

Faculty of English

**Alexander Pope and the Writing of Thought:
Representations of Revision and Composition in Pope's Works**

Jai Sandeep Rane
Pembroke College
University of Cambridge

This thesis is submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy September 2021

Declaration

This thesis is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. I further state that no substantial part of my thesis has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the relevant Degree Committee.

Abstract

This thesis examines Alexander Pope's literary career through the lens of his own portrayals of revision and the composition process. I argue that Pope's career-long interest in revision in its many forms — rewriting, rethinking, rewording, correcting, imitating, translating, editing, etc. — extends beyond the remit of manuscript interpretation and textual scholarship that it has predominantly been confined to, and merits thematic consideration as a unique and as yet underappreciated hallmark of his style as a poet. My more inclusive approach to defining revision aims to show how other forms of self-reflection, self-editing, or self-moderation that occur *in media res* in Pope's oeuvre, aspects of his style that are generally treated separately from his compositional process, for instance as forms of scepticism, argumentative inconsistency, or ambivalence, do in fact work in synergy with and ought to be considered part and parcel of the more conventional kinds of editorial revisions Pope is better known for as a 'reviser'. In the course of four chapter-long case studies I seek to construct a more holistic sense of what revision entailed for Pope by recognising the differing visibilities with which Pope himself revealed his own processes. I argue throughout this thesis that Pope's own textual and paratextual references to composition are designed to have a persuasive effect.

The first chapter considers Pope's unusual use of the word 'superfoetation' to describe errors of composition in *The Works of Shakespear*. I illustrate how Pope's interest in authorial decision-making could inform the ways in which we view creative processes in Pope's own works, particularly *The Rape of the Locke* and *The Dunciad*. The second chapter explores the ways in which Pope's portrayal of in-text self-correction in *Eloisa to Abelard* characterises Eloisa as both a heroine and a writer. I argue that Eloisa's meandering movements of self-doubt ultimately betray the delight she takes in writing for writing's sake. The third chapter shows how Pope's use of revision in the *Epistles to Several Persons* enables him to address the epistemological barriers preventing him from fulfilling his *opus magnum* vision, without necessarily giving up on his original ambition altogether. In the fourth and final chapter, I investigate the role revision plays in building an enduring sense of hope and anticipation in *An Essay on Man*. This chapter concludes the thesis by showing that, beyond being an inevitable aspect of the composition process, revision can function as a persuasive device as well as a way of thinking and communicating in and of itself.

Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter One: ‘Superfoetations’ of the mind in <i>The Works of Shakespear</i>	
The ‘Superfoetation’-problem.....	18
The unique precedents set by Pope’s <i>Works of Shakespear</i>	20
The role of the ‘superfoetation’	30
Popean superfoetations	37
<i>The Rape of the Locke</i> and early works	39
<i>The Dunciad</i> and later works	47
Chapter Two: ‘all the writer lives in ev’ry line’: the ‘Inhabitant Within’ in <i>Eloisa to Abelard</i>	
The epistolary function	53
The Fifth Letter of Heloise	56
Eloisa and the Fifth Letter.....	59
Pope’s interest in letter-writing.....	64
Eloisa the reviser.....	68
A comparison to Sappho.....	71
Eloisa and the Bard.....	75
Chapter Three: ‘snatch a grace beyond the reach of art’: the dexterity of thought in the <i>Epistles to Several Persons</i>	
The <i>opus magnum</i> vision	85
Horace, Lucilius and the ‘deathbed’ epigraph	87
The epistemological challenge of the <i>opus magnum</i>	93
<i>In potentia</i> and <i>in actu</i> : <i>To Cobham</i> and ‘what a scale is to a book of maps’	98
Reading and misreading the ruling passion	117
<i>To Bathurst</i> and the value of words	122
Chapter Four: <i>An Essay on Man</i> and the ‘power of rejecting his own thoughts’	
The irony of the ‘power of rejecting’	141
Manuscript, Variant, and In-text rejections in <i>An Essay on Man</i>	146
Rejected and rejecting.....	156
Bibliography	175

Acknowledgements:

I would like to thank my supervisor, Christopher Tilmouth, for his encouragement, advice, generosity, and support these last three years. It has been a privilege learning from him. I am also grateful to Fred Parker, Ross Wilson, and Phillip Connell for the feedback they have each given me at different stages of this research journey, and to Katrin Ettenhuber and Mary Newbould for being there at the very beginning.

Thanks are also due to Pembroke College and the Pembroke College GPC for making the half of the PhD that I spent in a pandemic exceedingly bearable and somewhat productive, despite all the obstacles in the way. I also extend thanks to the University Centre and Grads Café for providing a wonderful atmosphere for thought in the non-pandemic half of this degree, and to the Cambridge University Library and English Faculty Library for keeping me going for most all of it.

An extra special thank you is also extended to all my friends. I would like to thank Barbara Shaw, in particular, for her wisdom, kindness, and positivity, and Yvonne Zellen for her support and good humour.

I am immeasurably grateful to Sir. David K.P. Li and the Prince Philip Scholarship Committee, without whom none of this would have ever been possible. I am equally grateful to Hong Kong for giving me so much all my life. There are no words for how grateful I am to call you my home.

As for my family, I am especially grateful to my aunt, Deepa Khamkar, for her unconditional love and support throughout the years. I would also like to thank my late grand aunt, Sunala Lawand, for her love of poetry and the kindness she always showed me.

Above all, I dedicate this work and all my works to my parents and my sister. I do not know where I would be without their support, encouragement, faith, and sacrifices. My only wish is to do them proud.

Introduction

Lintot will think your price too much;
“Not, Sir, if you revise it, and retouch.”¹

This is the only quotation provided under the entry for the verb ‘to revise’ in Samuel Johnson’s *Dictionary* (1755). Johnson’s choice of exemplar, taken from Alexander Pope’s ‘most directly autobiographical work’, *An Epistle to Arbuthnot* (1734), gives us some indication of just how synonymous Pope was with ideas of revision.² The cry of the hacks and dunces, begging the poet ‘to review’ or ‘overlook’ their work (‘revise’) and to ‘improve [it] by new touches’ (‘retouch’), is presented as the authoritative example of what it means to revise, after which no supplementary clarification is deemed necessary.³ It is as if Johnson had said, ‘You had better ask Pope.’ The fact that he did not need to offer such an explanation lies at the heart of the present study. So implicit and apparently self-evident was this association between Pope and revision that, even today, research into that relationship tends to focus on the mechanical evidence of where and to what effect Pope revised, his so-called ‘revision habits’, rather than this larger abiding sense that Pope was also thematically and not just methodologically something of a poet of revision.⁴

Indeed, Popean quotations are used as the sole exemplars not only for ‘to revise’, but also for other adjacent compositional actions. These include ‘revisal’, ‘borrower’,

¹Alexander Pope, ‘An Epistle from Mr Pope to Dr Arbuthnot’, in *The Twickenham Edition of the Poems of Alexander Pope*, ed. by John Butt et al., 11 vols. (London: Methuen, 1939-69), iv (1939), pp.91-127 (p.100), ll.63-64.

²Pat Rogers, *The Alexander Pope Encyclopedia* (London: Greenwood Press, 2004), p.110.

³Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language; in which the words are deduced from their originals and illustrated in their different significations by examples from the best writers. To which are prefixed, a history of the language, and an English grammar*, ed. by Samuel Johnson, 2 vols. (London: W. Strahan, 1755), II, ‘to revise’ and ‘to retouch’.

⁴See John Butt, ‘Pope’s Poetical Manuscripts’, *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 40 (1954), 23-39; George Sherburn, ‘Pope at Work’, in *Essays on the Eighteenth Century Presented to David Nichol Smith* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1954), pp.49-64; Julian Ferraro ‘*Rising into Light*’: *The Evolution of Pope’s Poems in Manuscript and Print* Unpublished Dissertation (Cambridge University, 1993) and ‘Pope: Pen and Press’, in *Literary Milieux: Essays in Texts and Context Presented to Howard Erskine-Hill*, ed. by David Womersley and Richard McCabe (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2008), pp.116-39.

‘overwrought’, and ‘eke’ (‘to spin out by useless additions’).⁵ Notably, the quotation for ‘borrower’ redirects dictionary users to Pope himself in the same manner that ‘to revise’ does: ‘Some say, that I am a great *borrower*; however, none of my creditors have challenged me for it.’⁶ With ‘borrower’, we see Johnson, again, defer to Pope. This pervasive sense that Pope was not only a reviser, but also a well-rounded and industrious literary craftsman continues in modern scholarship which, having been gifted with greater access to Pope’s manuscripts, is even more certain that he was ‘ever an obsessive’ composer.⁷ References to Pope’s compositional habits are common in critical asides: ‘Pope is well known to have been a relentless reviser of his works’;⁸ ‘he rarely rested until he felt [his works] could not be improved’;⁹ ‘Pope is, of course, notorious as a reviser of letters’;¹⁰ ‘every student of Pope knows, the poet wasn’t content to leave the first version of his sprightly masterpiece alone’.¹¹ It is not my intention to cast doubt on what seems to be, very reasonably, a rare point of universal agreement among critics by grouping them together in this way. To quote Helene Koon, ‘The most cursory glance at Pope’s working manuscript reveals his capacity for meticulous revision’.¹² On the contrary, I wish to suggest that we have not delved into Popean revision deeply enough. We might, in fact, be in danger of taking it for granted.

This thesis examines Pope’s literary career in the light of his own writings about and portrayals of the composition process, with the view of showing the pervasiveness of Pope’s interest in literary creation and re-creation. I would like to suggest that revision is still an as yet underappreciated hallmark of Pope’s style as a poet, and one that extends beyond the remit of manuscript interpretation and textual scholarship that it is, I argue, often unhelpfully confined to. To facilitate a more holistic understanding of revision in Pope’s work, my interpretation of the word extends the OED definition 2a — ‘The action or an act of revising

⁵ See *The Dunciad in Four Books*, ed. by Valerie Rumbold (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), p.276, l.104. Further references to *The Dunciad in Four Books* (1743) are given after quotations in the text.

⁶ Johnson’s quote appears to be from Pope’s correspondence. See ‘Pope to Caryll, 5 December 1712’, in *The Correspondence of Alexander Pope*, ed. by George Sherburn, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), I, pp.160-2, 161. Further references are abbreviated to *Correspondence*.

⁷ *Anniversary Essays on Alexander Pope’s ‘The Rape of the Lock’*, ed. by Donald W. Nichol (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), p.xvii.

⁸ *Studies in Ephemera: Text and Image in Eighteenth-Century Print*, ed. by Kevin Murray and Sally O’Driscoll (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2013), p.44.

⁹ John Sitter, ‘Pope’s Versification and Voice’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Alexander Pope*, ed. by Pat Rogers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp.37–48, p.45.

¹⁰ Hester Jones, “‘Religion blushing veils her sacred fires’: Pope and the Veil of Faith”, in *Literary Milieux: Essays in Text and Context Presented to Howard Erskine-Hill*, ed. by David Womersley and Richard McCabe (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2008), pp.205-229, p.216.

¹¹ *Anniversary Essays*, ed. by Nichol, p.xvii.

¹² Helene Koon, ‘Pope’s First Editors’, *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 35.1 (1971) 19-27.

something; critical or careful examination or perusal of a text judgment, code, etc., with a view to making corrections, amendments, or improvements' — to include broader actions of re-examination that occur in the bodies of supposedly 'finished' texts. In-text forms of review and reconsideration such as shifts in argument, changes of mind, and portrayals of indecision can be seen as a continuation of the editorial reflections that occur at the manuscript stage. Through this expanded understanding of what revision could mean in a literary context, I aim to show how other forms of self-reflection, self-editing, or self-moderation that occur *in media res* in Pope's oeuvre, aspects of his work that have traditionally been treated separately from studies of his compositional process, for instance, as forms of scepticism, argumentative inconsistency, ambiguity, or ambivalence, might work in synergy with and be an extension of the more conventional kinds of editorial revisions Pope is better known for as a 'reviser'.

My approach takes its cue from Pope's own writings about composition. Pope's criticism of other poets suggests that revision is integral to the fabric of literature beyond its editorial purposes in the 'making of' the final drafts of published texts. Coming to Homer's defence in 'An Essay on Homer's Battles', Pope observes that Homer's habit of repeating 'the same comparisons in the same words at length upon different occasions' allows us to see the same idea from different perspectives: 'Though *Homer* speaks of the same creature, he so diversifies the circumstances and accidents of the comparisons, that they always appear quite different'.¹³ This is framed as a form of revision:

But may not one say, Homer is like a skilful *improver*, who places a beautiful statue so as to answer several vistas, and by that artifice one single figure seems multiplied into as many objects as there are openings from whence it may be viewed?¹⁴

For Pope, the recurrence of previous imagery shows the 'action' and 'movement' of Homer's invention, the 'living' quality of his creativity, at work. It is not that 'the greatest invention of any writer whatever' has run dry, but rather that it has been rendered visible.¹⁵ Crucially, this revisiting of previously used comparisons is suggested to be an extension of the kind of editorial revision that occurs outside the text. According to Pope, Homer is not a repetitious dotard but an 'improver', a reviser. What Pope sees is not a tendency for tautology, but one for revision. For Pope, such in-text revision is a part of literary consumption.

This line of thinking is reiterated in Pope's later advice to Spence about correction:

¹³ 'An Essay on Homer's Battles', in *TE*, VII (1967), pp.252-262 (p.254).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.255.

¹⁵ 'Preface to *The Iliad*', in *TE*, VII (1967), pp.3-25 (p.3).

After writing a poem one should correct it all over with one single view at a time. Thus for language, in an elegy: ‘these lines are very good, but are not they of too heroical a strain?’, and so vice versa. It appears very plainly from comparing parallel passages touched both in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* that Homer did this, and ‘tis yet plainer that Virgil did so, from the distinct styles he uses in his three sorts of poems. It always answers in him, and so constant an effect could not be the effect of chance.¹⁶

The language of ‘openings’, ‘answers’, and ‘views’, applied here to the specific case of correcting verse to match an elegiac register, echoes Pope’s description of the statue answering several vistas in ‘An Essay on Homer’s Battles’. Here, too, parallel passages are being appreciated as forms of revision in action. What is more, Pope’s assessment of Homer and Virgil, as well as the recommendation he makes, operates around the idea that actions of composition are something that can be read in the finished text. An elegy is made better when it can ‘answer’ the gaze of multiple readerly re-viewers. To dismiss the compositional process as something only of interest to those pursuing Pope’s manuscripts would therefore be to underestimate the importance of its role in Pope’s critical thought.

Pope, in fact, ruminates on multiple occasions about the possibility of judging poets according to their revision choices. Spence records that Pope’s copy of the 1709 edition of *Cooper’s Hill* was annotated with a note remarking how ‘admirable’ the author’s judgment seemed when viewed in light of the ‘great number of verses’ that had been omitted, corrected, improved, or added since the first edition.¹⁷ Pope drew particular attention to four lines describing the Thames (‘O, could I flow like thee’) as an example of one of the pleasing later additions. This choice of exemplar is possibly designed to reflect a hidden self-reflexivity in the poem: the unpredictability, or rather lack of ‘flow’, of John Denham’s composition process, as well as his desire to make it ‘flow’ better. Indeed, Pope follows a similar line of thought when he adapts the lines in his mocking caricature of Leonard Welsted in *The Dunciad* (‘Flow, Leonard, flow! like thine inspirer, Beer’).¹⁸ Spence recounts that Pope, likely regretful of how much of the poetic process is obscured in publication, ended his praise of Denham wistfully with a quote from Edmund Waller: ‘Poets lose half the praise they should have got, | Could it be known what they discreetly blot’. This desire to bring the composition process into focus as part of the text recurs in ‘The Second Epistle of the Second Book of Horace, Imitated’: ‘But how severely with themselves proceed | The Men, who write

¹⁶Joseph Spence, *Observations, Anecdotes, and Characters of Books and Men*, ed. by James M. Osborn, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), I, p.171. Further references to this edition will be abbreviated as *Anecdotes*.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, I, pp.194-196.

¹⁸*The Dunciad in Four Books*, iii.169 . See Osborn’s note in *Anecdotes*, I, pp.195-196.

such Verse as we can read?’¹⁹ It seems that appreciating the *poiesis* in the poetry, the creative processes underlying finished works, was an important part of reading for Pope, and one which he wished to bring to the fore.

Pope’s attention to composition processes in these readings may be a reflection of a new emphasis that was being placed on writing practice in the eighteenth century. Murray Cohen catalogues how grammarians of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries expanded and modified the classical definition of grammar by placing as much if not greater importance on ‘writing’ as ‘speaking’. This shift in thinking involved a transition ‘from the search to connect words with things to the assumption that the written language should be marked for syntactical sense’.²⁰ Grammar was redefined from *Grammatica est recte loquendi atque scribendi ars* to ‘the Knowledge or Art of Expressing our Thoughts in words join’d together in Sentences’ or ‘the Art of Expressing the Relations of Things in Construction’.²¹ It arose that ‘a Mastery of [grammar] is of more Consequence in Writing’ than in speaking.²² Greater attention placed on the construction of syntactical units as a result of this new understanding meant that discussion of aspects of grammar exclusive to written communication such as punctuation marks became a significant part of understanding a writer’s reasoning. Punctuation was now explicitly understood as part of the logic of written or printed meaning. It was appreciated as an aid ‘for the better understanding of the sense’ (*The English Grammar*, 1712), rather than simply a cue for speaking.²³ This shift in emphasis from rhetorical delivery to syntactical meaning led to grammar becoming, ‘pre-eminently, the syntax of connectives’.²⁴ One consequence of this was that the fine choices of written composition — conjunctions, interjections, adverbs, punctuation etc — were seen as a greater measure of a writer’s reasoning than ever before.²⁵ Pope’s notorious interest in the particulars of composition may be a response to the greater importance these niceties of grammar had come to play in the reasoning of works. Indeed, this changing understanding of grammar is part of what Ralph Cohen has dubbed ‘the Augustan mode’. Cohen writes that the typical poem of 1660-1750 was often a ‘poem by accretion’, something that achieved its ‘view of

¹⁹The Second Epistle of the Second Book of Horace, Imitated’, in *TE*, iv, pp.161-187, l.178 (p.177).

²⁰Murray Cohen, *Sensible Words: Linguistic Practice in England 1640-1785* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), p.52.

²¹Charles Gildon, *A Grammar of the English Tongue, With Notes, Giving the Grounds and Reason of Grammar in General* (London, 1711), p.1, quoted in *Sensible Words*, p.46, p.56.

²²*Ibid.*, p.46.

²³Michael Maittaire, *The English Grammar; or, An Essay on the Art of Grammar Applied to and Exemplified in the English Tongue* (London, 1712), p.21, quoted in Cohen, *Sensible Words*, p.51.

²⁴Cohen, *Sensible Words*, p.60.

²⁵*Ibid.*, p.59.

knowledge' through the gradual addition of multiple seemingly disconnected observations. Cohen notes that eighteenth century grammar productively complicated these accruing revisions by delineating a greater number of associations, comparisons, and contrasts between verse fragments. The increased use of syntactical qualifications drew new distinctions between outwardly fragmentary experiences, implying 'an increasing awareness of the unresolvably complicated world of man and nature'.²⁶

Man's complicated relationship with the universe also found apt expression in a concurrent wave of philosophy exploring the use of language more broadly. In the *Advancement of Learning*, Francis Bacon warned that 'words, as a Tartar's bow, do shoot back upon the understanding of the wisest, and mightily entangle and pervert the judgment' by creating 'fallacies and false appearances'.²⁷ This implied some difference between how something is thought and how it is (best) conveyed. It also underlined the potential for words to inadvertently confuse one's thinking, an idea that would later be echoed by Locke in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*.²⁸ This again drew renewed attention to matters of composition. Pope himself observed the difficulty of procuring a precise expression for his thoughts when writing to Cromwell in November 1711:

We grasp some more beautiful Idea in our brain than our endeavours to express it can set to the view of others; and still do but labour to fall short of our first imagination. The gay colouring which Fancy gave to our Design at the first transient glance we had of it, goes off in the Execution; like those various Figures in the gilded Clouds, which while we gaze long upon, to separate the parts of each imaginary Image, the whole faints before the Eye, and decays into Confusion.²⁹

Such perceived dislocation between design and execution, intention and result is presented as a subject of fascination in and of itself. Pope labours on despite knowing that he will eventually fall short of his beautiful first imagining. Yet, his persistence in expressing and re-expressing his thoughts in this way may describe both Cohen's 'poem of accretion' and Pope's famed 'unconscionable appetite for revision'.³⁰

²⁶Ralph Cohen, 'The Augustan Mode in English Poetry', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 1.1 (1967), 3-32 (pp.15, 31-32).

²⁷Francis, Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning*, ed. by Michael Kiernan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.117.

²⁸John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. by Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), III.9.4

²⁹ *Correspondence*, I, p.135.

³⁰ George Sherburn, 'Pope at Work', in *Essays on the Eighteenth Century Presented to David Nichol Smith* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1945), p.55. See Tom Jones, *Pope and Berkeley: The Language of Poetry and*

Knowing these contextual influences, it should be no surprise that Pope shows such an interest in matters of composition. One of the most significant statements of the importance of composition to his work can be found in the 'Preface' to his *Works*, which was first published in 1717 and saw few changes in the later editions that ran from 1736 to 1743. Pope states in the preface that his chief merit as a writer lies in 'the power of rejecting his own thoughts'.³¹ The 'power of rejecting his own thoughts' is Pope's most direct instruction to readers about what he values in his own work. It is notable that, as in the case of Homer's work as an 'improver', this self-rejection could describe multiple kinds of revision beyond the now customary editorial meaning. Considering how much the minutiae of syntactical construction were seen to direct the logic of written works, we can see why 'rejecting his own thoughts' can be read as both an editorial and conceptual kind of rejecting. These two forms of revision had never been more closely aligned. It is noteworthy that self-rejection could describe multiple kinds of revision — rethinking, editing, changes of mind, proofreading, additions, subtractions, etc. Pope's ambiguous use of the word 'thought' in the *Works* appears to treat rewriting as both a mental and written exercise: the changing of expression (written 'thoughts') as well as the changing of the mind. This conflation of meanings can be said to interact unexpectedly with some of our inherited view of Pope. One might wonder if the 'overflowings of the mind' 'always investigating, always aspiring', with second (third and fourth) 'thoughts' are necessarily conducive to the completion of a definitive final composition.³² By thus combining ideas of creativity and destruction, composition and rejection, Pope invokes a sense that his writing is a space of struggle wherein successive thoughts are at once building upon and overpowering one other.³³ This is something akin to the conjunction of oblivion and creation that De Quincey found admirable in Pope despite his disapproval of Pope's 'incapacity of self-determination towards any paramount or abiding principles': 'I admire him as a pyrotechnic artist for producing brilliant and evanescent effects out of elements that have hardly a moment's life within them.'³⁴ We might also think of the perpetual provisionality that Pope's work is characterised as having by critics such as

Philosophy (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) for a more detailed general overview of Pope's relationship to language philosophy.

³¹ 'The Preface of 1717', in *TE*, I (1961), pp.1-10 (p.2).

³² *An Essay on Man*, *TE*, III.i (1950; repr.1964), iv.369 (p.164), and Samuel Johnson's description of Pope's mind in *The Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets: With Critical Observations on Their Works*, ed. by Roger Lonsdale, 4 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), IV, p.63. Further references to *An Essay on Man* are given after quotations in the text.

³³ See 'Preface to the *Iliad*', p.3 for a description of Homer's writing as a 'wild paradise'

³⁴ Thomas De Quincey, *Theological Essays and other papers*, 2 vols. (Boston: Ticknor, Reed, and Fields, 1854), II, pp.236, 238.

Maynard Mack. If nothing else, such self-rejection reflects the inherent tension that the concept of compositional labour carries in Pope's career: the irony that his famed ease is so laboriously won.³⁵

Pope's self-characterisation in the preface to his *Works* naturally takes us back to the association linking Pope and revision in Johnson's *Dictionary*. We might in fact think that with 'the power of rejecting' Pope is confronting a narrative of his compositional process that we have perhaps become too familiar with. This would be the narrative of the fastidious reviser who reportedly wrote almost every line twice over when the *Epilogue to the Satires* was to be 'fairly copied', only to do so a second time when handed a clean transcript for the press.³⁶ At their worst, portraits of the poet's seemingly overzealous revision practices have tended towards comedy. Johnson reports Pope had once awoken a maid four times in one night so she could fetch more paper for him to write down his thoughts before he could forget them.³⁷ John Dennis, too, famously takes pity on the printer John Wright who was in charge of the *Dunciad*:

Does not half the Town know, that honest *J.W.* was the only Dunce that was persecuted and plagu'd by this Impression? that Twenty times the Rhapsodist alter'd every thing that he gave the Printer? and that Twenty times, *W.* in Rage and in Fury, threaten'd to turn the *Rhapsody* back upon the Rhapsodist's Hands.³⁸

In truth, there is a tempting facility with which we could dismiss Pope's fixation on revision as being part of his personality, what Pope's older half-sister Magdalen Rackett described to Spence as his 'maddish way'.³⁹ Some Romantic criticisms of Pope draw from an assumption that he over-revised to no purpose. Upon reading *Eloisa to Abelard*, Joseph Warton remarks with condescension that Pope was 'a most excellent improver, if no great original inventor'.⁴⁰ In *Conjectures on Original Composition* Edward Young, too, memorably characterised Pope as something of an improver — 'Swift is a singular wit, Pope a correct poet, Addison a great author'.⁴¹ *Blackwood's Magazine* echoes this sentiment in 1821: 'He is the poet of good

³⁵ As he notes in a September 1725 letter to William Broome, 'I correct daily, and make them seem less corrected, that is, more easy, more fluent, more natural'. See *Correspondence*, II, pp.320-21.

³⁶ Johnson, *Lives*, IV, pp.64-65.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.59.

³⁸ 'Remarks on the *Dunciad*', *The Critical Works of John Dennis*, ed. by Edward Niles Hooker, 2 vols. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1939-1943), II, p.356, quoted in James McLaverty, *Pope, Print, and Meaning* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p.6.

³⁹ *Anecdotes*, I, p.13.

⁴⁰ *An Essay on the Writings and Genius of Pope* (London: M. Cooper, 1756), p.298. *Early English Books Text Creation Partnership*. <<http://name.umdl.umich.edu/004831970.0001.000>> [accessed 28 September 2021]

⁴¹ *Pope: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by John Barnard (London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), p.430.

sense, wit, and judgment. His style, however, is plainly the effect of intense labour. Its polish is the result of repeated touches, and its correctness of anxious and perpetual pruning'.⁴² One of Leonard Welsted's earliest criticisms of Pope was that his verse lacked 'the spirit and informing flame, | Which breathes divine, and gives a Poet's name' because his 'numbers smooth' could sooth minds into 'indolence'.⁴³ This narrative describing Pope as an overzealous perfectionist builds what Emerson Marks describes as 'a picture of a man almost obsessively dedicated to his art, scarcely more able to quit poetry than to quit breathing, and deeply convinced of its supreme importance'.⁴⁴ There is a sense that there is a law of diminishing returns when it comes to revision, and Pope had crossed it.

It is only too easy, in Pope's case, to conflate revision practice with an eccentric and burdensome perfectionism, but I would like to suggest that there is also every indication that Pope knew this. Pope was after all the man who wrote to Bolingbroke, albeit with some level of facetiousness, that 'To write well, lastingly well, immortally well, must one not leave Father and Mother and cleave unto the Muse?'.⁴⁵ It is interesting, then, that on the opposite side of the spectrum, the most flattering portrayals of Pope's revision habits laud the poet for that same painstaking artistry. Johnson describes Pope working at his words like a craftsman chiselling away at a delicate sculpture: 'The method of Pope, as may be collected from his translation, was to write his first thoughts in his first words, and gradually to amplify, decorate, rectify, and refine them.'⁴⁶ This sentiment is echoed to some extent in modern evaluations of Pope's composition habits that find his insatiable appetite for revision to be a defining characteristic of his work. In his introduction to *The Last and Greatest Art*, Mack tries to facilitate an appreciation that Pope's poetry is 'made by an intending human consciousness'. He tries to break up Pope's processes of 'vision and revision' into three traceable stages of composition and their appropriate points of reference. The first point of reference is Pope's manuscript work. This shows the reading, thinking, and planning that both precede and accompany the direct act of composition, but are also external to it (annotations, running summaries, citations of classical inspirations, etc.). Second is the compositional process of revising and re-revising by which the essential final form of a work is 'painfully won'. Third, last, and ever-present are 'the stages of revision that take place after

⁴² 'Why are Poets indifferent Critics?', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 10 (1821), 180-186 (p.183).

⁴³ Leonard Welsted, *Palaemon to Caelia, at Bath; or, The Triumvirate* quoted in *Pope, the Critical Heritage*, ed. by John Barnard (London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), p.53.

⁴⁴ Emerson Marks, 'Pope on Poetry and the Poet', *Criticism*, 12.4 (1970), 271-280 (p.273).

⁴⁵ *Correspondence*, II, p.227.

⁴⁶ Johnson, *Lives*, IV, p.63.

[this] ostensibly final text has been arrived at'.⁴⁷ Mack's influence in describing the typical Popean work as being suspended in a state of provisional wholeness is evident in the general preface to the recent Longman Annotated English Poets edition of *The Poems of Alexander Pope* which describes Pope as 'a writer for whom (occasionally radical) revision was, in the case of some of his poems, a process ended only by death, and in whose work rejected readings remain susceptible to reinstatement in subsequent incarnations of a 'finished' text'.⁴⁸

Notably, all these evaluations of Popean revision processes operate around a largely manual and mechanical understanding of what revision entails. Pope's own writing about revision tells a different story. Like the rich ambiguity of the 'power of rejecting', Pope enjoys subverting the very assumptions about his revision practices that he all too knowingly alludes to. As we remember, Johnson's idea of the method of Pope was 'to write his first thoughts in his first words, and gradually to amplify, decorate, rectify, and refine them'.⁴⁹ This certainly corresponds with Spence's account of Pope's advice on writing a poem — 'After writing a poem, one should correct it all over with one single view at a time' — however, it would be misleading not to consider the varied ways in which Pope values different levels of attention to revision.⁵⁰ Even as he gleefully quotes Horace in advising hack writers to 'Keep your Piece nine years' (*Epistle to Arbuthnot*, l. 40), Pope openly ridicules those who would expend excessive energy on verbal curlicues in an effort to 'Strain out the last dull droppings of their sense'.⁵¹ Even when he suggests that the sound should echo the sense, he mocks the fools for whom 'smooth or rough' alone is 'right or wrong' (*An Essay on Criticism*, l.338). He does not support the blind following of ancient rules, but indicates that sometimes the sacrifice of a rule leads to a greater art of 'nameless Graces' (*An Essay on Criticism*, l.144). Nor does he claim that every single line needs to be revised: 'Sometimes our first Thoughts are the best, as the first squeezing of the Grapes make the finest and riches Wine.'⁵² Whilst 'On his Grotto' emphatically bemoans the fact that life seems too short for the punctilious reviser ('And life itself can nothing more supply | Than just to plan our projects, and to die.'), *An Epistle to Arbuthnot* restates (and revises) this notion that he must

⁴⁷Maynard Mack, *Collected in Himself: Essays Critical, Biographical, Bibliographical on Pope and some of his Contemporaries* (Newark: University of Delaware Press; London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1982), pp.330-339.

⁴⁸*The Poems of Alexander Pope: Volume One*, ed. by Julian Ferraro and Paul Baines, Longman Annotated English Poets (London: Routledge, 2019), p.xvi.

⁴⁹Johnson, *Lives*, IV, p.63.

⁵⁰*Anecdotes*, I, p.171.

⁵¹*An Essay on Criticism*, in TE, i (1961), pp.233-326, l.608 (p.308). Further references to *An Essay on Criticism* are given after quotations in the text.

⁵²*Correspondence*, I, p.19.

go on writing and re-writing indefinitely to the point of frustration: ‘Heav'ns! was I born for nothing but to write?’ (l.272). We find a sense of this sensitive attention to the purposes of revision in Pope’s oft-quoted account of some advice he received from William Walsh: ‘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’.⁵³ While ‘correctness’ itself is another aspect of Pope’s oeuvre that modern criticism has become arguably overfamiliar with, the ‘study’ of correctness has not been given as much attention as the ‘aim’. In his July 1706 letter to Walsh, Pope notes that while correction is important, it must be deployed with a well-studied eye: ‘Some parts ought to be lower than the rest; and nothing looks more ridiculous, than a Work, where the Thoughts, however different in their own nature, seem all on a level.’⁵⁴

Pope, too, seems to have been eager for readers to speculate upon and ‘study’ at least some of what he ‘discreetly blotted’. He commissioned Jonathan Richardson to compile a list of variants from printed texts and rejected manuscript readings for the later editions of his *Works*.⁵⁵ The open acknowledgement of variants ensured that the issue of revision would not be seen as a secret between scholars and manuscript readers but as a substantial part of Pope’s messaging. Recordings of his composition process allowed Pope to put his judgment, imagination, and interest in poetic creation and dissemination at the service of the wider entity of the poem they created. The offering of multiple alternatives suggests that none was part of an inevitable or predestined conclusion or master plan and that there might always be an argument, however varying in strength, for the discarded line. Given Pope’s interest in the revision processes underlying other poets’ works, it seems that to privilege a particular version of Pope’s poems as if it were in the works all along is to misunderstand something fundamental about the way Pope approached poetry itself both as a reader and a writer, and the way he presents his own process in his works.

We will notice that Pope’s evaluations of what makes ‘good’ writing are hardly about the hard work and discipline described in the letter he wrote to Broome in February 1721/22: ‘You do not need any man to make you a good poet, you need no more than what every good poet needs, —time, and diligence, and doing something every day.’⁵⁶ Nor does he invoke the compulsive editings of the finicky versifier described in Cowper’s characterisation of him: ‘in

⁵³ *Anecdotes*, I, p.32.

⁵⁴ *Correspondence*, I, p.19.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, IV, pp.78, 374.

⁵⁶ *Correspondence*, II, p.102.

every line he ever wrote, we see indubitable marks of the most indefatigable industry and labour'.⁵⁷ After all, if the 'power of rejecting' were only a case of manual revision, there would be little use in telling the reader about processes that they are not privy to. Taken as a whole, Pope's comments suggest that revision is not only a means to an end — the final publication — but also many other things besides. It is the contention of this thesis that through these repeated emphases on compositional decision-making Pope is instructing the reader to see the composition process itself as something more than (an inevitable) fact of writing that exists most apparently within the confines of private manuscripts. It might be more useful to approach his work in a similar fashion to the way he seems to have approached the work of others: as an ossification of many visible and invisible editorial choices. Seeing that he did publish textual variants in his *Works*, it seems important to appreciate Pope for the ways in which he selectively reveals the strains of his labour.⁵⁸ By giving us some understanding of the locus of judgments he made and those he reconsidered, Pope gives readers the opportunity to decide for themselves how far the central text offered is most representative of the poet's best intention and, as in Pope's own assessment of *Cooper's Hill*, how far these changes were judiciously made. Taking these instances of attention to different forms of intra-text and inter-text revision into account, Pope's emphasis on self-rejection as his strongest claim to being a good writer can be read as both a self-evaluation of his own strengths and a cue to readers to appreciate the breadth and scope of the different kinds of 'revision' practices that could fall under this description. It is perhaps these different levels of revision, these different powers of rejecting, if anything, that can supply the uniting principle that De Quincey finds lacking in Pope. As David Morris has noted, 'Like Proteus, [Pope's] nature seems centered, if a stable center exists, in the power to assume different shapes'.⁵⁹ I would like to suggest that that power is revision.

