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Pope's Ethical Thinking: Passion and Irony in Dialogue

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RECENT CRITICISM HAS recovered an Alexander Pope that might have been; a sentimental figure, emotionally invested in the Boy Patriots, from whom friends of the 1730s entreated not belittling satire but a positive, passionately inspired muse.¹ Aaron Hill looked to Pope to match his own enthusiasm for a poetics of high emotion, sublimity, and moral vision.² George Lyttelton craved a 'Moral Song' that would 'steal into [men's] Hearts' and proselytise for virtue.³ But why did contemporaries hope for such things from Pope? And why were their wishes long frustrated? This discussion addresses those questions by recalling, first, a neglected Pope: the early poet of passion and sentiment whose memory Hill implicitly cherished. However, even at this outset, a parallel commitment to ironic perspectivism curbed Pope's propensity for affectivity, and I want, secondly, to illustrate that, commenting on its wider significance in the early eighteenth century. My third claim is that, after 1733, growing anxieties made an absence of passionate confidence less Pope's choice than his fate. Only in 1738 did he overcome this impasse and his earlier ambivalence about passion. That year's *Epilogue to the Satires*, my concluding text, finally brought the two preoccupations of fervid emotion and ironising ridicule into constructive

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¹ See Christine Gerrard, *The Patriot Opposition to Walpole: Politics, Poetry, and National Myth, 1725–1742* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 68–95.

² Christine Gerrard, *Aaron Hill: the Muses' Projector, 1685–1750* (Oxford, 2003), pp. 102–44.

³ *The Correspondence of Alexander Pope*, ed. George Sherburn (Oxford, 1956), iv. 369; hereafter *Corr.*

dialogue such that each could support (not supplant) the other. Yet appreciating this involves taking the *Epilogue's* dialogic process more seriously than is commonly done.

I

James Thomson's 'Summer' (1727) pictures an idyllic couple caught in a thunderstorm. As tender Celadon comforts his Amelia, lightning strikes her dead in his arms; and who now 'can paint the Lover, as He stood, | Struck by severe Amazement, hating Life, | Speechless, and fixt in all the Death of Woe!'.⁴ This is the first of multiple sentimental episodes punctuating *The Seasons*; vignettes of death mostly, ranging from shepherds buried by snow to towns consumed by sandstorms, which enabled Thomson to lament 'pining [Wives], | And plaintive Children', pathetic passions caught 'live on every face'.⁵ Unlike much in *The Seasons's* ethical vision, this sentimentality does not derive from Shaftesbury's *Characteristics* (1711).⁶ For all his advocacy of nature-enthusiasm and social affections, Shaftesbury was too much the Stoic to entertain mawkish emotional indulgences of this sort. Rather, Thomson's broad inspiration was probably the 'speaking tears'⁷ and gushing emotional expressivity of 'affective tragedy',⁸ a tradition stretching from Otway's *Orphan* (1680) to Nicholas Rowe's she-tragedies of the 1710s. These studies in female suffering verbalised literature's earliest sentimental idioms, but for Thomson's lightning-struck lovers the source was Pope.

The actual lovers—Oxfordshire labourers—were killed together in 1718. On hearing of the event, Pope instantly grasped its sentimental force. He wrote to Martha Blount, Lady Montagu, and Lord Fortescue, enjoining each to be 'as much mov'd' as he by 'this true and tender Story' (*Corr.* i. 481). He imagined his chaste lovers ('more constant . . . than ever were found in Romance') busy 'talking of their Wedding Cloaths, . . . John . . . suiting . . . Field-flowers to Sarah's complexion', at the instant Jove struck (480–2). The 'faithful Pair's' bodies were found, he claimed, 'John

⁴*The Seasons*, ed. James Sambrook (Oxford, 1981), p. 292.

⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 193–4, 99.

⁶On that influence (here qualified) see Robert Inglesfield, 'Shaftesbury's influence on Thomson's "Seasons"', *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 9 (1987), 141–56.

⁷Nicholas Rowe, *The Tragedy of Jane Shore*, ed. Harry William Pedicord (London, 1974), p. 62.

⁸Laura Brown, *English Dramatic Form, 1660–1760: an Essay in Generic History* (New Haven, CT, 1981), pp. 69–101, 148–54.

with one Arm about [Sarah's] neck, & the other extended over her face, as to shield her'. Pope subsequently gave public status to this episode of domestic passion, celebrating it as a universal symbol of sentimental feeling, by publishing two affectionate epitaphs for the pair.

Pope's *Iliad* (1715–20) abounds with cameos of this affective sort. The commentary repeatedly highlights Homer's 'wonderful' contrasting of 'the *Moving* and ... the *Terrible*,' Achilles, for example, proving 'as much a Hero when he weeps, as when he fights'.⁹ Pope dwelt on the first of these dimensions, copiously annotating scenes of domestic grief: Hector's partings from Andromache, Priam, and Hecuba; Priam's pathetic appeal to Achilles to return Hector's body; etc. Throughout, editorial comments evoke Homer's sentimental potential—here magnified by viewing these episodes in abstraction, as a fine 'Piece of Painting', an 'amiable Picture of conjugal Love', a 'lively and Picturesque ... Attitude' (vii. 355, 349, viii. 234). Art, Pope says, could have no more 'admirable Subject' than 'the Attitude of *Priam*, and the Sorrows in [his] Countenance' as he abased himself before Achilles (viii. 561). Spence records how strongly Priam's reaction to Hector's death apostrophised itself in Pope's mind, moving him to tears at every recollection.¹⁰ That this emotional propensity impressed Hill even in 1726 is implied by the sentimental conclusion to Hill's own epic fragment, 'The Mutiny at Cartha', which ends not with heroic violence but with Gideon's sparing Shimron, so moved is he by Shimron's affection for his son.¹¹

Addison's *Cato* (1713) also revealed the affective Pope, preoccupied with vignettes of high sentiment. Contrary to criticism's polarising characterisations,¹² this play is remarkably dialectical, even interrogatory. Addison probes Cato's integrity, questioning whether his Stoic pose derives from virtuous rationality or passionate vanity. Cato presents himself as guided by wisdom, not 'impetuous zeal' or 'tow'ring frenzy', but

⁹ *The Twickenham Edition of the Works of Alexander Pope*, ed. John Butt *et al.* (London, 1939–69), viii. 454, 535. *The Dunciad* excepted, references to Pope's poems are to this edition. For verse quotations, line numbers and Book, Canto, or Epistle numbers are supplied parenthetically; for prose notes, volume and page numbers are given.

¹⁰ Joseph Spence, *Observations, Anecdotes, and Characters of Books and Men*, ed. James M. Osborn (Oxford, 1966), i. 223–4.

¹¹ *Miscellaneous Poems and Translations by Several Hands*, ed. Richard Savage (London, 1726), pp. 240–4.

¹² Where M. M. Kelsall ('The meaning of Addison's *Cato*', *Review of English Studies*, 17 (1966), 149–62) regarded Addison's hero as a beacon of virtue, Richard Terry ('Revolt in Utica: reading *Cato* against Cato', *Philological Quarterly*, 85 (2006), 121–39) is only the latest commentator to think *Cato* a critique of Stoicism.

that insinuation looks doubtful when he identifies himself with ‘the best of men’ and proudly applauds valour—his own—‘soaring above | What the world calls misfortune’ (II. i. 43, 47; iv. 53, 50–1).¹³ Passions likewise disrupt the self-mastery of his soliloquy on committing suicide. The decision to make a Stoic end may derive from reasoned consideration of Plato’s *Phaedo*, but it also reflects an adjudication between Cato’s ‘secret dread, and inward horror, | Of falling into nought’ and his ‘longing’ for immortality (V. i. 2–5). At least one contemporary understood that, precisely by perpetuating such ambivalence, Addison maximised his play’s ennobling power, since he exposed the magnificent leap of faith required to sustain Stoic heroism:

Observe ... the great Variety in that [soliloquy]; his Resolution, his Comfort from the Helps of Philosophy, the Prospect of Eternity, the Uncertainty of the *Where* and *When!* Observe how his Soul seems to stumble, and be shockt at that; and upon a View of the *Book* ... resumes its Resolution, and ... takes a noble Flight into *Immortality*. ... TULLY, upon this *Book* of PLATO’S, has an excellent Passage, which seems to warrant the Uncertainty of CATO’S Conduct ... ‘While I am reading ... I am allur’d and charm’d into a Conviction of the *Immortality of the Soul*, ... but as soon as I have laid down the *Book* I relapse, ... Conviction slides away.’¹⁴

Cato also interrogates the wrecking potential of powerful emotions. Besotted with Lucia, Cato’s son, Marcus, dismisses Stoicism because ‘Love is not to be reason’d down’ (I. i. 74). So extreme is his emotion, his brother, Portius (secretly Lucia’s true love), concludes with Lucia that they must deny themselves *their* affection lest it provoke Marcus to suicide. Such is passion’s disturbing potency. The same becomes evident again when Marcus dies in battle. Cato’s reaction reveals how readily Stoic composure could modulate into an unnerving variety of sentimentalism: ‘How beautiful is death, when earn’d by virtue!’ ‘Why mourn you [Marcus’ death]? let not a private loss | Afflict your hearts. ’Tis *Rome* requires our tears’ (IV. iv. 80, 89–90). Roman virtue is thus never far from extreme passion. As Syphax observes, *Rome* itself was ‘founded on a Rape’ (II. v. 46).

