhetorical foil, Pope has his friend, the attorney William Fortescue, advise him, “I’d write no more” (l. 11). “Not write?” Pope responds, incredulous, “but then I *think*, / And for my Soul I cannot sleep a wink. / I nod in Company, I wake at Night, / Fools rush into my Head, and so I write” (ll. 11-14). Well then, says Fortescue, “if you needs must write, write CÆSAR’S Praise: / You’ll gain at least a *Knighthood*, or the *Bays*” (ll. 21-22). Display, he continues, “all your Muse’s softer Art” (l. 29): celebrate the Queen and all the royal line—but whatever you do, leave off your attacks upon “the City’s best good Men” (l. 39), upon the follies and indigence of the realm’s peers, their superficial tastes and trivial amusements (ll. 38-40). Abandon satire. Having afforded himself an opportunity to lay out again the rationale, temper, and range of his satire, Pope insists that satire is his pleasure; that his satire, if poignant, is yet politically disinterested, an “impartial Glass” (l.

57). It is the production of an earnest spirit, but one predisposed to every sort of moderation:

My Head and Heart thus flowing thro' my Quill,  
Verse-man or Prose-man, term me which you will,  
Papist or Protestant, or both between,  
Like good *Erasmus* in an honest Mean,  
In Moderation placing all my Glory,  
While Tories call me Whig, and Whigs a Tory (ll. 63-68).

But at this point the mask of good-humored earnestness slips a bit, revealing the ferocity of the soul and visage beneath. Though Pope declares himself no Don Quixote in satire—"Satire's my Weapon, but I'm too discreet / To run a Muck and tilt at all I meet" (ll. 69-70)—he then issues a warning as quixotic in its breadth as in the severity of its promised punishments:

Peace is my dear Delight—not *Fleury's* more:  
But touch me, and no Minister so sore.  
Who-e'er offends, at some unlucky Time  
Slides into Verse, and hitches in a Rhyme,  
Sacred to Ridicule! his whole Life long,  
And the sad Burthen of some merry Song (ll. 75-80).

Such a resolve, his friend reasons, shaking his head sorrowfully, will no doubt mean an early death for Pope: perhaps his foes are already taking up a collection to put a contract on his head. At the corresponding point in Horace's poem, the Roman replies to this suggestion that the authority of literary precedent should shield him from persecution: "Yet Lucilius laid hands on the leaders / And on the people themselves: he played no favorites, / But favored virtue alone, and virtue's friends."<sup>3</sup> Pope, too, cites precedent: "Could pension'd *Boileau* lash in honest Strain / Flatt'ers and Bigots ev'n in *Louis'* Reign? / Could Laureate *Dryden* Pimp and Fry'r engage, / Yet neither *Charles* nor *James* be in a Rage? (ll. 111-114). Yet the threat of personal danger moves *him* to a very un-Horatian degree of indignation and contempt; moreover, it raises his sense of moral purpose to a far

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<sup>3</sup> Translated by Smith Palmer Bovie.



higher pitch, moving him not merely to defend his way of satire, but to an impassioned insistence of what for him is not (as for Horace) the afterthought of common decency, but the noblest of poetic missions: to expose the wicked and defend Virtue—or die in the attempt:

What? arm'd for Virtue when I point the Pen,  
 Brand the bold front of shameless, guilty Men,  
 Dash the proud Gamester in his gilded Car,  
 Bare the mean Heart that lurks beneath a Star;  
 Can there be wanting to defend Her Cause,  
 Lights of the Church, or Guardians of the Laws? . . . .  
 [Could Boileau and Dryden dare to do the same]  
 And I not strip the Gilding off a Knave,  
 Un-plac'd, un-pension'd, no Man's Heir, or Slave?  
 I will, or perish in the gen'rous Cause.  
 Hear this, and tremble! you, who 'scape the Laws.  
 Yet while I live, no rich or noble knave  
 Shall walk the World, in credit, to his grave.  
 To VIRTUE ONLY and HER FRIENDS, A FRIEND  
 The World beside may murmur, or commend (ll. 105-110; 115-122).

Though Pope's imitation of *Satire II: i* follows the structure of Horace's poem quite closely, the striking features of this passage—the truculent voice, the defiance of the world at large, the treatment of moral ideals as *causes*—have been introduced by Pope himself. Or rather, Pope has been led to introduce them by wishing to assume a particular stance relative to his society and its values. That stance, of course, is that which Pope's age took to be Juvenalian, and one might say that here as elsewhere in his *Imitations of Horace*, Pope seeks in tone, stance, and purpose to imbue Horatian form with Juvenalian fury. He achieves thereby what Weinbrot describes as an ideal amalgam: Horace's modesty, grace, and polish joined to the unequivocal moral seriousness of Juvenal (*Traditions*, 331ff.). But we might also see the blend as a shrewd rhetorical move, a practical way of better realizing the Juvenalian model itself. When the poet appears to make at least a pretence to putting on the Horatian mask of good humor, impartiality, moderation, and a love of peace and retirement (as Pope does here), he can throw it aside (as Pope does here) to greater effect

when the systemic corruption of the times makes the former pose a moral liability. If we lend credence to the Juvenalian Pope it is in part because we first believe in his Horatian alter ego.

This is as true for his satiric output taken as a body as it is for this particular poem. Nearly all of Pope's imitations of Horace, for instance, use the controlling themes of their originals—the poet's desire to leave the bustle of the City and Court (*Satire II, vi*); his pursuit of temperance and moderation, and his forfeiture of ambition and desire (*Satire II, ii*); his mature concern with the proper ordering of one's life and soul (*Epistles I, i* and *I, vii*); his readiness to take leave even of poetry itself (*Ep. II, ii*)—to couch piquant jabs at Pope's favorite human and institutional targets: the Hanoverian Court, Walpole's ministry, aristocratic decadence, bad writers, and (combining all within a single narrow compass) his arch-tormentors and butts, the effeminate Lord Hervey and the slovenly Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. But more broadly still, appearing after these imitations are Pope's two so-called *Epilogues to the Satires* (1738 and 1739), in which he foregoes all pretence of Horatian moderation and impartiality and returns to the tone and pose he adopts at the end of his *Imitation of Satire II, i*.

Once more he employs the device of an interlocutory foil, though in both *Epilogues* his companion is more explicitly antagonistic than in the earlier poem. In the first of these poems, Pope is again advised to forego the aggressive strain of satire, to ally himself instead with the Court's scheme of ethics and attack Scripture, honesty, principle, and those odd creatures called *patriots* who would preserve their nation's worth and honor: "These nothing hurts; they keep their Fashion still, / And wear their strange old Virtue as they will" (ll. 43-44). But in all events, the "friend" explains, one should not take aim at public figures simply because they are foolish or corrupt. Doing so would be ineffective: "Laugh then at any, but at Fools and Foes; / These you but anger, and you mend not those" (ll. 53-54); and besides, unless the satirist takes care to lash the Good as vigorously as the Bad, he creates the impression that Virtue is somehow preferable to Vice, and thereby "sets

half the World, God knows, against the rest" (l. 58). Faced with Horatian temporizing at its most extreme, Pope first bids an ironical farewell to sharp, biting satire—"Dear Sir, forgive the prejudice of Youth: / Adieu Distinction, Satire, Warmth, and Truth" (ll. 63-64)—and asks to be filled with such a temper as will let him "sing without the least offense, / And all I sung should be the *Nation's Sense*" (ll. 77-78): "So—Satire is no more—I feel it die— / No *Gazeteer* more innocent than I! / And let, a God's name, ev'ry Fool and Knave / Be grac'd thro' Life, and flatter'd in his Grave" (ll. 83-86). Pope's elaborate farewell is, of course, an inverted affirmation of satire's express qualities and duties as he conceives them—and of Britain's pressing need for satiric scrutiny. Satire *must* draw definite, even absolute distinctions between good and evil, virtue and vice;<sup>4</sup> because of this, it must arouse and admonish its readers, and thus must speak with warmth; it must not flatter its readers, but shake them from their complacency and therefore *must* be willing to offend even the most powerful. Indeed, because it is in the "nation's sense" (or interest) that satire asserts the truths in which it deals, the country's leaders must be held to *higher* moral and ethical standards and thus are *especially* fair game. Pope makes this last point clear enough when, having seemingly capitulated to his friend's argument, he then gives that argument a further ironic twist: on second thought, it might be worth keeping satire around after all; for if nothing else, the fear of being exposed and made ridiculous will keep the lower orders in their places, discourage them from aping those sins set aside for their betters:

*Virtue*, I grant you, is an empty boast;  
But shall the Dignity of *Vice* be lost?

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<sup>4</sup> Pope would later include in the front-matter of *The New Dunciad* an essay, "Of the Hero of the Poem," purportedly supplied by one Ricardus Aristarchus (the classicist Richard Bentley, another of his frequent targets). Explaining the moral compass of the ensuing poem, Aristarchus remarks (with Pope's blessing, one assumes), "If the Gods be not provoked at evil men, neither are they delighted with the good and just. For contrary objects must either excite contrary affections, or no affections at all. So that he who loveth good men, must at the same time hate the bad; and he who hateth not bad men, cannot love the good; because to love good men proceedeth from an aversion to evil, and to hate evil men from a tenderness to the good" (712).

Ye Gods! shall *Cibber's* Son, without rebuke  
 Swear like a Lord? or a *Rich* out-whore a Duke?  
 A Fav'rite's *Porter* with his Master vie,  
 Be brib'd as often, and as often lie?  
 Shall *Ward* draw Contracts with a Statesman's skill?  
 Or *Japhet* pocket, like his Grace, a Will?  
 Is it for *Bond* or *Peter* (paltry Things!)  
 To pay their Debts or keep their Faith like Kings? . . .  
 This, this, my friend, I cannot, must not bear;  
 Vice thus abus'd, demands a Nation's care . . . .  
 Vice is undone, if she forgets her Birth,  
 And stoops from Angels to the Dregs of Earth:  
 But 'tis the *Fall* degrades her to a Whore;  
 Let *Greatness* own her, and she's mean no more (ll. 113-22; 127-8; 141-44).

And having argued that vice on the grand scale is unarguably the prerogative of the Administration, Church, Court, and Royalty, Pope in the poem's final lines (ll. 145-170) takes the next logical step and portrays—perhaps in allusion to the conclusion of the *Dunciad Variorum*, and seemingly in anticipation of the more dire tone of the new *Dunciad* to come—the safeguarding of vicious privilege through Britain's repudiation of Virtue and “Old *England's* Genius” and her sanctification of Vice: “[H]ers the Gospel is, and hers the Laws” (l. 148). What Pope had seemed to celebrate is now suddenly under direct attack, as satiric inversion makes its way full circle into unironic, full-throated denunciation. Amusing as it is to imagine Pope's fictional friend wincing at the onslaught, it is yet more satisfying to reflect that he has only himself to blame for being scandalized. “Not twice a twelvemonth you appear in Print,” he had baited Pope at the poem's opening, “And when it comes, the Court see nothing in't. / You grow *correct* that once with Rapture writ, / And are, besides, too *Moral* for a Wit” (ll. 1-4).

Once roused, Pope's sense of satiric mission seemingly will brook no doubt of its divine sanction, heed no limits to its moral authority. At the end of his “versification” of Donne's fourth satire (1733), Pope had, following his original, declared that “*Courts* are too much for Wits so weak as mine; / Charge them with Heav'n's Artill'ry, bold *Divine!*” (ll. 280-281), though he teases himself into imagining that “what's now *Apocrypha*, my

Wit, / In time to come, may pass for *Holy Writ*" (ll. 286-287). Such self-ironic touches are altogether absent, however, in his second *Epilogue* (1739). Again the question between Pope and his antagonist is satire's proper sphere and targets, and again the "friend" would have Pope direct his attack only where it does no harm (and can do no good). But this time Pope does not play along. Instead, he defies his interlocutor, boldly (some might say vaingloriously) asserting not simply the power of his satire and the justness of his cause, but the self-evident righteousness of his own peculiar pursuit of the vocation. Heaven, in short, has ordained him and his verse to vex and scourge the wickedness of his times. If he claims to be above common considerations of tact, propriety, modesty, and discretion, it is because now he pays heed only to the guide and object of his quest—Virtue. Accused of being splenetic, an outright misanthrope, Pope responds with a long list of those he delights in commending (ll. 62-93), then adds, "Yet think not Friendship only prompts my lays; / I follow *Virtue*, where she shines, I praise" (ll. 94-95). It is in fact his selfless, single-minded devotion to the pursuit and defense of Virtue and Truth that allows Pope to disavow any partisan or private bias—but also, to claim a moral authority far beyond that of his personal social station as Alexander Pope, Esquire, and to presume to survey not only with impunity but with justice the appetites and actions of all levels and conditions of society. And so to his friend's repeated assertions that the supposed misdeeds of Court, Administration, and Clergy do not concern and therefore should not provoke him, Pope the satirist can respond with a humbling high-mindedness,

Ask you what Provocation I have had?  
 The strong Antipathy of Good to Bad.  
 When Truth or Virtue an Affront endures,  
 Th' Affront is mine, my Friend, and should be yours.  
 Mine, as a Foe profess'd to false Pretence,  
 Who think a Coxcomb's Honour like his Sense;  
 Mine, as a Friend to ev'ry worthy mind;  
 And mine as Man, who feel for all mankind (ll. 197-204).

Further, it is this high moral purpose that justifies Pope's claim for the supposed sacredness of his poetry and public persona. It is his satire, after all, that makes "Men not afraid of God, afraid of me: / Safe from the Bar, the Pulpit, and the Throne, / Yet touch'd and sham'd by Ridicule alone" (ll. 209-211); and satire's power, in turn, Pope argues, is derived in part from its utility as an instrument of divine justice, and in part from the providential election of the poet who plies it, made evident by the demonstrated probity and brilliance of his verse:

O sacred Weapon! meant for Truth's defence,  
Sole Dread of Folly, Vice, and Insolence!  
To all but Heav'n-directed hands deny'd,  
The Muse may give thee, but the Gods must guide.  
Rev'rent I touch thee! but with honest zeal;  
To rowze the Watchmen of the Publick Weal,  
To Virtue's Work provoke the tardy Hall,  
And Goad the Prelate slumb'ring in his Stall (ll. 212-219).

Pope clearly thinks of himself as being the "Heav'n-directed" wielder of the "sacred Weapon" of satire. Such a conception has been implicit in his self-portraiture since *Arbuthnot*, when he first promised to lash the "babbling blockheads" who dared to insult beauty, worth, and truth, but emerges fully developed and fully articulated only now, when the exigencies of a continuous social critique that has been building in volume and virulence throughout the decade force him to stake out at last the most extreme public position that may be claimed. Ironically, though he would seem here to have achieved rhetorically (and *practically*, in the esteem of his contemporaries among the literary Opposition) the fully realized Juvenalian stance that existed for Dryden only theoretically, Pope would declare in a textual note to a later edition of this *Epilogue*,

This was the last poem of the kind printed by our author, with a resolution to publish no more; but to enter thus, in the most plain and solemn manner he could, a sort of PROTEST against that insuperable corruption and depravity of manners, which he had been so unhappy as to live to see. Could he have hoped to have amended any, he had continued these attacks; but bad men were grown shameless and so powerful, that Ridicule was become as unsafe as it was ineffectual. The Poem raised him, as he knew it

would, some enemies; but he has reason to be satisfied with the approbation of good men, and the testimony of his own conscience (703).

In one sense, the slow emergence of Pope's persona upon the public stage has been its own satire on the times, reluctant, hesitant, antipathetic to his essential withdrawing nature as it has ostensibly been, coaxed out, then called forth only by the good man's instinct to deliver Virtue from danger. In a village of the just, Diogenes would have no need for his lantern. But Pope manages in his gloss upon this *Epilogue* to turn even his farewell to topical satire into a reflection on an age grown insensible to his lash. To hold the world unworthy of correction is indeed to make the grandest display of one's contempt for it. Or of one's self-conceit: as Johnson declares of Pope's resolve to quit poetry over the controversy attending his *Epistle to Burlington* (1731): "The man who threatens the world is always ridiculous; for the world can easily go on without him, and in a short time will cease to miss him. . . . Pope had been flattered till he thought himself one of the moving powers in the system of life. When he talked of laying down his pen, those who sat round him intreated and implored; and self-love did not suffer him to suspect that they went away and laughed" (II, 181). And of course Pope did not lay down his pen after 1739 any more than he had in 1731. As it proved, there was yet one great work ahead of him that would stunningly crystallize the satiric fiction he fashioned and propagated along with his public persona; and whatever his reservations (real or affected) about the efficacy of his satire may have been, they did not prevent him in the meantime from gazing into the future and taking it upon himself to deliver posterity's verdict upon his mission and muse:

Truth guards the Poet, sanctifies the line,  
And makes Immortal, Verse as mean as mine (ll. 246-47).

## 2. Epitaphic Satire and the Foundations of the Epitaphic Vision

Lest one conclude that Pope had by this time succumbed utterly to monomania, we should make note of John Butt's observation that Pope's two satiric dialogues had so discomfited Parliament that the House of Lords threatened him with prosecution for libel—

only to be threatened into silence again by the poet's promise to write a more explicitly scandalous piece should the prosecution go forward (*Poems*, 704n). But we might turn also to a short poem Pope composed the same year the second of his *Epilogues* appeared, "On receiving from the Right Hon. the Lady Frances Shirley a Standish and Two Pens." It is a playful poem, opening with "th' Athenian Queen" descending "in all her sober charms" (l. 2) to solemnly hand the poet her "celestial arms" (l. 4): the "golden lance" whose steel "shall stab [Vice] to the heart" (ll. 5; 7), and "the sable Well, / The fount of Fame or Infamy" (ll. 11-12). The real-life giver of pens and ink (the poem's "Flavia"), however, will have nothing to do with the poet's extravagantly heroic analogy:

'What *well?* what *weapon?* (Flavia cries)  
 A standish, steel and golden pen;  
 It came from Bertrand's, not the skies;  
 I gave it you to write again' (ll. 13-16).

She goes on to underscore the absurdity of the conceit: "*Athenian Queen!* and *sober charms!* / I tell ye, fool, there's nothing in't" (ll. 25-26); but if he will "be a quiet soul, / That dares tell neither Truth nor Lies, / I'll list you in the harmless roll / Of those that sing of these poor eyes" (ll. 29-32).

If nothing else, Pope's jab at his own pretensions shows us that the satiric persona he had created was for him just that, a fictive self employed in specific poetic contexts to declare what Pope could not if speaking in public in his own person. However, though we should not assume a one-to-one correspondence between the public persona and the private man, neither can we say that the two are absolutely distinct. We might note, for example, the strikingly close similarity between Pope's marginal lament at the end of the second *Epilogue to the Satires* that "bad men were grown shameless and so powerful, that Ridicule was become as unsafe as it was ineffectual" and his declaration to John Boyle in the January 1743 letter that opened this chapter: "As to any thing else I shall write, it will be very little, and very faint. I have lost all Ardor and Appetite, even to Satyr, for no body has Shame enough left to be afraid of Reproach, or punish'd by it." Nor is this particular



example of the correspondence between the public and private selves chosen at random, for indeed, one of the most important characteristics they share is a tendency to figure themselves as precipitously near death—or as one already dead and buried. (Note, for instance, that his marginal comments upon his last topical satire read as if their task was to explicate the motives of some auth-or whose passing has long since made his motives and meaning obscure.) Perhaps one can account for this by remarking Pope's early and emphatic awareness of his own highly vulnerable life-force. He related to Spence that while in his late teens, incessant study had reduced him "to so bad a state of health; that, after trying physicians for a good while in vain, he resolved to give way to his distemper; and sat down calmly, in full expectation of death in a short time. Under this thought he wrote letters to take a last farewell of some of his more particular friends" (38). Half a decade later, another dangerous illness prompted him to write to Henry Cromwell on May 17, 1710, that his friend should quickly finish the elegy he had proposed to write for him: "I shou'd at least have expected you to have finishd that Elegy upon me, which you told me you was upon the point of beginning when I was sick in London; If you will but do so much for me first, I will give you leave to forget me afterwards; & for my own part, will dye at discretion, & at my leisure" (*Corr.* I, 87). His tone here and throughout the letter is somewhat waggish, but his infirmity—"my present, living, dead Condition"—is sufficiently serious, the prospect of death real enough to preoccupy him with thoughts of possible epitaphs and of the several ways in which he has already been consigned to the shades: "I am, it must be own'd, Dead in a Natural Capacity . . . Dead in a Poetical Capacity, as a damn'd Author; and dead in a Civill Capacity, as a useless Member of the Commonwealth buried in Solitude" (87-88). But whether or not his frail constitution is the source of Pope's habit of speaking in his public and private voices as if he were a *revenant*, the fact remains that the propensity makes up an important feature in his self-fashioning. Reinforcing and reinforced by both his private pessimism and the extreme Juvenalian persona he had assumed in his public satires, it seems to have been a major influence upon

his adoption of the peculiar figurative apparatus—the “epitaphic vision”—he used to portray contemporary England.

In Pope’s hands, the epitaph’s rhetorical and commemorative capacities would fit well with the public persona he had fashioned. As Addison comments in *Spectator* No. 26 (Friday, March 30, 1711), the finality of the tomb and the infinity of time are likely to doom “the little Competitions, Factions and Debates of Mankind” as well as the variety and complexity of our individual personalities, experiences, and actions to oblivion—or, if *any* lasting record is made of them, to preservation in a few crudely reductive commemorative lines stamped on paper or engraved on stone. Record is made of our names, the dates of our births and deaths, our character and profession, and our lives are summed up in a motto or pious verse. But it is the very finality of death that makes those few reductive lines so important, for they have the power to define us and perpetuate our memories in the minds of the living. And this capacity, in turn, lends epitaphs the power to exhort the living to pursue virtues of the dead or admonish them against their vices. Epitaphs may thus serve as commentary upon the dead yet exercise a powerful moral appeal upon the living and their concerns. Pope was well aware of this, and instead of merely commemorating the dead, exploits the rhetorical form and force of the epitaph in an attempt to define absolutely and indelibly the personal, political, and poetical principles he publicly claims to champion. In this way, the conventions of the genre would give a distinctive epitaphic perspective and “shape” to the body of his philosophical and satirical poetry. Pope’s epitaphs, whether actual or merely literary, are therefore a logical—and important—extension of the satiric themes he pursued in his poetry at large. Yet the epitaph could serve still another turn. Taking a cue from his habit of portraying his own death in Virtue’s cause, Pope would expand this epitaphic pose or stance into a much broader “epitaphic vision,” insinuating the utter corruption of the age by portraying in his epitaphs the demise of all that once had been noble and worthy of English civilization.

Doubtless there are certain advantages accruing to the satirist who from the unique conventions, outlook, and contours of epitaphic rhetoric weaves the all-enfolding figurative “shroud” of his social criticism. But the peculiar figurative apparatus that slowly evolved from this practice and would culminate in the fourth book of the *New Dunciad* (1742-1743)—*the idea of Britain itself* cast as an entity *in extremis*, tenable once perhaps but now a thing past recovery and beyond belief—would have the probably unlooked-for but (coming when it did) likely unavoidable consequences of first, greatly segregating literal and figurative mnemonic cues within public poetry, which would have the effect, secondly, of disrupting the configuration and current of social memory established at the Restoration, thereby (thirdly) diminishing appreciably the role of poetry in the public sphere, a setback from which the genre has yet to recover.

Beginning with *An Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot*, the moribund quality of the public persona Pope crafts in his more general autobiographical statements becomes increasingly discernible, because more elaborate, more insistent as a component of Pope’s social rhetoric. In *Arbuthnot*, we remember, Pope speaks of poetry as the anodyne for “this long disease, my life,” but the poem even opens with the poet, harried by the world’s importunities, bidding his servant, “Shut, shut the door, good *John!* fatigu’d I said, / Tye up the knocker, say I’m sick, I’m dead” (l. 2). And though Pope here would feign death merely for comic effect, this episode foreshadows what by the end of the poem the fiction of his own death will have become (and henceforth remain) for Pope the public poet, a subtle reinforcement of his heroic stance: separated from the mundane distractions and self-serving preoccupations of the living, the “dead” man can speak in full knowledge of the world and its ways without being caught up or corrupted by them; he therefore can deliver with credible disinterest the absolute truths, the ideals of moral and ethical conduct that should govern human affairs. Moreover, he has the advantage of looking back upon his own life and its work as if it were a thing already accomplished, assigning it its final real

significance in the sweep of history and the otherwise unknowable course of Providential design. Thus when Pope inserts a sketch of himself immediately after the scathing “Sporus”-portrait of Lord Hervey, the effect he achieves is not simply a compelling contrast between the incarnation of Courtly decadence and depravity on one hand and of his ideals for himself on the other, but a shift in temporal perspective that underscores the moral disparity between the two men. Whereas Hervey, as a living embodiment of servile treachery—“Beauty that shocks you, Parts that none will trust, / Wit that can creep, and Pride that licks the dust” (ll. 332-333)—is a creature of the times’ corruption, and as such is likely to manifest still greater depravities, the figure Pope creates for himself exists outside of time, is fixed, final, and therefore not subject to the fleshly temptations and appetites that tend to wear away and make suspect even the most virtuous resolutions:

Not Fortune’s Worshipper, nor Fashion’s Fool,  
 Not Lucre’s Madman, nor Ambition’s Tool,  
 Not proud, nor servile, be one Poet’s praise  
 That, if he pleas’d, he pleas’d by manly ways;  
 That Flatt’ry, ev’n to Kings, he held a shame,  
 And thought a Lye in Verse or Prose the same:  
 That not in Fancy’s Maze he wander’d long,  
 But stoop’d to Truth, and moraliz’d his song:  
 That not for Fame, but Virtue’s better end,  
 He stood the furious Foe, the timid Friend . . . (ll. 334-343).

Note that this summary of the poet’s attributes is cast in the past tense—as is the catalogue of personal trials that makes up the second half of the portrait: “the loss of Friends he never had, / The dull, the proud, the wicked, and the mad” (ll. 346-47), the “distant Threats of Vengeance on his head” (l. 348), “the Lye so oft o’erthrown” (l. 350), “the Morals blacken’d,” “the libel’d Person, and the pictur’d Shape” (ll. 351-352), “Abuse on all he lov’d, or lov’d him spread, / A Friend in Exile, or a Father, dead” (ll. 354-355). As Pope’s use of the past tense renders the qualities of character that safe-guarded his pursuit of “Virtue’s better end” seemingly indelible, so are the worldly battles occasioned by that pursuit made to seem long resolved—and triumphantly so, allowing Pope to reduce the

disappointments and tribulations (but also the ambiguities, compromises, and missteps) of a life spent and lost in this quest to the nobility of its ostensible aims: “Welcome for thee, fair Virtue! all the past: / For thee, fair Virtue! welcome ev’n the *last!*” (ll. 358-359). The reflection that the imminent “last” (that is, *death*) will overtake him laboring in a worthy cause lets Pope reconcile himself to his own mortality, but also lends his current and future attitudes and actions—for he is, after all, still among the living—the moral authority of history’s favorable verdict upon them. In sum, by seeming to rank himself among the dead, Pope coaxes his contemporaries to look upon his persona and career as if both were but the visible forms of those defining virtues (to be) inscribed by posterity upon his epitaph.

This “epitaphic strain” or stance recurs throughout the satires of the 1730’s. At times, as in “The First Epistle of the First Book of Horace Imitated” and “The Second Epistle of the Second Book of Horace Imitated,” it is sublimated into the more conventional wish for retirement from public life. In the latter poem, for instance, Pope tells his imagined correspondent, Colonel Anthony Browne, that since poetry has brought him a competence that removes the necessity of further toil, “Sure I should want the Care of ten *Monroes*,<sup>5</sup> / If I would scribble, rather than repose” (70-71), for he has reached that time of life when he must lay poetry aside and “learn to smooth and harmonize my Mind, / Teach ev’ry Thought within its bounds to roll, / And keep the equal Measure of the Soul” (ll. 203-205). What Brean S. Hammond observes of “The First Epistle . . .” (addressed to Bolingbroke) may therefore be said of this as well: “To a limited extent, the poem can be placed in the *ars moriendi* tradition. The poet is examining his own preparedness to die, the readiness of soul and conscience for death and judgement” (119). In other places, however, the epitaphic strain bursts forth much more forcefully. In Pope’s “versification” of Donne’s fourth satire, for example, the poet bids “Adieu to all the Follies of the Age! I

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<sup>5</sup> Dr. MONROE, *Physician to Bedlam Hospital* [Pope’s note].

die in Charity with Fool and Knave, / Secure of Peace at least beyond the Grave" (ll. 2-4); the first *Epilogue to the Satires* concludes, as noted, with the apotheosis of Vice, but set apart from the rest of the poem is this final couplet: "Yet may this Verse (if such a Verse remain) / Show there was one who held it in disdain" (ll. 171-172)—making the preceding poem a "posthumous" monument to his struggle against the wickedness of the times; and in "Verses on a Grotto by the River Thames at Twickenham" (1741), Pope describes his beloved retreat as if he saw it many years hence, abandoned, obscure, yet in-spired still with the ethical and political ideals of those who once frequented it, those who joined with Pope in the struggle to uphold British civilization. "Approach," Pope's spirit bids the traveller, yet "Let such, such only, tread this sacred floor, / Who dare to love their Country, and be poor" (ll. 13-14).

If Pope's grotto here stands as a physical remnant evocative of the larger cultural struggle taken up by its denizens, we might notice likewise that, beginning with the passages from *Arbuthnot*, Pope's autobiographical statements have in addition to their rhetorical functions a similar commemorative purpose, serving as monuments in verse to himself, to his art, to the skirmishes he fought in service of the ideals he tried to uphold. Johnson in his *Life of Pope* wonders aloud upon the irony that by attacking so many knaves and fools Pope bestowed upon them an immortality they would otherwise not have enjoyed (II, 177). But this seems precisely what Pope had in mind. In the Advertisement to *The Dunciad Variorum* he declares grandly, "Of the Persons it was judg'd proper to give some account: for since it is only in this monument that they must expect to survive, (and here survive they will, as long as the English tongue shall remain such as it was in the reigns of Queen ANNE and King GEORGE) it seem'd but humanity to bestow a word or two upon each, just to tell what he was, what he writ, when he liv'd, or when he dy'd" (317). The cynical might conclude that Pope hoped to ensure for himself posterity's high esteem by keeping alive the memory of inferior talents. But satirists no less than love-poets must leave us pictures of their objects. Mere love is not enough: Dante must enchant us with his

Beatrice, Eloise her Abelard, Astrophel his Stella. Neither is the satirist's precept enough. In itself, as Dryden has told us, it is but "a crude preparation of morals, which we may have from Aristotle and Epictetus, with more profit than from any poet." If the satirist is to live after his death, so must his targets, sustained by the same verse that keeps his own memory alive. We might then observe to Dr. Johnson what Pope observed to his friend Cromwell in that waggish letter on death and monuments: "I fear I must be forc'd, like many learned Authors, to write my own Epitaph, if I wou'd be remember'd at all" (*Corr.* I, 87-88). For in a general sense, Pope's satire is its own epitaph, his way of keeping alive memories of the particular configuration of his historical moment, of those particular circumstances and cultural stakes that led him to modulate Virgil's voice into Juvenal's. And if eternal union with Dennis, Bentley, Tickell, Theobald, Cibber, Walpole, George II, Bubb Dodington, Lord Hervey, and Lady Mary strikes us (as it did Johnson) as less than ideal, Pope knew such to be the inescapable lot of the satirist. Thus in *Arbutnot*, for instance, he does not grudge the "word-catching" quibblers (l. 166) their incessant fault-finding with his works; for as "such small Critics some regard may claim, / Preserv'd in *Milton's* or in *Shakespear's* name" (ll. 167-68), so too does their dullness set off the genius of those lines of his in which it finds itself forever fixed: "Pretty! in Amber to observe the forms / Of hairs, or straws, or dirt, or grubs, or worms; / The things we know, are neither rich nor rare, / But wonder how the devil they got there?" (ll. 169-172).

Pope's epitaphic pose had its natural complement and culmination in the two actual epitaphs he wrote on himself. They are the most definitive of his self-definitions, and in them the elements and techniques of his rhetoric are most overt, his commemorative aims most evident. The first, composed around 1738 and published in his *Works* of the same year, is headed, "Epitaph for One who would not be buried in Westminster Abbey":

HEROES, and KINGS! your distance keep:  
 In peace let one poor Poet sleep,  
 Who never flatter'd Folks like you:  
 Let Horace blush, and Virgil too.

If Pope had declared in previous autobiographical statements that he would not spare the great and powerful (“A Knave’s a Knave, to me, in every state”), he here offers in his posthumous act of defiance perhaps the most grandiose gesture of poetic independence. Living, he never flattered “Heroes and Kings”; dead, he keeps his distance from them by warning them away from his final resting place, and by spurning the possible posthumous recognition of being buried in Westminster Abbey. Such recognition would in any event be tainted enough coming from a class whose tastes Pope often lampooned,<sup>6</sup> and whose neglect of true literary merit in favor of buying the flattery of hacks was a constant source of irritation—or worse. In *Arbuthnot*, for example, Pope remarks bitterly of the belated appreciation of Dryden’s genius, “But still the Great have kindness in reserve, / He help’d to bury whom he helped to starve” (ll. 247-248). A few lines later his disgust leads him to an ironic endorsement of literary prostitution: at least it matches dunce with dunce and keeps blockhead patrons and poets alike from his own door. His anger resurfaces, however, when he thinks of the fate met by John Gay, his beloved friend and fellow Scriblerian:

Blest be the Great! for those they take away,  
 And those they left me—For they left me GAY,  
 Left me to see neglected Genius bloom,  
 Neglected die! and tell it on his Tomb;  
 Of all thy blameless Life the sole Return  
 My Verse, and QUEENSB’RY weeping o’er thy Urn! (ll. 255-60)

Pope follows this up with a passage closely foreshadowing his first epitaph upon himself:

O let me live my own! and die so too! . . .  
 Maintain a Poet’s Dignity and Ease,  
 And see what friends, and read what books I please.  
 Above a Patron, tho’ I condescend  
 Sometimes to call a Minister my Friend:  
 I was not born for Courts or great Affairs,  
 I pay my Debts, believe, and say my Pray’rs (ll. 261; 263-268).

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<sup>6</sup> The *Epistle to Burlington* offers perhaps the best single example; especially ll. 99-176.



Note that in both these passages from *Arbuthnot*, Pope implies that death is a welcome alternative to the corruptions of the world, the tomb a sanctuary from its follies, the dead at last sanctified and beyond the reach of both. In his epitaph, however, Pope goes a bit further: this moral distance of the dead from the living is no longer sufficient to protect the former from the taint of the latter, who might yet compromise the poet's independence and integrity by interring him in Westminster Abbey—the burial place of those poets the people (and especially “the Great” among them) have taken to their hearts. He therefore takes care to avoid even the appearance of complicity with “Folks like you” (“folks” being a deft undercutting of their dignity) by forestalling their (presumably bumptious) efforts at tribute and composing his own commemorative verses. As Joshua Scodel argues in a lengthy and impressive explication of this epitaph, Pope seeks here not only to assert his independence from the world at large, but to define himself against the epitaphic stances of his fellow poets—Cowley and Prior among them, and even Horace and Virgil—who living have courted the Great, and who in death were assumed by them “into the mainstream of political and poetical tradition” (“Epitaphic Stance” 615; 625; 629-630). Distancing himself from the Great, Pope implies that he is in some way superior them, if not in wealth, power, or lineage, then in a capacity that casts doubt on the true worth of such earthly trappings. And what of this nature could he, the “poor Poet,” possess but the virtuous rage and poetic indignation that suffuses these four lines? But by putting himself beyond the reach even of the world's just esteem, Pope assumes likewise in this epitaph the satirist's ultimate antagonistic stance, estranging himself not simply from the realm of the living, but from his nation, time, people, and the cultural and literary traditions that lent structure to and in turn drew sustenance from his life, career, and memory.

This posture of extreme renunciation carries over into Pope's second epitaph on himself, published anonymously in January, 1741. Here he asserts with proud humility,

Under this Marble, or under this Sill,  
Or under this Turf, or e'en what they will;

Whatever an Heir, or a Friend in his stead,  
 Or any good Creature shall lay o'er my Head;  
 Lies he who n'er car'd, and still cares not a Pin,  
 What they said, or may say of the Mortal within.  
 But who living and dying, serene still and free,  
 Trusts in God, that as well as he was, he shall be.

Scodel calls Pope's declaration of his indifference both to the manner of his commemoration and its agent (ll. 1-4) an exaggerated form of what we have seen before, the ancient poetic ideal of retirement from the world ("Epitaphic Stance," 627); the poet, withdrawing from the final concerns of his fleshly mortality, resigns himself (ll. 5-8) with a clear conscience to the justice of heaven. But here as in the earlier epitaph, Pope goes beyond mere withdrawal from the world and beyond a weary resignation to its ways we have seen in several of his imitations of Horace to an active scorn of all worldly trappings—even, significantly, the dear intimates on whose companionship his Horatian idealizations of comfortable retirement had largely been based. This time it is not "the Great" from whom Pope defiantly takes his leave and asserts his independence, but the blood heir he would never have; the friends whose petty quarrels with him and with each other had become an all but continual vexation; and the "good creatures" whose officiousness and self-serving flattery—always resented—had grown truly noxious. The moroseness sufficient to prompt a farewell to friendship and humanity might, in Pope's case, be attributed to a gathering disillusionment regarding his Opposition acquaintance that the year before had taken form in the poem "One Thousand Seven Hundred and Forty," which Pope left incomplete (and unpublished). There Pope ascribes to a whole catalogue of plainly identifiable Patriot leaders the same venalities he had all along identified with the Walpole Administration. And if the Opposition leaders are humbugging opportunists, their rustic rank and file are a sorry lot of rubes indeed: "They follow rev'rently each wond'rous wight, / Amaz'd that one can read, that one can write: / So geese to gander prone obedience keep, / Hiss if he hiss, and if he slumber, sleep" (ll. 33-36). "The plague is on thee, Britain," Pope concludes, "and who tries / To save thee[,] in th' infectious office *dies*" (ll. 75-76). Or rather, becomes as dead

to Virtue as the body politic itself has. Reason enough, therefore, not only to disclaim any personal involvement in the practical guidance of the country, but (whatever the immediate causes of Pope's discontent) to disclaim publicly as well in this second epitaph those human ties most likely to cloud and compromise the satirist's integrity. Putting himself beyond the reach even of such elemental attachments, Pope can affect an absolute identification with a Providential justice that recognizes and prefers only Virtue, and knows him (as he knows himself) to be of such probity in life that with a conscience "serene still and free" he may in death "[trust] in God, that as well as he was, he shall be." Pope stops short of placing himself among God's elect, but his stoic renunciation of the mundane, his beatific anticipation of death are designed—perversely enough—to lend his persona an omniscience and objectivity sufficient to give his words an added moral weight among the mortals about whom he pretends to care "not a Pin."<sup>7</sup>

Pope occasionally extends elements of his self-fashioning to his epitaphs on others, as he does in his belated piece on Charles Earl of Dorset (1638-1706), written about 1731 and published in the *Works* of 1735. The epitaph commemorates Dorset as an ideal pattern of political merit: "Blest Courtier! who could King and Country please, / Yet sacred keep his Friendships and his Ease" (ll. 9-10); and Pope associates Dorset's ancestry with the lineage of Virtue itself: "Blest Peer! his great Forefathers ev'ry Grace / Reflecting, and reflected in his Race; / Where other Buckhursts, other Dorsets shine, / And Patriots still, or Poets, deck the Line" (ll. 11-14). It is, however, as poet-as-patriot that Dorset most fully

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<sup>7</sup> As it turned out, Pope chose neither of these epitaphs for his tomb—though his friend and literary executor William Warburton later inscribed (against Pope's wishes) the first upon the monument he raised to Pope in the church at Twickenham, where the poet was buried beside his parents. Instead, Pope had "and to himself" appended to the epitaph he had composed for them:

To God the Creator and best of Beings,  
 To *Alexander Pope*, a Gentleman of Honesty, Probity and  
 Piety, who liv'd LXXV. Years, died M.DCC.XVII.  
 And to *Editha*, his Excellent and truly Pious Wife,  
 who lived XCIII. Years, died M.DCC.XXXIII.  
 To his well-deserving Parents the Son erected this,  
 and to himself (*Prose Works*, II, 505).

comes to life (so to speak) in Pope's portrait, perhaps because during this period Pope was coming to see himself as a satirist laboring for the public weal. In any event, so closely does Pope identify himself with the courtly wit (whose verse characters he had imitated in youthful exercises) that his sketch of Dorset could have been the model for his own self-portraits of the 1730's—indeed, the following lines would not be out of place in *An Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot* or in either of the *Epilogues to the Satires*:

The Scourge of Pride, tho' sanctify'd or great,  
Of Fops in Learning, and of Knaves in State:  
Yet soft his Nature, tho' severe his Lay,  
His Anger moral, and his Wisdom gay.  
Blest Satyrist! who touch'd the Mean so true,  
As show'd, Vice had his Hate and Pity too (ll. 3-8).