This idea of Pope as a poet of revision, rejecter of thoughts, or moderator could be seen as kindred to the relatively recent move towards seeing Pope's use of equivocating

⁵⁷ Extract from letter to Rev. William Unwin, 5 January 1782, *The Works of William Cowper*, ed. by R. Southey, 15 vols. (London, 1836), quoted in *Pope: The Critical Heritage*, p.474.

⁵⁸ See Penelope Wilson, 'Reading Pope's Homer in the 1720s: The *Iliad* Notes of Philip Doddridge', *Translation and Linguistics*, 29 (2020), 163-98, for how Philip Doddridge read Pope's Homer in terms of his editorial choices. Writing in 1725, he remarked that Pope's translation of Homer 'appears to the best advantage when compared with the original': 'I think I can prove that, where Pope has omitted one beauty, he has added or improved four'. Doddridge's surviving commentary on Pope's translation, which he had read alongside Homer's original, has been transcribed by Penelope Wilson and by her count the ratio of praise and criticisms is roughly three to one.

⁵⁹ David Morris, *Pope: Genius of Sense* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2013; repr. 2014), p.3.

language as a deliberate form of scepticism designed to express and navigate irresolvable contradictions, often in a series of Montaignian movements.⁶⁰ This movement in Pope studies sees a Pope who is defined by contradictions, someone whose ambivalences range from his views on religion and politics through to his relationship with his own celebrity.⁶¹ Such approaches to Pope can be developed further with the recognition that Pope's scepticism and his refusal to be defined naturally align with issues of compositional revision. Scepticism enabled audiences to doubt whether writers truly understood the full implications of their own meaning before it was fully conveyed. As a result, the process of becoming, pre-writing, became entangled with questions of veracity as well. Following the publication of Descartes' *Discourse on Method*, the so-called 'presentational method', the written representation of ideas for the purposes of communication, would undergo 'a gradual shift to the more Cartesian concept of method as a means of inquiry'.⁶² The process of articulation and re-articulation was increasingly being seen as part and parcel of the validating process that qualified the veracity of one's claims. Descartes described that 'often the things which have seemed true when I first conceived them have appeared false when I committed them to paper'. The writing out of something as if it were to be published proved a useful way of testing it.⁶³ This, too, can be seen as a form of revision. Indeed, Noggle's description of a Pope being seized by scepticism in *The Dunciad* '(as if) against his will' bears a telling resemblance to Pope's reputation as a compulsive reviser. When Pope's in-text sceptical doubt is considered an extension of his extra-textual editorial doubt, the 'all-involving sceptical alienation' perceived in *The Dunciad* appears even more pervasive. Moreover, the discrepancies between earlier and later versions of the poem become part of the poem's overall sceptical stance rather than a preliminary anticipation of it.⁶⁴

Another kindred field of Pope studies that my reframing of Popean revision could contribute to is that which has tried to establish Pope as a thinker interested in the human mind. These approaches tend towards a kind of psychologising of Pope's choices: David

⁶⁰ See James Noggle, *The Skeptical Sublime: Aesthetic Ideology in Pope and the Tory Satirists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) and Fred Parker "'Sworn to no Master": Pope's Scepticism in the *Epistle to Bolingbroke* and *An Essay on Man*' in *Scepticism and Literature: An Essay on Pope, Hume, Sterne, and Johnson* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). Oxford Scholarship Online.<

10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199253180.001.0001> [accessed 28 September 2021]

⁶¹ See Emrys Jones, 'An Appetite for Ambivalence: Pope Studies in the Twenty-First Century', *Literary Compass* 15.12(2018) <<https://doi.org/10.1111/lic3.12502>> [accessed 28 September 2021]

⁶² Paul Alkon, 'Critical and Logical Concepts of Method from Addison to Coleridge', *Eighteenth Century Studies*, 5.1 (Autumn, 1971), 97-121 (p.99).

⁶³ Rene Descartes, *Discourse on Method and the Meditations*, trans. by F.E. Sutcliffe (London: Penguin, 1968), p.81.

⁶⁴ Noggle, *The Skeptical Sublime*, pp.197, 207.

Morris describes Pope's thought as having a characteristically 'eddy and recursive movement',⁶⁵ Rebecca Ferguson contextualises Pope's portrayal of the passions in terms of moral psychology;⁶⁶ and Helen Vendler portrays a Pope that 'creates a cinematic flow of living thought' that is 'quick and mobile, [and] ever darting to extremes and polarities, but resting in none of them'.⁶⁷ David Fairer identifies Pope as someone intensely interested in how the human mind works in all aspects of life: 'Some of his finest poems work on the assumption that the imagination is the heart of man's paradoxical nature, and is capable of many degrees of use and misuse.'⁶⁸ An alternative approach to understanding Pope as a thinker has been followed by Simon Jarvis who has suggested that the metrical and grammatical constraints navigated by Pope's poetry generate a form of 'verse thinking'. Jarvis' idea of correctness means 'the saturation of every single part of the linguistic material with expressive force' from its use of punctuation through to the placement of syllabic emphasis.⁶⁹ Such thinking in verse causes the work to no longer be paraphrasable in the way that prose is. My focus on correctness rather than straightforward correctness seeks to emphasise how the constructedness of such so-called 'verse thinking' is itself another aspect that is designed to give the reader pause. The present participle — thinking — itself becomes something of interest when we recognise how the verse line compresses not only the writer's thoughts but their process onto the page, the becoming of correctness as well as correctness in the absolute. It is my argument that, along with ideas of scepticism, such views of argumentative inconsistency and ambivalence in Pope's thinking can in their own ways be connected as symptoms of his career-long and perhaps most career-defining attribute, that of being a prolific reviser.

My work most obviously also takes cue from previous studies of Pope's revision habits. The pioneering study of Pope's manuscripts is George Sherburn's seminal essay, 'Pope at Work', in which Sherburn established Pope's practice of working on multiple projects at once in his later years. Sherburn used a transcript from the Pierpont Morgan Library to observe how the *Epistle to Arbuthnot* and the *First Satire of the Second Book of Horace Imitated* (to William Fortescue) had been written in tandem and how fragments from the final versions of both poems were originally interwoven between each other. Sherburn

⁶⁵Morris, *The Genius of Sense*, p.12.

⁶⁶See Rebecca Ferguson, *The Unbalanced Mind: Pope and the Rule of Passion* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986)

⁶⁷Helen Vendler, *Poets Thinking: Pope, Whitman, Dickinson, Yeats* (Harvard University Press, 2006), p.27.

⁶⁸David Fairer, *Pope's Imagination* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p.2.

⁶⁹Simon Jarvis, 'Bedlam or Parnassus: The Verse Idea', *Metaphilosophy*, 43 (2012), 71-81, (p.77).

had then remarked that a study of Pope's working manuscripts can only provide conclusions about the mechanical composition process and not necessarily the imaginative processes behind them.⁷⁰ My explorations of the wider kinds of revision Pope practised endeavours to show that the imaginative basis behind Pope's revision practice can still be 'read' in his finished pieces even if it cannot be accurately gleaned from the manuscripts themselves. Pope's in-text movements of self-review and re-creation need not be wholly separated from his extra-textual editorial manoeuvres but can be read alongside one another as two sides of the same coin.

Of equal importance is John Butt's lecture 'Pope's Poetical Manuscripts', which demonstrated how *An Epistle to Arbuthnot* was originally drafted as an epistle to Pope's friend William Cleland and likely written in the wake of the backlash concerning the identity of 'Timon' in *An Epistle to Burlington*. Butt had used his analysis of *Arbuthnot* to make the larger point that greater attention ought to be given to Pope's manuscripts. Butt emphasised the deliberateness with which 'Pope never doubted that he was a classic' and documented the glamorous way in which the *Works* were initially published with a portrait of the poet. He also noted the way in which that confidence was further reasserted when Pope decided to release variant readings of poems within two years of their original release.⁷¹ Pope even resurrected those variants rejected from his manuscripts for readers' perusal in the 1736 edition of the *Works*; as Butt notes, the Bodleian autograph of the *Essay on Criticism* and the Washington University autograph of *Windsor Forest* both carry instructions for the transcribing of passages not available in the printed text.⁷² Looking more closely at what Pope has said about writing and revision might help us understand the purposes that the publications of these variants may have played on a conceptual and interpretive level, beyond the establishment of classical status.

R.H. Griffith's essay, 'Pope Editing Pope', is another work of enduring influence that this study owes a debt to. Griffith's description of Pope's revision process as a thinking process approaches the kind of strategic revision that something like the 'power of rejecting' statement would seem to represent: 'The author revised as he became aware of a discrepancy between a word (as name) and the thing intended to be named, between one part of a statement and another part, and between the idea in his mind and the (different) idea mis-

⁷⁰ Sherburn, 'Pope at Work', p.52.

⁷¹ Butt, 'Pope's Poetical Manuscripts', pp.23-24.

⁷² Ibid., p.24.

aroused in the reader's mind.'⁷³ This thesis endeavours to link this tradition of attention to Pope's manuscripts back to Pope's own portrayals of what writing and rewriting were like. In this way, we might be able to bridge the gap between Pope 'the thinker' and Pope 'the pyrotechnic artist' by way of Pope the reviser, or Pope the rejecter of his own thoughts.

In order to approach a more holistic understanding of revision in Pope's work this study aims to be suggestive while resisting the need to determine anything that would be considered Pope's overarching theory of composition. To that end, this thesis does not offer a schematic overview or a single interpretation of Pope's relationship with revision, or any underlying Popean philosophy or theory of composition. Instead, it provides a series of case studies that show the different ways in which our appreciation of Pope can be enhanced through attention to his own writing about writing. Each chapter analyses the details of a different body of texts in the light of their textual and paratextual relationships with revision. The interpretations and insights gleaned as a result of this are specific to each chapter-long case study; however, every section emphasises the same central argument: in the case of Pope, revision is not only process but also product.

The first chapter considers Pope's unusual use of the word 'superfoetation' in *The Works of Shakespear* and makes a case for its significance as a marker of Pope's habit of reading texts in terms of the ways in which they are produced. This idea of a double pregnancy in the writer's mind shows what Pope might have appreciated about Shakespeare's compositional practices. It also provides a way of appreciating the use of in-text revision in Pope's own works. This exploration of gratuity, error, and writing too much works to show that, despite Pope's words to Spence, 'the most corrected [does not always] read the easiest'.⁷⁴

The second chapter considers the ways in which Pope references the compositional process in *Eloisa to Abelard* in order to portray both Eloisa and himself as writers and revisers. I consider the poem through the lens of Heloise's final letter in John Hughes' prose translation, in which Heloise makes a parting admission that she takes far too much pleasure in writing to Abelard. By putting this final confession in conversation with eighteenth-century epistolary practice and Pope's own remarks about letter-writing, I argue that Eloisa's mental struggles are also compositional struggles. Eloisa's in-text indecision ultimately

⁷³R.H. Griffith, 'Pope Editing Pope', *Studies in English* (1944), 5-108 (p.10).

⁷⁴*Anecdotes*, p.86.

shows the pleasure she finds in writing for writing's sake. By framing the complexities of her divided love for Abelard and God in this way, Pope puts in-text recordings of compositional deliberation at the service of characterisation.

The third chapter looks at how Pope uses revision as a persuasive device in *An Epistle to Cobham* in order to communicate his inability to realise his *opus magnum* ambition. Like the *Eloisa* chapter, this chapter reveals how in-text revision can show thinking in action by using the page as a sounding board for ideas. I argue that *To Cobham* demonstrates its epistemological argument by intentionally frustrating the reader's ability to understand it. I explore how this technique enables *To Cobham* to retroactively address the most common criticisms Pope faced after the release of *An Essay on Man* and other poems that were to be a part of the *opus magnum* vision. *To Cobham*'s exploration of ambiguity, under-writing, and under-explanation strikes a contrast with the first chapter's attention to gratuity. The focus on the limits of written communication aims to show how the incompleteness of the *opus magnum* project may be read in Pope's favour.

The fourth and final chapter concludes the series of case studies by considering *An Essay on Man* in the light of the holistic understanding of revision that has been proposed by this thesis. This concluding chapter explores how Pope uses revision to generate an enduring sense of hope and anticipation in one of his most ambitious works.

As a whole, this dissertation argues that Popean revision is best understood when it is considered as something that occurs on a spectrum of visibility. Revision, for Pope, had a purpose, and it did not end with the publication of a final draft. Underlying every chapter is Austin Warren's notion that Pope was a 'serious student of the poetic craft', someone who was 'conscious of their aims and methods' and 'seriously pondered their art', and that this seriousness extended to the art of revision.⁷⁵ When it comes to portrayals of revision, this dissertation looks to test how far we can take Pope at his word.

⁷⁵Austin Warren, *Alexander Pope as Critic and Humanist* (Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1929; repr. 1963), p.75.

‘Superfoetations’ of the mind in *The Works of Shakespear*

The ‘Superfoetation’-problem

In the preface to *The Works of Shakespear* (1725), Pope claims that Shakespeare’s ‘want of Learning’ accounts for only a small portion of errors such as ‘a wrong choice of the subject, a wrong conduct of the incidents, false thoughts, forc’d expressions, &c’.⁷⁶ Most such oversights, Pope argues, are ‘not properly defects, but superfoetations’ that have emerged during the revision process. Superfoetation (now more commonly spelled ‘superfetation’) is a physiological phenomenon where a second conception occurs during the gestational period of a prior one, resulting in the co-presence of two fetuses at two different stages of development. In the context of the plays, Pope seems to be suggesting that these figurative double pregnancies are due to a superfluity of ideas in the writer’s mind rather than a lack of writing skill. These are conceptual and compositional errors, not errors in writing. As Pope goes on to explain, Shakespeare’s superfoetations arise ‘not from want of learning or reading’ but ‘from want of thinking or judging’, more specifically ‘a compliance to those wants in others’ against the writer’s ‘own’ better judgment. This ‘compliance’ to others is to be distinguished from ‘Interpolations’, where Pope implies that third parties — ‘the Players, both as [Shakespeare’s] actors and as his editors’, ‘unknown authors’, or the ‘first Editors’ — have directly intervened in the text, the point being that, in the case of ‘superfoetations’, the fault is genuinely Shakespeare’s own.⁷⁷ It appears that, to Pope’s mind, Shakespeare’s original ‘genius’ is made to compete with the second conception of his desire to please his company (‘most of our Author’s faults are less to be ascribed to his wrong judgment as a Poet than to his right judgment as a Player’), and the two intentions ultimately warp the

⁷⁶ *The Works of Shakespear*, ed. by Alexander Pope, 6 vols (London: Jacob Tonson, 1725), I, pp.viii-ix.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.xxii, xiv, xx, xxi.

playwright's own writing.⁷⁸ The resulting 'superfoetations', as Pope presents them, appear to deliver a proto-doublethink, making Shakespeare appear as both 'the greatest Genius upon earth' and as having 'perhaps written worse, than any other'.⁷⁹

The above summarises what might be Pope's most curious defence of Shakespeare, if it may be called a defence, as well as one of his subtlest attempts to disabuse readers of the then longstanding notion that Shakespeare 'scarce ever blotted a line': the 'superfoetation'.⁸⁰ There is room for debate as to how far Pope meant the metaphor literally. 'Superfoetation' might be no more than a fanciful way of expressing an 'excess' of ideas. It could be inspired by the poet's conversations with his nurses or his familiarity with botanical superfetation but carry no larger intent. On the other hand, it can be argued that the circumstances surrounding the superfoetation-concept are too unusual for it not to merit further consideration. It is highly uncharacteristic of Pope to use a technical term like 'superfoetation', which most commonly appeared in guides about midwifery and husbandry, so casually and without any supporting in-text explanation, much less in a work designed for the general public. In a preface with an otherwise even-keeled register 'superfoetation' appears anomalously scientific; yet, there is no immediate indication of what textual examples it is specifically describing, if any at all. Due to these uncertainties, the meaning of 'superfoetation' has not received much attention. It is seen as no more than another word for 'abundance'.⁸¹ Without denying the sound reasoning underlying this cautionary approach to 'superfoetation', this chapter will make the case that 'superfoetation' provides useful insights into Pope's views of the composition process.

Since the reasoning behind the use of 'superfoetation', like almost all of Pope's innovations in *The Works of Shakespear*, is not adequately explained, we will need to examine the contexts surrounding *The Works of Shakespear*, including the literary-historical

⁷⁸ *The Works of Shakespear*, p. viii.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. ix, iv.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. viii. This notion that Shakespeare seldom ever needed to revise is originally derived from Heminges and Condell's words in the First Folio of 1623 that 'what [Shakespeare] thought, he vttered with that easiness, that wee haue scarce receiued from him a blot in his papers' See John Heminge and Henrie Condell, 'To the great Variety of Readers', in *Mr. William Shakespeares Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies* (London: Isaac Iaggard, and Ed. Blount, 1623).

⁸¹ Colin Franklin is, to my knowledge, the only critic to have given individual (albeit brief) attention to the word beyond the courtesy of a passing gloss (most commonly one-word definitions like 'excrecence'): "[...] for such passages as disappointed him he found a fine word, 'not properly Defects, but Superfoetations', defined in Johnson's *Dictionary* as 'One conception following another, so that both are in the womb together, but come not to the full time for delivery together'; bursting with ideas was his diagnosis" *Shakespeare Domesticated: The Eighteenth-Century Editions* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1991), p. 69. Austin Warren quotes Bradley's views on Shakespeare in relation to Pope's and so reads 'superfoetations' only as 'excess', 'a too abundant fancy'. *Alexander Pope as Critic and Humanist*, p. 148.

precedents it marked, Pope's unique position as the first named non-dramatist editor, and the other kinds of 'defects' Pope acknowledged in the preface, before we can approach a firmer understanding of 'superfoetation' as a concept in earnest. After having established the meaning of superfoetation in relation to these contexts, I will examine its links to a wider Popean tendency to think of texts in terms of the ways in which they were produced and explore how 'superfoetation' might be useful in understanding the evolution of Pope's own works.

The unique precedents set by Pope's *Works of Shakespear*

Jacob Tonson's innovation of naming the editor alongside the author on the title page of his editions of Shakespeare is noteworthy in relation to *The Works* because it drew attention to the agency of the editor as an actor within the texts. The naming of the editor was designed to bypass the restrictions placed on copyright by the 1710 *Act for the Encouragement of Learning*. It allowed Tonson to publish new editions of the plays under the names of new editors just before the copyright of previous editions was to expire. This enabled him to maintain his effective monopoly of the copyright of Shakespeare for most of the century.⁸² However, it also had the effect of drawing attention to the labour involved in setting and clarifying a text, and giving those previously invisible, unappreciated tasks authorial agency, proprietary value, and public visibility. As Andrew Murphy puts it, this foregrounding of the editor's role in producing the text occasioned something of 'the Birth of the Editor', forcing Rowe, Pope and their successors to reflect on what being an editor meant.⁸³ As the first publicly identified editors of Shakespeare, they were responsible for their editorial choices in a way that previous unnamed editors had not been. They would not just be fulfilling but also performing the duties of an editor. Moreover, these duties were whatever they defined them to be. I repeat 'editing' throughout this chapter in full cognisance that 'editing' is an unhelpfully polysemous word for a series of tasks that are more separated now than they would have been in the eighteenth century. There are more precise terms which we would use

⁸²James J. Marino, *Owning William Shakespeare :The King's Men and Their Intellectual Property* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), p.2.

⁸³ See 'The Birth of the Editor', in *A Concise Companion to Shakespeare and the Text*, ed. by Andrew Murphy (Wile-Blackwell, 2008), 93-108.

today to differentiate something like textual commentary from proofreading, textual collation, genetic criticism, and other activities involved in textual scholarship. These terms might also be considered disparate from authorial forms of editing like stylistic alterations. However, the formal boundaries between all these sub-disciplines were fairly blurred during the eighteenth century.⁸⁴ We can see this in Johnson's *Dictionary* where the words 'divulger', 'editor', 'promulgator', 'satirist', and 'spreader' are all also defined as 'publisher'. We see this confusion about roles in Pope's actions as well. James McLaverty has brought to our attention a letter to Jacob Tonson dated February 1723/4 where Pope assumes the responsibility for the printing of the *Odyssey* as well as its editorial quality by questioning the competence of the renowned printer John Watts.⁸⁵ In the letter, Pope insists that Watts should show extra care for the printing of the *Odyssey*, writing that 'nothing so mu[ch] contributes to the Beauty & credit of a Book, which would be Equally a reputation to Mr Lintot & to me'. As McLaverty observes, it seems that Pope felt that, more than the printer and in equal rank to the bookseller, it was he who was responsible for the quality of the print product. Pope did not see the printer as an equal collaborator despite Watts' exceptional renown for the craft. On the contrary, Pope assumed that the quality of the print was his responsibility as the editor and translator. This is symptomatic of Pope's own personal, career-long fascination with the print process, but it is also illustrative of the lack of distinct boundaries between the respective duties of the different agents involved in the making of books. Since the editing of secular English literature was in its infancy when Pope was preparing his edition of Shakespeare, Pope's choices in this then new field of inquiry and his later pushback against critics of his editorial methods are uniquely revealing of his formative views of editing as a craft. Having had little to no authoritative precedent or standard of practice to follow, Pope's choices and their reception provide an ideal foundation for understanding the editorial expectations of that period, where Pope differed from his peers, and what we could begin to consider as Pope's own editorial outlook as a literary consumer and writer.

Although producing a new edition of Shakespeare's works for Tonson was a major preoccupation for Pope between 1720 and 1725, it was not the only task he had in hand.⁸⁶ He was also working on his translation of the *Odyssey* and the works of the Duke of Buckinghamshire. It might be suggested that Pope's attention was likely skewed to these

⁸⁴ Marcus Walsh, *Shakespeare, Milton, and Eighteenth-Century Literary Editing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p.23.

⁸⁵ McLaverty, *Pope, Print, and Meaning*, pp.5-6.

⁸⁶ See Maynard Mack, *Alexander Pope: A Life*, (London: Yale University Press, 1985), pp.412-426.

other projects because they called on his creative and literary-aesthetic talents in a way that the job of improving on his late friend Nicholas Rowe's edition of Shakespeare did not. Jacob Tonson stood to gain the most from the Shakespeare edition monetarily so it is possible that Pope was uninterested in putting as much effort into the Shakespeare as his other, more lucrative projects. Pope also appears to have had little patience for and seen little value in the specialised scholarly reading that would require him to consult a host of obscure texts from antiquity. This was made worse by the fact that he could not contribute creatively to the Shakespeare in the way he was used to in his translations and even when editing living authors. So much was his impatience with footnotes, indices, and other forms of scholarly rigour that he tried to assign those tasks that seemed tedious to him to his more administratively-inclined friends, writing to Jacob Tonson Jr in September 1721 that he has 'a Man or two here at Oxford to ease me of part of the drudgery of Shakespear'.⁸⁷ Pope's intolerance for this 'drudgery' seems to stem from the view that it was just pedantry for pedantry's sake. James Sutherland describes a Pope caught in an 'unnatural struggle between learning and taste' where his disapproval of scholarly pedantry and preference for matters of beauty and art were at odds with his consciousness of not being well-read enough to catch the references which Theobald would later be able to annotate in his edition.⁸⁸ To be sure, Pope's commentary in *The Dunciad*, while decidedly embittered by Theobald's criticisms of his lack of scholarly attention, also shows that he was wary of editors who used the author's text for their own self-promotion:

These few lines exactly describe the right verbal Critick: He is to his Author as a Quack to his Patients, the more they suffer and complain, the better he is pleas'd; like the famous Doctor of that sort, who put up in his bills, He delighted in matters of difficulty.⁸⁹

Pope's light annotation of Shakespeare seems to have aimed to present an editorial relationship directly opposite to this one. Pope aimed to be the editor who furthered the reputation of the patient by sparing their body the aches of pedantry, even if this left the editor-Doctor less to do and therefore derive personal glory from.

⁸⁷ *Correspondence*, II, p.81. For evidence of Pope's longstanding dislike of what we might call scholarly 'drudgery' see his letter to Caryll dated 23rd November 1725 where, speaking of the Homer translations, Pope dramatically claims that he would rather be hanged 'than drudge for such a world as is no judge of your labour' (II, p.341), his 24 March 1720 letter of gratitude to Broome for the 'long and laborious things [he] undertook and discharged for [Pope's] sake' (II, 40-41), and his 1714 letter thanking Parnell for saving him the 'headache' of navigating Eustathius, Spondanus, Dacier, Scaliger and others alone (I, p.225).

⁸⁸ James R. Sutherland, "'The Dull Duty of an Editor,'" *Review of English Studies* 21 (1945), p.213.

⁸⁹ *The Dunciad* (1729), in *TE*, v (1953), pp.57-358, III.187-8 (p.172); *The Dunciad in Four Books*, III.191-2. Further references to *The Dunciad* (1729) are given after quotations in the text.

Yet, while Pope may have been wary of engaging in pedantry, some level of fault-finding was also one thing that was expected of editors. Early eighteenth-century critics of Shakespeare believed in the importance of moderating their praise of the playwright with some discussion of his faults. In ‘On the Genius and Writings of Shakespeare’ (1712) John Dennis bemoans ‘the blind Admirer’ who ‘shews in Effect the utmost contempt for [Shakespeare]’ by ignoring the faults that would ‘make his Excellency the more conspicuous’. The greater visibility of beauties in the light of faults was not simply a function of contrast. A work could be deemed superior both despite and *because* of its faults. Indeed, unqualified praise is described by Dennis as doing an injustice to the ‘solid Beauties and manly Graces’ of Shakespeare’s writing, whose masculine, English qualities, Dennis suggests, are achieved by a just balance of beauties and defects. The ‘empty effeminate Sound’ of foreign verse like the ‘*Italian* ballad’ favoured by the ‘blind Admirer’ is, by contrast, ridiculed and infantilised for being too stupid to be ‘corrected and amended by the harshest Discipline of the Place’.⁹⁰ The ability to withstand correction was a virtue. This prizing of faults for their potential conveyance of English ‘strength’ continues towards the end of the century where Samuel Johnson complains that Addison’s work is ‘the product of a mind too judicious to commit faults, but not sufficiently vigorous to attain excellence’. In an echo of Dennis’ association of faults with power, Johnson writes that this lack of ambition to allow fault means Addison is ‘warm rather than fervid, and shews more dexterity than strength’.⁹¹ Faults, when presented in a just balance with beauties, are thus considered in a positive manner as markers of a particularly English literary sophistication. We can see as much from *An Essay on Criticism* where Pope writes that ‘Great wits sometimes may gloriously offend, | And rise to faults true critics dare not mend’ (l.152-153). In other words, great writing dares to err. This sentiment recalls Dryden’s in *De Arte Graphica*: ‘A work may be *overwrought*, as well as underwrought: too much labour often takes away the spirit, by adding to the polishing; so that there remains nothing but a dull correctness, a piece without any considerable faults, but with few beauties.’⁹²

It is therefore unsurprising that the sense that Shakespeare was riddled with errors was, among Pope’s contemporaries, something of a critical commonplace; Theobald, for instance, also wrote that ‘we have scarce any Book in the *English* Tongue more fertile of Errors, than

⁹⁰ Quoted in Jean Marsden, *The Re-Imagined Text: Shakespeare, Adaptation, and Eighteenth-Century Literary Theory* (University Press of Kentucky, 1995), p.49.

⁹¹ *Lives*, III, p.36.

⁹² *The Works of John Dryden*, ed. H.T. Swedenberg, jr. et al., 20 vols. (University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1956-2002), xx, p.76.

the Plays of Shakespeare.⁹³ Addison, too, qualifies his praise of Shakespeare with a sense that his work was by no means perfectly correct but ‘there is more Beauty in the Works of a great Genius who is ignorant of the Rules of Art than in those of a little Genius who knows and observes them.’ Addison also suggests that there can sometimes be a disparity between Shakespeare’s thought and his expression: ‘when our Thoughts are great and just they are often obscured by the sounding Phrases, hard Metaphors, and forced Expressions in which they are cloathed’ and ‘*Shakespeare* is often very Faulty in this Particular.’⁹⁴ Pope’s ‘superfoetation’-concept may be considered an offshoot of this so-called beauties-and-faults line of criticism.

In this regard, it could be said that Pope was more rigorous in applying himself to Shakespeare than he has been given credit for being. John Hart is among those who have recently argued that Pope’s editorial choices, no matter how ill-explained, do not deserve to be dismissed as unsystematic or careless.⁹⁵ Hart demonstrates that when Pope’s edition is placed against Rowe’s edition and the quartos and folios that constituted Pope’s source material, Pope’s attention to the text appears fairly consistent and acute, even if he approached the duty of the editor differently from how we would today. Hart argues that Pope chose to produce a best possible text from the source material rather than to collate the evidence in a way that would reveal an original historical text. Pope would concede what he considered an authoritative, textually accurate variant if a more dubious form was deemed to be more pleasing to his taste, yet this privileging of taste does not mean Pope was unmethodical. As Marcus Walsh has argued, his choices were still altogether reasonable for his time.⁹⁶ He had a method but he used it for different purposes than we do today, purposes that he did not explain, supposing, perhaps, the general audience unlikely to be interested and those who were, able to understand his decisions implicitly over the course of the plays. To quote the preface again, the ‘method taken in this Edition will show itself’.⁹⁷ We are to learn along the way.

⁹³Lewis Theobald, *Shakespeare Restored: or, a Specimen of the Many Errors, as well Committed, as Unamended, by Mr. Pope in his Late Edition of this Poet* (London: printed by Samuel Aris for R. Francklin, J. Woodman and D. Lyon, and Charles Davis, 1726), p. i.

⁹⁴*Spectator* No. 39 and 592 quoted in *William Shakespeare: Volume 2, 1693-1733: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Brian Vickers (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 1995), p.272.

⁹⁵John A. Hart, ‘Pope as Scholar-Editor,’ *Studies in Bibliography*, 23 (1970), 45–59.

⁹⁶Walsh, *Eighteenth-Century Literary Editing*, p.131.

⁹⁷*The Works of Shakespear*, ed. by Pope, I, p.xxii.

The greatest challenge that Pope faced was arguably the task of translating the plays to the printed page. J. Gavin Paul has suggested that eighteenth-century editors of Shakespeare were the first to recognise the uniqueness of printed plays as literary objects and the importance of finding ways to bridge the conceptual gap between page and stage.⁹⁸ Although major editors like Rowe, Pope, and Theobald do not appear to have engaged greatly with performance practice, they did attempt to allude to the elements of theatrical practice beyond the grasp of the text. Rowe admits that since ‘the Author’s Original Manuscripts’ are lost, there were limitations to how far he could produce a ‘true Reading’ through a comparison of the several extant editions. Instead of aiming to produce a historically accurate reconstruction of the ‘Author’s Original Manuscript’, which in his view would be futile, Rowe claims to have produced whatever would protect Shakespeare’s reputation and ‘redeem him from the Injuries of former Impressions’.⁹⁹ Rowe’s concerns about redeeming Shakespeare ‘from the Injuries of former Impressions’ summarise those shared by his successors. Rowe’s edition is notable for its influential though unsystematic efforts to develop a range of paratexts that would help the reader imagine the contexts of a live performance. His innovations include the division of the plays into acts and scenes; the noting of entrances, exits, and location in each scene; the standardisation of spelling and punctuation across the play-texts; and perhaps most notably, the addition of a list of *dramatis personae* at the beginning of each play. Although Rowe never explicitly describes his edition as being concerned with the connection between text and performance, his choices show an implicit understanding that such stage directions are necessary for an understanding of the author’s ‘lost’ true intentions.

Pope, in turn, pioneered the practice of collecting variant versions of the plays and his preface ‘created a new vogue for attribution-based Shakespeare criticism on internal grounds’.¹⁰⁰ Pope was altogether far more sceptical, even than Rowe, about ‘the disadvantages under which [the plays] have been transmitted to us’. Pope’s distrust of the First Folio for having been compiled by the actors Heminge and Condell rather than the playwright resulted in his edition being the first to take an explicit interest in the differences between the quarto and folio texts, and the processes of revision he imagines each play underwent. In fact, it could be that Pope’s mistrust of the Players came from his own personal

⁹⁸ J. Gavin Paul, ‘Performance as ‘Punctuation’: Editing Shakespeare in the Eighteenth Century’, *The Review of English Studies*, 61 (2010), 390–413.

⁹⁹ *The Works of Mr. William Shakespear in Six Volumes*, ed. by Nicholas Rowe (London: Jacob Tonson, 1709) I, p.i.

¹⁰⁰ *Canonising Shakespeare*, p.133.

misgivings about writing for the stage. Pope was encouraged to write for the stage by a number of his friends, including the renowned actor and playwright, Thomas Betterton; however, Pope ‘resolved never to write anything for the stage’ after noticing ‘how much everybody that did write for the stage was obliged to subject themselves to the players and the town’, a statement that is supported by Martha Blount’s comment on the Huntington manuscript of Spence’s anecdote, in which she writes that she had ‘often heard him say so’.¹⁰¹ We can assume as much from when he declares ‘The Play’rs and I are, luckily, no friends’ in the *Epistle to Arbuthnot* (l.60). We have unprecedented access today to multiple versions of publications and source materials. It is natural for us to assume the importance of bibliographical referencing of variants; however, this was not the case for Pope, and his attempt to enumerate variants, no matter how poorly executed, is indicative of its importance to the way he himself read and wrote. He saw the text as a layering of Shakespeare’s intentional choices and a series of corruptions by intermediaries. Pope’s focus on processes of composition throughout his edition of Shakespeare is unique because it encourages an appreciation of the plays for the very difficulties of literary labour that are even less visible in print. Pope’s way of bridging the gap between play and print may have been to show the processes of revision and interpolation that shaped the plays into their final form.

Pope’s edition of Shakespeare is the first to offer an interpretation of the particular ‘excellencies’ and shortcomings of the plays through a typographical key. The ‘most shining lines’¹⁰² were distinguished by inverted commas and the most beautiful scenes were prefixed with a star. *Macbeth* was the highest scoring play in Pope’s system of appraisal, while *Othello*, *King Lear*, and *Hamlet* were among those less favoured.¹⁰³ Passages Pope considered too low to be written by Shakespeare were given what he dubbed a ‘mark of reprobation’ (three daggers), while others that were suspected interpolations were considered ‘degraded’ and moved out of the body of the text to be written in small type at the bottom of the page. Johnson’s complaint that this marking out of beauties and faults ‘precluded the pleasure of judging for ourselves’ reflects the general consensus of modern appraisals of Pope’s treatment of Shakespeare, which has largely considered him unable to uphold scholarly standards let alone adhere consistently to editorial practice.¹⁰⁴ Edmund King believes that Pope’s style of marking out beauties and faults was derived from an ancient

¹⁰¹ Spence, p.15.

¹⁰² *The Works of Shakespear*, ed. by Pope, I, p. xxiii.

¹⁰³ John Butt, *Pope’s Taste in Shakespeare* (London: Shakespeare Association, 1936), p.7.

¹⁰⁴ *Samuel Johnson: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by James Boulton (London and New York: Routledge, 1971), p.156.

practice of *athetesis* (the silent deletion of spurious lines by critics) and Pope's own belief that ancient critics would use asterisks to mark out beauties. King contends that this supposedly classical approach to Shakespeare was designed to allow Pope to revel in the aesthetic and appreciative parts of criticism that he did enjoy without having to labour too much in the drudgery of scholarly application he hated.¹⁰⁵ What it also did, however, was give readers an inside look into Pope's literary tastes. Pope marks the beginning of Act 2.1 of *The Tempest*, for instance, as being a potential interpolation. This is the scene where the well-meaning if overly-optimistic Gonzalo attempts to cheer up the shipwrecked group while being interrupted by Antonio and Sebastian's mocking commentary. Pope seems to find these attempts at humour entirely misplaced, describing them as 'most improper and ill plac'd Drollery in the mouths of unhappy shipwreckt people'.¹⁰⁶ He accepts Gonzalo's initial effort to 'beseech' the team to 'be merry', presumably since it is in keeping with Gonzalo's character. However, he finds the succeeding exchange of wit between Sebastian and Antony more of an opportunity for the actors to fit in some superfluous lines than a genuine effort from Shakespeare to further the story. Pope's mark of disapproval thus re-imagines the shipwrecked crew's reaction to calamity as a consequence of the politics of the stage. More importantly, he deems it as something that can be read in the errors of the play.

