

Dulness and Pope

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IT IS AN HONOUR AND A PLEASURE to give this lecture, and part of the pleasure comes from the opportunity publicly to honour earlier Academy lecturers. My title, 'Dulness and Pope', is a variation on the title of Emrys Jones's justly celebrated Chatterton Lecture of 1968, 'Pope and Dulness'.¹ This lecture has had a powerful influence on criticism of *The Dunciad*, helping to divert discussion of that poem into the channel within which it has since run.² Unable to agree either with those who deprecated *The Dunciad* as nothing more uplifting than an episode in Pope's personal 'war with Grub-Street', or with those who saw it as attempting nothing less lofty than 'taking a stand against barbarism on behalf of civilization', Jones instead pursued what he called his 'feeling that the poem is often more deeply ambiguous than Pope's overt purposes suggest'.³ As Jones followed the implications of that insight, what emerged was a richly elaborated account of Pope's strange affinity for what he was ostensibly attacking in *The Dunciad*: namely, dulness. Some years before Emrys Jones delivered that lecture, Howard Erskine-Hill had also pointed out how Pope's imagination was given to communing with what it condemned, and that, in consequence, in *The Dunciad* 'Pope wished to create and explore, for its own sake, an imagined world of folly, that he saw this "world" as something strange, fascinating and complex, surrealistically awe-inspiring or beautiful as well as ridiculous and offensive,

Read at the Academy on 11 May 2004.

¹ Emrys Jones, 'Pope and Dulness', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 54 (1968), 231–63.

² Later works which seem to me to extend, broaden and, at points, deepen the work of Jones include David Fairer, *Pope's Imagination* (Manchester, 1984) and Dennis Todd, *Imagining Monsters: Miscreations of the Self in Eighteenth-Century England* (Chicago, 1995).

³ Jones, 'Pope and Dulness', p. 234.

and that he was concerned that it should not be presented as wholly repulsive'.⁴

At the risk of being dully uncontroversial, my lecture this evening will trudge in the path of agreement with Howard Erskine-Hill and Emrys Jones. But I intend at least to approach the curious dividedness shown by Pope in *The Dunciad* by a fresh route. And I will, I hope, be able to offer a new explanation of that dividedness. I will rely less than did Emrys Jones on the psychoanalytic notion of a turbulent unconscious disrupting the operation of a conscious intention (although I find deeply congenial his dwelling upon the childish or puerile in *The Dunciad*, since the idea that there is a regression at work in that poem is one to which I shall return at the end of the lecture). But I will also seek out reasons for that dividedness more personal to Pope than might be suggested by an appeal to the myriad-mindedness and generous sympathies of a great poet. I will eventually dwell on Pope's relationship—if that is not too simple a word—with the man he seems to have identified as the supremely dull poet, Sir Richard Blackmore; and in the back of my mind will be Swift's insight, expressed in a letter to Pope, that writers like Sir Richard were 'Tools in my opinion as necessary for a good writer, as pen, ink, and paper.'⁵ In what ways might Blackmore have been necessary to Pope, and how might it influence our understanding of the magnitude and nature of Pope's achievement in *The Dunciad* to understand the nature of that necessity? Hence my modest reversal of Emrys Jones's title, for I shall argue that Pope himself acknowledged a kind of precedency in Dulness, that *The Dunciad* pays an implicit tribute to the priority of dull poets in general and Sir Richard in particular, and that accordingly the blame Pope distributes so widely and variously over the dunces in that poem is not untouched by other, more positive emotions.

Blackmore had attended Oxford, where he remained for several years after graduation and acquired the reputation of being an outstanding tutor. In 1682, aged 28, he began a tour of Europe, in the course of which he studied medicine at the University of Padua. Having qualified as a doctor in 1684, he returned to England, married well, and began a successful professional career which saw him appointed in 1697 one of William III's Physicians in Ordinary. In the same year he was knighted,

⁴ Howard Erskine-Hill, 'The "New World" of Pope's *Dunciad*', *Renaissance and Modern Studies*, 6 (1962), 58. It is a reading set out at greater length in the same author's *Pope: The Dunciad* (London, 1972).

⁵ Harold Williams (ed.), *The Correspondence of Jonathan Swift*, 5 vols. (Oxford, 1963–5), 2. 214 (30 Aug. 1716).

and in 1702 attended William in his final illness. In 1708 Blackmore was appointed Physician to Queen Anne, and was present also at her death-bed in 1714. In the course of a medical career pursued at the very highest level, he published what were at the time important works on small-pox, plague and consumption, as well as works such as *Natural Theology* (1728), which sought to demonstrate that the precepts of Christianity could be inferred from the study of nature, and more straightforward theological works denouncing the pernicious heresy of Arianism. In 1722 he retired from medical practice to the Essex countryside, and he died there on 9 October 1729, having survived his wife of thirty-four years by only eighteen months.

It was a full and varied life. But of course I have left out the dimension of it which, for posterity, has overshadowed all the rest. Blackmore was also a poet. He wrote epics: *Prince Arthur* in 1695, followed by *King Arthur* in 1697, *Eliza* in 1705, and *Alfred* in 1723. He wrote panegyrics on the victories of the Duke of Marlborough, versions of the Psalms, and in 1712 published *Creation. A Philosophical Poem*, in which a Lucretian literary form was filled with Christian and contemporary scientific content. He wrote essays on literary topics, and in 1718 published his shorter verses in a volume entitled *A Collection of Poems on Various Subjects*. After the *Guardian* had ceased publication in 1713 he undertook, with John Hughes, to publish a successor periodical, *The Lay-Monk*. In short, he approached literature with the energy he seems to have brought to everything he undertook, and for this—thanks in large measure to the bravura scorn he drew from Pope—he enjoys the reputation of a buffoon. The praise that was bestowed on him by Johnson in *The Lives of the Poets*,⁶ the sense of outraged justice which led the author of the article on Blackmore in the *Biographical Magazine* to begin with the thought that ‘To do justice to injured merit, is the most pleasing duty of a biographer’⁷—these have been drowned out by the inspired satire of *Peri Bathous* and *The Dunciad*. So Blackmore is a hard case for those, such as myself, or Emrys Jones, or Howard Erskine-Hill, who want to argue that something exists in excess of mere denunciation in Pope’s attitude towards the dunces. There was so much in Blackmore’s life which might have encouraged a more even-handed evaluation than that we find in *The Dunciad* and *Peri Bathous*. Pope seems to have ruthlessly ignored it all, and to have simplified Blackmore into a shorthand for literary

⁶ Samuel Johnson, *The Lives of the English Poets*, ed. G. B. Hill, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1905) 2. 235–56.

⁷ *The Biographical Magazine* (1794).

incompetence. As Johnson put it, Blackmore's 'name was so long used to point every epigram upon dull writers that it became at last a bye-word of contempt.'⁸ Here, surely, we have to accept that Pope's intentions were simple, hostile and vigorous.