These complexities provoked John Dennis’s derision. In a series of treatises he had advocated the edifying effects to be achieved by cultivating passions in literature. However, he emphasised that these emotions (whether everyday passions or sublime ‘Enthusiasms’ prompted by God¹⁵)

¹³ References are to *The Miscellaneous Works of Joseph Addison*, ed. A. C. Guthkelch (London, 1914), i.

¹⁴ *Mr Sewell’s Observations upon Cato, A Tragedy* (London, 1714), p. 11.

¹⁵ *The Critical Works of John Dennis*, ed. Edward Niles Hooker (Baltimore, MD, 1939–43), i. 216, 338.

must always 'take Reason along with them', that is, command reason's approval.¹⁶ Otherwise, they would not be worth readers' sympathy and emulation. In tragedies, that meant that passions should evolve progressively in response to narrative developments ('rais'd by ... true Springs') and within the framework of a morally instructive plot. Examining *Cato*, Dennis found no such logic there. Rather, his *Remarks* censure Addison's characters as figures all 'inconsistent with themselves' who lurch from being philosophers and patriots to being 'whining Amorous Milk-Sops', then back again, independently of the 'Force' of dramatic events and without serving a decisively instructive purpose.¹⁷ Most contemporaries, though, applauded Addison's tragedy and, as the verdicts in *Guardian* 33, 43, and 64 demonstrate (*pace* Dennis), popular adulation was focused on particular characters and speeches abstracted from the play's narrative arc. That detachment rendered readers' impressions sentimental (since sentimentalism characteristically isolates vignettes of emotion, as abstractions), and Pope's response was of exactly this order. His verse 'Prologue' erases all trace of *Cato's* dialectical subtleties, denying that such 'vulgar springs' as Portius and Lucia's 'pitying love', or hints of 'wild ambition' in *Cato*, contribute to the tragedy's moving effect (9–12). Rather, 'Here tears shall flow from a more gen'rous cause, | Such tears, as Patriots shed for dying Laws' (13–14). We are to imagine Addison's protagonist as a tear-jerking martyr for liberty, unequivocally 'godlike' (18) in his struggle against tyranny. Echoing *Cato's* fanatical reaction to Marcus's death ('Who would not be that youth?' (IV. iv. 81)), Pope asks of *Cato* himself, equally enthusiastically, 'Who sees him act, but envies ev'ry deed? | Who hears him groan, and does not wish to bleed?' (25–6). A feeling response is demanded for this abstraction: '*Britons* attend: Be worth like this approv'd, | And show, you have the virtue to be mov'd' (37–8).

Nevertheless, there was another Pope. His 'Epitaph' on Rowe memorialised she-tragedy's creator as one 'skill'd to draw the tender Tear, | For never Heart felt Passion more sincere' (4–5), but what Pope praised he could also mock. The 'Epilogue' he proposed for Rowe's *Jane Shore* (1713) ridiculed its pathological heroine as but a whore whom female audiences quietly envied. Presumably because this mockery went too far, Rowe rejected Pope's epilogue for his own which urged audiences to 'let your fellow-feeling curb your satire'.¹⁸ Tellingly, the rejected Popian poem also demeaned *Cato* by ironically privileging the 'Stoick husband' who 'courageously' whored

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, i. 150.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, ii. 58, 54, 64, 45–9.

¹⁸ *Jane Shore*, p. 75.

his wife to Hortensius over Addison's 'Stoick chief [of] our stage' (37–9). Likewise, Pope belittled Eusden's verses on *Cato* (which had celebrated audiences who 'their passions secret kept'¹⁹) by writing 'On a LADY who P—st at the TRAGEDY':

while her Pride forbids her Tears to flow,
The gushing Waters find a Vent below:
Tho' secret, yet with copious Grief she mourns,
Like twenty River-Gods with all their Urns. (3–6)

In one sense this squib argues *for* affectivity, mocking the repression of passion and commending Celia for (unwittingly) showing her grief 'in a sincerer Place' (8). Yet Pope's scatology clearly also associates expressivity with demeaning incontinence. Thus he trivialises Addison's play, as if to dissociate himself where previously he had been invested. And what he did for *Cato*, he did too for his fried lovers. He sent Teresa Blunt a private epitaph, surely about them: 'Here lye two poor Lovers, who had the mishap | Tho very chaste people, to die of a Clap' (*Corr.* i. 349). A bawdy pun here deflates the high-minded feelings expressed elsewhere. Precisely because of their abstracted isolation, moments of Popian sentimentality were perpetually open to this ironic subversion.

In contrast to the works discussed so far, *Eloisa to Abelard* and 'Elegy To the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady' (1717) present *sustained* explorations of emotion, explorations specifically of the sublimity of passion. Eloisa's complaint wilfully indulges flights of sexual longing. Its heroine mocks the frigid piety of convent life which demands that she 'forget my self to stone' amidst 'awful arches' that make 'a noon-day night' (24, 143). Far from chastening herself, she confesses,

I ought to grieve, but cannot what I ought;
I mourn the lover, not lament the fault;
I view my crime, but kindle at the view,
Repent old pleasures, and sollicit new. (183–6)

What follows is a work invested with such 'Breathings of the Heart' (*Corr.* i. 338), such expressive power and pathos, that readers warm to its aestheticisation of emotion. Suggestively, Joseph Warton connected what Pope called *Eloisa's* 'Enthusiastic Spirit' (*Corr.* iii. 269) to Richard Crashaw's habit of transposing sexual language into devotional contexts.²⁰ Pope read Crashaw keenly in his youth but later distanced himself from one too

¹⁹ *Works of Addison*, i. 339.

²⁰ *The Works of Alexander Pope*, ed. Joseph Warton (London, 1797), ii. 38.

given to 'pretty conceptions' and 'glitt'ring expressions' (*Corr.* i. 110). Crashaw is openly quoted once in *Eloisa*, but, perversely, Pope cites the uncharacteristically austere *Description of a Religious House* and invokes his chosen line (referring to the discipline of sleeping 'Obedient slumbers' (212)) to approve the devout life of a vestal virgin; the very antithesis, therefore, of *Eloisa*. It is as if, even in acknowledging his debt, Pope suppresses any connection to Crashawian affectivity. In fact, though, Crashaw's influence surfaces when *Eloisa* reflects on her regression from spirituality back into sexuality. She regrets how readily Abelard's image 'steals between my God and me' amidst hymns, prayers, and smoking incense, so that 'With ev'ry bead I drop *too soft* a tear' (268–74). The associations established here between music, prayer, 'Censer clouds', and particularly beads and tears, mirror stanza 18 of Crashaw's 'The Weeper' (1646); but whereas Crashaw's Magdalene directs those things towards Christ, the opposite is true of Pope's weeper. Even when *Eloisa* succeeds in shifting her focus from the erotic to the divine, it is unclear whether that shift *is* a sharp break or just a continuous development (sexual shading into religious ecstasy as per Crashaw's mysticism):

Unequal task! a passion to resign,
For hearts so touch'd, so pierc'd, so lost as mine.
...
But let heav'n seize it, all at once 'tis fir'd,
Not touch'd, but rapt; not waken'd, but inspir'd!
Oh come! oh teach me nature to subdue,
Renounce my love, my life, my self—and you. (195–6, 201–4)

This breathless, paratactic idiom, dominated by imperatives and interjectives, recalls Crashaw's signature style, especially perhaps 'To the Name Above Every Name' whose intoning of the command, 'Come', echoes throughout *Eloisa*. Here, it is Abelard who must 'come', just as elsewhere *Eloisa* urges him to 'Come, if thou dar'st, all charming as thou art!' (281). But, in this instance, is Abelard to 'teach' renunciation and transcendence in despite of sexual passion, or *through* it? Pope hints at the second, distinctly Crashawian possibility.²¹ Later, as *Eloisa* imagines her death and apotheosis, she urges Abelard to 'smooth [that] passage' for her (322). Ambiguously, her subsequent remark, 'Suck my last breath, and catch my flying soul!' (324), may be another command to her lover, again ecstatically fusing piety and sexual passion.