Indeed, the prevalent pattern in Pope's edition is this desire to attribute the 'faults' within the text to the way in which he imagines it to have been written and re-written. Pope could easily be accused, and has been, for having used the imagined activities of the Players as a scapegoat for cutting out passages that were not to his liking; however, such actions are invaluable for what they say about his own editorial views and reading habits. At the very beginning of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* Pope comments again with his single obelisk to declare that:

This Play was written in the Author's best and ripest years, after Henry the Fourth by the command of Queen Elizabeth. There is a tradition that it was compos'd at a fortnight's warning. But that must be meant only of the first imperfect sketch of this Comedy, which is yet extant in an old Quarto edition, printed in 1619. This which we here have, was alter'd and improved by the Author almost in every speech.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Edmund King, 'Pope's 1723–25 Shakespear, Classical Editing, and Humanistic Reading Practices' *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 32 (2008), 3–13, (p.10).

¹⁰⁶ *The Works of Shakespear*, ed. by Pope, I, p.25.

¹⁰⁷ *The Works of Shakespear*, ed. by Pope, I, p.233.

Similar speculation about the way in which the plays were written occurs when Pope first introduces his triple dagger ‘mark of reprobation’ in what he sections off as Act 1.2 of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. Pope writes:

This whole Scene, like many others in these Plays, (some of which I believe were written by Shakespeare, and others interpolated by the Players) is compos’d of the lowest and most trifling conceits, to be accounted for only from the gross taste of the age he liv’d in; *Populo ut placerent*. I wish I had authority to leave them out, but I have done all I could, set a mark of reprobation upon them; [*sic*] throughout this edition.¹⁰⁸

It seems Pope’s displeasure on this occasion was directed towards the elongated comparison of Speed and Valentine’s relationship with that of a sheep and a shepherd. He is similarly unconvinced when Valentine gives up Silvia readily to Proteus in the final Act,¹⁰⁹ a ‘fault’ which Pope tries to explain away with the suggestion that Shakespeare was only following the source material. The foregrounding of the processes underlying the text places emphasis time and time again on the fecundity of the play-text as a space that is always open to authorial and non-authorial emendation. This helps bridge the gap between page and stage by showing that the play always has room for theatrical improvisation. An interpolated passage can be slotted in and taken out as per the need of the moment, but the core of Shakespeare’s ‘lost’ original intention still constitutes the main body of the play. It is this core that Pope cannot conveniently put to the side in a footnote. Pope’s focus on processes of composition offers a unique perspective because it encourages an appreciation of the plays from the perspective of their making. These are the invisible struggles that he, in his distaste for the ‘drudgery’ of scholarly work, had complained to Caryl about in his correspondence, writing that he would rather be hanged ‘than drudge for such a world as is no judge of your labour’, only the results.¹¹⁰

Pope’s attention to the integrity of the source text might partially have been an effect of his being the first named non-dramatist and non-player to edit the plays, which is one of the least appreciated precedents set by his edition. The 1623 Folio, which was the first collected edition of the plays, had no named editors, only the publishers, John Heminges and Henry Condell of the King’s Men. Rowe’s edition, in contrast, was properly understood and advertised as being ‘Rowe’s *Shakespeare*’. Pope’s was ‘Pope’s *Shakespeare*’, Theobald’s ‘Theobald’s *Shakespeare*’, and so on and so forth¹¹¹. So while Pope’s methods are never fully

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., I, p.157.

¹⁰⁹ See Pope’s note on *ibid.*, p.226.

¹¹⁰ *Correspondence*, I, p.238.

¹¹¹ Sonia Massai, *Shakespeare and the Rise of the Editor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p.1.

explained up to modern standards, it is possible that this was also part of the edition's selling-point. As Colin Franklin writes, 'Nothing in eighteenth-century Shakespeare editions was more whimsical than the appearance or absence of Pope's commas in the margin, or his very rare award of a star to the scene.'¹¹² Moreover, Shakespeare had been known as more of a poet than a playwright in his own lifetime, when *Venus and Adonis* was considered the bestseller of the age. It was only during the posthumous editorial interventions of the 1640-1740 period, when Shakespeare started to be canonised as a national literary figure, that the plays began to overtake the poems in popularity, and he began to be known as the playwright we predominantly see him as today.¹¹³ One possible attraction of having Pope, who was known for specialising in poetry, was that it would potentially bring out the poetry of the plays. The successes of *The Rape of the Locke*, *An Essay on Criticism*, and *Windsor Forest* were enough for the *Weekly Journal* to dub Pope 'the celebrated Mr Pope' in an early advertisement for his edition of Shakespeare in November 1721.¹¹⁴ It might have been thought that Pope would be able to negotiate the relationship between literature and the stage to a more intense degree than Rowe could with his mixed experience as a dramatist and poet educated in the law. We can see the appeal of a fellow artist being the editor in George Sewell's preface to his own volume of poems. Sewell captures Pope's improvement of previous treatments of Shakespeare's plays with the following sentence:

When a Genius of similar Fire and Fancy, temper'd with a learned Patience, sits down to consider what Shakespear would *Think*, as well as what he could *Write*, we may then expect to see his Works answer to our Idea of the Man.¹¹⁵

Pope's approach is unique precisely because he is interested in what Shakespeare *thought* as well as what he wrote. This is not to say that Pope went to any great lengths to contextualise the plays in terms of the thinking of Shakespeare's contemporaries. However, it is to say that Pope's efforts to show where editions have been revised, where they appear repetitive, and where they seem to have been corrupted all stem from a desire to understand the thinking and labour behind the texts, and to use that sense of their being laboured as a tool to better appreciate them. Pope's editorial choices suggest that he was interested in the previous lives of the text as ideas, fragments, and drafts pre-publication. For Pope, the composition process

¹¹² Franklin, *Shakespeare Domesticated*, p.178.

¹¹³ See *Canonising Shakespeare: Stationers and the Book Trade, 1640–1740*, ed. by Emma Depledge and Peter Kirwan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), especially pp.216-222.

¹¹⁴ Quoted in George Sherburn, *The Early Career of Alexander Pope*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934), p.233.

¹¹⁵ *The Works of William Shakespeare, The Seventh Volume*, ed. George Sewall (London: J. Darby, 1725), p. viii.

is not entirely apart from the text. It can be discerned retroactively in the work's beauties and faults if they are examined by a trained eye. The quality of having identifying markings of appraisal encourages an appreciation of not only the plays' individual plots but the way they form an uneven plain of beauties and compromises. The marking of beauties and faults therefore is more than just a typographical iteration of the aforementioned beauty-and-faults line of criticism. It effectively maps out the rhythms of the playwright's genius, the peaks and troughs of his literary talents, as they are sonographed by the fixity of the finished text.

This is where Pope's famous comparison of Shakespeare's work to a piece of Gothic Architecture appears very apt. In the early eighteenth century 'Gothic' was equated with 'barbarity' and 'false wit'.¹¹⁶ Addison, for instance, wrote in *The Spectator* No. 62 that '[he] looks upon these writers as Goths in Poetry, who, like those in Architecture, not being able to come up to the beautiful simplicity of the old Greeks and Romans, have endeavoured to supply its Place with all the Extravagance of an irregular Fancy'.¹¹⁷ Pope tries to make a merit of this association of the Gothic with an excess of invention and error. When comparing the Gothic structure to the Modern building Pope notes that 'in one of these there are materials enough to make many of the other'.¹¹⁸ It seems that while not consistently and methodically beautiful, the Gothic structure with its uneven spread of beauties and faults had a fecundity that meant it could be recycled and repurposed into a variety of different things, including the very interpolations, corruptions, and enlargements Pope tries to outline throughout his edition. The purpose of his 'marks of reprobation' is not only to cast suspicion over certain parts of the text but to show how easily it yields to the creativity of others, as is often necessary in the contexts of a stage. This is something, Pope seems to suggest, a more correct, if simple, work would not be able to accomplish.

The role of the 'superfoetation'

¹¹⁶ For a detailed history recording the changing meaning of the word in the eighteenth century see Alfred Longueil, 'The Word "Gothic" in Eighteenth-Century Criticism', *Modern Language Notes*, 38.8 (1923), 453-460.

¹¹⁷ Joseph Addison and Richard Steele. *The Spectator*, ed. by Donald F. Bond., 5 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), I, p.269.

¹¹⁸ *The Works of Shakespear*, ed. by Pope, I, p.xxiii.

While acknowledging the uniqueness of Pope's editorial addition, it is important to note that Pope does not operate around the binary assumption that errors are either playhouse interpolations or Shakespearean originals. Pope seems to suggest that there is also a grey area in between that expresses authorial interventions that are not entirely reflective of Shakespeare's best intentions. This is where we can return once more to the initially posited issue of the 'superfoetation'. Even though metaphors of literary pregnancy are common in his correspondence, *The Works of Shakespear* mark the only use of the word 'superfoetation' in Pope's entire oeuvre.¹¹⁹ There seems to be a dearth of directly comparable contemporary uses of the word in the same literary-critical contexts. One lead might be found in the preface to the 1724 edition of *Virgil's Husbandry* in which Dryden is briefly accused of having self-servingly included in his translation of Virgil a line that is a '*Superfoetation* of his own fancy'.¹²⁰ While this offers another possible example of 'superfoetation' being used to express an instance of a writer's first intentions competing with his second ones, it does not dwell on the mechanics of that lapse in judgment — what competing ideas were at play and the polarising effect it has on the resulting work — to the degree Pope's 'superfoetation' does, especially considering the precedents he set with his edition of Shakespeare. One might compare this idea that the writer's judgement can be somewhat infected by the environment around him to a strikingly similar moment in *Peri Bathous* where, when discussing 'Of the profound, when it consists in the *Thought*', Pope talks of the usefulness of familiarising the mind to vulgar conversation in order to achieve mediocrity:

There is no question but the Garrett or the Printer's boy may often be discern'd in the compositions made in such scenes and company; and much of Mr. Curl himself has been insensibly infused into the works of his learned writers.¹²¹

Pope's satirical jab at Curl for infecting writers around him implicitly incorporates pseudoscience about the dangers of the maternal imagination — the idea that the body of the foetus could be 'overwritten [...] even to deformity' by the power of the mother's experiences.¹²² The word 'superfoetation' itself offers several intriguing ways in which this

¹¹⁹ For example, in a letter to Caryll he refers to his writing as 'embryos' to which any corrections are preservations of what he has 'miscarried'; likewise, while preparing to translate the second volume of the *Iliad*, he writes that he is 'to lye in of a Poetical Child for at least two Months.' *Correspondence*, I, pp160-1; p.293.

¹²⁰ *Virgil's husbandry, or an essay on the Georgics: being the second book translated into English verse. To which are added the Latin text, and Mr. Dryden's version. With notes critical, and rustick*, 2nd edn. (William and John Innys, at the West End of St. Paul's, 1724), p. viii.

¹²¹ *The Prose Works of Alexander Pope*, ed. Norman Ault and Rosemary Cowler, 2 vols. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1936-1968), I (1939), p.198.

¹²² K. Toor, "'Offspring of his Genius': Coleridge's Pregnant Metaphors and Metamorphic Pregnancies,' *Romanticism*, 13:3 (2007) 257-270 (p.258). Anja Muller, *Framing childhood in eighteenth-century English*

double conception can be imagined. Samuel Johnson defines mammalian ‘superfoetation’ as ‘one conception following another, so that both are in the womb together, but come not to their full time for delivery together’.¹²³ This would translate to an image of an extricable second or third thought co-existing alongside the original one. Alternatively, in Bacon’s *Sylva Sylvarum* botanical ‘superfoetation’ is described as creating a nested structure: a fruit with another fruit inside it, or a textual idea within another textual idea.

We can get a clearer sense of how this range of beauties, faults, interpolations, and possible superfoetations interact in *Henry V*. Here, Pope differentiates errors so influenced by third parties from Shakespeare’s own errors most clearly. This is the play where potential superfoetations are most emphatically marked. Pope indicates at the back of the sixth volume of his edition that he had had access to the first (1623) and second (1632) editions of the Folio of Shakespeare’s *Comedies, Histories and Tragedies publish’d according to the Original Copies*. He also claims to have used the *Chronicle History of Henry the Fifth*, his own experience as a consumer of plays, Thomas Creede’s 1600 text, and the quarto printed in 1608. Among the genuinely Shakespearian mistakes he finds is the ‘ridiculous’ exchange about learning English between Katherine and Alice, which he states he has left as he found it: ‘I am sorry to have no colour left, from any of the editions, to imagine it interpolated.’¹²⁴ Pope’s disapproval of this scene is unsurprising considering his similar dislike for the repetitive exclamations of despair over Juliet’s comatose body in Act 4.5 of his edition of *Romeo and Juliet*.¹²⁵ Act 3.9 of *Henry V*, which features the conversations of the French camp as they await the upcoming battle, is notable for its mixture of Pope’s own interventions, Pope’s acknowledgement of Shakespeare’s revisions, whether successful or unsuccessful, and the marking out of suspected corruptions or interpolations. Pope has marked the whole of Act 3 as being ‘very much enlarged and improved by the author since the editions of 1600, and 1608’.¹²⁶ However, in the case of Act 3.9, he states that he much prefers the first editions of 1600 and 1608, even though he believes these additions to be a product of Shakespeare’s own judgment: ‘as the enlargements appear to be the author’s own,

periodicals and prints, 1689-1789 (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), p.47. See also Jane Spencer, ‘‘Mighty mother’’: Pope and the maternal’ *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, 38.1 (2005) 163-178, and Marilyn Francus ‘The Monsterous Mother: Reproductive Anxiety in Swift Pope’ *ELH*. 6.4 (1994) 829-851 for discussions of Pope’s relationship with and portrayal of maternal figures.

¹²³ Johnson, *Dictionary*, ii, ‘superfetation’.

¹²⁴ *The Works of Shakespear*, ed. by Pope, III, p.437.

¹²⁵ The footnote on *The Works of Shakespear*, ed. by Pope, VI, p.324 states: ‘This speech of exclamations is not in the edition above cited. Several other parts, unnecessary or tautology [*sic*], are not to be found in the said edition; which occasions the variation in this from the common books.’

¹²⁶ *The Works of Shakespear*, ed. by Pope, III, p.429.

I would not omit them; but have, for the reader's curiosity, marked them with small commas.¹²⁷ What is curious is that, though he does degrade part of the sections marked with commas to the bottom of the page at the end of the scene, he does not do so for all of them. This suggests that while some of the comma-ed sections were gratuitous, not all of them were 'unworthy' of Shakespeare even though it appears that Pope would have liked to have been able to omit them entirely. He chooses not to remove the Constable of France, the Lord Rambures, Orleans, and the Dauphin's discussions of horses and armours completely. However, he does silently edit the enlarged text, most noticeably by removing the Dauphin's descriptions of his '*cheval volant*' and the ensuing comparison to a Pegasus which survives in Rowe's version. By presenting the scene as having been both written by Shakespeare, revised by Shakespeare, corrupted by external bodies, and then collated and corrected by Pope, Pope forces the processes of textual production, and the adjustments made in response to theatrical reception and unknown third-party interventions to be coplanar. This encourages readings that see the text as a function of its having been laboured into being. These superfluities can thus be understood not only as afterthoughts or gratuitous additions but as superfoetations — additions that are in fact remnants of the 'thinking and judging' involved in the composition process. By marking the second 'foetation' in commas, Pope allows the readers to see how and infer why Shakespeare expands the Dauphin's discussion of the excellence of his own horse:

'*Dau.* Nay the man hath no wit, that cannot from the rising
 'of the lark to the lodging of the lamb, vary deserved praise
 'on my palfrey; it is a theme as fluent as the sea: turn the sands
 'into eloquent tongues, and my horse is argument for them all;
 ''tis a subject for a Sovereign to reason on, and for a Sovereign's
 'Sovereign to ride on; and for the world, familiar to us and un-
 'known, to lay apart their particular functions and wonder at
 ' him[...].¹²⁸

The marking out of this passage as something added at a later date in fact makes the Dauphin's insistence that his horse is deserving of constant praise more effective. By suggesting that it was Shakespeare's own choice to enlarge the passage Pope encourages the

¹²⁷ Ibid., p.446.

¹²⁸ This passage is assigned to the Duke of Bourbon in modern editions but both Pope and Rowe believed it to be for the Dauphin.

audience to speculate as to why that might be and from where the second foetation or afterthought came. One might naturally infer, following Pope's ongoing critique of the Players, that Shakespeare may have been trying to prove that he or the players have 'wit', fluency, and eloquence aplenty, even when forced to elucidate on something so inconsequential. The self-indulgent quality of the Dauphin's boasting is self-reflexive of the self-indulgence of this expansion of the text. The fact that it has been expanded and is marked as such allows the reader to imagine the actor who would play it attempting to lengthen his time on stage through an inessential expansion of his original lines. The suggestion that Shakespeare's intentions were warped in this way enhances the experience of the play by creating an inside joke for readers of Pope's typographical markers that is unique to them as readers interested in Shakespeare's compositional habits. In this way, while the tautologies in *Romeo and Juliet* are berated, this instance of abundance and excess is 'not properly a defect, but a superfoetation'.

Pope's many aforementioned efforts to differentiate, as much as he could, the different kinds of revision that are superimposed to create the final version of every play-text suggest the importance he placed on the kinds of conceptual labour one cannot see the reasoning for directly. The common belief was that, despite Shakespeare's limited education in the correctness of 'the Writings of the Ancients', 'what he thought was commonly so Great, so justly and rightly Conceiv'd in it self, that it wanted little or no Correction, and was immediately approv'd by an impartial Judgment at the first sight'.¹²⁹ This assumption about Shakespeare's process followed from contemporary views of the timeline of composition. Eighteenth-century philosophers had a tendency to follow the same general order of the operations of the understanding: first, apprehension, the raw mental representation of an object; second, judgment, the shaping of beliefs concerning that object; and lastly reasoning, the formation of conclusions based on the premises provided by the judgments.¹³⁰ Pope's image of a Shakespeare prone to superfoetations is a far cry from the struggle-free compositional process normally associated with him. By suggesting that a perfectly sound initial composition can be compromised by secondary ideas, Pope suggests that literary works, too, undergo an ontogenesis. Pope's Shakespeare is not only a mechanical reviser and re-reviser, a blotter of lines, but also a thinker and strategist, someone whose dual intentions

¹²⁹ Nicholas Rowe in his edition of Shakespeare quoted in *William Shakespeare: Volume 2, 1693-1733: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Brian Vickers (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 1995), 190-202.

¹³⁰ *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Philosophy*, ed. by Knud Haakonssen, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), I, p.236.

and changes of mind can be perceived and appreciated in the received text. Pope's marking out of 'superfoetations', interpolations, later additions, and afterthoughts suggests that the final step of elocution, if a sense of an ending is to be reached at all, is less about 'accuracy' in expression — the negotiation of a compromise between what Shakespeare would have wanted as a poet and what he would have liked as a player and the tastes of his time — than the manufacturing of a clarity of thought that the mind may not naturally possess: regularization and forced discontinuation rather than a natural corrected end. Hence, Pope chooses to degrade those passages he deems 'unworthy' — perhaps for being underdeveloped rather than outright worthless — in order to give the reader the option of reading the crispness of a corrected Shakespeare. The elaborate typography and marking of variants interprets the plays as growing, multiplying things. Any 'excess' is an offshoot of the figurative stretch marks and growing pains experienced when one words and *re*words a preconceived (and still conceiving) poetic vision. Superfoetations might be thought of as akin to *pentimento*: they are traces of earlier designs peeking through the colours of subsequent layers of revision. As Pope suggests, the resulting image is not necessarily displeasing.

The superfoetation therefore presents a very different vision of Shakespeare writing than was presented by Theobald in his *Works of Shakespeare* (1733):

His Fire, Spirit, and Exuberance of Imagination gave an Impetuously to his Pen: His Ideas flow'd from him in a Stream rapid, but not turbulent; copious, but not overbearing its shores.¹³¹

The streamlined 'flow' of writing described presents a less tumultuous, and disquieted story of the writing process than the varying water pressures Pope perceives:

Yet even in these our Author's Wit buoys up, and is borne above his subject. His genius in those low parts is like some Prince of a Romance in the disguise of a Shepherd or Peasant: a certain Greatness and Spirit now and then break out which manifest his higher extraction and qualities.¹³²

We can see in a comparison of their characterisations the differences in their methodologies and beliefs about composition. As we recall, Theobald shared Pope's belief that Shakespeare's work was riddled with errors. However, he does not link this to the playwright's process; the plays may be imperfect but Shakespeare's 'Ideas' were not at fault. By offering an experiential in-story of how these moments of 'excess energy' came to be, Pope directly links process to result. Pope's 'Prince of Romance' hints at a story within the

¹³¹ *The Works of Shakespeare*, ed. by Lewis Theobald, 7 vols (London: Printed for A. Bettesworth and C. Hitch, by J. Tonson, F. Clay, W. Feales, R. Wellington, 1733), I, p.xvi.

¹³² *The Works of Shakespeear*, ed. by Pope, I, p. v.

story, an unseen battle to control the stray superfoetations ‘borne’ within the Author’s primary ‘flow’ of thought, and to project one consistent poetic vision. He not only dismisses the suggestion that Shakespeare did not blot, but also suggests that the blots themselves have fossilised the debris of a compositional process that was burdened with multiple, sometimes incompatible ‘fires’ of ideas. At the end of the preface, Pope argues for the inevitability and necessity of this kind of ‘error’ as constitutive of the charm of the aforementioned ‘Gothick Architecture’ it creates as a whole.¹³³ The plays are presented as relics of the playwright’s thinking process. Each work forms a museum of unevenly manifested thoughts and half-thoughts.

It should be acknowledged that Pope’s use of the term superfoetation may also be highly personal to him. John Dennis’ criticism of *An Essay on Criticism* summarised Pope’s weaknesses under the notion of his having a ‘deplorable want’ of judgment, making the point that ‘Poets like Painters not having the Skill to draw Nature without Art, hide their want of Art with a superabundance of Art.’¹³⁴ Superfoetation might offer a nuanced take on this issue of ‘superabundance’ by emphasising the varying ways in which gratuity comes about. To interpret ‘superfoetation’ as mere ‘abundance’ would ignore the motives Pope would have had to not only adopt but revise and improve upon Dennis’ criticism of his first major work. The disagreements Pope would likely have had with Dennis’ assumptions about ‘superabundance’ are evidenced in a remark at the very opening of Book 2 of *The Dunciad*, where Pope notes that verbal criticism is based on two assumptions: first, that ‘the Author could never fail to use the very best word, on every occasion’, and ‘second, that the Critick cannot chuse but know, which it is’.¹³⁵ Pope is certainly too presumptive about the origins of the ‘faults’ he perceives in Shakespeare to be said to have been entirely free of these two erroneous assumptions. His interventionist style of editing is also unorthodox and unscientific by modern scholarly standards. That being said, his attention to writerly processes, the genealogy of errors, and the nuances between revisions added for theatrical effect, the benefit of the actors, and those that genuinely relate to the story, suggests he had a far more complex perspective on why an Author might choose to use something other than the very best word. Dennis’ ‘superabundance’ misses this point that Pope’s ‘superfoetation’ attempts to restore.

¹³³ *The Works of Shakespear*, ed. by Pope, 1, p. xxiii.

¹³⁴ John Dennis, *Reflections Critical and Satyrical, upon a late Rhapsody, call’d, An Essay upon Criticism* (1711) quoted in *Pope, the Critical Heritage* (London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), p.71.

¹³⁵ *The Dunciad in Four Books*, p.147.

Popean superfoetations

These layers of meaning in ‘superfoetations’ and the typographical markers Pope uses to show the rhythms of the plays not only offer a rationale for ‘bad’ writing but also an account of what it is like to compose and write. I would like to argue that these observations go beyond Shakespeare as a standalone case-study and fit into a wider, distinctly Popean interest in the process of composition in general, and the genealogy of ‘bad’ writing in particular. In the 1717 preface to his own *Works*, Pope writes ‘it would be a wild notion to expect perfection in any work of man’, and a ‘good deal may be said to extenuate the fault of bad Poets’¹³⁶ in general:

What we call a Genius, is hard to be distinguish’d by a man himself, from a strong inclination: and if it be never so great, he cannot at first discover it any other way, than by that prevalent propensity which renders him more liable to be mistaken. The only method he has is to make the experiment by writing, and appealing to the judgment of others.¹³⁷

In the same vein as his later discussion of Shakespeare, Pope speculates that bad writers may be misled by ‘ignorant’ or ‘insincere’ friends, and readers ‘too well bred to shock them with a truth’. This results in their spending their time applying themselves (fruitlessly) to the profession through the very same feedback-mechanism which might allow a ‘Genius’ to flourish. While the results are different, the essential process of ontogenesis is the same. What is telling about the evolution of this idea between the *Works* and the preface to *Shakespear* is Pope’s hesitation to commit fully to the word ‘defect’ in the later work: ‘not properly defects, but superfoetations’. As the comparison of the genius seeking judgment shows, the process of superfoetation, while used to explain an error, may also show the genesis of a virtue of style. For this reason, Pope’s new approach presses less emphasis on literary value-judgment — the ‘good’ and ‘bad’ — and neutralises the (inherently negative) connotations of ‘defect’. Whereas ‘defect’ suggests deficiency, shortcomings, and even a mechanical fault, superfoetation points towards the existence of untapped *potentia* in the text, opportunity and incompleteness rather than a straightforward mistake or, to continue the pregnancy conceit, a misconception. It might be that, being a prolific corrector himself, Pope was hesitant to suggest that a text was ever truly wholly beyond improvement. There was

¹³⁶ Pope, *Prose Works*, I, pp.289, 290.

¹³⁷ *Ibid*, I, p.290.

always something to salvage, something to revise. In this sense, the provision of ‘superfoetation’ as a name for a potentially redeemable, potentially genealogically fascinating form of error embodies Johnson’s characterisation of Pope’s mind as ‘always imagining something greater than it knows, always endeavouring more than it can do’.¹³⁸ Only, the ‘imagining’ and ‘endeavouring’ signified here do not stop at the level of passing fancy, nor do they have to wait for the formality of subsequent revision; the thinking, inspiring authorial mind is imagined to make an imprint upon the text itself.

Indeed, attention to the way literary art is created on a compositional level may be a more pervasive thematic force in Pope’s career than it is appreciated for being. The asterisks and commas in *The Works of Shakespear* parallel similar markings in Pope’s own library. Austin Warren has noted that Pope’s library includes a copy of Ben Jonson’s works that contains an index of beauties and uses star-and-comma typography to distinguish the best passages and scenes.¹³⁹ R. D. Erlich has also shown that this practice of annotation in Shakespeare seems to match Pope’s annotations of his personal copies of Dryden, which contain an even more complex series of symbolic markers — raised commas, raised full stops, double quotation marks, lower case ‘c’s, ‘e’s, ‘I’s and ‘p’s and inverted commas — as well as some corrections of grammatical and spelling errors.¹⁴⁰

Moreover, the ‘superfoetation’ also has sister ‘swells’ in Pope’s other writing. Pope paints the creation of ‘living words’ as a kind of glassblowing in the *Iliad*:

‘Tis the sentiment that swells and fills out the diction, which rises with it, and forms itself about it: and in the same degree that a thought is warmer, an expression will be brighter [...] like glass in the furnace.¹⁴¹

In this context, we can see superfoetations as the air bubbles that distort the glass shape: other sentiments swelling and filling out the diction in unexpected ways. Whereas Homer’s expression is said to be ‘never too big for the sense, but justly great in proportion to it’, superfoetations suggest an imbalance between sense and expression. Pope compares the effects of sentiment on production to that of fire on glass and suggests that this *vivida vis animi* (‘living force of the soul’) is different for different writers:

¹³⁸ Johnson, *Lives*, III, p.294.

¹³⁹ Austin Warren, ‘Pope and Ben Jonson’, *Modern Language Notes*. 45 (1930), 86-88.

¹⁴⁰ R. D. Erlich, ‘Pope’s Annotations in his Copy of Dryden’s Comedies, Tragedies, and Operas: An Exercise in Cryptography’, *Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Theatre Research* 10 (1971), 14–24.

¹⁴¹ *TE*, VII, pp.10-11.

This fire is discerned in Virgil, but discerned as through a glass, reflected from Homer, more shining than fierce, but everywhere equal and constant: in Lucan and Statius it bursts out in sudden, short, and interrupted flashes: In Milton it glows like a furnace kept up to an uncommon ardour by the force of art: in Shakespeare it strikes before we are aware, like an accidental fire from heaven: but in Homer, and in him only, it burns everywhere clearly and everywhere irresistibly.¹⁴²

Again, we are given this notion that the composition process can be read in the finished text. *The Works of Shakespear* expands on the dubious agency of this ‘accidental fire’ that ‘strikes before we are aware’ and in what sense it is ‘living’. Second and third ‘foetations’, ideas thought about but not fully pursued, are shown to leave a trace on subsequent ‘glassblowing’ motions, allowing the ‘swell’ of life of the poem to soak up thoughts that were not consciously or wholeheartedly adopted in conjunction with those that were. The superfoetation appears to call for a mutual subsumption of the two meanings embedded in the ‘art to blot’:¹⁴³ that of effacing and that of covering with ‘worthless writing’ (OED).

The Rape of the Locke and early works

The superfoetation-concept could prove useful in readings of a poem with a revision history like *The Rape of the Locke*, which Pope famously called ‘one of the greatest proofs of judgement of anything I ever did’.¹⁴⁴ Knowing the importance Pope places in reading Shakespeare’s right and wrong judgements (the aforementioned superfoetations), the emphasis on judgement as a primary beauty of *The Rape of the Locke* ought to give us particular pause.

The Rape of the Locke was Pope’s first major exercise in textual revision, and one that is famously said to have been undertaken against the advice of Addison. It was first published at the very end of the *Miscellaneous Poems and Translations*, where it seems to have functioned as something of a superfoetation itself. It had the appearance of being a last minute addition to the miscellany as Pope gave it its own title page and pagination and did not follow the same running heading as the other poems (‘Miscellaneous POEMS and

¹⁴² *TE*, VII, p.5.

¹⁴³ ‘The First Epistle of the Second Book of Horace Imitated: To Augustus’, in *TE*, IV (1939), pp.189-232, line 281 (p.219).

¹⁴⁴ *Anecdotes*, I, p.45.

TRANSLATIONS'), choosing instead to use 'The Rape of the Locke' as the heading, as if the piece were a quasi-independent work.¹⁴⁵ This two-canto 1712 version of the poem grew to twice the size in the expanded five-canto poem of 1714 and then grew substantially again with the addition of Clarissa's speech in 1717. Between and after these three key milestones in the development of the poem several minor corrections were made and words altered including further variants unique to Warburton's 1751 edition of Pope's works.

In 1715, when the poem was enlarged and separated from the miscellany to form its own 48-page octavo volume, complete with engraved headpieces, plates, and initials, Pope reframed the revised edition as a fulfilment of the poem's true original design, explaining that the 1712 edition had been an 'imperfect Copy' published 'before [he] had executed half [his] Design'.¹⁴⁶ This effectively cast the 1714 edition as a completion of several underdeveloped aspects of the 1712 edition, giving the impression that he had had some idea of wanting to introduce the machinery of the sylphs and its accompanying Rosicrucian mythology from the start. Despite suggesting that the 1714 edition had been in his mind all along, Pope also specified that the Belinda of the later edition had nothing to do with Arabella Fermor, stating clearly that their only resemblance is in beauty. *The Rape of the Locke* was a piece originally commissioned by John Caryll, who was attempting to negotiate a reconciliation between the Fermor and Petre families after Robert Petre's cutting of Arabella Fermor's hair. Pope's distancing himself from the conflict in the later edition therefore places the 1712 edition in the strange limbo of being both separate from subsequent editions and a vision of the later editions coming into being.

It might be that this portrayal of the relationship between the 1712 edition and the later five-canto editions was designed to bridge the gap between manuscript and print just as the markings of superfoetations in *The Works of Shakespear* attempted to bridge the gap between page and stage. Here too Pope may be encouraging readings of the decision-making that led to a work's creation and refinement. The fact that the majority of the original piece is retained in the revised version openly showcases the awkwardness of Pope's transition from working vis-à-vis with his readership when he was initially commissioned by Caryll, to putting primary attention upon printing and marketing his work to a wider, unseen

¹⁴⁵ McLaverty, *Pope, Print, and Meaning*, p.18, and David Foxon, *Pope and the Early Eighteenth-Century Book Trade*, rev. by James McLaverty (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991)

¹⁴⁶ *TE*, II, p.142.

audience.¹⁴⁷ In doing so, however, Pope also encourages readers from a very early point in his career not to take the completion of the text for granted. One seems to be encouraged to search for the little hints that might engender the next revision. This structuring of the text has left plenty of fruit for critical speculation. James McLaverty, for instance, chooses to mention the political readings hovering around the plates of *The Rape of the Locke* for a significant portion of his chapter on them, only to discard them, or rather feel obliged to discard them, as they ‘are easy to generate’ but ‘difficult to validate’.¹⁴⁸ It would appear that providing such clues and encouraging the dramatisation of trivialities falls exactly within the remit of what Pope jokingly describes as the work of poets in his opening letter to Arabella Fermor: ‘let an action be never so trivial in itself, they always make it appear of the utmost importance.’¹⁴⁹ Critical instinct to dwell upon the hints and innuendos in *The Rape of the Locke* might even furnish a greater sense of pathos for Arabella in a heuristic way.¹⁵⁰ It would also do so without compromising the humour and bite of the mock-heroic form. This kind of fertility of imagery allowed by Pope’s referencing of the poem’s revision history enables us to see more in the poem than it may intend, to over-read just as it over-writes, but still be forgiven for it.

The sylphs provide ample ground for such interpretive play. In the 1712 *Rape of the Locke* we see inspiration take shape. Belinda’s character is oftentimes found in between various states of disclosure and revelation. It seems at first that her appearance is indicative of her interiority: ‘Her lively Looks a sprightly Mind disclose’.¹⁵¹ However, not long after this description, we are cautioned to be less credulous of her exterior façade: ‘Yet graceful Ease, and Sweetness void of Pride, | Might hide her faults, if *Belles* had Faults to hide’ (i.31-2). Belinda’s true nature is not to be underestimated. Her expressive eyes and smiles hide her faults even as they reveal her thinking. Yet, despite being aware of this concealment, the speaker insists that you need only ‘Look on her Face’ to forgive it all (i.25-34). The politics of Hampton Court is also presented as part of this interpretive game of divulgation and concealment. Here, we find people gossiping about card games, speaking of the Queen, and

¹⁴⁷ McLaverty, *Pope, Print and Meaning*, p.14.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p.33.

¹⁴⁹ *TE*, II, p.142.