But, although we may lightly think that praise and blame are opposites, nevertheless expressions of praise and blame are rarely pure. This can be a matter of rhetorical effectiveness, for unrelenting condemnation is as unpersuasive as full-throated eulogy is nauseating. At other times, however, one might think instead that there is something in the grain of the language which disposes it towards creating paradoxical intimacies between criticism and compliment. Sometimes these intimacies are comic, such as those we sometimes encounter in the literary form which more than any other makes praise the herald of blame: namely, academic references. Which of us has not occasionally read—which of us has not from time to time been tempted to write—sentences such as: 'To see Dr So-and-so in action is quite extraordinary', or 'The university which could get Professor So-and-so to work for them would be indeed fortunate'? The first line of Pope's poetic slap at Sir Richard, 'Verses to be Placed under the Picture of England's Arch-Poet', has something of this quality, in the way it can be applied both to those poets one cannot bear to leave half-read, and to those different poets in whose works one cannot get near the half-way point: 'See who ne'er was or will be half read!'

These Janus-like sentences face in two directions at once, and are the simplest form of what can pass beyond the elementary condition of confronting the reader with two irreconcilable meanings. The vocabulary of praise contains a sub-set of terms which can open a door into the domain of blame: stunning, stupefying, awesome, endless, everlasting, deathless, dazzling, even brilliant—these words can create passages between positive and negative judgement, and be the means whereby praise receives its salutary seasoning of blame, as well as enjoying simpler uses in literary forms such as the paradoxical encomium or the mock-heroic; literary forms which satisfy our liking for bringing together the prized and the despised.

But these words may also give expression to more divided impulses. They can pay tribute to praiseworthy qualities while at the same time hinting that certain kinds of achievement may straddle our categories and perplex our desire cleanly to separate the good and the bad. When used in this way, these words pass from being the vehicles of lampoon, and

⁸ Johnson, *Lives of the Poets*, 2. 252.

become instead the ushers of irony which (as Empson noted) has 'no point unless it is true, in some degree, in both senses; . . .'⁹ They are the words on which we call when we are, at some level, confused ourselves as to the quality of what we are trying to judge; when we are, following Pope's advice in *An Essay on Criticism*, trying to 'mark *that Point* where Sense and Dulness *meet*',¹⁰ and in consequence feel ourselves falling into the grip of contending sympathies. An example occurs in the preface to A. E. Housman's edition of Manilius. Housman is reviewing earlier notable editions of this difficult poet, and has reached the eighteenth century, in which editions were published by Richard Bentley and Elias Stoeber:

If a man will comprehend the richness and variety of the universe, and inspire his mind with a due measure of wonder and of awe, he must contemplate the human intellect not only on its heights of genius but in its abysses of ineptitude; and it might be fruitlessly debated to the end of time whether Richard Bentley or Elias Stoeber was the more marvellous work of the Creator: Elias Stoeber, whose reprint of Bentley's text, with a commentary intended to confute it, saw the light in 1767 at Strasburg, a city still famous for its geese.¹¹

In its transit from its lofty opening to the bathos of 'geese' the insult to Stoeber is such a vivid miniaturisation of the mock-heroic that it is easy to be distracted from the traces it bears of an underlying emotion more complicated than pure contempt. For Housman here calls repeatedly on that special ambidextrous vocabulary which allows praise to cohabit with blame: 'wonder', 'awe', 'marvellous.' He does so because, in the equal exorbitancy of his admiration for Bentley¹² and his scorn of Stoeber, Housman is forced to acknowledge that these two men—the one unapproachably excellent, the other unforgivably foolish—in one respect join hands. That Bentley never deviated into error, and that Stoeber never deviated into sense: these twin facts do, each, and genuinely, prompt wonder in Housman.¹³ And the perplexity of that moment leads to a flash

⁹ William Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral* (London, 1935), p. 56.

¹⁰ *An Essay on Criticism*, 51; J. Butt *et al.* (eds.), *The Twickenham Edition of the Poems of Alexander Pope*, 11 vols. (London, 1939–69), 1. 244.

¹¹ *M. Manilii Astronomicon. Liber Primus Recensuit et enarravit A. E. Housman. Editio Altera* (Cambridge, 1937), i. xix.

¹² For Housman's refusal to allow himself to be compared to Bentley, see R. P. Graves, *A. E. Housman: The Scholar-Poet* (London, 1979), p. 201.

¹³ '*Lucida tela diei*: these are the words that come into one's mind when one has halted at some stubborn perplexity of reading or interpretation, has witnessed Scaliger and Gronovius and Huetius fumble at it one after another, and then turns to Bentley and sees Bentley strike his finger on the place and say *thou ailest here, and here*' (*Astronomicon*, i. xvi): 'Stoeber's mind, though

of oblique self-revelation on Housman's part. Strasburg is famous for the geese one can eat in its restaurants, typically in the form of *foie gras* encased in pastry, the famous *pâté de Strasbourg*. The skewering of Stoeber admitted into the preface to the edition of Manilius a trace of an aspect of his life which Housman was otherwise sedulous to exclude from his scholarly writing. This was Housman the connoisseur of food and wine, who each year visited France in pursuit of those pleasures; whose choice of wines to accompany a particular meal sometimes showed such judgement that the owners of hotels would enter the restaurant to congratulate him; but who made no public display of this expertise, and certainly did not allow it to invade his classical scholarship.¹⁴ Yet in the moment when the paradoxical intimacy of the transcendently good and the unfathomably bad made itself felt, there was a trembling of the veil of authorial *persona*, and fugitive expression was given to an otherwise concealed aspect of character. In Pope's engagement with Dulness, too, there was as we shall see a spasm of self-disclosure; and Blackmore was for Pope, as Stoeber was for Housman (although for different reasons), much more than simply his 'favorite whipping boy'.¹⁵

To remember and re-apply as I have just done Dryden's contemptuous (but also daunted) formulation of Shadwell's inseparable adherence to nonsense—'But *Sh*—never deviates into sense'—is to begin to reflect on the extent to which late seventeenth-century poets are conscious of how the impulse to praise can be easily deflected towards something which falls short of eulogy.¹⁶ In her Warton lecture of 1975, Elsie Duncan-Jones memorably showed how Marvell was guided by his own insight, that 'improbable *Elogies* . . . are of the greatest disservice to their own design, and do in effect diminish alwayes the Person whom they pretend to magnifie'.¹⁷ This is the principle which would later be quoted by Pope towards the end of the *Epistle to Augustus*: 'Praise undeserv'd is scandal in disguise.'¹⁸ And it also lay behind Tom Brown's mischievous suggestion that Blackmore had in fact lampooned William III in the epics which had

that is no name to call it by, was one which turned as unswervingly to the false, the meaningless, the unmetrical, and the ungrammatical, as the needle to the pole' (*Astronomicon*, i. xix).