²¹ Cf. Rebecca Ferguson, *The Unbalanced Mind: Pope and the Rule of Passion* (Brighton, 1986), pp. 26–8.

Eloisa presents us, then, with an ‘exquisitely passionate’ Pope and verses ‘worthy the *sensibility* of Sappho’,²² but both it and the ‘Elegy’ end by emphasising emotion’s fragility. *Eloisa* concludes by imagining how, in ‘ages hence’ (345), lovers, choristers, or some bard might respond sentimentally to her tale. Readers, though, recognise these fantasies as second-bests, surrogates for a sympathy denied in life. *Eloisa*’s suffering goes unacknowledged in its own present moment, and has succumbed to evanescence long before another ‘best can paint’ it (366). Similarly, in the ‘Elegy’ only the poet ‘melts’ for the suicidal Lady, otherwise shunned by relatives; and when he dies, ‘Then from his closing eyes thy form shall part, | And the last pang shall tear thee from his heart’ (77, 79–80). The Lady lives primarily in this poet and, as his fiction, must share his ephemerality. Hence, just as elsewhere Pope belittles his sentimentalism, so here he stresses the evanescence of those few heart-breathings he permits himself.

An Essay on Man (1733–4) presents a third passionate Pope. Passions, now, are ‘springs of motion’ which drive action and which reason must harness (II. 59). Morally neutral, their defining characteristic is ‘strength’ (67), that concept being invoked fifteen times in Epistle II, as if Pope were wrestling with the psychology of *The Fable of the Bees* (1714) which rendered man a warring ‘compound of various Passions, that ... as they are provoked and come uppermost, govern him by turns’.²³ In the *Essay*’s competition of strength one ‘master Passion’ emerges as lastingly dominant within the individual, determining his conduct (131). In fallen man such a disposition would degenerate into an affliction, were not Providence adept at ‘educing good from ill’ (175). Hence Reason, Providentially influenced, fosters whatever virtue is most compatible with each person’s ruling passion, the outcome being the ‘stronger’ for this origin (178):

The surest Virtues thus from Passions shoot,
Wild Nature’s vigor working at the root.
What crops of wit and honesty appear
From spleen, from obstinacy, hate, or fear!²⁴
See anger, zeal and fortitude supply;
Ev’n av’rice, prudence; sloth, philosophy. (183–8)

Pope summarised this claim’s polemical positioning by telling Spence: as ‘Rochefoucauld, and that sort’ prove ‘all virtues are disguised vices, I

²² Joseph Warton, *An Essay on the Writings and Genius of Pope* (London, 1756), p. 314.

²³ Bernard Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees: Or, Private Vices, Publick Benefits*, ed. F. B. Kaye (Oxford, 1924), i. 39. Page numbers (all from volume i) are referenced parenthetically hereafter.

²⁴ Referring to Swift (Dustin Griffin, *Swift and Pope: Satirists in Dialogue* (Cambridge, 2010), p. 166).

would engage to prove all vices . . . disguised virtues.²⁵ Mandeville, for whom morality, honour, and politeness were products of proud egotism, was certainly of 'that sort', and one might say that Epistle II's moralising of the passions internalised (in order to defuse) the *Fable's* thesis. The *Fable*, to which Pope alludes,²⁶ maintains that vice's presence amongst some within society is a prerequisite for the production of virtue amongst others and prosperity amongst all. Commerce benefits from supplying the vicious (the proud, idle, and criminal) with what they want, and then again, by catering for vice's consequences—manufacturing everything from painkillers to prisoners' chains. Mandeville contends that this servicing of vice and luxury drives whole economies. Furthermore, since, psychologically, man *must* indulge his appetites in some degree, his ability to realise virtue in the main depends upon enjoying a modicum of vice on the side. In Mandeville's typically provocative words, 'how is it to be suppos'd that honest Women should walk the Streets unmolested, if there were [not also] Harlots to be had at reasonable Prices, . . . hired as publicly as Horses at a Livery-Stable?' (96). Preponderant chastity depends upon occasional lechery. The logic underlying this is one of endless circulation, trade feeding vice feeding trade, vice and virtue likewise treading a circle. Mandeville realised that such circulation tended, ultimately, to occlude value distinctions, hence his reflection that, although one man might steal another's fortune, 'as soon as this Money should come to circulate, the Nation would be the better for the Robbery'; or that, so long as a 'Man's Money is good, he thinks it no Business of his to examine whom he gets it by' (87). This occlusion of values is most provocatively imaged by comparing the state to a bowl of punch: tasting 'the several Ingredients apart, [one] would think it impossible they should make any tolerable Liquor. . . . Yet Experience teaches us, that . . . judiciously mixt, [they] make an excellent Liquor' (105–6). Mandeville, then, distributes the dialectic of good and evil across all of society, according different people positive and negative roles within that economy. Conversely, Pope's *Essay* internalises this dialectic within each individual mind, as a one-step archaeological accretion which educes virtue from a bedrock of ruling passion and so draws every agent from corruption into goodness. Equally, whereas Mandeville envisages a perpetual circulation between virtue and vice that erodes moral distinctions, Pope insists that value differences endure:

²⁵ Spence, *Observations*, i. 219.

²⁶ e.g. II. 193–4, 245. Cf. Laura Brown, *Alexander Pope* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 88–91, 108–17.

If white and black blend, soften, and unite
 A thousand ways, is there no black or white?
 Ask your own heart, and nothing is so plain. (II. 213–15)

It might therefore seem that the *Essay* secures passion's position at virtue's centre. But actually, in a repetition of Pope's characteristic shift from affirmation to derision, Epistle II ends by side-lining virtue's rehabilitation of affection. Instead, it delights in recognising the propensity of *unreconstructed* ruling passions to function as bases for imaginary happiness.

Whate'er the Passion, knowledge, fame, or pelf,
 Not one will change his neighbour with himself.
 The learn'd is happy nature to explore,
 The fool is happy that he knows no more;
 ...
 See the blind beggar dance, the cripple sing,
 The sot a hero, lunatic a king;
 The starving chemist in his golden views
 Supremely blest, the poet in his muse. (261–4, 267–70)

These lines convey 'a sublimely acquiescent vision of the subjective, non-rational comforts inspired by self-love';²⁷ but they also rework those raptures that sooth Tibbald, the 1728/29 *Dunciad's* anti-hero, as he doses in Dulness's lap:

the Fool's paradise, the Statesman's scheme,
 The air-built Castle, and the golden Dream,
 The Maids romantic wish, the Chymists flame,
 And Poets vision of eternal fame. (III. 9–12)²⁸

This connection to duncery underlines how readily master passions could become material for satire if abstracted from the *Essay's* narrative of moral improvement. Accordingly, Epistle II's closing treatment of the emotions poises itself between amused indulgence and sharp mockery. Ruling passions are reframed as the adult equivalent of children's 'toys' and 'baubles' (280–1); no longer virtue's assets but trivial obsessions which delight 'the moving Toyshop of [the] Heart' (*Rape of the Lock*, I. 100). Again, Pope retreats from his initially serious-minded view of affectivity.

²⁷Fred Parker, *Scepticism and Literature: an Essay on Pope, Hume, Sterne, and Johnson* (Oxford, 2003), p. 122.

²⁸References to the 1728 and 1729 *Dunciads* are to *The Poems of Alexander Pope, Volume III: The Dunciad (1728) & The Dunciad Variorum (1729)*, ed. Valerie Rumbold (Harlow, 2007). Parenthetic references are to book, verse, and associated footnote numbers, where applicable; otherwise to page numbers, preceded by the abbreviation *Poems, III*.