The parallels between Dorset's epitaph and Pope's own claims for himself and his satire alert us to two things. First, they alert us to the generic capacity of the epitaph for upholding the larger ideals, topics, and themes of the satirist's major works. But secondly, the demonstration of this capacity within this particular epitaph, coinciding as it does with the nascent emergence of Pope's satiric persona, hints that the development of that persona—coaxed into assuming its epitaphic stance by the lifelong "imminence" of Pope's own mortality and the extreme (though logical) consequences of his peculiar assimilation of the Juvenalian model—might have links as well with Pope's frequent forays into memorial verse between 1716 and 1736, when he composed the majority of his epitaphs. And a survey of Pope's epitaphs in fact reveals that the progress of the epitaphic stance I have traced in the foregoing pages largely recapitulates, rapidly and within a narrow compass, the slow evolution of that stance during the previous two decades within his actual epitaphs. Indeed, the features characterizing the development of Pope's epitaphic pose—the quest for an impregnable rhetorical space; the exposition of ideals of private and public conduct and the segregation of those ideals from the living world in order to secure them from its corruptions; the use of these ideals, once segregated, to serve as an implicit commentary on the depravity of Pope's foes and times; and finally, the implication that as

the world has become dead to virtue, so virtue must be dead to the world—occur in roughly the same order there as they do here. It is tempting, therefore, to argue that even as Pope's epitaphs on others serve as an early auxiliary to the ideals he would uphold and the targets he would assail in his satires of the 1730's, so do the epitaphic habits acquired in the composition of these commemorations seem to confirm Pope in his later satiric predisposition toward portraying a moribund Britain, facilitating his movement from mere epitaphic stance toward a more comprehensive epitaphic vision.

In his earliest epitaphs, Pope yokes the somewhat self-contradictory elements of the epitaphic form, its supposed disinterestedness (the dead, beyond "the little Competitions, Factions and Debates of Mankind," would appear immune from both the scorn and flattery of the living), its severely limited space, and the finality of its sentiments, to lend authority to the patterns of public and private virtue his verse commemorations seek to establish. For as with his own epitaphs, the nearly thirty epitaphs Pope wrote for others are designed not so much to commemorate the individual as to define and proffer models of good character and right action. However, though Pope frequently seems to append a name to a list of abstract virtues, one cannot say that Pope's epitaphs are wholly impersonal, or that he has no feeling for his subjects. Rather, Pope emphasizes the abstracted and therefore more broadly recognizable merits of his subjects over their more specifically individual qualities of mind and manner, assembling these merits in a highly idealized way. This might be expected in an age held to favor general expressions of universal truths over, in Dr. Johnson's words, numbering the streaks of the tulip or describing the different shades in the verdure of the forest. But even for Johnson Pope's epitaphs seem overly generic. In "An Essay on Epitaphs" (1740), Johnson asserts that epitaphs are not to be too general. "because the mind is lost in the extent of any indefinite idea, and cannot be affected with what it cannot apprehend" (134). This would be a just criticism of Pope's epitaphs, if one did not recognize that their rhetorical effectiveness within his general satire would be diminished if they were any more intimate or particular. As in his own case, the qualities he

defines and defends seem to operate most effectively as satire only after they have been abstracted from the living world, and, once fixed and stabilized, have been placed beyond all possibility of corruption and compromise.

Pope's habit of fitting his subjects within themes of broad, absolute ideals may be demonstrated by comparing two early epitaphs written on behalf of friends. The first, composed in 1716 for William Trumbull and published in the 1717 edition of Pope's *Works*, ascribes to its subject:

A pleasing form, a firm, yet cautious mind,  
Sincere, tho' prudent, constant, yet resign'd;  
Honour unchang'd, a principle profest,  
Fix'd to one side, but mod'rate to the rest;  
An honest Courtier, yet a Patriot too,  
Just to his Prince, yet to his Country true (ll. 1-6).

Well might Pope so praise Trumbull, for Trumbull had been both a faithful public servant and a warm friend. Trumbull, whose long diplomatic career culminated in a Secretaryship of State under William III, and who in retirement was a model steward in his appointment as royal administrator for Windsor Forest, had befriended Pope, Mack notes, by June 1706 (104). Despite the vast difference in their ages (Trumbull was nearly 50 years Pope's elder), their friendship Mack calls "the most intimate and affectionate of [Pope's] early career" (104), adding that for Pope, "Trumbull played the role of a second father, or perhaps more accurately, of a solicitous grandfather and great uncle" (105). Trumbull and Pope read and rode together, and the older man encouraged Pope in his early poetry. It is somewhat odd, then, that a man so beloved by Pope is commemorated in part with lines taken from an earlier epitaph, one Pope wrote for John Lord Caryll (uncle and namesake of his great friend John Caryll), a Jacobite who at the Glorious Revolution had fled to France, where he served as Secretary of State to the exiled Stuarts—and a man whom Pope had never met:

A manly Form; a bold, yet modest mind;  
Sincere, tho' prudent; constant, yet resign'd;

Honour unchang'd, a Principle profest;  
 Fix'd to one side, but mod'rate to the rest;  
 An honest Courtier, and a Patriot too;  
 Just to his Prince, and to his Country true (ll. 1-6).

Men of different factions, different faiths, different fortunes, described not in equivalent but in identical terms in these lines. Moreover, of the two epitaphs, Caryll's is the longer, more elaborate. Whereas Trumbull is said to possess "the sense of age, the fire of youth; / A scorn of wrangling, yet a zeal for truth" (ll. 7-8), religious tolerance, love of peace and hatred of tyranny—no mean qualities, to be sure—Caryll in whom wisdom, learning, virtue, and bravery are met, is painted as the touchstone of human achievement: "Go now," Pope exhorts the reader,

learn all vast Science can impart;  
 Go fathom Nature, take the Heights of Art!  
 Rise higher yet: learn even yourselves to know;  
 Nay, to yourselves alone that knowledge owe.  
 Then, when you seem above mankind to soar,  
 Look on this marble, and be vain no more!<sup>8</sup> (ll. 12-17)

Having mastered every art and science, Caryll has apparently attained complete self-knowledge as well, and in doing so seems to possess a degree of knowledge and wisdom somewhat above what is usually possible for human beings. [Indeed, he surpasses even Newton, who, Pope says, has revealed all Nature's law but cannot "Describe or fix one movement of his mind," or "Explain his own beginning, or his end" (*Essay on Man*, II, 36; 38)].

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<sup>8</sup> In "Epistle to Mr. Jervas" (1717) Pope adapts lines 16-17 to refer to Elizabeth Countess of Bridgewater: "Bid her [any paragon of womanhood] be all that makes mankind adore; / Then view this marble, and be vain no more!" (ll. 53-54). In either case, the expansiveness of this praise can be seen when these lines are compared to those with which Pope later upbraided human pride and ignorance of self in *The Essay on Man* (1733-34), lines very similar in tone and rhetorical structure:

Go, wond'rous creature! mount where Science guides,  
 Go, measure earth, weigh air, and state the tides;  
 Instruct the planets in what orbs to run,  
 Correct old Time, and regulate the Sun; . . .  
 Go, teach Eternal Wisdom how to rule—  
 Then drop into thyself, and be a fool! (II, 19-22; 31-32)

Though it may seem curious that Pope praises a relative stranger more lavishly than an intimate friend, one need not conclude from this that Pope is either inconsistent or insincere. For one thing, the extravagance of Lord Caryll's epitaph may have been prompted in part by Pope's great affection for the younger John Caryll, and by his desire to praise a fellow Catholic with whose politics and plight he could well sympathize. For another, it is the particular license of poets and politicians to assume masks appropriate for the moment, and to believe (and have us believe) that these are indeed their true faces. But still more to the point, Pope in these epitaphs is not praising the man so much as the virtues he possesses. Both Caryll and Trumbull were men who served loyally the leaders and causes to which they had pledged themselves. It matters not that they were on opposite sides of the political and religious debates of their day: integrity is integrity. As Pope would later declare in his second *Epilogue to the Satires*, there are, above considerations of blood, rank, and wealth, certain "*Trophies [that] deck the truly Brave*" (l. 236), "*Such as on HOUGH's unsully'd Mitre shine, / Or beam, good DIGBY! from a Heart like thine*" (ll. 240-241). And who are Hough and Digby? Pope explains in a footnote: "Dr. John *Hough* Bishop of *Worcester*, and the Lord Digby. The one as assertor of the church of England in opposition to the false measures of King James II. The other as firmly attached to the cause of that King. Both acting out of principle, and equally men of honour and virtue" (703n). It is to Pope's credit that he can call by the same name such mutually antipathetic stances. Virtue remains fixed, though its practitioner and its expression may differ. Indeed, the similarities between the Trumbull and Caryll epitaphs suggest that for Pope the concepts of virtue and nobility of character (among others) exist as a set of fixed ideals, outside the individual and his immediate circumstances, to be judged according to the general competence and not the idiosyncrasies of their execution. The varied lives of these two men help round off our abstract notions of the qualities each embodied—much as in Locke's explication of complex (or moral) ideas, or in Augustan mimetic theory generally, the



usefulness of the tangible lies mainly in its power to intimate the intangible, the indiscernible aspects of what lies before us.

This patterning of moral cognition becomes a rhetorical strategy in Pope's epitaphs for statesmen and public figures. As in the epitaphs for Trumbull and Caryl, Pope appends the name of his subject to an ideal pattern of right character and action for his subject's station and duties, implying, of course, that he indeed fulfills the stated ideal. However, when (or at least *as*) this formula is applied to the friends of a Catholic poet known to be at least sympathetic to the Opposition and suspected of Jacobitism as well, the effect works both ways, giving us an idea of perfect vice as well as perfect virtue—or rather, an idea of vice by way of the poet's segregation of public virtues among the dead. For by linking the opposition of goodness to corruption with the analogous, absolute opposition of the dead to the living, Pope establishes the friends he commemorates as models for public emulation, with the clear, inescapable implication that those currently in authority fall far short of the moral standards against which they are being measured. Pope's verse raises the merits of its subjects to perpetual perfection. Such impossibly high ideals will always find the living wanting, but the satire of these pieces comes, first, from Pope's canonization of controversial, even officially disgraced personages at odds with or persecuted by Pope's enemies in office, and, second, from the consequent implication that the ruling powers are so antipathetic to virtue generally that only in death—that is, in his own memorial verse, written in despite of the times—may it find its fullest realization and reward.

Such is the thought behind the final couplet of Pope's epitaph for Trumbull, "who now, from earth remov'd, / At length enjoys that liberty he loved" (ll. 11-12). And such is the epitaphic rhetoric at work in Pope's epitaph for James Craggs, who had been made Secretary at War in 1717, and who had succeeded Addison as Secretary of State in March 1718. Upon taking the latter office, he received in Pope's "Epistle to James Craggs" his friend's congratulations and admonishment :

But candid, free, sincere, as you began,

Proceed—a Minister, but still a Man;  
 Be not (exalted to whate'er degree)  
 Asham'd of any Friend, not ev'n of Me.  
 The Patriot's plain, but untrod path pursue;  
 If not, 'tis I must be ashamed of You (ll. 12-17).

Pope sent him yet another “reminder” in “A Dialogue” (c. 1718), in which he puts into Craggs's mouth the appropriate reassurances:

Alas! if I am such a Creature,  
 To grow the worse for growing greater;  
 Why Faith, in Spite of all my Brags,  
 'Tis *Pope* must be ashamed of *Craggs* (ll. 5-8).

The political climate gave Pope good cause to worry, tainted as it was by the brutal machinations of opposing Whiggish factions vying for ministerial power and royal favor, which culminated, at about the time of Craggs's death in 1721, in Walpole's rise to power after successfully screening members of the Court and Administration from accountability (and prosecution) in the South Sea scandal. When Pope composed Craggs's epitaph he had yet to fall out with Walpole; however, the epitaph's first appearance in print—in Pope's *Works* of 1735—came at a time when the poet was making his antipathy toward the Prime Minister widely known. With this in mind, it is difficult not to read Pope's epitaph for Craggs as a barb against Walpole and his ministry, for Craggs, in short, is everything Walpole is not:

Statesman, yet Friend to Truth! of Soul sincere,  
 In Action faithful, and in Honour clear!  
 Who broke no promise, serv'd no private end,  
 Who gain'd no Title, and who lost no Friend,  
 Ennobled by Himself, by All approv'd,  
 Prais'd, wept, and honour'd by the Muse he lov'd.

Pope had originally included these lines in an apostrophe to Craggs in his “To Mr. Addison, Occasioned by his Dialogues on Medals” (1720), before Craggs's death and before Craggs had, according to Morris Brownell, “disgraced himself in the South Sea scandal, and was subjected to ridicule and parody” (349). (The sixth line then read, “And prais'd, unenvy'd, by the Muse he lov'd.”) But they served the moment of their publication

very well, for in establishing an ideal pattern for the statesman, Craggs's epitaph would have served likewise as an easily and broadly recognized satire on the shortcomings of the Prime Minister, the most powerful, and therefore by default the most dangerous living embodiment of the soul-destroying "plague" that had infected Britain's political sphere, killing the integrity of her public servants. By 1735 Walpole (known to contemporaries as simply, "the Great Man") had long since grown notorious—and not only in Opposition circles—for his political "pragmatism": that is, for duplicity, moral equivocation, the heavy-handed execution of his policies, and for brokering his office into a knighthood, a title (George II created him Earl of Orford), and great personal wealth. As W.A. Speck explains in *Stability and Strife: England, 1714-1760* (1977), "Walpole himself was quite cynical about the allegations of corruption made by the opposition. As he put it 'I am no saint, no spartan, no reformer.' . . . It is significant that where his own immediate predecessors, Godolphin, Harley and Stanhope, had all left office poorer than they had entered it, Walpole himself amassed a fortune during his twenty year premiership. The period of his administration was undoubtedly coarser, more materialistic and indeed more corrupt than the previous era" (228-229). For Pope, who had known Sir Robert when, as Robin Walpole, he had been an amiable coffee-house habitu , known him "in his happier hour / Of Social Pleasure, ill-exchang'd for Pow'r; / Seen him, uncumber'd with the Venal tribe, / Smile without Art, and win without a Bribe,"<sup>9</sup> the Prime Minister had become by mid-decade the antithesis of political justness and integrity. It was as such that Pope had portrayed him in his "versification" of Donne's fourth satire (revised and published two years before the appearance of Craggs's epitaph), in which he puts into the mouth of a Court creature his own (and the Opposition's) criticisms of Walpole and his policies:

Then as a licens'd Spy, whom nothing can  
Silence, or hurt, he libels the *Great Man*;  
Swears every *Place entail'd* for Years to come,

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<sup>9</sup> *Epilogue to the Satires* (I), ll. 29-32).

In *sure Succession* to the Day of Doom:  
 He names the *Price* for ev'ry *Office* paid,  
 And says our *Wars thrive ill*, because *delay'd*;  
 Nay hints, 'tis by *Connivance* of the Court,  
 That *Spain* robs on, and *Dunkirk's* still a Port (ll. 158-165).

Coming from Pope, the assertion here that the courtier's accusations are mere libel would only have underscored the poet's implicit faith in their accuracy. In an analogous, if inverted way, the epitaph on Craggs, preceded by many such critical enumerations of the Prime Minister's supposed missteps, would have directed at least as much attention toward Walpole's deficiencies as toward the memory of one whose merits saw him ruined, not enriched by the scandal that had raised the Great Mar. to power.

Pope is bolder in his 1732 epitaph for his friend and sometime moral confidant, Francis Atterbury (1662-1732), dean of Westminster and bishop of Rochester, a man of strong Jacobite sympathies who had allowed himself to become half-heartedly involved in a plot of 1722 to restore the Stuarts in the wake of the South Sea fiasco, when the Whiggish Hanoverian administration was greatly discredited and seemingly vulnerable. Though the plot came to nothing and no restoration was attempted, Walpole used it as an excuse to disgrace the Opposition once for all, thereby ingratiating himself further with George I and solidifying his own power base. Atterbury was his prime target. After a brief show trial (at which Pope himself testified, skirting both perjury and the incriminating truth), Atterbury was exiled to France, where in 1729 he received his ailing daughter, who died of tuberculosis shortly after her arrival. It was a felony to correspond with Atterbury, but Pope wrote anyway to console him. And when Atterbury died, still in exile, in 1732, Pope took it upon himself to rehabilitate the man Walpole had sacrificed to political expediency. It was a dangerous thing to do, even so many years after the facts. Howard Erskine-Hill argues that when Johnson observes in his *Life*, "The contemptible 'Dialogue' between He and She should have been suppressed for the author's sake" (II, 242) he speaks less of the quality of the piece than of what Erskine-Hill calls its "politically subversive nature," which, he says, still had the power to embarrass Johnson in the 1750's ("Life Into

Letters," 220). If this is the case, it is no wonder that at the last minute Pope had the poem struck from the 1735 edition of his *Works*.

Erskine-Hill calls Pope's epitaph, a dialogue between father and daughter, "startling and unconventional," for it seemingly has no formal precedents (215-216). In it, Pope collapses time and alters strict historical fact so that Atterbury dies moments after his daughter expires in his arms:

She: Yes, we have liv'd—one pang, and then we part!  
 May Heav'n, dear Father! *now*, have all thy Heart.  
 Yet ah! how once we lov'd remember still,  
 Till you are Dust like me.

He: Dear Shade! I will:  
 Then mix this Dust with thine—O spotless Ghost!  
 O more than Fortune, Friends, or Country lost!  
 Is there on earth one Care, one Wish beside?  
 Yes—*Save my Country, Heav'n,*  
 —He said, and dy'd.

This epitaph is shameless in its attempt to evoke pathos for Atterbury. The immediate cause of his death, apparently, is a heart broken by grief at his daughter's loss. But there have been other heartbreaks: the loss of Fortune, Friends, and Country. At his death, Atterbury is a man, like Job, utterly bereft of earthly trappings; he is in possession "only" of deep love for daughter and country, and of great faith in the power and benevolence of Heaven. A model father, a long-suffering Christian resigned to fate's whims, a patriot whose dying words show his yet fervent love for the country that betrayed him—can this man, Pope's epitaph seems to ask, really have been the traitor he has been painted to be? And if he is not a traitor, what can one help concluding about the characters of those men who prosecuted and persecuted him? What could be in *their* hearts? Certainly nothing that could appreciate Atterbury's benevolence, fortitude, and constancy. As with the epitaph for Craggs, that for Atterbury establishes a space for Virtue far removed—and necessarily so, it would seem—from the circles of political society, implying thereby the total mutual incompatibility of honor and power. But even the direct assertion of Atterbury's virtue is a bold political

statement giving the lie to the government's case against him. Prudence may have led Pope to suppress this epitaph—it was first published only in Warburton's 1751 edition of Pope's *Works*—but this does not diminish its importance as a political document, for Pope composed it after he had finally broken with Walpole, and it serves as evidence that in Pope's mind the associations of corruption with the Administration, of integrity with the Opposition had become fixed and absolute.

In this epitaph and in that for Craggs, Pope makes a point of putting himself in the scene, of commemorating his own recognition of merit. In Craggs's epitaph, for instance, Pope declares openly that his subject is "Prais'd, wept, and honour'd by the Muse he lov'd." He is less conspicuous in Atterbury's epitaph, but the final half-line makes it clear that the dialogue between father and daughter has had a witness, that its pathos has been deeply felt, that the episode has been reflected upon, its greater moral import understood and recorded. By so underscoring his own commemorative presence in his epitaphs, Pope achieves three main things. For one, he calls attention to the power of poetic memory, to his skill in managing the conventions of the genre, and thus to his own reputation among those who wished to perpetuate the memory of their beloved. For another, he establishes his stake in the history and social heritage of the nation by directly associating himself with some of its greatest and most distinguished families, as in his epitaph for Simon Harcourt, the "Son most dear" (l. 2) of England's Lord Chancellor: "Oh let thy once-lov'd Friend inscribe thy Stone, / And with a Father's Sorrows mix his own!" (ll. 7-8); or that for Robert and Mary Digby, the grown children of the 5th Lord Digby: "These little rites, a Stone, a Verse receive, / 'Tis all a Father, all a friend can give!" (ll. 19-20). Finally, and most important for the present purpose, Pope's insistent presence in these pieces makes us aware of the larger consequences for the temporal, living world when the greatly good and the good among the great pass away, for though he mourns as a friend, it is, however, as a public poet that he records their loss and interprets its significance for the nation. In short,

his poetic presence facilitates the arrangement of these commemorations within a moral and cultural context far beyond the personal or familial circumstances of his individual subjects.

Exactly what that greater context is begins to emerge explicitly in several later “political” epitaphs. In his epitaph to General Henry Withers (published 1730), for example, Pope addresses his long-time friend in a voice that is meant to speak for the nation and the age:

Withers adieu! yet not with thee remove  
Thy Martial spirit, or thy Social love!  
Amidst corruption, luxury, and rage,  
Still leave some ancient virtues to our age:  
Nor let us say, (those English glories gone)  
The last true Briton lies beneath this stone (ll. 7-12).

But the voice is Pope’s own. The direct address, the reference to “*our* age,” and the phrase “Nor let *us* say” all call attention to the speaker, his world, and his idiosyncratic view of it. His characterization of the present age as one of “corruption, luxury, and rage,” for instance, does throw into relief Withers’ apparently uncommon virtues, yet their scarcity, in turn, sets off to far greater effect the speaker’s anxiety lest the “ancient virtues,” “those English glories,” really have been removed from Britain with the general’s death, lest “the last true Briton” really does “[lie] beneath this stone.” To a greater degree than in earlier epitaphs, Pope here directly contrasts the virtues of his subject with the general and deep-set decadence of the age, enabling the piece to function as a comprehensive social criticism. In a sense, Pope has raised the stakes vis-à-vis the segregation of virtue among the dead: not only has that virtue in itself become a reflection on the times—in its rareness, a rebuke to the moral status quo—but the times themselves seem no longer capable of nourishing men like Withers,<sup>10</sup> of replenishing the nation’s loss of such, because they can no longer

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<sup>10</sup> In a preface to the printed versions of the epitaph, Pope says of Withers, “A love of glory and of his country animated and raised him above that spirit which the trade of war inspires; a desire of acquiring riches and honours by the miseries of mankind. His temper was humane, his benevolence universal, and among all those ancient virtues, which he preserved in practice and in credit, none was more remarkable than his hospitality” (809n).

instill in succeeding generations those “ancient virtues” and “English glories” that sustain a people and its civilization. When one can imagine the passing of “the last true Briton,” it seems only logical to think of Britain itself as an unsound entity, its mortal hour imminent. Indeed, what we see here—and in his epitaphs for Edmund Duke of Buckingham and John Knight—is a foreshadowing of how Pope will adopt and extend the figure of a moribund Britain into his poetry at large.

Pope’s epitaphs for Buckingham and Knight, composed in 1736, appear to develop the themes found in his lines on Withers. Both pieces are animated by a sentiment closely similar to a flattering observation Pope had made to Lord Digby in a letter of September 8, 1729, regarding the memorial verses he was writing for Robert and Mary Digby’s monument: “It is you My Lord, that perpetuate your Family the best way, by *transmitting thro’ yourself all the Virtues of it into your Posterity. Your whole family is an example of what is almost now lost in this Nation, the Integrity of ancient Nobility*” (*Corr.* III, 52; emphasis added). Virtue has no guarantee of posterity; its lines of descent may be prematurely and permanently severed. Pope underscores this in heading Buckingham’s epitaph “On Edmund Duke of Buckingham, who died in the Nineteenth Year of his Age, 1735,” and by emphasizing in the poem’s first lines that goodness is no less vulnerable to “fate” (l. 3) for being good, nor “modest Youth,” “cool Reflection,” and “ev’ry opening Virtue” (ll. 1-2) any less immune to death. He underscores likewise the consequences for the nation of losing so early those merits that might have “add[ed] one Patriot to a sinking state” (l. 4): “how many Hopes lie here! / The living Virtue now had shone approv’d, / The Senate heard him, and his Country lov’d” (ll. 6-8). Instead, now the “Race, for Courage fam’d, and Art” (l. 11), and for the “Chiefs or Sages long to Britain giv’n” (l. 13) meets its end “in the milder Merit of the Heart” (l. 12). Edmund was the youngest and only surviving son of John Sheffield, first Duke of Buckingham and Normanby. He is lost, and with him the family line, and with the line, presumably, the qualities that so long had kept the “sinking state” from utter dissolution. In a similar way, Pope’s opening epithet



describing John Knight as the “fairest Pattern to a failing age!” (l. 1) implies that the personal qualities he enumerates in subsequent lines are starkly antithetical to prevailing mores—vital to the social health of the nation, yet so rare that their actual occurrence is something of a curiosity, worthy of a record in marble. Knight, whose “Publick Virtue knew no Party rage” (l. 2), was one “Whose Private Name all Titles recommend, / The pious Son, fond Husband, faithful Friend” (ll. 3-4); one remarkable for his “Manners plain,” his refinement “in Sense alone,” his goodness “without Show,” and his principled kindness (ll. 5-6). As such, his passing is consequential enough, given present circumstances, to be “by Friendship, Honour, Virtue; mourn’d” (ll. 9-10), for with him these things themselves pass from living force into an abstract existence in Pope’s memorial verse.

### 3. Pope’s Epitaphic Vision

To be sure, epitaphic conventions encourage the hyperbolic praise of the dead as well as an exaggerated lament for their loss. But given the similarity of feature between these pieces for Withers, Buckingham, and Knight, and Pope’s own epitaphic poses, as well as their coincidence with the emergence of Pope’s epitaphic persona in *Arbuthnot*, it seems reasonable to think of these epitaphs as prototypes and extensions of the more general epitaphic stance he was beginning to assume in his poetry at large. But if the rhetorical progress in Pope’s epitaphs—from appropriating the voice of the dead for purposes of the living, to asserting the decadence of the world by pointing to its deadness to virtue, to the assertion in these last three epitaphs of the deadness of that virtue itself—roughly prefigures the evolution of that more general stance from *Arbuthnot* to Pope’s own epitaphs, it moreover facilitates the transition from epitaphic pose or stance (that is, from a rhetorical figure adopted for a particular situation) to a more general vision for the sustaining values of British civilization as a whole. For underlying the epitaphic pose is the

implicit conviction that those values are somehow unable to survive outside the nourishing idealism and nostalgia of the poet's lines: if Virtue shows to best advantage when segregated from the living world, the implication is that it is too frail to survive in it, either because it is too rarified and theoretical to make itself effectual, and therefore relevant, or that it is too readily overmatched and defeated by vice; and when Virtue itself is portrayed as actually dying or dead, as in these latter epitaphs, we are left to infer that that *idea* of England sustained by the several private and political aspects of this Virtue is imperilled as well. Pope thus puts himself in something of a paradox, for by assuming this epitaphic stance, he is led almost inevitably to the position that the *living* English panorama unfolding before his poetic eye is not worth observing and portraying in his work save as a foil to an idealized Britain that can exist only in the poet's commemorative verse.

Thus far, Pope's outlook seems only an extreme version of that shared by pessimists, reactionaries, curmudgeons, and the aged nearly everywhere in nearly all times: the best days are well behind us; only worse can follow. More specifically, he takes up the historical perspective adopted by the Tory Opposition at almost precisely this moment in his career. As R.C. Richardson reminds us, during the 1730's "the political rivalry between Walpole and the Whigs and Bolingbroke and the Tories came to acquire a curious historiographical dimension," with Tory politicians "espousing the basic tenets of Whig historiography [that is, of the general decline in the rightness and integrity of social and political institutions since the ancient past], while in retaliation Whigs hurled back a hastily assimilated version of Tory historical principles [that is, of the general progress in these same institutions]" (48). What "the Tory Bolingbroke [for one] was doing was to use the Whig appeal to a free past as a weapon in his assault on the corrupting and enslaving efforts of Walpole's Whig administration. Turning Whig theories of history on their head, Bolingbroke was arguing in his *Remarks on the History of England* (London, 1730) that the present was not better than the past but *worse*" (48). Pope, however, goes further than either human nature or Tory ideology singly or together would have carried him, and with

perverse deliberation sets about—as we have seen him do with his own persona—effectively “killing off” those private, political, and poetic (or, more broadly, *aesthetic*) virtues that still survive and might yet redeem the age, or at least suspend the utter ruination of British civilization. Instead of highlighting the remaining excellences of Britain and of individual Britons, Pope pretends that they are already past nurturing, propagating, and preserving for succeeding generations—as if by figuring forth England as a dead land he may the more convincingly portray its moral and cultural despoilers, lament the more vividly and movingly its “erstwhile” merits in their passing. In short, Pope would destroy England as it is in order to save it in his verse as it ought ideally to have existed. And further still, far exceeding the grumblings of the disillusioned and the self-serving discontentment of the merely partisan, Pope’s satiric fiction is distinguished by its peculiar quality of bringing the arc of English history to a complete end-stop, of reducing the present moment to an all-dissolving nothingness, as void of form and meaning as of merit. Void, too, of any future, of any possibility of reconstitution and rehabilitation. Social memory itself thus stands suspended—at least as it has been heretofore fashioned within poetry and projected beyond its bounds. For (as we shall see when we come shortly to the culmination of Pope’s epitaphic vision in the fourth book of *The New Dunciad*) by abstracting living Virtue from the vitality of its settings in the historical present and embalming it in premature commemoration, Pope’s figurative apparatus necessarily loses contact with the known and knowable literal world, while suspending or fixing its own non-literal elements (e.g. its images and ideals) within a static fiction that seems almost designed to defy practical application. However brilliant its concept and realization, Pope’s epitaphic vision ends in its own undoing.

Pope’s thematic formula for extending the features of the epitaph and epitaphic stance to the larger body of his work is simple enough: Virtue and its exemplars are dead; Vice and its minions live and thrive. Indeed, it is only a slight exaggeration to say that throughout Pope’s poetry of the 1730’s his portraits of the good are cast syntactically in the

past tense, those of the corrupt or debauched in the present—as if the extinction of one and the perpetual viability of the other were self-evident givens, standing concessions. Often Pope commemorates the good well before their actual physical deaths in what one might call “epitaphic statements”: not true epitaphs, but sketches of character and deeds so closely patterned after Pope’s epitaphic form and rhetorical stance as to be virtual epitaphs for the living. And though we might expect a retrospective treatment of those moral heroes who have died before Pope has had a chance to memorialize them, we find that in their epitaphic statements Pope frequently kills off the distinguishing Virtue with its paragon, forestalling the possibility of its finding another adequate living champion. Active virtue thus shares the fate of the virtuous in these epitaphic statements, consigned to the shades mid-stride while it yet walks abroad.

Two pictures of private virtue show Pope, if not quite burying goodness with the good, at least displacing his ideal patterns of domestic goodness far from the living world—and so idealizing his subjects and their merits as to put their examples beyond realization and therefore beyond serious emulation. The first of these portraits, Pope’s tribute to the philanthropist John Kyrle (1634–1724; known to history as the Man of Ross) in his *Epistle to Bathurst* (1733; subtitled, “Of the Use of Riches”), especially has much of popular legend and parable about it. The sketch itself is familiar enough, but we should note the specific context of its occurrence in the poem. Having given us portraits of the Miser and the Prodigal in the persons of Sir John Cutler and his son-in-law and heir, Charles Bodvile Robartes, respectively (ll. 179–218), the poet appeals to Bathurst to serve as a model for moderating the extremes of meanness and waste: “To balance Fortune by a just expence, / Join with Economy, Magnificence; / With Splendour, Charity; with Plenty, Health; / Oh teach us, BATHURST! yet unspoil’d by wealth!” (ll. 223–226). We might expect such an invocation to preface a fairly specific, detailed account of that moderation Bathurst so aptly embodies—but no such sketch is forthcoming. Instead, Pope restates the need for the wise use of riches—“Wealth in the gross is death, but life diffus’d, / As

Poison heals, in just proportion us'd" (ll. 233-234)—then wonders aloud if there be any noblemen left "Who cop[y] Your's, or OXFORD's better part, / To ease the oppress'd, and raise the sinking heart?" (ll. 243-244). For, he adds, it is by the example of such that "English Bounty yet a-while may stand, / And Honour linger ere it leaves the land" (ll. 247-248). Yet Pope here merely *associates* Bathurst and Oxford with the English bounty and honour about to retreat forever from the land; his only full-drawn exemplum of the bounty and honor now seriously imperilled depicts an obscure gentleman who has been dead for a decade. But after all, examples must be gathered where they are found. As Pope writes on June 7, 1732, to Jacob Tonson, Sr., "My motive for singling out this man, was twofold: first to distinguish real and solid worth from showish or plausible expence, and virtue fro' vanity: and secondly, to humble the pride of greater men, by an opposition of one so obscure and so distant from the sphere of publick glory, this proud town," adding that the portrait's beauty and power derive "from the manner in which it is *placed*, and the *contrast* (as the painters call it) in which it stands, with the pompous figures of famous, or rich, or high-born men" (*Corr.* III, 290). At first glance, it appears that the contrast Pope alludes to is the succeeding sketch of the abject end made by the once-magnificent George Villiers, Second Duke of Buckingham (1628-1687) (ll. 299-314). But given his elliptical treatment of Bathurst and Oxford's *noblesse oblige* and the abrupt segue to his "epitaphic" tribute to John Kyrle<sup>11</sup>—"But all our praises why should Lords engross? / Rise, honest Muse! and sing the MAN of ROSS" (ll. 249-250)—one is left to infer that the contrast applies to the better sort of noblemen as well, and that for Pope the best days of hospitality, magnanimity, and social responsibility among them are already long past, having first descended to one "so obscure and so distant from the sphere of publick glory, this proud

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<sup>11</sup> Pope's tribute was in fact eventually inscribed on a monument to Kyrle erected by Jacob Tonson at Pope's suggestion. As Kathleen Lynch observes in her biography of Tonson, the Man of Ross had for some years obsessed Pope (166-167), who wrote to the publisher November 14, 1731, asking him to discover the Man's real name and "any Particulars you can procure about him. I intend to make him an Example in a Poem of mine" (*Corr.* III, 244).

town” and now, with his death, past recovery.

The portrait itself tends to strengthen this inference, for it asks to be read as much as a reflection on the times as a truly moving encomium on the man it commemorates—or rather, as Pope’s comments to Tonson, Sr. would imply, the enumeration of the Man of Ross’s virtues and deeds is meant to stand as a rebuke to the “pompous figures of famous, or rich, or high-born men.” If so, the rebuke is compounded nearly forty-fold, once for every line of Pope’s memorial (ll. 249-290): the Man of Ross has forested the mountains’ “sultry brow,” improved the waterways and designed an irrigation system, constructed a tree-lined causeway through the countryside (not forgetting to set up resting places for the weary traveller), and erected churches; he has overseen the distribution of alms among the needy, provided poor women with dowries, placed orphans in apprenticeships, found employment for the able-bodied, and arranged for pensions for the old; he has prescribed for and tended to the sick (even making their medicines himself), and as magistrate for his little community has administered justice with the wisdom of Solomon: “Is there a variance? enter but his door, / Balk’d are the Courts, and contest is no more” (ll. 271-272). The Man of Ross has in fact so nurtured the lives of his charges, and so justly executed the law, that “Despairing Quacks with curses fled the place, / And vile Attornies, now an useless race” (ll. 273-274).

If, at this point, the Man of Ross seems more demigod than human, it is by shrewd design. In his letter to Tonson, Pope confesses that he has somewhat exaggerated the bounty of Mr. Kyrle, observing, “If any man shall ever happen to endeavor to emulate the Man of Ross, ’twill be no manner of harm if I make him think he was something more charitable and more beneficent than he really was, for so much more good it would put the imitator upon doing” (*Corr.* III, 290). Though such emulation would be ideal (if it were at all possible to do more than *endeavor* to emulate—and note the vaguely despairing tone introduced by the imprecision of “any man” and “shall ever happen”), Pope is quite aware

that his idealized portrait is far more likely to elicit among his readers the response of the awe-struck interlocutor<sup>12</sup> he suddenly introduces at this point:

‘Thrice happy man! enabled to pursue  
What all so wish, but want the pow’r to do!  
Oh say, what sums that gen’rous hand supply?  
What mines, to swell that boundless charity?’ (ll. 275-278)

So deftly in the lines that follow does Pope expose the vulgarity and hypocrisy of this entirely reflexive exclamation that one senses a trap has been sprung, that all along the aim of the passage has been to demonstrate the world’s preoccupation with the price rather than the practice of virtue:

Of Debts, and Taxes, Wife and Children clear,  
This man possest—five hundred pounds a year.  
Blush, Grandeur, blush! proud Courts, withdraw your blaze!  
Ye little Stars! hide your diminish’d rays (ll. 279-282).

In an age when, as Roy Porter estimates, a family could live in minimal comfort on £50 a year, and bachelor curates often had to make do with £10-15 per annum (83, 91), £500 a year might seem a fortune. In fact, as W.A. Speck demonstrates, it put the possessor near the bottom of the ranks of the landed gentry; by contrast, he observes, the nation’s wealthiest men were clearing more—often far more—than £10,000 annually (35ff). These last are the men Pope admonishes in lines 281-282, and it is worth noting that he seeks rather to shame and belittle than to exhort them. But not content with pointing up the relative paltriness of their charity, Pope bids them further, in light of the all-encompassing and unsurpassable goodness of this humble squire, to “withdraw” and “hide” their pretensions to magnificence and benevolence—and not at all to vindicate them. Seemingly, as the Man of Ross’s medicines and justice have made quacks, with lawyers, “an useless race,” so too, it appears, has his bounty made that of his betters morally and socially irrelevant.

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<sup>12</sup> Perhaps the addressee of this epistle. Bathurst himself?