¹⁴ See Graves, *A. E. Housman*, p. 118.

¹⁵ Maynard Mack, *Alexander Pope: A Life* (New Haven and London, 1985), p. 524.

¹⁶ *Mac Flecknoe*, 20.

¹⁷ Elsie Duncan-Jones, 'Marvell: A Great Master of Words', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 61 (1975), 267–90. Annabel Patterson *et al.* (eds.), *The Rehearsal Transpros'd*, in *The Prose Works of Andrew Marvell*, 2 vols. (New Haven and London, 2004), 1. 55.

¹⁸ 'To Augustus', 413; *Twickenham Edition*, 4. 229.

been designed to compliment him.¹⁹ So Marvell, alive to this pitfall, habitually sharpened the sweetness of praise with a dash of something more astringent. There is no reason to believe that Marvell did not admire *Paradise Lost*, and of course he was a colleague of Milton's during the Interregnum. Nevertheless, there are surely some interesting effects in the conclusion to the poem Marvell wrote in praise of *Paradise Lost*. The poem's last ten lines touch on Milton's aversion to what he had condemned as 'the troublesome and modern bondage of rhyming'.²⁰ Marvell begins by apparently conceding the superiority of unrhymed verse:

Well mightst thou scorn thy readers to allure
With tinkling rhyme, of thine own sense secure²¹

But the final four lines of the poem show Marvell protecting Milton from the disservice of an improbable eulogy, as in a characteristic moment of self-reflection he draws the fact of his own poem being rhymed into the orbit of this exposure of the redundancy of rhyme:

I too transported by the mode offend,
And while I meant to praise thee must commend.
Thy verse created like thy theme sublime
In number, weight, and measure, needs not rhyme.²²

As Elsie Duncan-Jones so well observed, in the first of these couplets Marvell is offering 'himself up to prove Milton's point that rhyme makes a poet express himself less well' by providing an instance of 'the wrong done to sense by rhyme'.²³ The exigencies of rhyme force Marvell to commend Milton rather than to praise him, because 'praise' does not rhyme with 'offend'. But in conceding that rhyme can in this respect be inferior to unrhymed verse, Marvell also implicitly claims a superiority for himself, since commendations (unlike praises) are bestowed only downwards. And that sense of the partial retraction of an offered compliment which arises from the forced substitution of 'commend' for 'praise' is strengthened in the poem's final couplet. We might expect to encounter unusual effects when 'rhyme' is itself made a rhyme-word; and those effects may themselves be concentrated when, as is the case here, the poet's subject is

¹⁹ Quoted in Richard C. Boys, 'Sir Richard Blackmore and the Wits: A Study of "Commendatory Verses on the Author of the Two Arthurs and the Satyr Against Wit" (1700)', *University of Michigan Contributions in Modern Philology*, 13 (1949), 6.

²⁰ Milton, *Paradise Lost*, 'The Verse'.

²¹ 'On Mr Milton's *Paradise Lost*', ll. 45–6.

²² *Ibid.*, ll. 50–4.

²³ Duncan-Jones, 'Great Master of Words', 288 and 289.

also rhyme. It would surely be unwary to take Marvell's ostensible extolling of Milton's sublime verse above rhymed verse at face value in a poem which culminates in the word 'rhyme', and in which the word Marvell chooses to capture the quality in *Paradise Lost* which makes rhyme unnecessary to Milton—'sublime'—is made to do the ancillary work of setting up, and so is itself conscripted into, the poem's own climactic act of rhyming. The statement that the sublime stands in no need of rhyme becomes oblique when it is turned literally into the support of 'rhyme'.

Such praise takes back something of what it seems to give. In the case of Marvell, it is tempting to construe this as an instance of his fondness for the Delphic. Yet perhaps it also wears a more public face. Marvell was some thirteen years younger than Milton.²⁴ Although he survived his older colleague by only four years, the two men belonged to separate generations, Marvell surviving as a public figure in a Restoration world from which Milton was obliged to retire. Beneath the playfulness with rhyme and on the subject of rhyming at the end of Marvell's poem can we not also sense a sharper awareness of severance? Your ways—sublime though they were—are not now our ways. Deference and valediction merge in a poetic gesture which both acknowledges an earlier achievement and also places it firmly as indeed earlier. It is a signal of something verging on dismissal which is captured in the passage from past to present tense in the line 'And while I meant to praise thee must commend.' How different the line would be if it read: 'And while I mean to praise thee must commend.' But the past intention to praise has been succeeded—and supplanted—by a cooler present obligation to commend.

This Marvellian blending of tribute with judgement has an afterlife. It is a recurrent signature in the poetry of that generation which followed Dryden but preceded Pope. This was also the generation which saw the *floruit*, if that is the right word, of Sir Richard Blackmore, and I want now to spend a few minutes describing something of its characteristic quality as a way of throwing into relief the sequences of Pope's poetic career, and then subsequently approaching the subject of Pope's dealings with Blackmore.

English poetry of the period 1693–1708—that's to say, the poetry published between the appearance of *Examen Poeticum* and the arrival of Pope in London literary circles—is rarely discussed. Leaving aside the gamey splendours of late Dryden, which modern scholarship has learned

²⁴ Milton, 1608–74; Marvell, 1621–78.

to relish only relatively recently, the verse of these decades is customarily written off in accounts of English poetry as an interregnum of poetasters and journeyman writers, some of whom come to our attention only when they loom up in the halls of literary infamy which are the footnotes to *The Dunciad*. We hurry past it in our eagerness to reach the brilliant advent of Pope, and so Bonamy Dobrée's judgement of nearly fifty years ago has not seemed to recent scholars in need of serious updating:

The early years of the century offer in abundance verse which has not now to be read, though it need not be despised; for poetaster after poetaster—and after poet—produced his pindarics, his imitations or paraphrases of Horace, his Virgilian eclogues or Georgics, his entrance-ticket amatory verses, his songs and laments, his ballads, fabliaux, or fables. Many of them have considerable skill, a healthy awareness of what had been written before; but their poems do not often impress us as corresponding with any imaginative apprehension, or to be the result of poetic, as opposed to social, pressure.²⁵

Those closer in time were less critical. Joseph Warton identified 'the latter end of King William, and the reign of Queen Anne' as the time 'when the arts and polite literature, were at their height in this nation'.²⁶

It would be folly to characterise the poetry of even so brief a period as this on the basis of a reading of only one short poem (although I think that the account I am about to give you of Addison's poem to Dryden could be amplified, deepened and refined, though not essentially altered, by a consideration of Congreve's various tributes, in verse and prose, to Dryden, and Dryden's celebrated poem to Congreve). But if we look for a moment at the poem in which Addison complimented Dryden on the Ovidian translations published in *Examen Poeticum*, we may be able to see the mediocrity of this poetry from a different angle, as something chosen rather than as a condition of limitation from which the poets of the time were unable to escape. Warton judged this poem to be 'languid, prosaic, and void of any poetical imagery or spirit', and accordingly dismissed it as 'coldly correct'.²⁷ But its decorous levelness can be read

²⁵ Bonamy Dobrée, *English Literature in the Early Eighteenth Century 1700–1740* (Oxford, 1959), p. 123. Cf. Emrys Jones: 'The literary world into which the young Pope grew up was, it seems fair to say, relatively poor in imaginative opportunities. The poets writing immediately before Pope were without fables and without myths, except those taken in an etiolated form from classical antiquity; they seemed content with verses that made little demand on the imaginative life of their readers. . . . the literary scene as Pope must have viewed it as a young man was, at its best, lucidly and modestly sensible; but in feeling and imagination it was undeniably somewhat impoverished' (Jones, 'Pope and Dulness', p. 239).