This shift at the Epistle's end is indicative of a doubleness of perspective (brilliantly described by Parker) which pervades much Popian verse, one where 'the serious and *engagé* moralist, whose poetry is devoted to a cause or principle of truth, is continually collaborating, or colluding, or competing with another voice, more casual, more elusively ironic'. For Parker, this bespeaks a mind 'unable to rest in any one intellectual position, because so sceptically open to the claims of other ways of thinking'.²⁹ I agree with this judgement, but wish to add to this sceptical inclination a second explanation for Pope's Janus-faced thinking, namely the observation that whenever this poet found himself embracing attitudes of mind expressive of a collective sensibility, his next instinct was always to reassert his distant independence. It is ironic perspectivism born both of scepticism and of this separatism that habitually curbs Pope's forays into passion and sentiment. In elaborating this argument, though, I want to demonstrate first that doubleness was a feature common to Scriblerian writings, Mandeville's work, and Shaftesbury's.

II

Reading John Gay's *Trivia: Or, The Art of Walking the Streets of London* (1716), one quickly senses a mobile intelligence at work, awkwardly negotiating interplays between aloof separatism and sympathetic identification. Gay's persona styles himself and his fellow street-walkers as bestowers of 'Charity', men of 'lib'ral Purse' who perambulate 'Wrapt in ... Vertue', relieving the sick as they go (II. 453–4, 590). They contrast themselves with 'Proud Coaches [that] pass, regardless of the Moan | Of Infant Orphans, and the Widow's Groan', courtiers and lawyers 'sunk in Velvet' sleeping within, as children 'weep' without (451–2, 579–80).³⁰ In reality, though, *Trivia's* instruction is more focused on preserving the self against outside contact—by advising how to keep the wall, cross roads safely, or avoid whores and greasy tradesmen—than with fostering common humanity. For Gay, most city-dwellers are not worthy recipients of benevolence but mere 'Tides of Passengers [who] the Street molest' (8). Furthermore, even the didacticism about navigating these 'Tides' actually

²⁹Parker, *Scepticism*, pp. 98, 90. Cf. James Noggle, *The Skeptical Sublime: Aesthetic Ideology in Pope and the Tory Satirists* (New York, 2001), pp. 97–156.

³⁰References are to *Walking the Streets of Eighteenth-Century London: John Gay's Trivia (1716)*, ed. Clare Brant and Susan Whyman (Oxford, 2007).

proves trivial in nature (for all that the poem's solemnity cum mock solemnity suggests otherwise). The street-walker may claim to brave crowds and coaches so that by his example men 'Their future Safety from my Dangers [shall] find' (III. 398), and Gay certainly invests real energy and enthusiasm in developing his street-tour's many details; but still, the banality behind his intentions surfaces in the question, 'Why should I teach the Maid when Torrents pour, | Her Head to shelter from the sudden Show'r?' (II. 303–4). *Trivia*'s insightful 'Signs of fair Weather' amount to such obvious prognostications as 'Ladies gayly dres'd' and 'chirping Sparrows' (I. 145, 148), signs the sun is shining that any fool could read. Other profound counsels include the precept that walkers should keep their distance from chimney sweeps, coalmen, and dustmen (II. 31–8).

The poem, then, undercuts the very moral and practical frameworks with reference to which it simultaneously invites judgement. It does so pursuant to its broader concern to parody the didacticism of the *Georgics*. In fact, literary playfulness—skittish imitating of Horace, Juvenal and Virgil³¹—is a constant presence, underlining how urbanely aloof Gay stands from his subject matter. Far from sympathising with the poor, he reworks Virgil's account of Orpheus' death (*Georgics* IV. 523–7) to present a brutally comic version of Doll the fruit-seller's drowning:

The cracking Crystal yields, she sinks, she dyes,
Her Head, chopt off, from her lost Shoulders flies:
Pippins she cry'd, but Death her voice confounds,
And Pip-Pip-Pip along the Ice resounds. (II. 389–92)

Similarly, when describing coachmen brawling in the muddy street, Gay bestialises them as boars disputing 'the Reign of some luxurious Mire; | ... | Till their arm'd Jaws distill with Foam and Gore' (III. 48, 50). 'Foam' plays upon the 'frothy bubbles' of the sexually aroused boar in Dryden's *Georgics* III. 400.³² These dehumanising touches actually indicate an imagination not merely aloof from, but actively repulsed by, London and its inhabitants, an impression reinforced by the street-walker's obsession with avoiding pollution. The mire in which the coachmen wallow is elsewhere 'gath'ring', threatening to 'besmear' Gay's feet (II. 99). It 'marks thy Stocking with a miry Trace' and invades the mouth and eyes of those dunked in it (III. 120, 76). Other hazards such as paint are also invasive

³¹ See Dianne Ames, 'Trivia and the Art of Allusion', *Studies in Philology*, 75 (1978), 199–222; Eugene Kirk, 'Gay's "Roving Muse": problems of genre and intention in *Trivia*', *English Studies*, 62 (1981), 259–70.

³² *John Dryden*, ed. Keith Walker (Oxford, 1987), p. 510.

folly and stripping virtues of their value, reducing the latter to so many extensions of pride. The pleasure he takes in antagonising readers is clear from his adoption of provocative language (already noted). Even his 'Preface' proves inflammatory in comparing vice to dirt. The one 'Filth', Mandeville maintains, is no less a by-product of London's affluence than the other. Hence (we should infer), the execution of justice is no different in kind from 'the cleaning of Shoes, or sweeping of Streets' (12). The strongest instance of this provocative intent comes, though, in 'Remark G's' discussion of the gin trade. Mandeville presents a Hogarthian evocation of the perils of liquor but sets against that a utilitarian defence of the same, emphasising tax revenues earned from gin, the profits garnered by the malting industry, even the nutritional and analgesic benefits that gin offers the poor. These (sometimes tenuous) arguments are plausibly enough stated to be taken seriously—until, that is, Mandeville hypothesises one further 'Benefit': that a man who makes his plumb from drink might then join the Reformation of Manners movement, becoming a 'Scourge of Whores,' a 'constant Plague to Sabbath-breaking Butchers', even 'persecuting that very Class of Man to whom he owes his Fortune' (93). This fantasy marches off at a satirical tangent, but in its glorious tendentiousness it also mocks the very business of making utilitarian arguments—and mocks readers, too, for soberly attending to such stuff. Mandeville's manoeuvrings thus allow him to be simultaneously half-involved in and half-distant from the society he portrays. He is committed to public instruction, hence his professing traditional moral credentials. Yet he is committed, also, to preserving his maverick identity as custodian of insights that others cannot stomach, something he does by antagonising polite opinion at every opportunity.

Gay and Mandeville's oscillations between involvement and withdrawal illuminate Pope's Janus-faced treatment of affectivity. In describing tearful, passionate episodes, whether in the *Iliad*, *Cato*, or *Eloisa*, Pope found himself participating in a nascent culture of sentimentality born of the fashion for sublime emotions and affective tragedy. Meantime, his *Essay on Man* envisaged Providence's design for mankind understood as a single community. All these cases therefore pressed Pope to involve himself in a collective sensibility. Yet throughout his life this poet, who delighted that 'Tories call me Whig, and Whigs a Tory' ('Satire II. i.', 68), built his identity around his independence and evasion of others' efforts to appropriate him. This separatist instinct (to reiterate) was surely one consideration that prompted him to distance himself, through irony, from passion and its intersubjective emphasis. That he exercised this instinct in

company with others anxious to limit their involvement in the public sphere underlines the larger significance of that interplay between communitarian and individualist impulses which was so prevalent in this age of party politics and nascent capitalism, when moral consciousness had been permanently reshaped by the Civil Wars. That said though, Pope's turns against affectivity *are* also explicable in terms of the intellectual concern with scepticism which Parker explores, and this is best returned to by way of still another contemporary who valued ironic perspectivism.