And if doubt remains that Pope here uses the example of John Kyrle primarily to demonstrate the utter antipathy of virtue to the values of the world (and, given that Kyrle was long dead when this tribute appeared, the effective deadness of that virtue itself), one should consider the second “trap” Pope springs on his interlocutor, the reader’s hapless stand-in. Upon hearing what real goodness can perform with the most modest of sums, he exclaims indignantly, “And what? no monument, inscription, stone? / His race, his form, his name almost unknown?” (ll. 283-284). Pope’s reply shows that he has again missed the point:

Who builds a Church to God, and not to Fame,  
 Will never mark the marble with his Name:  
 Go, search it there, where to be born and die,  
 Of rich and poor makes all the history;  
 Enough, that Virtue fill’d the space between;  
 Prov’d, by the ends of being, to have been (ll. 285-290).

As Pope had recently expounded in the fourth epistle of *An Essay on Man* (1733-34), “Virtue’s prize” is “What nothing earthly gives, or can destroy, / The soul’s calm sunshine, and the heartfelt joy” (ll. 169; 167-168). Because Virtue is complete in and of itself as the end and test of being, it stands beyond the purview even of an admiring world’s commendations and memorials. If these passages have something of stoic indifference in them, they share also that note of defiance characteristic of Pope’s epitaphs on himself. “I was not sorry [the Man of Ross] had no monument,” Pope wrote to Tonson, “and will put that circumstance into a note, perhaps into the body of the poem itself” (290-291), promising to hint that “the Man of Ross himself would not have any monument in memory of his own good deeds” (291)—lest, perhaps, such a monument, tendered by the corrupted world, would somehow compromise the memory of one whose life gave the lie to its complacency and whose death in consequence has left it all but bereft of goodness. When England’s bounty and honor are but lingering before their final disappearance (ll. 247-48), even the estimable Bathurst is only “yet unspoil’d by wealth” (l. 226; emphasis added).



A second portrait of private virtue—of Pope’s father, Alexander Pope, Sr.—points up the poet’s operative emphasis on this deadness of virtue and the contrasting resiliency of vice. The power and larger significance of this portrait, too, are set off by “the manner in which it is *placed*, and the *contrast* (as the painters call it) in which it stands.” Appearing near the end of *Arbuthnot*, the sketch is immediately preceded by the poem’s second catalogue of the abuse Pope has endured without answering in kind. Describing himself (not quite believably) as “soft by Nature, more a Dupe than Wit” (l. 368), he claims his temperament has prevented him from provoking or answering the ceaseless attacks of Lady Mary, Dennis, Theobald, Cibber, Moore, Welsted, and Budgell with attacks of his own; he has even, he says, “Let the *Two Curls* of Town and Court,<sup>13</sup> abuse / His Father, Mother, Body, Soul, and Muse” (ll. 380-381): “Yet why? that Father held it for a rule / It was a Sin to call our Neighbor Fool, / That harmless Mother thought no Wife a Whore” (ll. 382-384). Brandishing this parental injunction for Christian submissiveness, forbearance, and tolerance at the libels of his foes, Pope renders them puny and pathetic indeed, while establishing by force of contrast the replete goodness and guilelessness of his parents, those “Unspotted names! and memorable long, / If there be Force in Virtue, or in a Song” (386-387). But whereas his enemies and their malice are very much alive, these two unspotted names now live only in this his song: the senior Alexander Pope died in 1717; Edith Pope in 1733. Their loss and the ethical disparity it exposes within the nation are brought home by the following sketch of Pope’s father, an obvious “answer” to the earlier “Sporus”-portrait of John Hervey (ll. 305-333).

Donald Torchiana observes that Pope’s thinking is characterized by its tendency to find in “earlier principles” models for right behavior (713). Certainly this applies to the epitaphic portrait of his father in *Arbuthnot*; the senior Pope is drawn as a representative of

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<sup>13</sup> Respectively, Edmund Curll, the piratical publisher and sometime pornographer, and Lord John Hervey, Baron of Icksworth.

essential Man uncorrupted by the lust for power and possession, and in fact seems an amalgam of Pope's ideas regarding prelapsarian humanity, as illustrated in the third epistle of *An Essay on Man* (ll. 146-240), which, appearing in May 1733, is therefore almost exactly coeval with *Arbuthnot*. There, living in a paradisaical *Lockean* state of Nature, humanity is instructed in religion, social order, law, and the mechanic arts by examples found in the natural world. But the natural world also forms human character and ethics: self-love and social responsibility have yet to become estranged; so united is humankind with the greater web of life that immoderate appetites have no occasion to thrive: "Pride then was not; nor arts, that Pride to aid; / Man walked with beast, joint tenant of the shade" (ll. 151-152). Guileless as the beasts, humanity could let itself be directed as they were—by instinct—for instinct, being closest to nature, was the purest, the surest guide: "And Reason raise o'er Instinct as you can, / In this 'tis God directs, in that 'tis Man" (ll. 97-98). Thus when Pope puts his father before us, the embodiment of all that is peaceful, decent, unsophisticated, instinctive, and temperate—

Born to no Pride, inheriting no Strife,  
 Nor marrying Discord in a Noble Wife,  
 Stranger to Civil and Religious Rage,  
 The good Man walk'd innoxious thro' his Age.  
 No Courts he saw, no Suits would ever try,  
 Nor dar'd an Oath, nor hazarded a Lye:  
 Un-learned, he knew no Schoolman's subtle Art,  
 No Language, but the Language of the Heart.  
 By Nature honest, by Experience wise,  
 Healthy by Temp'rance, and by Exercise:  
 His Life, tho' long, to sickness past unknown,  
 His Death was instant, and without a groan (ll. 392-403)—

we are to see in the portrait an image drawn from the original pattern of unalloyed human virtue. As he does in his true epitaphs for General Withers, the Digbys, or the young Duke of Buckingham, Pope here presents his subject as the latest descendant of an honored lineage, the worthy man who has in his person and actions maintained uncompromised the virtue of his forbears. And as in those epitaphs, Pope adds poignancy to this figure by

implying that virtue's line of descent is in real peril of extinction: "Of gentle Blood (part shed in Honour's Cause, / While yet in *Britain* Honour had applause) / Each Parent sprung" (ll. 388-390). Though in brackets, that "while yet in Britain honour had applause" is hardly parenthetical in its import: the nation has become so dead to honor that town and court alike openly asperse the honorable; thus honor will remove itself from the land as, one by one, its exemplars pass away, their loss not to be recouped in a Britain unable to regenerate and nourish such virtues.<sup>14</sup>

Not that such a nation could care very much whether or not it does so, given its ready generation and doting husbandry of creatures who *are* as depraved and corrupt as their moral opposite, Mr. Pope, *was* estimable. In Pope's world, though we have only memories of the good, the wicked are ever before us, thriving and seemingly impervious to justice and fortune. And by the time we have come to the end of the senior Pope's portrait—if the poet's hint about the Curll of the Court (that is, John Hervey, Baron of Icksworth) abusing his father and mother, together with his own "Body, Soul, and Muse" (l. 381) has not already alerted us to the connection—we might reflect that it serves as the now-unrealizable antithesis of the sort of man that currently flourishes, that same Court Curll whose own portrait as Sporus<sup>15</sup> (ll. 305-333) exposes him as the living, diabolic caricature of the ideals the deceased man once upheld. If the senior Pope "walk'd innocuous

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<sup>14</sup> Pope concludes his portrayal of his father with the wish, "O grant me, thus to live, and thus to die!" (l. 404), yet, ironically, it is not a standard to which Pope himself can truly aspire. As Scodel shrewdly points out, Pope cannot exalt such a model without departing from it himself ("Epitaphic Stance," 623). To assume a moral and rhetorical stance that seeks to define virtue absolutely and thereby confront the corruption of the age is to forfeit for oneself the image of the modest, ingenuous country gentleman. But such a guise is not what Pope seeks to fashion for himself, as his epitaphic statements on himself make clear.

<sup>15</sup> Pope is ill-served by the fastidious, aggravatingly incomplete, explanations most critical annotators furnish for the allusion to Nero's minion. The scope of Pope's insult and the degree of humiliation he intended to inflict are best appreciated if we have the following passage from Suetonius' *Life of Nero* before us: "Having tried to turn the boy Sporus into a girl by castration, he [Nero] went through a wedding ceremony with him—dowry, bridal veil and all—took him to his palace with a great crowd in attendance, and treated him as a wife. A rather amusing joke is still going the rounds: the world would have been a happier place had Nero's father Domitian married that sort of wife" (*The Twelve Caesars*, 228; trans. Robert Graves).

thro' his Age," Sporus likewise gives no offense—because he says always what his auditor wants to hear, and because his "Eternal Smiles his Emptiness betray" (l. 315); if Pope's father spoke with "the Language of the Heart," Sporus knows the tongue well—at least the dialect of self-interest: "in florid Impotence he speaks, / And, as the Prompter breathes, the Puppet squeaks" (ll. 317-18); if Pope is descended from ancestors whose "gentle Blood" was "part shed in Honour's Cause," Sporus also serves his royal masters—as "Fop at the Toilet, Flatt'rer at the Board" (l. 328); if Pope, Sr., enjoyed the health of moderation and exercise, Sporus is nothing if not well-formed: "Eve's Tempter thus the Rabbins have exprest, / A Cherub's face, a Reptile all the rest; / Beauty that shocks you, Parts that none will trust, / Wit that can creep, and Pride that licks the dust" (ll. 330-33); and where Mr. and Mrs. Pope were (their son implies) something of an ideal union of man and woman, Sporus *in himself* comprises such a union: he is an "amphibious Thing," who "now trips a Lady, and now struts a Lord" (ll. 326, 329).

Hervey's essential duplicity of being underlies all the rest of his falseness, and though the sketch here shows him in his habitat at Court, it shows likewise the essential human degeneracy underlying Hervey's treachery in that sphere. Damning as it is, in fact this depiction of Hervey as Sporus, "this Bug with gilded wings, / This painted Child of Dirt that stinks and stings" (ll. 309-10), is only the most scathing portrait Pope composed for the courtier whose loyal pamphleteering on Walpole's behalf had earned him a title and the offices of vice-chamberlain and privy councillor, and whose effeminate appearance had led Pope elsewhere to dub him "Narcissus," "Adonis," and "Lord Fanny." So frequently does Pope thrash Hervey that this supposed composite of unalloyed Vice seems for him to represent all that is corrupt in the court and ministry. For in this picture of Sporus, Pope fixes an image not simply of Hervey himself, but of the eternal courtier, fawning, cynical, servile and cruel. It is a picture of the man whom the trappings of the Court and the intrigues of the powerful have irrevocably beguiled from virtue and principle. And the portrait was bound to sting, not just Hervey and his friends, but Walpole, for Hervey was

Walpole's man—and even George II, for Sporus, ultimately, is the creature of a royal presence that petted sycophants but withheld favor from the worthy if they dared be strong-willed.

Sporus thus serves double duty (fittingly enough) as a living emblem of the Administrational depravity that has made political virtue obsolete and therefore effectively moribund. At least, in his tributary verses to those whose public integrity he professes to admire, Pope often casts his subjects as already eclipsed and ineffectual, turning his praise into epitaphic commemoration. And this by design rather than chance. In his second *Epilogue* to the satires, Pope declares to his interlocutor, “God knows, I praise a Courtier where I can” (l. 63), and names specifically Richard Lumley, 2nd Earl of Scarborough. Scarborough, however, would commit suicide in January 1739, and it is suggestive that in later editions of the poem Pope did not replace him in the commendatory couplet, “When I confess, there is who feels for Fame, / And melts to Goodness, need I SCARBROW name?” (ll. 64-65), choosing instead to explain in a footnote that Scarborough's “personal attachments to the king appeared from his steady adherence to the royal interest, after his resignation of his employment of Master of the Horse; and whose known honour and virtue made him esteemed by all parties” (l. 65n). Curious, too, that Pope is careful to praise the earl for his service *after* the resignation of his post—but this seems only natural for one avowedly resolved to honor such men only once their moment of power has passed; indeed, dismissal and disgrace seem to be preconditions for the poet's esteem:<sup>16</sup>

But does the Court a worthy Man remove?  
That instant, I declare, he has my Love:  
I shun his Zenith, court his mild Decline;

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<sup>16</sup> Pope defends (or explains) his practice of posthumous commendation in “A Letter to the Publisher,” prefacing *The Dunciad Variorum* and subsequent editions of the poem: “[The poet] has liv'd with the Great without Flattery, been a friend to Men in power without Pensions, from whom as he ask'd, so he receiv'd no favour but what was done Him in his friends. As his Satyrs were the more just for being delay'd, so were his Panegyrics; bestow'd only on such persons as he had familiarly known, only for such virtues as he had long observ'd in them, and only at such times as others cease to praise if not begin to calumniate them, I mean when out of Power or out of Fashion” (323).

Thus SOMMERS once, and HALIFAX were mine.  
 Oft in the clear, still Mirrour of Retreat,  
 I study'd SHREWSBURY, the wise and great:  
 CARLETON's calm Sense, and STANHOPE's noble Flame,  
 Compar'd, and knew their gen'rous End the same:  
 How pleasing ATTERBURY's softer hour!  
 How shin'd the Soul, unconquer'd in the Tow'r!  
 How can I PULT'NEY, CHESTERFIELD forget,  
 While *Roman* Spirit charms, and *Attic* Wit:  
 ARGYLE, the State's whole Thunder born to wield,  
 And shake alike the Senate and the Field:  
 Or WYNDHAM, just to Freedom and the Throne,  
 The Master of our Passions, and his own.  
 Names, which I long have lov'd, nor lov'd in vain,  
 Rank'd with their Friends, not number'd with their Train;  
 And if yet higher the proud List should end,  
 Still let me say! No Follower, but a Friend (ll. 75-93).

Of those listed here, all but the Opposition Whigs William Pulteney and the Earl of Chesterfield, as well as Frederick, Prince of Wales (hinted at in l. 92) are either out of office (enjoying—or enduring—their “mild decline”) or dead. Assembling the active with the retired, interring the quick with the dead, Pope's catalogue of heroes suggests much about the poet's estimation of political integrity in 1738, and, consequently, much as well of how he would have his readers view it. We should remember that Pope produces this list in self-defense, to demonstrate that he is not so innately or affectedly antipathetic to power and place as to be dead to merit where it exists. But his list implies nonetheless that such merit lies for the most part buried with the dead—or in any event with those now excluded from the ruling circles. In phrases and figures we have seen often enough before, Pope makes the point here implicit unmistakably explicit near the poem's conclusion:

Yes, the last Pen for Freedom let me draw,  
 When Truth stands trembling on the edge of Law:  
 Here, Last of *Britons!* let your Names be read:  
 Are none, none living? let me praise the Dead,  
 And for that Cause which made your Fathers shine,  
 Fall, by the Votes of their degen'rate Line! (ll. 248-253)

Just as Pope is about to draw up another catalogue of champions, he is caught short by the dearth of living candidates, and so must search over the ranks of the dead: Britain has,

apparently, seen the last of the “last of Britons.” In consequence, Britain itself would become irredeemably corrupt—and corrupting. Only two years hence, in the unpublished “One Thousand Seventeen Hundred and Forty,” Pope would, as we have seen, lament that “a plague is on thee, Britain, and who tries / To save thee in th’ infected office *dies*” (ll. 75-76), repudiating both Pulteney and Chesterfield (the first for being mercenary, the second for being a political dupe), and ironically praising Walpole for being “spite of thyself a glorious minister”: “At length to B[ritain] kind, as to thy [whore,] / Espouse the nation, you [debauched before]” (ll. 47-48; fragmentary couplet completed by John Wilson Croker).

Obviously, England cannot be utterly lacking in political worthies if Pope has managed to find political personages to praise—despite the somewhat imprecise use of possessive pronouns in lines 250 and 252, which makes the “Last of Britons” and the “degen’rate Line” of their fathers one and the same. Pope is simply being forthright in fashioning his conceit of an England void of heroes by burying the worthy before their time. But the practice is one he has practiced at least twice before, in epitaphic passages on his friends and political idols, Robert Harley, 1st Earl of Oxford and 1st Earl Mortimer, and Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke. In his “Epistle to Oxford,” published in 1722 in Pope’s edition of Thomas Parnell’s *Poems*, Pope commemorates Oxford’s friendship with Parnell (and with the Scriblerians generally) and presents the aging Tory (Oxford was then 61) with a picture of himself in his “mild Decline.” With more emphasis and condescension than would seem reassuring, let alone polite, Pope stresses to Oxford that even when his career was at its height, he did well to neglect his official duties for the sake of friendship’s obligations:

For him [Parnell], thou oft hast bid the World attend,  
Fond to forget the Statesman in the Friend;  
For *Swift* and him, despis’d the Farce of State,  
The sober Follies of the Wise and Great;  
Dextrous, the craving, fawning Crowd to quit,  
And pleas’d to ’scape from Flattery to Wit (ll. 7-12).

If Pope thus reduces Oxford's Ministry under Queen Anne to a motley of farce, folly, and flattery, it might be because the poet had no very great opinion of it; in the mid-1730's he would tell Joseph Spence, "Lord Oxford was not a very capable minister, and had a good deal of negligence into the bargain. He used to send trifling verse from court to the Scriblerus-club almost every day, and would come and talk idly with them almost every night: even when his all was at stake. —He talked of business in so confused a manner, that you did not know what he was about; and every thing he went to tell you was in the epic way; for he always began in the middle" (130-31). But by distinguishing the Friend from the Statesman, Pope is perhaps better able to reconcile Oxford to his fortunes,<sup>17</sup> and to isolate for his own purposes those aspects of Oxford's career and character that he *can* sincerely commend. As Pope would tell Spence, "They were quite mistaken in his temper, who thought of getting rid of him, by advising him to make his escape from the Tower [when imprisoned there by the Whigs from 1715-1717]. He would have sate out the storm, let the danger be what it would. —He was a steady man, and had a great firmness of soul, and would have died unconcernedly: or, perhaps, like Sir Thomas More, with a jest in his mouth" (131). For this dissevering of Oxford from his "toilsom Days" (l. 15) is but the first step in rehabilitating an officially disgraced personage into a model of personal and public integrity and Christian fortitude, with the likely ends of voicing his own political ideals and undercutting the moral character of the party that would persecute such a paragon: "A Soul supreme, in each hard Instance try'd, / Above all pain, all Passion, and all Pride, / The Rage of Pow'r, the Blast of publick Breath, / The Lust of Lucre, and the Dread of Death" (ll. 23-26). To achieve such a rehabilitation and the rhetorical ends thereof, Pope must place Oxford beyond the vagaries of public life and indeed from those of life

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<sup>17</sup> Upon his dismissal from office in 1714, Oxford enclosed the following poetic maxim in a letter to Swift: "To serve with love, / And shed your blood, / Approved is above / But here below, / Th' examples show / 'Tis fatal to be good" (qtd. by Brian Hill in *Robert Harley: Speaker, Secretary of State and Premier Minister*, 222).



itself. Thus Pope memorializes Oxford prematurely, in effect entombing him in his retirement, lending his commemorative voice additional authority by pretending to speak from the perspective of the dead, in this case the late Parnell, who “Perhaps forgets that Oxford e'er was Great; / Or deeming meanest what we greatest call, / Beholds thee glorious only in thy Fall” (ll. 18-20)—as if true merit can only emerge, be discerned, and celebrated once the “Farce of State” has been foregone. Pope therefore has little compunction about romanticizing Oxford’s absence from power or revelling in his chance to impose himself between the sun and his subject and record the hastened twilight of Oxford’s life:

In vain to Deserts thy Retreat is made;  
The Muse attends thee to thy silent Shade:  
'Tis hers, the brave Man's latest [that is, *last*] Steps to trace,  
Re-judge his Acts, and dignify Disgrace (ll. 27-30).

Pope even goes so far as to give Oxford’s political demise the trappings of actual death; the muse accompanies him “or to the Scaffold, or the Cell,” and waits with the condemned man as one by one interest with “all her sneaking Train,” the obliged, “all the Vain,” and “the last ling’ring Friend” (ll. 31-34) bid him farewell, the Muse alone crossing with him into that realm beyond the ken of the public sphere, bearing witness even to Oxford’s ultimate cloud-shrouded apotheosis:

Ev'n now she shades thy Evening Walk with Bays,  
(No Hireling she, no Prostitute to Praise)  
Ev'n now, observant of the parting Ray,  
Eyes the calm Sun-set of thy Various Day,  
Thro' Fortune's Cloud One truly Great can see,  
Nor fears to tell, that MORTIMER is He (ll. 35-40).

By eulogizing him thus, Pope can make the living Oxford worthy of the expansive epithet, “And sure if ought below the Seats Divine / Can touch Immortals, 'tis a Soul like thine” (ll. 21-22), making him as well more than fit for the implicit moral contrast between the worthy man in exile and the shameful culpability of those in power who put him there.

Though a similar address to his friend, personal philosopher, and political mentor, Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke, at the end of *An Essay on Man*, is not so markedly

epitaphic as this for Oxford, it nevertheless demonstrates Pope's preoccupation with posterity, whose verdicts he would preempt by pushing his living heroes from the stage in order to render authoritative pronouncements of their merits as well as, conversely, the systemic deficiencies of their historical moment. Calling Bolingbroke the "master of the poet, and the song" (l. 374), Pope throughout this passage associates the arc of his poetic career with Bolingbroke's political fortunes. Like Oxford, his rival for power under Anne, Bolingbroke had suffered proscription when the Whigs regained ascendancy under George I; unlike Oxford, however, he had fled the country, living in France for a decade, simultaneously intriguing for a Jacobite restoration and his own reconciliation with the Hanover administration. He returned to England in 1725, insulated from reprisals initially by the substantial bribes he had paid to the King's mistress, and subsequently by a parliamentary pardon. Safe from persecution and once more in full possession of his property, Bolingbroke was yet denied his seat in the House of Peers, forcing him to resume his political career from the margins, as pamphleteer and *éminence grise* of the Opposition. It is with these events in mind that Pope bids Bolingbroke, "Teach me, like thee, in various nature wise, / To fall with dignity, with temper rise" (ll. 377-378), and though he allows Bolingbroke what he denies to Oxford, the possibility of rising again, as the passage unfolds it becomes clear that Bolingbroke himself will remain in the shadows, exercising his power at one remove, through the poet's voice. For as the "Genius" (l. 373) of Pope's muse, Bolingbroke will instruct her while remaining publicly silent himself. "Form'd by thy converse," his muse shall "happily to steer / From grave to gay, from lively to severe; / Correct with spirit, eloquent with ease, / Intent to reason, or polite to please" (ll. 379-382). Thus informed, the Muse shall ensure her own immortality by attaching herself to the name she shall celebrate: as Bolingbroke's renown "Expanded flies, and gathers all its fame" along "the stream of Time," so shall Pope's "little bark attendant sail, / Pursue the triumph, and partake the gale" (ll. 383-386). As in the "Epistle to Oxford," Pope claims his commemoration of a statesman in eclipse will preserve memory

of his merits; so, too, will it serve to distinguish its subject from his one-time antagonists, and, given their rank and authority, to comment implicitly upon the age at large:

When statesmen, heroes, kings, in dust repose,  
Whose sons shall blush their fathers were thy foes,  
[Then shall] this verse to future age pretend  
Thou wert my guide, philosopher, and friend (387-390).

Effective as such premature commemoration is in setting forth the private and public virtues needed to sustain the nation socially and politically, and in distinguishing Virtue's guardians from its antagonists, it likewise lends a peculiar rhetorical force to the poet's emerging satiric figure of an England dying because dead to all that is good and worthy. If exaggerated posthumous praise makes the examples of the dead rather more fantastic than credibly practicable, an early memorialization of the living effectively consigns them and their merits to the grave, for when living subjects are, with their virtues, translated from the three-dimensional human world, both are rendered incapable of participation in that world: insofar as the fiction of their demise teases us into lamenting their supposed passing, we are prompted to regard both with a retrospective glance, and to accept tacitly that the death of the individual has left the world substantially poorer in, if not altogether dispossessed of, those abstract qualities he is said to embody.

Pope does not hesitate, therefore, to extend the practice of premature commemoration to the sphere that for him above all others establishes and safeguards the cultural, intellectual, and moral robustness of the nation, its health offering a ready measure of the soundness of its civilizational foundations—that is, the sphere of the arts and learning generally, and of poetry more particularly. In an early prose work, “The Narrative of Dr. Robert Norris, Concerning the Strange and Deplorable Frenzy of Mr. John Dennis” (1713), Pope has a Dennis maddened with paranoia cry out melodramatically at what he takes to be a universal conspiracy to overturn his critical tenets, “Is all the Town in a Combination? Shall Poetry fall to the ground? Must our Reputation be lost to all foreign Countries? O Destruction! Perdition! *Opera! Opera!* As Poetry once rais'd a City, so when

Poetry fails, Cities are overturn'd, and the World is no more" (162). But though here his quarrel with Dennis over *An Essay on Criticism* (1711) prompts Pope to mock Dennis' self-obsession, dogmatism, and irascibility, the raving man's identification of the death of poetry with the world's undoing is really quite close to Pope's habit of linking dullness to what for him is the nearest temporal approximation of Apocalypse, the suspension of moral and ethical progress and humanity's subsequent return to barbarism via the overthrow of humane thought and letters. In *An Essay on Criticism* itself, for example, Pope had written of Rome, learning, and the consequences of their fall,

*Learning and Rome alike in Empire grew,  
And Arts still follow'd where her Eagles flew;  
From the same Foes, at last, both felt their Doom,  
And the same Age saw Learning fall, and Rome.  
With Tyranny, then Superstition join'd,  
As that the Body, this enslav'd the Mind;  
Much was Believ'd, but little understood,  
And to be dull was constru'd to be good;  
A second Deluge Learning thus o'er-run,  
And the Monks finish'd what the Goths begun* (ll. 683-691).

And this early association of intellectual and artistic dissolution with cultural and national ruin would, in fact, remain with Pope until his death, serving as the controlling figure of his last major work, Book IV of *The New Dunciad* (1741). But long before that final triumph of Dulness over enlightenment, Pope reprises—at greater length and in greater detail—the destruction of classical civilization at the hands of the Goths and monks in the third book of *The Dunciad Variorum* of 1729. There, the “clouds of Vandals” (l. 78) pouring down on Latium, Spain, and Gaul, and Rome's “gray-hair'd Synods damning books unread” (l. 95) take their place among many of Dulness' “old scenes of glory, times long cast behind” (l. 55) disclosed in a vision to the new King of the Dunces, Lewis Theobald: the Chinese emperor Shi Huang-ti's piling high the scholarship of untold ages and with “one bright blaze turn[ing] Learning into air” (l. 78); the caliph Omar I's burning of the great Ptolemean library at Alexandria; Mohammed's conquest of the lands that had

first nurtured Western letters and science, his “conqu’ring tribes” enthroning ignorance by laws (ll. 89-90). For the poet who in his *The Temple of Fame* (1715) made the columns depicting Homer, Virgil, Pindar, Horace, Aristotle, and Cicero the edifice’s strongest, grandest, and centermost support, literature and learning, as the clearest, deepest mirrors of Nature and Truth, were not merely the trappings of civilization, but were civilization itself. The death of either is the death of both.

Pope, then, is not backward in portraying the death of poetry in Britain in order to demonstrate the death of Britain itself, to suggest that in its historical present, matters stand much as they stood in Shi Huang-ti’s China, Mohammed’s Middle East, and Omar’s Egypt; in barbarian-razed Rome, and in a medieval West reduced by the Church to “one heavy sabbath” (l. 91). Pope wrote despondently to Gay October 23, 1730, soon after the appearance of *The Dunciad Variorum*,

I can tell you of no one thing worth reading, or seeing; the whole age seems resolv’d to justify the Dunciad, and it may stand for a publick Epitaph or monumental Inscription, like that at Thermopylae, on a *whole people perish’d!* There may indeed be a Wooden image or two of Poetry set up, to preserve the memory that there once were bards in Britain; and (like the *Giants at Guildhall*) show the bulk and bad taste of our ancestors (*Corr.* III, 142-143).

Putting aside for the moment Pope’s describing *The Dunciad* itself “a publick Epitaph or monumental Inscription,” we should note his close identification of poetry and people, the two here so narrowly conflated that their demise may be denoted and commemorated by a single common memorial. Note also the manner of that demise as suggested by Pope’s allusion to Thermopylae, the reference evoking as it does images of the General Leonidas standing with his 300 Spartans at Thermopylae pass, holding it against the vast Persian army till the last Spartan had fallen. Simonides’ epitaph tells their story:

Leonidas, king of the open fields of Sparta,  
those slain with you lie famous in their graves,  
for they attacked absorbing the head-on assault

of endless Persian men, arrows and swift horse.<sup>18</sup>

How tempting for Pope to equate these Spartans with the circle of Scriblerians, guarding desperately the integrity of sense, truth, and virtue against hordes of Dunces—ministers, fops, pedants, poeticules—but doomed at last to fall to them. Weinbrot notes that the example of Juvenal had given the age the “formulaic fury” of “a morally collapsing world, an offended God, exalted enemies and venal flunkies massed against the isolated, angry good man” (*Traditions*, 117). But as usual, Pope gives the commonplace his own distinctive turn, and here once more takes the liberty of preëmpting posterity to show his correspondent a vision of what must be as a way of intimating what he would have his reader take for already having been: the literary battles of the present day have been fought and decided, the heroes defeated—*routed*, in fact—no trace at all remaining of them, only tacky wooden images “to preserve the memory that there once were bards [rather than *poets*] in Britain.” These makeshift memorials are testament as well to the “bad taste” that once spawned, sustained, and fed itself fat upon the “Persian” swarms of what Weinbrot, in imitation of contemporary idiom, terms the “hostile poetic insects and locusts destroying the nation” (*Traditions*, 118). The allusion to Thermopylae, therefore, allows Pope to suggest not so much that he, his circle, and their literary values are under relentless attack, but that even now they are long dead, long forgotten—and with them the British virtues they once defended, the Britain they once celebrated. As the progress of Pope’s poetic treatment of English letters throughout the 1730’s and into the 1740’s makes clear, few other images, if any, could have so concisely, so powerfully captured the mindset that would both lead Pope to consign English poetry and poets to early burial and determine the manner of their commemoration.

As he does with private and public virtues and their paragons, Pope tends to bury poetry with its worthy practitioners, not hesitating to inter the quick as well as the dead

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<sup>18</sup> Translated by William Barnstone.

when necessary. As in his other epitaphs and epitaphic statements, he seeks thereby to perfect, stabilize, and segregate merit from the compromises and corruptions of the living world in order, in this case, to portray and indict a nation so dead to poetic virtue that poetry itself is left to wither and die. The ready emblems of this national philistinism were, not surprisingly, a Court and an Administration whose neglect of the arts and learning was notorious, and made the more harmful because of the influence it seemed to have upon the patron classes. As Plumb notes, the aristocracy and the *nouveaux riches* patronized the works of foreign masters: French and Italian painters and furniture makers, Italian architects, Continental decorators, Italian opera singers, French dramatists. And thus, Plumb concludes, “There was no development, no increase in stature, no burgeoning of a culture, literary, scientific, or artistic, which could compare with France; at times even the Dutch and Italians seemed far superior” (*Four Georges*, 33).

Pope’s anger at the nation’s especial neglect of poetry spills over into his epitaphs on poets. He uses his first epitaph of Rowe (1720), for example, to point to the neglect of Dryden, who lies beneath “a rude and nameless stone” (l. 3), and concludes that Rowe is fortunate: “One grateful woman to the fame supplies / What a whole thankless land to his [Dryden’s] denies” (ll. 7-8). This epitaph, Brownell observes, led John Sheffield, Duke of Buckinghamshire, to erect a monument to Dryden, completed in 1726 (339). Pope did as much for other poets. He was a consultant (at least) for the design of Samuel Butler’s monument in Westminster, and, if Curll may be believed, may have written its inscription, which labels Butler, too, an unappreciated genius—indeed, “the outstanding writer of satirical verse among us” (qtd. in Brownell, 343). Pope also helped to raise money for a monument to Shakespeare (based on the design for Craggs’s), again not sparing those who neglect poetic genius. The wry inscription above the monument: “Erected by Public Love 124 years after his death” (Mack 734).

But without doubt, John Gay (1685-1732) stands for Pope as the consummate symbol of poetry’s neglect. If Pope, by reason of his religion and temperament, was

admittedly unsuitable for preferment and promotion within Court, Administration, and University circles, the same could not have been said of Gay, whom Pope aptly describes in the opening couplet of his 1733 epitaph as being “Of Manners gentle, of Affections mild; / In Wit, a Man; Simplicity, a Child” (ll. 1-2). Mack characterizes Gay as “happy-go-lucky, infinitely good-natured, distinctly a *bon vivant*,” he was an affectionate if exasperating friend, for though his tastes were expensive he had no head for money, and he was perpetually disappointed in his lifelong search for official appointments (187).<sup>19</sup> However, if Gay’s equanimity allowed his spirits to survive such disappointments,<sup>20</sup> he yet possessed a keen satirical edge, and in his best-known work, *The Beggar’s Opera* (1728), he lampooned savagely the corruptions of the Walpole ministry. This side of Gay furnishes Pope with the second and third couplets of his epitaph: “With native Humour temp’ring virtuous Rage, / Form’d to delight at once and lash the age; / Above Temptation, in a low Estate, / And uncorrupted ev’n among the Great” (ll. 3-6). Pope might have put something of his own ideal self in these lines, but for the most part his epitaph for Gay presents its subject as the purest of hearts and most deserving of poets, the one man whom “the Great” could not neglect without exposing their philistinism and their indifference (if not outright hostility) toward the good poet who is also a good man. Pope appears to recognize that the more guileless, innocent, and humane Gay’s character is made out to be, the greater the culpability of those who “Left me to see neglected Genius bloom, / Neglected die! and tell it

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<sup>19</sup> Two months before Gay’s death, Pope sent him a mock epitaph:  
 Well then, poor G— lies under ground!  
 So there’s an end of honest *Jack*.  
 So little Justice here he found,  
 ‘Tis ten to one he’ll ne’er come back.

<sup>20</sup> Not that Gay bore these disappointments gladly. When, in October 1727, his dedication of his *Fables* to the young Prince William earned him, not the respectable place he might have expected from Queen Caroline, but only the insultingly trivial appointment of Gentleman-Usher to the infant Princess Louisa, he wrote to Pope, “There is now what Milton says is in Hell, Darkness visible. —O that I had never known what a Court was! Dear Pope, what a barren Soil (to me so) have I been striving to produce something out of! . . . I find myself in such a strange Confusion and Depression of Spirits, that I have not Strength even to make my Will; though I perceive, by many Warnings, I have no continuing City here. I begin to look upon myself as one already dead” (66).



on his Tomb.” Hence his reluctant compliance to Gay’s request to have the epitaph he composed for himself—“LIFE is a jest; and all things show it. / I thought so once; but now I know it”—put upon his tomb. Pope followed Gay’s wishes, but, as Maynard Mack surmises, likely felt that this epitaph made Gay appear flippant and cynical (189). Therefore, in *his* epitaph, inscribed in the Poets’ Corner of Westminster Abbey, Pope sought to establish Gay as the self-evident touchstone of all that is virtuous and humane:

A safe Companion, and an easy Friend,  
Unblam’d thro’ Life, lamented in thy End.  
These are Thy Honours! not that here thy Bust  
Is mix’d with Heroes, or with Kings thy dust;  
But that the Worthy and the Good shall say,  
Striking their pensive bosoms—*Here* lies Gay (ll. 7-12).

Johnson argues that it is inconsistent to ascribe to the same man “manners gentle” and “affections mild” as well as “virtuous *rage*” (II, 240-241). But he has only caught Pope at his favorite epitaphic strategy of fashioning an ideal type to serve his rhetorical ends, among them here the (by now) familiar antipathies of virtue to the trappings of the beau monde, and of the beau monde to real merit. It is significant, for example, that though Gay is buried among heroes and kings, it is at *his* monument that the worthy and the good find their own image. Even in death, Gay is among the Great, but not one of them; his ashes mix with theirs, but his spirit dwells in nobler chambers, the hearts of the virtuous. Pope is thus able to insinuate that a moral opposition exists between this true poet and the Great who neglected him in life, between the virtue that outlives the grave and the pomp that crumbles to dust within it. But by insisting on this absolute opposition, Pope is able to suggest likewise that with this poetic exemplar has passed as well the possibility of there being in future a model poet in whom are met all virtues, but especially ease of temperament, a loathing of vice, and a character impervious to corruption—not simply because the noblest of poetic characters has forever departed the world, but because by its neglect that world has proven itself complicitous in his passing, has demonstrated by its

indifference that poetic genius is irrelevant in Britain, that Britain is incapable of nourishing such genius, and therefore that such genius, once lost, can never be replenished.

The inevitable outcome of this slow atrophy is demonstrated by Pope's epitaphic statement on Jonathan Swift (1667-1745) in "The First Epistle of the Second Book of Horace Imitated," better known by its subtitle, "To Augustus" (1737). Indeed, the mere presence of Pope's "memorial" portrait of his friend, collaborator, and fellow Opposition satirist suggests that the attrition of poetry in Britain already underway at the time of his epitaphs on Gay has since become mortal—or if the poetry of the highest technical and moral order is not yet utterly extinct in Britain, it is as good as dead for having become culturally irrelevant. On first glance, however, Pope's tribute to Swift would seem in line with the declared purpose of the poem, to illustrate to "Augustus"—that is, George II—the continued potential usefulness of poetry in England:

Let Ireland tell, how Wit upheld her cause,  
Her Trade supported, and supply'd her Laws;  
And leave on SWIFT this grateful verse ingrav'd,  
The Rights a Court attack'd, a Poet sav'd.  
Behold the hand that wrought a Nation's cure,  
Stretch'd to relieve the Idiot and the Poor,  
Proud Vice to brand, or injur'd Worth adorn,  
And stretch the Ray to Ages yet unborn (ll. 221-228).

But recommending the utility of this particular poet's writings to George II involves the King and his Prime Minister in a grotesquely ironic tangle. For Swift upheld Ireland's rights against the self-interested encroachments of the Walpole ministry, defeating the minister's attempted imposition of a debased currency and fighting the English monopoly of trade between the two islands, going so far as to organize boycotts of English goods. That Swift would "relieve the Idiot and the Poor" speaks well of him, but it also suggests the misery and poverty to which English economic exploitation under Walpole had reduced Ireland. The "Proud Vice" Swift took such delight in branding includes, in fact, the cynical predations of "Augustus" and his government. If anything, therefore, the latent indictment

of the policies and ethics of the Hanoverian administration contained in these lines would bring home to George II what an embarrassment, what a political liability such “relevant” poetry could and would be, given the moral incompatibility of the government and the age’s best poets—all the more reason, perhaps, for the Court to continue its habitual neglect of letters, or at most to patronize only those poor or inept enough to be made reliably servile by the prospect of royal pay. But Pope’s irony redounds in part upon Swift as well. By interring Swift prematurely, Pope’s epitaphic statement establishes exactly the opposite of what the portrait of him purports to show—the importance of poetry in present-day Britain, but also Swift’s individual influence. Consigned to the shades with Dryden and the late Addison, the yet living Swift is effectively precluded from further engaging his enemies. The character and exploits Pope here praises for their heroism now must take their place in literary and national history, along with Dryden’s earnestness in the time of Charles II’s “lewd, or un-believing Court” (I. 212) and Addison’s passion for propriety, truth, and virtue (II. 215-220). As such, they are from a broad historical perspective mere relics of the battles Swift won during the larger war he lost: for though he dwells now in eclipse, his antagonists yet thrive.