²⁶ Joseph Warton, *An Essay on the Writings and Genius of Pope* (1756), pp. 160–1.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 266.

more positively, as a token of discretion, judgement and historical insight.

To Mr. *DRYDEN*. By Mr. *JO. ADDISON*.

How long, Great Poet, shall thy Sacred Lays,
 Provoke our Wonder, and transcend our Praise?
 Can neither Injuries of Time, or Age,
 Damp thy Poetick Heat, and quench thy Rage?
 Not so thy *Ovid* in his Exile wrote,
 Grief chill'd his *Breast*, and checkt his *rising Thought*;
 Pensive and sad, his drooping Muse betrays
 The *Roman* Genius in its last Decays.

Prevailing Warmth has still thy Mind possest,
 And second Youth is kindled in thy *Breast*.
 Thou mak'st the *Beauties* of the *Romans* known,
 And *England* boasts of Riches not her own;
 Thy Lines have heighten'd *Virgil's* Majesty,
 And *Horace* wonders at himself in Thee.
 Thou teachest *Persius* to inform our Isle
 In smoother Numbers, and a clearer Stile;
 And *Juvenal* instructed in thy Page,
 Edges his Satire, and improves his Rage.
 Thy Copy casts a fairer Light on all,
 And still out-shines the bright Original.

Now *Ovid* boasts th'advantage of thy Song,
 And tells his Story in the *Brittish* Tongue;
 Thy charming Verse, and fair Translations show
 How thy own Lawrel first began to grow;
 How wild *Lycæon* chang'd by angry Gods,
 And frighted at himself, ran howling through the Woods.

O may'st thou still the Noble Tale prolong,
 Nor Age, nor Sickness interrupt thy Song:
 Then may we wondring read how Human Limbs,
 Have water'd Kingdoms, and dissolv'd in Streams;
 Of those rich Fruits that on the Fertile Mould
 Turn'd yellow by degrees, and ripen'd into Gold:
 How some in Feathers, or a ragged Hide
 Have liv'd a second Life, and different Natures try'd.
 Then will thy *Ovid*, thus transform'd, reveal
 A Nobler Change than he himself can tell.
Mag. Coll. Oxon,
*June 2. 1693.*²⁸

²⁸ *Examen Poeticum: Being the Third Part of Miscellany Poems* (London: Jacob Tonson, 1693), pp. 247–9.

Addison was twenty-two when he wrote this poem, Dryden sixty-two when he received it.²⁹ It is a poem of extraordinary self-possession to be written by one so young. It shows self-possession that Addison wrote the poem at all, but the sense of self-possession is strengthened by the quality of the tribute that he pays to Dryden. There is, is there not, something complicated about a poem in praise of works of translation which dwells, to quite the extent that Addison's does, on how unlike the original is the translation and on how thoroughly Dryden has 'transform'd' the ancient poets in his versions. Persius has been clarified and polished, Juvenal sharpened, Virgil heightened, and Horace 'wonders at himself in Thee'. 'Wonder', of course, is a central term in that poised vocabulary which suspends itself between praise and blame, and it is a word which Addison uses three times in this poem ('Provoke our Wonder', '*Horace* wonders', 'we wondring'). The thread of wonder links Dryden to the subject matter of the most recent translations which Addison is admiring here (and alongside which it was first published)—namely, the translations of book one and parts of books nine and thirteen of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*—for wonder is, according to Addison, the response provoked by Ovid's stories of transformations, just as it is the response provoked by those other transformations which are Dryden's translations. However, to see translation under the aspect of metamorphosis is another compliment which, on closer inspection, dissolves into equivocation. The two metamorphoses from the first book upon which Addison concentrates are the transformation of Daphne into a laurel ('How thy own Lawrel first began to grow') and Jove's transformation of the monstrous monarch of the Iron Age, Lycaon, into a wolf. Does Addison's choice of these two metamorphoses imply some connection between Dryden's poetry ('thy own Lawrel') and the fate of Lycaon? At the beginning of the poem, Addison marvels at Dryden's poetic endurance:

Can neither Injuries of Time, or Age,
Damp thy Poetick Heat, and quench thy Rage?

'Rage' is, at this time, a term for poetic inspiration. But it is also a word upon which Dryden had called twice in quick succession when he was translating Lycaon's transformation into a wolf, and wished to evoke the essential savagery which metamorphosis would leave untransmuted:

²⁹ In later collected editions of Addison's works the words '*The Author's age 22*' are printed under the date of composition: see for instance *The Works of the Late Right Honourable Joseph Addison Esq.*, 4 vols. (London: Jacob Tonson, 1730), 1. 4, or *The Works of the Late Right Honourable Joseph Addison Esq.*, 4 vols. (Birmingham: John Baskerville, 1761), 1. 4.

About his lips, the gather'd foam he churns,
 And, breathing slaughters, still with rage he burns, . . .
 He grows a Wolf, his hoariness remains,
 And the same rage in other Members reigns.³⁰

Unnaturally enduring rage, then, is a quality shared by Dryden and Lycaon, and the connection, once made, sends us back to the beginning of the poem, and the contrast Addison had drawn there of the different spirits in which Dryden and Ovid had met the sad changes which eventually overtook them both. In Ovid, the fall from political favour had produced a 'drooping Muse'. In Dryden, 'neither Injuries of Time, or Age' can cool his 'Poetick Heat . . . and Rage': like Lycaon, 'still with rage he burns'. The compliment Addison pays Dryden, of being more indomitable than Ovid, is itself, when taken alongside the language of the translation to which it refers, metamorphosed into an observation about Dryden's demeanour in the 1690s which is less fulsome and more astute than it looks.