Shaftesbury's recent commentators have focused on his notion of moral sense and the politics of polite Whiggery,³⁵ but one critic—Michael Prince—has taken a different tack, examining how the *Moralists* dialogue incorporates a scepticism which moderates the wider *Characteristics*' potential dogmatism.³⁶ *The Moralists*' leading protagonist is Theocles who reflects the author's own attachments to neoplatonism and Marcus Aurelius' idea of the *anima mundi*. Theocles voices the 'reasonable ecstasy'³⁷ of one blessed with a vision of the universe's orderly beauty and of the place of man (replete with moral sense) within that system. However, against this enthusiast-figure Shaftesbury sets Philocles, a doubter whose function is to interrogate the adequacy of others' beliefs through Platonic dialogue. Philocles is sceptical not in Pyrrho's extreme sense but in the Academic sense of keeping all beliefs open to question. Over the course of Shaftesbury's text, he *is* persuaded by Theocles' visionary passion, but (as with Cicero's reading of the *Phaedo*) only in the present moment of conversation. *The Moralists* presents Philocles some time after that occasion, now narrating his conversation retrospectively, to a third party. At this later juncture Philocles' scepticism has reasserted itself, thus apostrophising the rapture learned from Theocles as a temporary mind-set that must prove itself anew whenever reconsidered. Shaftesbury regards any 'philosophical passion' as a potential 'danger' (247), open (for example) to the falsifications of group hysteria. Implicitly, he thinks that, to preserve liberty, the individual must constantly step back from received beliefs, testing their integrity. The point is not that Shaftesbury ultimately rejects Theocles' enthusiasm but that the latter coexists in dynamic tension with

³⁵ e.g. Stephen Darwall, *The British Moralists and the Internal 'Ought', 1640–1740* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 176–206; Lawrence Klein, *Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness: Moral Discourse and Cultural Politics in Early Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge, 1994).

³⁶ Michael Prince, *Philosophical Dialogue in the British Enlightenment: Theology, Aesthetics, and the Novel* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 47–73.

³⁷ Anthony Ashley Cooper, third Earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, ed. Lawrence Klein (Cambridge, 1999), p. 320; hereafter referenced parenthetically.

a scepticism forever challenging it. Nor is this a passing philosophical nicety. Shaftesbury's *Miscellanies*, a series of essays appended to the *Characteristics* and attributed to an anonymous commentator, urges readers to re-scrutinise the preceding work on the grounds that, 'Notwithstanding the high airs of scepticism which our author assumes . . . he proves himself at the bottom a real dogmatist', concealing 'what is scholastical under the appearance of a polite work' (395, 458). Here, therefore, as with other writers, a double perspective is enforced, but in this case it is less ethical, more epistemological: less the product of a separatist instinct; more the product of an anxiety to preserve truth by constantly testing the judgements before one.

From 1738 onwards, when the *Essay on Man's* Christianity began to be questioned, it suited Pope to dissociate himself from the allegedly deist Shaftesbury (on whose works the *Essay* had drawn unambiguously at least once³⁸). Accordingly, he included a note in the 1743 *Dunciad* attacking Shaftesbury for supposing that morality could flourish separately from religion (IV. 650 n.).³⁹ The same *Dunciad* also ridiculed Theocles, presenting his rapturous nature-worship as deistical and corroborating this in the notes with two prose quotations mockingly recast as verse (IV. 488 n.). Pope, though, then juxtaposed these citations with a third which readers might assume also came from Theocles: 'Above all things I lov'd *Ease*, and of all Philosophers those who reason'd most *at their Ease*, and were never angry or disturb'd, as those call'd *Sceptics* never were' (489–90 n.). Pope clearly intended 'sceptic' to be read as a dirty word here, the implication of the juxtaposition being that deistic rapture and intellectual irresponsibility were linked. But the irresponsibility was all Pope's. This last quotation occurs much earlier in *The Moralists* than his other citations; is spoken by Philocles, not Theocles; and is said in support of the very scepticism which checks obsessive passions like Theocles' (*Characteristics*, 241). Returning, then, to the question of affectivity, it is again clear that a second reason why Pope distanced himself from his own evocations of passion was because he shared Shaftesbury's inclination to be sceptical about the truth of such enthusiasms. However, come the late 1730s, his eagerness to put clear water between himself and the deistical Earl was so strong that he used the *Dunciad* to obscure precisely this common ground.

³⁸ See *Works of Pope*, ed. Warton, iii. 89–90.

³⁹ References to the 1743 *Dunciad* are to *The Dunciad in Four Books*, ed. Valerie Rumbold (Harlow, 1999).

Shaftesbury's example helps to explain Pope's ambivalence about affectivity but it also illuminates other dimensions of Pope's ironic, dialogic praxis. The *Characteristics*' opening argument is that any moral quality which proves *capable* of being ridiculed will only be so because it was already in some way false, ignoble.⁴⁰ Shaftesbury believed in common sense, a bedrock of knowledge born of a 'sense of public weal and . . . the common interest, love of the community, . . . natural affection', to which all right-minded thinkers would attest if considering ethical matters honestly with themselves (48). Anything that men of common sense thought departed from this template must necessarily appear 'deformed', and whatever accorded with it 'handsome and just' (59). Ridicule amounted to a process of exposing such deformity, showing that (by common sense's measure) certain things looked inherently absurd. Ethical truths, by contrast, were supposedly impervious to mockery because their intrinsic beauty resisted caricature: 'there [is] nothing so successfully to be played upon as the passions of cowardice and avarice [but] One may defy the world to turn real bravery or generosity into ridicule. . . . To laugh *both* ways is nonsensical. And if the ridicule lie against . . . avarice and cowardice, you see the consequence' (59–60). Ridicule could thus be applied as a test, to sift the moral integrity of things, and Shaftesbury reckoned that gravity, zeal, and many enthusiastic passions would reveal their deformed absurdity under this pressure.

The *Characteristics* exemplifies this point by targeting Hobbes. One of *Leviathan*'s contentions is that, since reading classical historians taught men to disobey their sovereigns, these writings should be destroyed. Hobbes thus deploys learning to advocate learning's suppression; to which Shaftesbury responded, 'Is not this . . . somewhat Gothic? And has not our philosopher in appearance something of the savage that he should use philosophy [thus]?' (42). Hobbes, then, opens himself to ridicule because he exposes his own savagery, his deformity. However, Shaftesbury now pirouettes to reveal the *unmockable* truth inside Hobbes's speech act. *Leviathan*'s declared thesis—that all men are brutally self-interested—is, again, savage. Yet Hobbes is desperate to persuade us of his claim's truth. *Why* this urge to communicate, if his argument is right and men are so selfish? It is, Shaftesbury comments, 'the height of sociableness to be thus friendly and communicative' (43). In sum, Hobbes's speech act reveals an intrinsic impulse to converse, the sociability of which contradicts our

⁴⁰The argument is best represented in Stanley Grean, *Shaftesbury's Philosophy of Religion and Ethics: a Study in Enthusiasm* (Athens, OH, 1967), pp. 123–8.

alleged egotism. Men of common sense, being mindful of exactly such ‘humanity’ within themselves, can therefore ridicule Hobbes again because the gap between what he argues and what the gesture of making an argument at all implies constitutes another of his absurdities: ‘Sir! . . . We are beholden to you for your instruction. But, pray, whence is this zeal in our behalf? What are we to you? . . . Is there then such a thing as natural affection? . . . It is directly against your interest to undeceive us and let us know that only private interest governs you.’

Shaftesbury does not confine this trial by mockery to others. For ethical purposes, the *Characteristics* advocates introspective soliloquising, a cross-examination of one’s own motives, and this soliloquising embraces amongst its methods internally directed ridiculing. Accordingly, Shaftesbury apostrophises his own appetites—a liking for indolence and luxury—as whims of Lady Fancy, and then subjects her Ladyship to derision in a soliloquised conversation recorded in his text (136–47). The *Miscellanies* then replicate this self-ridiculing at a second remove, the commentator suggesting there that this Earl has merely ‘affected soliloquy, as pretending only to censure himself’, whilst actually ‘taking occasion’ to attack his readers (418). Reflections of this order re-emphasise Shaftesbury’s openness to self-scepticism. Indeed, all his textual strategies serve to encourage dialogic thinking, a capacity for self-irony, and freely speculative enquiry; and such methods, because they combat conceitedness, also promote sociability, an ‘easy and familiar way’ (33). Herein lies the *Characteristics*’ further relevance for Pope. Shaftesbury’s practice provided the template for a kind of dialogic thinking which, whilst militating against the singularity of focus that passion and sentiment demanded, fostered a good-humoured, potentially satirical outlook.