A similar irony pervades the whole of “To Augustus.” Though the verse epistle purports to solicit royal patronage by vindicating the utility of poetry, in fact its case could hardly have moved George even if he had been inclined to listen—first, because under guise of praise and petition the poem delivers a pointed running critique of the Hanoverian administration’s deficiencies (*à la* the sketch of Swift); and second, because although Pope follows his original in recounting the past glories of his nation’s literature in order to stoke his addressee’s enthusiasm for contemporary poetry, he “neglects” to offer, with Horace, evidence that the best elements of that literature have survived into the present day. It is the presence of this second irony that makes “To Augustus” an extended epitaphic statement on poetry in England, for if we base our assessment of the present state of poetry on the survey Pope here provides, we are bound to conclude that though once quite robust, the

British Muse now lies in the grave with her mouldering champions, having found among the living none worthy of bearing her standard.

In fact, "To Augustus" is Pope's second epitaphic statement for English poetry. Two years earlier, in his "versification" of Donne's "Satyre II" (1735), Pope had depicted poetry as an anemic, emaciated entity indeed. As the poem's speaker reviews a number of disreputable professions in an attempt to find the most noxious, he is able, before awarding the prize to England's attorneys, to dismiss poetry almost immediately from consideration. Though such a plague and nuisance as to be a ready and deserving scapegoat for the nation's ills—"I grant that Poetry's a crying sin; / It brought (no doubt) th' *Excise* and *Army* in" (ll. 7-8)—it is actually quite harmless, an impotent virus easily treated: "the cure is starving, all allow" (l. 10). So impotent, in fact, that it hardly merits attention: "Yet like the Papists is the Poets state, / Poor and disarm'd, and hardly worth your hate" (ll. 11-12). Readers have grown too mercenary, poor bards too cringing, and genteel authors too vain for poetry to retain its native spirit and force:

One sings the Fair; but Songs no longer move,  
No Rat is rhym'd to death, nor Maid to love:  
In Love's, in Nature's spite, the siege they hold,  
And scorn the Flesh, the Dev'l, and all but Gold.  
These write to Lords, some mean reward to get,  
As needy Beggars sing at doors for meat.  
Those write because all write, and so have still  
Excuse for writing, and for writing ill (ll. 21-28).

Moreover, poetic invention has seemingly deserted the island, with the result that plagiarism now thrives. But bad as he is "who makes his meal on others wit" (l. 30), worse still is an unlooked-for consequence of such thieving: the wit of former ages is lost to the present, because it grows odious in its reconstitution. Though "changed no doubt from what it was before," the poetic pickpurse's "rank digestion makes it wit no more" (31-32): "Sense, past thro' him, no longer is the same, / For food digested takes another name" (ll. 33-34). Its current productions at best innocuous, its past triumphs despoiled by

the predations of literary harpies, poetry is rendered socially, morally, and aesthetically null.

Pope's pursuit of this theme in "To Augustus" is, however, perhaps all the more effective rhetorically for being oblique, for presenting the case for contemporary poetry while "inadvertantly" arousing, then confirming the reader's suspicions that indeed no such case can be made. For though he purports in his imitation of Horace to champion living writers against the nation's reflexive slighting of them and its equally unthinking adulation of past giants of English literature, by tracing the rich history of English letters without extending the line of poetic achievement into the present day, Pope suggests thereby that that line has expired: whatever the glories of its past, English poetry can be afforded no moment in the historical present, and thus can have no claim to effectual existence. This is a significant departure from Horace's original. Horace, impatient with those who blame a work, "not for its grossness / Or awkward matters of style, but for being new, / When old things deserve not praises and prizes but excuses"<sup>21</sup> (251), assures Augustus that despite the prejudices and loud carping of the old-guard and the frequent ineptness of living writers—"Doctors do doctors' work, and carpenters carpenters'; / But we all write poems, whether we know how to do it or not" (253)—modern Roman poetry holds out real benefits to society, at least potentially:

The poet helps mold  
The tender and lisping speech of the young, and diverts  
The ear even then from coarse conversation; and soon  
He can form the heart with his friendly advice, and expunge  
Its rawness, its envy, its anger. Reciting great deeds,  
He fits out the rising age with noble examples;  
He comforts the sick at heart and holds up the helpless (253).

And should these general boons leave Augustus unmoved, Horace reminds the Emperor that in preferring poets he serves his own self-interest: "Still, it's worth your while to take

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<sup>21</sup> Translated by Smith Palmer Bovie.

cognizance of those / Who minister unto your merit at home and abroad, / And not trust your fame to an unworthy servant” (257). Horace names likely candidates for encouragement, “Those poets beloved by you, your Varius, your Vergil, / Don’t disgrace your judgement of them, or your gifts, / Which reflect great credit on the donor” (253), and hints that he for one, “if my powers but matched my desires,” would likewise be a good candidate for Augustus’ favor, though he confesses, “Your majestic achievement cannot be aptly encompassed / In makeshift song; my modest attainments preclude / Attempting a work that lies outside of my range” (258).

Pope largely follows the arc of Horace’s argument. He chafes, for instance, at the fact that “Authors, like Coins, grow dear as they grow old; / It is the rust we value, not the gold” (ll. 35-36), and is so bold as to clip some of that gold from even the most hallowed reputations of the English Ancients, the dramatic and non-dramatic poets of the last century: Shakespeare wrote for money and “grew immortal in his own despight” (l. 71); Jonson “as little seem’d to heed / The Life to come, in ev’ry Poet’s Creed” (ll. 73-74); “Spenser himself affects the obsolete, / And Sydney’s verse halts ill on Roman feet” (ll. 97-98); Milton’s performance is wildly uneven, now soaring above heaven, now creeping “serpent-like” along the ground (l. 100): “In Quibbles, Angel and Archangel join, / And God the Father turns a School-Divine” (ll. 101-102). Of the Courtly Wits, the “Mob[s] of Gentlemen” (l. 108) who wrote during “either Charles’s days” (l. 107), he speaks yet more harshly: “One Simile, that solitary shines / In the dry Desert of a thousand lines, / Or lengthen’d Thought that gleams thro’ many a page, / Has sanctify’d whole Poems for an age” (ll. 111-114). Yet unlike Horace, Pope has barely begun his defense of the Moderns at the expense of the Ancients before making clear that his case is not wholly unalloyed with irony: “In ev’ry publick Virtue we excell, / We build, we paint, we sing, we dance as well, / And learned Athens to our Art must stoop, / Could she behold us tumbling thro’ a hoop” (ll. 45-48). This contrast of ancient *writing* with modern *stage-effects* and *spectacle* reflects sharply upon current poetic standards and proficiency, as does Pope’s observation

that “one Poetick Itch / Has seiz’d the Court and City, Poor and Rich: / Sons, Sires, and Grandsires, all will wear the Bays, / Our Wives read Milton, and our Daughters Plays” (ll. 169-172). But poetic ideals have been debased as well by the professionals and acknowledged masters of recent years. True enough that “Dryden taught to join / The varying verse, the full resounding line, / The long majestic march, and energy divine” (ll. 267-269), but true as well that like Shakespeare this “copious” poet “wanted, or forgot, / The last and greatest Art, the Art to blot” (ll. 280-281). And unfortunately, Dryden’s deficiencies have only multiplied themselves in his dramatic successors:

Observe how seldom ev’n the best succeed:  
 Tell me if Congreve’s Fools are Fools indeed?  
 What pert low Dialogue has Farqu’ar writ!  
 How Van wants grace, who never wanted wit!  
 The stage how loosely does Astræa tread,  
 Who fairly puts all Characters to bed:  
 And idle Cibber, how he breaks the laws,  
 To make poor Pinky eat with vast applause!  
 But fill their purse, our Poet’s work is done,  
 Alike to them, by Pathos or by Pun (ll. 286-295).

That last couplet cuts especially deep, for in it Pope moves from pointing up the characteristic weaknesses of individual dramatists to ascribing those debilitating idiosyncrasies to a general failure of poetic ethics: English dramatic poesy has grown so mercenary as to seriously compromise its fundamental end, to make moral instruction delightful, preferring to aim at delight alone—and the profits to be had by pandering to the lowest possible appetites. Note that in the progress of this passage’s more or less chronological survey of the theatre’s leading lights, we move from stylistic and technical flaws—Dryden’s “copiousness,” William Congreve’s faulty characterization, respectively—to ever-greater transgressions against taste: George Farquhar’s “pert low Dialogue,” Sir John Vanbrugh’s coarseness, Aphra Behn’s bedroom naughtiness, and lastly, Cibber’s play for applause by having a gluttonous character in his *Love Makes a Man* (1700) fall upon a brace of chickens and devour them in three minutes’ time. The growing slackness of

professional standards has meant that “Taste, eternal wanderer, now flies / From heads to ears, and now from ears to eyes” (ll. 312-313), infusing all ranks of society with the same desire for cheap sensual gratification: “What dear delight to Britons Farce [for one] affords! / Farce once the taste of Mobs, but now of Lords” (ll. 310-311).

But even if we grant, as I think we must, that in finding fault with his contemporaries or near-contemporaries Pope is not denying outright their talent or the power of their productions to please with wit and in wholesome ways, his portrait of encroaching literary decadence nonetheless points up the larger theme of the extinction of England’s line of poetic achievement. It follows that the more poetry plays to “the many-headed Monster of the Pit: / A sense-less, worth-less, and un-honour’d crowd” who “before ten lines are spoke, / Call for the Farce, the Bear, or the Black-joke” (ll. 305-306; 308-309), the more diminished its power to exercise the kind of instructive, civilizing, culturally sustaining influence upon its audiences that Horace had described to Augustus. Following his at best ironic defense of the English moderns, then, Pope can only make a second departure from his Roman model when he recommends the advantages of poetry to *his* royal addressee. Where Horace could point to the positive benefits of poetry, the debased state of English tastes means that Pope can offer only the “negative utility” of letters to his king and country. Annoying as it is, for example, that “All ryme and scrawl, and scribble to a man” (l. 188), these would-be poets can present no danger to the state: “Allow him but his Play-thing of a Pen, / He n’er rebels, or plots, like other men” (ll. 193-194). Preoccupied with rhyming, the poet is too busy to be much concerned with Government scandals: “Flight of Cashiers [as in the South Sea Bubble], or Mobs, he’ll never mind; / And knows no losses while the Muse is kind” (ll. 195-196). Criminality he leaves to others (“To cheat a Friend, or Ward, he leaves to Peter”)—hardly a surprise, since his pursuit of the Muse has left him so introverted that he has no ambition above “enjoy[ing] his Garden and his Book in quiet; / And then—a perfect Hermit in his Diet” (ll. 197; 199-200), precluding his concern with and participation in the public sphere, making



him safely acquiescent in the face of governmental corruption and mismanagement. In short, poetry is useful precisely because it does *not* arouse, inform, teach, and reform, because it instead operates upon the national psyche as an ideal soporific, reducing mettlesome subjects to social and political cyphers. When Pope does pretend to enumerate the positive benefits of poetry, they prove, if read unironically, to be no better than superficial:

Yet let me show, a Poet's of some weight,  
And (tho' no Soldier) useful to the State.  
What will a Child learn sooner than a song?  
What better teach a Foreigner the tongue?  
What's long or short, each accent where to place,  
And speak in publick with some sort of grace (ll. 203-208).

However, it is more than likely that these lines are meant as a reflection upon what many Englishmen saw as disturbing attributes of their King: his doting maintenance of his standing armies and his “despotic” love of military show; his foreign birth and manners, and his preoccupation with his native Hanover; his inability to achieve more than a minimal competence in the English language, and his unwillingness to acclimate himself to the temperament and traditions of his subjects, or even to appear much before them. Thus, at the point where Horace reminds Augustus of the lasting fame poetry can confer upon its subjects, Pope says instead that the only real harm a poet can commit is to “praise some monster of a King, / Or Virtue, or Religion, turn to sport, / To please a lewd, or unbelieving Court” (ll. 210-212); and where Horace wishes aloud that his talent matched his desire to praise Augustus as he deserves, Pope backhandedly lists the qualities of George Augustus he would praise—“Your Arms, your Actions, your *Repose* to sing!” (l. 395; emphasis added); “Your Country's Peace, how oft, how dearly *bought!*” (l. 397; emphasis added); “How, when you nodded, o'er land and deep, / Peace stole her wing, and wrapped the world in sleep” (ll. 400-401)—and concludes disingenuously, “But Verse alas! your Majesty disdains; / And I'm not us'd to Panegyric strains” (ll. 404-405), insinuating in addition that in any event the King is not worthy of whatever praise he could offer: “A vile

Encomium doubly ridicules; / There's nothing blackens like the ink of fools; / If true, a woeful likeness, and if lyes, / 'Praise undeserv'd is scandal in disguise' " (ll. 410-413). When I stoop to such flattery, he declares, let my "dirty leaves" (l. 415), smeared with the "qualities" of an undeserving subject, "Cloath spice, line trunks, or flutt'ring in a row, / Befringe the rails of Bedlam and Sohoe" (ll. 418-419).

So Pope obviously does not hold out to George II the possibility that any serious poet can offer him serious praise and secure thereby posterity's good opinion. Thus Pope's appeal to the king as he "[nods] serenely, surrounded by his smiling troop of Hanover-Walpole poetasters, educators, ecclesiastics, and politicians" (*Torchiana* 714) to assume his rightful place as patron of the arts is weighted with the heaviest irony. Given its immediate context, the appeal becomes a dare, a stinging accusation of royal dullness. But by this point Pope has made it equally clear that even if he had meant to make a serious case to his monarch for the theoretical usefulness of poetry in establishing the heroic stature of its subjects, the present debilitated state of British poetry would prevent the success of any actual attempts to do so. Horace could point proudly to a Varius and a Virgil as worthy objects of Augustus' favor and Rome's esteem; but Pope, making a third deviation from his model, uses the weakening of poetic standards and the resulting moral and cultural enervation of poetry to throw into relief the embarrassing inferiority of the present generation of England's literary figures. For though he admonishes George II to "Think of those Authors, Sir, who would rely / More on a Reader's sense, than Gazer's eye" (ll. 350-351)—that is, those non-dramatic poets who could plausibly fulfill the roles of their Augustan counterparts—Pope does not recommend any living poets by name. Indeed, it seems that for Pope few living writers of any type are of sufficient stature even to earn a bare mention in "To Augustus": his catalogues of England's notable dramatists and poets (especially ll. 69-114 and ll. 286-295) exhaust themselves with those who flourished at about the turn of the century or a bit beyond—as if the line of major and minor worthies grew first faint, then altogether extinct. For Pope's catalogues are clearly designed to trace

a general diminution of literary talent. His first, for example, takes us from Shakespeare and Jonson down to the authors of those “dry Desert[s] of a thousand lines,” “Sprat, Carew, Sedley, and a hundred more” (l. 109); and within this list he recounts the succession of English drama’s popular laureates: Beaumont, Fletcher, Shadwell, Wycherley, Southerne, and Rowe—all those “[f]rom eldest Heywood down to Cibber’s age” (l. 88). Cibber also rounds off Pope’s second catalogue (given above, p. 96), which, beginning with Dryden, shows the descent (qualitative as well as chronological) of dramatic accomplishment from Charles II’s Laureate to George II’s own ill-chosen composer of birthday odes.<sup>22</sup> As Cibber’s example twice demonstrates, the living literary men Pope *does* name are used to point up how slight their capacities are compared to those even of the last generation. Thus elsewhere in “To Augustus,” the late Addison is replaced as the age’s leading critic by “slashing Bentley with his desp’rate Hook” (l. 104), and Swift, prematurely commemorated as the model of poetic virtue, courage, and indignation, by the blandishments of sapless Administration apologists: Walpole’s creature, the foppish, philistine Lord Hervey, “th’ affected fool / At Court, who hates whate’er he read at School” (ll. 105-106), and those whose “pathetic strains” (l. 232) beguile work-house children from the drudgery of their labor, reconciling them to the misery of their condition while instilling in them attitudes friendly to ministerial policy: “Verse cheers their leisure, Verse assists their work, / Verse prays for Peace, or sings down Pope and Turk” (ll. 235-236). In “The Battel of the Books” (1710), Swift had derisively portrayed the “modernist” Dryden in a helmet (i.e., a reputation) “nine times too large for the Head, which appeared Situate far in the hinder Part . . . like a Mouse under a Canopy of State, or like a shriveld

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<sup>22</sup> Pope advises George that if he would have his exploits celebrated as Louis XIV’s had been by Boileau and Racine, he must consider well “what Poet best may make them known” (l. 377); at minimum, Pope admonishes, the King must “chuse at least some Minister of Grace, / Fit to bestow the Laureat’s weighty place” (ll. 378-379). When these lines and those in which Pope ironically disqualifies himself from praising George II (ll. 390-419; quoted above) are taken together, the overall impression we receive is that there is no poet fit even to offer base flattery to a King who is himself unfit to receive even that.

Beau from within the Pent-house of a modern Perewig" (390). Perhaps in "To Augustus" no single image captures the bathetic devolution of the literary "hero" in England than a similar image of Colley Cibber cavorting on stage in the actual helmet, breast plate, and greaves of the Black Prince, making himself (and Edward's memory) ridiculous as he earnestly plays the role of England's champion (ll. 316-319). There could be no apter emblem for what Pope would have us see as a literary culture inept, impotent, and presided over by a stunted race absurdly strutting before the public eye in the armor forged by the giants of a former age.

As in his "versification" of Donne's second satire, Pope must content himself with painting his survey of the triumphs of English letters in luminous retrospect. For as the utter lack of honest statesmen among the living forced him in his second *Epilogue* to the satires to praise the dead exclusively, so does the extinction of the "last of Britons" in the sphere of poetry here oblige him to turn in disgust from the present and recall those who, great enough to be plagued by merely petty faults, have taken to the grave with them the true poet's skill and virtue, as well as that sense of higher moral mission that once defined and defended the soul of the nation, stood fast between its civilization and the dissolution attendant upon dullness.

#### 4. The Dunciad: Pope's Grand Epitaph for England

The cultural bulwark of poetry once breached, weakened, and overthrown, the overturning of civilization itself must follow. Indeed, it is because *The Dunciad Variorum* of 1729 stands as a record of the defeat of arts and letters in England that it may likewise stand, as Pope wrote to Gay in 1730, "for a publick Epitaph or monumental Inscription, like that at Thermopylae, on *a whole people perish'd.*" But what in 1728 and 1729 was largely a brilliant mock-heroic treatment of the dull, the scandalous, and the inept (Books I and II)—to which the poet had appended an extended conceit of a Britain undone by the

triumphant dunces (Book III)<sup>23</sup>—became something else altogether with the addition in 1741 of a fourth book that treats the prophecies of Book III as *faits accomplis*. Poetry has failed and Britain is no more; Dulness and her empire have been restored—now and for all time. Pope’s satiric figure has hardened from fancy into established “fact”; it remains only to give a final, comprehensive account of the expiration of poetry and the institutions that had once sustained British civilization. As such, Book IV of *The New Dunciad* not only brings Pope’s epitaphic vision to its logical culmination, but in itself serves as Pope’s grand epitaph for England.

Even before we come to Pope’s declaration in the “Argument” of Book IV that its design is “to declare the Completion of the Prophecies mention’d at the end of the former” (764), we might have inferred that the coming of the Goddess Dulness “in her Majesty, to Destroy *Order* and *Science*, and to substitute the *Kingdom* of the *Dull* upon Earth” is a foregone conclusion, that in fact it has all but been accomplished. After all, we have seen the new King of the Dunces anointed in Book I, the games held in his honor in Book II, and in Book III a survey of the Goddess’ past triumphs and a vision of those yet to come under the reign of Colley Cibber—but nowhere have we seen the struggle between Sense and Dulness, at no point witnessed the decisive battle between the Wits and Dunces. The defeat of Sense and Wit, the victory of Dulness are simply givens, easily confirmed if only

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<sup>23</sup> A conceit, Pope says, fashioned from such stuff as “the Fool’s paradise, the Statesman’s scheme, / The air-built Castle, and the golden Dream, / The Maid’s romantic wish, the Chymist’s flame, / And Poet’s vision of eternal fame” (ll. 9-12). Pope has the purblind Martinus Scriblerus gloss lines 5-12 as follows: “Hereby is intimated that the following Vision is no more than the Chimera of the Dreamer’s brain, and not a real or intended satire on the Present Age, doubtless more learned, more inlighten’d, and more abounding with great Genius’s in Divinity, Politics, and whatever Arts and Sciences, than all the preceding.” The disavowal, of course, only underscores that the learning of the present age is *precisely* the object of the poet’s satire. Yet in the “Argument” for Book III of *The Dunciad Variorum*, Pope explains that the most dire effects of dullness have still to be realized:

[The ghost of Elkanah Settle] first prophecies how first the nation shall be overrun with farces, opera’s, shows; and the throne of Dulness advanced over both the Theatres: Then how her sons shall preside in the seats of arts and sciences, till in conclusion all shall return to their original Chaos: a scene, of which the present Action is but a Type or Foretaste, giving a Glimpse or *Pisgah-sight* of the promis’d Fulness of her Glory; the Accomplishment whereof will, in all probability, hereafter be the Theme of many other and greater Dunciads (348-349).

one knows how to read aright the telltale signs of the times. And so as Cibber nods in the lap of Dulness near the conclusion of Book III, he beholds in his dream-vision the shade of Elkanah Settle enumerating to the hosts of the Underworld evidence that the “new Saturnian age of Lead” (I, l. 28), long-expected, has at last arrived with the reign of King Colley:

Signs following signs lead on the mighty year!  
 See! the dull stars roll round and re-appear.  
 See, see, our own true Phœbus wears the bays!  
 Our Midas sits Lord Chancellor of Plays!  
 On Poets' Tombs see Benson's titles writ!  
 Lo! Ambrose Philips is prefer'd for Wit!  
 See under Ripley rise a new White-hall,  
 While Jones' and Boyle's united labours fall:  
 While Wren with sorrow to the grave descends,  
 Gay dies unpension'd with a hundred friends,  
 Hibernian Politics, O Swift! thy fate;  
 And Pope's, ten years to comment and translate (ll. 321-332).

Taken together, there could for Pope be no surer portent of the imminent extinction of English civilization: dullness not only thrives, it is rewarded with title, office, and wealth—while talent is allowed to languish and die. Thus Cibber is made Laureate and Chancellor of Plays—and Swift is denied preferment and all but exiled to Ireland. Thus Thomas Ripley (d. 1758), the inept, inexperienced architect who “[built] a Bridge that never drove a pyle” (“To Augustus,” l. 185), is yet assigned, owing to Walpole's influence, to repair the King's palace at Whitehall; and William Benson (1682-1754) is brought in to replace the aging genius Wren as Royal Surveyor, though so incompetent that he first wrongly pronounces the building housing the House of Lords unsound and then so badly botches his commission to refurbish it that Defoe would observe in *A Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain* (1724-26) that “some thought he was more likely to throw the old fabric down, than to set it to rights” (324). No wonder that Wren “with sorrow” descends to his grave—when, in his case, merit is pushed aside, and in that of Inigo Jones, its works are neglected. “At the time when this Poem was written,” Pope glosses in a footnote

in *The Dunciad Variorum*, “the Banqueting-house of *Whitehall*, the Church and Piazza of *Covent-garden*, and the Palace and Chappel of *Somerset-house*, the works of the famous *Inigo Jones*, had been for many years so neglected, as to be in danger of ruin” (l. 324n)—and had to be restored privately by Richard Boyle, Earl of Burlington. Benson, moreover, is one of those who promote the Empire of Dulness “by connivance, weak resistance, or discouragements of Arts; such as Half-wits, tasteless Admirers, vain Pretenders, the Flatterers of Dunces, or the Patrons of them” (“Argument” for Book IV, 764), setting up as a promoter of the arts when in fact his taste and judgement limit him to subsidizing living fools and monuments to worthies long dead.<sup>24</sup> Thus while Benson builds his reputation as a connoisseur, Gay “dies unpension’d with a hundred friends.”

Given these signs of the dullness immanent in Georgian England, we should not be surprised to find, even as Book IV opens, that Science already “groans in Chains” (l. 21) beneath the footstool of Dulness; that “*Wit* dreads Exile, Penalties and Pains” (l. 22); that Logic, “gagg’d and bound” (l. 23) has been supplanted by Sophistry, “fair *Rhet’ric*” (l. 24) by “shameless Billingsgate” (l. 26), and Morality by “Chicane in Furs, and Casuistry in Lawn” (l. 28). But by reason of their innately virulent antipathy to Dulness and their peculiar ability to withstand her power, the Muses in defeat must be treated with such severity as guarantees their absolute nullification. Held “in ten-fold bonds” and “[w]atch’d both by Envy’s and by Flatt’ry’s eye” (ll. 35-36), Mnemosyne’s daughters have no recourse but despair and no hope but death:

There to her heart sad Tragedy address  
The dagger wont to pierce the Tyrant’s breast;  
But sober History restrain’d her rage,  
And promis’d Vengeance on a barb’rous age.  
There sunk Thalia [Comedy], nerveless, cold, and dead,  
Had not her Sister Satyr held her head (ll. 37-42).

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<sup>24</sup> Such patrons are, as we have seen, one of Pope’s frequent targets; he skewers Benson specifically in an epigram on Shakespeare’s monument: “Thus Britain lov’d me; and preserv’d my Fame, / Clear from a Barber’s or a Benson’s Name.” Better to remain in oblivion than to be the occasion of a self-promoting philistine’s monument to his own ego.

Their impotence leaves them subject as well to the noxious insults and tortures arising from the Goddess' especial enmity. Dulness smiles, for instance, when the "Harlot form" (l. 45) of Opera makes her entrance "with mincing step, small voice, and languid eye" (l. 46), casts "on the prostrate Nine a scornful look" (l. 51), and exults over the captives, "Joy to great Chaos! let Division reign: / Chromatic tortures soon shall drive them hence, / Break all their nerves, and fritter all their sense" (ll. 54-66). She then grants Opera's prayer to drive "Giant Handel" (l. 65) from England unto "th' Hibernian shore" (l. 70), lest the sense, power, and sublimity of his music "stir, rouze, and shake the Soul" (l. 67) of the nation and disrupt the torpor of the Goddess' reign. And with the Muses conquered and powerless, their would-be followers languishing in oblivion or exile, Dulness has now only to call her children to her and bid her particular favorites, the Patrons "who sneak from living worth to dead, / With-hold the pension, and set up the head" (ll. 95-96) and the Critics who "in the chequer'd shade, / Admire new light thro' holes yourselves have made" (ll. 125-126), to mangle between them the memories and achievements of the Muses' past champions. "Revive the Wits!" she commands, "But murder first, and mince them all to bits" (ll. 119-120):

Let standard-Authors, thus, like trophies born,  
 Appear more glorious as more hack'd and torn . . . .  
 Leave not a foot of verse, a foot of stone,  
 A Page, a Grave, that they can call their own;  
 But spread, my sons, your glory thin or thick,  
 On passive paper, or on solid brick (ll. 123-124; 127-130).

Thus defeated, enchained, and tormented, their glories obscured, so helpless are the Muses in the face of "the Restoration of Night and Chaos" ("Argument" for Book IV, 765), that as the final book of *The New Dunciad* opens, the poet finds that if he is to be able to articulate the final triumph of Dulness, he must first beg from her a brief space of time in which articulation itself can yet exist: "Yet, yet a moment, one dim Ray of Light / Indulge, dread Chaos, and eternal Night!" (ll. 1-2). Putting his request to those powers "whose Mysteries restor'd I sing," and toward which, he acknowledges, "Time bears me



on his rapid wing" (ll. 5-6), the poet recognizes implicitly that with the expiration of that final brief, dimly lit instant of poetic vision, the very possibility of poetry will be extinguished, and he along with it. "Suspend a while your Force inertly strong, / Then take at once the Poet and the Song" (ll. 7-8): one last moment in which to sing one last song commemorating the end of poesy, and the poetic voice resigns itself to being stilled, now and forever.

Such use the poet makes of the "one dim Ray of Light" remaining to him after the fall of the arts and sciences. Around him, however, the remaining pillars of British civilization—liberal humanist education, social and political liberty, faith in the justice of an immanent Providential order—have already been toppled, and precluded from ever being restored.

Certainly the youth of Britain will not grow up to threaten Dulness' reign. As the legions of the dull crowd about their triumphant goddess, the spectre of the legendary schoolmaster William Busby, here depicted as archetypically autocratic, brutal, and narrow, pushes to the fore and, brandishing a bloody switch, boasts that the education meted out to the young ensures their lifelong loyalty to Dulness. Curiosity, intelligence, quickness of parts, imagination—all the intellectual attributes that might rebel against the goddess have been beaten, drilled, and recited out of them:

To ask, to guess, to know, as they commence,  
 As Fancy opens the quick springs of Sense,  
 We ply the Memory, we load the brain,  
 Bind rebel Wit, and double chain on chain,  
 Confine the thought, to exercise the breath;  
 And keep them in the pale of Words till death.  
 Whate'er the talents, or howe'er designed,  
 We hang one jingling padlock on the mind (ll. 155-162).

Once they have been rendered sufficiently uniform, habitually insipid and obtuse, the young scholars will be herded in their "sable shoal[s]" (l. 190) to the universities, where, under the tutelage of "Aristotle's friends" (l. 192), they will make up the "black blockade"

(l. 191) of latter-day scholastics that promotes “each staunch Polemic, stubborn as a rock” (l. 195), and applauds “each fierce Logician, still expelling Locke” (ll. 196). And there they will come under the influence of those such as the pompously purblind Aristarchus,<sup>25</sup> who now strides up to Dulness and demands haughtily if the goddess does not know him, “Thy mighty Scholiast, whose unweary’d pains / Made Horace dull, and humbled Milton’s strains” (ll. 211-212). His programme, much akin to Busby’s, is to so clog the mind with trivia that it is incapacitated for higher contemplation—or even for connecting up the innumerable bits of minutiae it has ingested in order to comprehend their larger significance. “In ancient Sense if any needs will deal,” avows Aristarchus, “Be sure I give them Fragments, not a Meal” (229-230): “How parts relate to parts, or they to whole, / The body’s harmony, the beaming soul” (ll. 243-235) are things “the critic Eye, that microscope of Wit” (l. 233) shall see only “When Man’s whole frame is obvious to a Flea” (l. 238). For Aristarchus, as he goes about petrifying each “Genius to a Dunce” (l. 264), the object is never to advance knowledge, but to multiply it needlessly and demonstrate it to no purpose—and thus he “dim[s] the eyes, and stuff[s] the head / With all such reading as was never read” (ll. 249-250); thus he sets the pupil “on Metaphysic ground to prance, / Show all his parts, not a step advance” (ll. 265-266); thus his regimen successfully “bring[s] to one dead level ev’ry mind” (l. 268).

One dead level, because whether the “scholars” produced by Aristarchus’ parsing methods busy themselves, as he does, with texts or, like the virtuosos, antiquarians, and collectors that soon afterward appear before Dulness, with curiosities and trifles, none is capable of ever being more than an intellectual dilettante, for none has the method, discipline, or desire to raise the sights of his investigation from the parts before him to the

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<sup>25</sup> That is, the classicist Richard Bentley. As Mack points out, Bentley was the most renowned—or notorious—practitioner of the maddeningly self-obsessed “new criticism.” Bentley, Mack writes, “did not hesitate to present himself as endowed with powers of textual divination which in his own view entirely equalled . . . if indeed they did not surpass, whatever art or genius might have been possessed by the poet on whom he was then commenting” (483).

larger æsthetic, natural, or providential design that subsumes them. For this latter group, the tribe of myopic natural philosophers, “with weeds and shells fantastic crow’d” (l. 398), then, the only possible business of their investigations, the only possible end of their obsession with the minutiae of physical objects is, to paraphrase Johnson, to register only the streaks of the tulip, not the flower itself—and certainly not the interrelatedness of the natural world. Hence the feud Dulness is forced to arbitrate between the florist and the butterfly collector. The florist is outraged that other’s “vile . . . insect lust” (l. 415) has led him to trample the new species of carnation he has created; the collector, pridefully ignorant of what lies at the edge of his acquaintance, replies with contempt, “Rose or Carnation was below my care; / I meddle, Goddess! only in my sphere” (ll. 431-432). Both fail to see that the objects of their self-absorbed studies occupy a single, interdependent natural system. Dulness can only be pleased to observe how effectively the specialists’ vocations have blunted their intellect and scattered their energies, and thus she congratulates the disputants for promoting her arts, encouraging them to disseminate the hobbyist’s enthusiasm among the ranks of the idle young:

‘O! would the Sons of Men once think their Eyes  
And Reason giv’n them but to study *Flies*?  
See Nature in some partial narrow shape,  
And let the Author of the Whole escape:  
Learn but to trifle; or, who most observe,  
To wonder at their Maker, not to serve’ (ll. 453-458).

As Dulness’ benediction suggests, the benefit she derives from the reduction of learning to the microscopic examination of minutiae—whether physical or textual—is twofold. First, reason itself atrophies in its close confinement, becomes incapable of seeing or imagining beyond the objects with which it has surrounded itself; second, a reason thus narrowly self-enclosed soon becomes self-reflexive, interested only in its own perpetuation. This all but guarantees that learning and science will be rendered insignificant and unintelligible because of their isolation from the experience, exigencies, and language of the everyday world. But more important, because the investigations undertaken in such isolation soon

become answerable only to themselves, they become divorced as well from the ethical and spiritual spheres, content, as Pope observes in a gloss on line 453, to “rest in Second causes, with a total disregard of the First.” So dissevered, even if they produce nothing positively harmful to human society, such studies yet constitute a real obstacle to material and moral progress. For one thing, whether undertaken within or beyond the bounds of formal education, they draw young scholars “out of the way of real Knowledge” (“Argument” for Book IV), and lead them to forfeit the full exercise and scope of their reason, precluding thereby any profitable examination, explication, and propagation of the useful, the beautiful, the true, or the sacred; for another, the regimen of such studies all but ensures that the present generation of the learned dull will only replicate themselves in their charges, rendering these in their turn incapable of producing anything but yet another generation of dunces.<sup>26</sup> And so decade by decade, learning follows the errant footsteps of its past, hastening to its own extinction.

Disastrous as this development is in itself, its malign power is magnified by the fact that the consequences of dullness never come singly, and never remain localized—and never less so than in the present instance. The boys dancing before Busby’s bloody switch, the young scholars receiving their well-parsed fragments of knowledge by Aristarchus and his ilk, and (the product of these two systems) the intellectually and occupationally idle gentlemen soon to be initiated into the mania of esotericism by the likes of the botanist and butterfly collector, are all, by reason of their birth, lineage, condition, and rank, destined

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<sup>26</sup> Roy Porter’s description of preparatory and higher education in England during the eighteenth century largely confirms Pope’s unflattering portrait. “Public-school culture,” he says, “was that of [the boys’] fathers in embryo; boys drank, gambled, rode, fought, and gained precocious bi-sexual experience. They frequently rebelled: the militia had to be called in to storm Eton”; the universities, with their “dons steeped in port and privilege,” were no less shabby or intellectually stagnant:

Oxford and Cambridge came to be attended principally by sauntering young gentlemen filling in time with bagatelles (few troubled to graduate) and by penurious sorts on scholarships, many the sons of curates, seeking ordinations into the Church. It was grinding tutors and slumbrous pedants who made an academic career in the colleges: the great scholars of Georgian England—the law reformer Jeremy Bentham, historians such as Edward Gibbon, Archdeacon Coxe, and Charles Burney, and scientists such as Joseph Priestly and Henry Cavendish—were not dons (*English Society in the Eighteenth Century*, 177).

for public life and office. The erosion of humanist education's traditional connections between the particular and the universal, the practical and the philosophical, the material and the moral, ruinous enough to individual talents and sensibilities, promises to be yet more so for Britain's social and political life when,

First slave to Words, then vassal to a Name,  
Then dupe to Party; child and man the same;  
Bounded by Nature, narrow'd still by Art,  
A trifling head, and a contracted heart (ll. 501-504),

"ev'ry finish'd Son" (l. 500) takes his place among the ruling classes. Justice, policy, and statecraft must go begging once those "mark'd out for Honours, honour'd for their birth" (l. 507), have been by the course of their education "to [Dulness'] gentle shadow . . . shrunk, / All melted down, in Pension, or in Punk" (ll. 509-510). Confirmed in their impudence (ll. 530-531), self-conceit (ll. 534ff), and party interest (ll. 537ff), in their pride, selfishness, and dullness (l. 582), they leave school ethically, even developmentally stunted. Disinclined to discharge their social responsibilities, they are scarcely fit to do so in any case, their lives and fortunes given over to adolescent whims and appetites, to bland eccentricities. A certain duke likes to pretend that he is a jockey; a marquis impersonates his footman; an earl drives his own coach from theatre to theatre (ll. 585-588). Harmless enough in themselves, inasmuch as the indulgence of idiosyncrasy compromises the dignity of authority and subverts social order, and insofar as such pursuits divert the attention and energies that might have been spent on the fulfillment of one's duties, they comply with Dulness' charge to her favorites, "Guard my Prerogative, assert my Throne" (l. 583). And so they take their place in the Goddess' final directions to her privileged sons, along with her bidding

The learned Baron Butterflies design,  
Or draw to silk Arachne's subtile line;  
The Judge to dance his brother Sergeant call;  
The Senator at Cricket urge the Ball;  
The Bishop stow (Pontific Luxury!)  
An hundred Souls of Turkeys in a pye;

The sturdy Squire to Gallic masters stoop,  
And drown his Lands and Manors in a Soupe (ll. 589-596).

Thus distracted, "No more, alas! the voice of Fame they hear, / The balm of Dulness trickling in their ear" (ll. 543-544); "How quick Ambition hastes to ridicule! / The Sire is made a Peer, the Son a Fool" (ll. 547-548).

As Roy Porter points out in his study of Edward Gibbon, throughout the eighteenth century the "classic object lesson in political suicide" was the "degeneration" of Republican Rome into Imperial Rome (27). The republic, so the view ran, had "presented a fair prospect of a virtuous, flourishing, militarily successful commonwealth . . . animated by the political energies of a citizenry whose conflicts proved to be healthy safeguards against despotism, and free from the abuses of hereditary or arbitrary power" (28):

By contrast, imperial Rome, its patricians corrupted by luxury, its plebeians slaves to bread and circuses, afforded a spectacle of arid despotism. The proponents of this vision of history feared that Britain, like Rome, would lapse from liberty into despotism through a chain of socio-political transformations set off by changing circumstances but exploited by crafty opportunists. . . . Standing armies, dropsical bureaucracies, 'placemen' and hangers-on would render the nation helpless before the machinations of absolutism. Thus wealth would breed luxury, luxury corruption, and corruption despotism (28-29).