It had been the revolution of 1688 which had decisively reversed Dryden's fortunes, and of the consequences of which Addison was eventually to prove an adroit advocate. By bringing the recent political revolution of the kingdom into the scope of his poem, Addison further broadens the relevance of the idea of metamorphosis. States, as well as individuals, can undergo transformations. Just as Jove had purged the Iron Age of Lycaon, and had (as Dryden put it) 'from wondrous Principles' ordained 'a Race unlike the first', so England had recently been purified by a god-like visitor. But in Dryden, as in Lycaon, 'hoariness remains'. One recalls Dryden's sour denial, in the dedication of *Examen Poeticum* to Lord Radcliffe, that after the events of 1688 anything had really changed: 'No Government has ever been, or ever can be, wherein Time-servers and Blockheads will not be uppermost. The Persons are only chang'd, but the same juglings in State, the same Hypocrisie in Religion, the same Self-Interest, and Mis-mannagement, will remain for ever.'³¹ There may be, then, a hint at sedition, in the '*rising Thought*' that Ovid 'checkt' but that Dryden by contrast continued to cherish. The youthful Addison, however, spoke for a different generation; a generation who wished to claim that in their mild nature rage did not burn, and who therefore could respond to 'Nobler Change' without rancour. So the proclamation of Addison's youth, which accompanied the reprintings of this poem in

³⁰ *The First Book of Ovid's Metamorphoses*, ll. 309–10, 316–17 in *Examen Poeticum*, p. 21.

³¹ *Examen Poeticum*, 'The Dedication', sig. A3^v.

editions of his works, involves both deference to Dryden (as to the senior poet) and firm separation from him (as the embodiment of ferocious times now banished for good). Addison's praise of Dryden has just that trace of placing valediction which we saw also in Marvell's praise of Milton.

As poetry we may find this too insipid, too artfully judged, for our taste, just as it was for the taste of Joseph Warton. Like Warton, we may crave stronger meat from a position of comparative security. But before we dismiss Addison's poetry as callow or even false, a poetry of compliment which more than half retracts what it confers, we should reflect a little on the implications of the generational difference between the author and the recipient. In a work of 1709 Shaftesbury proposed that "Tis the persecuting Spirit has rais'd the *bantering* one: . . .",³² and this roughly contemporary notion that a polite suspension of meaning may be the unressembling offspring of violence and intolerance is a useful one to bear in mind when we think about the genealogy of Addison's poetic style. Combining as it does a fastidious aversion to undiluted eulogy with a well-bred determination not to be driven from the forms of compliment, is it altogether improbable to see in this poetry a literary counterpart to the Whiggish politics which were even then being fabricated from the ill-adapted materials furnished by the recent English past? Writing to Boswell in 1782, Burke brilliantly generalised that the thread running through English politics since 1688 had been a union of Whig measures and Tory language.³³ In poems such as that addressed by Addison to Dryden, we can see that thread beginning to be twisted, as an inherited literary form is adjusted to the needs of a rising generation whose sense of what they owe to others is checked and controlled by a conviction of what they owe to themselves. This is a new kind of propriety, equally aloof from both the factions which had collided on the battle-fields of the mid-seventeenth century, and resolved to demonstrate that the success of liberty did not entail the destruction of religion, politeness or monarchy. It was a creed—a road-map for the development of Whiggism, if you like—to which Addison would give most memorable expression over twenty years later in number 29 of *The Freeholder*. But it was already embryonically present in the carefully graded implications of the youthful poem he addressed to Dryden.³⁴

³² *Sensus Communis*, Sect. 4, in *Characteristicks*, 3 vols. (1711), 1. 72.

³³ 'I take the true Genius of this constitution to be, Tory language and Whigg measure'; Burke to Boswell, 1 Sept., 1782 (T. W. Copeland *et al.* (eds.), *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, 10 vols. (Cambridge, 1958–78), 5. 35).

³⁴ Published 30 March, 1716; Joseph Addison, *The Freeholder*, ed. James Leheny (Oxford, 1979), pp. 156–60.

Pope's poetic career can be seen as a movement away from the suave finessing of judgement which characterised at least some of the poetry which was being written and published during his childhood, and towards a poetry of greater outspokenness. It was a movement not always performed at the same pace, and it was not altogether free of pauses or even reversals. Nevertheless, much of Pope's early poetry takes delight in the delicacy which can arise when judgements are not pushed to the uttermost, but rather are left understated and with the possibility of qualification or even revocation. In this perspective, *The Rape of the Lock* is the centrepiece of Pope's early career, and represents his fullest exploration of this poetic mode. But one might also recollect the way *An Essay on Criticism* tacks between conflicting positions and advises its reader to 'Avoid *Extreams*; and shun the Fault of such, | Who still are pleas'd *too little*, or *too much*.'³⁵ In that poem Pope repeatedly found the point of true judgement to be suspended between warring alternatives, and in what are almost the poem's final lines he himself resolved to be 'Still pleas'd to *praise*, yet not afraid to *blame*.'³⁶ It is for this reason that these famous lines from the beginning of *Windsor-Forest* seem so central to Pope's early verse:

Here Hills and Vales, the Woodland and the Plain,
 Here Earth and Water seem to strive again,
 Not *Chaos*-like together crush'd and bruis'd,
 But as the World, harmoniously confus'd:
 Where Order in Variety we see,
 And where, tho' all things differ, all agree.
 Here waving Groves a checquer'd Scene display,
 And part admit and part exclude the Day;
 As some coy Nymph her Lover's warm Address
 Nor quite indulges, nor can quite repress.³⁷

This is not so much the description of a landscape as the rolling out of a particular poetic sensibility: one pleased to find agreement in difference, happy to vary admission with exclusion, at home in the temperate region between the torrid zone of indulgence and the frigid pole of repression.

It was a very different poet who, over thirty years later and imagining a conversation in which he was called upon to justify the extremity of his poetry, would write:

³⁵ *An Essay on Criticism*, ll. 384–5; *Twickenham Edition*, 1. 284.

³⁶ *An Essay on Criticism*, l. 742; *Twickenham Edition*, 1. 326.

³⁷ *Windsor-Forest*, ll. 11–20; *Twickenham Edition*, 1. 149–50.

Ask you what Provocation I have had?
The strong Antipathy of Good to Bad.³⁸

Just as harmonious confusion was the central characteristic of Pope's early poetry, so strong antipathies structured his later verse. The innocent pleasures of mingling were supplanted by the heroic duty to separate. This could entail the abrupt renunciation of some of Pope's own earlier poetic selves—for example, the dismissal of the Horatian *persona* which had dominated his poetry in the 1730s which we find in poems such as the first 'Epilogue to the Satires' and 'Epitaph. For one who would not be buried in Westminster Abbey'. The 'sly, polite, insinuating stile'³⁹ of Horace now perhaps seemed less astute than foolish—a flinching from the naming of vice, in which timidity went disguised as subtlety, and which therefore did nothing to displace what it deplored. By contrast Pope's later poetry, as the 'Friend' in the first 'Epilogue to the Satires' shrewdly observes, aims at setting 'half the World, God knows, against the rest'.⁴⁰ No poem of Pope's achieved that polarising aim more thoroughly than did *The Dunciad*, particularly the final four-book version of the poem published in 1743, which concludes in so strongly apocalyptic a vein, and which at one level proclaims the utter distinctness of literary worth and literary worthlessness.