The *Rape of the Lock* (1714) illustrates the point. The poem aims gently to ridicule its readers’ gravity and passion but (as with Shaftesbury) does so to restore them to common-sense ethical truths. Pope discreetly satirises Belinda’s vanity and coquettish reserve. The one is mocked in the toilet scene, where ‘sacred Rites of Pride’ are administered (I. 128); the other via the sexual undercurrent implied in Belinda’s ‘Quick’, ‘unfix’d’ eyes, her veiled awareness of the Baron’s threatening advance towards her, and her professed wish that he had ‘seized | Hairs less in sight’ than her lock (II. 10, III. 138, IV. 175–6). Vanity and coquetry are also satirised in the card game where Belinda ‘Burns to encounter . . . adventurous Knights’ and ‘swells her Breast with Conquests yet to come’ (III. 26, 28). These innuendos reveal the truth Belinda’s reserve denies, namely that she desires the Baron’s advances, he being the secret ‘Lover lurking at her Heart’

(144). Clarissa's advice to the girl to 'keep good Humour' in defeat (V. 30), reconciling herself to her assailant, therefore carries weight. Implicitly, Belinda's forgiving the Baron would only amount to being true to herself. That this advocacy of 'good Humour' was Pope's moral too seems likely because, when Dennis attacked the poem's lack of instructiveness,⁴¹ Pope annotated his *Remarks on Mr Pope's Rape* with the comment, 'Clarissas Speach' (ii. 370–1). The larger point, though, is that the existence of Belinda's desire and the pertinence of Clarissa's guidance validate Pope's ridicule, confirming that it does indeed expose (in Shaftesburian fashion) a kind of moral falsity—Belinda's lack of self-honesty.⁴² The *Rape's* pre-fatory epistle emphasised this, ridicule's truth-revealing power, predicting that the poem would provoke ladies like Arabella Fermor 'to laugh not only at their Sex's little unguarded Follies, but at their own' (ii. 142). However, just as Shaftesbury insisted that raillery must be genial, promoting sociability, so Pope gives his satire an ameliorating charm to offset its critique. Piquant instances of bathos, the machinery of comic sylphs, and scalar contrasts sliding effortlessly from dying tyrants to manteaus 'pinn'd awry' (IV. 8), all delight readers with their inventiveness, creating a poem (in Pope's words) intended to 'laugh' the feuding Fermors and Petres 'together again'.⁴³

The 1729 *Dunciad*, similarly, resonates with Shaftesbury's claim that ridicule only sticks to what is inherently deformed and so assays the common-sense truth of things. Pope insists that the dull are not here 'ridicul'd because Ridicule in itself is . . . a pleasure; but because it is just, to undeceive or vindicate . . . honest and unpretending' men (*Poems*, III, 132). The *Dunciad* thus aims to expose the deformity of those who falsely suppose themselves geniuses. However, whereas in the *Rape* Pope could appeal to an external source of validation, predicting that Arabella would eventually concede his ridicule's truth, no such assumption holds for the *Dunciad's* targets. Dullness is by definition undialogic, immune to correction from without. Wherever the goddess Dulness rules, 'Her ample presence fills up all the place', leaving no space for alternative perspectives, a sceptical order of knowledge (I. 217). Tellingly, Tibbald's writings are the spinnings of a silkworm that 'clouds itself all o'er', cocooning itself within its own excretions in a fashion that precludes dialogue with others (172). Pope swoops on Theobald's line, 'None but Thy self can be thy parallel'

⁴¹ *Critical Works of Dennis*, ii. 331.

⁴² Cf. David Fairer, *Pope's Imagination* (Manchester, 1984), pp. 72–5.

⁴³ Spence, *Observations*, i. 44.

(III. 272), because it epitomises this self-absorption. The absence of dialogic thinking is further accentuated in the 1743 *Dunciad*. There, Richard Bentley, Dulness's plenipotentiary, operates like a 'microscope' that 'Sees hairs and pores, examines bit by bit', but misses 'How parts relate to parts, or they to whole' (IV. 233–5). The goddess's deist followers, too, 'all Relation scorn, | See all in *Self*' (479–80). Any 'laughing together', Pope laughing with his victims as they concede his ridicule's force, is thus impossible. The poet must instead rely on literary form to prove his satire's truth, accrediting his judgements on duncery unilaterally by demonstrating, through stylistic self-command, that harmony and order lie with him. Take, for example, the 1729 lines mocking Leonard Welsted:

Flow Welsted, flow! like thine inspirer, Beer,
 Tho' stale, not ripe; tho' thin, yet never clear;
 So sweetly mawkish, and so smoothly dull;
 Heady, not strong, and foaming tho' not full. (III. 163–6)

We are persuaded to believe this ridiculing judgement because the couplets, besides carrying their own sense, also parody John Denham's River Thames, 'Tho' deep, yet clear; tho' gentle, yet not dull; | Strong, without rage; without o'erflowing, full' (163 n.). Pope's ability simultaneously to hold two measures of literary achievement in parallel, using his imitative mastery of Denham to belittle Welsted, validates his verdict.

Pope generates further dialogic perspectives by adding four kinds of commentary to his *Dunciad*,⁴⁴ again thereby paralleling Shaftesbury's methods. First, some notes ascribed to Scriblerus are merely continuous with the pedantry of *Memoirs of Scriblerus*. The commentator fusses over how many e's are in 'Dunciad' and complains that the Trojan horse was really a Grecian mare (*Poems*, III, 175; I. 212 n.). Such remarks are parodies of scholarly pignicquity made at Scriblerus' expense. Elsewhere, Scriblerus, rather than being ridiculed, is made to fight Pope's causes, as when he stresses the latter's '*Candour* and *Humanity*' or applauds his 'prodigious Tenderness' for bad writers (I. 41 n., 258 n.). There is some truth to these claims, particularly Scriblerus' intimation that Pope had 'some esteem' for Dennis (II. 271 n.). A third category of footnote sees Scriblerus playing Pope's straight man, his prose actively supplementing the poetry's ironies. He introduces a résumé of Dennis's attacks on Pope by remarking, with unmistakable irony, 'It would be unjust not to add [Dennis's]

⁴⁴Scriblerus' presentation is, I think, more varied than, for example, James McLaverty (*Pope, Print and Meaning* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 99–105) or Aubrey Williams (*Pope's Dunciad: a Study of its Meaning* (London, 1955), pp. 68–71, 81–4) allows.

Reasons . . . , they are so strong and so coercive', and he concludes by saying that indeed Pope must be 'a terror, not to Mr. *Dennis* only, but to all Christian People' (I. 104 n.). Likewise, the Scriblerian persona archly observes that Theoblad's *Odyssey* 'may yet be seen at his Shop' (being unsold) and describes his *Phaedo* as translated 'in the familiar modern stile of *Prithee Phaedo*, and *For God's sake Socrates*' (106 n., 221 n.). These comments are knowingly ironic, and Scriblerus is given a similarly sarcastic tone when he pronounces the *Dunciad* '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' (III. 5–6 n.). Another, fourth type of note intensifies the textual layering by introducing commentaries of indeterminate, non-Scriblerian authorship. In an appendix to the 1729 *Dunciad* one such anonymous figure annotates the publisher's foreword to the original 1728 poem. These 1729 remarks reframe the latter, retrospectively, as 'almost a continued Irony', discrediting its evasive references to '*The Author of the following Poem*' with the riposte that Pope's authorship was always obvious, and mocking those who believed 1728 claims that this poem took six years to write or was read by 100,000 people (*Poems*, III, 322–3). Pope's *third* type of note, in which Scriblerus supplements the satire of the poem proper, stabilises the text because it indicates Pope and Scriblerus laughing together. But this fourth kind of note exerts a contrary, destabilising effect. It emphasises anew how far Pope's playful text has been, and will continue to be, misunderstood, so provoking uncertainty about the wit/dunce boundary. By inviting this scepticism and keeping the text open, mobile, it mirrors the function of Shaftesbury's third-party commentator. In fact, in Pope as in Shaftesbury all the work's dialogic features force on the reader an alert, questioning attitude—vital in combating dullness. Pope, meantime, demonstrates that he stands beyond dullness's reach precisely because he can be (as dunces cannot) Janus-faced, a poet as receptive to ironic perspectivism as to passion and sentiment.