¹⁵⁰ See for instance, Stewart Crehan, “‘The Rape of the Lock’ and the Economy of ‘Trivial Things.’” *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 31.1 (1997), 45–68.; Richard Kroll, “Pope and Drugs: The Pharmacology of ‘The Rape of the Lock’”, *ELH*, 67.1 (2000) 99–141; Earl R Wasserman, “The Limits of Allusion in ‘The Rape of the Lock.’” *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 65.3, (1966), 425–44,

¹⁵¹ *The Rape of the Locke* (1712), in *TE*, pp.125-137, i.25 (p.128). Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

describing interior decoration. Among these conversers are silent interpreters who observe the ‘Motions, Looks, and Eyes’ (i.79) of the court. In this economy of chatter and silent judgments — ‘singing, laughing, ogling, and all that’ (i.82) — we are left to imagine for ourselves how and why ‘At ev’ry Word a Reputation dies’ (i.80). These social games of confession and secrecy are exposed and elongated by the addition of the sylphs in the later five-canto editions. They are presented as excrescences of Belinda’s undisclosed interiority, the faults she hides, and therefore as representations of her own brainchildren as well. This is true both literally and in terms of the narration. When we learn that Belinda’s ‘Guardian *Sylph* prolong’d the balmy Rest’ we understand that this parallels Pope’s actions in elongating the poem.¹⁵² When the sylphs fly around her, unseen yet ‘ever on the Wing’ (i.43), we understand that they are both a fantastical part of the poem and a symbol of Pope’s own imagination hovering and hanging over his own work. The first edition focuses on the quarrel itself. The addition of the sylphs puts this quarrel at a fantastical remove so that it may be reviewed in a new light: ‘’Tis but their *Sylph*, the wise Celestials know, | Tho’ *Honour* is the Word with Men below’ (i. 77-78). ‘Honour’ is no longer something that is won, lost, negotiated, or felt, but something that is contrived by the sylphs, or rather the poetic powers of invention and narration that they symbolise: the making of a trivial cutting of a lock into an epic battle. In this way, the sylphs are both markers of the *Rape of the Locke*’s textual evolution from the 1712 text as well as portrayals of the thinking and decision-making underlying the plot, both Belinda’s and Pope’s. This is the irony underlying the line ‘Oh blind to Truth! The *Sylphs* contrive it all’ (i.104). The sylphs ‘contrive it all’ because they are both forms of divine machinery and symbols of Pope’s poetic appetite for revision.

Our only connection to Belinda’s interiority comes in the form of the sylphs, gnomes, and other fantastical creatures added in to the later editions. However, the most sustained description of the sylphs struggles to grasp their figures wafting in the air:

Transparent forms, too fine for mortal sight,
 Their fluid bodies half dissolved in light,
 Loose to the wind their airy garments flew,
 Thin glittering textures of the filmy dew,
 Dipped in the richest tincture of the skies.
 Where light disports in ever mingling dyes,

¹⁵² *The Rape of the Locke in Five Cantos*, in *TE*, pp.139-212, i.20 (p.147). Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

While every beam new transient colours flings,
Colours that change whene'er they wave their wings. (ii.61-68)

The moment of distraction provided by this vision of the sylphs does not add anything substantial to the progression of the plot aside from its essential poetic pleasure. In fact, it is difficult to say that these are really sylphs at all. Instead of offering an image of these supernatural creatures we find what is more like a prism of optical illusions, at once too blurry and brilliant to form distinct shapes. The appearance of the sylphs might remind us of Locke's definition of reverie: 'when Ideas float in our mind, without any reflection or regard of the Understanding.'¹⁵³ However, the reverie Pope has created here relies precisely on the abundance of reflection rather than the absence of it: the reflective surfaces of the 'Silver Tames' (ii.4) responding to the sun, and the unseen reflections of Belinda, the reader, and Pope rendered blindingly (in)visible in this spectacle of light. The 'colours' that are made to 'beam' and bounce through the passage never cohere into a steady reflection but seem to paint a picture of pure reflectivity, a stalemate between Belinda's impenetrable mind, that of Pope's unknown readership, and the hypothetical question of how the sylphs could be developed in a further revision.

What therefore is the passage's function? One answer might be found in Pope's superfoetations. This passage ultimately functions as a space for readers to exercise their own poetic conceptions, a womb space for other ideas. This superfoetal chamber is built purposefully out of a commonplace of words designed to inspire poetic delight: 'airy garments', 'glittering textures', 'filmy dew', etc. These creatures appear at points in the narrative when the fabric of the mock-heroic is at its loosest, places where the writer's doubts and struggles are made most apparent by the insertion of inchoate passages in the body of the action. Such sylphic sequences encourage readers' attentions to wander to the nature of thought itself — both their own, the poet's, and that of the 'pensive nymph'. Although the sylphs famously draw from the Rosicrucian mythology of the *Comte de Gabalis*, where they are said to be composed of the purest atoms of the air, these mythical origins do not take the same shape throughout the poem. Sometimes we are presented with Pope's take on the Rosicrucian myth; at other times the illusion frays and we are given a glimpse of the poet thinking behind it. We might also think of the later reviser of Shakespeare who has to

¹⁵³Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ii.19.1, p.227.

apologise for having ‘no colour left, from any of the editions, to imagine it interpolated’.¹⁵⁴ Here, we have too much colour. The realm of the sylphs allows and celebrates revision by providing all the colours needed for the potential editor, collator, or reviser to imagine as they please. The mini uncreating world it creates looks momentarily away from the progression of the plot in order to afford readers a breathing space to join Pope and his protagonists in making nothing happen. In this, Pope seems to stray from the neoclassical emphasis on conciseness and universal truth by finding in the very stylistic excess it reacts against a paradoxical transparency for the uncertainty of the human mind — the universality of irregularity.

One of the jokes of *The Rape of the Locke* is that the sylphs seem to skirt between the borders of genuine allusion and superfoetal coincidence. Every so often the sylphs seem to defect from their assigned role as defenders of coquettes and dissolve into humours. As imaginative footholds within the text, the sylphs are evocative of the Epicurean sense of ideas as effluvia flying between bodies. The way in which they are described in ocular terms might remind us of the ocular origins of the word ‘think’. It was common to describe fancies as dust motes visible in sunlight. It is therefore telling that every sylphic moment in *The Rape of the Locke* is characterised by the presence of light. They arrive with daybreak (‘Sol thro’ white Curtains shot a tim’rous Ray’, i.13) and they arise to the foreground again when Belinda sets off for Hampton Palace by boat (‘Sun-beams trembling on the floating Tydes’, ii.48). Even after fleeing from the site of the cutting of the lock, they are only recalled when they can be viewed in the light of the stars. The irony is that while Belinda can stretch across the world map through the surrogates of her commodities, Pope’s sylphs pull the reader back to the disquieting reality of the ephemerality of poetic vision and readerly assimilation. Such moments of inertia, where the sylphs become shapeless, vitreous humours, allow Pope to inject a sense of the movements of mind informing the poetic process: the true engines behind the progress of the work. Here again he can pay tribute to the poetic labours excessive scholarly scrutiny undervalues. The readers know that this is no anonymous miscellany poet. This is Pope having fun. As we can see, despite being airy forms that should show no outline, the sylphs slowly morph into distinctly insect-like shapes. The suspension of belief, the idea that this is simply a description of the invisible sylphs, cannot be sustained for long, and slowly, despite, and because of its sublime qualities, the vision glitches and we become hyperaware that Pope is showing off. Pope even goes on to use words punning on the nature

¹⁵⁴ *The Works of Shakespear*, ed. by Pope, III, p.437.

of paper like ‘waft’-ing and ‘unfold’-ing (‘Some to the sun their insect wings unfold, | Waft on the breeze, or sink in clouds of gold’, ii.59-60) to draw a connection between the world of the poem and its external form in the hands of readers. We can imagine the spirit of the ‘sylphs’ passing between the reader and the writer as they think through the poem.

The poem thus acts as a spin on the ‘fairy way of writing’ described in *Spectator* no. 419, where a poet ‘work[s] altogether out of his own invention’.¹⁵⁵ We may also see a comparison between Pope’s self-aware, self-narrating adoption of the Rosicrucian mythology and Prior’s description of commentators on Aristotle co-opting the latter’s thought through their own lenses:

The Commentators on Old ARI—
 STOTLE (’tis urg’d) in Judgment vary:
 They to their own Conceits have brought
 The Image of his general Thought.
 Just as the Melancholic Eye
 Sees Fleets and Armies in the Sky.¹⁵⁶

We can also see the sylphs as superfoetations developed out of the original 1712 text, separate but connected outgrowths from that initial conception. Once we realise that the sylphs allude to the processes of revision underway *in medias res*, the lines that have been rearranged or cut in the 1712 version of the poem take on a new light. We can see the seeds of ideas that sprouted the five-canto poem germinating in the 1712 one. We understand to a greater extent why the original version of the poem referred directly to the mind:

Her lively Looks a sprightly Mind disclose,
 Quick as her Eyes, and as unfixt as those. (i.25-26)

The original poem foreshadows the presence of the sylphs with its disclosure of Arabella’s looks. In the five-canto poem, the sylphs replace this opening and become one reason why her eyes might appear so ‘unfixt’. Their ‘sprite[ly]’ forms can be said to be directly related to the description of Belinda’s ‘sprightly mind’ that opens the 1712 poem and becomes part of

¹⁵⁵ *The Spectator*, VI, p.93.

¹⁵⁶ Matthew Prior, *The Literary Works of Matthew Prior*, ed. H. Bunker Wright and M.K. Spears, 2 vols., 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), I, i.206-211 (p.476).

the second canto in the later editions. Arabella's daydreaming gaze is given direction and purpose by the addition of the sylphs, who become symbolic of her changing thoughts.

The theme of revision itself is, in fact, integral to the project of revising Arabella Fermor's view of events and offering new eyes to the previous version of the poem (and the argument that inspired it). The visual ambiguity of the sylphs is designed to recall the myopic nature of some pedantic criticism — 'the critic Eye, that microscope of Wit, | Sees hairs and pores, examines bit by bit'¹⁵⁷ — in order to satirise the way in which the loss of the real 'lock' has been examined in a similar manner, just as the fictional 'lock' of the poem will be. James McLaverty notes that the spelling of lock is not standardised throughout the poem and sometimes the word 'locke' is used, particularly, it seems to McLaverty, in relation to the Baron and Belinda's thoughts and the overall mood of the poem. Yet, beyond reflecting 'the distorted consciousness of his two main figures' there seems to be no immediate suggestion as to why the difference in spelling exists.¹⁵⁸ One might even wonder if lock is to locke what Dunciad is to Dunciad. Here, too, there is an echo of Theobald's words, 'nor is the neglect of a Single Letter so trivial as to some it may appear'.¹⁵⁹

We see more exploration of superfoetal structures in other early poems by Pope, including 'The Epistle to Miss Blount, on her leaving the town, after the coronation'. This offers another occasion where Pope imagines the compositional process *in media res*. This time we are confronted with the nested structure of superfoetation: Bacon's fruit within a fruit. As before, Pope shows an interest in exploring how the poem is thought out. We see that the architecture of the poem builds an approximate symmetry between Zephalinda's fantasies of the city and the speaker's efforts to imaginatively extend towards the Blounts. We can feel the strain of the thinker willing themselves to immerse in the slowly weaving fantasy. Four out of the five stanzas begin with the indefinite determiner 'some'.¹⁶⁰ With each successive 'some' the thinker steps back from the growing specificity of the fantasy, which sharpens itself from 'some fond virgin' (l.1) to 'Zephalinda' (l.7), from 'Some Squire' (l.23) to the most personable character in the poem (ll.29-30), only to plunge even deeper into the same imaginative space from a different angle. The second stanza, the only one not beginning with 'some' new thing as a prompt, carries on from the previous stanza by using the *anadiplosis*

¹⁵⁷ *The Dunciad in Four Books*, iv.233-234.

¹⁵⁸ McLaverty, *Pope, Print, and Meaning*, p.20.

¹⁵⁹ *Shakespeare Restored*, p.193.

¹⁶⁰ 'Epistle to Miss Blount, on her leaving the Town, after the Coronation' in *TE*, vi (1954), pp.124-126, ll.1, 23, 31, 41 (pp.124-125). Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

‘she went. | She went’ (ll.10-11) to strengthen the image of Zephalinda’s boredom. We see a literal tuning process take shape as the poet gradually calibrates his lyre and verse-mind to imaginatively reach out and answer the sound of ‘some’ with both Zephalinda’s and his own ‘hums’ (ll.20 and 50). We hear a series of other tuning sounds throughout the poem — ‘purling’ (l.11), ‘croaking’ (l.12), ‘smacking’ (l.26), ‘cries’ (l.26) — until at last ‘a tune’ is formed in Zephalinda and the poet’s shared resignation to reality. While attempting to reach out, the poem in practice draws further and further inwards. With each renewing ‘Some’ Pope shifts perspective, moving from third person to second person in the 23rd line and then from second person to first person in the final stanza. What is important is that the poem reaches its state of deep thought through the direction of words. This is not a fantasy enabled by an intermission provided by the poet (as in the sylphs). This is a fantasy that is intentionally laboured. The way in which Pope progresses from ‘Telling stories to the Squire’ (l.20) to actually telling ‘you’ stories about ‘Some Squire’ (l.23) suggests that the stage directions to the next step of fantasy are written in a previous iteration of the imaginative sequence. Although a depiction of distracted daydreaming, this meta-compositional work of nested fantasies is very deliberate in manoeuvring itself into further avenues of fantastical escape; this is a self-willed narrative of inceptions within inceptions: superfoetation. By creating new fantasies out of the words of previous ones, he allows earlier ideas, earlier foetations, to subsist in the shapes of succeeding ones. It is only after humming the completed tune at the end of the poem and so closing the last nested fantasy (not necessarily after the pat on the shoulder from Gay) that these chains of inceptions, of revisions upon revisions, are truly broken. From this point forward, Pope effectively passes on the baton to the reader as the next reviser in line. From this point onwards the reception process begins. We might wonder if the reader’s role is also to initiate another inception by continuing the superfoetal chain in the form of their response.

***The Dunciad* and later works**

This fascination with the ways in which poems become is not isolated to Pope’s early works. Both the three-book and the four-book *Dunciad* are interested in the story behind writing. Pope’s hesitancy to use the word ‘defect’ in its absolute in *The Works of Shakespear* highlights a principal difference between his and Theobald’s approaches to editing. For Pope,

the apparent defect was more than a ‘defect’ but a source of philosophical and natural curiosity. Theobald’s approach was to diligently identify and address corruptions as per his duty as an editor. There was no need to observe them for their own sake. The difference between the two can be articulated in terms of the three kinds of criticism listed in Theobald’s edition of Shakespeare:

The Science of Criticism, as far as it affects an Editor, seems to be reduced to these three classes; the Emendation of corrupt Passages; the Explanation of obscure and difficult ones; and an Inquiry into the Beauties and Defects of Composition.¹⁶¹

The two former tasks were Theobald’s primary mode of scholarly enquiry in his edition of Shakespeare, while the third task was Pope’s chief focus. Indeed, Pope memorably called the ‘pointing out an Author’s excellencies’ the ‘better half of Criticism’ in his preface to Shakespeare.¹⁶² In contrast, Theobald sneered at Pope’s preference for the third point, writing that ‘The third lies open for every willing Undertaker’, the word ‘undertaker’ being a known nickname for Pope after his poorly received edition of Shakespeare and his controversial ‘undertaking’ of the translation of the *Odyssey*.¹⁶³ Pope’s response to these taunts in the *Dunciad* reflects his choice to dub Shakespeare’s errors ‘superfoetations’. He presents us with a story of creation rather than the morbid workings of an undertaker. This functions as both a riposte to the nickname and a defence of his preferred kind of criticism. Pope’s *Dunciad* effectively stretches out the concept of superfoetations into a conceit about the production of a world that creates error, not through ‘defect’ (the ‘want or lack of something’) but through a superfluity of creations:

Here she beholds the Chaos dark and deep,
Where nameless somethings in their causes sleep,
’Till genial Jacob, or a warm Third-day,
Call forth each mass, a poem, or a play:
How Hints, like spawn, scarce quick in embryo lie,
How new-born Nonsense first is taught to cry,
Maggots half-form’d, in rhyme exactly meet. (*The Dunciad in Four Books*, I.55-61)

Dulness’ creation-from-chaos in this passage provides us with a genealogy of the apparently ‘defective’ by exploring the numinous status of the idea in the struggle of literary creation.

¹⁶¹ *The Works of Shakespeare*, ed. by Theobald, I, p. xli.

¹⁶² *The Works of Shakespear*, ed. by Pope, I, p. xxiii.

¹⁶³ *The Works of Shakespeare*, ed. by Theobald, I, p. xli.

Having existed before Zeus' conception of Athena, before the pretence of immediate conception and execution, the lightning of the 'eureka moment', Dulness is more attentive to the many sub-steps that are involved in the thinking process, which is conceived here as the period of gestation. Creation is not instantaneous but laboured into being. While her mode of creation appears to rest in simply 'beholding' the chaos and 'see-ing' how it pans out, the joke is that this too is not a passive action. The word 'idea' comes from the word for 'to see', or 'idein', therefore when Dulness 'beholds' it is understood that she also thinks, and this thinking process is set into motion wordlessly, even before the ideas it creates are directly addressed as the 'maggots' (whims) that learn to crawl. This is why it is important to notice that she is later compared to a 'watchful Bruin' who 'forms, with plastic care' (l.101). The primordial masses are mutated and deformed by a series of further conceptions throughout the gestation. So much so that the final result seems to lie more in their mutual multiplication than the sum of their parts. The verse foregrounds the central mystery of ideation — the emergence of identifiable ideas from the indistinct states of human mental life — by questioning at what point the innocent 'mass' morphs into the unsightly 'maggot'. The search for this missing link between 'nameless somethings' and 'cry'-ing, maybe even wording, 'new-born Nonsense' might be said to play on the Lockean idea of 'superadditions', the speculation that God differentiates humans from their animal and plant counterparts by adding thought on top of matter (*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, IV.3.6). In the case of Pope's superfoetations in the *Dunciad*, this newborn nonsense, it becomes unclear at what precise time the nameless masses advance into sentient human-like language, if at all.

By playing with these different forms of creation in the *Dunciad* Pope alludes to the way in which underdeveloped superfoetations become a form of lesser, non-rational intelligence in word form. They lack the rationality of good writing but are still somewhat alive with thought, even if it is in a state of dullness. In this way, when the transition from mental 'hints' and 'nonsense' to language ('poor word') is marked with little 'maggots' ('whims' or 'ideas') 'crawling [unnaturally] upon poetic feet', Pope describes the intelligence of these bits of word as not 'properly defects'. This is an intelligence of ideas that have yet to grow into the rationality characteristic of the best writers. Indeed, Pope's Dulness diverges from the eighteenth-century associations of the word with sluggishness and inactivity. This is commented upon in Bentley's note to line 15 of the first book ('Laborious, heavy, busy, bold, and blind') in the four-book variorum text:

Dulness here is not to be taken contractedly for mere Stupidity, but in the enlarged sense of the word, for all Slowness of Apprehension, Shortness of Sight, or imperfect Sense of things. It includes (as we see by the Poet's own words) Labour, Industry, and some degree of Activity and Boldness: a ruling principle not inert, but turning topsy-turvy the Understanding, and inducing an Anarchy or confused States of Mind.¹⁶⁴

The comment is itself rather superfoetal in nature as it was not added until 1743. But whether it is its own separate addition or a superfoetal outgrowth like the sylphs is made productively unclear. We cannot wholly subscribe to Bentley's authority as he exemplifies precisely the pedantry Pope rejected in the *The Works of Shakespear*. Yet the quote might also be thought of as self-descriptive. The irony is that perhaps Bentley too need not be taken 'contractedly' as mere 'Stupidity'. This too is not without 'Labour, Industry, and some degree of Activity and Boldness', even if it is to Bentley's own detriment. The comment, like the line it addresses, is 'Laborious, heavy, busy, bold, and blind'. Indeed, this zoomed-in perspective of Pope's verse reveals a buzzing activity unspoken in the 'contracted' viewpoint from which Dulness is generally viewed; there is a method behind the stupidity, as ridiculous as that is. Another point being made in the comment is that Pope's action of adding these ironic pseudo-scholarly remarks is also not inherently laborious, bold, and blind. He is entirely aware of the seeming pettiness of his satirical jabs and that is part of the irony of the comment. Pope's Dulness, like his Bentley, seeks to stretch the 'contracted' use of dullness so that it touches its seeming opposite: a certain quickness and hastiness. Ironically, this feeds into Pope's original purpose in annotating beauties and faults. As always, Pope is interested in the vitality of poor writing on a compositional level. Even moments of stupor, inattention, and dazed contemplation might still be fascinatingly alive with vigour and life. Bentley continues, saying that the true key to the work is to see it, 'like Jacob's ladder, rise, | Its foot in dirt, its head amid the skies' — that is, like a garden plant. Rumbold's notes contend that this is an approximate quotation from Dryden's *The Hind and the Panther*. However, at the risk of falling into the same trap as Bentley, one might also suggest that it converses with Plato's vision of man as an upside-down heavenly plant in *Timaeus*.¹⁶⁵ As a celestial plant, Man's 'root' is its head which contains its (heaven-gifted) rationality; the 'stem' and 'leaves' are the rest of its body. In this sense, to use Bentley's wording, the creation of the 'topsy-turvy' is not topsy-turvy at all. In fact, it plays with the nature of man as this innately inverted creature — a plant in reverse — and with the figure of Dulness as that which is transforming it

¹⁶⁴ *Dunciad in Four Books*, i.15 (p.99).

¹⁶⁵ See J.B. Skemp, 'Plants in Plato's *Timaeus*', *The Classical Quarterly*, 41.1 (1947), 53-60.

into the literal Jacob's Ladder —the plant as opposed to the biblical dream— with roots (head) in the ground.

Indeed, beyond its analogies concerning biological and literary creation, we can see that the superfoetation limns Pope's interest foremost in the psychology of writerly creation. In the case of the *Dunciad*, we see not only the superfoetal influences of ideas from other people's works, but also the niggling presence of Pope's own previous endeavours, in this case the editorial work snubbed by Theobald in *Shakespeare Restored*. Through this elongated enumeration of the way in which ideas become words Pope explains how good writers can write poorly and that this is not 'properly a defect'. At the same time, the concept of superfoetations offers us a useful way of reading Pope's work without reading with 'too free a mind' as Geoffrey Tillotson cautions in *Pope and Human Nature*, that is, to see how multiple meanings can coexist in the same piece of writing without succumbing to the very kinds of overreading Pope loathes, satirises, and yet delights in.¹⁶⁶ The attention Pope pays to the mental activity informing linguistic choices indicates that there is a greater self-awareness to Pope's writing process than the easy addition of prefixes in Bateson's characterisation of Pope would suggest: the poet laboriously 'revising and re-revising'.¹⁶⁷ Swift's description of Pope's own compositional process offers its own interpretation of the superfoetations traced in this chapter:

Now Backs of Letters, though design'd
For those who more will need 'em,
Are fill'd with Hints, and interlin'd,
Himself can hardly read 'em.

Each Atom by some other struck,
All Turns and Motions tries;
Till in a Lump together stuck,
Behold a *Poem* rise!¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶ Geoffrey Tillotson, *Pope and human nature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), pp.252-260.

¹⁶⁷ *Alexander Pope: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by F.W Bateson and N. Joukovsky (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), p.288.

¹⁶⁸ Jonathan Swift, 'Dr. Swift to Mr. while he was writing the *Dunciad*', in *The Poems of Jonathan Swift*, ed. by Harold Williams, 5 vols., 2nd edn. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), II, pp.405-6, II.9-16 (p.406).

Swift's description of Pope in the middle of writing the *Dunciad* resembles the line in the *Dunciad* where the 'watchful Bruin forms, with plastic care, | Each growing lump, and brings it to a Bear' (l.101-102). In both cases the lump that could be taken as an injury or defect is wrangled into a poem by a physical craftsmanship. This image of Pope's writing seems to hold the same unpredictable turn as the swerve or *clinamen* of Lucretius' atoms engaged in a cosmic world-building. However the agencies compounding these forces together are of dubious origin. Instead of two embryos developing separately at the expense of one another, we find a mutative chemical reaction where snippets of writing are hoarded and stuck together to form a poem, seemingly of their own independent volition. We might in fact reconsider Pope's confession in his *Works* that he is 'altogether uncertain, whether to look upon [him] self as a man building a monument, or burying the dead'¹⁶⁹ as a reflection of such a compositional process. The Pope of the poem, like that of the preface, is trying to preserve and fossilise the invisible sub-processes of literary labour that get enfolded between the visible sediments of language and outward sense. He is also uncomfortably aware that by so monumentalising them he also forces upon them a fixity that goes against (what this thesis argues is) his career-long and perhaps career-defining interest: revision. Pope's use of 'superfoetation' is a useful way of understanding the multiplicities in his texts and their ever-openness to further and further alteration. It also provides a useful introduction to the variety of references to composition that will be explored in the succeeding chapters.

¹⁶⁹ *Prose Works*, I, p.295.

‘all the writer lives in ev’ry line’: the ‘Inhabitant Within’ in *Eloisa to Abelard*

The epistolary function

The idea that the finished text can preserve the doubts of the composition process in its own form will prove useful in understanding Pope’s in-text portrayals of writers as thinkers, composers, and revisers. It is my contention that Pope’s interest in foregrounding the literary labours of composition is also evident in some of his characterisation of his poetic speakers as writers. Indeed, the discussions about the role of the editor outlined in the previous chapter were also accompanied by reflections on the role of the author and, in particular, the extent to which a writer’s character could be conveyed through their writings. The relationship between a writer and their work was itself the subject of philosophical interest. In his chapter ‘Of our Knowledge of the Existence of other Things’, Locke describes the act of writing as a means of externalising the ideas in our minds into an unknown world without.¹⁷⁰ Locke observes that when he writes he has control over how his ideas are presented; ‘he can change the Appearance of the Paper; and by designing the Letters, tell beforehand what new *Idea* it shall exhibit the very next moment’. As the last clause suggests, this exercise of creative control engenders in him a temporary sense of prescience over the fate of his written work. In that moment he believes he knows what he has written, what ‘ideas’ it will provoke, and that this is all ‘made at the pleasure of [his] own Thoughts’. This sense of foreknowledge is, however, short-lived. Once ‘made on the Paper’, Locke finds that his writing no longer ‘obey[s]’ him. The same ideas he understood intuitively when they were contained in his mind suddenly appear ‘not barely of the Sport and Play of [his] own Imagination’, that is, not

¹⁷⁰ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, IV.9.7.

entirely of his own making. Now their very ‘sight [...] shall, from another Man, draw such Sounds’ as Locke himself had ‘before-hand design[ed] they shall stand for’. Moreover, these words may even act upon him, their creator, ‘caus[ing] a long series of regular Sounds to affect [Locke’s own] Ears’. As Locke reports with awe, the actions of this written incarnation of his thoughts ‘could not be the effect of [his] Imagination, nor could [his] Memory retain them in that order’. These thoughts that were once present to him with a certainty that ‘neither needs, nor is capable of any proof’ are suddenly vulnerable to a degree of ontological scepticism at par with that levelled at the existence of other external things. When his thoughts are completely written *out* their existence is no longer as indubitably real to him as that of his own being. This does not, as per Locke’s previous arguments in the chapter, go so far as to cause Locke to doubt their existence or the fact that he had written them. What it does do, however, is intimate the idea that his thoughts have gained an autonomous life of their own. Though designed by him, his words are sustained by something other than himself.

It is something of Locke’s wonder at this othering of his own ideas that Pope carries into his article ‘On the Origin of Letters’ in the *Guardian* No. 172.¹⁷¹ The word ‘letter’ is etymologically rooted in the Latin *littera* (‘letter of the alphabet’ or simply ‘writing’). The word therefore encompasses a relatively wide gamut of forms, ranging from alphanumerical signs to written missives. The ‘epistle’, on the other hand, while more limited in scope, is less particular about form. It is derived from the Greek *epistole*, ‘message, letter, command, or commission’, which comes from the verb *epistellein*, ‘to send as a message’. Whereas the ‘letter’ is identified by its written nature, the ‘epistle’ is concerned with the action of conveying a message or command regardless of whether it is written or oral. This etymological distinction is important to keep in mind when reading *Guardian* No. 172 because while ‘On the Origin of Letters’ begins as an essay about letters in their alphabetical sense, it concludes with the suggestion that all writing, whether intended as courier letters or not, serves an epistolary function. That is to say, all written communication is involved in that ‘sending’ action of conveying something from their writer emphatically *outwards*. The fact that the article itself is structured as a letter, and one where the identity of Philogram (‘lover of letters’) is conspicuously uncertain, stresses the question throughout of what, or perhaps who, is being received.

¹⁷¹ See Norman Ault’s introduction to *The Prose Works*, I, pp.lxx-lxxii, for details on the authorship of the *Guardian* article.

Like Locke, Pope lauds the ability of letters to transcend the ‘narrow Limits of Place and Time’, to ‘materialize our Ideas, and make them as lasting as the Ink and Paper, their Vehicles’.¹⁷² Pope agrees that the act of writing externalises the contents of his mind but he does not concur that this necessarily makes the product foreign to his self as Locke’s description would suggest. On the contrary, Pope suggests that the process of writing extends his interior world. When comparing writing to painting Pope notes that painting ‘represents the outward Man, or the Shell; but can’t reach the Inhabitant within, or the very Organ by which the Inhabitant is revealed: This Art may reach to represent a Face, but can’t paint a Voice’.¹⁷³ Pope describes writing as an entryway to this inner ‘Inhabitant’, the adding of ‘a sixth Sense’ that ‘mak[es] the Voice become visible’. Pope argues that letters differentiate themselves from other art forms through their ability to bring out the interior lifeworld of the speaker and, in so doing, to do for this ‘Inhabitant within’ what the Egyptians did for the ‘shell’ with their ‘Mummies [*sic*]’: ‘This preserves the Works of the Immortal part of Men, so as to make the Dead still useful to the Living’. Pope thus creates an overlap between the distinctions between the epistle and the letter, suggesting that all letters, that is to say, all writing in general and not only those pieces that are nominally epistolary, are to some extent evocative of this essential epistolary function, the externalising of the ‘inner inhabitant’.

The description of the written medium in ‘On the Origin of Letters’ recalls the opening couplet of the ‘Epistle to Miss Blount, with the Works of Voiture’:

In these gay Thought the Loves and Graces shine,
And all the Writer lives in ev’ry Line.¹⁷⁴

There is a sense here that the author himself as well as his vision can be ‘read’ in his works. At the same time, Pope’s celebration of Voiture not too immodestly gestures to the nature of his own presence in the verse. Perhaps these lines are also alive with ‘all’ of Pope as well. ‘These’ might be as deictic to Pope’s own couplet as it is to ‘all’ of Voiture’s. We see Pope linger once more on this relationship between writer and writing in the final couplet in the ‘Epistle to Mr Jervas, with Dryden’s Translation of Fresnoy’s Art of Painting’: ‘Alas! how little from the grave we claim? | Thou but preserv’st a Face and I a Name.’¹⁷⁵ Even while

¹⁷² *The Prose Works*, I, p.142.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, I, pp.142-4.

¹⁷⁴ ‘Epistle to Miss Blount, with the Works of Voiture’, in *TE*, VI, pp.62-65, ll.1-2 (p.62).

¹⁷⁵ ‘Epistle to Mr Jervas, with Dryden’s Translation of Fresnoy’s Art of Painting’, in *TE*, VI, pp.156-160, ll.77-8 (p.158).

suggesting that much of his self will be lost irrevocably after death, Pope betrays an unspoken challenge for readers to find something more. It is to this sense of finding continued life in letters that Pope gestures in the epigraph to the *Guardian* No. 172, which quotes from book six of Virgil's *Aeneid*. In this passage we find Aeneas in the middle of his search for his father, Anchises, in the underworld. We are given a description of the various kinds of soul that have earned entry into Elysium. These range from those who died fighting for their country to those who spent their lives as priests. Of the souls described, it is those 'Who grac'd their Age with new invented Arts' — *vitam excoluere per artes* — that are referenced in the epigraph.¹⁷⁶ The final moments of the essay question whether there may not be another form of Elysium — dare we say a Tartarus? — in letters themselves. True to his name, Philogram suggests that arts provide such souls with a second life. This continued life bypasses the self-forgetting rivers of Lethe and bequeaths what it has previously learned to the next generation. Naturally, this manages 'to make the Dead still useful to the Living'.¹⁷⁷ Such moments where Pope refers to the fate of writing after death are thus engaged with a sense of a world of ideas, an immaterial 'Immortal part of Men', that persists through the page and confers a picture of the writer's lost interior world beyond the oblivion of death. Such instances of lettered immortality are deictic to that externalising power of the epistolary function. This chapter explores how such interest in the process of writing enhances Pope's portrayal of the heroine-writer of *Eloisa and Abelard*, enabling her meandering movements of self-doubt to confirm her agency as a composer. By portraying Eloisa as not only as a heroine, but a writer and reviser, Pope allows the literary labours of the writing process, revision in all its forms, to play a role in Eloisa's conflict of conscience. He makes her agency felt as not only a participant in but also the writer of her own story. When we recognise Eloisa's turns of thought as both moments of doubt and moments of writerly hesitation, we see how Pope uses revision to lend Eloisa's situation a greater complexity. This chapter explores the varying ways in which Pope's own interests in composition animate Eloisa with her own authorial voice.

The Fifth Letter of Heloise

¹⁷⁶John Dryden, *The Works of Virgil in English*, 1697, ed. by W. Frost and V.A. Dearing (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), IX.900 (p.558).

¹⁷⁷*The Prose Works*, I, p.144.

The letters of Heloise and Abelard were first translated into English in 1713 from a series of French paraphrases collected in François Nicolas DuBois' *Histoire des Amours et Infortunes d'Abélard et Éloïse*. *Eloisa to Abelard* is inspired by this prose edition by John Hughes and, as Pope specifies in his prefatory argument to the poem, '[only] partly extracted' from it.¹⁷⁸ There is general agreement — and rightfully so — that the poem is based largely on Heloise's first letter to Abelard. This first letter includes several scenes from Pope's retelling: Eloisa's apprehension at all 'hundred Times' her name would appear; the passionate renewal of her old memories upon reading Abelard's letter; and various reflections on her own emotional reactions '— Oh! Whether does the Excess of Passion hurry me?'¹⁷⁹ This was the most reprinted letter out of the eight of the original Latin correspondence, the best known, and the most adapted into verse.¹⁸⁰ That being said, another candidate for one of the specific 'extracted' parts Pope mentions may be hinted at towards the end of Pope's argument to the poem. This is where he explains what he finds praiseworthy in the letters: 'This awakening all her tenderness, occasion'd those celebrated letters (out of which the following is partly extracted) which give so lively a picture of the struggles of Grace and Nature, Virtue and Passion'.¹⁸¹ Pope's Eloisa is defined less by her incompatible desires than her struggle to overcome them. The combination of 'Grace and Nature, Virtue and Passion' has hitherto drawn thematic comparisons to Eloisa's conjoined loyalties to God and Abelard and, to a similar extent, to faith and love, and remembering and forgetting. However, there is reason to believe that Pope may be additionally framing his adaptation, if only in part, more directly from the paragraph that closes Heloise's final letter in Hughes' translation, the fifth letter in the six-letter series. This is the letter where Eloisa pulls the act of writing itself to the forefront of discussion:

I begin to perceive, *Abelard*, that I take too much Pleasure in writing to you. I ought to burn my Letter. It shews you I am still engaged in a deep Passion for you, tho' at the beginning of it I design'd to persuade you to the contrary; I am sensible of the Motions both of Grace and Passion, and by turns yield to each.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁸ *TE*, II, p.318.