Blackmore was one of the hinges about which Pope turned as he moved from his earlier to his later career. As Norman Ault suggested many years ago, at first it was probably loyalty to Dryden which led Pope to tilt at Blackmore in *An Essay on Criticism*.⁴¹ But then he seems to have undergone a change of heart, for in all reprintings of that poem from the second edition of 1711 until its appearance in the *Works* of 1717 Pope substituted the name of Shadwell for that of Blackmore. In 1714, Pope and Blackmore seem even to have been on good terms, for in April of that year Pope asked their common friend, John Hughes, to 'Pray make my most humble service acceptable to Sir Richard Blackmore'.⁴² But when Blackmore (whose own religion was by all accounts sincere and simple) attacked Swift as an 'impious Buffoon' for the way in which, in *A Tale of a Tub*, he had made himself 'pleasant with the Principles of the Christian',⁴³

³⁸ 'Epilogue to the Satires: Dialogue II', ll. 197–8; *Twickenham Edition*, 4. 324.

³⁹ 'Epilogue to the Satires: Dialogue I', l. 19; *Twickenham Edition*, 4. 298.

⁴⁰ 'Epilogue to the Satires: Dialogue I', l. 58; *Twickenham Edition*, 4. 302.

⁴¹ Norman Ault, *New Light on Pope* (London, 1949), pp. 248–58.

⁴² George Sherburn (ed.), *The Correspondence of Alexander Pope*, 5 vols. (Oxford, 1956), 1. 218.

⁴³ Sir Richard Blackmore, *Essays Upon Several Subjects* (1716), 'An Essay Upon Wit', p. 217.

and followed that up the next year with an attack on Pope himself as a ‘godless Author [who] has burlesqu’d the *First Psalm* of *David* in so obscene and profane a manner, that perhaps no Age ever saw such an insolent Affront offer’d to the establish’d Religion of their Country’⁴⁴ (a reference to *A Roman Catholick Version of the First Psalm; for the Use of a Young Lady*, which Pope had intended only for manuscript circulation, but which had been piratically printed by Edmund Curll in 1716),⁴⁵ then the battle-lines were drawn between the two poets, and Blackmore’s fate with posterity was sealed. He was doomed to become the ‘everlasting *Blackmore*,’⁴⁶ the prodigious winner of the competition in *The Dunciad* to demonstrate ‘the wond’rous pow’r of Noise’:

But far o’er all, sonorous Blackmore’s strain;
Walls, steeples, skies, bray back to him again.
In Tot’nam fields, the brethren with amaze
Prick all their ears up, and forget to graze;
Long Chanc’ry-lane retentive rolls the sound,
And courts to courts return it round and round;
Thames wafts it thence to Rufus’ roaring hall,
And Hungerford re-echoes bawl for bawl.
All hail him victor in both gifts of song,
Who sings so loudly, and who sings so long.⁴⁷

This passage was cited by Emrys Jones as an instance of the ambiguity of Dulness, because (as he put it) ‘the image of deafening, gigantesque noise—as of a giant *shouting* over London—is, though comic, a disturbingly powerful one’.⁴⁸ The difficulty which this passage shows Pope encountering when trying to realise his evident desire to make Blackmore seem purely contemptible can be related to a curious fact about *The Dunciad* which has been known for many years, but which scholarship has recorded rather than pondered;⁴⁹ namely, that *The Dunciad* seems to have been influenced by a poem on the subject of Dulness published by Blackmore in 1708 called *The Kit-Cats*.

⁴⁴ Sir Richard Blackmore, *Essays Upon Several Subjects. Volume II* (1717), p. 270.

⁴⁵ For this episode, see Ault, *New Light on Pope*, pp. 156–62.

⁴⁶ Pope’s footnote to *The Dunciad*, ii. 268; *Twickenham Edition*, 5. 131 and 308.

⁴⁷ *The Dunciad*, ii. 222 and 259–68; *Twickenham Edition*, 5. 306 and 308.

⁴⁸ Jones, ‘Pope and Dulness’, p. 255.

⁴⁹ The original perception is to be found in John C. Hodges, ‘Pope’s Debt to One of His Dunces’, *Modern Language Notes*, 51 (1936), 154–8. For the recording of possible debts to Blackmore in the most recent edition of *The Dunciad*, see Alexander Pope, *The Dunciad in Four Books*, ed. Valerie Rumbold (London, 1999), pp. 89, 267, 351.

In his 'Life of Pope' Johnson boldly stated what has become the generally accepted view of the literary genealogy of *The Dunciad*: 'Of *The Dunciad* the hint is confessedly taken from Dryden's *Mac Flecknoe*.⁵⁰ It might have been more accurate, however, to say that Dryden's poem provided Pope with *a* hint rather than *the* hint, since there is much in Pope's poem which has no counterpart in *Mac Flecknoe*.⁵¹ In particular, the way Pope mythologises Dulness and gives her a local habitation in *The Dunciad* far exceeds what we find in Dryden's poem. In this respect, although there are in *The Dunciad* no close verbal allusions to *The Kit-Cats*, the imaginative groundwork of Pope's poem has strong affinities with that of Blackmore, as the following passage, describing the position of the temple of Dulness, may suggest:

In fam'd *Hibernia* on the *Northern* Main,
Where Wit's unknown, and Schools are built in vain,
Between two Hills, that rise with equal Pride,
And with their Tops the floating Clouds divide,
A lazy Lake, as *Lethe* black and deep,
Secure from Storms, extended lies asleep.
Young vig'rous Winds, which heavy Tempests bear,
With fruitless Toil shove at the stagnant Air;
Their Breath all spent, they from their Labour cease,
And leave th'unweildy Fogs to rest in Peace.
The Beasts, that come for Water, at the Brink
Benumb'd, stand Nodding and forget to drink:
The Birds by luckless Fortune hither brought,
Fall down, and sleeping on the Water, float:
The thoughtless Boat-Men scarcely half awake,
Do never one successful Voyage make,
But yawn, and drop their Oars into the Lake.⁵²

At the risk of sounding like one of Blackmore's detractors, I am tempted to say that in passages such as this Blackmore evinces a true feeling for Dulness. But I might be on safer ground to say that this poetry is at variance with Blackmore's reputation for writing verse which was always, so to speak, at the top of its voice, always 'rumbling, rough and fierce' as Pope put it.⁵³ It possesses some subtlety and force—for instance, the use

⁵⁰ Johnson, *Lives of the Poets*, 3. 241. Ian Jack restated the view trenchantly in his *Augustan Satire: Intention and Idiom in English Poetry 1660–1750* (Oxford, 1952), p. 116.