As Pope depicts them, the British "patricians" fashioned by miseducation and the privileges of place are destined to preside over England's own decline and fall. Raised in dullness, tyrannized and trivialized by turns in their youth, disused by the time of their maturity from serving anything but their own material and sensual self-interests, these are not the men to attempt and achieve English glories abroad—or, more important, defend traditional English liberties at home. The connection between such an upbringing and the encroachment of domestic despotism is not lost upon Pope, who in tracing the inculcation of dullness accounts as well for the weakness of mind, character, and idealism that underlies his scenario for the slow erosion of political will and power among the Parliamentary classes in the face of Administrational hauteur. Nor is the connection lost upon Dulness herself. She is so taken with Busby's methods of "instruction," for instance, that she wishes the whole

kingdom might be made subject to “some pedant Reign,” presided over by a schoolmaster-king who, ruling by words alone (rather than by laws, or the principles upon which those laws are founded), would reduce his Parliaments and advisors to a group of terrified schoolboys, would “Senates and Courts with Greek and Latin rule, / And turn the Council to a Grammar School!” (ll. 179-180). “For sure,” she concludes, “if Dulness sees a grateful Day, / ’Tis in the shade of Arbitrary Sway” (ll. 181-182).<sup>27</sup> It is in fact with this end of arbitrary sway in mind that before one of her “finish’d sons” is presented to her as one fully her own, the lad is first coaxed by “a WIZARD old” (that is, Walpole) to drink from the “*Cup of Self-love*, which,” as Pope explains in a footnote, “causes a total oblivion of the obligations of Friendship, or Honour, and of the Service of God or our Country; all sacrificed to Vain-glory, court-worship, or yet meaner considerations of Lucre and brutal Pleasures” (l. 517n):

. . . a WIZARD old his *Cup* extends;  
Which who so tastes, forgets his former friends,  
Sires, Ancestors, Himself. One casts his eyes  
Up to a *Star*, and like Endymion dies:  
A *Feather* shooting from another’s head,<sup>28</sup>  
Extracts his brain, and Principle is fled,  
Lost is his God, his Country, ev’ry thing;  
And nothing left but Homage to a King! (ll. 517-524)

Steeped in dullness from childhood, those who from personal virtue, familial tradition, or *noblesse oblige* might have found the strength to check or at least challenge the encroachments of royal and ministerial authority upon the ancient rights of Parliament and people, are instead led by the prospects of advancement and title to become accomplices to the Court’s predations. He who is lost to “his God, his Country, ev’ry thing” and is left

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<sup>27</sup> Pope has Dulness sigh for “some gentle James” (l. 175), i.e., the scholarly (and absolutist-tending) James I, but her picture of the schoolmaster’s brutal, autocratic manner could have been drawn from the court of George and Caroline, as Plumb’s description of the monarchs’ demeanor (see p. 46, above) in governing makes clear.

<sup>28</sup> The *star* of the Order of the Garter; the *feather* worn in the caps of the Knights of the Garter.

with nothing at heart but mercenary “Homage to a King” will be unwilling, unable (morally, philosophically, constitutionally) to oppose those like Walpole who, while other virtuosos lose themselves in their several eccentricities, seek to import still more eccentric “arts” into England. As, for instance, the arts to “Teach Kings to fiddle, and make Senates dance,” that is, of introducing absolutism-by-proxy from France:

Perhaps more high some daring son may soar,  
 Proud to my list to add one Monarch more;  
 And nobly conscious, Princes are but things  
 Born for First Ministers, as Slaves for Kings,  
 Tyrant supreme! shall three Estates command,  
 And MAKE ONE MIGHTY DUNCIAD OF THE LAND! (ll. 599-604)

Note how closely Walpole’s achievement complements that of the Laureate he appointed. As Cibber has brought “the Smithfield Muses to the ear of Kings” (I, l. 2)—that is, has introduced the “Shews, Machines, and Dramatical Entertainments” of London’s great cattle market to the Court, debauching its taste as well as poetic standards in the process—so have Walpole’s power, policies, and intrigues figuratively reduced kings to fiddling and senates to dancing to the tune he calls. One sphere of dullness replicates itself in another. But in this case, the translation of æsthetic dullness into its ministerial equivalent has been abetted by an all-encompassing, all-infecting relativism that has weakened the nation’s moral, artistic, and political principles by eroding the will to uphold them. Pope here portrays its arch-champion as a freethinking clerk, “Whose pious hope aspires to see the day / When Moral Evidence shall quite decay” (ll. 461-462). A scientific materialist in clerical garb, he would replace faith with a reason that ignores both ethical considerations and the evidence of the senses and refers only to its own method: “We nobly take the high Priori Road, / And reason downward, till we doubt of God” (ll. 471-472). The model reductivist, it is a simple matter for him to move from mere doubt to the actual elimination of God, and to then

Thrust some Mechanic Cause into his place;  
 Or bind in Matter, or diffuse in Space.



Or, at one bound o'er-leaping all his laws,  
 Make God Man's Image, Man the final Cause,  
 Find Virtue local, all Relation scorn,  
 See all in *Self*, and but for self be born . . . .  
 Wrapt up in *Self*, a God without a Thought,  
 Regardless of our merit or default (ll. 475-80, 485-6).

It is far more dangerous to make gods of men than tyrants of kings. God represents a higher law; as creator of the best of possible worlds, he is the first cause of ethical behavior or right action. As such, he constitutes a check on human behavior: ultimately, he will punish the vicious, and reward the virtuous. Contemporary philosophy would have told Pope that in the absence of an operative universal moral order—the “Moral Evidence” as revealed in Scripture and in Nature—human beings would quickly lose their humanity and “all Relation [i.e., all social ties, all communal curbs upon individual appetite and power] scorn.” There would be nothing to inspire and compel adherence to the necessary ideals of civilization: justice, order, humanity. But we should consider as well that, as Porter reminds us, “the scheme of history as the fulfillment of a divine plan remained powerful through Georgian England” (*Gibbon*, 24). Whether viewed as cyclical or progressive, history ultimately constituted a providential pattern that lent cosmological significance to the affairs of individuals and nations. Nullify God in the universe and human society reverts to moral chaos, to the ethics of circumstance and the exigencies self-interest; remove God from the flow of human events, and the result is the historical shapelessness, and in turn the despair, confusion, and cynicism of existence in a world without meaning. And this is exactly what the clerk and his ilk have done. Having separated the world and humanity from their creator, the clerk has likewise separated both from their place in creation, that is, from their purpose and significance in the cosmological order. He has, in short, divorced the all-creating Word from its manifestation. In doing so, he has invalidated the heretofore inherent justification for Britain's sustaining values and institutions.

In the absence of immanent moral and providential order and of literary, educational, or governmental cultures capable of reasserting and upholding it, nothing

remains to stand between British civilization and its utter dissolution. And so when Dulness, having charged her minions to make one mighty Dunciad of the land, yawns so potently that “All Nature nods” (l. 605), the entire nation must sink, rotted institution by rotted institution, into a final torpor. Pope’s description of the event largely recapitulates the progress of dullness throughout Book IV: “Churches and Chapels instantly it reach’d” (l. 607); “Then catch’d the Schools; the Hall scarce kept awake; / Lost was the Nation’s Sense, nor could be found, / While the long solemn Unison went round” (ll. 609-612). Even “Palinurus” (i.e., “white hall,” i.e., Whitehall, i.e., Walpole) succumbs, bringing the business of Government to a halt: “The Vapour mild o’er each Committee crept; / Unfinish’d Treaties in each Office slept; / And Chiefless Armies doz’d out the Campaign; / And Navies yawn’d for orders on the Main” (ll. 615-618).

As the effects of the Goddess’ yawn ripple outward across the land, the poet invokes his Muse to “Relate, who first, who last resign’d to rest; / Whose Heads she partly, whose completely blest . . . / ’Till drown’d was Sense, and Shame, and Right, and Wrong— / O sing, and hush the Nations with thy Song” (ll. 621-622; 625-626). But the invocation is made in vain: that final, half-lit moment the poet had begged of Night and Chaos at the opening of Book IV has expired, and now, as those powers are restored with their dull daughter, and all order is quickly dissolving into elemental anarchy, the Muse finds that her being, too, is rapidly evaporating: “Before her [Dulness], Fancy’s gilded clouds decay, / And all its varying Rain-bows die away. / Wit shoots in vain its momentary fires, / The meteor drops, and in a flash expires” (ll. 631-634). There is just time now, before the Muse’s voice is forever silenced, to list the arts going out one by one, leaving nothing behind them but endless night; just time now to record the end of being:

See skulking *Truth* to her old Cavern fled,  
Mountains of Casuistry heap’d o’er head!  
*Philosophy*, that lean’d on Heav’n before,  
Shrinks to her second cause, and is no more.  
*Physic* of *Metaphysic* begs defence,  
And *Metaphysic* calls for aid on *Sense*!

See *Mystery* to *Mathematics* fly!  
 In vain! they gaze, turn giddy, rave, and die.  
*Religion* blushing veils her sacred fires,  
 And unawares *Morality* expires.  
 Nor *public* Flame, nor *private*, dares to shine;  
 Nor *human* Spark is left, nor Glimpse *divine*!  
 Lo! thy dread Empire, CHAOS! is restor'd;  
 Light dies before thy uncreating word:  
 Thy hand, great Anarch! lets the curtain fall;  
 And Universal Darkness buries All (ll. 641-656).

### 5. Universal Darkness. Poetry, and Public Memory

Universal Darkness buries All. The corresponding lines of *The Dunciad Variorum* had read, “Thy hand great Dulness! lets the curtain fall, / And universal Darkness covers all” (ll. 355-356). The difference in rhetorical degree between “Dulness” and “Anarch” and between “covers” and “buries” is so great as to signal a difference in rhetorical end. That difference is described in part by the respective contexts of the two couplets in which these terms occur. In *The Dunciad Variorum*, for instance, the couplet is, significantly, the last but one, and only concludes the dream of the new King of Dunces as he snores in Dulness’ lap. The final couplet—“Enough! enough!’ the raptur’d Monarch cries, / And thro’ the Ivory Gate the Vision flies” (ll. 357-358)—therefore emphasizes that the preceding scenes of Dulness’ ultimate triumph have been yet but a vision, and a *false* vision at that, tradition holding that trustworthy images pass through the Gate of Horn on their way from Hades to mortal imaginations, misleading ones through the Ivory Gate. By contrast, because these framing lines have been trimmed from the conclusion of *The New Dunciad*, we know that *its* final couplet is meant to mark the actual and unequivocal restoration of Dulness. Moreover, her new title, “Great Anarch,” establishes her as a force no longer merely capable of blunting and frustrating genius and integrity, but of effecting their utter—and final—destruction. Hence her darkness now does not simply *cover* all, leaving open the possibility that these have only been occluded and might again burst to the fore; her

darkness now *buries* all, suggesting crushing, suffocating obliteration—an entombment, in fact. And this, together with the shift in context, the Goddess' new puissance, and the greatly expanded account of the extinguishing of the arts, underscores that the rhetorical end of *The Dunciad* is no longer the ridicule of a bothersome literary opponent but an epitaphic commemoration of England and the English.

But Pope's *act* of epitaphic commemoration (both here, in its explicit climax, and as it recurs more or less implicitly throughout the body of his satire) is curious in at least two major respects. For one thing, the extremity of its conclusion all but obliges us to second-guess both the poet's motives and the validity of his satiric figure; for another, the unusual, even paradoxical, configuration of temporal, spatial, mnemonic cues within the commemoration itself is more likely, ultimately, to muddle the reader's perception and understanding of the historical present than to offer him or her a clear and compelling explication of it.

I argued in the second section of Chapter 5 that to gain and hold the attention and trust of his audience, to secure his credibility with it and extend his authority over it, the satirist must establish himself as the champion of the public's interests, while distancing himself from his own. As we have seen in this section, Pope habitually insisted upon the balance of his temper, the breadth of his acquaintance, the impartiality of his tolerance, his lack of material and political ambition, and his distaste for partisan feuds; if and when he unleashed his satiric wrath, his capacity to excite indignation and ridicule, it was, after all, in the personally disinterested defense of virtue and the virtuous, in which cause, naturally, he could give no quarter, could leave no vice unlashd, could spare no name, no rank, no condition. However, Pope was so long and so minutely in the public eye, and his chronic infirmity, his personal and poetic tempers (the one choleric, the other fundamentally epic), his antipathy for the Hanoverian regime, and his sympathies for Bolingbroke and the Opposition so well known, that long before the fourth book of *The New Dunciad*

appeared, the reading public would have had ample reason to suspect his assessments of contemporary Britain to be hyperbolic and alarmist.

I argued as well in Section II that both the literal and figurative elements of the satirist's controlling figure or fiction must not only be sufficiently compatible to cohere advantageously, but be readily and broadly intelligible in themselves. However, from what we know of Pope's Britain, and what we know his contemporaries knew, Pope's depiction of its everyday (or literal) realities would seem only to have undermined the figurative power of his epitaphic vision. For universal darkness did not fall on eighteenth-century England. If anything, the reverse is true. As Linda Colley points out in *Britons*, life under the first two Georges did not, in general, give the peoples of the British Isles reason to believe that their newly united kingdom, its institutions and values, were about to pass away into nothingness. On the contrary, Colley says, as Britons looked upon their nation and compared it to others on the Continent (especially France) they could not help but be impressed by what they saw: food in plenty; a comparatively high standard of living, sustained in good part by a robust internal and external trade; a high degree of physical mobility with (at least at the beginning of the century) encouraging prospects for social mobility as well; ready access to newspapers and political and social debate, as well as to Scripture and the spiritual life of the kingdom (30ff.). Indeed, if Britons during this period believed "that they were richer in every sense than other peoples, particularly Catholic peoples, and particularly the French" (33), the notion was largely due to the conviction—building rather than abating with the passing years, shared alike by the English, Scots, and Welsh, and by the prosperous and poor, by the Whigs and Tories among them—that Protestant Britain was "a chosen land" (33) enjoying God's special care and favor (42-43). Such a belief so widely held would seem rather to suit with a people expecting, not national apocalypse, but national apotheosis. And ironically, such expectations are exactly of a kind with those Pope himself had encouraged in *Windsor-Forest* with his stirring climactic portrait of an England in full possession of the destiny a doting Providence had set aside

for her, an England singularly blessed among the world's nations: justly triumphant abroad, free, peaceful, and prosperous at home.

Colley rightly cautions that such national myths are always more comforting than true (33), but as the event would prove, this one at least was not wholly chimerical. For not only was Britain *not* benighted by tyranny and chaos; the strong, centralized Parliamentary authority under Walpole allowed for the emergence of the first true constitutional monarchy Britain had known. This provided Britain the requisite stability for the tremendous economic and territorial expansion it would enjoy during the middle and latter parts of the century—expansions already underway by the time of *The New Dunciad*. Furthermore (gazing to the end of the century and beyond), this stability, the general prosperity that accompanied it, and the gradual expansion of civil liberties that grew out of both, would allow England to escape the horrors of the French Revolution. And it was a strong, stable England that defeated Napoleon and set the terms for a European peace that would last a full century. Given all this, it is more than easy to be skeptical of the nightmare scenario of a poet who affected to cast himself as the conscience and scourge of his age.

Of course, Pope could not have known how the political, social, and economic upheavals, struggles, and controversies of his time would resolve themselves; and it is only just to observe that Pope's concern is not so much with England's material or imperial well-being, as with its moral foundation, with its "soul."<sup>29</sup> As such, his premature commemoration of British civilization, its sustaining values and ideals—even when

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<sup>29</sup> England was successful in the eighteenth century, but it paid a high ethical price for that success. Political stability under Walpole had its dark side: cronyism, graft, factionalism, savage party infighting, repressive legislation against religious and political dissenters, chronic lack of faith in government; so did economic expansion: enclosure, the ills attendant on (early) industrialization, a money ethic replacing noblesse oblige and the bonds of familial and communal unity. And what of the arts? Perhaps Plumb overstates the case when he says of Georgian England, "[I]n all the arts, save perhaps for the poetry of the romantic revival, it was definitely inferior. Here and there—Gibbon and perhaps Hume—there is a writer of European stature, but the general level of achievement in philosophy, history, and literature is mediocre. Painting and music tell the same story" (35). But it might be observed that by the end of the century poetry ceased to matter very much in England. That is, it largely ceased to participate in and therefore be relevant to government, economics, and religion.

delivered as graphically, as emphatically as at the conclusion of *The New Dunciad*—is arguably not only descriptively accurate, but rhetorically necessary if the poet is to rouse his country and countrymen from their complacency. And as we have seen, premature commemoration has certain inherent advantages. It gives the satirist a redoubtable vantage point as an assessor of persons and society; it allows him thereby to make definitive distinctions between vicious and virtuous thought and action, and between the vicious and virtuous themselves; and it affords the moralist the strongest possible expression of righteous disgust with the times, for in adopting the epitaphic figure he shows his willingness to see the good, the worthy—the world itself—destroyed rather than leave them at the mercy of the corrupt who stand ready to overwhelm them.

But for the satirist to bury a body while it is still discernibly vital, however sluggish its reflexes, feeble its pulse, or shallow its breath, is to infect his own operative figure or fiction with any number of potentially mortal flaws. Most obviously, as we have just seen, there will be significant discrepancies between the moribundity the poet portrays and the vibrancy readers are likely to see should they undertake their own critical survey of the society about them. Second, the satirist risks succeeding all too well in filling readers with his own despair: if all that is good and worthy has passed away, and—as in Book IV of *The Dunciad*—with them the nation and even Creation itself, how can moral tuition matter any longer? Such instruction must, after all, assume that its lessons can be learned and that once learned these can in future be applied practicably and effectively. If it assumes instead that those whom it would teach are incapable of profiting by its efforts, or are simply unworthy of them, and further, that the principles and ideals it would instill are wholly untenable in the world, how relevant can such instruction be? One can and probably should observe that one function of epitaphs is to advise the living and remind them of their own ultimate mortality. As a grand epitaph to an age, *The Dunciad*, for one, is self-evidently a record of the poet's role in the cultural struggle within *his* nation, among *his* people, immortalized in *his* verse. But it is likewise a warning to other times and other places,

giving us vivid, instantly recognizable, instantly understood images of Dulness, her minions, her many manifestations, and the consequences for civilization if these are allowed to thrive and spread unexposed and unchecked. But when the writer of epitaphs assumes that his end and that of time itself are one and the same, whom can he expect to heed his warning? This points up a third weakness in the epitaphic figure: even if Pope's readers wished to act upon what he shows them, they cannot, for the figure deprives them (at least rhetorically) of the time and space in which they might do so. Whether done implicitly (as throughout the satires) or explicitly (as here in the fourth book of *The Dunciad*), to cast the present moment as the last is to bring time to an effective stop, much as the premature commemoration of an individual effectively abstracts him from the living world and in so doing suspends his being, renders him incapable of moving and acting among the living to any purpose. And much as the lens of figurative moribundity forces us to regard his living being with precocious retrospection, so does the suspension of time's course induce us to view the present as if it were already the past—an ever-beckoning stage, well lit and gaudily appointed, yet ever-receding, forever unapproachable, a mirage incapable of bearing the living weight of our desire and disgust, our ideals and indignation, our hope and anxiety.

This brings us (if we have not arrived already) to the second peculiarity of Pope's act of premature commemoration, the unusual configuration of temporal, spatial, and, when these are taken together, the mnemonic cues within the epitaphic figure itself. These cues might be identified and examined in nearly all of the poems I have discussed in this section, particularly in those passages—such as that describing the triumph of Corruption in the “Epistle to Bathurst” (ll. 135-152), and of Vice in the first *Epilogue to the Satires* (ll. 141-170; see above, p. 55)—that seem to prefigure closely the curtain fall of Universal Darkness. But not surprisingly, it is this curtain fall, this final, most explicit epitaphic statement that displays these cues most prominently. And to throw their problematic nature into greatest relief it will be helpful to compare Pope's treatment of them here, in a poem



designed to memorialize the end of British civilization, with his treatment of similar cues in *Windsor-Forest*, composed, as noted, to give shape to the coming national apotheosis.

We might begin by observing that both poems commemorate restorations. *Windsor-Forest*, as we have seen, commemorates (or would have us believe it commemorates) a threefold restoration—of the Stuarts, of internal peace and prosperity, and of England herself to her rightful place among the world's nations. *The Dunciad*, for all its promise of apocalypse, is no less a restoration piece. Certainly in both its earlier and later versions its coronational elements are prominent enough: the new King of the Dunces, whether Theobald or Cibber, is anointed by Dulness, games are held in the new king's honor, and visions of the glories of his reign are disclosed to him. But the accession of the dunces' new king entails the restoration of Dulness herself—and with her, “the Restoration of *Night and Chaos*” (“Argument” to Book IV, 765). That is, all things are returned to the formless void, the dimensionless depths from which time, space, and creation were called forth. As once for Pope Great Anna's commandment, “Let Discord cease!” (*Windsor-Forest*, l. 327) brought order, peace, and meaning to the world, so now the Great Anarch's “un-creating word” (l. 654) reduces all to universal darkness—to nothingness. Given this, the restoration conceit can only be paradoxical.

This central paradox spins off others. Recall that in *Windsor-Forest* the trappings of an earlier restoration—its circumstances, personages, episodes, and consequences—are reclaimed in order to frame readers' perception of the historical present and to give shape to their anticipation of Britain's future glories. But even as these trappings give Pope's readers the wherewithal to discern the distinctive features of their own age (its “topography”), they also serve as so many cues in the formation of a more general temporal perspective, orienting readers in their own present moment. Knowing what has been, they know, in consequence, what must be now, and what, in consequence of that, must be in future. Or, if this is to claim too much, as they read, they are secure in a present moment vivid before the mind's eye, and assured of an equally vivid future moment, even if its

anticipated features finally prove unrealizable. No such temporal orientation is possible for the reader of *The New Dunciad*, however. By the time the panegyric impulse behind his paean to Great Anna has given way in Pope to the disillusionment and bitterness arming his depiction of the Great Anarch's triumph, both Pope's satiric persona, the demands of his new poetic mode, and the satiric figure he felt obliged to adopt dictate that he now employ his temporal cues so as to reverse the temporal perspective fostered by his poem. In Section II, I suggested that the Juvenalian satirist had to write as if he were both within and beyond real cultural time. His moral precepts had to be as universally timeless as their illustrations had to be recognizably topical. Moreover, I suggested that given the difficulty of achieving such "universal topicality," the satirist in any one work would be tempted to incline toward one end of the literal-figurative scale at the expense of the other. As we have seen, Pope here (and under the aegis of the epitaphic figure generally) does not simply *incline* toward the figurative end of the scale, he passes beyond it, insinuating the present moment into the past and precluding altogether the possibility of a future. Not only is there no "now" for the reader to "occupy," there is no "then" for him or her to anticipate. This effects an unnecessary estrangement between the literal and figurative worlds. The reflective reader is denied the familiar typological convention of past events prefiguring those of the present (and these, in turn, others still to come), but also denied reference to the most elementary of temporal patterns—yesterday, today, tomorrow. Hence the temporal paradox of *The New Dunciad*: the fictional and real worlds the poet would have us occupy can exist simultaneously only in a moment outside of time. Put another way, the lack of temporal cues linking the poet's figurative world to the everyday world of the reader forces us at any given point to identify with one world only, and to view the other as mere tapestry. This effectively abstracts the poem itself from real time, and therefore from the real world it would address and influence.

The spatial cues of *The New Dunciad* lead to a similar paradox: within and beyond the poem, the spaces the reader must occupy exist nowhere. In *Windsor-Forest*, our gaze

seems to pass with the poet's over the various scenes and locales he describes. The effect derives in part from Pope's detailed rendering of the landscapes, events, and personages before his poetic eye, though in fact his manner of describing them is often highly idealized or stylized according to classical literary precedent. Nonetheless, we are "there" in Windsor Forest as the poem unfolds before us on the page; we even seem to see vividly, though they are images of the future related to us third hand, the thrilling tableaux of an Augusta triumphant. If the poet enables us to see so clearly, it is due mainly to the fact that his figurative overlays complement and enrich their originals, investing them with an historical or mythological significance that allows one actually passing through Windsor to "read" in its physical features, landmarks, and monuments much that does not appear directly to the eye.<sup>30</sup>

The situation is just the reverse in *The New Dunciad*, and particularly in Book IV. Despite the many specific topographical references in the poem—to Smithfield, Bedlam, Grub Street, Fleet Ditch, Whitehall, the Universities, the law courts, the several boroughs of London—it is difficult to put and maintain oneself in these locales for any appreciable time, for, generally speaking, they are used only allusively, to give us a rough notion of Dulness' progress. Throughout much of the poem we seem rather to be standing to one side of Dulness' throne, sitting at her feet among her minions, or reposing in her lap with the Dunces' new King. Though Pope is careful to locate the Goddess' "sacred Dome" (i, l. 265), her "Cave of Poverty and Poetry" (i, l. 34), close-by the gates of Bedlam (i, ll. 29-44), the site itself is "conceal'd from vulgar eye" (i, l. 33). This is fitting, for the setting neither occupies nor reflects any real place in the literal world. Imaginary places can exist very credibly in the imagination. But here again, the problem is that Pope would have us

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<sup>30</sup> Pope's extended account of the forest under the Conqueror, for instance, evokes a distant period in English history, affording profitable before-and-after glimpses of the places we thought we knew; likewise, the myth of the nymph Lodona, though sheer Ovidian pastiche, awakens us to pleasures of seeing the unexpected in the familiar, charging the humble River Loddon with the romance and mystery attaching to classical lore.

see the literal through the lens of the figurative. In the previous section I suggested that by encouraging us to recall the literal through the figurative, satire imposes upon us a certain brief suspension of our belief in what lies observable before us, and hence a certain dissociation of sensibility, a certain displacement of Self from the social panorama. However, in this case the figurative is so far removed from the literal that once we have turned from Dulness' lair to the world beyond our window, we are likely to find that though our idea of her is complete to repletion, our literal surroundings remain uninflected by her figurative presence. Again, at any given moment we must choose between the spectacle we know for ourselves and that the poet fashions for our imaginations. And the difficulty is only compounded once we come to the end of the poem, and stop to consider where we "are," as readers, while we witness, with the poet, the dissolution of English civilization. I am not asking if we are reading the poem in a chair, or on the bus, or in a meadow, but rather, where we stand in direct relation to the apocalypse before us. The answer, I think, is that when Pope's epitaphic figure at last swells to consume all creation, being, and time, we must at that moment stand with the poet outside of any imaginable place, just as that moment itself must exist outside of time. At that moment, the extremity of this the epitaphic figure's fullest expression points up that this particular satiric fiction, being absolutely opposed to the everyday world, cannot satisfactorily reconstitute that world—any more than it can reconstitute our perception of and our relation to it, for to accept the fiction the reader has to allow himself to be abstracted from his own historical present.

These temporal and spatial vagaries of Pope's satiric fiction all but ensure that his literal and figurative materials will not be in synch. Because they are not, Pope cannot, for all his topical references, imbue his peculiar poetic figure with the urgency of the immediate, with the energy and pulse of the living, everyday world. As we observed in Section II, the satirist who tends overmuch toward the figurative risks making the features of the historical present mere props for his framing conceit, effectively freezing cultural

time within the fiction he has created for its explication and, ultimately, its betterment. And by now it should be clear that Pope's epitaphic vision forces him toward just such a figurative extreme. Accordingly, when the lessons of that vision are brought to bear upon the everyday world, for all their timeless pith, for all the brilliance of their illustration, they cannot be more than vaguely relevant, for they grow out of a set of circumstances that simply do not exist. England is not dead. Hence we come to the mnemonic paradox. We have observed that the satirist, as he overlays the literal with the figurative, forces us in effect to misremember, that is, to remember not the thing in itself, but as the satirist had transfigured it through the use of context, content, cast, or continuity. Ideally, the elements of one mode will lead us to those of the other. This does happen in many discrete instances, as in the caricatures of Cibber and Hervey, the one drawn as the King of Dunces, the embodiment of poetic ineptitude (and an oblique stand-in for George II himself), the other made an emblem of Court corruption and intrigue; or as in Pope's use of epic machinery to depict the migration of depravity in taste from Smithfield to the formerly knowledgeable world of the theatre and the formerly sophisticated world of the Court. Pope's greater figurative overlay, however, would have us remember at cross purposes: not simply misremember, but to give cultural authority to the memory of something that quite obviously never happened and could never happen. When, therefore, we come to the end of *The Dunciad* and encounter that final, chilling couplet—"Thy hand, great Anarch! lets the Curtain fall; / And Universal Darkness buries All"—we may find ourselves overcome by the grand melancholy, by the sheer horror of the lines, but we must also acknowledge that our reaction takes place in a wholly figurative sphere that can only parallel, never impinge upon the sphere of our workaday lives.

Obviously, a single poetic figure, however elaborate, however well executed, however powerful in its effects, cannot in itself be held responsible for bringing about the estrangement of the two mnemonic modes, or for the consequent diversion of the mainstream of poetry from the mainstream of public memory. However, we can discern in

the epitaphic figure an emblem of the increasingly figurative course poetry had begun to take, and undoubtedly its progress was accelerated by the example and stature of Alexander Pope, said by Johnson in his *Life* to have brought English versification to its nearest perfection, and reported by Weinbrot to have been the touchstone for formal verse through the end of the eighteenth century, well into the age of Wordsworth. Neither the new current of poetry's mainstream nor Pope's role in determining it seems to have been incidental. If we look back over *The New Dunciad*, for instance, we might see that if England's sustaining institutions and ideals have shared poetry's ostensible fate, it is largely because for Pope their failure has been the failure of poetry, for the demise of poetic standards has prefigured, then facilitated the complete and final failure of language itself to maintain within itself the essential cognitive and cultural bonds between the literal and the figurative, the material and the moral, the immediate and the age-old. Verbal chaos prefigures all other disorder. As Book IV progresses, Pope's depiction of the dullness that has fatally contaminated Britain's learning, government, and spiritual life reveals it to be, ultimately, the very same underlying dullness in the arts, particularly poetry: the steady divergence of words from their traditional collective connotations, whether æsthetic, ethical, or sacred. Thus isolated, the meaning of words, and that which words suggest beyond their connotative significance, become subject to individual whim, to circumstance, to expediency; language becomes formless. A good deal of this linguistic divergence, Brean Hammond notes in his essay, "Scriblerian Self-Fashioning," was the result of the "new scientific methodology" being indiscriminately applied to all learning, even the humanities (110-111). Such an application, he asserts, tended to rob the arts of their spiritual and ethical properties by reducing all learning to a mechanical study of words. This had the effect of reducing words to objects, thereby stripping them of their ability to convey meanings beyond the merely material. Love, honor, integrity—these would have no connotative power to the linguistic materialist. And the more objectified words became, the further they were isolated from their meanings. The Scriblerians saw writers as "custodians

of verbal culture entrusted with the task of restoring an organic harmony between body and soul, the material and the immaterial" (111)—and, one might add, between words and their meanings. They set themselves the task, Hammond observes, of "replac[ing] in the world the spirituality that mechanistic natural philosophy and the professionalization of writing had taken away" (113).

Unfortunately for formal verse's role in the shaping of public memory, Pope's response to the materialist challenges of his day would over time leave poetry in much the same condition as the poet had found himself on that cold dark night of January 1743, when he wrote to his friends the Orrerys, "I have seen and heard, what makes me shut my Eyes & Ears, and retire inward into my own Heart; where I find Something to comfort me, in knowing it is possible some men may have some Principles. I wish I had been no where but in my Garden; but my weak frame will not endure it; or no where but in my Study; but my weak Eyes cannot read all the Evening" (437). It is in large part this inward turn, from the folly and viciousness of the world toward the inner recesses of the poet's own heart and imagination, that had effected what Pope so bitterly complains of here, that lash the age as he will, "no body has Shame enough left to be afraid of Reproach, or punish'd by it." As the event proved, Pope's example ensured that others, Wordsworth prominent among them, could and would seize upon the cult of poetic personality and strike an heroic public pose. But from now on that pose would be in defiance of, not on behalf of the public—for Pope's example also ensured that the materials and predominant mode of the poetry appearing before the public would put poet and reader essentially at odds, their interests and ends now being so different. "[The poet] must write as the interpreter of nature, and the legislator of mankind, and consider himself as presiding over the thoughts and manners of future generations; as a being superiour to time and place"—Dr. Johnson could write these words with complacence in 1759; they had become a desperate declaration by the time Shelley appropriated them, in 1821.

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSION

#### 1. By Way of Denouement: Pope and Posterity

Nearly half a century has passed since James Sutherland reminded us that it is foolish indeed to speak of eighteenth century poetry and Alexander Pope as if the two were equivalent terms. To do so may, Sutherland says, "be an unintentional tribute to Pope's contemporary importance; yet there is surely something wrong with a definition that leaves out most of the other notable poets of the age—Thomson, Gray, Collins, Goldsmith, Cowper, Crabbe—on the grounds that they were in revolt from its poetical standards, and groping their way with varying success towards the dawn of romanticism" (*Preface to Eighteenth Century Poetry*, 158-159). And no doubt we would today add the names of other poets to Sutherland's list of notables: Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, perhaps, or Edward Young, or John Byrom, or Mary Leapor. But while acknowledging the justness of Sutherland's admonishment, we should not let the great variety of eighteenth-century poetry, or our delight at discovering "new" poets of the period or at reclaiming its half-forgotten names, lead us to overlook the fact that during his lifetime Pope so impressed his poetical persona and principles upon Britain's cultural consciousness that his identification with the mainstream of contemporary poetry was automatic and absolute.<sup>1</sup> If anything, this

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<sup>1</sup> Pope's careful fashioning of a poetic mainstream to be inherited from Dryden, together with his specification of the terms upon which he sought to be acknowledged Dryden's successor, were traced in the first section of the last chapter. There I observed that such acknowledgement was broadly forthcoming with the appearance of Pope's translation of *The Iliad*: thus in his "Winter" (1726), for instance, James Thomson portrays Pope as the perpetual occupant of "the Muses' hill" (l. 550), his place there reserved for him by the sweetness of his Homer (l. 553) and the "more endearing song" (l. 554) of his own life; George Lyttelton's "An Epistle to Mr. Pope, From a Young Gentleman at Rome" (1730) terms him an "Immortal Bard" (l. 1) born "our drooping Genius to restore, / When ADDISON and CONGREVE are no more," "the darken'd Age's last remaining Light!" (ll. 3-4, 6), and, like Thomson's apostrophe, would style Pope the English heir of the great classical poets; and though the anonymous author of "An Epistle to the Little Satyrst of Twickenham" (1733), argues that Pope has wasted his "Gift of Numbers" in the writing of satire, he acknowledges nonetheless that that gift "still encreas'd



identification intensified in the decades following his death, perhaps because his death forced Pope's biographers, critics, and readers generally to set forth the distinctive features of his character and career, the defining merits and deficiencies of his work, and his place in the popular imagination in order to assign him a "final" resting place in the field of English literary history.

Certainly his admirers were not backward in proclaiming him the latest of England's poetic greats, a ranking they usually justified by citing the one criterion that would have pleased Pope best, his "perfection" of English versification. "An Elegy on Mr. Pope," for example, written by an anonymous "friend" and appearing only days after Pope's death on May 30, 1744, terms him "the brightest ornament of Albion" (l. 9), "Of the poetick World th' illustrious Sun" (l. 10), "the first distinguish'd Genius" (l. 15):

Not GEORGE returning to his native sky,  
From these sad Scenes shall with more Glory fly,  
Than POPE who in his loftier Sphere did sit  
Sov'reign of POETRY, and Prince of WIT,  
Whose Fame wide Earth's remotest Corners heard,  
And own'd and lov'd th' inimitable Bard (ll. 25-30).

The elegist goes on to say that "soon as [Pope's] Lyre was tun'd and touch'd the Ear" Dryden's followers knew their man to have been bested, "For not by Dryden's voice, not Waller's tongue, / Such Harmony of melting Sounds was sung" (ll. 57, 59-60); and Dryden is only the first of his conquests: Prior, Garth, Swift, and Congreve, "at his stronger Blaze, / Shrunk in their Spheres, and shone with fainter Rays" (ll. 63-64). Such epithets and pronouncements may strike us as hyperbolic, overwrought, yet even Dr. Johnson, arguably the most sober critic of the age, credited Pope with having discovered in

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with Age and as you grew, / 'Till to Perfection you at last arriv'd, / Which none have e'er excelled that ever liv'd" (273). In section three of the last chapter I noted that by the time of his death Pope had become for his contemporaries the living muse of English satire; indeed, so generally pervasive was Pope's example in this mode that even his literary foes often felt themselves obliged to attempt (though in the event with mixed success) to pay him back in his own coin, as in Lady Mary's *Verses Address'd to the Imitator of the First Satire of the Second Book of Horace* (1733) and Lord Hervey's *The Difference Between Verbal and Practical Virtue* (1742).

the works of Dryden “the most perfect fabric of English verse” (ii, 229) and bringing this fabric to its nearest possible perfection: “New sentiments and new images others may produce; but to attempt any further improvement of versification will be dangerous. Art and diligence have now done their best, and what shall be added will be the effort of tedious toil and needless curiosity” (ii, 230). Even critics essentially hostile to him had to confess that Pope had taught England to tune its poetic ear according to the sounds and rhythms of his verse, that Pope *was* poetry in the public mind. Joseph Warton, for instance, who could not bring himself to admit Pope to the ranks of Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton—the “more genuine” poets, whose works excited sublimity and pathos—yet conceded that Pope had introduced “that harmony in English verse, which is now<sup>2</sup> become indispensably necessary; and which has so forcibly and universally influenced the publick ear, as to have rendered every moderate rhymers melodious” (386). The same year the second volume of Warton’s *Essay* appeared (1782), one more openly antipathetic toward Pope, William Cowper, wrote to his friend the Reverend William Unwin that Pope’s renowned correctness was but “the unwearied application of a plodding Flemish painter, who draws a shrimp with the most minute exactness. . . . Never, I believe, were such talents and such drudgery united” (474-475). But for Cowper the real problem with Pope was the pernicious ubiquity of his example. True enough, he concedes in *Table Talk* (1782), that Pope’s harmony, his “well disciplined, complete, compact” (l. 647) verse “Levied a tax of wonder and applause, / E’en on the fools that trampled on [Virtue and Morality’s] laws” (ll. 650-651). But the very polish of his lines tended to conflate pains with genius in the popular mind, reducing poetry in theory and practice to “a mere mechanic art,” the more so since the exactness of his harmonies merely ensured that “every warbler ha[d] his tune by heart” (ll. 654-655).

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<sup>2</sup> That is, 1756; the quotation is from the first volume of Warton’s *An Essay on the Writings and Genius of Pope*.

Far from calling Pope's stature in the cultural imagination into question, such unflattering appraisals of his career tend rather to confirm it. Indeed, there may be no surer evidence of Pope's identification with the mainstream of English verse than that in the decades after his death Pope was the main target of the reaction against the supposed didacticism, prosaism, imitation, pedantry, and stylistic artificiality that critics and poets had begun to cite as evidence of contemporary poetic decadence and as justification for their several programmes of poetic reform. Warton, for instance, termed Pope "the great Poet of Reason, the *First of Ethical* authors in verse" (ii, 521) and cast his works as the perfect foil for his own ideas about the characteristics of a "genuine" poetry produced by "a creative and glowing IMAGINATION" (i, 380), among them the power to elicit "strong emotions" (pathos and rapture) in the reader (ii, 520), and its inability to be reduced to prose. "If there be really in [a verse composition] a true poetical spirit," Warton argues, "all your inversions and transpositions will not disguise and extinguish it; but it will retain its lustre, like a diamond, unset, and thrown back into the rubbish of the mine" (i, 381). Pope, Warton admits, is "our last great poet," an "English classic" (i, 383); and yet, he says, the nation's esteem for his elegance and wit, for his insight into human nature, for the moral force of his satire, has left it in need of a reminder that for all its brilliance, his poetry (much of it) is not true poetry at all, but prose tricked up into verse (i, 381). As if he would reawaken a poetic sensibility too long bewitched by the beauty of Pope's versification, Warton declares with some impatience that "a clear head, and acute understanding are not sufficient, alone, to make a POET; . . . the most solid observations on human life, expressed with the utmost elegance and brevity, are MORALITY, and not POETRY" (i, 380). As if he would startle readers into seeing a truth self-evident to all but the enchanted, he insists warmly that poetry, to be genuine, must partake of the sublime and the pathetic: "What," he demands, "is there very sublime or very Pathetic in Pope?" (i, 381).