¹⁷⁹ *Letters to Abelard and Heloise, To Which is prefix'd, A Particular Account of their Lives, Amours, and Misfortunes, Extracted Chiefly from Monsieur Bayle. Translated from the French*, trans. by John Hughes, 5th edn. (London, 1729), pp.110, 129.

¹⁸⁰ Cecilia A. Feilla, 'From "Sainted Main" to "Wife in all her Grandeur" Translations of Heloise, 1687-1817', *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 28.2 (2004), 1-16 (p.2).

¹⁸¹ *TE*, II, p.318.

¹⁸² *Letters to Abelard and Heloise*, trans. by Hughes, p.211.

While notions of ‘Grace’, ‘Virtue’, ‘Nature’ and ‘Passion’ litter the entirety of the letters, this is the only point where they are put together by one of the lovers themselves and, in a moment of sudden, devastating clarity, recognised for what they are. Pope seems to have preferred Heloise’s description of the oppositions of ‘Grace and Passion’ to Hughes’ introduction in his preface of ‘a lively Picture of Human Nature in its Contraries of Passion and Reason, its Infirmities and Sufferings’. Pope has accordingly mixed the two conclusions to form his own picture of a picture. The word ‘struggles’ recapitulates the ‘Contrarieties’ of ‘Human Nature’ described in Hughes’ own preface. It directs attention away from the relationship these forces have with one another and towards their relationship with Eloisa. Rebecca Ferguson has already noted both these parts of Hughes’ work as potential sources for the phrase.¹⁸³ However, in the case of the fifth letter she only quotes what follows the semi-colon in the last sentence and therefore misses that Heloise’s newfound sensibility hinges upon the act of writing. Heloise’s ‘sensib[ility]’ is not to be interpreted solely in its affective sense; she is not only aware of these turns of ‘Grace and Passion’ because she ‘feels’ them on a personal level. She is also ‘sensible’ of them in a wider intellectual sense from having written these feelings out and read them to herself. She has a form of cognisance and awareness provided by the epistolary function of writing, Locke’s realisation that his words are also now other than himself. This last section of the fifth letter represents the moment Heloise herself begins to ‘perceive’ the ‘picture’ Hughes gestures towards in his preface. She pierces through the obstacles of time and space to be ‘sensible’ of not only Abelard, but also herself and her future readers: us. The ‘Word’ and ‘Design’ she rebukes in her first letter have at last been re-discovered as a ‘design’ of her own making, and one abetted by the medium of the letter itself and the pleasure she takes in it. In this moment of self-reflection we can imagine that Heloise sees the thought patterns she has been immobilised by. Yet, we are for the first time unsure how knowingly she ‘yields’ to them. Is her emotional deadlock truly a function of her devastating situation or are these ‘turns’ willingly and knowingly being seen, written, and counted? The fifth letter offers us a picture that shows Heloise not as a portrait within a frame, but as a painter looking upon an image of her own design. Like Locke in ‘Of our Knowledge of the Existence of other things’, she is looking at the makings of her own mind. Heloise observes her own creation just as the Eloisa of the frontispiece to the 1719 octavo edition (post-dated 1720) does. We find her sitting in an ambiguous outdoors location

¹⁸³Ferguson, *The Unbalanced Mind*, p.18.

with a quill in one hand, a piece of parchment in the other, and both eyes fixed on a distant building: perhaps Abelard's monastery or, more intriguingly, her own nunnery.

Eloisa and the Fifth Letter

We see this picture-in-a-picture in Pope's portrayal of Eloisa. Pope repeatedly asserts that she is not only a heroine but also a writer. Eloisa's movements between first and third person narration show her re-reading her written self. She is not only a protagonist but also a composer and reviser. Her reflections on her writerly choices allow her to embed within the poem a second voice, at a narratorial remove. This voice is there to analyse her words ahead of time and to supply second opinions to her first instincts. The first instance of this occurs at the end of the first verse-paragraph. The text traverses between what she truly writes to Abelard and the numinous space of the unwritten, what she may be saying or thinking to herself:

In these deep solitudes and awful cells
Where heav'nly-pensive, contemplation dwells,
And ever-musing melancholy reigns;
What means this tumult in a Vestal's veins?
Why rove my thoughts beyond this last retreat?
Why feels my heart its long-forgotten heat?
Yet, yet I love! — From Abelard it came,
And Eloisa yet must kiss the name.¹⁸⁴

Eloisa can be seen narrating her own actions in third person as both the onlooker and first person protagonist of her story. The conjunction 'yet', repeated here in a stuttering hiccup, marks where, forgetting her reader for the first time, Eloisa says the word that she has harboured in the word 'rove' and the 'I' sounds that are consistently repeated in every line before it: 'love'. With the word 'love', she also utters her own subjective first person pronoun: not 'a Vestal's veins', not 'my thoughts', not 'my heart', but 'I'. But no sooner is this active

¹⁸⁴ *Eloisa to Abelard* in *TE*, II, pp.317-349, ll.1-8 (p.319). Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

voice reached than her efforts are thwarted. Eloisa suddenly realises that she has forgotten herself, the self that is committed to her religious duties and the self writing a letter. As a result, we see an abrupt transition to the third person following the em-dash. This second force seems to have remembered both Eloisa's reputation and the needs of the reader, whom Eloisa seems to have momentarily abandoned to write to and for herself. It is not yet clear to first time readers what exactly is troubling her. The silent interjection of this second reflective Eloisa helps explain the jump between the first two 'yets' with its own 'yet': 'And yet Eloisa must still kiss the name'. The ambiguity of what 'it' refers to, whether 'love' or the letter itself, indicates their strong association in her mind. We cannot tell whether it is truly love for Abelard or love for writing that has spurred Eloisa forward so recklessly. Abelard was after all the one to initiate contact with her and, through the writing of letters and private tuition, it was he who eventually taught her to love him, God, and perhaps even letters.¹⁸⁵ Eloisa's early fixation upon the name itself and the power the word has even independent of its referent shows Heloise's final epiphany taking form; she sees that the written form itself has conspired against her more noble intentions and, intriguingly, she lets it. While Abelard's name helps rouse repressed memories of life with him, it also indicates Eloisa's own agency as the inciter of her own unwilling memory.

Heloise's final realisation continues throughout Pope's poem. In order to further show the complexities of Eloisa's thinking, Pope selectively decelerates each turn of Eloisa's mind and each stage of information processing. Her initial questions asking why her feelings are suddenly being stirred after all this time spent apart on spiritual devotion seem at first to have an obvious answer: the arrival of his letter. We see this when her second moment of defecting between persons is shown through another em-dashed appositive not long afterwards:

Hide it, my heart, within that close disguise,
 Where mix'd with God's, his lov'd idea lies:
 O write it not, my hand—the name appears
 Already written—wash it out, my tears!
 In vain lost Eloisa weeps and prays,
 Her heart still dictates, and her hand obeys. (ll.11-16)

¹⁸⁵ *Letters to Abelard and Heloise*, trans. by Hughes, pp.11-13.

While not a clear switching of persons, the sudden change in sentence structure and tone mid-panic from an imperative and possessive noun pairing ('Oh write it not, my hand) to a more straightforward subject-verb structure ('The name appears | Already written') qualified by the suddenly measured 'appears' indicates a difference in voicing that is later solidified with the final couplet of the stanza: 'In vain lost Eloisa weeps and prays, | Her heart still dictates, and her hand obeys.' Unable to speak consistently as herself, this more cautious second voice enters in periodically to provide to the reader the courtesy of explanation while the other Eloisa enjoys the pleasures of writing out her predicament. One could argue that this is Pope's voice but perhaps the blurring of the lines between Pope and Eloisa-the-writer are intentional. Through this switch in tone, the narrative is shown to be involved in producing as well as retelling her crisis of faith. At times we are asked to fill the gaps in her narration by our own inductive strength: 'I can no more; by shame, by rage suppress, | Let tears, and burning blushes speak the rest' (ll.105-6). Yet even in such cases we are to recognise Eloisa's role as the conductor and writer of the very orchestra of emotional suggestion and mnemonics which her words dance to: 'I view my crime, but kindle at the view' (l.185). This kindling is a poetic fire as well as one of shame and guilt. As in the fifth letter, one wonders if her guilt comes not from baiting herself but rather from enjoying it. These underlying movements of writerly, compositional struggle show Pope using in-text revision to enhance and complicate Eloisa's character. Ultimately, Eloisa seems to be at odds with the different forces of narration competing to establish dominance in the letter. She is semantically, authoritatively, and hermeneutically 'lost' in a very literal way between what she 'dictates' and what she 'obeys'. These are both words that speak of an internalised tyranny, that of the voice she has learned through Abelard's teaching as a tutor, spiritual leader, husband, and lover, and that of her own agency as the jilted lover. There is also this third force of the fifth letter: her role as a writer and craftswoman.

This characterisation of Eloisa as a writer is important because it recasts her as the victim of both her fate and her own creativity. By foregrounding the fifth letter in this manner, Pope shows how in-text forms of reconsideration and doubt can also be seen in compositional terms as forms of revising. His attention to written labour, this self-erasing, self-moderating Eloisa, allows him to address one of the chief complaints against Ovid's heroic epistles:

[They were] often writ too pointedly for his Subject, and made his persons speak more Eloquently than the violence of their Passion would admit: so that he is frequently witty out of season: leaving the imitation of Nature and the cooler dictates of his Judgment for the false applause of Fancy.¹⁸⁶

Pope avoids this potential pitfall by making the idea that Eloisa may be too performative in her grief a point of discussion. It is with Heloise's final realization, the discovery that the process of penning these letters has itself been a catalyst to her self-destructive passion, that Pope frames the poem and his Eloisa. He suggests that it may not be that Eloisa loves Abelard or God too little, but that she loves writing too much. These feelings she describes may be both descriptions of something that happened to her and compositions she has herself created. We see that Pope's Eloisa is regularly distracted by her hands, the nature of letters themselves, and her inability to control her own thoughts. Moreover, these writings have the power of working upon her in the same way that Locke witnessed his own writings work upon him.

Equally importantly, we find that her portrayal is self-consciously engaged with theories of letter-writing that explore the prospect of a continued life in words described in the *Guardian* No. 172. Erasmus's *De conscribendis epistolis* and Juan Luis Vives' later work by the same name had revived the genre of familiar letters and rescued letter-writing from the monopoly of the highly formal mode which dominated medieval writing practice.¹⁸⁷ The sixteenth-century revival defined the letter as that which make the absent present, an idea which is repeated in Justus Lipsius' definition of it as a message of the mind to someone who is absent.¹⁸⁸ Letters were designed to be conversations on paper. As Seneca's Epistle 75 to Lucilius most notably states, such letters were ideally 'spontaneous and easy' even at the risk of carelessness. Seneca describes the character of the epistle as that of 'taste and elegance', adding that 'nothing therefore should be forced or unnatural, laboured, or affected, but every part of the composition [should] breathe, an easy, polite, and unconstrained freedom.'¹⁸⁹ This process of conversation, as we have already hinted earlier, was not just meant to fill a linguistic gap but a spiritual one, supposedly emitting not only the writer's opinion but their very spirit. It was believed that the breath of the reader could resuscitate the dormant thought

¹⁸⁶ John Dryden, 'Preface to Ovid's Epistles', in *Poems, 1649-1680*, ed. by E.N. Hooker, H.T. Swendenberg, and V.A. Dearing (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), pp.109-119, p.112.

¹⁸⁷ Ramie Targoff, *John Donne, Body and Soul* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), p.26.

¹⁸⁸ *Passions and Subjectivity in Early Modern Culture*, ed. by Brian Cummings and Freya Sierhuis (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), p.58.

¹⁸⁹ Seneca, *Epistles (Ad Lucilium epistulae morales)*, trans. Richard M. Grummere, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), II, p.137, quoted in Targoff, *John Donne, Body and Soul*, p.28.

in the letter and thus give absence presence. This is a feedback loop we see regularly in *Eloisa to Abelard*. Eloisa's seemingly abrupt changes in mood evoke a picture of her rereading her own words and finding herself repossessed by new thoughts that direct her towards different resolutions:

I hear thee, view thee, gaze o'er all thy charms,
And round thy phantom glue my clasping arms.
I wake—no more I hear, no more I view,
The phantom flies me, as unkind as you. (ll.233-236)

This manner in which the letter serves as a spiritual meeting point functions both ways. Not only does the writer transport their soul towards the addressee ('I hear thee, view thee [...]') but they feel the intimacy of the addressee's presence in writing to them ('the phantom') and anticipating their responses ('The phantom flies me, as unkind as you'). Petrarch specifies that, in the case of written letters, the writer must both 'envisage the person he is writing to' and 'the state of mind in which the recipient will read what he proposes to write'.¹⁹⁰ Hughes' frequent reminders of the importance of knowing Heloise and Abelard's states of mind at the beginning of his translations thus serve the more practical purpose of aligning the readers' souls to appropriately receive the lettered souls being sent. As if in reaction to this necessity, Eloisa's writing is similarly preoccupied with whether Abelard will respond to them; whether another lover will take their mantle after her and continue her legacy; and whether her previous written selves have conveyed her passion accurately. By conveying Eloisa's worries in this way Pope introduces a third and perhaps the more powerful actor among these 'turns' led by 'Grace and Nature, Virtue and Passion': the act of composition itself. Eloisa's portrayal as a reviser thus enhances her complexity as the poem's titular heroine. She is both grappling with her fate and attempting to rewrite it.

Rebecca Ferguson has argued that the perceived irreconcilability between these different values of 'Grace and Nature, Virtue and Passion' is neither an expression of surrender on Eloisa's part nor a symptom of confusion; rather, Ferguson perceives it as an indication of Eloisa's sustained faith in a higher form of being where such a union is possible, where all 'Grace and Nature, Virtue and Passion' can be achieved together. The centrality of the fifth letter to Pope's argument might lend this conclusion a more complex sense of

¹⁹⁰ *Letters from Petrarch*, trans. by Morris Bishop (Bloomington and London: Indiana University press, 1966), p.20, quoted in Targoff, *John Donne, Body and Soul*, p.37.

resolution. It seems that to interpret this struggle as the consequence of Eloisa's aspirations for an as yet unreachable moral ideal would discount the knowingness and joy with which Eloisa undertakes the task of not only writing out her situational deadlock, but also understanding and crafting her own story from the inside out. It is important to remember that the tradition of conversational familiar letters privileged form over matter. Having nothing to talk about does not excuse the letter-writer. In fact *The Enemy of Idleness* treats letters written for the desire to write (rather than the conveyance of any particular message) as a category in and of itself, a remedy for the urge to write or to travel, at least in spirit.¹⁹¹ Eloisa herself can be said to have written for many reasons. There is the most immediate purpose of fulfilling her need for intimacy from both her primary nominal addressees: Abelard and herself. It is also conceivable that she had ulterior motives. Perhaps she wished to use that epistolary function to convey her story out into posterity. However, we would be naïve not to suspect that there exists at the same time another purpose to her letters that is both simpler and more psychologically complex than the previous two: the desire to write for the sake of writing. It could be argued that while mediating within and between the principles of 'Grace and Nature', 'Virtue and Passion', Eloisa becomes enamoured by the potential for a stern opposition and is tempted to build one, even if the forces described are not necessarily antithetical. Dramatising her own self-delusion seems to be its own gratification. This conflict is expressed most potently in her writing style. Even in her passion, she struggles to move beyond the balancing mechanisms of antithesis, parallelisms, and juxtapositions: 'Not touch'd, but rapt; not waken'd, but inspir'd!' (l.212). These are themselves stylistic symbols of her situational double bind and ones with their own hypnotic appeal. By thus characterising Eloisa as not only a heroine but also a composer, Pope suggests that her moral conundrum is also a compositional one. It is not only that she cannot choose between Abelard and God but that the process of choosing itself has become attractive to her. By prolonging her deliberation, this constant changing of mind and voice, Pope both allows himself the space to humour his own love for writing and re-writing, and uses his signature appetite for revision to construct a more psychologically complex Eloisa.

Pope's interest in letter-writing

¹⁹¹William Fulwood, *The Enemy of Idleness* (London: Leonard Maylard, 1568), pp.72-73.

Pope turns regularly throughout the poem to this final realization that Eloisa's intentions — what she 'design'd to persuade' — have been hijacked by a different sensibility she is unable to control: her pleasure in writing itself. This pleasure, or at least Pope's understanding of it, can be seen in Pope's early letters. Pope's correspondence includes a great variety of letters. Some are written with deliberate showmanship while others, more often than not those unpublished, are composed less overtly self-servingly and often in haste. In his preface to the quarto edition of his 1737 letters Pope reminds readers to keep in mind at what age and to whom he was writing each letter and then cautions them, not without a touch of irony, to judge other moments where his writing might displease as 'Emanations of the Heart' rather than 'Efforts of the Genius'.¹⁹² Pope's attempts to control his public persona through lettered personas, for instance in *Arbuthnot*, bear an affinity to the control Eloisa attempts to take of her image through her writing — a mixture of confessional self-disclosure and calculated literary-artistic motions. She too, like Pope, is actively reviving friendships and coping with absence through letters and Pope rightly constructs her as her own knowing literary agent.

Pope's letter to Caryll, dated December 1712, which is printed in Pope's edition of his correspondence, is one of the documents that is most indicative of the poet's conception of his own creative process, not least as it pertains to his thoughts on the writing of letters. We can find the first indication that Pope had begun thinking of using his letters for publication in his preceding message to Caryll, dated November 1712, in which Pope requests Caryll to look through the letters he had previously sent and return any that seem worthy of preservation. Pope promises to return the messages by courier once he is finished with them, explaining that he requires them in case the 'several thoughts which I throw out that way in the freedom of my soul [...] may be of use to me in a design I am lately engaged in'.¹⁹³ The editors of the correspondence speculate that the particular 'design' Pope has in mind here might be the essays he had committed himself to write for *The Guardian* at that time; however, there is as yet no proof of where, if at all, the epistles were used —or if they may have included *Guardian* No. 172. Written in response to Caryll's generous handling and return of the poet's correspondence, the December 1712 letter reflects on how the review of those letters Caryll marked as noteworthy has occasioned 'a kind of examination of

¹⁹² *Correspondence*, I, p. xxxvii.

¹⁹³ *Correspondence*, I, p.156.

conscience' for Pope by confronting the poet 'from time to time [with] the true and undisguised state of [his] mind'.¹⁹⁴

Here we can turn again to Locke. Locke describes how essential letter-writing is to education:

The writing of letters has so much to do in all the Occurrences of Human Life, that no Gentleman can avoid shewing himself in this kind of writing. Occasions will daily force him to make use of his Pen, which, besides the Consequences, that, in his Affairs, his well or ill managing of it often draws after it, always lays him open to a severer Examination of his Breeding, Sense, and Abilities, than oral Discourses; whose transient Faults dying for the most part with the Sound, that gives them Life, and so not subject to a strict Review, more easily escape Observation and Censure.¹⁹⁵

Locke argues that writers need to be deliberate in their self-presentation in letters because these kinds of 'talking on paper' will invite greater scrutiny of character and skill than regular verbal communication. It was the job of the reader to recognise moments of genuine 'emanations of the heart', as Pope describes his letters in his preface to the 1737 quarto edition, and so distinguish the writer's true character from the dressings and disguises that, as we have seen explained by Johnson, formed epistolary convention. The quality of the reader was therefore integral to the recognition of the writer's own character. Consequently, we must be mindful that *Eloisa and Abelard* is also a testament to Eloisa's qualities as a reader of herself and of Abelard, as well as Pope's. Her identity is thus formed intersubjectively both within the subjectivity of her different selves, and those of her perceived images of Abelard and Pope. Most importantly, her actions have a double meaning. Because she is both the heroine and the writer, her changes of mind are simultaneously compositional changes and changes of heart. Because she is both the reader of Abelard's letters and his lover, her interest in his name bespeaks both genuine heartbreak and readerly intrigue.

Keeping this self-exploratory aspect of letters in mind, it is easy to see why Pope's response to Caryll holds more philosophical resonances than we may expect. Pope begins the letter by expressing his gratefulness and surprise at Caryll's choice of preserved letters which, while unavailable to us, we can imagine belonged, at least in part, among the less polished pieces. It can be inferred that these letters reacquainted him with parts of his mind he would rather hide, or in Eloisa's word 'blot' out or 'wash'. The value of these returned letters for

¹⁹⁴Ibid., I, pp.160-161

¹⁹⁵John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, ed. by J.W. Yolton and J.S. Yolton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p.243.

Pope is that they provide a test of his mental character. They are a means of assessing how he communicates his state of mind and how it communicates itself. More importantly, they reveal the way in which his manner of writing shaped those perceived and existing states, states that Pope believes could be designed to showcase his nobility of character through revision.

After explaining to Caryll how touched he is at the care with which more lowly letters have been collated for values he himself did not see, Pope confesses that there were many instances when rereading his letters where he was presented with ‘thoughts just warm from the brain without any polishing or dress, the very *déshabille* of the understanding’. He reflects that many of these ‘thoughts’ would have ordinarily caused him great ‘shame’ from both literary and moral standpoints had he not been ‘more desirous to be thought honest than prudent’.¹⁹⁶ While the seemingly gratuitous use of the French ‘*déshabille*’ in this case suggests that these supposedly ‘careless’ moments are themselves not entirely artistically unaffected, the value of this letter to our study is that it openly acknowledges that Pope’s lettered ‘honesty’ is artificial on different levels. The natural point of comparison to these forms of dress would be Pope’s statement that ‘Expression is the dress of thought’ in *An Essay on Criticism* (l.318). However, I would like to suggest the usefulness of these ideas of lettered honesty as a critical background for Eloisa’s self-reflections when she is confronted with her own state of mind in various states of undress. They provide a background for the psychological complexity embedded in the way in which Pope crafts Eloisa’s own self-presentation using repeated references to the composition process.

Indeed it is in this letter to Caryll that Pope asks questions about how this metaphorical ‘dress’ came to be. Pope vents his frustration at how his sketches of friendship ‘give as faint imperfect images of it, as the little Landscips we commonly see in black and white do of a beautiful country: they can represent but a very small part of it and that deprived of the life and lustre of nature’. He finds that this faintness results, ironically, from over-application rather than from lack of effort:

I perceive that the more I endeavoured to render manifest the real affection and value I ever had for you, I did but injure it by representing less and less of it, as glasses which are designed to make an object more clear, generally contract it.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁶ *Correspondence*, I, p.160.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, I, p.161.

The source of frustration in this process lies in the task of making his writing representative of his intentions, intentions that themselves are only properly revealed by the ill-fit of the linguistic dress in which he tries to communicate them. By over-writing he somehow underwrites, but this act of over-writing also proves necessary to discover the shape of his thoughts. This is part of the back-and-forth we perceive in Eloisa's voice. This may be why she feels the need to switch between voices and edit her previous wordings repeatedly. In this way, her turns of thought can also be read as an effort of trial and error and frustration. It may be that, like Pope, the more she endeavours to write out her feelings, the more she realises her inability to do so. As a result, her passion and energy gets redirected to the task of writing and the true emotion that first prompted her to read Abelard's letter and write her own is slowly forgotten. Instead of looking at her 'object' of affection through the 'glasses' of her writing ability she becomes distracted by the inadequacy of the glasses themselves. Unable to reach the eloquence she desires, she eventually calls for 'all-eloquent' death (l.337) and then writes herself into a grave (l.345) in the hopes that 'some future Bard' may continue her compositional endeavours. What is significant here is that it's not clear whether her final passing of the baton to the bard is prompted by emotional exhaustion or the dead-end of writer's block.

Eloisa the reviser

Given this background concerning disguise and dress in lettered personalities, we can see why Eloisa's movements between modes of self-address retain a certain dramatic quality recalling the stage as much as they do a letter. Hoyt Trowbridge observes that the heroic epistle, as it was described by Ovid, was interpreted by Dryden, Joseph Trapp, and Warton as a poem that was intrinsically closely related to the stage, something that also dealt with 'feigned persons' through which the poet must speak.¹⁹⁸ This is perhaps partially why it becomes easy to forget when reading *Eloisa* that this is not a speech. Even though Pope moors us back periodically to the fact this is a letter, we cannot escape the certain performative quality it has. This dramatic quality, however, is key to understanding the cycle

¹⁹⁸ Hoyt Trowbridge, 'Pope's *Eloisa* and the *Heroides* of Ovid', *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, 9 (1973), 11-34 (p.14).

of self-manipulation and self-revision that defines Pope's Eloisa. She is re-enacting, in one sense, her own despair, but she is also drawing from that of others beyond her own literary tradition. She recognises that '[she] ha[s] not yet forgot[ten] [her]self to stone' (l.24). Yet, in so doing, she consciously answers for both the Heloise in Hughes' translation ('You have not made me Marble by changing my Habit') and the nun in *Il Penseroso* ('Forget thy self to Marble').¹⁹⁹ She cannot fully entomb herself into the realms of tragic fantasy. Her multiple narratorial voices remember her other literary selves and sisters, effectively disrupting the excursion to pure fantasy.

Pope thus pulls from Hughes the sense that both lovers' struggles to commit themselves to their religious asceticism are expressed in the tension between their writerly intentions and written outcomes. We know from the letters that writing plays a central role in and is in fact the initial catalyst of their affair. It is the ether of written portrayal that not only presents their love to us but to one another. Abelard states that his first attempt to woo Heloise was 'to write a Billet-doux'. He 'hoped, if ever she permitted [his] absent self to entertain her, she would read with Pleasure those Breathings of [his] Heart'.²⁰⁰ Signs of his enamoured state of mind are also first discerned through a trail of composition rather than through eye-witness accounts:

My Scholars discover'd it first; they saw I had no longer that Vivacity of Thought to which all things were easie: I could now do nothing but write Verses to sooth my Passion: I quitted *Aristotle* and his dry Maxims, to practice the Precepts of the more ingenious *Ovid*.²⁰¹

Their feelings and changes of mind are as much read as felt. Eloisa's attention to this third force of writing and the way in which her love for writing goads her into further self-pitying despair mirrors Hughes' Abelard's turn to Ovid. Indeed, the Ovidian concept of *akrasia* is a useful term for describing their situations. We see it explained in *Metamorphoses* Book VII: *video meliora probaque, deteriora sequor* ('I see the better and approve it, but I follow the worse').²⁰² Eloisa knows what she should have done when finding a letter addressed to someone else and she takes a certain pleasure in knowingly acting against her knowledge, in enjoying the letter as a lover, and perhaps even a reader. We must remember that when Hughes opens his account of the 'Lives, Amours, and Misfortunes' of Heloise and Abelard,

¹⁹⁹ *Letters to Abelard and Heloise*, trans. by Hughes, p.129 and John Milton, 'Il Penseroso', in *The Shorter Poems*, ed. by B. Kiefer Lewalski and E. Haan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp.32-36, l.42 (p.33).

²⁰⁰ *Letters to Abelard and Heloise*, trans. by Hughes., p.89.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, pp.92-93.

²⁰² Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. by Frank Justus Miller, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University 2014), I, p.343.

which he had ‘extracted’ from Bayle before Pope could extract them from him, he specifies that Heloise ‘has a surprising Quickness of Wit, an incredible Memory, and a considerable share of Learning’: ‘the Wit and Learning of Heloise was every where discours’d of’.²⁰³ Her knowledge and academic inclinations are to be taken into account when considering her complicity in her own despair, her awareness of her own self-sabotage. These layers of self-reflexiveness form an integral part of the body of the poem in a way that has not been explored in detail for its allusions to these philosophies of letter-writing. Pope’s career-long interest in revision and composition plays a key role here as Abelard and Eloisa’s love affair is both birthed and buried by letters. Pope’s portrayal of Eloisa as a composer only complicates her state of *akrasia* by suggesting that writing and re-writing is also a pleasure that she struggles to give up.

In this way, Pope’s retelling of the story of Heloise and Abelard implicitly weighs in on the provenance of the word ‘composition’ in Abelard’s first description of Heloise in the French letters: ‘a young Creature (ah *Philintus!*) formed in a Prodigality of Nature, to shew Mankind a finish’d Composition’.²⁰⁴ Abelard’s image of Heloise as a completed work of nature, whole and self-sufficient, is shown to be at odds with her written self-manifestations in Pope’s version. Pope’s Eloisa finds herself repeatedly disillusioned by the way her words unwittingly betray her secret desires. Ironically, she is forced to betray herself by virtue of her very completeness as a composition. The problem is not so much that she is torn between Abelard and God, but that her writing, like Abelard’s changed scholarship before her, betrays her guilt and impiety, even as it aims to provide closure and even as she attempts to revise it. Writing and re-writing her situation allows her to bask in self-pitying self-gratification through quasi-dramatic monologue. Whereas Abelard, castrated and incomplete, can deny his written pen, Eloisa, a finish’d physical composition, cannot hide her feelings. What is nominally *Eloisa to Abelard* is also simply a battle of Eloisas and their competing dictations: Eloisa the disciple of God; Eloisa the wife of Abelard; Eloisa the disciple of Abelard; Eloisa the lover of both; but also first and foremost Eloisa the writer and reviser, before and beyond her imagined Bard, Pope. As a half-form that is not fully the young bard’s yet not fully Eloisa’s, the poem constitutes a hybrid in-between. It is lost in the process of developing a distinct identity. This enables it to revel in its createdness, a factor that by acknowledging its own artifice becomes a champion of its sincerity.

²⁰³ *Letters to Abelard and Heloise*, trans. by Hughes, p.11-13.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p.88.

A comparison to Sappho

This is not the only poem where Pope uses allusions to composition practice to humanise his speakers. The role of the heroine as a writer and reviser is also a talking point in Pope's first sustained effort at the heroic epistle, the fifteenth of Ovid's *Heroides*, 'Sappho to Phaon'. Here, too, Pope alludes to the heroine speaker's writerly inclinations in order to give her greater depth. The poem vacillates between Sappho's anguish at being rejected by Phaon and the ebb and flow of her continued passion for him. Stranded between cross-currents of grief and desire, anger and pain, Sappho's presence is felt not only as the heroine, but more importantly (as we are continually reminded throughout the course of the poem) as the 'Writer' of the poem. Her implorations for literary if not companion-ly recognition — 'Can Phaon's Eyes forget his Sappho's Hand?', 'To me What Nature has in Charms deny'd, | Is well by Wit's more lasting Charms supply'd' — impose an urgency to be validated, understood, and perhaps most importantly, read: all desires that not only align her more closely with what may be Pope's view of himself, but also heartbreakingly contrast with the absence and silence of her addressee, Phaon, who could easily choose not to read it or, perhaps worse, fail to understand it.²⁰⁵ While worrying about whether or not she needs to prove herself to Phaon, she remarks that thus far her wit has been able to win her widespread recognition. Having abandoned her usual lyric tunes for an elegiac form, Sappho's 'Hand' speaks not only of handwriting, but also of a sense of a continuing *her* that is carried forward regardless of written form, and the need to remake her new self post-Phaon. She asks him whether he can recognise the signature of her voice entombed in these words: 'See, while I write, my Words are lost in Tears; | The less my Sense, the more my Love appears' (ll.109-110). In this way, Sappho feels her rejection from Phaon more acutely as a writer and written entity. Unlike Eloisa, who is moved to resurrect her love by the mnemonic, persuasive powers of Abelard's name alone, Phaon, Sappho fears, can recall neither 'Name' nor 'hand': 'Must then her Name the wretched Writer prove? | To thy Remembrance lost, as to thy Love!' (ll.3-4). Whereas Abelard's name has an uncontrollable associative power directing Eloisa's mind to its forgotten woes, Sappho fears her name and voice have no staying power in his mind. Being

²⁰⁵ *Sappho to Phaon*, in *TE*, I, pp.391-404, l.2 (p.393), ll.37-36 (p.395). Further references to this edition will be given are quotations in the text.

heretofore purely a lyric poet, she tries to save face by moving to elegiac forms, attempting different persuasive techniques to penetrate Phaon's mind. His absence is quantified by his inaccessibility as an addressee on a literary level; her inability to keep his attention becomes her failure as a linguist and persuader and so she presents herself as much as a poet scorned as a woman. When her lyrics are unable to win him she grasps at other numbers, other techniques, until, giving up, she resorts to suicide, hoping at least in death she can create a lasting impression on him as the waves under his ferryman's oars. At last, she begins contemplating silence as the most powerful tool: 'The less my Sense, the more my Love appears' (l.110). Hiding her sense in the ocean of her tears, her unprinted passion enables her to convey herself better and impress herself better upon him by ceasing to exist.

Pope's *Eloisa* takes this role of writer-heroine further than Sappho by recognising her place within a production process. In her final (written) moments she calls forth another poet to ghost write her woes. In this sense, her composition is not only 'to Abelard' but also 'to' a wider audience, an unknown readership that she could win over. She recognises posterity as a repository to validate her feelings where Abelard cannot. Sappho, on discovering she cannot ever win over Phaon, and being distraught that she must continue without his validation, describes herself as reverting to a statue form in a reversal of the Pygmalion-effect: 'Like some sad Statue, speechless, pale, I stood; | Grief chill'd my Breast, and stopp'd my freezing Blood' (ll.125-126). *Eloisa*, on the other hand, believes in the longevity of her word and is hopeful of a wider audience. She structures her epistle as an awakening. It is a resurrection that, whilst ultimately forced into silence by the scarcity of pages, ends with the hope that she will be rewritten once again by another. The power, that essential epistolary function that *Eloisa* indicates the letters themselves have in communicating herself to Abelard and her readers, perhaps speaks to Donne's notion in his epistle to Sir Henry Wotton that 'more than kisses, letters mingle Soules.'²⁰⁶ Donne positions this letter, as *Eloisa* does, as the site of intimacy and as a substitute for physical presence; for him, too, the letter can function as a conduit that aids the migration of souls to one another just as kisses were believed to do in classical thought. Whilst working as a preacher, Donne wrote a letter to the Countess of Montgomery stating that while written words 'remain and are permanent', words spoken 'vanisheth' and he is therefore unable to assist her in her request for a copy of one of his

²⁰⁶ John Donne, *John Donne: The Major Works*, ed. by John Carey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p.47.

sermons.²⁰⁷ The permanence he gestures to here is described not as a physical permanence — the greater durability of the text than the sound — but that which is provided by the reader. He describes written things as ‘dead carcasses’ when left alone but things that when heard or read can be ‘inanimated’ — that is, in effect resuscitated — by listeners and readers, and he adds that when this occurs ‘that soul that inanimates them, never departs from them’. In this way he describes how, in the case of a sermon, ‘The Spirit of God that dictates them in the speaker or writer, and is present in his tongue or hand, meets himself again (as we meet ourselves in a glass) in the eyes and hearts of the hearers and readers’. As her own reader, Eloisa is seen resurrecting and rewriting parts of herself by correcting and adjusting her arguments upon rereading. In the final coda, however, this task of renewal, of reviewing and reframing her story is passed forward to an unknown posterity.

This is again, in part, a testament to the poem’s Ovidian roots. Early Modern Ovidianism was informed by Ovid’s interest in the transmission and survival of his texts beyond the fragility of their physical forms and his own human mortality. The question of how his texts will be re-embodied by a future readership and a different context haunts his work, portraying immortality as a prospect of horror and fascination and the idea of oblivion as a lasting peace.²⁰⁸ Ovid’s physical exile from his work and readership was considered kindred to the temporal distance between humanist imitators and their classical sources. R. Alden Smith distinguishes three primary ‘poetic strata’ in Ovid’s *Heroides*: the mythic or intertextual level which participates in a poetic tradition; the ‘fantastic or psychological’ level, in which the myth is filtered through the letter-writers’ own affectivity; and the literary form of genre, the means through which these ‘fully psychological, mythical’ characters communicate to their readers.²⁰⁹ Smith contends that these three functions work inseparably in the Ovidian corpus to generate the personae of the letters. We can render a similar distinction between Eloisa’s relationship with the story of Heloise, her psychological state, and the letter form. However, Pope’s work also diverges from this structure in the fact that Eloisa appears aware of it. This psychological filtration system which Ovid creates seems to be oblivious to the heroines themselves in the *Heroides* and only privy to their readers.²¹⁰

²⁰⁷ John Donne, *John Donne: Selected Letters*, ed. by P.M. Oliver (New York: Routledge, 2002), p.89.