⁵¹ As Johnson himself, of course, goes on immediately to observe: 'but the plan [of *The Dunciad*] is so enlarged and diversified as justly to claim the praise of an original' (Johnson, *Lives of the Poets*, 3. 241).

⁵² Sir Richard Blackmore, *The Kit-Cats. A Poem* (1708), pp. 9–10.

⁵³ 'What? like Sir *Richard*, rumbling, rough and fierce, | With ARMS, and GEORGE, and BRUNSWICK crowd the Verse? | Rend with tremendous Sound your ears asunder, | With Gun,

of the triplet in the final three lines, the half-pun in ‘yawn’ to the technical nautical term ‘yaw’ (which Pope also uses),⁵⁴ the metrical evocation of unavailing effort through the reversed foot in the line ‘With fruitless Toil shove at the stagnant Air’. It is neither as concentrated nor as inventive as Pope, of course. But it shows Dulness taking hold on its prey in much the way it does in *The Dunciad*, and it is very much more accomplished than you would have expected had you been unguarded enough to take Pope’s account of Blackmore as the unvarnished truth. It also shows that when it came to imagining a landscape for Dulness, Blackmore had preceded Pope. He had done it already, and done it competently.

Not many years ago, when the exponents of the art of sinking in criticism were at their most pert, suggestions that Pope had not been too proud to lift ideas from those he attacked would have been gleefully seized upon as evidence of expedient hypocrisy. In this case, a sanctimonious eagerness to prosecute Pope, while unlovely in itself, would also distract us from a more profitable line of thought. For, if Blackmore’s double presence in *The Dunciad*, as both target and influence, makes him at once Pope’s anti-type and colleague, then we can see a similar doubleness of relation between Pope and Blackmore in *Peri Bathous*, the compendium of bad writing for which Pope had been collecting examples since probably 1716, and which he eventually published in 1728, the same year as the first, three-book version of *The Dunciad*. Blackmore’s epics are laid under heavy contribution in *Peri Bathous* and supply numerous examples of ‘the Bathos; the bottom, the end, the central point, the *non plus ultra*, of true Modern Poesy!’⁵⁵ Some other examples—equally ludicrous when wrenched from their context—are unattributed. Where do they come from? In later life Pope told Joseph Spence that they were taken from a piece of his own *juvenilia*, an epic poem written between 1701 and 1703 called *Alcander, Prince of Rhodes*.⁵⁶ The poem does not survive except in these fragmentary quotations. Pope burnt it at some point during the winter of 1716–17 at the instigation of Bishop Atterbury, although (as

Drum, Trumpet, Blunderbuss & Thunder?’ *Imitations of Horace*, Sat. II. i, ll. 23–6; *Twickenham Edition*, 4. 7.

⁵⁴ ‘And Navies yawn’d for Orders on the Main’ (*The Dunciad*, iv. 618; *Twickenham Edition*, 5. 405).
⁵⁵ *The Prose Works of Alexander Pope*, volume 2, ed. Rosemary Cowler (Oxford, 1986), p. 186.

⁵⁶ The attribution of these anonymous verses was made by Spence to Joseph Warton: Joseph Spence, *Observations, Anecdotes, and Characters of Books and Men*, ed. James M. Osborn (Oxford, 1966), no. 41, i. 19 n. Cf. Warton, *Essay*, pp. 82–3: ‘I have been credibly informed, that some of the anonymous verses, quoted as examples of the *Art of Sinking in Poetry*, in the incomparable satire so called, were such as our poet remembered from his own ALCANDER.’

he told Spence) he did so ‘not without some regret’.⁵⁷ We shall return to the significance of that backward glance. In another conversation with Spence, Pope explicitly associated *Alcander* with Blackmore, claiming that ‘it was better planned than Blackmore’s *Prince Arthur*, but as slavish an imitation of the ancients’.⁵⁸ The hint Pope gives us here, that in his teenage years he had passed through a phase of writing in the idiom which Blackmore had made his own, perhaps even modelling himself upon Blackmore—this hint is amplified by the account he gave in 1716 of his earliest writings: ‘I had made an Epic Poem, and Panegyrics on all the Princes in Europe, and thought myself the greatest genius that ever was.’⁵⁹ Epic and panegyric were two of Blackmore’s stocks in trade, notorious as he was for his devotion to the House of Nassau. So in *Peri Bathous*, as in *The Dunciad*, Pope and Blackmore were in one respect antagonists, in another sense colleagues.

What dissuaded the teenage Pope from following further in the poetic footsteps of Sir Richard? Once again, Spence’s *Anecdotes* supplies a clue. Pope told Spence that, at just the age when he laid aside *Alcander*,⁶⁰ he also made a new literary friendship:

[When] about fifteen [that is to say, in 1703], I got acquainted with Mr. Walsh. He encouraged me much, and used to tell me that there was one way left of excelling, for though we had 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.⁶¹

William Walsh (1663–1708) had been a friend of Dryden’s, and in giving this advice to the young Pope Walsh encouraged him towards a poetic career which would be an extension and completion of that of his recently dead friend. Pope himself saw Dryden as his master, but a master who had left a space in which Pope might make his own contribution: ‘I learned versification wholly from Dryden’s works,’ he told Spence, ‘who had improved it much beyond any of our former poets, and would probably have brought it to its perfection, had not he been unhappily obliged to write so often in haste.’⁶²

⁵⁷ Spence, *Anecdotes*, no. 39, i. 18.

⁵⁸ Spence, *Anecdotes*, no. 38, i. 17.

⁵⁹ Pope, *Works* (1751), 1. *xi.

⁶⁰ At times Pope appears to speak of *Alcander* as of a completed poem (e.g. Spence, *Anecdotes*, no. 38, i. 17); at others he clearly implies that it was never finished (e.g. Spence, *Anecdotes*, no. 36, i. 16 and no. 37, i. 17). The balance of probability seems to be that *Alcander* was laid aside as a consequence of the advice Pope had received from Walsh.

⁶¹ Spence, *Anecdotes*, no. 73, i. 32.

⁶² Spence, *Anecdotes*, no. 55, i. 24.