Pope is likewise the obvious, if for the most part unnamed, target of Edward Young's *Conjectures on Original Composition* (1759). He is for Young the archetypical

poetic imitator who “but nobly builds on another’s foundation” (330B), emblematic of those whose poetry is too greatly infused with a learning that is “fond, and proud, of what has cost it much pains; it is a great lover of rules, and boaster of famed examples” (332B). Yet if imitation and pedantry prevent Pope’s own poetry from being of the highest order—that is, *original*: “ris[ing] spontaneously from the vital root of genius; it grows, it is not made” (330B)—a career spent, as Pope’s purportedly was, in keeping before the public eye the “illustrious examples” of past masters has had the more generally deleterious effect of diffusing the spirit of imitation throughout the realm of letters, instilling in the nation’s poets especially an enervating diffidence, stifling original observation, thought, and expression. Worse, this imitative impulse has prevented the innovation necessary for the advancement of letters, “hence, while arts mechanic are in perpetual progress, and increase, the liberal are in retrogradation and decay”; has extinguished the uniqueness innate in each of us, “blots out nature’s mark of separation, cancels her kind intention, destroys all mental individuality”; and therefore “with great incongruity it [has made] us poor, and proud: makes us think little, and write much” (334). That Pope yet stands high in public estimation merely reveals how thoroughly the example of the man who could reduce Homer’s “lofty and harmonious” numbers into the “childish shackles, and tinkling sounds” of heroic couplets and convince the nation that to copy Homer is to copy Nature itself has debased right thinking about poetry. If the truth be told, Pope is one of those “grandees . . . who owe more of their elevation to the littleness of others’ minds, than to the greatness of their own” (336B)—and is the more culpable because he himself is largely responsible for that littleness. Not only has he unleashed “that gothic demon”—rhyme—“which modern poetry tasting, became mortal” (336B), he has grossly imposed upon the age, letting himself pass for a “famed example” of the present day, basking in the esteem, obedience, and deferential imitation normally accruing only to the greatest of Ancients. Bad in itself, the offense is compounded by Pope’s scorn for Milton’s genius, by his refusal to follow up on the glories of *Paradise Lost*—his choice, in effect, to remain a second rate example to the

nation. “Great things he [Pope, “our favorite”] has done,” Young sighs, “but he might have done greater” (336B).

We might continue patterning ourselves after one whose heel went “undipped in Helicon” (337A), as Achilles’ in Styx; or we might—every one of us, Young insists—choose rather to assert our own original geniuses. But we must first come to know ourselves truly: “Dive deep into thy bosom; learn the depth, extent, bias, and full forte of thy mind,” he enjoins us, “contract full intimacy with the stranger within thee; excite and cherish every spark of intellectual light and heat, however smothered under former negligence, or scattered through the dull, dark mass of common thoughts; and collecting them into a body, let thy genius rise . . . as the sun from chaos”; and we must learn to reverence ourselves: “[L]et not great examples, or authorities, browbeat thy reason into too great a diffidence of thyself: thyself so reverence, as to prefer the native growth of thy own mind to the richest import from abroad” (336A). Only then will we be able to call our productions truly our own; only then will we deserve the title of “author.”

These imperatives, self-knowledge and self-reverence, together with Young’s admonition to contemporary writers to find and drink for themselves from “the true Helicon, that is, the breast of nature” (331B), are almost identical to those William Wordsworth would wield in his attempts to displace Pope from his position of cultural authority and remake English poetry in his own image. That literary history has seen Wordsworth as Pope’s most notable theoretical antagonist is no doubt bound up with the fact that Wordsworth’s generation is the very last for whom Pope’s legacy represents the mainstream of poetic sensibility<sup>3</sup>—the last, because it was Wordsworth who finally

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<sup>3</sup> Coleridge (1772-1834), for instance, writes in Chapter 1 of *Biographia Literaria* (1817) that “Among those with whom I conversed [in youth about poetry], there were, of course, very many who had formed their taste, and their notions of poetry, from the writings of Mr. Pope and his followers: or to speak more generally, in that school of French poetry, condensed and invigorated by English understanding, which had predominated from the last century” (18). For Byron (1788-1824), by contrast, *Wordsworth* represented the poetic norm to be served—or subverted: Reeves notes that Byron, attributing “the present deplorable state of English poetry . . . to that absurd and systematic depreciation of Pope, in which, for the last few years, there has been a kind of epidemical concurrence” (qtd. in Reeves, 16), was only too

succeeded in diverting that mainstream into a new channel, leaving Pope's poetic sensibility to eddy everlastingly in the backwaters of literary history. For though after Wordsworth Pope is neither forgotten nor neglected, after Wordsworth it is simply no longer possible to take him as the defining emblem of English poetry. William Lisle Bowles might in his 1806 edition of Pope's *Works* sketch an unflattering biographical portrait of the poet, painting him as one made despotically temperamental, "impatient of contradiction, scarcely brook[ing] a dissenting voice" by overindulgence in childhood and the unremitting "sunshine of flattery" in his maturity (qtd. in Reeves, 14); Byron, in response to Bowles and in despite of "those miserable mountebanks of the day, the poets," might champion Pope as "the most faultless of poets, and almost of men."<sup>4</sup> Hazlitt might describe him (and Dryden) as "the great masters of the artificial style of poetry in our language," with "a clear and independent claim upon our gratitude, as having produced a kind and degree of excellence which existed equally nowhere else"<sup>5</sup>, whereas Macaulay, in his essay, "The Life and Writings of Addison" (1843), might viciously describe Pope as the master rhymester in an age in which "[one] who had any skill in it passed for a great poet, just as in the dark ages a person who could write his name passed for a great clerk" (334),<sup>6</sup> and De Quincey, in "The Literature of Knowledge and the Literature of Power" (1848), might

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glad to turn Coleridge's cutting assessment of Pope—"next to the man who formed and elevated the taste of the public, he that corrupted it, is commonly the greatest genius" (*Biographia Literaria*, I, 40n)—against Wordsworth himself in, for instance, *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*. Byron, of course, would himself come to be the poetic hero and touchstone for the generation (Tennyson's) succeeding his own.

<sup>4</sup> Letter written from Ravenna to John Murray, September 4, 1820 (266).

<sup>5</sup> *Lectures on the English Poets* (1818-19): Lecture IV, "On Dryden and Pope" (68).

<sup>6</sup> Citing the "mechanical" nature of the heroic couplet, Macaulay observes with a scorn unsurpassed in these later assessments of Pope's art and life that "From the time when his *Pastorals* appeared, heroic versification became a matter of rule and compass; and, before long, all artists were on a level. . . . Hundreds of dunces who never blundered upon one happy thought or expression were able to write reams of couplets which, as far as euphony was concerned, could not be distinguished from those of Pope himself." Thankfully, says Macaulay, "we are now as little disposed to admire a man for being able to write [heroic couplets], as for being able to write his name" (333-334).

argue that the example of Pope's polished obscurity is ultimately responsible for a century's worth of bad poetry: "[R]are is the man amongst classical writers in any language who has disfigured his meaning more remarkably than Pope by imperfect expression" (qtd. in Reeves, 25). But whether their pronouncements upon Pope are ultimately favorable or damning, it is clear that for each of these writers—even for Byron—Pope has become merely representative of a poetic mode once fashionable but now no more than a curiosity, an artifact from a distant age to be preserved, studied, and anatomized, not for the purpose either of perpetuating or expunging it, but of assessing, in Hazlitt's phrase, "an *entirely distinct* turn of mind" (68; *emphasis added*).

However, at the time the young Wordsworth was producing translations and imitations of classical authors and turning out descriptive sketches of the Loire Valley in competent heroic couplets, that turn of mind had yet to become entirely distinct. Its poetic values and their primary human emblem were in fact sufficiently current to serve Wordsworth in his *Preface* to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* (1800) and the later *Essay Supplementary to the Preface* (1815) as ready, widely recognized aesthetic standards against which he could set his own proposals for the reformation of English poetry. Repeatedly in these theoretical pieces, Wordsworth acknowledges (or complains) that the "[new] class of Poetry . . . well adapted to interest mankind permanently" (320B) his friends have credited him with devising, faces its major opposition from long-standing expectations about the sound, subjects, and aims of poetry. "It is supposed," he says in the *Preface*, "that by the act of writing in verse an Author makes a formal engagement that he will gratify certain known habits of association; that he not only thus apprises the Reader that certain classes of ideas and expressions will be found in his book, but that others will be carefully excluded" (320). Metrical language is one of the elements contributing to those "blind associations of pleasure which has been previously received from works of rhyme and metre" (329A); allegory or the "personification of abstract ideas" is another, used so extensively as to have become a mere "mechanical device of style, or as a family language

which Writers in metre seem to lay claim to by prescription” (323A). But it is another branch of this “family language” of poets, “the grandiose and inane phraseology of many modern writers” (321A), their “arbitrary and capricious habits of expression” (321B)—that is, poetic diction—that has had the most sinister consequences for poetry and poetic sensibilities. For though, Wordsworth explains in the “Appendix” to the 1802 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, such constructions have their origin in the first age of poetry, when poets “wrote naturally, and as men” (331A), later writers, “desirous of producing the same effect without being animated by the same passion, set themselves to a mechanical adoption of these figures of speech, and made use of them, sometimes with propriety, but much more frequently applied them to feelings and thoughts with which they had no natural connection whatsoever”; worse, they “introduced phrases composed apparently in the spirit of the original figurative language of passion, yet altogether of their own invention, and characterized by various degrees of wanton deviation of good sense and Nature” (331B). It is this “adulterated phraseology” (331B), couched in verse, that has come to symbolize poetry in the popular mind, that has “[thrust] out of sight the plain humanities of Nature by a motley masquerade of tricks, quaintnesses, hieroglyphics, and enigmas” (332A), that has beguiled poets from a faithful observation of the natural and human worlds into the toils of a decadent artifice “in order to furnish food for fickle tastes, and fickle appetites of their own creation” (*Preface*, 321B).

Given the inability of these “perverted” appetites to distinguish between “the true and the false” in the language of poetry (“Appendix,” 331B), it is unlikely, Wordsworth argues preemptively in the *Essay Supplementary*, that readers his age and older will “be moved by the unostentatious beauties of a pure style” (336B)—that is, by the qualities he believes specific to *his* poetry: “Is it not, then, inevitable that an eye, accustomed to the glaring hues of diction by which Readers are caught and excited, will for the most part be rather repelled than attracted by an original Work, the colouring of which is disposed according to a pure and refined scheme of harmony?” (336B-337A). Not that his would be



the first worthy poetry to lose out to vulgarities in verse. English literary history would have been very different, for instance, if readers had had the sense to prefer Thomson over Pope. For all his faults, Thomson at least had the temerity to anticipate Wordsworth by examining the natural world about him and recording his responses to it. But though Thomson's poetry pleased many, it remained an anomaly because it could not overturn the narrow, prejudicial expectations for poetry inculcated by those (Wordsworth quotes Thomson's biographer, Patrick Murdoch) "who had not been used to feel, or to look for anything in poetry, beyond a *point* of satirical or epigrammatic wit, a smart *antithesis* richly trimmed with rhyme, or the softness of an *elegiac* complaint" (341A). Wordsworth comments (no doubt with wrinkled lip), "Wonder is the natural product of Ignorance; and as the soil was *in such good condition* at the time of the publication of the 'Seasons,' the crop was doubtless abundant" (342A). As it is in the present day, apparently, for of the famous moonlight scene in Pope's translation of *The Iliad* (VIII, ll. 555ff) Wordsworth remarks incredulously that "there is not a passage of descriptive poetry, which at this day finds so many and such ardent admirers" (341B)—admirers who have been sufficiently dazzled by artifice not to notice that "though he had Homer to guide him" Pope's lines "are throughout false and contradictory": "A blind man, in the habit of attending accurately to descriptions casually dropped from the lips of those around him, might easily depict [the scene] with more truth" (341B).

Pope had been dead for nearly three-quarters of a century now, but the extreme warmth of these words leads one to suspect that for Wordsworth he is as menacingly alive as ever he had been for Dennis, Addison, Theobald, and Cibber. To be sure, Wordsworth in these theoretical pieces does not fault Pope alone; Dryden, Johnson, Gray, and Cowper come in for their share of criticism. But it is clear that for Wordsworth, even at this late date, Pope is the arch-emblem of the poetical ethos he feels compelled to challenge and overturn. And thus, as depicted in Wordsworth's survey and assessment of the preceding 200 years of British letters in the *Essay Supplementary*, Pope is Britain's own cultural

Mephistopheles, a self-conjured spectre whose arts of self-promotion “procure[d] himself a more general and higher reputation than perhaps any English poet ever attained during his life-time,” a guileful phantasm who “bewitched the nation by his melody, and dazzled it by his polished style, and was himself blinded by his own success,” inducing both it and himself to grasp for the gaudy shade of poetic ornament (metre, rhyme, and “the vague, the glossy, and unfeeling language of [his] day”) and cast away the Humanity and Nature that are poetry’s true matter (341A; 343A). The result has been a self-perpetuating corruption of poetic sensibility, a tolerance and even a yearning for “metrical writers utterly worthless and useless, except for occasions like the present, when their productions are referred to as evidence what a small quantity of brain is necessary to procure a stock of admiration, provided the aspirant will accommodate himself to the likings and fashions of his day” (344B)—as well as a corruption of human sensibility that Wordsworth’s own example as poet and earnest soul is only just now beginning to redress:

The love, the admiration, the indifference, the slight, the aversion, and even the contempt, with which these [his own] Poems have been received, knowing, as I do, the source within my own mind, from which they have proceeded, and the labour and pains, which, when labour and pains appeared needful, have been bestowed upon them, must all, I think, be received as pledges and tokens, bearing the same general impression, though widely different in value;—they are all proof that for the present time I have not laboured in vain; and afford assurances, more or less authentic, that the products of my industry will endure (345A).

## 2. Pope and the Romantics

The present moment often plays Prospero to the Caliban of the past. The progressive fallacy obtains no less stubbornly in letters than in philosophy or technology. Dryden, we recall, ascribed the purported advancement of literary theory and practice from Shakespeare and Jonson’s day to his own to a general advancement in human consciousness; likewise, if Pope presumed to correct English versification, he could do so

only because he could first presume the judgement and taste of his own age to be more refined, more sophisticated than Dryden's. Now we see it is Wordsworth's turn to look back—and down—upon Pope and the age of “metrical writers utterly worthless and useless,” to pronounce its poetic sensibility an aberration imposed upon a gullible nation,<sup>7</sup> a grotesquerie thankfully no more now than a cautionary tale useful for throwing into relief the more enlightened sensibility that has since emerged, the essential humanity of which ensures that “the products of [its] industry will endure.” But though the Present would teach the Past to speak in its tongue and in the sentences it finds most useful and pleasing, it thereby indentures itself to the discipline of its pupil, and in time finds its own voice rich in and modulated by the accents of the Past. Or, putting metaphor aside, though the Present is continually recasting the Past in terms that further its sense of itself, its self-definition, the Past seldom proves as tractable as we would have it, and in fact tends to give our pretensions to progress and originality the lie the more we would condemn it or constrain it toward our ends. Indeed, for all the pride we might take in our uniqueness, in our independence from the past, we often find *ourselves* playing the Caliban and cursing our masters in the very language they took such pains to teach us.

And so it proves with the case before us. For all the apparent antipathy between the credos of “Augustan” and “Romantic” poetry, and for all of Wordsworth's insistence on there being a definite, readily identifiable “then” and “now” in the condition and character of English poetry, the fact of the matter is that both the peculiarly figurative mode of Pope's poetry and the peculiar example of Pope's highly public career would provide Wordsworth (and the Romantics generally) with the terms of his reaction against both, would greatly influence Wordsworth's own poetic theory and practice, and thus have lasting consequences for the course poetry would take in the decades and centuries after his death. We

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<sup>7</sup> In *Sleep and Death* (1817), Keats would treat the period as a poetic dark age, as “a schism / Nurtured by foppery and barbarism” (ll. 181-182).

must keep Sutherland's admonition in mind, and acknowledge the seeming recklessness of attributing to a single poet—let alone to a single poetic figure, such as an epitaphic vision—the power to effect a fundamental change in the nature of mainstream poetry and thereby a lasting shift in its relation to the larger society. Nonetheless, we should observe that the figurative extravagance of Pope's epitaphic vision is at the very least emblematic of the by-now uneasy yoking of literal and figurative elements within public poetry, and may well have accelerated the disruption of their union in the decades following the poet's death. Warton, for one, would argue in effect that the topical or local had no place in genuine poetry; Young and (especially) Wordsworth, by contrast, would advocate the stripping away of the figurative machinery they claimed had come to obscure the poet and public's view of the literal world around them. Warton champions a transcendent poetic genius over Pope's prosaic preoccupation with "observations on familiar life, and the manners of the age"<sup>8</sup>; Wordsworth, an imaginative sensitivity to the pathos of everyday life at the expense of his technical facility. But both make their final appeal to the personal character and public prestige of the poet, and thus owe much to the cult of the poetic personality Pope had established during his career: his boldly stepping before the public eye; his highly public fashioning of first one, then another poetic persona; his demanding that his society accede to his æsthetic and cultural authority, to his defining vision of its historical present.

Though the segregation of the literal from the figurative would at last, as we shall see, call into question the efficacy and even the desirability of public poetry itself, it is this turning inward, this assumption of absolute autonomy from the outside world Pope's example encouraged in later poets that all but ensured the ultimate withdrawal of poetry from the public sphere, and with it, poetry's influence upon the shaping of public memory.

Turning first to the reaction against the highly figurative materials or trappings of Pope's poetry, we might recall that in constructing his epitaphic vision, Pope inclined so

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<sup>8</sup> Warton. *An Essay on the Writings and Genius of Pope* (I, 380).

far toward the figurative end of the spectrum that the personages, events, and circumstances of the everyday world became wholly subordinated to a highly idiosyncratic satiric apparatus that had very little to do with Britain as it existed outside the poet's imagination. Such discrepancies did not go unremarked. For instance, of the *Epilogues to the Satires*—a major component, as we have seen, in the fashioning of Pope's apocalyptic vision—Warton declares the invective to be “carried to excess”:

Our country is represented as totally ruined, and overwhelmed with dissipation, depravity and corruption. Yet this very country, so emasculated and debased by every species of folly and wickedness, in about twenty years afterwards, carried its triumphs over all its enemies, through all quarters of the world, and astonished the most distant nations with a display of uncommon efforts, abilities, and virtues. So vain are the prognostications of poets, as well as politicians. It is to be lamented, that no genius could be found to write an *One Thousand Seven Hundred and Sixty-One*, as a counterpoint to these two satires (*Essay II*, 516).

But it seems that for Warton, the merging of the literal and figurative would have been problematic in any case. On the one hand, he faults Pope for imposing a figurative apparatus upon everyday life, as when he declares that the “mixture of British and Grecian ideas may be deemed a blemish in the PASTORALS of Pope”—the Grecian trappings suiting ill with the realities of the English landscape (I, 384). On the other hand, Warton is reluctant to allow the raising of everyday life above its literal pitch: there is little in the present day, for instance, that seems worthy of, say, epic treatment. If it is true, Warton argues, “that for a poet to write happily and well, he must have seen and felt what he describes, and must draw from living models alone; and if modern times, from their luxury or refinement, afford not manners that will bear to be described; it will then follow, that those species of poetry bid fairest to succeed at present, which, treat of things, not men; which deliver doctrines, not display events” (II, 509). The poet, such as Pope, who would portray his age is thus debarred from casting it in heroic terms and must content himself with composing “didactic and descriptive poetry” (II, 509) instead—as Pope does in *An Essay on Man* and his *Moral Epistles*. Such poetry is necessary, Warton admits, because it

is an elegant component of moral tuition. He observes of the *Epistle to Bathurst*, for example, that its “use” and “force”—its instructive power—comes from its “raising, *clear, complete, and circumstantial* images, and in turning *readers* into *spectators*” (II, 513). But we must not let the jingle of verse mislead us into believing that something as mundane as human nature, society, and manners is the stuff of “genuine” poetry, the sublimity of which makes it *truly* philosophical, its pathos, *truly* heroic. And so the essentially prosaic nature of the subjects, illustrations, and aims of *An Essay on Man*, a poem in which Pope has “relied on the poetry of his stile, for the purpose of interesting his readers,” keeps its author from laying claim to an imagination and genius of the first rank (II, 509-510). At most, the trivialities of the present age<sup>9</sup> will permit only the mock-epic—*The Rape of the Lock*, for instance, which Warton praises as “the BEST SATIRE extant,” for “it contains the truest and liveliest picture of modern life;. . . the subject is of a more elegant nature, as well as more artfully conducted, than that of any other heroi-comic poem.” “It is in this composition,” he continues, “[that] POPE principally appears a POET; in which he has displayed more imagination than in all his other works taken together” (I, 399). Here the combination of attention to the literal details of “modern life” and the figurative machinery of the epic is successful because Pope has raised contemporary persons and manners in order to ridicule them, to diminish their significance, not to exalt them; usually, however, Warton argues, “[t]he meaner the subject is of a preceptive poem, the more striking appears the art of the poet” (II, 510), making (we might add) the union of figurative and literal rather more problematic, more bathetic than complementary. Best, then, Warton implies, to leave prose what is essentially so, and to reserve the vestments of poetry for truly poetic works—such as Spenser’s *Fairie Queene*, or Shakespeare’s tragedies, or Milton’s *Paradise Lost*—that

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<sup>9</sup> If Warton views his age as less than epochal, it is likely because one’s close familiarity with the actors of one’s own time, their circumstances, and their often less-than-heroic ambitions and deeds has the effect of demystifying them, humanizing them to a degree impossible with the characters and personages of antiquity.

derive their inspiration from subjects and themes far removed from everyday experience and the average human condition.

The more familiar response, however, to the highly figurative trappings of Pope's mode of poetry—its specialized diction and syntax; its often elevated, even epic, tone; its frequent recourse to expansive historical and literary allusion and to the personification of abstract ideas; the rhetorical cast, the “points of satirical or epigrammatic wit,” the “smart antitheses” of its sharply chiselled couplets—has been Wordsworth's call for the rejection of such devices in favor of the “fitting to metrical arrangement a selection of real language of men in a state of vivid sensation” (*Preface* of 1800, 320A). In this view he is, as I have hinted, anticipated at least obliquely by Edward Young, who in *Conjectures on Original Composition* argues for a similar renunciation of received thoughts and forms and a first-hand re-examination of the original truths of Nature (having himself already employed in his 1742-45 *Night Thoughts* a “unique” approximation of blank verse and a series of perambulatory cogitations reminiscent of Thomson's *Seasons* to recast many of the precepts of *An Essay on Man*). But if we credit Wordsworth with leading the reaction against Augustan figurativism (much as we might credit Dryden with effecting the transition from the baroque “Metaphysical” to the comparatively spare public mode of the Restoration), it is in part because in theory and practice he is far more sophisticated and thoroughgoing than Young. In fact, as it is set forth in the *Preface* of 1800—

The principal object, then, proposed in these Poems was *to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them, throughout, as far as was possible in a selection of language really used by men, and, at the same time, to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect; and, further, and above all, to make these incidents and situations interesting by tracing in them, truly though not ostentatiously, the primary laws of our nature: chiefly, as far as regards the manner in which we associate ideas in a state of excitement* (321A; emphasis added)—

the programme of what one might call the “new literalism” of Wordsworthian Romanticism is sufficiently complex that we should examine separately each of its three distinct components (italicized in the above passage): subject, language, and affect.

It is difficult to separate Wordsworth’s predisposition toward “literal” subjects from the “literal” language in which he proposes to treat them, for, as he explains in the *Preface*, it is the poet’s steady gaze upon the former—the “incidents and situations of common life”—that makes possible his use of the latter, that is, such language as is “really used by men.” However, the close conjunction of the two actually emphasizes, first, that when Wordsworth resolves to describe the circumstances, occupations, and episodes of “humble and rustic” lives (321A), and in language that is itself drawn from those lives, he signals his intent to eschew the conventions of pastoral poetry and to draw his scenes, not from literature, but directly from life. That is, from conditions and persons as they actually—or literally—exist. But the conjunction also points up a second, more oblique aspect of Wordsworth’s literalism in his choice of subject. Note that Wordsworth takes “common life” to denote life as it lived in the countryside, by those whose station obliges them to labor in close proximity to “the beautiful and permanent forms of Nature” and thus puts them in “hourly communica[tion] with the best objects from which the best part of language is originally derived” (321B); in such an environment, “the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language” (321A-B). In other words, it is among the modest, normally obscure lives of shepherds, farmers, mendicants, rural lovers, the feeble-minded, and those whose marginal employments raise them only occasionally to the level of bare subsistence that one may find the closest approximation of a one-to-one correspondence between perception, feeling, and expression. And so, if rustic folk, “from their rank in society and the sameness and narrow circle of their intercourse, [and from] being less under the influence of social vanity” (321B), lack the refinements, material comforts, formal learning, and experience of the wider world (all the things, in short, that enable Wordsworth to exercise the



counterintuitive sophistry needed to envy those less fortunate than himself), their want has left them more essentially, more nobly human. We might argue that it is wholly arbitrary to regard lives spent toiling or trekking in all weathers as more natural, more wholesome than those passed in other settings and pursuits, and highly patronizing to regard such lives as touchstones for the “common,” that is, as more fully representative of “the primary laws of our nature,” of human existence as it ought by design to unfold. But Wordsworth’s notion derives from a primitivist impulse still thriving in our own time: that the life passed in close, sensual contact with the elements is necessarily more “real” because it is taken up satisfying the most basic appetites and needs; because the struggle for subsistence leaves little time for human desires to grow complicated or corrupt; because the labors of the body, unlike those of the mind, are readily observable, their practicality and benefit readily measurable; because the life of labor is passed among the unambiguous solidities of *things* rather than the shapeshifting ether of *ideas*, *allusions*, and *conceits*. Seemingly, it offers few occasions and has even fewer uses for the superimposition of conventional poetic figures, and thus (one infers from this portion of the *Preface*) may be thought of as more essentially *literal* than urban or courtly life, which, being more under “the influence of social vanity,” is necessarily given over to affected complexities in its leisures, luxuries, learning, and æsthetic tastes, is necessarily more artificial—more inherently *figurative*. Wordsworth’s resolve, therefore, to “keep the Reader in the company of flesh and blood” (323A), allows, justifies, and even dictates a rejection not only of the figurative trappings of Augustan poetry, but of its typical materials: the places, persons, episodes, and themes upon which these trappings had habitually been fixed.

A necessary consequence of this turning away from Augustan poetry’s matter and manner is the levelling of poetic subjects, making existing generic hierarchies suddenly obsolete—as they must be when the intense family feeling of poor orphans (“We Are Seven”), the experiences and homilies of a leech-gatherer (“Resolution and Independence”), or the life and sad end of a promising son of the countryside (“Michael”)

are considered as worthy (if not more so) of the poet's attention as the affairs and follies of the Court and aristocracy, or the bewildering, corrupting political, social, and economic life of the metropolis. And this levelling is reinforced by Wordsworth's insistence upon a more literal poetic language—more "literal," because as with his choice of "low" subjects, it is designedly *unpoetic*, in the sense that it eschews the conventional, highly figurative diction of formal verse of the preceding century—the "personifications of abstract ideas," the "mechanical device[s] of style" that served as "a family language which Writers in metre seem to lay claim to by prescription" (323A)—and purports to be the "language really used by men." "Such a language," Wordsworth argues, "arising out of repeated experience and regular feelings, is a more permanent, and a far more philosophical language, than that which is frequently substituted for it by Poets, who think that they are conferring honour upon themselves and their art, in proportion as they separate themselves from the sympathies of men, and indulge in arbitrary and capricious habits of expression" (321B). These "arbitrary and capricious habits of expression" would seem not only to estrange poetry from "the sympathies of men" who live "common" lives, but to perpetuate the distinctions and gradations of genre, thereby preserving the notions of "high" and "low" poetry. By bringing the language of poetry closer to that of everyday experience and "regular feelings," Wordsworth would not only put the reader into closer contact with the world of the poem, but erode one basis of generic classification. Can the designations of epic, pastoral, and lyric, for instance, have much meaning if the poet, rejecting the received topics of poetry rejects likewise the received "family language" of poets and keeps his eye steadily upon the object before him (or the mind's eye), writing in the language it inspires? It is more than likely that the language of all poetry would in consequence be more concrete rather than abstract or allegorical, particular rather than general, local rather than allusive, and Anglo-Saxon rather than Latin in origin. It would, in short, be closer to the prosaism of everyday speech than to the constructions of conventional poetic diction. And so, whereas Warton had faulted Pope's poetry for being but versified prose, for Wordsworth,

the language of poetry need not and indeed should not differ greatly from that of good prose. Defending the prosaic in his own poetry, he asserts that “not only the language of a large portion of every good poem, even of the most elevated character, must necessarily, except with reference to the metre, in no respect differ from that of good prose, but likewise that of the most interesting parts of the best poems will be found to be strictly the language of prose when prose is well written” (323B).<sup>10</sup>

Greater literalism in subject and language would seem to have a democratizing effect upon poetry, obviating the need, for instance, for a classical education or for a great familiarity with formal modes and conventions, requiring only that readers be alive to the world about them as it is actually peopled, and as its people actually live and speak. Taking Wordsworth’s resolutions and prescriptions at face value, we might in fact expect by training the public eye upon heretofore obscure or neglected features of the social landscape and by making poetry itself more accessible they might thereby enlarge the forum for public poetry, reinvigorating a mode whose figurative excesses had cost it much of its cultural relevance and authority. Indeed, some such reform is not far from Wordsworth’s mind, for if, as we have seen him declare in this piece and in the *Essay Supplementary*, misguided expectations for poetry have hindered broad acceptance of his own compositions, such expectations must be appropriately recast, that a reformed poetry aiming at true genius might “wid[en] the sphere of human sensibility, for the delight, honour, and benefit, of human nature,” might introduce “a new element to the intellectual universe: or, if that be not allowed, [apply its] powers to objects on which they had not before been exercised, or

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<sup>10</sup> Byron savages Wordsworth for this assertion in *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* (1809). Calling Wordsworth a “dull disciple” of the Southey school, a “mild apostate from poetic rule,” (ll. 235-236), he further characterizes him as one

Who both by precept and example, shows  
That prose is verse, and verse is merely prose;  
Convincing all by demonstration plain,  
Poetic souls delight in prose insane;  
And Christmas stories tortured into rhyme  
Contain the essence of the true sublime (ll. 241-246).

[employ] them in such a manner as to produce effects hitherto unknown" (*Essay Supplementary*, 346A).

However, though the "new mission" of poetry might be to "extend [the] kingdom" of passion and sublimity "and to augment and spread [their] enjoyments" (*Essay Supplementary*, 346B), the employment of more literal subjects and language actually *diminishes* the viability of the public mode. On the one hand, Wordsworth's programme turns its back upon the topics of primary and immediate interest to the reader's own public attentions; on the other, it undermines the communality of poetry by doing away with the specialized diction and versification that Wordsworth scornfully terms a false "symbol or promise" of "the genuine language of poetry" ("Appendix" to the *Preface* of 1802, 331B): stylized such language may have become from Pope's day to Wordsworth's, but for all that nonetheless recognizable as the language of poetry, emblematic of a broadly intelligible poetic mode, capable of evoking complex patterns of perception, thought, and response. Put simply, Wordsworth's programme shifts the responsibility (one might say *prerogative*) for setting the criteria for writing and reading poetry from the public sphere to the individual poet, whose own poetic sensibility will be shaped—if we may judge from Wordsworth's statements here—by comparatively unique personal experiences and highly idiosyncratic emotional reactions to them. The public is effectively disenfranchised: it must take the poet's word that this or that subject is truly poetic, that in throwing over it "a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect" the poet has treated it poetically, and that the medium of such treatment—language as it is "really spoken by men," but purged of "the vulgarity and meanness of ordinary life" (*Preface*, 324A)—is somehow essentially poetic.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Defending his choice of employing meter in a mode of writing between whose language and that of good prose "there neither is, nor can be, any *essential* difference" (324A), Wordsworth insists upon the following distinction:

In the [case of Augustan poetry], the Reader is utterly at the mercy of the Poet, respecting what imagery or diction he may choose to connect with the passion; whereas, in [the case of poets such as himself, who constrain themselves to feel and speak as "other men" do],

But it is the third element of Wordsworthian literalism—literalism of affect—that poses the most serious challenge to the public mode of poetry. Wordsworth's notion of affective literalism follows logically from his prescriptions for greater literalism in subject and language. Wordsworth argues, for instance, that if "the Poet's subject be judiciously chosen, it will naturally, and upon fit occasion, lead him to passions the language of which, if selected truly and judiciously, must necessarily be variegated, and alive with metaphors and figures" (324A-B). The poet's close attention to the object before the physical or mental eye allows that object to excite in him feelings that of themselves prompt the imagination toward the language necessary to express them. At first glance, this seems strongly reminiscent of Longinus' receipt for achieving the sublime, and Wordsworth's subsequent admonishment that "it will be the wish of the Poet to bring his feelings near to those of the persons whose feelings he describes, nay, for short spaces of time, perhaps, to let himself slip into an entire delusion, and even confound and identify his own feelings with theirs" (325A) sounds very much like Longinus when he asserts that the poet must first seem to feel what the audience is asked to feel, or when he speaks of the truly sublime image as a passage "in which, carried away by your feelings, you imagine you are actually seeing the subject of your description, and enable your audience as well to see it" (121). However, if Wordsworth's resolve to use the emotional power of his poetry to trace "the primary laws of our nature: chiefly, as far as regards the manner in which we associate ideas in a state of excitement" is indeed a promise to evoke a more "literal" affect than his classical and neo-classical counterparts, its greater "psychological realism" (as what we might call it today) lies partly in the fact that the emotions he purports to describe are not

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the metre obeys certain laws, to which the Poet and Reader both willingly submit because they are certain, and because no interference is made by them with the passion, but such as the concurring testimony of the ages has shown to heighten and improve the pleasure which co-exists with it" (*Preface*, 327A-B).

As I see it, however, the very grounds that lead Wordsworth to object to Augustan poetic diction as being "arbitrary, and subject to infinite caprices, upon which no calculation whatever can be made" (327A-B) may be turned against him, point for point.

stylized according to the demands of particular generic conventions, but drawn from the life.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, the sublime Wordsworth would achieve is not founded upon an appeal to an elevated subject and style, but upon what his declared object of discovering “the manner in which we associate ideas in a state of excitement” suggests is a neurologically correct understanding of the relation of physical, intellectual, and emotional sensation, as well as (I would say, *especially*) the make up of and connections among the complexes of human affect: how our feelings are allied, how they are aroused, and how they trigger one another once aroused.

This might bring Longinus to mind yet again, but in fact Wordsworth has inverted the ends and thus the principles and methods of classical affective mimeticism. Note, for instance, that for Longinus the poet should aim at achieving a readily communicable sublimity of effect that unites poet and audience in a shared figurative realm, whereas for Wordsworth the passions roused by poetry are an end in themselves; they are not so much a vehicle to a shared world beyond the Self (or even, keeping in mind *The Prelude*, into the obscurer realms of the individual Self), as they are a means of making us more intensely, more completely *self-aware* at any given moment — “*to send the soul into herself,*” as Wordsworth explains in his *Essay Supplementary*, “to be admonished of her weakness, or to be made conscious of her power” (346B; emphasis added). Accordingly, whereas Longinus would have the poet execute images of sufficient credibility and vividness to transport both himself and his listener or reader beyond themselves and their immediate sensory surroundings, for Wordsworth the “appropriate business of poetry, . . . is to treat of things not as they *are*, but as they appear: not as they exist in themselves, but as they

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<sup>12</sup> Wordsworth asserts, for instance, that the affective properties of poetry are “undoubtedly” connected “with our moral sentiments and animal sensations, and with the causes which excite these; with the operations of the elements, and the appearances of the visible universe; with storm and sunshine, with the revolutions of the seasons, with cold and heat, with loss of friends and kindred, with injuries and resentments, gratitude and hope, with fear and sorrow. These, and the like, are the sensations and objects which the Poet describes, as they are the sensations of other men, and the objects which interest them” (*Preface*, 327A).

*seem to exist to the senses, and to the passions*" (*Essay Supplementary*, 336A), and therefore, given the highly subjective nature of perception and affective response, "*the feeling therein developed [in these poems] gives importance to the actions and situation, and not the action and situation to the feelings*" (*Preface*, 322A; emphasis added). Longinus would heighten our (figurative) perception of an object or situation in order to rouse in us the feelings appropriate for it; Wordsworth, however, reverses this, insisting instead that the appropriate passions must be roused in order to rightly apprehend the object or situation. And so whereas for Longinus metaphors and other figurative rhetorical constructions are to be employed to heighten the affective power of the image, for Wordsworth the feelings will all but articulate themselves with language "variegated, and alive with metaphors." If Longinus would transport us via the image, for Wordsworth the image is important mainly as a focal point for our overflow of feeling. To risk oversimplifying the matter: for Wordsworth, as the end of poetry is to excite feeling so as to heighten our sense of being at a given moment, the matter of poetry serves primarily as an outlet, as the target or context of that feeling.

Though Wordsworth's shift in affective emphasis necessitates his use of generally familiar subjects and language, it has nonetheless greatly reduced the degree to which poetry composed according to its principles might be public. For one thing, a heightened literalism of affect invites the reader to turn inward toward his or her own personal physical and (especially) emotional sensations, toward what he or she alone may feel. Such an inward turn effectively estranges the reader from the larger community, despite Wordsworth's insistence to the contrary in the *Essay Supplementary*,<sup>13</sup> and despite Shelley's half-articulate insistence in *A Defence of Poetry* (1821) that "The imagination is

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<sup>13</sup> There, Wordsworth argues that poetry must aim—through attainment of "the profound and exquisite in feeling, the lofty and universal in thought and imagination; or, in ordinary language, the pathetic and the sublime"—toward "divesting the reader of the pride that induces him to dwell upon those points wherein men differ from one another, to the exclusion of those in which all men are alike, or the same; and in making him ashamed of the vanity that renders him insensible [to the merits of] men who may stand below him in the scale of society" (345B).

enlarged by a sympathy with pains and passions so mighty that they distend their conception the capacity of that by which they are conceived; the good affections are strengthened by pity, indignation, terror, and sorrow; and an exalted calm is prolonged from the satiety of this high exercise of them into the tumult of familiar life" (176). For when the feelings excited by poetry are effectively an end in themselves and are given no definite object in "the tumult of familiar life," the desired enlargement of good will and sympathy either remains too unfocused to have any practical effect or else becomes excessively self-reflective. In reality, if there is any specific, particular fellow-feeling excited by the poetry of sensibility, it is solely between poet and reader. Indeed, as Wordsworth explains it in his *Essay Supplementary*, the feelings roused in the reader must in large part serve as complement to the poet's own emotional engagement in his subject: the pathetic and sublime, he says, cannot be achieved by appealing to the "passive" faculty of taste, "And why? Because without the exertion of a co-operating power in the mind of the Reader, there can be no adequate sympathy with either of these emotions: without this auxiliary impulse, elevated or profound passion cannot exist" (345B-346A). In sum, the reader's attentions, when they are not turned inward upon themselves, are to be directed toward the poet and thus away from the public sphere. Returning for a moment to Wordsworth's assertion that the poet must "bring his feelings near to those of the persons whose feelings he describes, nay, for short spaces of time, perhaps, to let himself slip into an entire delusion, and even confound and identify his own feelings with theirs," we should note that whereas Longinus would have the poet *see* what he describes, Wordsworth has him *feel* with his subjects, to the point of merging his affect with theirs. The reader is thus made a spectator not so much to the poet's images, but to the poet's own capacity for depth and delicacy of feeling—and thus the true subject of all such affectively literal poetry is, ultimately, the poet himself.