²⁰⁸ Colin Burrow, ‘Re-Embodying Ovid: Renaissance Afterlives’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Ovid*, ed. by Philip Hardie, Cambridge Companions to Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp.301–19.

²⁰⁹ Alden Smith ‘Fantasy, Myth, and Love Letters: Text and Tale in Ovid’s ‘Heroides’’, *Arethusa*, 27.2 (1994), 247-273 (p.247).

²¹⁰ Smith, ‘Fantasy, Myth, and Love Letters’, p.259.

Eloisa differs in that she is very much aware of her hypocrisies and opposing emotions. Even her sobering moments of self-analysis — ‘but whence arose that pray’r? | Sprung it from piety, or from despair?’ (ll.179-180) — are unable to allay or pacify her state of mind:

Tis sure the hardest science to forget!
How shall I lose the sin, yet keep the sense,
And love th' offender, yet detest th' offence?
How the dear object from the crime remove,
Or how distinguish penitence from love?
Unequal task! [...] (ll.190-195)

While she claims to be attempting to forget Abelard, the way in which she groups her ideas creates unnecessary parallels between what she believes she should choose and what she knows she should not. She thus distracts herself from differentiating her love for Abelard and her penitence for her sins, all the while being aware of her own hypocrisy. The way she describes her situation in balanced pairs reduces what is in fact an ‘unequal’ comparison (rather than an ‘unequal task’) into a misleadingly memorable play on sound: ‘sin’ and ‘sense’, ‘offender’ and ‘offence’. Her use of the word ‘unequal’ betrays her own calculatedness in positing her dilemma through these plays on words. The fundamental conflict of interest between ‘Eloisa the Writer’ and ‘Eloisa the Heroine’ remains ever-present. She is ready to reframe her situation for the sake of a more pleasing poetic line even if this pushes her further into her lovelorn misery. Her linguistic pleasure in articulating her situation in a pleasing and balanced form is, in this instance, prioritised over all else. This depiction of her conflict of interest as both the writer and the protagonist further nuances her character. Benjamin Boyce has observed that ‘Pope sometimes invented imaginary antitheses in order to give life to a creature not in himself very complex or interesting.’²¹¹ By reframing Pope’s delight in antitheses as an extension of his interest in revision we can see how it gives not only life but personality and character to Eloisa. We cannot help but see that her self-sabotage comes from a place of knowledge. Eloisa knows full well that the longer she dwells upon her predicament, the more she has to compose and write, and the more a future poet has to work with. Indeed, we might even suspect her of having silently revised her true feelings

²¹¹ Benjamin Boyce, *The Character Sketches in Pope's Poems* (Durham, N. C., 1962), p.116

into a more rhetorically pleasing alternative. Eloisa's voice is thus no longer just the voice of a heroine, it is also the creative, compositional voice of a versifier. What is more, these silent references to the rhetorical strengths of the poem itself add to rather than detract from Eloisa's characterisation. She is not only the tragic protagonist, but also the ambitious writer, someone who shares Pope's own desire for classical status.

Eloisa and the Bard

In this way, we see Eloisa silently acknowledge that her words are both the creative act and its physical manifestation, and that these may be slightly different things. Pope's role as an in-between agent emphasises this potential rift. The popularity and rich history of the story frees Pope of any pressing need to prove Eloisa's love or to provide an explanatory narrative of their affairs. This gives him the licence to focus deeply on her state of mind and on Heloise's realisation that her ideas were not entirely sourced in her memories themselves. Pope makes this more evident by showing how the trauma of the lovers' separation lives on in Eloisa's struggles to recollect enough memories to rewrite their story. The labours of the compositional process, the decision-making struggles that inform writing and that are largely forgotten in its published form, are triggered to resurface in fragments as Eloisa argues with herself to reach a conclusion. To understand this on a critical level it is useful to consider Locke's remarks on how the practice of rephrasing clarifies thought:

There are few, I believe, who have not observed in themselves or others, That what in one way of proposing was very obscure, another way of expressing it, has made very clear and intelligible: Though afterward the Mind found little difference in the Phrases, and wondered why one failed to be understood more than the other.²¹²

Eloisa's repeated turns to the same essential struggles in different terms indicate an ongoing learning process. We see Eloisa not only re-reading but editing and correcting her own thoughts. She cries 'tear me from my God!' at the end of one stanza, only to immediately recoil in guilt and remember what her sentences have forgotten: 'No, fly me, fly me! Far as Pole from Pole; | Rise Alps between us!' (ll.291-292). Without Abelard to provoke her response she must be her own Socratic voice. In the words of Pope when describing his

²¹²*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, p.8.

attempts at editing Wycherley, she needs to be the ‘midwife’ of her own ideas.²¹³ Each narratorial voice works to move away from the prompts of Abelard’s letter and the trance she succumbs to upon hearing his name. Eloisa has a desire to create her own lifeworld on her own terms. Given the fame of the story, the only point still in contention and therefore the only point still in Eloisa’s power is the telling. For this reason, we can read these shiftings of stance not only for their reflection of writerly pleasure, as Heloise suggests, but also for how they function as a means for Eloisa to discover her own agency. By reframing her story as something she has written and created, Pope allows us to read the poem as both the implementation and narration of an editing process.

What is most interesting, however, is the role of the imagined poet in Eloisa’s writing, editing, and thinking process, the fact that her ‘heavn’ly pensive contemplation’ (l.2) at last leaves a ‘pensive ghost’ (l.367). While we are obviously aware that the poem is written by Pope, we are still left to wonder if the poem calls to be read as a version of Eloisa’s story written by the poet she imagines, ‘Pope’ not Pope, or one written by Eloisa the character herself. After having worked to establish her own voice between the turns of ‘Grace and Nature, Virtue and Passion’, the poem leaves us to wonder if we have not been reading the future poet’s voice all this time. That is to say, whether this is not Pope-as-the-imagined-poet or Pope-as-‘Pope’ rather than Pope-as-Eloisa. Is Eloisa the nominal writer or is it the ‘Bard’? Is the imagined future poet she describes a character in themselves distinct from the actual poet — Pope? Perhaps we are to imagine the speaker as being somewhere in between what Eloisa would like him to be and the equal craftsman he is. We are left to follow Eloisa’s lead and rethink the moments of third person interjection once we finally reach the poem’s enigmatic ending, which might be said to carry something of the final shift in perspective that ends *Lycidas*:

The well-sung woes will soothe my pensive ghost;
He best can paint ’em who shall feel ’em most.²¹⁴ (l.367)

This is in fact another nod to Hughes’ preface:

These Letters therefore being truly written by the Persons themselves, whose Names they bear, and who were both remarkable for their Genius and Learning, as well as by a most extravagant Passion for each other, are every where full of Sentiments of the Heart, which are not to be imitated in a feign’d Story, and Touches of

²¹³ *Correspondence*, I, p.2.

²¹⁴ John Milton, ‘Lycidas’, in *The Shorter Poems*, pp.50-58, ll.367-368 (p.58).

Nature, much more moving than any which could flow from the Pen of a Writer of Novels, or enter into the Imagination of any one who had not felt the like Emotions and Distresses.²¹⁵

The ending transforms Eloisa from a self-sufficient force contained within her own echo-chamber of thought to a numinous entity vicariously gaining shape, colour, and secondary artistic manifestation in another person's thoughts upon her own writing. However, she is nonetheless intended to be read as having real 'Sentiments of the Heart, which are not to be imitated in a feign'd Story'. Pope echoes this language in a letter to Martha Blount on the subject, in which he writes that she is meant to have 'some Breathings of the Heart'.²¹⁶ This is perhaps quoted directly from Abelard's first letter to Eloisa that 'she would read with Pleasure those Breathings of my Heart.'²¹⁷ The conscious letteredness of the poem and Eloisa's frequent asides to the fact that she is writing may provide a clue to reconciling both Eloisa's and Pope's authority here. Eloisa's desire to keep a correspondence with Abelard lies in the desire to preserve intimacy with him by living vicariously through her written words. In this way her motives are not very different from those of Sappho. However, Eloisa takes this process further by reflecting to a greater extent on the nature of writing. It is writing which, as we learn in this final couplet, gives Pope, who is undoubtedly extremely aware of his lack of amatory experience, authority to contribute to the tale regardless. This is a level of authority he describes Eloisa as mirroring in her grasping for some form of agency between Abelard and God. Like Pope, the physicality of her love is intensely concentrated in her acts of writing, which becomes their shared love language. Pope impresses on readers a sense of this epistle's letteredness more than in any of his other epistles. He concentrates on the practice of writing down and speaking to the addressee with a self-awareness not evident at the same intensity in his other verse epistles. His other speakers tend to lose themselves in their own poetry rather than be distracted and absorbed by the way it becomes.

Indeed, the ending of *Eloisa* actively invites a response in a way that the similarly sympathetic coda that ends the 'Elegy to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady' does not. The Lady is first introduced as a vision of a 'beck'ning ghost' which 'invites' the speaker and 'points to yonder glade'; the speaker recognises her but is confused as to why she still bleeds, and why the sword that has caused her death still pierces her chest.²¹⁸ The reader in turn is

²¹⁵ *Letters to Abelard and Heloise*, trans. by Hughes, p.i.

²¹⁶ *Correspondence*, I, p.338.

²¹⁷ *Letters to Abelard and Heloise*, trans. by Hughes, p.89.

²¹⁸ 'Elegy to the Memory of An Unfortunate Lady', in *TE*, II, pp.362-368, ll.1-2 (p.362). Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

confused as to the relationship between the speaker and the lady, which, while hinted to be one of intimacy, is left undisclosed until the said coda. This, as Reuben Brower notes, subverted the expectation that a heroic epistle should discuss a public affair and led many eighteenth-century readers to guess at the identity of the lady.²¹⁹ Whereas the coda in *Eloisa to Abelard* invites further additions to the tradition from another poet, the 'Elegy' uses its final ending to mark the poem as a sepulchre for a tale we do not know and that will therefore remain only partially preserved. When the speaker finally introduces himself as the 'poet', he diminishes to some extent any insinuation until then that he may have been a friend or lover. This is perhaps where the importance of the word 'memory' in the title comes into play. Being the last living memory linking the Lady to the reader, the poet has the power to immortalise some trace of her experience in language. It is through this role that he too gains authority and recognition as a poet. The closed knowledge system that the 'Elegy' thus constructs contrasts greatly with *Eloisa* where the sense of identity Eloisa builds for herself relies on a network of intersubjective validation within and beyond her own narratorial sphere.

This intense focus on the written in *Eloisa* is likely why one of the aspects of Heloise's first letter that is conspicuously missing from Pope's verse, and explicitly mentioned by Geoffrey Tillotson in his introduction to the poem as being so, is the scene where Eloisa is comforted by the sight of Abelard's portrait.²²⁰ This section, which would have conceivably been an attractive addition to Pope's poem, is likely discarded because of its turn away from the medium of the letter which dominates his retelling:

I have your picture in my room, I never pass by it without stopping to look at it; and yet, when you were present with me, I scarce ever cast my eyes upon it: If a Picture, which is but a mute Representation of an Object, can give such Pleasure, what cannot Letters inspire? They have Souls, they can speak, they have in them all that Force which expresses the Transports of the Heart; they have all the Fire of our Passions, they can raise them as much as if the Persons themselves were present; they have all the Softness and Delicacy of Speech, and Sometimes a Boldness of Expression even beyond it.²²¹

Although absent in the poem itself, the missing section and Pope's true role within the poem is hinted at in a letter to Lady Mary Montagu, which we know was probably originally dated 18 August 1716. It appeared in Pope's own editions of his correspondence (1737) under the

²¹⁹ Reuben Brower, *Alexander Pope: The Poetry of Allusion* (London; New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp.63-66.

²²⁰ *TE*, II, pp.297-298, n.5.

²²¹ *Letters to Abelard and Heloise*, trans. by Hughes, p.116.

title 'To a Lady Abroad'.²²² Pope's prose here contains many resonances of the missing passage from the first letter and Heloise and Abelard's relationship as it is told in Hughes' history of them. The prose begins by structuring itself around a conceit comparing the letters he is to write to her to a painting in which 'Not a feature will be soften'd or any advantageous Light employd to make the Ugly thing a little less hideous'. Like Heloise, Pope describes his letters in painterly terms and emphasises the honesty of them with erotic subtones: 'I must be content to show my taste in Life as I do my taste in Painting, by loving to have as little Drapery as possible.' His descriptions of his 'Esteem at first sight' for her bewitching 'Reason and Virtue' echo how Abelard was mesmerised by Heloise's wit in Hughes' translation. Pope's sadness at the 'unhappy Distance at which we correspond' and their 'State of Separation' reflects that of the lovers as well. Moreover, Pope's prose echoes Heloise's when he talks of passing Montagu's house: 'I never since pass by the house, but with the same Sort of Melancholy that we feel upon seeing the Tomb of a Friend; which only serves to put us in mind of What [*sic*] we have lost.' The comparison is especially appropriate considering that Pope kept a portrait of Montagu in his house and Montagu, like Eloisa, had disobeyed her father by eloping with Edward Wortley Montagu in 1712. Montagu was known for her Stoic philosophy, something Heloise describes in her letters as being introduced to her by Abelard, and she was likely introduced to it by her tutor Bishop Gilbert Burnet.²²³ The evidence only mounts when we consider that Pope seems to hint to Montagu in another letter that the last lines of *Eloisa to Abelard* concern her: 'There are a few things in them but what you have already seen, except the Epistle of Eloisa to Abelard; in which you will find one passage, that I can't tell whether to wish you should understand, or not?'²²⁴ Considering that their relationship dissolved into a vicious enmity before Pope's correspondence was published, it is unsurprising that he removed her name from the letter. However, the parallels between 'To a Lady Abroad' and points made in Hughes' letters that did not appear in Pope's verse suggest that this letter frames Pope's own position in his 'lively picture' of Eloisa. It can fruitfully be thought of as forming a part of the poem's multiverse. Seeing it in such a way allows us not only to see how Pope makes the letter form felt in *Eloisa to Abelard* but also to better understand Pope's presence within the poem's own lifeworld before the narration of the fact in the final stanza. Indeed, as Seneca writes in another epistle to Lucilius:

²²² *Correspondence*, I, pp.352–53.

²²³ Bruce Redford, 'Lady Mary Wortley Montagu: The Compass of the Senecan Style', in *The Converse of the Pen: Acts of Intimacy in the Eighteenth-Century Familiar Letter*, 19–48, pp.22–24.

²²⁴ *Correspondence*, I, pp.385, 407.

If the pictures of our absent friends are pleasing to us, though they only refresh the memory and lighten our longing by a solace that is unreal and unsubstantial, how much more pleasant is a letter, which brings us real traces, real evidence of an absent friend!²²⁵

The recognition of the true self, the internal soul rather than the exterior appearance, is what differentiates the letter from the painting for Seneca, and it is this recognition that Pope relies on in both his *Guardian* article and his rejection of Hughes' painting scene in his own work.

Pope's use of the letter in this instance may remind us of Eloisa's own reflection on letters. Thrilled by the act of reading not only Abelard's name but even her own, Eloisa's sudden emotional turbulence is shown to be caused by her relationship with the letter in and of itself as well as her relationship with Abelard.

Heav'n first taught letters for some wretch's aid,
Some banish'd lover, or some captive maid;
They live, they speak, they breathe what love inspires,
Warm from the soul, and faithful to its fires,
The virgin's wish without her fears impart,
Excuse the blush, and pour out all the heart,
Speed the soft intercourse from soul to soul,
And waft a sigh from Indus to the Pole. (ll.51-58)

In the spirit of both 'To a Lady Abroad' and *Guardian* No. 172, Eloisa praises the power of letters to diminish the impact of distance. She celebrates their ability to forge proxy physical connections beyond the limits of geography. As free agents separate from their exiled sources, the letters 'live', 'speak', and 'breathe' what their senders cannot. 'Warm from the soul' plays on a phrase common in Pope's own letters: 'warm from the brain'. *Eloisa* divulges how this warmth, however insistent of its own sincerity, is still somewhat processed. It erases the unnecessary complications of 'the blush', 'her fears', and the realities of distance and separation, and presents a more perfected, independent, and polished, revised image of *Eloisa* than exists in reality. It is here perhaps that we realise why the letter is so dear to both Pope and Eloisa. The safety of the page enables him to overcome any embarrassment and feelings of emasculation engendered by his deformities and health. Tellingly, the words of Pope's letter to Montagu are remarkably similar to Eloisa's in the poem:

²²⁵ *Epistles (Ad Lucilium epistulae morales)*, quoted in Targoff, *John Donne, Body and Soul*, p.29.

The unhappy Distance at which we correspond, removes a great many of those punctillious Restrictions and Decorums, that oftentimes in nearer Conversation prejudice Truth to save Good breeding. I may now hear of my faults, and you of your good qualities, without a Blush.²²⁶

Cummings describes this relationship between letter-writer, letter, and recipient as a kind of *ekstasis*. The letter becomes ‘something standing outside the person but also for or even in place of that person, expressing his feeling for the other’.²²⁷ In the case of *Eloisa to Abelard*, this system goes from encompassing only the two lovers and Eloisa’s conflicting selves to embracing the tradition of future and past Eloisas and Heloises. It also admits a sense of a greater psychological complexity within the confines of Pope’s verse. By intentionally portraying his work as having been laboured over by someone with a true enjoyment of writing for its own sake, Pope lends Eloisa a complexity that gives her authorial agency over her own fate as both a writer and something written. We see in Eloisa’s turns of mind the shadow of multiple ‘inhabitant[s] within’ coming to terms with and taking advantage of their very letteredness. This in-text insinuation of matters of composition shows how Pope used ideas of revision, understood throughout this chapter in the wider sense of review and self-examination outlined in the introduction, as a persuasive tool, a way of humanising Eloisa as a flawed yet multifaceted persona.

Of all Pope’s verse-epistles, and indeed his works in general, *Eloisa to Abelard* is perhaps the most concerned with the way in which writers manifest themselves in their writings. The existential questions that surface in the silences of the previous examples — what is it that is happening when someone writes out their ideas? — are allowed to marinate in their own introspection in *Eloisa to Abelard*. This is a different kind of introspection than a poem as outwardly confessional as *To Arbuthnot*. *To Arbuthnot* is perhaps the most directly autobiographical of Pope’s poems and so, in that sense, more personal than *Eloisa to Abelard*. As Pat Rogers notes, the poem is commonly discussed for its pervasive sense of ‘anxiety’, both with Pope’s status as a writer and his celebrity.²²⁸ However, this anxiety, while more outwardly self-revealing, is more distant than that in *Eloisa to Abelard*. In much of *Arbuthnot* Pope alternates between expressing frustration with the opportunistic petitioners and adversaries at his door and exercising restraint by making light of their faults. We see him struggle to abide by the rule of the poem’s epigraph: *Quid de te alii loquantur, ipsi videant, sed loquentur tamen* (let what others say of you be their own concern; whatever it is, they

²²⁶Correspondence, I, p.354.

²²⁷*Passions and Subjectivity in Early Modern Culture*, p.65.

²²⁸Pat Rogers, *Essays on Pope* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), p.93.

will say it in any case).²²⁹ He gleefully regales readers with lively accounts of the mad and foolish characters seeking his aid with ‘Fire in each eye, and Papers in each hand’. However, when his amusement inevitably sours into pure frustration — “‘Tis nothing” — Nothing? if they bite and kick?’ (l.78) — he has to hold himself back or be cautioned by the calm voice of Arbuthnot to ‘Hold’ (l.75) and ‘Forbear’ (l.75). The alternating playfulness and indignation of Pope’s complaints in the poem is so outside the domain of nonchalance he hazards to return to that he cannot help but betray the times he forgets his own epistolary intentions. While Eloisa too has difficulty restraining herself from expressing her feelings, in the *Epistle to Arbuthnot* this performance of self-control and self-revelation is more heavy-handed and visibly strained, not least by Pope’s knowledge of his own celebrity. Whereas Eloisa’s different impulses are always released knowingly *despite* herself — despite, indeed, her perceptions of not only current infamy but future fame — those in the *Epistle to Arbuthnot* are informed, perhaps even malformed, by Pope’s public personality. As Rogers notes, ‘he is preoccupied by the world around him’ and his place in it as a public figure ‘rather than [being] stoically detached’.²³⁰ In his *Life of Pope* Johnson writes that epistles surpass other forms in their proclivity for self-serving shows of sophistication. The ‘eagerness of conversation’ may allow the ‘first emotions of the mind’ to ‘burst out’ without prior deliberation. However, ‘a friendly letter is a calm and deliberate performance in the cool of leisure, in the stillness of solitude, and surely no man sits down to deprecate by design his own character’.²³¹ As Dowling puts it, ‘a letter is read in a world different from the one in which it was written, and at a time different from that in which it was composed’.²³² That contrast in spaces and worlds is written into the way epistolary discourse is read, and the lack of sincerity such a performative letter might entail is taken less as a failing than a defining precondition. It is what is expected. As Johnson explains, this temptation to perform is increased by the fact that the letter is usually written to ‘a single mind’, more likely than not a friend, ‘of which the prejudices and partialities are known; and must therefore please, if not by favouring them, by forbearing to oppose them’.²³³ (After all, ‘by whom can a man so much wish to be thought better than he is, as by him whose kindness he desires to gain or keep?’)²³⁴ It is understood that the letter is written in private so its tendency towards

²²⁹ *TE*, iv, p.91.

²³⁰ Rogers, *Essays on Pope*, p.95.

²³¹ *Lives*, iv, p.58.

²³² William Dowling, *The Epistolary Moment: The Poetics of the Eighteenth-Century Verse Epistle* (Princeton University Press, 2014), p.26.

²³³ *Lives*, iv, p.58.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, iv, p.58.

sycophancy or a favourable representation of the writer cannot be taken as insincerity in the same way that it would in a social setting. The verse epistle is thus understood to be written out of an idealist world in the Berkeleyan sense where all there is is the mind of the speaker, Eloisa's mental 'cell'. Pope's inability to shed his consciousness of his own celebrity in *Arbuthnot*, to forget the different, less-than-friendly minds that may read his verse-letter, makes it difficult for him to withdraw into this intimate setting and so fully dissolve himself in the epistolary state of mind. Pope cannot fully commit to the introspective preoccupations of solitude expected of the epistle because he is always self-conscious of being in the public eye. As a result, the poem seems at times to be uncomfortable with its own form. It prefers to half withdraw its attacks with flairs of wit instead of conveying an unobstructed flow of genuine indignation. Glimpses of serious emotion are thus stunted by a pervasive self-consciousness, a far cry from the gracious indifference depicted in the poem's epigraph. As a result, what is nominally an 'epistle' to Arbuthnot appears more of a stage drama and one where Arbuthnot figures more as an interloping voice of reason than a genuine addressee. As Julian Ferraro comments, 'Arbuthnot is less important for his articulated contribution than for the implication of his presence as a sympathetic companion to whom Pope can address himself without confrontation'.²³⁵ In this way, *Arbuthnot* manages to be both more personal and less intimate than the rendering of Pope in *Eloisa* where the communion between writer and addressee(s) is unobstructed by these unsteady attempts at ease and detachment, the performance of a public figure trapped in his own self-consciousness.

In the case of *Eloisa to Abelard*, the nature of the internal audience created and sustained in this private verse-world is complicated by the poem's awareness of its own epistolarity and its multiple internal would-be writers and readers: Eloisa, Abelard, Eloisa's imagination of the 'Bard', and, of course, Pope. Pope creates an entanglement of authority figures that in its own way speaks to Wimsatt's famous description of the 'actual' reader: 'something like a reader over another reader's shoulder', someone who reads 'through [...] the person to whom the full tone of the poem is addressed in the fictional situation'.²³⁶ In the case of *Eloisa to Abelard* the chain of eavesdropping begins with Eloisa's reading of Abelard's letter to Philintus. It is then complicated by Eloisa's second person and third person addresses, and then re-figured a final time by the sentimental coda. Gillian Beer has described how the epistle has a 'mimetic basis: the primary 'author' or authority is conceived

²³⁵ Ferraro, 'Pope, Pen, and Press', p.131.

²³⁶ W.K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley, *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (Lexington, 1954), p.xv.

as the experiencer [Eloisa]; the actual author-writer casts himself as secondary, a concealed scribe recording the actualities derived from women's experience'.²³⁷ I would like to suggest that this mimesis goes both ways. Moments where Eloisa switches between first, second, and third person address show her periodically imagining herself assuming the role of the 'actual author-writer' described by Beer. Similarly, by embedding himself in the poem, Pope reveals himself to share that role of experiencer. This change of roles can be compared to that in the 'Epistle to Miss Blount' discussed in the previous chapter. However, in the case of *Eloisa to Abelard*, Pope ventriloquises the character of Eloisa to be as involved in imagining her future 'Bard' as she is in imagining Abelard, and as Pope is in imagining her. The poem thus closes as David Fairer has aforesaid in similar terms: by being an answer to its own voice.²³⁸

Wimsatt's idea of the chain of eavesdroppers is turned into a Gordian knot of mutual eavesdropping. These different eavesdroppers convey that numinous sense of an 'Inhabitant within' in *Eloisa to Abelard*, and this encourages readers to read Eloisa as a writer and not just a heroine. Eloisa's expression of her situation is designed to be read as not only a tragic circumstance but a written performance, and a laboured one at that. By reading the poem as an exercise in revision, a composition that has been read, re-read, and blotted in em-dashes, the reader can gauge the complexities of Eloisa's psyche and her own role in designing her fate. Eloisa's self-reflections on the act of writing and the task of conveying her side of the story become, for her, a means of regaining intimacy with herself and, for Pope, a method of exploring in what sense 'all the writer lives in ev'ry line'. Pope deliberately emphasises the createdness of the poem, the fact that it was thought through, composed, and revised, in order to show Eloisa experiencing the othering of her thoughts in the Lockean manner described at the very beginning of this chapter. The next chapter will explore how Pope used in-text deliberation and exploration as a persuasive device in his later poems.

²³⁷ Gillian Beer, "'Our Unnatural No-Voice': The Heroic Epistle, Pope, and Women's Gothic', *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 12 (1982), 125–51, (p.140).

²³⁸ David Fairer, *English Poetry of the Eighteenth Century 1700-1789* (London: Longman, 2003), p.73.

‘snatch a grace beyond the reach of art’: the dexterity of thought in the *Epistles to Several Persons*

The *opus magnum* vision

The *Epistles to Several Persons* is an offshoot of Pope’s unrealised *opus magnum* project, which had been an ongoing pre-occupation for the poet from 1729 up to the time of his death. The *opus magnum* was to have comprised an ethical scheme considering all aspects of human existence spanning topics such as man’s relation to the universe, the limits of human reason, and the use of education. Towards the end of the ‘Design’ of the first collected edition of *An Essay on Man* Pope wrote that the essay was part of a much larger ethical system which would be continued in a series of ‘charts which are to follow’.²³⁹ From the ‘Index’ prepared for the 1734 folio edition of the essay, which was later recalled by Pope, we can gather that this scheme was originally envisioned to be longer than the eight epistles we have of the essay and the *Epistles to Several Persons*. As the Twickenham editors note, while this so-called *opus magnum* project was never outright discarded, its effective dissolution is implicit in the poet’s decision to detach the epistles that were to form ‘Ethic Epistles, the Second Book’ — *To Cobham* (1734), *To a Lady* (1735), *To Bathurst* (1733), and *To Burlington* (1731) — from *An Essay on Man* (the ‘First Book’) in the 1739 reprint of the Works. This was the first time that the epistles were regrouped to form the *Epistles to Several Persons*.²⁴⁰ While the final ‘deathbed’ edition attempts to explain the relationship of the epistles to the abandoned ‘*Opus Magnum*’ in the ‘Advertisement’, it is evident that they do not easily

²³⁹ *TE*, III.i, p.8.

²⁴⁰ *TE*, III.ii, p.xvi, n.5.

accommodate each other. In fact, Pope's reworkings and regroupings may even emphasise certain inter-epistle ironies rather than resolve them.²⁴¹

The facts of Pope's fluctuating progress on the project, summarised in brief above, are well-documented in Pope's correspondence, records of his conversations by Spence, several surviving manuscripts, and the paratexts of published editions, all of which have been made more accessible by Miriam Leranbaum's study, *Opus Magnum*. Despite this rich revision history, extended studies of the poems in the light of Pope's evolving iterations of the *opus magnum* ambition remain rare. Part of the problem may lie in the assumption that if these remnants of the project still merit reading as an interconnected system, it is mostly for the sake of gleaning Pope's 'true' intentions, whatever they may be, in the hopes of rendering the poems a united unit. Seeing as Pope's plans were themselves revised ferociously over the years, the exercise of searching for a master blueprint running through the poems would be to search for something that is itself, in Bateson's words, 'almost non-existent'.²⁴² However, the value of the *opus magnum* frame may not necessarily lie in its potential ability to reconcile the differences in tone, perspective, and quality between its constituent poems. On the contrary, Pope's participation in this mythos of the unrealised masterpiece and his encouragement of the scholarly culture attempting to excavate it suggests that the value of the *opus magnum* idea might lie in its ability to facilitate multiple attempts at reconstruction rather than a singular answer.

As a marketing tool, the recording of the *opus magnum*'s changing nature in the paratexts of Pope's publications adds to our pervasive idea of Pope as having what George Sherburn has characterised as an 'unconscionable appetite for revision'.²⁴³ We know that Pope's relationship with the project was punctuated even in its earliest stages with thoughts of its desertion. Spence records that Pope 'had been speaking coldly' of the project in May 1730 (only around a year into his attempts) but 'had been pressed to go on with it, on account of the good it might do to mankind'.²⁴⁴ The *Anecdotes* also show that Pope had later confessed to having 'drawn in my plan for my Ethic Epistles much narrower than it was at first'.²⁴⁵ This change seems to have been informed by Pope's growing sense of his own poetic limits in the face of his chosen task. The wonderful irony of the idea that the plan of the *opus*

²⁴¹ Ibid., pp.xvi-xxiv.

²⁴² *TE*, III.ii, p.xxii.

²⁴³ Sherburn, 'Pope at Work', p.55.

²⁴⁴ *Anecdotes*, p.16.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., p.136.

magnum exists for us to induce is that we are left with as many answers about Pope's design as Pope likely had of his subject of study; it seems that both reader and poet are left with what one critic has called 'a jigsaw puzzle that has many broken pieces and many pieces lacking'.²⁴⁶ While Pope attempts to unravel one unsolvable system, we are left with another.

The following chapter will explore how the narrative Pope constructed around his abandoned *opus magnum* might serve rather than detract from his would-be system's moral purposes. I argue that Pope's various projections of the *opus magnum* framed throughout the latter half of his career were designed to provoke more interconnected readings of his later works. By reading the *Epistle to Cobham* and the *Epistle to Bathurst* in the light of their paratexts, I suggest that the *opus magnum* poems lean on the art of reconstruction as a source of poetic intrigue and interpretive pleasure.

Horace, Lucilius and the 'deathbed' epigraph

The 'deathbed' edition of the *Epistles to Several Persons* (1744) is markedly the longest epigraph attached to any of Pope's publications:

est brevitæ opus, ut currat sententia neu se impediât verbis lassas onerantibus auris; et sermone opus est modo tristi, sæpe iocoso, defendente vicem modo rhetoris atque poetæ, interdum urbani, parcentis viribus atque extenuantis eas consulto

[...]what's needed is brevity, to let the thought run on, to stop it entangling itself with words that burden the weary ears, and a style is needed which is sometimes stern, often playful, maintaining the part now of the orator and poet, sometimes of the civilised individual who reserves his strength and deliberately underplays it.²⁴⁷

The ambiguity of Pope and Warburton's respective roles in the creation of the 'suppressed' 1744 edition has cast an unfortunate shadow on the epigraph's perceived usefulness, for which reason it has, regrettably, received little critical attention. Knowing that there are only two likely candidates for authorship, we may conclude that the epigraph indicates either a step away from Pope's usual epigraphic practice (indeed, it may be exactly like Pope to be

²⁴⁶ Miriam Leranbaum, *Alexander Pope's 'Opus Magnum': 1729-1744* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), p. ix.

²⁴⁷ Horace: *Satires I*, ed. by P. Michael Brown (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), *Satire* 1.10, ll.9-14 (p.29).

uncommonly garrulous when advocating brevity), or some extent of deferment to Warburton, in which case the associated irony may be wholly unintentional. My sense is that Pope's hand (if it is there) can be seen more clearly in the effects of the epigraph than in its contents. It could be argued that the relationship between the epigraph and the *Epistles* comments too knowingly on the poems' reception and Pope's experiences and anxieties in writing and re-writing the *Epistles* for it not to have been at the very least sanctioned, if not directly added in by the poet.

To understand the extent of this self-referencing it is necessary to first summarise the epigraph's origins in Horace and how this might directly comment upon the fate of the *opus magnum*. The epigraph draws from the beginning of Horace's *Satire* 1.10, which is one of the satires surprisingly not included in Pope's *Imitations*. Howard Erskine-Hill has suggested that this choice of quotation might have been designed to defend the abandonment of the *opus magnum*. Erskine-Hill contends that the epigraph may function as a defence of the digressive style of the epistles in the light of the inchoateness of the overall scheme. Perhaps Pope is trying to indicate that the *Epistles* too 'let the thought run on' without any overarching plan or argument as Horace so appears to recommend. While Erskine-Hill takes the epigraph as a comment on the value of this digressive style, 'what was gained by Pope's liberation from the *opus magnum* project', this does not mean that the epigraph does not also forewarn us of the epistles' shortcomings, what may have been forfeited in the abandonment of the system of ethics.²⁴⁸

By looking at the extract's ancillary purposes within its Horatian contexts, we can see how the epigraph anticipates a number of criticisms readers have levelled at Pope's later works in general and these poems in particular. Firstly, it must be noted that Horace has up to the point of the quotation been primarily talking about Lucilius. Horace opens *Satire* 1.10 by reminding offended Lucilians that his praise for Lucilius was as genuine as his criticism. Although he faulted Lucilius for his verbosity and metrical clumsiness he also praised him in the same passage for his strength of wit. Horace's point, however, is that Lucilius' flair for making 'the listener grin from ear to ear', which had been the chief merit he had lauded previously, is not enough on its own to make a fine poem. Pope's epigraph constitutes the beginning of the succeeding elaboration on the stylistic virtues that make good poetry and hence, by its suggestive placement in the poem, also those specifically lacking in Lucilius. It

²⁴⁸ Howard Erskine-Hill, 'Pope's Epigraphic Practice', *The Review of English Studies*, 62 (2011), 261-274 (p.266).

is important to note that, while his emphasis might lie elsewhere, Horace is still at this point partially invested in elaborating upon his original critique of Lucilius. The quoted passage marks a shift in focus where Horace seems to pan out from his quibbles with Lucilius' works in particular to his own literary standards more generally. Yet it is still contextually branching out from a suggestion first made in *Satire* 1.4 that Lucilius specifically lacks the concision, strategic self-restraint, and fluid shifts of tone that would, in Horace's eyes, make him a better poet. It is therefore important to keep in consideration that Horace's purposes are not only to espouse a stylistic recommendation but also to subtly advance a highly directed literary-critical point. This distinction is crucial for us to see the full effect of the epigraph because it suggests that Pope's usage of Horace is not necessarily purely defensive or self-expository. It might also be self-critical.