The repeated advice from Walsh to devote himself to correctness turned Pope into the poet we know and admire. But, in so doing, it also pushed Pope into a new direction, away from the Whiggish ‘true Modern Poesy’ then being written by Blackmore in which he had been dabbling, and towards a cultivation of the poetry of Blackmore’s inveterate enemy, Dryden.⁶³ Aware of this, and thinking again about *The Dunciad*, we can return to an aspect of the poem which had worried Emrys Jones. Impressed by, yet also wanting to resist, the virtuously reading of Aubrey Williams, who did so much to establish how directly and minutely Pope’s poem was embedded in contemporary London, Jones wanted equally to stress the transforming, imaginative dimension of the poem.⁶⁴ He was surely right to do so. *The Dunciad*’s glaring deficiency, if considered as an image of early eighteenth-century literary London, is the absence from it of the period’s pre-eminent literary figure: namely, Pope himself.⁶⁵ What is the significance of this absence? It is that the Pope we know—the Pope whose poetical character as the correct successor to Dryden was already firmly established in 1728—cannot be present in *The Dunciad*, because in part *The Dunciad* is an exploration of the literary career which Pope did not have—the literary career as the follower of Blackmore from which he had been deflected by the insistent advice of Walsh. *The Dunciad* presents us with a fantasy landscape of a literary London in which all the forces of poetic incorrectness against which Pope had spent his adult life waging war are exuberantly at large. The triumph of Dulness at the end of the poem is ‘dire, overwhelming and absolute’.⁶⁶ But it is also an ‘all-composing Hour’ in which (to follow just one of the many clews of meaning in the word ‘composing’) conflicts are reconciled, losses repaired, and the mind freed from disturbance.⁶⁷

⁶³ For a succinct account of the origins of the hostility which grew up between Dryden and Blackmore, see Harry M. Solomon, *Sir Richard Blackmore* (Boston, 1980), pp. 57–64.

⁶⁴ Aubrey L. Williams, *Pope’s Dunciad: A Study of Its Meaning* (London, 1955). Cf. also Howard Erskine-Hill: ‘in the *Dunciad* . . . fragments of the real world are assimilated in to the dominant fantastic world of the poem, where they lend it solidity’ (‘New World of Pope’s *Dunciad*’, p. 53).

⁶⁵ There is only one reference to Pope himself in the poem, at iii. 332: ‘Hibernian Politics, O Swift! thy fate; | And Pope’s, ten years to comment and translate’; *Twickenham Edition*, 5. 336.

⁶⁶ Erskine-Hill, *Pope: The Dunciad*, p. 63.

⁶⁷ *The Dunciad*, iv. 627; *Twickenham Edition*, 5. 407. *OED*, 9, 13. Cf. once again Empson on the possible composing effects of irony: ‘The fundamental impulse of irony is to score off . . . both sets of sympathies in your mind, . . . and the process brings to mind the whole body of their difficulty with so much sharpness and freshness that it may give the strength to escape from it’ (*Some Versions of Pastoral*, p. 62).

Pope liked to present his poetic development as a matter of embracing responsibility:

That not in Fancy's Maze he wander'd long,
But stoop'd to Truth, and moraliz'd his song:⁶⁸

Such in part it was. But *The Dunciad*, as Emrys Jones appreciated, also has a juvenile side: its poetry was marked by 'a learned puerility', the dunces who people it are 'as free of inhibition and shame as any small infant', and at moments the poem evokes 'the unrestrained glee of childhood'.⁶⁹ As well as being Pope's most mature work, *The Dunciad* is a poem which allows Pope to revisit his youth. Some of his *juvenilia* is recycled into the later work—the lines he contributed to Wycherley's mock-encomiastic 'Panegyrick on Dulness', the attack on Elkanah Settle he had composed in 1702 entitled 'To the Author of a Poem, intituled, Successio'. But the dunces of *The Dunciad* are also Pope's proxies. Through them he gains imaginative access to the literary world from which he had withdrawn when he took to heart Walsh's advice, but into which as a teenager he had already wandered a little way. There is nothing to suggest that Pope ever repented of the decision to follow Walsh and embrace correctness, but you can be unrepentant and still feel regret, as Pope told Spence he did when he burned the manuscript of *Alcander*. The decision to be guided by Walsh had, after all, entailed nothing less than the loss of an alternative literary self. It was this un-lived life which in *The Dunciad* Pope mourned, celebrated, mocked, and vicariously enjoyed.

Did Pope have some inkling, even in the outset of his poetic career, that Blackmore would eventually assume for him the double importance of embodying both what he might have become and what he came to deplore? Pope's first poetic swipe at Sir Richard occurred in *An Essay on Criticism*. It arose in the context of Pope's regret for the object of his 'greatest veneration',⁷⁰ Dryden, but found expression in lines over which Pope hesitated for many years:

Pride, Malice, Folly, against *Dryden* rose,
In various Shapes of *Parsons, Criticks, Beaus*;
But *Sense* surviv'd, when *merry Jests* were past;
For rising Merit will *buoy up* at last.

⁶⁸ *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot*, ll. 340–1; *Twickenham Edition*, 4. 120.

⁶⁹ Jones, 'Pope and Dulness', pp. 237 and 253.

⁷⁰ Spence, *Anecdotes*, no. 57, i. 25.

Might he return, and bless once more our Eyes,
New *Blackmores* and new *Milbourns* must arise;⁷¹

In the last couplet Pope is reworking a line from an epigram of Martial: ‘Sint Maecenates, non deerunt, Flacce, Marones.’⁷² In keeping with the variegated character of Pope’s early poetry, the allusion casts a chequered shade over the verse, making it seem in part mock-heroic, in part aligned with its original. In bringing together Virgil and Dryden (whose translation of Virgil had been published in 1697), Pope’s allusion to Martial pays Dryden a grand, but straightforward, compliment. However, when it puts Blackmore and his fellow-dunce, Luke Milbourn, in the place of the munificent patron of Augustan poetry, Maecenas, as the necessary precondition for the advent of a great poet, there is a flavouring of burlesque, and an implicit comparison of a degraded present with a truly Augustan past. Whereas, in the reign of Augustus, poets were supported and encouraged, now they have to make do with the more brutal stimulants of provocation and insult: this is partly what is implied by the substitution of Blackmore and Milbourn for Maecenas. But that mock-heroic reading does not exhaust the richness of what is implied by the verse which carries the allusion. In particular, it cannot account for the distracting chime of ‘*rising Merit*’ with ‘New *Blackmores* and new *Milbourns* must *arise*’—a chime which persisted through all Pope’s indecisions over these lines, and which hints at there being some direct rather than adversative link between merit and Blackmore.

For Pope allusion was, as we know, a form of truth-telling and of self-revelation.⁷³ So it was entirely in character for him to choose allusion as the way to intimate his early awareness that Blackmore might prove to be a true, if surprising, Maecenas, and Dulness itself a necessary predecessor and patron of great poetry, including—in particular—the great poetry of *The Dunciad*.

⁷¹ *An Essay on Criticism*, ll. 458–63; *Twickenham Edition*, 1. 290–1. Dryden had himself brought Blackmore and Milbourn together, as egregious enemies of his, in the preface to *Fables* (1700).

⁷² Martial, VIII. lvi. 5: ‘Flaccus, if there are Maecenases, Virgils will not be lacking.’ The echo of Martial was first heard by Gilbert Wakefield, and was noted in his 1794 edition of Pope.

⁷³ Reuben Brower, *Alexander Pope: The Poetry of Allusion* (Oxford, 1959).