III

Still, by the mid-1730s Pope's confidence had diminished. In 'Satire II. i.' (1733) he remained sure enough of his virtuous autonomy to assert himself as a public satirist, but anxieties about duncery's invasive effect were apparent in the same year's 'Fourth Satire of Donne'. There, the persona,

dogged by an impertinent courtier, speaks for Pope in fearing ‘Infection slide from him to me’ (170). Donne’s image of himself as one who feels ‘like a discover’d Spy’ when in the court’s presence (279) suggests a Pope who feels compromised by—even complicit with—that which he would satirise. Similar anxieties suffuse the *Epistle to Dr Arbuthnot* (1735), ‘Epistle II. ii.’ (1737), and ‘Epistle I. i.’ (1738), Pope’s dialogic tendency turning in on itself as his successive poems contradict one another. ‘Epistle I. i.’, for instance, reverses ‘Satire II. i.’ by arguing that to protect one’s autonomy now, requires not an espousal but a relinquishing of public life. The same work also upends the 1734 ‘Epistle to Cobham’ by finding the self-inconsistency that the latter mocks in mankind endemic in Pope himself—‘I plant, root up, I build, and then confound, | Turn round to square, and square again to round’ (169–70)—thereby depriving the poet of his right to satirise others. *Arbuthnot*, Pope’s strongest statement of duncery’s polluting effects, opens defensively (‘Shut, shut the door, . . . | . . . say I’m sick, I’m dead’ (1–2)) amidst a nightmarish world in which poetasters besiege Twickenham. Crucially, intertextual resonances intimate that the boundary between the mental state of these sycophants and Pope’s own condition is unstable (just as the boundary between Pope and Atticus/Sporus also is⁴⁵). The poetaster-types plaguing Twickenham include, indicatively, an unfettered madman (or prisoner), someone who, when ‘lock’d from Ink and Paper, scrawls | With desp’rate Charcoal round his darken’d Walls’ (19–20). Yet this is one of the very destinies Pope had hypothesised for himself in ‘Satire II. i.’—then defiantly—when he wrote that he would rhyme even in prison or bedlam, ‘Whether the darken’d Room to muse invite, | Or whiten’d Wall provoke the Skew’r to write’ (97–8); and now Pope is indeed cell-bound, imprisoned at home. Similarly, in ‘Satire II. i.’ Pope had imagined himself secure in Twickenham’s underground grotto, the world’s ‘Din’ confined to the London Road rolling overhead (123–4); but now this locus of reassurance has become another axis of invasion: ‘They pierce my Thickets, thro’my Grot they glide’ (*Arbuthnot*, 8). At least in *Arbuthnot* Pope can reflect that he has not been ‘like a Puppy daggl’d thro’the Town, | To fetch and carry Sing-song up and down; | Nor at Rehearsals sweat, and mouth, and cry’ (225–7). But this, too, becomes exactly his fate two years later, in ‘Epistle II. ii.’:

⁴⁵ See David Fairer (ed.), *Pope: New Contexts* (Hemel Hempstead, 1990), pp. 87–8; Dustin Griffin, *Alexander Pope: the Poet in the Poems* (Princeton, 1978), pp. 172–89; Brean Hammond, *Pope* (Brighton, 1986), pp. 84–5.

In Palace-Yard at Nine you'll find me there—
 At Ten for certain, Sir, in Bloomsb'ry-Square—
 Before the Lords at Twelve my Cause comes on—
 There's a Rehearsal, Sir, exact at One. (94-7)

These disquieting intertextual echoes reveal a drama of self-confrontation silently at work.

The persona of 'Epistle II. ii.' abandons poetry, turning instead to moral self-cultivation and the scrutiny of his 'Heart's' sentiments (211), a thrice-invoked repository of intuitive wisdom. This recourse to moral sentiment is structurally crucial, also, in the *Epistle to Arbuthnot*. Having begun by evoking a besieged present moment, *Arbuthnot* retreats into the narrative of Pope's past, reliving a time when he could face detractors with equanimity. The Atticus episode is heralded as the volta in this story, Pope recalling how he used to wish 'Peace' upon his critics before introducing Addison, mock-subjunctively, as a turning point ('but were there One . . .' (193)). We are thus led to expect an autobiographical revelation here, explaining the author's recent loss of composure. But instead twenty lines of character assassination suddenly deflate, impotently: 'Who but must laugh, if such a man there be? | Who would not weep, if *Atticus* were he!' (213-14). Pope never defines quite when or why he lost his equanimity. Instead, he struggles to counterbalance assertions of contempt for others with claims of personal moral authority (he has 'stoop'd to Truth, and moraliz'd his Song' (341), for example), as if mythologising his narrative where he cannot explain it etiologically. The grammar of the third such self-evocation (334-59) is especially fraught. Pope attempts to qualify twenty separate predicates with the verb 'Laugh'd' ('Laugh'd at the loss of Friends he never had, | The dull, the proud . . .', etc (346 ff.)); but the notion that this moralist laughs off 'A Friend in Exile, or a Father, dead' (355) hardly persuades, suggesting, rather, that grammatical control is lost here, under fortune's attritional pressure. The result is an epistle in which Pope tries but fails to neutralise those who have 'bit' him (369). Only by escaping, finally, into domestic sentimentality does he evade his tormentors. Pope concludes *Arbuthnot* not by reflecting on the public sphere but by memorialising the care he showed to his ailing mother. A note records that Edith Pope died shortly after the *Epistle* was completed, but the poem frames Pope's now past act of affection as if it were eternally present:

Me, let the tender Office long engage
 To rock the Cradle of reposing Age,
 With lenient Arms extend a Mother's breath,
 Make Languor smile, and smooth the Bed of Death,

Explore the thought, explain the asking Eye,
And keep a while one Parent from the Sky! (408–13)

The poet clings, here, to a moment of perfect sympathising valued precisely for its detachment from the public sphere.⁴⁶ However, his tender feeling is, for that very reason, utterly different from the social sentimentality of Thomson's *Seasons* or the *Cato* Prologue. In *Arbuthnot*, moral passion only seems able to survive within the private home. How, then, did Pope overcome such pessimism? And how did he reconcile his two selves: one passionate and sentimental, one ironic and dialogic?

Pope achieved these things, I suggest, in his *Epilogue to the Satires*. The 'Friend' with whom he converses over this poem's two dialogues is usually dismissed as a pusillanimous courtier,⁴⁷ and since this character's views are disregarded, so is the force of the work's dialogic structure. To my mind, though, the exchange of views dramatised here *is* a substantial one, because Friend, an ambivalent rather than derisory figure, is the medium through whom Pope confronted criticisms that genuinely perturbed him. Granted, the first of the notes added to the 1751 printing dubs this interlocutor 'an impertinent Censurer' (iv. 297); and other 1751 notes, also, retrospectively encourage this antagonistic response. However, these later accretions cannot erase the ambiguous, dialogic reading that the original poem's allusive associations invite.

Friend's comments in 'Dialogue I' have real bite. His opening challenge, 'You grow *correct* that once with Rapture writ, | And are, besides, too *Moral* for a Wit' (3–4), reflects starkly on Pope's abandonment of works like the *Iliad* and *Eloisa* in later years. It may also recall Hill's stinging criticism that, in persuading himself his 'moral Life' had placed him above other 'Wits', Pope lost sight of the real '*Soul of Poetry . . . Sentiment*' (*Corr.* iii. 168). Equally poignant is Friend's accusation that a now Juvenalian Pope has forgotten the ethical power of Horace's 'sly, polite, insinuating stile' (19):

Horace, Sir, was delicate, was nice;

...

⁴⁶In emphasising this I qualify prevailing opinion which has viewed the *Sporus* episode as *Arbuthnot*'s emotional climax, what follows being 'protracted diminuendo' (Howard Erskine-Hill, *The Augustan Idea in English Literature* (London, 1983), p. 313; cf. Howard Weinbrot, *Alexander Pope and the Traditions of Formal Verse Satire* (Princeton, 1982), p. 264).

⁴⁷See Griffin, *Poet in the Poems*, pp. 168–72; Weinbrot, *Traditions of Satire*, pp. 310–25; and, most subtly, Erskine-Hill, *Augustan Idea*, pp. 345–7. Thomas Edwards (Maynard Mack and James Winn (eds.), *Pope: Recent Essays by Several Hands* (Brighton, 1980), pp. 565–84) takes a more dialogic view.

*Horace would say, Sir Billy serv'd the Crown,
Blunt could do Bus'ness, H—gins knew the Town,*

...