And of course the poet himself feels and composes far from the bustle of the larger society. Recall that Wordsworth's famous—and notorious—declaration in his *Preface* that



“poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” is immediately and rather jarringly qualified by the observation that this overflow “takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity: the emotion is contemplated till, by a species of re-action, the tranquillity gradually disappears, and an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind” (328B). No journalistic exercise in observation and recording, this, but rather the habit of one who moves through the world making careful note of the affective sensations its scenes and experiences excite in him—not allowing himself to feel them fully while on the scene or in the midst of the experience, but only when his leisure affords him opportunity to unfold them privately, without fear of interruption, as a child will unwrap a piece of candy filched from the forbidden dish only once a safe getaway has been made. And as the tang of the child’s treat is made the sweeter by the knowledge that it is a pleasure savored in secret, so, it seems, does the Wordsworthian poet relish more than the original emotion itself the pleasure of self-consciously reconstructing it bit by bit, revelling in each affective sensation it can be made to yield, and taking especial pleasure in the essential autonomy of the imaginative act. “Grand thoughts (and Shakespeare must often have sighed over this truth),” Wordsworth observes plaintively in the *Essay Supplementary*, “as they are most naturally and most fitly conceived in solitude, so can they not be brought forth in the midst of plaudits, without some violation of their sanctity” (347A). This is the aesthetic of the connoisseur. And if the reader responds with diffidence to Wordsworth’s demand upon his or her attention—his demand, that is, that the reader serve as spectator, as auxiliary to the movements of his sympathetic imagination—it is in fact precisely because Wordsworth claims for the poet (and, by implication, the sensitive reader) a more exquisite affective faculty than his fellows. Though it is true that the poet’s “passions and thoughts and feelings are the general passions and thoughts and feelings of men,” the poet is yet “chiefly distinguished from other men by a greater promptness to think and feel without immediate external excitement, and a greater power in expressing such thoughts and feelings as are

produced in him" (327A). The Augustan poet—the public poet generally, the satirist particularly—also appealed to the reader's sense of exclusivity, but of "being in the know" with regard to knowledge readily attainable and toward the sources of which (literature, history, public life) the poet directed the reader's attention. Wordsworth, however, would shift the æsthetic prerogative from the circles of the learned, the cultured, to a new aristocracy of the sensitive, an elite far more exclusive than the former because its qualifications are immanent rather than enumerable, innate rather than acquired. We can always bring ourselves to *know* more; it is far more difficult to *feel* more, or to feel *more finely*. Moreover, insofar as the quest for sensibility invites the aspiring poet to seek out the new and unique, and to respond to these idiosyncratically, the impulse toward literalism of affect leaves the reader in much the same predicament as those toward more literal subjects and language: we are forced to take the poet's word that what he feels is genuine, and (more problematic) appropriate for his subject. For instance, when Goldsmith tells us of Switzerland in "The Traveller, or, A Prospect of Society" (1764) that "No product here the barren hills afford, / But man and steel, the soldier and his sword" (ll. 169-170), what we know of the land allows us either to believe or doubt him. When, on the other hand, Shelley addresses Mount Blanc thus, "Thou hast a voice, great Mountain, to repeal / Large codes of fraud and woe; not understood / By all, but which the wise, and great, and good / Interpret, or make felt, or deeply feel" (ll. 80-83), our knowledge of the Alps is quite irrelevant; we have little choice here but to allow the highly subjective poetic truth of the lines—or scoff, and risk being charged with ignorance, pettiness, and perversity.

Their own inward turn away from the public sphere and the public mode no doubt increases the willingness of Wordsworth and Shelley to draw absolute, oppositional distinctions between the sensibility of the poet and his coterie and that of the larger society—distinctions that more than hint at the Romantic poets' essential antipathy toward the common reader. Not that this antipathy is theirs alone. When Warton, for example, argues for the segregation of the literal and figurative elements Pope had joined so

problematically, he implies that a poetic treatment of the prosaic only eclipses right notions of true poetry among the reading public, confirming the public in its appetite for the topical and trivial, and in its aversion to the richer food of the pathetic and sublime. Is Pope yet more widely read than Milton? No wonder, Warton observes, for “it cannot be doubted, that the Odes of Horace which celebrated, and the satires which ridiculed, well-known and real characters at Rome, were more eagerly read, and more frequently cited, than the *Æneid* and the *Georgic* of Virgil” (*Essay*, ii, 521). And when Young argues against imitation, he seems as much as anything to chafe at the indiscriminately broad access to poetic composition such a practice affords: “An original may be said to be of a vegetable nature; it rises spontaneously from the vital root of genius; it grows, it is not made: *imitations are often a sort of manufacture wrought up by those mechanics, art, and labor, out of preexistent materials not their own*” (*Conjectures on Original Composition*, 330B; emphasis added). Anyone with a well-stocked library and a knack for rhyme can imitate; originality is reserved for genius alone. A similar anti-demotic sentiment runs through the frequent Romantic and post-Romantic complaint that the methods of versification Dryden and Pope had perfected provided the public at large with an entrée into the preserve of true poets, inviting it to mix with the æsthetic elect. We have already seen Wordsworth’s attack on the prior age’s legions of undifferentiated versifiers—“utterly worthless and useless” except as evidence for “what a small quantity of brain is necessary to procure a stock of admiration, provided the aspirant will accommodate himself to the likings and fashions of his day” (344B); and we have seen Macaulay’s scorn for Pope’s reduction of versification to “a matter of rule and compass,” which put all would-be poets “on a level”: “Hundreds of dunces who never blundered on one happy thought or expression were able to write reams of couplets which, as far as euphony was concerned, could not be distinguished from those of Pope himself” (“The Life and Writings of Addison,” 333). To these we might add Keats’s observation in *Sleep and Poetry* (1817) that if the preceding age constituted “a schism” (l. 181) in the history of English poetry it is because, “Nurtured by foppery and

barbarism" (l. 182), those "who did not understand / His [Apollo's] glories" nonetheless "with a puling infant's force / . . . swayed about upon a rocking horse, / And thought it Pegasus" (ll. 184-187):

But ye were dead  
 To things ye knew not of—were closely wed  
 To musty laws lined out with wretched rule  
 And compass vile: so that ye taught a school  
 Of dolts to smooth, inlay clip, and fit,  
 Till, like the certain wands of Jacob's wit,  
 Their verses tallied. Easy was the task:  
 A thousand handicraftsmen wore the mask  
 Of Poesy (ll. 193-201).

This disdain for the "handicraftsmen" of poetry—for a widespread public interest and participation in the production and consumption of poetry (if one may extend the application of the epithet more broadly)—should not surprise us, given the poet-centeredness of the Romantic ethic. In fact, unlike his Augustan counterpart, the Romantic poet owes his cultural authority to the mystique of an autonomous exclusivity fiercely independent of and even hostile to the world beyond his circle. His estrangement from society throws him into greater social prominence by underscoring the uniqueness of his affective faculties; his defiance of that society suggests that those faculties are indeed superior to the common sort. Wordsworth, for one, might lament that "the poet must reconcile himself for a season to few and scattered hearers" when, as in his own poetry, "life and nature are described or operated upon by the creative or abstracting virtue of the imagination; [when] the instinctive wisdom of antiquity and her heroic passions uniting, in the heart of the poet, with the meditative wisdom of later ages, have produced that accord of sublimated humanity, which is at once a history of the remote past and a prophetic enunciation of the remotest future" (*Essay Supplementary*, 346B-347A). But Wordsworth must know that poetry as he has reformed it can never be appreciated by more than a few. Here, for instance, he makes the *heart* of the *poet* (that is, the innate, sovereign sensibility of a member of the culture's most elite vocation) the expressionistic forge for his

reconstitution of poetry's means of defining the historical present (largely, he suggests here, by serving as an emblem of "sublimated humanity"—an index to a society's collective spiritual advancement). And in any event, throughout his critical pieces he takes too much glee in baiting the æsthetic expectations and opinions of that fraternity of ardent though amateur readers corresponding to the coffeehouse habitués of Dryden and Pope's day, exhibits too much self-satisfaction in spiting "the clamour of that small though loud portion of the community, ever governed by factious influence, which, under the name of the PUBLIC, passes itself, upon the unthinking, for the PEOPLE" (347A) for us to take his lament very seriously. Shelley, at least, is more open in his contempt for the broadly public and the readily pragmatic in poetry: "Didactic poetry," he declares in the preface to *Prometheus Unbound* (1818-1819),

is my abhorrence; nothing can be equally well expressed in prose that is not tedious and supererogatory in verse. My purpose has hitherto been simply to familiarize the highly refined imagination of the more select classes of poetical readers with beautiful idealisms of moral excellence; aware that until the mind can love, and admire, and trust, and hope, and endure, reasoned principles of moral conduct are seeds cast upon the highway of life which the unconscious passenger tramples into dust, although they would bear the harvest of his happiness (208).

### 3. Poetry and Public Memory After Pope

It will not do, of course, to associate Wordsworth too closely with Shelley, and I would not be understood to imply that the two poets—or, more generally, the two generations of Romantic poets—availed themselves of the same poetic materials and manner. In fact, Wordsworth's literalist impulse did not survive even the first wave of Romanticism. As Thomas Love Peacock observes in his waggish history of English letters, *The Four Ages of Poetry* (1820), whereas Wordsworth sought inspiration in the "village legends" told him by "old women and sextons" (that is, in the materials of living, local memory), his contemporaries, rummaging yet more deeply in "the rubbish of departed

ignorance,” were likely to find theirs in the ancient, exotic, or eccentric: “Mr. Scott digs up the poachers and cattle-stealers of the ancient border. Lord Byron cruizes for thieves and pirates on the shores of the Morea and among the Greek Islands. Mr. Southey wades through ponderous volumes of travels and old chronicles, from which he carefully selects all that is false, useless, and absurd . . . and Mr. Coleridge, to the valuable information acquired from similar sources, superadds the dreams of crazy theologians and the mysticisms of German metaphysics” (763B). As for Romanticism’s second wave, the most perfunctory perusal of the compositions of Shelley and Keats (and, for that matter, of their Victorian successors: Tennyson, Arnold, Browning, the Rossettis, and Swinburne) will reveal their authors’ highly un-Wordsworthian interest in the trappings of classical mythology and remote history, particularly the Middle Ages.

However, if these poets deviate from Wordsworth’s example in their choice of poetic materials, they seem to have followed his example in the purpose toward which they turned them. Consider: local legends, folklore, personages and events made fabulous by time or distance, the elaborate metaphorical conceits of the speculative mind, antiquity’s archetypes—these are precisely the materials by which the historical present had been explicated and woven into the fabric of public memory during the Augustan period. They might still have been put to such a use, if poets were not now employing them instead in the exposition of their own immediate moods and feelings, their own idiosyncratic perceptions and understandings of the world about them. Thus Peacock says of Wordsworth himself—“the great leader of the returners to nature”—that “he cannot describe a scene under his own eyes without putting into it the shadow of a Danish boy or the living ghost of Lucy Gray, or some similar phantastical parturition of the moods of his own mind” (763A). And of the Lake Poets generally—that “egregious confraternity of rhymesters”—he observes,

They wrote verses on a new principle; saw rocks and rivers in a new light;  
and remaining studiously ignorant of history, society, and human nature,

cultivated the phantasy only at the expence of the memory and the reason; and contrived, though they had retreated from the world for the express purpose of seeing nature as she was, to see her only as she was not, converting the land they lived in into a sort of fairy-land, which they peopled with mysticisms and chimæras (763A).

Charged through with ironic hyperbole though they may be, Peacock's statements say nothing of the operations and subjects of the new poetic sensibility that Wordsworth has not said or implied himself, nothing that Coleridge does not say or imply in his description of the reconstitutive power of the secondary imagination. They convey a fairly precise idea of the use Shelley makes of Greek myth in *Prometheus Unbound*, when, amidst "the mountainous ruins of the Baths of Caracalla, among the flowery glades and thickets of odoriferous blossoming trees," gleaning inspiration from "the bright blue sky of Rome" and "the vigorous awakening spring in that divinest climate," he goes about recasting Aeschylus' drama according to the ideas and imagery "drawn from the operations of the human mind or from those external actions by which they are expressed" (205). They account as well for Keats's object in revivifying classical Arcadia in his "Ode on a Grecian Urn": not to illuminate his own age by means of the past, but to erect a conceit upon which to hang a reverie on the power of the imagination—"Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard / Are sweeter; therefore, ye soft pipes play on; / Not to the sensual ear, but, more endear'd, / Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tune" (ll. 11-14)—and to trace in the "flowery tale" (l. 4) arrested upon the vase an emblem of the particular instant in his own being when a momentary complex of thought and emotion gave rise to that poetic Idea his verses perhaps only half-suggest.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Tennyson makes similar use of cultural myth in his proto-Symbolist poem, "The Kraken" (1830), and Matthew Arnold recasts Greek history for a purpose analogous to Shelley's in his Byronic *Empedocles on Etna* (1852). A. Dwight Culler includes the following note on the poem in his edition of Arnold's selected poetry and criticism: "In the summer of [1849] J. Campbell Shairp, an Oxford friend, wrote to [Arthur Hugh] Clough, 'I saw the said Hero—Matt—the day I left London. . . . He was working at an "Empedocles"—which seemed to be not much about the man who leapt in the crater—but his name & outward circumstances are used for the drapery of his [Arnold's] own thoughts.' Indeed, Arnold's close identification with his protagonist's desperate course had much to do with his state of mind at the time of the poem's composition: "These are damned times," he wrote to Clough in September 1849, "everything is against one—the height to which knowledge is come, the spread of luxury, our physical

This somewhat paradoxical appropriation of the materials of the common cultural inheritance for the explication of the private Self had many and profound short- and long-term consequences for poetry and its readers, for habits of social self-perception, and, ultimately, for the fashioning of public memory. We should begin, however, by noting the special characteristics of the particular channel into which this appropriation had diverted the mainstream of English poetry. A poem may focus upon highly personal or broadly public matters (that is, upon the Self or the larger society); its primary sources and materials may be either literal or figurative in nature (comprising, respectively, either the immediate, the local, the situational, and the demonstrably actual, or else the precedential, the archetypal, the fabulous, and the metaphorical); and it may be kept private or subjected to public scrutiny. Typically, the particular configuration of these characteristics within a given poem is consistent with that poem's overall mode, whether private, semi-public, or fully public. Renaissance courtly lyrics, for example, may break into the common store of imagery from classical myth and literature for the (figurative) materials with which to articulate the private psyche, but then these lyrics are for the most part circulated only among the poet's immediate circle and, kept from the public gaze, make no demands upon the notice of society at large. Conversely, though much Augustan poetry is thoroughly occasional, its use of figurative apparatus to throw the circumstances, personages, and events of the present moment into a more general *cultural* relief and its insistence upon securing and influencing the attentions of a broad spectrum of readers mark it out as fully public. Only when we get to the Romantic period does this essential consistency of aim, audience, and mode break down. Perversely enough, the Romantic poet insists upon the primacy of the feelings and meditations of the autonomous Self as poetic subjects while

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enervation, the absence of great *natures*, the unavoidable contact with millions of small ones, newspapers, cities, light profligate friends, moral desperadoes like Carlyle,—our own selves, and the sickening consciousness of our difficulties" (qtd. in Culler, 543).



simultaneously demanding the attentions and approbation of a sizable reading public.<sup>14</sup> The Romantic poet turns his back upon the public sphere and its inhabitants, scorns those of meaner or more conventional sensibility, gives expression to a passing psychological state unique to himself—all the while taking it for granted that we will be so eager to play the spectator to his “overflow of powerful emotions” as he reflects upon them in tranquillity that we will actually *pay* for the privilege.

Though perverse enough in itself, this new relationship between poet and reader had such detrimental consequences for poetry’s public role and, more broadly, for the role of figurative habits of mind in the fashioning of public memory, because it also entailed the separation of poetry’s figurative *materials* from the public sphere. Appropriated for largely private ends, the rich cultural lexicon that had given shape to communal memory and identity was over time effectively excised from social discourse. It could hardly be otherwise. A given icon—whether historical, literary, mythological, or æsthetic—cannot function as an emblem of the universal and the individual simultaneously. It either elicits broadly common associations or narrowly personal ones. These two sets of associations may largely coincide; or we may find the latter set compelling in its novelty or idiosyncrasy. No matter. In either case we recognize that the depiction, use, and final significance of the icon before us is personal and at most only indirectly public. It would be absurd to pretend that personal considerations play no part in public poetry or that public poets will always agree on the content and connotations of the cultural lexicon they employ. Usually the reverse is true. However, when we consider that the true subject of much Romantic poetry is the poet’s affective capacity, we can make this distinction, that whereas for the public poet even a problematic icon plays its part in the public fashioning of public self-perception and identity, for the private poet the most potent, most self-evident icon is

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<sup>14</sup> With the perhaps obvious exception of William Blake—but then it mattered very little to Blake if the larger public noticed or heeded his eccentric private visions.

but a catalyst, focus, or prop for the stream of thought and feeling that is (or becomes) the primary occasion of his poem. The icon is thus reduced from a cultural archetype to an emblem of some portion of the poet's personal experience. Keats makes such use of his Grecian urn, for instance, that readers of his rhapsody upon it are required neither to participate in the formation (or confirmation) of a broad cultural artifact by extending their own knowledge and understanding of ancient Greece to the poet's exposition, nor to allow (let alone actively encourage) the imaginative world evoked by the poem to inform—to transfigure—the circumstances of their immediate, everyday world. Rather, they are asked to play the more passive role of approving witness or spectator to the operations of the poet's sensibility, for which they are rewarded with perhaps a momentary identification with that complex of thought and feeling that gave rise to the poet's vision. Our identification with the poem may indeed be intense—so much so that its images become emblematic of our own experiences, and the poem itself, such a potent embodiment of our physical and psychological circumstances at the occasion of our first reading it that even years later the mere glimpse of its title may transport us to that exact moment so wholly and so forcefully that in reverie we seem to be reliving it. In such a case, we only replicate the poet's treatment of the original icon: the poem becomes a private artifact, a vehicle for recapturing a moment quite apart from the "now" of our lives, an affective experience unique to ourselves—both at any given instant as segregated from the attentions of others as the poet's private vision is from the sphere of public life.

This segregation has three main consequences for the figurative elements of social self-perception and public memory. The first, logically enough, is that as readers over time become accustomed to seeing poetry employ its figurative elements toward private ends, the historically or culturally rich associations traditionally attaching to these elements cease to reverberate in the public sphere. Instead, as these associations become ever more closely associated with the individual imagination, they come to be regarded as a quaint auxiliary—if that—to our apprehension of the world about us rather than an integral part of our

perception and understanding of it. In short, these elements lose their capacity to lend public experience a readily intelligible iconographic significance. In fact, once it becomes habitual, instinctive to distinguish between the figurative and the public, even a poem that seems to invite its readers to draw parallels between its world and their own—Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*, for instance—we find it difficult if not outright impossible to inhabit both worlds simultaneously, for we have lost the reflexive expectation that one will meaningfully inform the other. In the case of Tennyson's poem, the contemporary reader is either immersed in Arthur's world (as the poet has configured it) or in Victoria's world reading a series of Arthurian tales in blank verse. Poetry and life have become different things altogether.

We acquiesce in this estrangement largely because the diminution in the transmutative power and cultural authority of poetry's figurative elements changes our expectations for poetry itself—and for ourselves as readers of it. For if the figurative becomes closely identified with the operations of the private imagination, thanks to the poet's inward turn poetry becomes associated with both, and comes thereby to be seen as something not only to be written apart from the bustle of the public world, but experienced apart as well. And so instead of turning to poetry for an explication of the events, personages, and circumstances of our time, readers are now likely to erect a psychological wall between it and their everyday lives and relegate it to a means of escaping from the world beyond their window. Poetry had always sought to delight and instruct; now if anything it had become merely a diversion or recreation—something that existed for its own sake, with no particular claims upon its readers' public sensibilities (like much of the learned matter devoted to its study, both then and now).

This state of affairs was not altogether unprecedented. During the Renaissance, poets (perhaps taking at face value Sidney's assertion that poetry and literal truth have little to do with one another) prided themselves on their ability to transport their readers to idealized fictional worlds far removed from everyday realities. Marlowe's passionate

shepherd, to cite a famous example, would seduce his nymph—and enchant us—with a vision of Arcadian paradise; and Donne's persona in "The Canonization" (1633) assures his mistress that "if unfit for tombes and hearse / Our legend be, it will be fit for verse; / And if no peece of Chronicle wee prove, / We'll build in sonnets pretty roomes" (ll. 29-32). In fact, so long had poetry encouraged its readers to dwell apart in its "pretty roomes" that by the time Dryden had set up for a poet in London the poetic mode itself had fallen into public disregard, and even as he set himself the task of bringing the images and language of poetry meaningfully to bear upon political and social questions, Dryden at times greatly doubted the possibility of success.<sup>15</sup> But even with his occasional misgivings it would have been impossible for Dryden to imagine the width of the chasm that had come to divide the poetic and the public by Tennyson's day. For when Tennyson in "The Palace of Art" (1833; 1842) confronts the impossibility of inhabiting the two worlds simultaneously, he speaks not of being immured in a sonnet's pretty room but of confining his soul within a vast, self-sufficient edifice, a world unto itself. Having "built my soul a lordly pleasure-house, / Wherein at ease for aye to dwell" (ll. 1-2), to "live alone unto herself" (l. 11), the poet bids her "while the world runs round and round" to "Reign thou apart, a quiet king, / Still as, while Saturn whirls, his steadfast shade / Sleeps on his luminous ring" (ll. 13-16). Content at first among the splendours of her own imagination, the poet's soul at length finds her "Godlike isolation" (l. 197) from "the darkening droves of swine / That range on yonder plain" (ll. 199-200) and from the incessant brawls of sects (l. 210) to have reduced her to "a spot of dull stagnation, without light / Or power of movement" (ll. 247-248). Fearing that madness will be her portion, she rejoins the larger

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<sup>15</sup> Winn notes, for instance, that in *Astraea Redux* (1660) Dryden ultimately discredits his apostrophe to General Monck by designating as one of "the fond *chimæras* we [poets] pursue" (l. 159) his extended analogy of the artist and military man's power to reduce chaos to order. "By retreating from the apparent earlier equation of the 'Arts of Sway' with the arts of pencil, brush, and pen," comments Winn, "he makes at a personal level a distinction like the one Virgil had made between Greek and Roman arts. Yet it was from Virgil's seriousness, elevation, and moral complexity that Dryden would learn to develop a poetic voice that could have a real effect on politics" (112).

world, exchanging her palace for “a cottage in the vale,” “where I may morn and pray” (ll. 291-292). Yet she would not have her lofty towers razed: “Perchance I may return with others there / When I have purged my guilt” (ll. 295-296). A resolution portending poetry’s return to the public sphere? By no means. On the contrary, it is a sign of just how removed from the public sphere poetry now is that Tennyson here casts the separation of life and art as a purely personal struggle, a conflict between the social and æsthetic motives within the individual Self.

Further, it is a sign of our revised expectations for ourselves as readers of poetry that we do not bid Tennyson an ironic welcome when he decides to end his self-imposed solitude and rejoin our world of peace, wars, sectarian brawls, and “filthy sloughs” (l. 201) filled with maddened swine, or greet his anguished epiphany that one cannot live in Art with a shrug and a yawn. For even as Tennyson’s theme is borne in on us, we find that our experience of his poem has been much akin to his own solipsism: the poem has not asked us to conflate its world with the circumstances of our own, but rather to let the latter go by and play passive, appreciative witnesses to the rich tapestry of the poet’s imagination. And we are likely to comply, for if the poet’s appropriation of the figurative means we are no longer his partners in the creation of broad cultural meaning, we can yet pride ourselves on our ability to appreciate the pleasing images proffered us. We can revel in our gifts as connoisseurs—as knowing consumers—of the poet’s productions.

Our expectation that poetry should be enjoyed as well as written apart from the larger society points up the second consequence of the separation of the figurative from the public sphere: its loss of real social and cultural relevance. Or we might say that when we no longer expect the figurative to resonate communally, when we no longer demand that it signify readily beyond the individual sensibility, then whatever its æsthetic appeal, the figurative has effectively lost much of its cultural authority. That is, it is no longer capable of intimating a cohesive collective identity either among its readers or between the present day and the past: it loses its power to compel belief in and elicit reliance upon the

universality and timelessness of experience within a given culture, and thus loses as well its power to provide patterns of such experience by which we may perceive, define, and explicate the historical present. Instead, when figurative materials are consigned to the private sphere they become, as we have seen, yet another vehicle by which the individual can define him- or herself *against* the collective identity (multilayered or amorphous as it may be) and extend his or her personal autonomy *at the expense* of the aggregate power of society. But at base, as the separation of the figurative from the public sphere entails a loss of cultural relevance, so does this loss of relevance over time foster in poetry's readers (not to mention those who have no use for it) expectations of its irrelevance for the public sphere; this in turn discourages the poet from offering up his productions to the public weal, and the public, from taking such efforts seriously.<sup>16</sup> The cycle is self-perpetuating: the longer the figurative's absence from the public sphere, the less likely its return—and the less likely the re-emergence of poetry itself from its indenture to the individual consciousness, the less likely its restoration to cultural authority. For if the figurative is imperilled by the poet's inward turn, the poet's appropriation of figurative materials so undermines the viability of public poetry as to all but guarantee its extinction: as the former forfeits the best (and last) forum for the figurative, so the latter deprives poetry not only of its power to capture, frame, and interpret collective experience (as I have just suggested), but of its unique æsthetic appeal as well. Public poetry need not be exclusively or even highly figurative; individual poems in the public mode may be only minimally figurative, if at all. Yet without recourse to credible figurative elements that can transform common experience, uniting discrete, even disparate, individual perceptions within the compass of common icons, poetry itself has no special claim upon public attention, and therefore little power to compel public attention—and thus effectively *ceases to be public*. Nor is this all.

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<sup>16</sup> When asked by National Public Radio if she planned to write a poem commemorating the Million Man March, Maya Angelou replied that she found it difficult to write public poetry. In fact, she said, "It's a contradiction in terms, really, 'public' and 'poem.' I don't think one can write a poem for the public."

Once poetry has surrendered the last of its erstwhile prerogatives to the specialists—the historians, philosophers, moralists, psychologists, scientists, sociologists, and anthropologists all claiming their portion—poetry that would be public may well prove noxious to society and individual poet alike, its figurative treatment compromising verifiable fact, its necessary breadth of appeal an affront to the integrity of one's private vision (see note 16, below).

The cultural restoration of the figurative and indeed of public poetry is made the more unlikely by the third consequence of the separation of the figurative from the public sphere, the decay of figurative materials and of the figurative habit itself. If it happened that in a certain village the inhabitants ceased to speak to one another, and whether alone or in company spoke only to themselves, over time not only would the significations of their words diverge, becoming increasingly subject to personal associations, but eventually the words themselves would change, modified by the tendencies of individual tongues and palates. A common language would thus fragment into any number of individual patois, still mutually intelligible, perhaps, but none of them singly either capacious or authoritative enough for the conduct of public affairs. The figurative materials of poetry decay in an analogous way, and for a similar reason. The body of such materials in a given community is, like its language, ever changing: the exigencies of experience and expression mean that its elements are continually being added to, deleted, and modified. And yet, though this body is by no means static, the values of its components not absolute, so long as it participates in the social life of the larger community these components, however inflected, will remain broadly and readily intelligible. When, however, the larger community no longer presides over the figurative vocabulary, when it is resigned instead to the usages of the individual poet, this vocabulary is likely to grow corrupt. Its terms detached from the social milieu that generated and sustained them, the broadly *cultural* significations of these terms become arrested, and soon cease to be vital, organic. Replaced by an indefinite number of narrowly *personal* associations, these erstwhile significations are first

diminished as their connotative power is constricted—then lost altogether. As for the terms themselves, their use in articulating the private Self's ephemeral caprices and moods will tend to compromise their identification with the universal and timeless, and thus trivialize them, undermining their *cultural* credibility and authority. Ultimately, however, when the passage of time has obscured its denotative origins and promiscuous application has eroded its connotative significance, the allegorical, historical, literary, or æsthetic icon will largely cease to reverberate even within the poet's own consciousness. Never having thought of it as a living thing, the poet will be as ignorant of it as the public from which he has emerged and would distinguish himself, as conditioned to regard what little he has seen of it to be dated and quaint, the trappings of ages and mindsets rightly consigned to extinction. When the figurative does glint here and there amidst the prose lines of the poet who has regained some knowledge of it, we are as likely to be struck by its taint of self-consciousness as by the frustrating strangeness of it—as when we come across an English paragraph peppered needlessly with words from a language we do not understand. True it is that our appetite for the figurative lingered long enough into the twentieth century to allow Freud to explain experience allegorically, and Jung, archetypically. But if Freud's allegories were too shifting, their significations too dependent upon the minute particulars of the individual psyche to merit general application, Jung's archetypes were too far removed from everyday experience to be quite compelling. And in any case, however attractive the systems of Freud and Jung may have proven, the essential loss of the operative figurative language and frameworks by which poetry once explicated the historical present is revealed by the failure of Yeats, Eliot, and Pound to resurrect and reintroduce those elements, to reinfuse them into their depictions of everyday life. The cultural allusions and locutions had already grown too obscure for readers of poetry—now so very few in number—to have any



chance of integrating them into their day-to-day negotiations of the early twentieth century.<sup>17</sup>

And so for the figurative, segregation from the public sphere leads to decay; decay, to ignorance and misuse; and these, to extinction—and so an ancient common tongue is lost. Lost, because the figurative habit itself is compromised by the removal of the figurative lexicon from the public sphere.

It would face other serious challenges as the nineteenth century wore on and gave way to the twentieth: industrialization, which tended to reduce the individual's role in the economic life of the community, and thus his or her presence in the community itself; urbanization, which compounded the isolation and alienation attendant upon industrialism by throwing together hordes of mutual strangers in metropolises simply too vast to be fully comprehended, let alone culturally cohesive; the progress of science and the specialization

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<sup>17</sup> To take Eliot as example: few poets have ever insisted upon the necessity of cultivating a sense of the past as forcefully as Eliot did in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919). Tradition, he says, "cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labour. It involves, in the first place, the historical sense . . . [,] a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order" (38). Such a resolution certainly *seems* to promote the poet's facility with figurative vocabulary and frameworks. But apart from the difficulty of acquiring an idiom as esoteric and exotic as this passage concedes the literary tradition to be, is the laborious self-consciousness with which Eliot actually carried out this programme. Citing Eliot's assertions in "The Metaphysical Poets" (1921) that "poets in our civilization, as it exists at present, must be *difficult*" and that "the poet must become more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate if necessary, language into his meaning" (65), Richard Poirier suggests that this credo is "designed to intimidate his readers, to make them assent to what he is trying to exhibit by his technique of allusiveness, which is that he is a great poet working directly in the idiom of other poets known to be great" (39). Eliot uses the artifacts of tradition to make himself a high priest of Western culture, conducting his ritual explications of it in a language made all but unintelligible not simply by his audience's ignorance of its terms, but by Eliot's investing these terms with his own highly personal associations. Poirier discusses a "notorious example" I cannot resist quoting in full, the epigraph to "Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar" (1919-20):

The epigraph is a hodge-podge of six quotations, starting with a rather supercilious 'Tra-la-la-la-la-la-laire,' this being the call of the gondolier in Venice taken from a poem by Théophile Gautier, from whom Eliot was imitating the highly accelerated stanza form of the poem. This is followed by 'nil nisi stabile est; caetera fumus.' The first word ought to be 'nihil' and the phrase means 'only the divine endures; the rest is smoke.' The Latin is from an inscription in a painting by Mantegna, one of Eliot's favorite painters, found in a church in Venice, on the subject of the martyrdom of St. Sebastian. . . . The next four allusions are respectively to *The Aspern Papers*, *Othello*, both set in Venice, and then to Browning and Marston (39-40).

of learning, which both drew upon and fostered the specialization of language, throwing into relief the distinction between the literal and the figurative and favoring the former over the latter; and the development of technologies—photography, the telegraph (which made global journalism possible), film, sound recordings, radio—that not only increased the speed and efficiency with which information could be gathered and disseminated, but were able, seemingly, to realize and convey the moments they recorded without the aid of figurative apparatus. Having given us new means of capturing experience in itself (as it were), such media have in fact changed our notions of it, making it seem individual, local, unique, its separate instants perhaps vaguely part of some pathless linear progression, but each effectively whole in itself, autonomous from what came before or what will come after—and the more completely realized the moment, the more autonomous, the more authentic it may be supposed to be. If such changes in demography as the last century and a half has seen have predisposed the individual consciousness to turn inward, to assign its own private cognitive and narrative patterns (or mnemonic system, since memory is patterned experience) to what it experiences, to regard the significant events of the public sphere world as merely so many signposts, so many associative triggers that bring discrete points of these patterns to mind again, the successive advances in communication technologies have made images of events in the public sphere increasingly ubiquitous and uniform, so crystallizing their historical moments as to preclude their fusion into a greater cultural narrative: the very clarity of such images refer us only to a particular instant or configuration of circumstances, and to their most proximate associations. And thus when we are asked where we were and what we were doing when Kennedy was shot, or when *Apollo 11* landed on the moon, or when we heard *Challenger* had exploded, though we may briefly share with him or her a certain specific mnemonic catalyst, we are prompted by the habit of self-reference, by our new assumption of a self-contained present, and by the structure of the questions themselves not to seek out and partake of whatever collective significance may be assigned to such events, but to see that moment in isolation from its

larger context and then turn inward to our private experience of it, to look back upon it in after days, reflecting upon its role in the formation of our own individual identity. Preoccupied with our own personal preservation of the moment, we become the market for ready-made souvenirs and mementoes such as commemorative plates, coins, figurines and stamps; or, if we resist these objects, our preoccupation at least predisposes us toward accumulating artifacts (also mass-produced, -distributed, and -marketed) that represent or come to represent the separate episodes along the timelines of our lives. In this way, then, the loss of cultural continuity leads ultimately to the commodification of experience, memory, and identity.

The separation of the figurative from the public sphere reinforces the perceptual and mnemonic habits inculcated by these and other features of our modern world and sensibility. Insofar as disuse of the figurative entails its corruption, the loss of a viably public figurative lexicon means that readers will over time lose the ability and desire to read figuratively—perhaps even the bare notion that it is possible to do so. In its turn, such a development will, by closing off what had been the broadest, most reliable avenues to the larger society and the common cultural heritage that binds an individual to the community and the community to its past, tend to isolate us within ourselves and within the present moment. Indeed, Pound was only making a virtue of necessity when he laid out his programme for Imagism in the first years of this century. Defining the all-important image in his 1918 essay, “Retrospect,” as “that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time” (4), Pound enumerates the three tenets of the Imagist movement:

1. Direct treatment of the “thing” whether subjective or objective.
2. To use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation.
3. As regarding rhythm: to compose in the sequence of the musical phrase, not in the sequence of the metronome (3).

These principles recall Pound’s assertion in his earlier essay, “Vorticism” (1914), that, “In [an Imagist poem] one is trying to record the precise instant when a thing outward and

objective transforms itself, or darts into a thing inward and subjective" (467). The moment is all, complete in and unto itself, and the image that captures it is and must be at "the furthest possible remove from rhetoric" ("Vorticism," 462): "[T]he author must use his *image* because he sees it or feels it, *not* because he thinks he can use it to back up some creed or some system of ethics or economics" (464). The image and the moment it subsumes are not, in other words, to make any pretense of participating of public affairs. Indeed, the image, properly rendered, is so self-referential as to transcend language and become the idea of the "thing" itself: "The point of Imagisme is that it does not use images as *ornaments*. The image is the speech itself. The image is the word beyond formulated language" ("Vorticism," 466). The fully realized Imagist would thus be very much at home among the projectors of Swift's *Lagado*, who, having at last achieved an absolute one-to-one correlation of word to thing, conduct their conversations by showing one another the physical objects themselves. Entirely self-contained, the image admits of nothing beyond itself, nothing that is not absolutely intrinsic to it; it cannot, therefore, be alloyed with the figurative trappings that might imbue it with a significance beyond itself, nor lend itself to any application beyond its immediate context. The moment *is* the image, and the image, the moment; poetry's task is to conflate the two utterly. Pound here prescribes rather narrowly, for a single poetic effect, but his precepts and practice—and the example of the generation of poets he and Eliot helped shape—would sufficiently transcend the immediate objectives of Imagism to make the image as he defined it the goal of much twentieth century poetry.

It may be that Pound's prescriptions proved so influential because they accorded so well with what poetry in English was fast becoming—or perhaps, with what poetry had essentially been for much of the preceding century and before. Consider the principles for Imagism as set forth by Amy Lowell and Richard Aldington in the first of their three Imagist anthologies (1915):

1. To use the language of common speech, but to employ always the exact word, not the nearly exact, nor the merely decorative word.

2. To create new rhythms—as the expression of new moods—and not to copy old rhythms, which merely echo old moods. We do not insist upon “free verse” as the only method of writing poetry. We fight for it as for a principle of liberty. . . .In poetry, new cadence means a new idea.
3. To allow absolute freedom in the choice of subject. . . .
4. To present an image (hence the name: “Imagist”). We are not a school of painters, but we believe poetry should render particulars exactly and not deal in vague generalities, however magnificent and sonorous. . . .
5. To produce poetry that is hard and clear, never blurred nor indefinite.
6. Finally, most of us believe that concentration is of the very essence in poetry.<sup>18</sup>

Whatever anxiety of influence may have caused many Modernists to reject the objectives and achievements of their Romantic forebears, these tenets demonstrate that nothing is as derivative as rebellion. The emphasis on “the language of common speech,” the quest for new rhythms and moods, the insistence on “absolute freedom in the choice of subject,” the notion that “poetry should render particulars exactly,” the repudiation of imitation, of established forms and diction, of ornamental language and “vague generalities, however magnificent and sonorous”—such ideas might have been cribbed from Wordsworth’s critical pronouncements of exactly one hundred years earlier. Wordsworth, it is true, never championed free verse (though he likely would have regarded Lowell’s defense of it as “a principle of liberty” an important assertion of the poet’s fundamental autonomy from the philistine tastes of “the public”); free verse, however, is but the final step in making poetry as prosaic, as based in the immediate, the individual—the literal—as the novel had been since Defoe, as capable now as that genre to record, in Woolf’s phrase, “the atoms as they fall upon the mind, in the order in which they fall,” to “trace the pattern, however disconnected and incoherent in appearance, which each sight or incident scores upon the consciousness” (“Modern Fiction,” 155).<sup>19</sup> In a sense, then, Lowell’s tenets bring us full

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<sup>18</sup> Quoted in Coffman, Stanley K., Jr. *Imagism: A Chapter for the History of Modern Poetry*. Norman: U of Oklahoma P, 1951. 28-29.

<sup>19</sup> Woolf’s next sentence is equally apropos to my argument here: “Let us not take it for granted that life exists more fully in what is commonly thought big than in what is commonly thought small.”

circle,<sup>20</sup> return us to that moment when poetry broke from its Augustan norms, show us perhaps what that break had meant for poetry all along, that it would henceforth, first by design then by necessity, increasingly adapt itself to those modern habits of mind—the inward turn; the conception of time as a series of discrete moments, each with its defining complex of thought and emotion; and the consequent forfeiture of an historical present in favor of a largely self-referential, perpetual Now—that make it possible to isolate and thus commodify experience, and with it, memory, and with memory, identity.