My suggestion is that Pope is positioning himself as a Lucilius-figure as well as an Horatian observer. The problem with reading the epigraph purely as an explanation of what the epistles seek to achieve is that it is hardly to the poems' favour. The epigraph's sketch of discursive poetry burdens the epistles with a blueprint that inherently overpromises. When read without a sense of its Lucilian contexts, this is always at the epistles' expense as it all but guarantees their perceived underperformance. As much as the epistles may outwardly align themselves with Horace, the poetic ideals presented in the epigraph are too abstract for the epistles to truly reflect them; indeed, it becomes more natural for them to exemplify their opposite. Reading Horace's ridicule of 'entangled' verbiage we might be reminded (seemingly to the poems' detriment) of the 'affected' and 'Aenigmatical Obscurity' Pope was criticised for in *The Poet finish'd in Prose, Being a Dialogue Concerning Mr. Pope and his Writings* in 1735, or Lord Hervey's 1742 suggestion that Pope's chief 'Merit of Versification' has been 'either from Age and Rust entirely lost' in his late epistles and satires.²⁴⁹ Such a view of the epigraph would predispose us to read a Pope painfully lacking in self-awareness — something we know that he was not, especially when it came to public perceptions of his works. It is also difficult to believe that the writer of the *Epistle to Arbuthnot* would so unwittingly justify the criticisms of his detractors, or that the writer of

²⁴⁹ Anonymous, *The Poet finish'd in Prose, Being a Dialogue Concerning Mr. Pope and his Writings* (1735), pp.10-11 and Lord Hervey, extract from *A Letter to Mr. C—b—r* (1742), both repr. in *Pope: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by John Barnard, pp.242-3, pp.251-2.

‘Trust not your self; but your Defects to know, | Make use of ev’ry Friend —and ev’ry Foe’ (*An Essay on Criticism*, ll.213-214) would choose this moment to ignore his own advice.²⁵⁰

It is only when we recognise the parallels between Pope and Lucilius in the unquoted contexts of the epigraph that these seeming deficits begin to amount to something more than unintentional irony. The anonymous *An Epistle to the Little Satyrst of Twickenham*, which bemoaned Pope’s move to satire as a waste of his early promise as a poet, tellingly echoes Horace’s sentiments in the moments just before the beginning of the epigraph: ‘Because for Poetry your Taste is nice, | D’ye think that you are free from ev’ry Vice?’²⁵¹ This resonates in particular with the Loeb editors’ translation: ‘Yet, while granting this virtue, I would not also allow him every other.’²⁵² Such parallels connecting Horace’s critique of Lucilius’ awkward metre to criticisms of Pope’s late work become more intriguing when we consider that the critical diagnoses in the epigraph and the biographical circumstances of the *Epistles*’ publication are also haunted by Horace’s concluding remarks in the poem: first the suggestion that Lucilius is not a bad writer per se but only lacked the polish to reach his full poetic potential (ll.65-7); and second, and perhaps more importantly, that were Lucilius alive today such criticisms would be taken in stride and the appropriate revisions duly committed (ll.67-73). Since the last months of Pope’s life were spent trying to build a ‘perfect edition’ of his works it is not inconceivable that Pope anticipated being unable to fulfil his plans and benefit from future criticisms — the future Horace’s to his Lucilius. In fact, later issues of the first epistle of *An Essay on Man* explained that Pope was ‘induced’ to publish each epistle separately because he did not want to ‘impose upon the Publick too much at once of what he thought incorrect’ and he thought he ‘might profit of its Judgement on the Parts, in order to make the Whole less unworthy’.²⁵³ Of this ‘perfect edition’, Pope ultimately managed to publish only *The Dunciad*, *An Essay on Man*, and *An Essay on Criticism*. The *Epistles to Several Persons*, which was next in line to be published, was printed but not ready to be published before Pope’s death.²⁵⁴ In this way, Pope’s main issue with his own poetry in general, but also particularly nearer his passing, may have been the same as Horace’s with

²⁵⁰ See Christopher Tilmouth, ‘Pope’s Ethical Thinking: Passion and Irony in Dialogue’, Chatterton Lecture 2011, *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 181 (2012), 35-62 for a reading of ‘Friend’ in the *Epilogue to the Satires* as a ‘medium through whom Pope confronted criticisms that genuinely perturbed him’ (p.58) including those of his turn to morality and his increasingly Juvenalian satiric voice.

²⁵¹ *Pope: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by John Barnard, p.273, ll.9-10.

²⁵² Horace, *Satires, Epistles, The Art of Poetry*, trans. by H. Rushton Fairclough, Loeb Classical Library 194 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926), *Satire* 1.10 (p.115). Further references to all Horace’s *Satires* and *Epistles* are to this edition and are given after quotations in the text.

²⁵³ *TE*, III.i, p.6.

²⁵⁴ *Anecdotes*, pp.295-6.

Lucilius': that both bodies of work required more *limae labor*, more polishing and revision, to reach their full potential. Pope is thus essentially his own Lucilius as well as his own Horace.

Such an interpretation of the epigraph is useful because it also relates dialogically to Pope's self-identification with Lucilius in the *Imitations of Horace*. In *Satire 2.1* we see Horace shift his critical stance on Lucilius when he is asked by Trebatius why he continues to write satire despite the backlash it can provoke against him. In response, Horace speaks of his predecessor's character reverentially, suggesting that Lucilius should be appreciated for the same careless versification he had been criticised for in *Satires 1.4* and *1.10*. Horace believes Lucilius to be a better man than either Horace or Trebatius because the flaws that Lucilius demonstrates in his sloppy versification are markers of honest self-revelation. Just as in the case of the epigraph, Lucilius' willingness to show both his poetic strengths and weaknesses is shown to earn him the right to wield his invective. As an apologia for satire, *2.1* reveals that the motivations behind satire need not be confined to sheer anger and spitefulness; rather, satire can be used as a meditative outlet for the exploration of one's misfortunes and triumphs. Horace suggests that Lucilius divulged all his pains and successes into his books as if they were his most trusted confidantes and it is this openness that marks him as a true satirist. *2.1* thus steadily transforms satiric poetry from an imprisoning of words in metrical units (l.28) into an avenue for genuine introspection, where the satirist's whole life may be laid forth for examination like a self-portrait in a votive tablet (ll.32-34). The unrefined quality of the votive tablet, a painting offered to the gods in gratitude for deliverance from calamity, reframes Lucilius' rough verse into a marker of his virtuous character.

Helen Deutsch has emphasised how the meaning of 'descripta' limns the line between the visual and the verbal; it could mean 'to write down' or 'to copy off', but it also has visual senses such as to 'to sketch' or 'to describe in painting', and broader definitions like 'to represent, delineate, describe'.²⁵⁵ Through these different forms of 'descripta' we can see how Lucilius' verse enacts different complexities of openness beyond mere transparency. Between its visual and verbal senses, the votive tablet is able to at once inhabit and transcend the limits of time. It may present the satirist all at once, as in an image whose contents are all immediately self-evident to the eye of the onlooker, as well as more incrementally, like a text that must be experienced over time to be understood. Pope's own imitation of this passage

²⁵⁵ Helen Deutsch, *Resemblance & Disgrace: Alexander Pope and the Deformation of Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), p.149.

treads the line between both temporal experiences of revelation and places Pope himself as the Lucilius-figure:

I love to pour out all myself, as plain
As downright Shippen, or as old Montaigne.
In them, as certain to be lov'd as seen,
The Soul stood forth, nor kept a Thought within;
In me what Spots (for Spots I have) appear,
Will prove at least the Medium must be clear.
In this impartial Glass, my Muse intends
Fair to expose myself, my Foes, my Friends.²⁵⁶

Although, at first, Shippen and Montaigne seem to be the Lucilius-replacements, the verse's overwhelming focus on Pope himself shows that, in truth, Pope is the one who has taken up the role of the exemplar of honest self-exposition. The egocentric focus on Pope himself develops alongside his claims of candour, echoing the inherent contradictions between vindication and humble self-revelation in the 'deathbed' epigraph. What is more, Pope incorporates the multiple meanings of 'descripta' by offering both an incremental revelation of his own argument, and an instantaneous communication of his work's role as a foreground of 'Glass' built on a background of his own relationship with the Horatian originals. While the former is steadily being poured out, the latter compresses time and history so they can be experienced all at once. Additionally, as Erskine-Hill has previously pointed out, when we come to the point where Horace praises Lucilius for his fearless attacks upon the vices of high-ranking officials, Pope deviates from Horace to assume the heroic role of Lucilius himself.²⁵⁷ Having taken such positive, even self-glorifying identifications with Lucilius in the *Imitations* into account, the epigraph is even more noteworthy as it enacts the negative side of these self-revelations. By identifying in an unassuming way with the criticisms of Lucilius in *Satires* 1.4 and 1.10, the epigraph further qualifies the positive identification with Lucilius in the *Imitations* with a sobering sense of Pope's weaknesses.

This evocation of the double-role which so playfully riffs on the vision we have developed of Pope as the prolific reviser is a valuable lens from which to read the *Epistles*. It appears especially apt that Horace's infamous claim that Lucilius 'flowed muddily' (*Satires*

²⁵⁶ 'The First Satire of the Second Book of Horace, Imitated', in *TE*, IV, pp.1-21, ll.51-58 (pp.10-11).

²⁵⁷ Howard Erskine-Hill, *The Augustan Idea in English Literature* (London: Edward Arnold, 1983), p.90.

1.5, 1.11 and 1.10, 1.50) and was too lazy to refine his writing is perhaps the chief criticism from the previous satire being elucidated in the epigraph. By quoting Horace in this way, Pope uses what appears to be a pre-emptive self-defence of his methods (as per Erskine-Hill's reading) to shelter what may truly be an introductory self-critique. Pope is suggesting that his verse is muddy, that his argument is obscure and unnecessarily convoluted, and, above all, that maybe that is one of its intended points. I contend that rather than purely justifying what was 'gained' in the abandonment of his *opus magnum* vision, Pope is also acknowledging that something was lost — and maybe not entirely inadvertently so. By thus introducing the work as being not only circumstantially but almost definitively incomplete, he suggests that there is a paradoxical value in verse thus 'entangled' and that it is best read when parsed as being so.

The epistemological challenge of the *opus magnum*

Pope's self-reflexive commentary on his own poetical strengths and weaknesses in the epigraph correlates with the anxieties about his *opus magnum*. If we are persuaded by Geoffrey Tillotson's suggestion that Pope's later poems 'did not "stoop to Truth" for the first time, but stooped only to more of it'²⁵⁸ (as we might well be considering the continuity of Pope's interest in morality throughout his literary career), we may also recognise that the shift in Pope's writing in the post-1729 *opus magnum* period that produced *An Essay on Man*, the *Epistles to Several Persons*, and the *Imitations of Horace* was perhaps in some senses as much a realization of his own literary 'ruling passion' as it was of that theory or 'New Hypothesis' as he describes it to Spence.²⁵⁹ This is true not only in terms of content but also in terms of compositional practice. His troubled relationship to the project appeared to draw in part from his keen awareness of how he himself might be treated as the Lucilius to his

²⁵⁸ Geoffrey Tillotson, *The Moral Poetry of Pope* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Literary and Philosophical Society, 1946), pp.1-2. You can see the tendency towards themes of morality prevailing in Pope's highest-frequency nouns, among which 'god', 'eyes', and 'man' rank foremost. See the Bedford and Dilligan, *Concordance to the Poems of Alexander Pope*, 2 vols. (Detroit: Gale Research, 1972), II, pp.669-728 for the statistics on word frequencies.

²⁵⁹ *Anecdotes*, p.130 and *TE*, III:ii, p.xxii. See 'ruling passion' in *Essay on Man*, II.133-60; and 'To Sir Richard Temple, Lord Viscount Cobham', in *TE*, III:ii, pp.15-38, 1.174 (p.30). Further references to the epistle to Cobham are to this edition and are given after quotations in the text.

readership's Horace. Writing to Swift in December 1734, Pope conveyed his struggle to make more of the 'Moral Essays' than his poetic capacity and human abilities would allow:

I am almost at the end of my Morals, as I've been, long ago, of my Wit; my system is a short one, and my circle narrow. Imagination has no limits, and that is a sphere in which you may move on to eternity; but where one is confined to Truth (or to speak more like a human creature, to the appearances of Truth) we soon find the shortness of our Tether.²⁶⁰

Pope's frustration is an aggregation of the natural limitations of a human imagination and the need to further confine this imagination to the limits of human understanding. If imagination is a limitless sphere that can extend across eternity, 'Truth' (as humans know it) seems, to Pope, to be only a two-dimensional circle — and one further narrowed by the second, smaller circle of one's own modest knowledge ('Trust not yourself your Defects to know[...]', *An Essay on Criticism*, l.213). The addition of the parenthetical qualification '(or to speak more like a human creature, to the appearances of Truth)' is significant because it nuances the differences between absolute 'Truth' and apparent 'Truth' with the curious sense that in between differentiating these terms Pope is slipping between the voices and perspectives of two different creatures. Even when writing the word 'Truth' he recognises that the use of the word tends towards an assumption of absolute 'Truth' which, in the case of a 'human creature', can only be based on the imagination of something beyond what they could actually know. The challenge Pope sees for himself is to reflect human nature and its role in the universe while still remembering to write actively from the perspective of a human intelligence that may pretend to know more than befits its station — and is, indeed, naturally predisposed to wanting to be 'the GOD of GOD' (*An Essay on Man*, l.122) — but cannot be wholly believed when it does so. The paradox of the task he has set himself requires him to convey superhuman intelligence in a human voice: 'Truth' through the lens of apparent 'Truth'. This is an iteration of the perennial issue critics have with *An Essay on Man* in particular: that it pretends to know too much.

Pope was thus well aware of the paradox for which the *Essay* and, as a cursory reading of the epigraph would demonstrate, the *Epistles* could be faulted. This made it difficult for him to finish his *opus magnum* scheme. This same question of 'Truth' that Pope conveys to Swift is expressed in a letter to the Earl of Marchmont in October 1741 which reads:

²⁶⁰ *Correspondence*, III, p.445.

I am determined to publish no more in my life time, for many reasons; but principally thro' the Zeal I have to speak the Whole Truth, & neither to praise or dispraise by halves, or with worldly managements. I think fifty an age at which to write no longer for Amusement, but for some Use, and with design to do some good.²⁶¹

This determination is echoed in a letter written to Warburton earlier in that same year, in which he explained his fear that if he were given more of Warburton's encouraging 'Hints' he would break his 'resolution, & become an author anew'.²⁶² The fact that he would rather say 'little to no purpose, than a great deal'²⁶³ seems to imply that the option to expand each epistle further or to create more epistles to supplement those that remained would not solve the essential paradox from which the epistles collectively suffer, which lay in their very methodology; as he writes to Swift in March 1736, 'But alas! the task is great, and *non sum qualis eram!*'.²⁶⁴

The epigraph may not solve this paradoxical desire both to write 'Truth' and for it to be seen as truthful, but it does redeem Pope by acknowledging the issue. The epigraph's focus on the value of revision encourages readers to pay closer attention to the formal elements of the poems in a way that is unique to the *opus magnum*. Pope describes 'The Design' of *An Essay on Man*, out of which the epistles were originally derived, in terms of bodies of water: 'I am here, only opening the fountains and clearing the passage. To deduce the rivers, to follow them in their course, and to observe their effects, may be a task more agreeable'.²⁶⁵ Seeing as Pope's declining health meant no new 'fountains' were to be opened, the epigraph's expansion on the stylistic particularities of Lucilius' 'muddy' verse allows Pope to acknowledge that his readers too have been left with the dregs of something that is in some way incomplete. It is perhaps here that the 'more agreeable' task of 'follow[ing] them in their course' and 'observ[ing] their effects' truly lies. Pope may be actively appealing to the reader to confront his shortcomings just as Horace does Lucilius' and, through Horace, Pope indirectly does his own. The main caveat in all of this is that he is not unaware of his faults but is only opening the fountains to them. Pope's true line of defence within the epigraph likely lies here. While both Pope and Lucilius fail to live up to their epigraphic promise, it is a promise and failure that Pope, unlike Lucilius, suggests he already sees. In Horace and Lucilius we see both Pope's skill and his fallibility. The epigraph uses Horace's recommendations on the best way to compose discursive writing to suggest Pope's intentions

²⁶¹ *Correspondence*, IV, p.364.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, IV, p.357.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, III, p.445.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, IV, p.5.

²⁶⁵ *TE*, III.i, p.8.

in reshaping his *opus magnum* plan into the *Epistles*. Yet it also generates a sense of self-depreciating irony by commenting on Pope's very inability to realise those intentions. The relationship sketched between Horace and Lucilius in the epigraph thus usefully supplements Pope's absence in the delivery of the *Epistles* by framing the relationship between Pope and his readers that would survive his death.

The self-critical aspects of the epigraph are also important because they speak to Horace's admission in *Satire* 1.4.56-62, the satire he is defending in 1.10, that neither his nor Lucilius' work qualify as true poetry of the epic kind. This might remind us of Warton's comment that despite the merits of *Eloisa to Abelard* and *The Rape of the Locke* Pope was '[n]ot, assuredly, in the same rank with Spencer, Shakespeare, and Milton'.²⁶⁶ Horace admits that he would not consider himself as that kind of epic poet either, writing that if both his and Lucilius' verses were to be broken up and the order of the words transposed the remains would not be like those of Ennius, whose words he describes as forming *disjecti membra poetae*. Ennius' words read as poetry even when dismembered, leaving behind the 'limbs of a scattered poet'. This language is reused in Pope's 'Advertisement', which states that due to the author's health and other unforeseen circumstances the *opus magnum* scheme was 'interrupted, postponed, and, lastly, in a manner laid aside'. Although it is uncertain how much of the 'Advertisement' was written by Warburton, the way it makes the case for the value of these remnants of the unrealised scheme seems to suggest that this part at least was informed by the same hand as the epigraph — most likely Pope's:

[...] this was the Author's favourite Work, which more exactly reflected the Image of his strong capacious Mind, and [...] we can have but a very imperfect idea of it from the *disjecta membra poetae*, that now remain [...]²⁶⁷

By referencing *Satire* 1.4 in the 'Advertisement' as well, Pope asks what kind of poetry is truly being put forward and to what extent it is poetic. By gesturing towards these Horatian contexts Pope is asking what can still be gained from his work's status as being as yet, and, it seems, forever-after unpolished, a kind of literary *non finito*. Spence notes Pope saying that:

Horace's "Art of Poetry" was probably only fragments of what he designed; it wants the regularity that flows from following a plan, and there are several passages in it that are hints only of a larger design. This appears as early as the twenty-third verse—

²⁶⁶ Joseph Warton, *An Essay on the Genius and Writing of Pope*, 2 vols. (London: Printed for J. Dodsley, 1782), II, p.480.

²⁶⁷ *TE*, III.i, pp.xviii-xix.

“Denique sit, quod vis, simplex duntaxat et unum,”

which looks like the proposal of a subject on which much more was necessary to be said, and yet he goes off to another in the very next line.²⁶⁸

This Horatian frame of reference encourages a different kind of reading from his earlier works. The signal to regard the poems as *disjecta membra poetae* that reflect a ‘strong capacious Mind’ invites the reader to excavate a sense of the poet’s thoughts and character from the remains of the teased *opus magnum*. It suggests that some of the nature of Pope’s design can be induced from its half-formed products. We find that Pope ‘deliberately underplays’ his strengths both as a stylistic choice — as Horace advises — and as an expression of an inability to articulate his abandoned design, to reach the polish he envisions in the current draft. The reader is effectively invited to act as the Horace to Pope’s Lucilius and intuit, as Horace does, the poetical potential — not the definitive value — latent in unrealised linguistic gestures. The advertisement’s description of the ‘projected books’ that had been ‘maturely digested’ is both teasing and wistful as it lets the drama of incompleteness, the unrealised *limae labor* of the lost *opus magnum*, take shape as a selling-point in its own right. Here is Pope half-baked. Moments of unrealised revisional potential express moments where Pope strains to stretch language to fit the scope of his vision. The reader’s mind and hindsight must supply the *Epistles* with a sense of completion beyond the limits of the poems’ expressivity yet one that is also still rooted in the realms of human understanding. It is only by encouraging future readers to build on his work that Pope can hope to attain his abandoned vision. In this manner, Pope is suggesting that ‘A’ in *The Poet finish’d in Prose* is not wrong to accuse Pope of ‘inverting the Use of Language, which is design’d to convey your Ideas in the clearest and most obvious manner’.²⁶⁹ Where ‘A’ is wrong is in suggesting that there is no ‘additional grace to justify it’. By making the matter of unrealised ambitions an object of curiosity, the epigraph effectively liberates Pope from both the *opus magnum* project and the quest for a ‘perfect edition’.

Such a reading is not designed to give Pope more credit than he may be due, but rather to temper our criticism with a sense that Pope is not acting naively. On the contrary, by framing his works with this self-directed criticism, Pope may be attempting to save himself from the charge of condescension. By playing both Horace and Lucilius, Pope presents

²⁶⁸ *Anecdotes*, I, p.227.

²⁶⁹ *Pope: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by John Barnard, pp.242-3.

himself as sharing values that are ahead of his predecessors' times (his Lucilius') but perhaps fall short of posterity's expectations (his Horace's). In this way, he suggests that, despite the enormity of his original vision, his ideas are not being proclaimed from the heights of a superhuman intelligence but from alongside those still grappling with the enormity of life down below. He too is not exempt from the ethical scheme he attempts to draw.

. The rest of this chapter aims to reconsider the *Epistles* through the spirit of the epigraph. It will explore moments where the *Epistles* make their point demonstratively by miming their own deficiencies and playing into Horace's vision of Lucilius as the careless versifier and under-reviser.

In potentia and in actu: To Cobham and 'what a scale is to a book of maps'

It is not easy to tell which versions of what poems combine to form the *Epistles to Several Persons* and if that title is the appropriate name for them. The collection could be of four, seven, or even eleven poems depending on the three main groupings Pope made before his passing. The 'Second Book' of 'Ethic Epistles' in the 1735 folio and quarto editions of the Works consisted of the four main epistles as well as 'To Mr Addison', 'To Robert Earl of Oxford, and Earl of Mortimer', and 'To Arbuthnot'. It is unclear if all of these poems were necessarily connected to the *opus magnum* project. The 'Directions to the Binder to place the Poems' in the quarto edition specify that the '*Essay on Man*, or Ethic Epistles' is to be followed by '*Epistles to Several Persons*' which seems to indicate a shift in the genre of epistles from those that are 'ethic' to those that are merely personal. Hesitations about the interrelations of the poems come partially from the way in which the central four are titled so as to explicitly indicate their abstract purposes within the scheme — for example, 'Of the Knowledge and Characters of Men', 'Of the Use of Riches' — whereas the final three only indicate the addressee. Adding to the confusion, the 1735 octavo edition and the 1736 edition of the Works group 'To Oxford', 'To James Craggs', 'To Mr Addison', 'To Mr Jervas', 'To Miss Blount', 'To the Same' and 'To Arbuthnot' under the title 'Epistles, The Third Book', bringing the grand total of epistles to eleven. This scheme is maintained in the 1739 edition; however, instead of separating the eleven epistles into 'the Second Book' and the 'Third

Book' all eleven are grouped under the heading '*Epistles to Several Persons*'. This is the format taken forward into the 1740 and 1743 editions as well. These extra epistles that made the 'Third Book' in the 1735 octavo are removed from the suppressed deathbed edition which forms the basis of the Twickenham edition. Part of the challenge and the reward of reading the *Epistles* lies in finding different links between the epistles to induce different senses of the *opus magnum* and the 'capacious Mind' behind these *disjecta membra poetae*. As the epistle opening the 'deathbed' edition, the *Epistle to Cobham* provides one understanding of how potential readers might navigate the uncertainty of the scheme.

To Cobham uniquely rewards attention to its framing devices. The poem begins by examining a viewpoint that Pope attributes to Cobham, namely that those 'to Books confin'd' lack the empirical, experiential knowledge to prove true Philosophers.

Yes, you despise the man to Books confin'd,
 Who, from his study rails at human kind;
 Tho' what he learns, he speaks and may advance
 Some gen'ral maxims, or be right by chance.
 The coxcomb bird, so talkative and grave,
 That from his cage cries Cuckold, Whore, and Knave,
 Tho' many a passenger he rightly call,
 You hold him no Philosopher at all (ll.1-8)

Pope's purposes in the conversation with Cobham read differently depending on how we interpret his use of 'Yes'. At first the gesture of assent associated with 'yes' might suggest that Pope is expressing agreement. On closer inspection, it is unclear whether the word is affirming that this is Cobham's viewpoint or contradicting a negative statement that we are not privy to — for instance, the suggestion that Cobham does not despise men who are 'to Books confin'd'. While being inessential to the sense of the first sentence, 'Yes' sets the scene for the elusive nature of Pope's argument as one that can very easily be taken as being more credulous and simplistic than it truly may be. 'Yes' could be an intensifier responding to Pope's own thoughts, an indication of assent to something Cobham has said, or an emphatic rebuttal mid-debate. Crucially, the onus of interpretation is guided more heavily by the readers' intuition than any meaningful direction from Pope. Consequently, we are in

practice predisposed and perhaps even prompted as readers to read our own opinions into the poem when it seems we ought to be discovering Pope's.

After the ambiguous 'Yes', Pope seems to further moderate his moments of tacit agreement with what he believes to be Cobham's position — if agreement is truly what is being suggested by the general sense of advocacy in ll.1-8 — by reminding Cobham in the lines beginning with 'Tho' that at least the bookish scholar shares what he learns. Those to books confined at least 'may advance' their thoughts incrementally towards 'gen'ral maxims' or, in the process of having shared them, be proven right by chance and even in the absolute. In contrast, Cobham's absent-presence as the silent but opinionated empirical observer seems to amount to a kind of overly-entitled passivity. The empiricist is seen leaching off the active efforts of discovery conducted by those labouring over books in their studies. We see Pope demonstrate the initiative underlying the book learner's methods in the enjambment of 'advance | some general maxims'. The journey from 'advance' to 'some' makes visible the invisible process of cross-referencing that yields general maxims, and it does so in a way that can only be noticed by the reader of books, not the listening observer. The line thus presents itself as an example of how those over-reliant on experience might underestimate and undervalue the thought and effort behind seemingly general maxims. In so doing, it creates a current of resistance within Pope's verse that threatens to turn Cobham's criticisms on their head. From this new standpoint, the empirical observer seems no less a 'coxcomb bird' than those they, too, rail at.

In keeping with this underlying defence of the book-learner, the next verse-paragraph argues that those informed by empirical observation alone are just as fallible as those 'caged' in their physically and mentally isolating scholarly cloisters.

And yet the fate of all extremes is such,
Men may be read, as well as Books too much.
To Observations which ourselves we make,
We grow more partial for th' observer's sake;
To written Wisdom, as another's less:
Maxims are drawn from Notions, these from Guess (ll.9-14).

Again the general sense of the verse-paragraph concurs with the words of the argument: ‘Books will not serve the purpose, nor yet our own Experience singly’.²⁷⁰ Only Pope himself is not talking about Books and Experience ‘singly’. While at first it may seem that an opposition is being structured around the two superficial extremes — empiricists as readers of ‘Men’ and scholars as readers of ‘Books’ — an argument can be made that the bookish ‘coxcomb bird’ railing at ‘many a passenger’ is in fact reading ‘Men’, not books. At the same time, the empiricist too is being cast as a reader. The zeugmatic sharing of ‘read’ between ‘Men’ and ‘Books’ suggests that the skills and faults of the man of books can be transferred to the man of experience. As a result, when we reach the comparison ‘Maxims are drawn from Notions, these from Guess’ it is ambiguous who stands on which side of the comma. According to the ‘Argument’, this final line is trying to suggest that scholarly and empirical learning alone lead to theories that are too speculative and conjectural to be applicable outside the realm of thought — ‘General maxims, unless they be formed upon both [books and experience], will be but notional’. However, whereas the argument suggests that ‘both’ book-experience and empirical knowledge will be notional, the verse-form indicates that there is a difference between ‘maxims’ and ‘these’, ‘notions’ and ‘guess’. The over-reliance on associative reasoning means that ‘maxims’ and ‘these’, and ‘notions’ and ‘Guess’ can apply to both empirical ‘observations’ and ‘written wisdom’. While both meanings and their associated permutations can coexist in our minds like they do linguistically in the ‘Argument’, within the logic of the verse-form readerly convention requires that the reader (prematurely) pick a specific interpretation. Just as before, the poem traps readers into potentially lapsing into their own interpretive inclinations before they are adequately forewarned of the poem’s intentions. Readers are thus prompted to read into the poem rather than to read from it.

The way in which readers are immediately lured into pre-emptively judging the poem, at least in the first reading, has a domino effect on the experience of the rest of the poem that crucially contributes to its culmination in the idea of the ‘ruling passion’. We find on repeated perusal that *To Cobham* seems to frustrate readers’ abilities to understand it outside of their own relationship to it. As readers we are reminded that we too present a mediated, observed version of the poem ‘more partial for th’observer’s sake’. We may notice in time that we are being led to this conclusion of self-implication by the polyptonic relationship between ‘observations’ and ‘observer’. Sharing the same root word, the ‘observer’ seems already embedded in (their?) ‘observations’. The associative, phonetic logic here draws our partiality

²⁷⁰TE, III.ii, p.13.

to ‘written Wisdom’ further into question: are we reading the poem and deducing the same from our own observations or simply abiding by the persuasion of ‘written wisdom’? The phrase ‘to written wisdom, as another’s less’ is curious because in some senses written wisdom is arguably definitively another’s. When you refer to written wisdom, whether this is something written by someone else or something of your own making informed by wider reading of another’s work, you are also in some sense referring to another’s wisdom. For this reason, it is curious that the simile-like comparison between the scepticism directed to ‘written wisdom’ and that to ‘another’s’ wisdom suggests that there is a difference between them. One underlying insinuation may be that even if written wisdom is inherently another’s, readers might only be limited to drawing from it what wisdom they already subscribe to, that is to say, their own. The rest may be taken as they would ‘another’s’. The stylistic prompting of ‘observer’ and ‘observation’ in the previous couplet thus places the issue of ownership and control into further question. To what extent is the poem being read and to what extent is it doing the reading? The word ‘passenger’ used in l.7 — ‘Tho’ many a passenger he rightly call | You hold him no Philosopher at all’ — seemingly in the sense of ‘passer-by’, may be self-reflexive. Readers appear as both passengers carried in the midst of the poem as well as the ‘you’ it is being directed to and implicitly evaluated by. When readers are rightly called out (or feel that they have been) the poem only seems to be ‘right by chance’. As per the suggestion of the written wisdom comparison, this may be because readers themselves have chanced past the interpretations that most pleased them.

In all, Pope’s readers become unsuspecting volunteers in a mini-experiment examining human nature. Those who depend too heavily on empirical evidence (the reading of the poem rather than the searching of the intention) are likely to privilege the conclusions of their own observations (whether ‘maxims’ apply to book-knowledge or experience-knowledge) over that of others. They are thus likely to ignore the variety of human experiences recorded in both ‘written wisdom’ (the ambiguous togethering of Pope’s points) and others’ testimony (Pope’s variously reiterated arguments and intentions).

To read the *Epistle to Cobham* properly, to truly listen to it, there is a need to repress the urge to deduce a single conclusive, logically consistent reading. This does not mean that readers are expected to immediately induce the many concurrent interpretations that are being simultaneously evoked in the poem’s framing language. Pope’s point is that readers cannot fully do this and that is the realisation that *To Cobham* requires. Pope is interested in how readers’ personal inclinations act on the reality of his own wording in a way that creates

meanings in excess of (though not necessarily in conflict with) his own purported aims, however partially unrealised he suggests these aims might be. The word ‘notion’ itself (‘Maxims are drawn from Notions, these from Guess’) has a complex history that could lead readers onto very different paths of interpretation. ‘Notion’, while often used interchangeably with ‘idea’, has various technical senses in philosophy that differ in their minutiae from philosopher to philosopher. In logic, ‘notion’ was generally synonymous with intention. ‘First intentions’ or ‘first notions’ were conceived as the primary knowledge of things formed by the mind’s direct engagement with extramental objects; ‘second intentions’ or ‘second notions’ were created through the application of further thought onto first intentions (OED). Isaac Watts explains that what he calls ‘Second Notions’ were described as mental relations (‘Entia Rationis’) in schools and were known for having ‘no real Being, but by the Operation of the Mind’. Therefore, Watts writes, when we understand ‘an Egg as a Noun Substantive in grammar, or as signified by the Letters e,g,g’ we understand it in terms of second notions.²⁷¹ Pope’s zeugmatic linkage of ‘Maxims’, ‘Notions’, ‘these’ and ‘Guess’ may in this sense be commenting on readers’ own reliance on the logic of second notions, what exists more in the operation of the mind and in grammar than in sensible reality, as itself mirroring the maxim-forming process described. We cannot assume whether this is in favour of or against the bibliophile or the empiricist because ‘first notions’ — knowledge acquired by direct application of the mind to an object — seem to more strongly imply the experiential knower. In *Rational Notions*, Pope’s acquaintance Charles Mein describes ‘Rational or reflex notions’ as ‘the mind’s second or after-thoughts’ whereby it acquires ‘a more perfect and mature knowledge of things’. Mein also suggests that it is only through these notions that the mind can attain ‘that sort of knowledge which is truly satisfactory to it’.²⁷² This definition of ‘notion’ as a more mature, thought-out stage of thinking may steer readers into reconsidering ‘maxims’ as indicating a hidden process of self-reflection behind their pithy exterior. It might be questioned if ‘guess’ indicates more immaturity of thought than a ‘notion’ or if this pursuit of a satisfying answer to what Pope precisely means may be over- or under- complicating Pope’s point.

Given the word’s historical relationship with questions about the relationship between language and philosophy, this is likely intentional. Richard Burthogge described ‘notions’ as having no ‘Existence of their own’ outside the mind other than their formal being as

²⁷¹ Isaac Watts, *Logick: or, the Right Use of Reason in the Enquiry After Truth, with a Variety of Rules to Guard Against Error, in the Affairs of Religion and Human Life, as well as in the Sciences* (London: 1725), p.33.

²⁷² Charles Mein, *An Essay Concerning Rational Notions* (London, 1733), p.6.

‘Noemata’ in writing.²⁷³ In rhetoric, *noema* is a figure of speech denoting when something is stated so obscurely that the readers or listeners will need to spend considerable time in working it out.²⁷⁴ This would suggest that readers are supposed to linger on the word and question how Pope’s choice of diction complicates readings. The Twickenham editors cite Locke in reference to ‘notions’ but it is likely, given the noncommittal nature of the argument, that Pope is also using ‘notion’ to refer to the pushback against Locke led by John Sergeant and his circle, as well as the anonymous *Two dissertations concerning sense, and the imagination* (1728), which is currently thought to be written by Charles Mein. This resistance was defined by a series of attempts to distinguish ‘notion’ from ‘ideas’. These series of efforts are likely to have been familiar to Pope at the time of his writing *Cobham* as it was a key addition to his friend George Berkeley’s 1734 edition of *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*. Locke defined ‘notions’ as complex ideas that had ‘their original and constant existence more in the thoughts of men than in the reality of things’ but he also grouped them together with a host of other quasi-synonyms for ‘ideas’ from ‘phantasms’ to ‘species’.²⁷⁵ This was considered by some, including the author of *Two dissertations*,²⁷⁶ as a misuse of the word. *Two dissertations* emphasised that having an idea of something did not mean that it was understood; perception and understanding were different processes. If an idea is the representation in the mind of a sensation of an external object, a notion is what gives it significance, that which is understood of the representation. Pope’s emphasis on notion so early in the poem seems to direct the reader to focus on precisely this, what is understood. In fact, the word ‘notion’ is central to the *Two dissertations*’s differentiation of man from animals and automata, another aspect of the word’s history that bears great relevance to an epistle on ‘the Knowledge and Characters of Men’. *Two dissertations* is concerned that Locke’s doctrine of ideas and his conception of thinking-matter might persuade readers that animals share the same mental capacities as humans, only in a different shape. It argues that the faculties of sense and imagination that humans and animals share are not intellectual faculties because they do not determine the ‘Mind’s Powers

²⁷³ Richard Burthogge, *Organum vetus & novum, or, A discourse of reason and truth wherein the natural logick common to mankind is briefly and plainly described* (London: Printed for Sam. Crouch, 1678), p.15.