An artful Manager, that crept between
His Friend and Shame, and was a kind of *Screen*.
But 'faith your very Friends will soon be sore. (11, 13–14, 21–3)

Line 11 here ventriloquises Lady Montagu's 'Verses Address'd to the Imitator of Horace'; but although this was therefore an arch-enemy's view, Pope must have fondly remembered his own advocacy of Horace's aesthetic in his *Essay on Criticism* where he recommended 'Silence' over 'Spite' or 'a raging Vein' and celebrated the Roman poet as one who 'charms with graceful Negligence' and 'like a *Friend* familiarly conveys | *The truest Notions in the easiest way*' (598, 606, 653, 655–6). Friend's comments summon other authorities besides. Lines 13–14 imitate Horace's euphemistic style of criticism as practised in *Satire I. iii.* 49–54; and despite 'Screen's' Walpolian associations, from the *Epilogue's* first edition onwards a note linked line 22 with Persius' *praising* of Horace's ironic method. Such 'artful Management' was also Arbuthnot's dying prescription to Pope when, in a letter that informs this entire poem, he urged his friend to 'study more to reform than chastise' (*Corr.* iii. 417). Line 23 is challenging too. Besides beginning to hint at wavering Patriots, it remembers the Chandos furore sparked by the *Epistle to Burlington*, and the reflection in Pope's pseudo-anonymous *Master Key to Popery* that Alexander Pope satirises even his 'Best Friends', 'so *Bad*' is his '*Heart*'—a statement made ironically there, but not without truth.⁴⁸ Clearly, then, Friend's first speech evokes dispiriting associations. Subsequent interjections are equally perturbing. The mockery of Old Whig Patriots, for example (39–44), reflects back at Pope the ridicule which accompanied his genial fondness when he ruminated on this same subject in 'Epistle II. ii.' (184–97). Unnerving, too, is the accusation that Pope's dichotomies are arbitrary, the poet dubbing Lyttelton worthy and Hervey base merely through habit (45–50). In voicing all these challenges, Friend functions as Shaftesburian sceptic within the text. Crucially, though, Pope's reply to this voice from within is emphatically dialogical.

His answer is to ridicule the *reductio ad absurdum* of Friend's recommendation that he become an emollient satirist. Pope, it seems, will indeed adopt the anodyne complaisance that polite insinuation requires: 'Come

⁴⁸ *The Prose Works of Alexander Pope*, ed. Norman Ault and Rosemary Cowler (Oxford, 1936–86), ii. 411.

harmless *Characters* that no one hit', 'O Come, that easy *Ciceronian* style', 'Satire is no more—I feel it die' (65, 73, 83). But these things are said sarcastically, in mockery of their impotence. In reality, Friend's voicing of criticisms propels Pope into a withering *re-affirmation* of his satiric vein—the stronger because it flows from an acknowledgement of personal shortcomings. Initially, Friend responds to the aggression of Pope's mock-compliance by becoming, likewise, more antagonistic. He purports to recommend ever more ignoble, ineffectual forms of satire. But Friend then inverts this position, parodying his apparent attitude by voicing spoof adulation for oleaginous courtiers:

These, may some gentle, ministerial Wing
Receive, and place for ever near a King!
There, where no Passion, Pride, or Shame transport,
Lull'd with the sweet *Nepenthe* of a Court. (95–8)

Friend functions here like Scriblerus in the *Dunciad's* third kind of note: he plays the straight man to Pope's blunter sarcasm, both men in fact speaking ironically. Pope promptly matches Friend's tone, retreating from his own sarcasm and adopting an ironic, insinuating style: 'Good Heav'n forbid, that I shou'd blast their Glory' (105), he says of these same courtiers. He then proceeds to express mock outrage that commoners should presume to intrude upon 'the Dignity of *Vice*' (114), that privilege of wrongdoing exclusive to men of rank.

Pope and Friend meet, then, on the common ground of irony. Through a crucially dialogic process, they learn to laugh together.⁴⁹ After fifty lines of this shared mockery Pope finally modulates the mood of sarcasm into one of fury. He concludes 'Dialogue I' by denouncing the disgrace of English virtue's being dragged 'at the Wheels of [vice's] Triumphal Car' (151). At last Hill and Lyttelton get the public passion they had craved and which Pope's early writings had promised. Yet that passion's new-found strength and durability derives precisely from its being forged out of shared, ironic humour, itself the product of dialogue with a questioning, challenging interlocutor. The two Popes thus converge.

The *Epilogue's* second dialogue repeats this pattern. Friend presses a frequent Popian concern by counselling against lashing others by name:

⁴⁹That laughter's ethical power is central here is clear from an earlier passage in which even Walpole is described escaping his own venality and discovering the 'happier hour | Of Social Pleasure' when in Pope's humorous company (29–30). (On that relationship see Pat Rogers (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Pope* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 134–49.)

'Spare then the Person, and expose the Vice' (12). In the 1728 *Dunciad* (*Poems*, III, 16) and in 'Satire II. i.' (43–4) Pope had favoured the opposite tactic of naming specific targets. In 1734 Arbuthnot urged him (in the letter already mentioned) to be more prudent. What exactly this meant became clear when the *Epistle to Arbuthnot's* 'Friend' implored Pope to name no names (76, 102). However, in his published correspondence replying to Arbuthnot, Pope protested: 'To attack Vices in the abstract, without touching Persons, ... is fighting with Shadows. ... Examples are pictures, and strike the Senses, nay raise the Passions, and call in those (the strongest ... of all motives) to the aid of reformation' (*Corr.* iii. 419). *Passion* was at stake, then, in the argument over naming; specifically that of 'hating the Vicious', which Pope thought an essential corollary of the abstract 'just abhorrence of Vice'. When, therefore, the poet has the *Epilogue's* Friend reopen this question, he is tenting an old wound, reminding Pope of a fond acquaintance's concerns. Pope, though, defuses this haunting anxiety through, again, good-humoured dialogue. He hints at recent public outrages but then has Friend succumb twice to the delightful pull of scandalised curiosity: '... The pois'ning Dame—*Fr.* You mean—*P.* I don't.—*Fr.* You do' (22). The tone here is one of amicable gossiping, laughing together, and it prompts Pope to tease his interlocutor by satirising even the King, whereupon Friend shrieks, 'Stop! stop!' (52). This is not the antagonistic dialogue that some critics imagine.

Friend levels further poignant criticisms when he rightly highlights Pope's obsession with criticising Peter Walter and then asks how others' vices touch Pope personally (58, 157). As in 'Dialogue I', these exchanges propel the poet towards self-clarification. He is prompted, first, to invoke a circle of friends ranging from Junto Whigs to Patriots to Jacobites, all of whom he admires for their virtue; next, to insist, contrary to the growing contemporary mood, that sentimentality is no basis for approval ('Each Mother asks it for her Booby Son, | Each Widow asks it for the Best of Men' (107–8)); and finally, to argue that his praise is grounded in a visceral passion (flattery 'turns my Stomach' (182)), but that it is morally valid even so: 'When Truth or Virtue an Affront endures, | Th'Affront is mine, my Friend, and should be yours' (199–200). The *Essay on Man's* association of passion with virtue is thus reinvigorated. Meantime, in a further defence of his satiric method, Pope also asserts ridicule's value (in recognisably Shaftesburian terms). First, he exemplifies the claim that truth defeats ridicule by showing that *mock* criticisms necessarily fall flat in the face of harmonious souls (even that of Walpole's private self):

COBHAM'S a Coward, POLWARTH is a Slave,
 And LYTTLETON a dark, designing Knave,
 St. JOHN has ever been a wealthy Fool—
 But let me add, Sir ROBERT'S mighty dull,
 Has never made a Friend in private life,
 And was, besides, a Tyrant to his Wife. (130–5)⁵⁰

Conversely, Pope then insists that '*Ridicule*' is able to 'touch and shame', to 'brush ... away', all that is morally false (211–12, 223), this being his satire's purpose.

Again, therefore, the two Popes converge, the poet arriving at a rationale for his practice under the impress of which he can *sustain* a passionate, even sublime mode of ethical thinking, but now in concert with irony and ridicule. But does the sceptical Scriblerian disappear? Not quite. The final 1751 note asserts that by the time the *Epilogue* was published 'Ridicule was become ... ineffectual' (iv. 327). With that note, Pope's sceptical self-dialogue flickers back into view.

⁵⁰Pope's point is that none of this is true or, crucially, even seems plausible.