When poetry retreats from the public sphere, it deprives the figurative habit and its language of their last, best forum, and the cultural impulse toward the figurative grows moribund; once it has, for good or ill, the mythic gives way to the material.

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<sup>20</sup> Not that Lowell is the last to assert what she does. I find it significant—and pleasantly ironic—that as Pound, Eliot, and Lowell end up reaffirming what they claim to reject, so decades later would Philip Larkin, representative of a generation of poets that repudiated much of Modernism's doctrines and posturings, echo his bogeys so closely. In his short essay, "The Pleasure Principle" (1957), Larkin asserts that writing a poem "consists of three stages: the first is when a man becomes obsessed with an emotional concept to such a degree that he is compelled to do something about it. What he does is the second stage, namely, construct a verbal device that will reproduce this emotional concept in anyone who cares to read it, anywhere, any time. The third stage is the recurrent situation of people in different times and places setting off the device and re-creating in themselves what the poet felt when he wrote it" (80). This is the process Larkin would refer to in his essay, "Writing Poems" (1964), as "verbal pickling" (83). It is true that in "Subsidizing Poetry" (1976) Larkin rejects Eliot's conception of poetry—propounded in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919)—"as a living whole of all the poetry that has ever been written" (40). Calling Eliot's view "the American, or Ford-car, view of literature, which holds that every new poem somehow incorporates all poems that have gone before it and takes them a step further" (89), Larkin argues that "the drawback of such a notion is that it suggests that poems are born of other poems, rather than from personal non-literary experience, and for a poet this is disastrous. He will become obsessed with poems that are already in existence, instead of those it is his business to bring into being by externalizing and eternalizing his own perceptions in unique and original verbal form" (89). But even in his advocacy of a "small," local poetry, of a poetry that is immediate, broadly accessible, and ever mindful of its readers' interest and pleasure, he no more than Eliot can keep from segregating the experience of poetry from the other formative experiences of life, cannot help seeing poetry as something very different than and essentially divorced from real life. Insofar as poetry is a rarified encounter it is a qualified, compromised one, because to that degree it is engaged apart from the gritty business of living and of making sense of life. There could hardly be a clearer sign of just how absolutely poetry (in itself and as a vehicle for the figurative) has been expunged from the scenes of everyday life, private as well as public.

#### 4. *The SoHoiad: Or, The Masque of Art*

To appreciate just how disorienting, even unsettling the figurative as a mnemonic device has become, we might consider a poem that first appeared some years ago in *The New York Review of Books*—no doubt to the general puzzlement of its readership. *The SoHoiad: or, The Masque of Art* (1984), by the Australian art critic Robert Hughes, is, as the title page tells us, “A Satire in Heroic Couplets Drawn from Life,” taking for its subject the figures, fads, and tastes of the New York art world of the late 1970’s and early 1980’s. It is at once a lament for the narrow, self-referential insularity of much modern art and art criticism and an indictment of the cynical manufacture and marketing of artistic trends. In theme, *The Sohoiad* offers up an apt, if incidental demonstration of how experience, memory, and identity come to be commodified (here, by artists, their handlers and clients); in effect, the form, scope, pose, and usages of Hughes’ poem, taken together, throw into clear, jarring relief what we have forfeited by eschewing the figurative—and the essentially figurative notion of an historical present—in our portrayal of the moment immediately before us.

From the title’s announcement that the poet’s satire will be conducted in couplets, the late-twentieth-century reader is likely to be on unsteady or at least unfamiliar ground. Most of us encounter rhyme only in greeting card verse, typically so bad that we may be forgiven an instinctive identification of rhyme with the frivolous, mawkish, and absurd.<sup>21</sup> But granting that rhyme might be turned to a serious purpose, it has been so thoroughly displaced by free verse that its appearance is likely to suggest the contemporary poet’s affectation of the antique. Far from adapting the dress of his poem to the fashions of the times, however, Hughes deliberately sets about heightening the quaintness of the piece by

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<sup>21</sup> A venerable, well-meaning poet once admonished our poetry writing seminar at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln to avoid rhyme unless we were aiming at a comic effect.

adopting eighteenth-century diction, locutions (epic similes; *cano*, *fuit*, and *dixit* constructions; syntax inverted for “heroic” effect), typography (personified nouns are given as FRIVOLITY, YOUTH, and CHAOS; significant or ironically used words are italicized; hyphens frequently take the place of letters in proper names), and spellings (Dulness, Apodictick, Critick). In addition, Hughes makes no attempt to mitigate or explain the poem’s implicit and explicit allusions. To begin with the title, few indeed are the readers who will discern in “SoHoiad” an echo of “Dunciad,” or recognize that the bare similarity of sound is itself a clue to what we will find in a poem that takes Pope’s work as its model: it will be a mock-heroic survey of its subject; it will offer within a loose narrative framework a series of satiric pen-portraits of the poet’s contemporaries; its collection of grotesqueries will not simply expose vice and folly, but seek to insinuate a set of stable, universally operative principles, moral as well as æsthetic; and, despite the vigor and apparent success of its satire, it will conclude with a nightmare vision of virtue, worth, and merit in defeat, Dulness and her Dunces (or their equivalents) triumphant. Hughes in fact resurrects the characters of Dulness and Chaos for *The Sohoiad*. The former is a denizen of “glamorous SoHo,” where she “dwells in sweats and glooms, / Gnaws her brown nails, and shakes her sable plumes” (405); while the latter, as in Pope’s poem, brings about the return, if not of anarchy, then of chronic dissipation: “Now at thy hands, Great Chaos! are restored / The brief and foolish pleasures of the bored: / The pompous novelty, the well-hyp’d trick / Delivered in the merest *Augenblick*” (406). These deities—and lesser goddesses reminiscent of Pope’s Cloacina, such as “KAKOPICTA, Muse of Transient Modes” (408)—accompany any number of verbal and stylistic allusions to the body of Pope’s satire, as when Hughes’ persona speaks of “Trustees who deal, and dealers none may trust” (407), or, more specifically, of art pedlar Leo Castelli, who leads on collectors and critics “as the *Organ* leads the *Ape*” (411), or when he describes the present day as an age long ago foretold, “The gross *Saturnian* age of iron and gold” (411). Such allusions adorn in new and unfamiliar guise the personages, circumstances, and character of an



already esoteric milieu with which few may claim close acquaintance. And just who is it that presumes to put before us such an eccentric portrait of the avant-garde? The pseudonym beneath the title (presuming we *recognize* it as a pseudonym) is not likely to give us much of a clue. Few will discern in “Junius Secundus” a reference to the anonymous Whig author whose satirical letters against the administration of George III appeared in *The Public Advertiser* between 1769 and 1771, and whose own pen name derives from Marcus Junius Brutus (c. 85-42 BC), arch-republican assassin of the man who would make himself dictator of a free people—and thus the implications of “Junius Secundus” for the character and aims of Hughes’ persona will go largely unrecognized.

Insofar as the formal and literary allusions of Hughes’ poem prove obscure to the reader the public’s loss of a working figurative vocabulary would seem to be confirmed. However, the difficulties *The SoHoiad* presents to the reader of the late twentieth century go beyond Hughes’ use of antiquated trappings and references grown dim with time. For the poem asks its readers to pattern their experience of the world before them in ways not simply unfamiliar but wholly antipathetic to their usual practices; it asks them, in short, to adopt broadly figurative habits of perception and understanding.

The scope of the poem, its sheer breadth of subject, demands that we exercise one such figurative habit. By giving his poem the title, *The SoHoiad*, Hughes asks us to believe that the portraits, scenes, and images opening before us really do constitute the SoHo art world at a given time. Certainly Hughes would give us an encyclopedic view of that world. Here are the tasteless, “purblind *Virtuosi*” (406), among them the cloying DOLORES GRUESOME, smothering protectress of slim, half-fledged talents; here is the egomaniacal JULIAN SNORKEL, “Poor SoHo’s cynosure, the dealer’s dream, / Much wind, slight talent, and vast self-esteem” (407); here, the “pliant and complaisant throng of Art-Reporters” that “flatulates along / with tongues a-wag and wits made dull by rust” (407); here, the trustees and dealers, and the curators “clutching freebies to their breasts” (407), here the critic “expounds her fribbling law / That scarce an *Artists’ Groupie* was before”

(407); here, the dull and incompetent who botch the masters they would plagiarize; here, the ranks of patrons: “mild stock-brokers with blow-dried hair” (409), “tanned regiments of well-shrunk Dental Surgeons,” their “leather-swaddled spouses,” and “the prattling, lacquered Divorceé” (410); here, the “*Art Advisers, / Dragging bewildered clients by the nose / Down Spring Street, through the lofts and studios*” (410); and here, the grand debaucher of SoHo, “pale ANDY WARBLE,” whose “life in Art is ever to confer / With Stars and Catamites, a keen *Voyeur*” (411-12). We are, in fact, to infer from the dazzling variegation of the poem that its canvas is *comprehensive*, or effectively so, that in its personalities and productions SoHo itself has been captured complete, entirely compassed. The multifarious spectacle we witness here is a “masque,” after all, and thus possessed of at least a latent design. Indeed, to believe or assume that such totality of vision and portrayal is possible we must first presuppose that despite its bewildering variety and boiling chaos the world is essentially a narrow, orderly place—sufficiently so at any rate to allow the poet to reduce it to coherence with the allegorical conceit, the pen portrait, and the couplet. And sufficiently so to allow us to see the whole in the part: for though the poem captures the merest fraction of the workings of one endeavor in one area of a vast metropolis, Hughes’ title, *The SoHoiad: or, The Masque of Art*, asks us to equate the poem’s few telling particulars with the entirety of the art trade in SoHo—and the art trade in SoHo with the state of Art itself. We are asked, that is, to believe that the world is so much of a piece that the part replicates the whole, and therefore that the local may be identified with the universal, the latter understood by careful scrutiny of the former. One might say that the scope of the poem asks us to see what is not before us in any literal sense (order, completeness, the typical) while asking us to see what is there (the random, the fragmentary, the particular) synecdochically, as emblems of an immanent comprehension.

The form of the poem elicits another figurative habit in the reader. Hughes’ use of conventions readily identifiable with *The Dunciad* but also with such works as Horace’s *Satire I.10* (“Yes, I did say Lucilius’ lines occasionally falter”), his epistle to Augustus,

Rochester's *An Allusion to Horace*, Dryden's "MacFlecknoe," and Byron's *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* suggests that our world and what we know of it may be organized according to age-old models. This moment in history, its inhabitants, and their impulse to depict compellingly their circumstances and experiences are not so unique as to be without precedent. Continuity of form implies larger continuities: of cultural identity, of human nature, of aesthetic standards. And it is to a sense of such continuities that Hughes' poem appeals, for it is upon their axis that its satire turns. Like all good epics, mock or genuine, *The SoHoiad* opens upon an apparently climactic pass, specifically, that moment when a resurgent Chaos has restored "the brief and foolish pleasures of the bored" (406), when the crass, philistine ethics of art's marketplace have supplanted taste, sense, and perspective—"Opinion bows and scrapes, to Trade defers, / As Disco-Owners turn to Connoisseurs; / Historians to the urinous subway fly / To scribble theses on 'The Spraying Eye'" (406)—effecting a broader cultural dissolution. When, at the poem's climax, MAMMON's "acolytes and nautch-girls" dance about the triumphant god's monstrous effigy (its eyes "glazed with fiscal lust / And nostrils caked with prime *Peruvian dust*"), the narrator observes ruefully, "Thus is arriv'd, as in the past foretold, / The gross *Saturnian* age of iron and gold" (410-411). But worse is to come—and must come. As, "pervasive, fruity, sulphurous, full, and ripe," the distinctive "odour of an *Art World Hype*" escapes from the effigy's "gilt behind," the gas is unluckily set alight and in the resulting explosion "Galleries totter, boutiques are laid bare" / . . . "The crowd of celebrants is whirl'd from sight / As PHOEBUS disappears, and all is Night" (412-413). Abhorrent in themselves, their productions hideous, the real danger posed by those serving Lucre under the guise of Art is that when their bubble finally bursts Art itself will lose its credibility and social sanction, imperilling its true devotees and their cultural vocation—as here Mammon's immolation obscures Phoebus himself and thereby plunges *all* into darkness. "Thus," reflects Hughes' persona, "to distracted culture justly come / The punishments of Herculaneum" (413). Though the particulars of our moment of cultural collapse are unique to it, such moments have been witnessed by other

cultures—by the hapless residents of Herculaneum, for instance, and, after them, the ancient Romans. Early in the poem, Kakopicta, “muse of transient modes,” encourages her dispirited minions by reminding them that “As once the tourist, ’midst the ruins of *Rome*, / Cull’d from the earth the decor for his home, / A cornice here, a herm or statuā there, / To prink the prospect of the dull parterre” and “[cumber] his house with false Etruscan urns” (408), so now they may profitably scavenge the “orts and fragments” of past and current masters that bestrew the æsthetic wasteland of SoHo. The destruction of its classical forebears, Hughes implies, prefigures the ultimate fate of our own decadent civilization.

As he aligns the moment before us with its historical precedents, we realize that one target of Hughes’ satire here is our general disinclination to see the past in the present, the present in the past. So far as art is concerned, this means that we are left vulnerable to those who, exploiting our ignorance, literally capitalize upon it, passing off the old as new, the ancient as original. “Such,” vaunts Kakopicta, “is the custom of our *Post-Modernes*”:

Post-Modernism long ago took note  
 That when Invention flags, we needs must quote:  
 And when the cobbled-up quotation drops  
 To semi-illiterates and earnest fops  
 (American collectors), the convention  
 Is to extol it as a new *Invention*.  
 Thus to advance, but likewise to retard,  
 Is purpos’d by the *Post-Trans-Avant-Garde*.  
 So in our world the energies are spent—  
 What few remember, dullards may invent (408–409).

Such subterfuges separate us from our money, but their long-term effects are far more serious. By occluding our sense of historical and æsthetic perspective, they prevent us from applying the standards such perspective would instill and sustain, forcing us to take the market’s word that what it offers is worth buying. But by the time we have become “semi-illiterates and earnest fops,” our common cultural heritage has likely been so eroded as to deprive us of our sense of an historical present and our place in it—deprive us, in short, of our identity.

If Hughes would have us regard the present as an extension or reiteration of the past, he would likewise have us think of individuals not as an absolutely unique, enigmatically complex beings, but as representatives of well-defined, broadly recognizable types. To recognize the type in the individual and the individual in the type, however, we must assume that the individual is but a unique configuration of timeless, universal characteristics, and to make this assumption we must further assume that human nature in general is sufficiently finite in its variety and its several varieties sufficiently constant and predictable to bear greatly reductive categorization. For such assumptions seem, ultimately, to cast us as the *dramatis personæ* in a vast, self-renewing diorama, each of us taking our turn at roles that recur in equivalent terms toward equivalent ends age after age after age. At any rate, this is the perspective we must adopt if we are to appreciate the method and aim of the *The SoHoiad's* pen-portraits. Consider, for instance, what is perhaps the poem's most effective character sketch, that of JULIAN SNORKEL, "the hybrid child of *Hubris*" (406). Though Snorkel pretends to great talent, he is in fact possessed of "ten fat thumbs"; though he would be taken for a profound thinker, Snorkel only "babbles, whines, and prates / Of Death and Life, Careers and Broken Plates / (The larger subjects for the smaller brain) / And as his victims doze, he rants again" (407). No matter, for Snorkel's megalomania is as blinkered as it is brazen:

Shall I compare me to Picasso? Yes!  
 Within me, VAN GOGH's vision, nothing less,  
 Is wedded to the genius of TITIAN  
 And mixed promiscuously, without permission,  
 With several of Bob RAUSCHENBERG's devices.  
 The market's fixed to underwrite my prices—  
 Compared to my achievement, JACKSON POLLACK's  
 Is nothing but a load of *passé* bollocks;  
 My next show goes by *Concorde* to the Prado:  
 'Painter as Hero: Snorkel, Leonardo.'  
 Yet the comparison's a trifle spotty,  
 Since Leo says I'm heir to BUONARROTI.  
 Though those old *Guineas* knew a thing or three,  
 They'd certainly know more if they'd known me (407).

Here is the arch-egotist, the poseur exposed by his own pretensions. We know him well, for he is the kin of such literary cousins as Zoilus, Robert Greene, Sir Richard Blackmore, John Dennis, Colley Cibber, D.H. Lawrence, and Gore Vidal. But if, as Hughes hopes, we recoil in contemptuous exasperation from Snorkel's picture here, it is because Snorkel himself has cornered us at parties and prattled *ad nauseam* about his *raison d'être*, his politics—or his boat; has numbed us in the lecture hall with his intellectual preening; has driven us from the coffee-house with his poetry or singing on open-mike nights; has filled the pages of his many, many books (both pedantic and popular) with fatuous posturing and gassy self-congratulation. Should we fly to altars he would find us, and there talk us dead, for fools *still* rush in where angels fear to tread. In other words, so well has Hughes captured the *type* of the minimally talented boor that we are ready to acknowledge the veracity of the portrait, even before we consider whether or not it depicts an actual person, even if Hughes' real-life model escapes us in whole or in part. In fact, the details of Snorkel's character and career are intended to bring painfully to mind and viscera those of the artist, promoter, and SoHo celebrity Julian Schnabel,<sup>22</sup> who, Hughes reports, once "recorded his solemn opinion that his 'peers' were 'Duccio, Giotto and van Gogh'" (303), and whom Hughes would characterize in the same 1987 essay<sup>23</sup> as the art world's consummate *fraudeur*, "a true self-constructed American": "His entry [into the art scene and public consciousness in general] was propelled by a megalomaniac, painfully sincere belief in his own present genius and future historical importance" (301). Schnabel and his friends might protest that Hughes' sketch is too distorted, reductive, and angry to render a true likeness of its original, but such objections would miss the point. The satiric pen-portrait

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<sup>22</sup> Schnabel recently produced a film biography of his sometime protégé, Jean-Michel Basquiat, here renamed by Hughes JEAN-MICHEL BASKETCASE.

<sup>23</sup> "Julian Schnabel." Republished in *Nothing if Not Critical* (1990). 299-308.

makes no pretense to strict biographical accuracy or photorealism; it is rather a compelling caricature that distends the singular features of its subject until they become recognizable as emblems of the vices and follies they would expose and ridicule. Snorkel is Schnabel, but Schnabel dressed in the gaudy rags of Imposture. Thus attired, SoHo's would-be Prometheus stands forth no hero, merely the latest scion of an ancient house.

Even if we are charmed by Schnabel's practice of affixing broken plates to his canvasses—"which," Hughes notes, "have lately developed the irksome habit of falling off the paintings, so that he now has a factotum who flies about America gluing them back on" (304)—we are likely to roll our eyes at the artist who proclaims himself heir to da Vinci, Michelangelo, Titian, van Gogh, and Picasso. Indeed, the satirist counts on our doing so, and can assume we will, for though our acquaintance with Schnabel's work may be slight, we are familiar enough with the others' (or its reputation) to know that any given contemporary artist is unlikely to merit such a comparison. But if the juxtapositioning of Schnabel and his crockery with these masters excites our sense of the absurd, Hughes has succeeded in arousing our sense of a third continuity, that of aesthetic standards. Not necessarily the exact same standards: it is self-evident that Titian and Picasso cannot *both* be accounted deathless unless we apply very different criteria to Renaissance and Modernist modes. I mean rather that whatever specific rules an age or public may impose upon its artists, certain essential assumptions will always apply. One is that standards beyond the artist's immediate aims, whims, and interests *do* exist. Merit is not simply what an artist's ego or avarice would have it be, nor what his incompetence or poverty obliges him to declare it to be. Snorkel would have us take him for the equal of Picasso and the rest on the strength of his word and that of his promoter, Leo Castelli—a bit of wishful puffery designed to ensure that the market will remain "fixed to underwrite my prices" (407). Another assumption is that an artist will either submit to the current standards—thereby giving us the means to assess his work and relate it that of others—or defy them compellingly, offering us a vision at once original and coherent. Snorkel cannot pretend to

greatness by plagiarizing “several of BOB RAUSCHENBERG’s devices”; or the Post-Modernes, by “cobbling up” quotations and passing the resulting product off as a new invention; or David Salle (here renamed DAVID SILLY), by basing “a whole career” reiterating “one late PICABIA” (409); or “GEORGE BUNGLEWITZ,”<sup>24</sup> by “painting some lumpish *Fraülein*’s upside-down” (409). Nor will anyone be long remembered for his “well-feigned homage to the Mantic Arts” when he “express[es] [him]self in spastic fits and farts” (409). For underlying our disdain of such is a third assumption, that whatever liberties they might take with literal or representative form, the truly great will have shown themselves to be masters of it. As Hughes notes in his essay on Schnabel,

With scarcely an exception, every significant artist of the last hundred years, from Seurat to Matisse, from Picasso to Mondrian, from Beckmann to de Kooning, was drilled (or drilled himself) in ‘academic’ drawing—the long tussle with the unforgiving and real motif which, in the end, proved to be the only basis on which the great formal achievements of modernism could be raised. Only in this way was the right to radical distortion within a continuous tradition earned, and its results raised above the level of improvisory play (306).

To be creditable, the artist must first be a competent draftsman. Snorkel, we remember, has “ten fat thumbs”; Bunglewitz is known by his “thick wrists, thick neck, thick skull, and thicker paint” (409). But the formalistic deficiencies of these two merely reflect the general decline of the most basic skills:

A generation past, *Abstraction*’s sway  
Prevailed from Brooklyn to remote Bombay,  
Extracting homage from the subtle *Jew*,  
The coarse *Australian*, and the mild *Hindoo*—  
And on repealing its presumptuous law  
'Twas found that none remembered how to *draw*:  
Yet this proved less a problem than a quibble,  
Since none, it seemed, had quite forgot to *scribble*:  
Thus from Academies in every nation  
Arose the chant: EXPRESSIVE FIGURATION! (409)

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<sup>24</sup> Georg Baselitz, whom Hughes describes in his essay, “Art and Money” (1984), as “that sturdy German fountain of overwrought mediocrity” (*Nothing If Not Critical*, 403).



Much as our knowledge of human nature allows us to discern Snorkel's shortcomings in the very shifts he makes to obscure them, so does our presupposition that art should refer recognizably to what we know or can imagine lead us to suspect that "expressive figuration" is simply a ruse by which the untrained or untalented would lay claim to an undeserved esteem, making a virtue of necessity as they rename failure perfection. But only the ignorant and philistine would give voice to their suspicions.

We should note that Hughes' own effort here makes no such evasions, but fulfills the standards it would impose, reinforces the sense of æsthetic continuity which it implicitly invokes. The genre, structure, and conventions of the poem not only invite us to compare it with its illustrious antecedents, but in themselves suggest the criteria by which we may assess this poem's individual merits. The couplets, for instance, if not turned just as Pope's would be, or quite as well, are more than competent enough to demonstrate the poet's knowledge of the rules of one of the most demanding English verse patterns as well as his ability to execute them. They move us efficiently through the narrative and capture alive the targets of his satire; but moreover, they offer an apt instance of form following function, deftly turning observation into epithet, and lending epithet the force of truth and law.

But who is Hughes to lay down the law—and in such manner as this?

The question brings us to the third figurative demand *The SoHoiad* makes of us, that in acceding to the authoritative pose of the poet and his poem—accepting the premise that the piece does indeed depict the world of SoHo; approving the justice of its tone, the aptness of its caricatures; crediting the learning and judgement of the author; *simply allowing ourselves to be moved by turns to scornful laughter and despairing exasperation*—we subscribe likewise to a number of implicit fictions fostering our identification with a wholly figmentary *community*.

The first concerns the poet himself. Who is it that addresses us here, unfolding before us *The SoHoiad's* outré milieu? Not Robert Hughes, but his persona, Junius

Secundus, whose “Apodictick Rhyme” presents itself as “the Gadfly, yet the Mirror of its time” (406). Whereas Hughes is a human being circumscribed by human limitations, weaknesses, and biases, a specific, identifiable individual possessed of a certain recognizable personality and any number of defining idiosyncrasies, Junius Secundus is an entity that has no existence anywhere save in the shared imagination of poet and audience; he is bodiless, timeless, placeless, and therefore not subject to the restrictions in perception, knowledge, and authority such considerations typically impose. Consequently, Secundus can lay claim to powers and a purpose far beyond anything Hughes himself may assert. He may, for instance, pretend to comprehensiveness of vision. When he describes himself as the Mirror of his time, we are to infer that his eye takes in, his poem renders not only the panorama of SoHo but the very souls of its inhabitants, missing nothing—and indeed the putative scope of the poem, its wealth of detail, its movement from scene to scene, personage to personage, would tend to reinforce the impression, would seemingly realize the poet’s claim. Moreover, since his vantage point lies outside time, Secundus can, as we have seen, read the past as clearly as the present; he can discern, therefore, the rise, fall, and reemergence of historical patterns and æsthetic idiom. The omniscience born of this Godlike perspective allows Secundus to assert the veracity of his vision, the infallibility of his pronouncements—as he does when he pronounces his rhyme to be “apodictic,” that is, self-evidently true, incontestable, “established on incontrovertible evidence” (*OED*). Such wisdom and probity, joined to an encyclopedic knowledge, make Secundus the perfect agent to undertake what for the real-life Hughes would be an absurd, vainglorious mission, to set up for “the gadfly of his time”: to step before the public and address it disinterestedly, for its own good; to brave its displeasure as he decries its follies and moral lapses and instructs it in the hard yet needful truths and principles that alone can restore and maintain its æsthetic and spiritual health. Junius Secundus is thus more than Hughes’ alter ego; he is a wholly public entity, an emblem of ourselves, our cultural values

and identity. To heed his address is to participate in the reification our own collective sense of Self.

But if Junius Secundus is wholly emblematic, so are the space he occupies, the public he addresses, and the occasion that prompts him to address it. For instance, though the speaker alludes to identifiable real-world landmarks in SoHo and Manhattan, to actual inhabitants we might see in a restaurant or pass on the sidewalk, the poem's particular configuration of topography and faces is merely the operative framework for a given narrative and theme and exists nowhere save in imagination. However, we are likely to accept it as representative of New York and its art world figures because the allusions to its places and people are at once concrete enough to orient us, yet sufficiently adumbrated to allow us to project our personal memories and associations onto the fabric of the poem without serious risk of contradiction. We are induced, in fact, to take our particular, subjective experiences of SoHo for a fair approximation of the poet's own vision. By doing so, as the public poet well knows, we are not so much reducing the poem's settings, actions, and characters to our individual experiences of them as allowing those experiences to be abstracted into elastic, emblematic notions (or impressions) adaptable to the poet's needs. When, for example, Secundus transports us to "the urinous subway" to witness the "graffitists" throng from Kutztown and the Bronx, to hear "the spray-cans hiss, the ghetto-blasters shriek" (406), we nod in recognition, for his images bring others before the mind's eye: the undergrounds we have ridden; the murals of script twining over local buildings, bridges, and sidewalks; the distinctive rattle of a marble inside an aerosol can; the thudding bass of the boombox; the sullen, ill-dressed youth bobbing to the beat—no doubt contemplating a night of surreptitious creativity. Hughes' poem appropriates such private imagery, effectively reconstituting it by placing it in a new or wholly fanciful context. Here, the graffiti artists are cast as "*Noble Savages* on sneakered feet," patronized by the patronizing DELORES GRUESOME, who herds her young charges to "the doors of Fifty-seventh Street," where, happily at play in a studio that is "part day-care center, part *Bateau-*

*Lavoir*,” “the infant dauber[s]” are allowed to deface “*Belgian Flax* instead of walls” (406). Such reconstitutions are necessary because though we have all seen the work of these young prodigies, we have not seen the same graffiti in the same places under the same circumstances. The image of spray-can Picassos exhibiting their craft in museums where “the matrons twitter and the Cash-Bell rings” (406) forces us to pool our past individual experiences in the fashioning of an altogether new collective one; it orients us individually even as it brings us together in the only public space our separate perceptions and associations allow us to share, an amalgam (of subway, museum, nursery, and emporium) seen only in the mind’s eye, occupiable only in the imagination.

We acquiesce in the poet’s appropriation and reconstitution in part because they seem to verify, to lend authority to what we ourselves have seen and heard and thought. Moreover, the capaciousness of the poet’s images or their configuration teases us into the rather gratifying conceit that we are part of a greater society, that we indeed experience this public space collectively. Yet the public with whom, presumably, we share the world of *The SoHoiad* is as illusory as the space it seems to occupy in the poem: figurative settings and events can have no *literal* witnesses. Nevertheless, the poem induces us to think ourselves among a throng watching the “infatuate procession” (406) of Mammon’s triumph—first by seeming to place us in the familiar setting of the parade, a very public progress of curiosities and grotesques, and thereby, secondly, encouraging us to project our experience of the poem onto those fellow spectators who may be supposed really to exist: readers like ourselves, who presumably see what we seem to see, and respond to it as we do. Under these circumstances such projection is all but instinctive, not simply because we like to suppose that our notions are widely held, but because as social creatures we find comfort in and derive identity from our connections with groups whose members have shared our historical moment, have experienced what we have experienced, and thus traverse the same cultural topography. Much the same thing occurs when, having seen a major disaster or scandal reported on the evening news, we suppose that the people we

encounter the next day are turning the event over in their minds as compulsively as we are. There is, however, this difference, that whereas television tends to reinforce our separateness from other viewers (in part because the mediation of the camera keeps us from spectating directly, and thus in company with others), poems such as *The SoHoiad* allow the public poet to use imagery and allusions that accommodate our many individual observations and associations and thus to sidestep the hopeless tangle of multiple perspectives and radical relativism, turning private experience against itself by making the unique seem universal.

If the public poet is able to make us believe that we sit amidst a larger public, he has gone a long way toward persuading us to accept perhaps the most daring figure of all, that we have indeed gathered in a certain place at a certain time to witness an event of great import unfold before us. In the present case, Hughes-as-Secundus would have us believe that we are immediately present at the gilded pageant of Mammon, and thus present, at a farther remove, for what Mammon's trampling of taste, sense, and merit represents, a moment a cultural collapse that has visited itself upon other places, other peoples.<sup>25</sup> But as the god's minions prance only in the imagination, so a glance out our drawing room window, a stroll down the streets of SoHo, will reveal neither an angry Vesuvius nor hordes of barbarians laying waste to the studios, galleries, and museums of Manhattan. Though Secundus effectively exposes the follies and corruptions of the art world, the occasion upon which he addresses us is merely a figurative apparatus. And yet, if the

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<sup>25</sup> I should concede that for all his cynical deprecation here, Hughes is not as despairing as Pope at the end of Book IV of *The Dunciad*. Concluding his essay, "Art and Money," Hughes writes, not unhelpfully, "The slide [in art prices] will begin with graffiti and it will gather momentum from there. It will not affect every artist, because there are many reputations with the justifiable solidity that will enable them to survive such vicissitudes. But it will shake the confidence of the art market, and of the art world as a whole. It won't happen in 1985, or 1986, but we shall see what has happened as the millennium crawls closer. Nor will all its effect be bad. One does not lament the pricking of the South Sea Bubble, or the sudden collapse of the Tulip Mania. At the very least, it may cure us of our habit of gazing raptly into the bottom of the barrel, in the belief that it contains the heights of Parnassus (404)."

poet's figure makes no claims to literal truth, we are likely to find it compelling nonetheless, for though the settings, persons, and action of *The SoHoiad* are wholly figmentary, they are the occasion of highly perceptible, quite genuine *psychological events*—an orderly, if metaphorical apprehension of the world about us, for instance, as well as the sense that our manner of comprehending it merges us with a greater cultural whole—that have the very real consequence of shaping our understanding of and thus our response to the present historical moment. Indeed, if we give ourselves over to the fiction of this or similar poems, we are temporarily caught up in the illusion that so much in our world is concerned in the outcome of the events we seem to witness and in which we are obliged to participate.

Because they make us feel that we are part of a moment inclusive of but not limited to our experience of it, the speaker, setting, public, and occasion of the poem become emblematic of a yet greater emblem, the larger cultural superstructure that informs, sustains, and draws upon our individual sensibilities: the community that inculcates the principles and habits by which we perceive, interpret, remember our shared historical moment; the community we suppose to be ever at our elbow, ever attentive to us, ever concerned in our affairs, and whose stake in those affairs lends them weight, significance; the community that we may therefore shape and redirect by merging the private into the collective Self, by recasting the dark hieroglyphics of private consciousness into the common tongue of public discourse. No doubt the community presupposed by *The SoHoiad* and public poetry in general is entirely chimerical; at any rate, if we have not utterly lost our belief in this community, we have come to regard the idea of such an entity with suspicion, as an agent of compulsion and conscription, an enticer to complicity, an enforcer of conformity. Yet, however figmentary this community may be, however tenuous or reluctant our belief in it, the presupposition of community makes possible a fourth figurative habit (one at work in the previous three), that of seeing the literal infused with non-literal elements. Community allows the poet to bid us look upon the world, its

inhabitants, their social, political, and æsthetic backdrops, and see them not as they demonstrably are, but in terms of their typological, mythological, or precedential values, that is, in terms of their place in an over-arching figurative apparatus. The literal thereby acquires a significance it did not, could not possess before. Moreover, as poet and reader meet in the forum of a figurative apparatus, the bond between them, and thus between poetry and the public, is strengthened, as are the bonds between readers, between the past and their present, between their present and the future, and between the truth of verifiable fact and the truth of the imagination—this last bond nothing less than the forge of meaning.

### 5. Conclusions

If this examination of *The SoHoiad* has allowed me to demonstrate something of the antipathy of the figurative mode to modern sensibilities, and in doing so, to summarize the elements of that mode, it has also allowed me to reintroduce Pope and a consideration of the Augustan habits of memory into my discussion. Some decades ago, M.H. Abrams' classic study, *The Mirror and the Lamp* (1953), taught us to think of the shift in poetic sensibility between the Augustan and Romantic periods as one from a mimetic to an expressivist orientation, taught us to see the simultaneous inward turn of the poet as a shift in the perceived function of poetry from a pragmatic to an "objective" rationale in which æsthetic merit rather than tuitionary power becomes the source, end, and test of art. Though Abrams' model and terminology remain useful, I find I must recast both—as well as the conception of literary history that gives rise to them—if I am to account, not only for what the present study has (I hope) discovered, but for the conclusions I would draw from those discoveries as the arc of my argument nears its end.

We should begin with the matter of dating this shift in poetic sensibility. I hope to have demonstrated in my chapter on Pope's peculiar employment of satiric figures in the fashioning of his "epitaphic vision" that long before the first generation of Romantics,

poetry had been used by a major poet—*the* major poet of his day, perhaps the most celebrated to that point in English history—as a vehicle for the public exposition of an unapologetically idiosyncratic, highly expressionistic account of England's historical present. As I have explained above, the extreme figurative nature of Pope's portrait effectively estranged the world of his poetic fiction from the everyday world beyond the window. This estrangement in turn inspired (in the short run) a reaction against the figurative in poetry in favor of the literal, and (in the long run) allowed Wordsworth to declare Pope's mode of verse moribund and articulate a new aesthetic and purpose for poetry. And yet we must recognize that it is the cultural authority Pope amassed for the poet and his poetic vision that effected an important change in the relation between poet and audience without which it would have been nearly impossible for Wordsworth to step before the public at century's end and make himself the new arbiter of poetic principles—or for Shelley, say, or Keats (or Tennyson, or Arnold, or Swinburne), to appropriate the materials of the common cultural inheritance for their own use in explicating the private Self. For it is Pope's creation of the role of poet as social icon in Britain that provides Wordsworth a place to stand before the public gaze, Pope's compelling, if quixotic hubris (at times bordering on monomania) that commands public attention and deference even as it turns its back on them that gives Wordsworth and the later Romantics license to do the same. Pope is the first English poet to strike such an extreme pose of "heroic" autonomy. So while we must acknowledge a shift in poetic sensibility between the Augustan and Romantic periods, I would argue that the shift constitutes no "Romantic revolution," but a long, slow transformation, its foundations laid earlier in the eighteenth century rather than later.

Moreover, in acknowledging the fact of the shift itself, we should observe that it need not be described solely in terms of the poet's choice of subject (Nature or the Self—the mimetic / expressivist model) or according to the aims of his or her composition (the pragmatic / objective model). Instead, we might look at the nature of the poet's materials



themselves. Has the poet reclaimed them from historical, literary, and mythological precedents, or is their origin in immediate, everyday experience? Does their application to present-day circumstances render them metaphorical, requiring the reader to make a mental "leap" from what he perceives to what he is to understand, or, being so applied, do the poet's materials remain measurable and verifiable, significant for what they are in themselves? And then, are they more readily conducive to the explication of collective or private consciousness? To this last question we might respond that the example of Pope's *Dunciad* demonstrates that a largely idiosyncratic worldview may in fact seek to take its place before the communal eye, may seek to shape its perception and win the approbation of the community at large. Therefore, we should turn to a second consideration, one that subsumes the first: What is the *forum* of the poem to be? Does the poet seek to engage a fairly wide readership in a matter that concerns it at large, or is he to be the poem's primary audience and write mainly of things that concern himself alone? With these considerations in mind, we might look back upon the foregoing survey and observe on the one hand that since Pope's estrangement of the figurative and literal elements Dryden's generation had managed to meld workably, poetry's figurative materials and frameworks have withered, gradually giving way to the literal (and where the figurative has been retained, it has been in the service of articulating an actual moment of experience, an actual psychological complex), and on the other, that since Pope's appropriation of the public sphere for his private ends, the forum of poetry has become primarily private and only secondarily, incidentally public.

To describe the changes in English poetry between Pope's time and our own according to these models and in these terms is to do more than exchange old labels for new. For by adopting them we effect significant changes in the scope and focus of our view of literary history and the history of social sensibility. For one thing, to consider poetry according to its public, semi-public, or fully private status is to impose new criteria—cultural authority and social utility—for our evaluation (and approbation) not only

of individual poems but of whole schools and periods of poetry as well. Such considerations reconfigure the broad panorama of English poetry, and though one cannot claim it makes our view of it any more disinterested or objective, the new configuration does at least throw the strengths of “second-rate” periods such as the Augustan into greater relief and force us to acknowledge the inherent limitations of poetry that is not accountable to the public. Moreover, in reintroducing the idea that poets and poetry might be significant agents for the community, we reintroduce likewise a notion of the *possibility* of community itself, the materials from which it may be fashioned and the means by which it may be maintained. For another thing, when we have recovered the idea of the figurative representation we recover also our sense, say, of historical contiguity—that is, of the present’s connection with the past and future (but also our awareness of the many moments recalled in the present one)—and of the simultaneous multiplicity of cast and significance of our immediate circumstances—that is, the many parallel ways in which these circumstances may be plausibly discerned and their meaning construed. Thus we are restored to the possibility of “locating” ourselves by means of continuities instead of innovations and interruptions, to the possibility of patterning our private and collective experience according to the figurative apparatus of history, culture, myth, and metaphor, of fashioning our memories of ourselves and our times from them, and therefore of founding our identity upon them.

In sum, if these new models and terminology put us in mind of how the development of poetry over the last 250 years has largely paralleled and reinforced the English-speaking world’s turn from the mythic to the material, as well as the withdrawal of its individual members from the larger community into a narrow personal autonomy, they also remind us that memory and identity need not consist merely of gathering about us our clusters of mass-marketed souvenirs, that though our individual consciousness is ours and no other’s, that ceaseless swirl of perception, thought, and memory need not be a hopeless chaos, nor need the ordering of it be situational, segregated, solitary.

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