²⁷⁴ ‘But by this figure [*Noema*] the obscurity of the sence lieth not in a single word, but in an entier speech, whereof we do not so easily conceiue the meanings, but as it were by coniecture’, George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589), III.19, p.193, in *Early English Books Online* <<http://name.umd.umich.edu/A68619.0001.001>>[accessed 28 September 2021]

²⁷⁵ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, II.22, 2 (p.288).

²⁷⁶ See Tim Milnes, ‘On the authorship of *Two dissertations concerning sense and the imagination, with an essay on consciousness* (1728)’, *Notes and Queries*, 47.2 (2000), 196–198; and James G. Buickerood, “‘The whole exercise of reason’: Charles Mein’s Account of Rationality”, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 63.4 (2002), 639–658.

of understanding things'.²⁷⁷ These lower faculties offer only 'a bare Representation of some corporeal Phenomenon or external Appearance, as Colour, Sound, Taste, Odeur, etc' and do not communicate the significance of these appearances or 'what Thought or Notion and Apprehension [the mind] ought to have of it'.²⁷⁸ It is this ability that distinguishes the human faculties of reason and understanding from simple animal sensation. Following this definition, even the empiricist who relies on sense-perception must not be underestimated as a merely passive force. If they have 'notions' it is because they actively use their reason and understanding. *Two dissertations* specifies that the reason this distinction between sense and reason is difficult to express is that 'we are seldom mindful, or take any care of our words and Expressions, so as sufficiently and plainly enough to distinguish the one from the other'.²⁷⁹ By confusing 'notions' as mere 'ideas' we tend to 'ascribe to Sense more than its Due', allowing some 'Intellectual Notions' from our high powers of reason and understanding to 'creep in, and mingle it self' with 'Sense'. This technical sense of notion as an indicator of not only further thinking but also meaning thus arises from a desire for clarity and precision in diction. These origins add a fresh layer of irony to the rhetorical *noema* of its use in *To Cobham*.

Scholarly readers, aware of the many technical definitions of 'notion', a word at the centre of so many philosophical quibbles, might take the potentially esoteric nature of the line as one in favour of the book-learner. On the contrary, those using it in the layman's sense of 'idea' or 'general concept' might see the verse as being more ambivalent and cryptic. In reality, Pope might be encouraging reflection on the common thinking processes underlying both methods of knowing. By diverting to the nature of how both book-learners and explorers acquire knowledge, Pope asks readers how both methods can be valued. Pope's use of the word 'notion' in the 'Argument' and in his verse, and demonstratively in the readerly experience, works to reveal how much men are predisposed to observing, arguing, and reading notionally, that is, with more emphasis on what exists in their own minds than the reality of a work. However, as we have seen, Pope is also concerned about the nature of what knowledge of men and their characters might be. This is where our final definition of 'notion', Berkeley's, will prove illuminating. Berkeley also emphasised that 'the terms 'idea' and 'notion' may not be used convertibly'. Berkeley's so-called 'Likeness Principle' held that 'an

²⁷⁷ *Two dissertations concerning Sense and the Imagination with an Essay on Consciousness* (London: Tonson, 1728), p.3.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p.9.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p.17.

idea can be like nothing but an idea' as an idea's very existence consists only in being perceived.²⁸⁰ Following this rule, any conception of 'spirits', active beings that think and perceive, and their operations, could not be called an 'idea' without creating false equivalence between something active (*esse est percipere*) and something inert (*esse est percipi*). Berkeley offered the word 'notion' as the term to describe those who perceive.²⁸¹ Pope's use of the word thus draws attention to the nature of what he is trying to explore, the 'knowledge and characters of men', something that cannot in itself be perceived because it is itself perceiving. It foregrounds how difficult it is to 'read Man' and form 'notions' of him as we do of 'Books', and precisely how nebulous the prospect of the 'knowledge and characters of men' is. To cater to this realization of the limits of the project, *To Cobham* and, as we shall later see, the other *Moral Essays* often deliver their points demonstratively rather than expositively. They advise on the application of their philosophical tenets through performance and demonstration.

To Cobham creates space for such richly self-reflexive readings and over-readings so as to show the two titular studies — 'the Knowledge and Characters of Men' — running concurrently. Anthropology and epistemology — the study of man and the study of the nature of (human) knowledge — seem to be simultaneously in focus from the outset. The two interpretations of 'the Knowledge of Men', knowledge about mankind and the nature of knowledge belonging to and generated by mankind, seem to be indistinguishably intertwined and, in this case, at odds with one another. Even as Pope attempts to describe the methodology of the criticised 'coxcomb bird' he seems to repeat it and seemingly undermine his argument. By showings readers how they too are implicated in the apparent fluency or otherwise of the poem, Pope allows them to see such angles of self-contradiction as demonstrative of both interpretations of 'the Knowledge of Men', knowledge about men and human knowledge, rather than an ill-thought-out structural flaw. When Pope explains that 'all' extremes have a tendency to generalise — 'Men may be read, as well as Books too much' (l.10) — the fluency of the argument is impeded by the reader's concurrent readings of themselves. Lingering uncertainties about the opening make readers feel the pressure of both extremes: how best to read Pope (the 'Man') as well as his book. In this way, the gulf indicated between over-readers of men and over-readers of books is intrinsically mirrored by that between Pope-as-poet and readers. The knowledge about mankind Pope might be trying

²⁸⁰ Desmond M. Clarke, *Berkeley: Philosophical Writings*, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p.85.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp.141-142.

to implicate is always mediated by our own questions about the structure in which they are presented. We might read him as someone thinking with himself in verse and, not unlike the ‘coxcomb bird’, cyclically learning, speaking, and advancing to the general maxim of the ruling passion. What he is indicating very early on is that the ruling passion is not only a way of ‘reading’ the characters of men; it is also how reading and interpretation work in general. While the poem may appear in many respects self-reflexive, it also functions as a two-way mirror. Readers see the epistle reflecting on its own operations yet they also see their own biases and characters faintly superimposed on the reflective glass of their viewing screen. As a result, the experience of reading *Cobham* has a way of subsuming its contents. Because of the disorienting introduction, the reader is distracted by the fact that much of their own knowing of Pope is based on book knowledge and therefore their own capacities and judgment are also under scrutiny. The prospect of over-reading seems inevitable, misreading perpetual.

By creating this interpretive gap between the propositional structure of *To Cobham* in the abstract and its realities in verse, Pope furnishes a space for that ambiguity that exists more in the act of reading and interpreting the poem than in its actual contents. Through their own difficulties in truly reading the poem rather than reading into it, readers can see the layers of self-analysis in-built in the work and recognise it as being self-aware of its tendencies to repeat the same behaviours it rebukes, judges, and describes. Even though this temptation to generalise about mankind is present throughout the poem, when it does ultimately prevail in Pope’s elaboration of his ruling passion theory the experience of having attempted to resist it in the first two-thirds of the poem deters readers from fully accepting the idea. By enacting precisely the readerly propensity for theorisation and simplification that the beginning of the poem attempts to interrupt and forestall, Pope shows this inclination to be a part of human nature to which he too is not immune. In creating this self-reflexive structure Pope addresses the perennial problem facing his *Essay on Man* without truly upsetting his argument: how can he express all this knowledge of mankind’s place in the universe without overstepping his own position as a human with finite intelligence?

Fred Parker describes *To Cobham* as a work that explores concepts that may be called philosophical yet also one that presents ideas with a recognition of ‘their saturation in the dimension of experience’. For Parker, this ‘incarnation of thought as experience’ expresses experiential knowing as one in which the ‘understanding is a movement of mind plotted through time, and depends upon an irreducible compound of thought, feeling, and

imagination'.²⁸² In the light of the epigraph to the deathbed edition, this relationship between theory and experience can also be understood as one that has its roots in the relationship between the linguistic logic of poetry and its varying attempts to evoke the non-linearity and multiplicity of thought. We have on the one hand the readerly pull to find the 'ruling passion' and, in Pope's words, to 'read originally for the sense'.²⁸³ We have on the other hand a characterisation of the mind as this dynamic, mutable force, an active being that can only be known as 'notions', and something that naturally creates precisely the 'irreducible compound of thought, feeling, and imagination' that is all Pope tangibly had of his original *opus magnum* design. By playing with the differences between his stated 'Argument' and its verse incarnation, Pope is conveying that an idea may appear less confusing in a pocket of thought than when reified on paper. Such recurring gestures to the lack of polish in his work suggest that revision is necessary because a work of systematic writing is in some ways entirely different from a work of systematic thought in its purely imaginative and experiential sense. What follows in the rest of *To Cobham* may be read as a defence of Pope's own authority as a poet in the face of his most common criticisms, as well as the poet's most express reflections on the nature of the mind.

In an effort to bypass the epistemological limits of his project, Pope attempts to insinuate ideas that *To Cobham* does not directly propose. Ambiguities in the poem's logic allow the epistle to carry forward multiple viewpoints within a single clause as if to show the medium straining against the weight of its ambitions. Berkeley's sense of 'notions' as the 'ideas' of active beings seems to prevail in Pope's succeeding explorations of the 'many sorts of Mind':

That each from other differs, first confess;
 Next, that he varies from himself no less:
 Add Nature's, Custom's, Reason's, Passion's strife,
 And all Opinion's colours cast on life.

Yet more; the difference is as great between
 The optics seeing, as the objects seen.
 All manners take a tincture from our own,
 Or come discolour'd thro' our Passions shown.

²⁸² Parker, "'Sworn to no Master': Pope's Scepticism in the *Epistle to Bolingbroke* and *An Essay on Man*" in Oxford Scholarship Online.

²⁸³ *Anecdotes*, p.13.

Or Fancy's beam enlarges, multiplies,
Contracts, inverts, and gives ten thousand dyes (ll.19-28).

The portion of the prose 'Argument' which glosses the above states that there is 'Some Peculiarity in every man, characteristic to himself, yet varying from himself' and that the difficulty in identifying this peculiarity arises from 'our own Passions, Fancies, Faculties, &c'.²⁸⁴ This reasoning is more self-reflexive in its verse form. The phrase 'Yet more' may be read as a volta between the first and second verse-paragraphs but it can also be taken as an indication of further elaboration to the effect of 'Yet [there is] more'. In the latter case, Pope could be simply conveying that there are 'yet more' colours to be cast from the list of variables in ll.21-22. In the former case, Pope could be changing the angle of his argument to suggest that 'he varies from himself' not only 'no less' but also 'more' than individuals vary with one another. Instead of shifting the argument (as we might expect in the case of a volta), the second verse-paragraph can also be read as furthering the economy of comparison ('more', 'less', 'as') which has already been operating with ambiguous levels of figurativeness so far. It could also be suggesting that however infinitely various our minds seem to be, we are also limited by our differently constituted bodies. According to this potential third point we are difficult to read because, in addition to differing in character from one another and, over time, in ourselves, each of us also sees through differently powered 'optics', whether that means literal anatomical sense-perception, the optical tools at our disposal, or the biographical contexts of our lives.

This ambiguity in the function of 'Yet more' seems intentional and well-placed and is echoed in the subsequent use of the coordinating conjunctions 'Or[...] | Or[...] ', which seem to trace the gradual evolution of thought in the first verse stanza. Following the logic of the first stanza, we go from an understanding 'that each from other differs' (hence we each have a tincture of our own) to the realisation that 'he varies from himself no less' (and our tinctures can by different optics be interpreted as other dyes). However, the greater sense of uncertainty in 'Or' than in the corresponding conjunctions in the previous iteration of the point ('[...]first confess: | Next [...]') seems to shine its own 'beam' of fancy over the preceding passage. In this way, Pope shows the poem itself undergoing a process of refraction like the 'manners' described. We see the content of the first stanza refracting through the prism of 'Yet more'. We question if the 'Or' is betraying Pope's own wavering

²⁸⁴ *TE*, III.ii, p.13.

stance on how exactly ‘Opinion’s colours cast on life’ or if it is simply narrating the different examples latent in the previous iteration of the idea. In this way Pope opens up his verse-space so that the same compressed syntax can suspend multiple, very different pathways of thought. What is crucial to understand is that he accomplishes this without necessarily privileging one interpretation over another. In complicating our understandings of the poem in this way Pope shows how we might be forgiving of these same uncertainties, irregularities, and blurs as they occur within us in the mental phenomena he describes, but experience confusion when they are conveyed to us in writing in a similar fashion.

The poem’s incarnation of these multiple possibilities through its use of conjunctions, while confusing for anyone wishing to paraphrase the argument of the poem faithfully, enacts the reviser’s and, indeed, readers’ excitement as they reach for an aspiration — that of the *opus magnum* project or a greater understanding of the knowledge and characters of men — from the vantage point of a blur of possibilities. The repetitive qualities of these two paragraphs might lead us to suspect that Pope is testing how long his verse can sustain his ideas before lapsing into renewed self-doubt or resorting, in a defeatist gesture, to the comfortable but unproductive imaginative deadlock of hyperbole — ‘ten thousand dyes’. While Pope is outwardly describing the difficulty of observing without self-implication he is also describing the difficulty of revising a work, or articulating the notions in his mind, without betraying the true changeability of his thinking and, as the epistle argues, all thinking. This includes reading as well. The use of the word ‘less’ as the end-word in both ‘To written Wisdom, as another’s, less’ and ‘Next, that he varies from himself no less’ (l.20) links together two important factors about Pope and the reader’s shared mutability: first, that there is a difference between both their experiences of the poem and the poem itself; and second, that both the reader and Pope may be as varying in their opinions from one part to the next.

Pope’s description of the nature of human character as being so changeable is compelling because it validates and explains his critics’ chief complaint that the poem is poorly constructed and obscure. This excess of ideas and activity that would have presumably been pruned, regularised, and clarified in further revisions had the project not been ‘laid aside’ is carried forward in the minutiae of the poem’s syntactical logic in a way that is intentionally and productively disruptive of reader experience. By creating a symbiotic relationship between the experience of the poem and its stylistic vices Pope is suggesting that there is a level of incompatibility between how we are used to reading poetry and understanding discourse and the way it takes shape and unravels in our minds. Perhaps these fragments

which the ‘Advertisement’ describes are not *disjecta membra poetae* in a purely written or notional sense but something in-between – half-jointed ideas created because there is something in the interaction between language and the workings of Pope’s ‘capacious mind’ that cannot realise them: ‘that may be reason but is not man’ (l.36). The ‘muddied waters’ Horace accuses Lucilius of proliferating are still muddy in Pope but this time as an informed choice. Pope wants the reader to feel distinctly aware that there is a clogging in the flow of communication between them that is being expressed in these deliberate entanglements between verbal particularities and the central arguments of the poem.

Pope’s reiterations of the difficulties in reading mankind periodically return to the difficulty of catching the ‘notion’ of an active being:

His Principle of action once explore,
That instant ’tis his Principle no more.
Like following life thro’ creatures you dissect,
You lose it in the moment you detect (ll.37-40).

Fifteen lines after ‘Yet more’ we reach ‘no more’ but this is no indication of resolution. Pope expresses frustration that our process of investigation seems always at least one step behind the characters we would investigate. Similarly, in ‘dissecting’ the minutiae of the poem’s many meanings readers risk overanalysing a part at the expense of their appreciation of the poem’s overall argument. There seems to be a fundamental incompatibility between method and aim that expends both Pope’s ability as a poet-philosopher and our abilities as readers. Yet, while acknowledging the irreducible variety of human nature in this way, Pope does not altogether discount the usefulness of the categories and classifications afforded to other experiences. The very idea of the ‘ruling passion’ tends towards the concept that flux and diversity of experience may eventually amount to some form of general truth or maxim. It is, of course, very much in Pope’s interest to defend the ‘ruling passion’ principle as it is characteristic of his satiric trade. However, by expatiating on its opposite, a chaos of passions, Pope also shows that this is not simply a self-interested choice. The ‘ruling passion’ is in one sense also a natural response to the unreadable nature of mankind:

Oft in the Passions’ wild rotation tost,
Our spring of action to ourselves is lost:
Tir’d, not determin’d, to the last we yield,
And what comes then is master of the field (ll.41-44).

Pope is already building up to his 'ruling passion' exposition early in the poem. Part of the persuasiveness of these early efforts comes from the uncertainty fatigue he is building in readers as they struggle to distinguish his 'spring of action' from their own. We may say that 'to the last' Pope, too, yields but now it appears as a necessary compromise: unable to keep up with 'Passions' wild rotation' the only viable coping mechanism is to generalise. In this regard the 'ruling passion' is not so different from reading and interpretation. We see this in the unfolding of Pope's argument. Pope describes how historians overlook the niceties of particular characters to focus on 'One action Conduct; one, heroic Love' (l.86), an analogy that perhaps tellingly corresponds with ideas of classical unities in Tragedy, the unity of action in particular. Part of the effectiveness of Pope's satires lies in the fact that even whilst knowing that actions do not always reveal character (ll.61-70) we still use them as a measure of personal worth. Pope's discussion of how one may 'read' man according to their professions — the 'boastful and rough' squire, the 'meek' and dishonest tradesman, the 'bold, and brave' Soldier — rings with a similar irony. Through successive re-readings the reader recognises that their own processes tend towards the same discerning of continuity, a line of understanding if not argument, through rich variation. The poem recognises that the accuracy of this shared process is undermined by the nature of the human processor and that the reliable identification of both the knowledge and character of man may require a perspective so wide it may be outside the locus of a finite, human intelligence, let alone a poetic one. This may be another reason why the optics in action and the optics being searched are of the same slippery material.

To compensate for this fundamentally human deficiency, the poem deliberately invites the reader to supplement an idea of what the poem cannot directly say. The poem's periodic returns to the nature of the mind are designed to encourage the reader to participate in the construction of this unrealised ambition:

Our depths who fathoms, or our shallows finds,
 Quick whirls, and shifting eddies, of our minds?
 Life's stream for Observation will not stay,
 It hurries all too fast to mark their way.
 In vain sedate reflections we wou'd make,
 When half our knowledge we must snatch, not take (ll.29-34).

Pope describes how the changing nature of the mind seems to preclude the possibility of a permanent generalization of human character, particularly as much of our own observations of our own minds occur subconsciously. While developing his initial point about how a person varies from themselves over time, a concept that is clearly influenced by Montaigne's 'Of the Inconstancy of our Actions', Pope also draws on more systematic philosophical descriptions of this process. Here, I believe he is taking inspiration partially from Locke's understanding of human consciousness. In the *Essay*'s chapter on 'Identity and Diversity' Locke argues that every person's consciousness is definitively interrupted. Locke defines a person as a 'thinking intelligent Being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing in different times and places'.²⁸⁵ This ability to think of themselves self-reflectively and as continuing to exist over time is provided to the 'person' by their 'consciousness'. This 'consciousness' is 'essential' to their thinking ability: 'it being impossible for any one to perceive, without perceiving, that he does perceive'. Actions such as 'Thought' which 'consist in a continued train of Succession' have, for Locke, an unquestionable 'diversity':

Because each perishing the moment it begins, they cannot exist in different times, or in different places, as permanent Beings can at different times exist in distant places; and therefore no motion or thought considered as at different times can be the same, each part thereof having a different beginning of Existence.²⁸⁶

While we may think differently at different moments in time, the consciousness that 'always accompanies thinking' remains the same and constitutes one's continued sense of 'personal Identity'. Locke finds that our difficulty in believing that the same thinking thing is always constantly present in the mind comes from this uniting consciousness' inability to offer a continuous timeline of its own thinking. One's consciousness is always forgetting itself. Instead of building a continuous bridge between moments in time, one's consciousness offers stepping-stones of conscious presence over a stream of forgotten interconnections. Locke also describes how there is:

[...] no moment of our Lives wherein we have the whole train of all our past Actions before our Eyes in one view: But even the best Memories losing the sight of one part whilst they are viewing another; and we sometimes, and that the greatest part of our Lives, not reflecting on our past selves, being intent on our present

²⁸⁵ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, II.27.ix, p.335.

²⁸⁶ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, II.27.ii, p.229.

Thoughts, and in some sleep, having no Thoughts at all, or at least none with that consciousness, which remarks our waking Thoughts.²⁸⁷

Locke notes that because the mind is not perpetually thinking, consciousness is interrupted by periods of unconsciousness such as in slumber, and such gaps in consciousness are filled by memories of ‘a past consciousness’. Pope’s rhetorical questions in the quoted passage seem to respond partially to Locke’s suggestion that these voids in memory may lead to a crisis of identity: ‘our consciousness being interrupted, and we losing sight of our past selves, doubts are raised whether we are the same thinking thing; i.e. the same substance or no.’ Depending on the placement of emphasis, it is unclear from the first line if ‘quick whirls’, ‘shifting eddies’ and ‘our minds’ refers to other things that can be found or fathomed, or if it refers to the elusiveness of the active being ‘who’ is doing the discovering. The inclusive pronoun ‘we’ in ‘in vain sedate reflections we would make’— notably different from the use of ‘you’ at the very beginning of the epistle — places Cobham and the reader alongside Pope instead of opposite him. This appeal to their shared humanity — the interrupted natures of their own minds as well as that of the *opus magnum* project as it is described in the ‘Advertisement’ — once again asks readers to approach the work differently from how they would other poetry. They are asked to supply to any gaps and confusions of logic — moments of subconscious inarticulation — the presence of their own minds. ‘Life’s Stream’, if it is to be observed, is difficult to observe alone.

This is why, perhaps, the closing couplet in the sequence quoted above deliberately recalls *An Essay on Criticism*:

From *vulgar Bounds* with *brave Disorder* part,
And *snatch* a *Grace* beyond the Reach of Art,
Which, without passing thro’ the *Judgment*, gains
The *Heart*, and all its End *at once* attains (ll.154-157).

In *An Essay on Criticism* the word ‘snatch’ seems to be itself caught in the life ‘stream’ of the poem. It describes how moments of inelegance or artistic incorrectness can sometimes capture something of value beyond the capacity of artistic rules. It, however, hurries past the question of why that is and how it might work. In *Cobham*, this question is given the central focus. By suggesting that ‘half our knowledge we must snatch, not take’ Pope is also suggesting that there are different speeds at which life and art work, and that the same can be

²⁸⁷ Ibid., ll.27.x, pp.335-336.

said of writing, reading, and thinking. We can see that the original dichotomy between written wisdom and experiential wisdom is still ongoing however much of the division between them has blurred. Pope seems to move between the two intelligences indiscriminately. While the discussion of the shifting movements of the minds appears to suggest that he is trying to discuss mental observations, the word ‘mark’ in ‘It hurries all too fast to mark their way’ could indicate that he has somehow transitioned to ‘written wisdom’ once more. Indeed, when he writes ‘In vain sedate reflections we wou’d make’ he speaks at once of both mental and pictorial reflections: images of ourselves mirrored in the waters of the poem, and that of our own thinking on that poem and those waters. Both kinds of ‘reflections’ are unsettled by their inability to match the speed of their surrounding waters, but one is artistic and the other notional. Their position relative to one another in the space-time-voice-thought continuum of verse is a conspicuous unknown.

This doublespeak of the two ‘reflections’ in the poem tells us how to read it. The epigraph that heads *An Essay on Criticism* comes from Horace’s epistle to Numicius which begins ‘Nil admirari’ — ‘Marvel at nothing’ — and advises that this is the only way to be happy and remain so. Horace is wary of the way in which the unexpected can unsettle the mind into a ‘benumbed’ state even when the surprise is a cause for joy. Whereas the *Essay on Criticism* glides past the question of ‘snatch’-ing, the *Epistle to Cobham* is not scared to be benumbed and to linger and analyse that state even if it is considered ‘obscure’ or ‘entangled’ for pursuing it. It is equally if not more invested in critical practice than *An Essay on Criticism* as it magnifies that point of potential bewilderment — ‘who’ does ‘fathom’ our minds? — and looks critically at the causes underlying that unknowing. The self-contentment suggested in *An Essay Criticism*’s epitaph seems quite the opposite of the self-analytical dissatisfaction in the *Epistles*:

Si quid novisti rectius istis,
Candidus imperti; si non, his utere mecum

[If you know something better than these precepts, pass it on, my good fellow. If not, join me in following these.]
(Horace, *Epistle* 1.6, ll.67-68)

In the *Epistles* the operative concern is not ‘if you know something better’. The question asked in *To Cobham* is of a more wistful epistemological kind — why is it that I can only know so much and in this way?

Pope thus presents an epistle that seems in some ways to consciously contradict its pivotal epiphany of the existence of a uniting ‘ruling passion’. These repeated gestures towards the multiplicity of the mind and the unknowability of much of its workings seem to dispute the suggestion that there is a ‘ruling passion’ at all. Its portrayal of vacillation and ‘irresolution’, what Montaigne considers the most blatant and pervasive human defect, seems to discount the existence of a ruling passion.²⁸⁸ What does support the theory at last is the reader’s own need to find a ‘ruling passion’ in the form of a central argument within the poem. As aforementioned, this is something that is realised before the idea of a ‘ruling passion’ is even mentioned. Throughout Pope’s artful turns between arguments Pope draws to our attention how much we naturally search out a ‘ruling passion’ when reading. The ideal of suspension of judgement, which is essentially sceptical, is upset by readers’ inability to wait for the poem’s ‘ruling passion’. They seem too eager to follow their own. The essential ‘principle of action’ of the epistle’s ruling passion moves too swiftly for in-text analysis and so the poem naturally requires multiple re-readings. The individual will is lost in passions’ ‘wild rotation’. As a result, the reader’s endurance is worn down by contradiction until they too find themselves lost in a flurry of chaotic impulses. At last, they, too, must seek a sense of security by succumbing to the ‘ruling passion’ of their own readerly desires. Pope captures the culmination of this pent up frustration in his build-up to his first explicit statement of the ruling passion hypothesis:

Judge we by Nature? Habit can efface,
 In’trest o’ercome, or Policy take place:
 By Actions? those Uncertainty divides:
 By Passions? these Dissimulation hides:
 Opinions? they still take a wider range:
 Find, if you can, in what you cannot change.

Search then the Ruling Passion: There, alone,
 The Wild are constant, and the Cunning known (ll.168-174).

We see Pope dismissing different methods of judging character one by one. Each dismissal of a potential point of reference — Nature, Actions, Passions, Opinions — has an impact on the following attempt as the clauses grow more and more truncated. The colons linking ll.168-72

²⁸⁸ Montaigne, *Essays*, trans. by Charles Cotton, ed. Hazlitt (The Floating Press, 2009), pp.675-676.

into one sentence show the disappointment after each fruitless effort to find a measure for human character leaks into the succeeding one. The build up of momentum is finally broken by the appositive ‘if you can’ as the sentence finally tires itself into the realisation that it is likely searching in vain. The inevitable surrender to the ‘ruling passion’ is not designed to leave us any less dissatisfied. The ruling passion rejects prolonged scepticism as an unsustainable and exhausting strategy and it reverts to ideas of the constancy of divinity and nature as an anchor of solace amidst constant change: ‘Know, God and Nature only are the same’ (l.154).

However this, too, has its own kind of facility that leaves it as unsatisfactory as that of those who judge ‘in the gross’. Having gained an appreciation for the mutability of the mind, we understand that any attempt at paraphrase or summary dooms Pope and his readers into reducing his work to something that is better expressed in that struggle between interpretive habit, un-analysed experience, the pull of our own ruling passions and our efforts to resist and read objectively. It is in this realization that the frustrating inconsistencies of the poem induce in us that the poem’s argumentative foothold truly lies. Pope shows that this form of ‘ruling passion’ is in any case how interpretation works — both to its advantage and its detriment — and the consistent temptation it poses (despite the abundance of inconsistencies the poem presents) is the greatest advocate for its relevancy as the defining ‘tincture’ by which to uncover human character. That natural pull to order must be rejected and suspended because the poem is as much about self-restraint as it is about its purported subjects. The poem requires an analysis of the subject — human knowledge and character — because it is also its medium. The purpose of such scepticism is not to batter the understanding into a perpetual pyrrhonic defeatism but to force the reader to look upon their own mental movements and to see the way in which such habits enact, defy, and interact with the positions the verse lays out. This interaction between habits-of-mind and the habits-of-writing prevents us from fully understanding Pope’s *Epistles to Several Persons* just as much as it prevented Pope from completing it. However, by presenting the poem as definitively incomplete, and therefore always open to revision, Pope allows the readers’ own willingness to understand the work to push them towards the poem’s final epiphany: the ruling passion.

Reading and misreading the ruling passion

The concept of reading for a ‘ruling passion’ might also be essential to the way Pope describes his own particular way of reading. The *Anecdotes* record that ‘He, (as he observed in particular), read originally for the sense; whereas we are taught, for so many years, to read only for words.’²⁸⁹ The reading-for-‘sense’ and reading-for-‘words’ comparison might even be another variant of Cobham and Pope’s original argument for and against empirical learning. What the ruling passion does for us as readers is give us licence to read the *opus magnum* creatively. We can curate any number and combination of ruling passions within the *opus magnum* frame and find both instruction and readerly fulfilment in a more knowingly self-directed way. It is apposite that an author for whom there is no sense of a true finish in the revision process and for whom seemingly completed works could still be susceptible to future corrections should afford his readers the same creative liberty by making it so key to his work’s central message.

At the same time Pope is careful not to discount the fact that, in reality, one is unlikely to discern someone’s true ruling passion, let alone his. An abiding source of uncertainty in *To Cobham* is the idea that since actions do not always show character (ll.61-70) and human beings have inconsistent natures it is very easy to misread people: even ‘the wisest may mistake, | If second qualities for first they take’ (ll.210-211). However, Pope’s ambiguous use of language throughout the poem recognises that we often do take ‘second qualities for first’ and that it is not entirely disadvantageous to the reader to do so. Indeed, the significance of the couplet is deepened when we consider how it counteracts the deterministic qualities of the couplet-paragraph that precedes it:

Nature well known, no prodigies remain,
Comets are regular, and Wharton plain (ll.208-209).

Considering that some of the principal pleasures of *To Cobham* arise from its commitment to complexity, its frustrating yet stimulating inability to find the plainness and resolution here described, this isolated couplet-paragraph strikes a jarring contrast to what readers have been expecting of the poem so far. The contrast between the landscape of equivocalness navigated in the first half of the poem and this return to the possibility of definitive knowledge emphasises that the template for what could be the ‘correct’ understanding of ‘Nature’ and an

²⁸⁹ *Anecdotes*, p.29.

understanding that is considered too simplistic, uncritical, and optimistic are worryingly similar. Even the rare satisfaction of sense-making is now suspect. The problem that this couplet reveals is that we tend to imagine and expect elegant solutions even if we know that they are underpinned by the same infinitely complex contradictions that the first half of the poem strives with such difficulty to describe. This unspoken expectation might have more to do with the level of complexity we are willing to bear than that which a solution should realistically require. The couplet starting ‘the wisest may mistake’ not only frees us of this unspoken template of what understanding might look like but also demonstrates why it may not be in our interests to achieve it. If readers take a secondary characteristic of *To Cobham* as the linchpin for their interpretation of the poem it might be to their advantage. They might appreciate it more than the ‘ruling passion’ because it has the ability to sustain the satisfying richness of irregularity that ‘Nature well known’ disappointingly does away with.

This emphasis on the fallibility of human judgment is freeing because it gives readers the implicit licence to mistake the ruling passion. They may use their own unique observations of secondary and tertiary passions to create meanings in excess of Pope’s plans so long as the resulting interpretations exist within the margin of tolerance provided by Pope’s grammatical and syntactical frames. Pope’s continued description of the relationship between non-ruling and ruling passions encourages readers to take an actively creative role in their own experience of the text:

In vain th’observer eyes the builder’s toil.
But quite mistakes the scaffold for the pile.

In this one Passion man can strength enjoy,
As Fits give vigour, just when they destroy (ll.220-223).

The focus on last moments (the final ‘Fits’) develops Pope’s very first published poetic description of the ruling passion as ‘the Mind’s disease’ that ‘Grows with [each sufferer’s] growth, and strengthens with his strength’ (*An Essay on Man*, ll.136-138). Whereas in *An Essay on Man* the predilection for the ruling passion is so pervasive it ‘mingle[s] with [the sufferer’s] very frame’ (ll.137), in *To Cobham* that frame is broken down into further parts such that it is difficult to differentiate the ‘scaffolding’ of secondary or supplementary passions from the essential ‘pile’ that supports the entire superstructure. Unable to differentiate between ruling and non-ruling passions we are left with only conjecture. Pope’s

message for readers in his exploration of the paradoxical value in misidentifying the ruling passion is that there is no use in being only the passive onlooker. It would be better to both observe the builder's toil and test its foundations by building upon and alongside it. The reader can take charge creatively and co-opt Pope's work for their own aesthetic and philosophical satisfaction because the existence of the ruling passion, the unseen 'pile', does not take away from the persuasive qualities of arguments derived from a scaffolding of secondary and tertiary passions.

We see this in action at the very end of the poem. Towards the end of *To Cobham* Pope fixates on the value of last words as markers of one's true ruling passion. This final section culminates in a verse-paragraph that both supports and subverts the importance of the ruling passion hypothesis:

And you! brave Cobham, to the last breath
 Shall feel your ruling passion strong in death:
 Such in those moments as in all the past.
 "Oh, save my country, heav'n!" shall be your last (ll.262-265).

In a subtle tribute to the opening of the epistle, Cobham 'feel[s his] ruling passion' (empirically) and words it too. Yet, we walk away from the poem not entirely sure whether this abiding patriotism is truly Cobham's 'ruling passion' or a function of Pope's courtesy to his friend. The stanza can all too easily be read as a compliment from Pope rather than as a reflection of Cobham's character itself. Indeed, Pope is recorded to have given Francis Atterbury exactly the same last words in his 'Epitaph to Atterbury' so their attribution to *Cobham* may not be entirely sincere.²⁹⁰ The last words might even be designed to reflect Pope's own virtuousness rather than Cobham's. This ambiguity about Pope's intentions and their effects is important because it demonstrates how difficult it is to differentiate the ruling passion from lesser passions, and how the process of doing so leads the observer to be unwittingly implicated in their own study. We cannot be sure if this is truly Cobham's ruling passion or if the little 'death' of the poem indicates that it is reflective of Pope's. However, as ever in the case of *To Cobham*, no one argument can reliably supplant another. Ultimately, we cannot escape the fact that Cobham's last words are also in a sense Pope's, and when they are taken up by the reader in their own critical paraphrases, the reader's.

²⁹⁰ See *TE*, III.ii, p.28, n.262-5.

As the last of the *Epistles to Several Persons* to be published, *Cobham* is most sensitive to Pope's difficulties in completing the *opus magnum*, especially since it was also intended to be the opening epistle in Pope's planned 'Ethic Epistles Book Two'. In May 1730 Spence records Pope saying that 'the first epistle [of the so-called 'Moral Epistles'] is to be to the whole work what a scale is to a book of maps, and in this, I reckon, lies my greatest difficulty — not only in settling and ranging the parts of it aright, but in making them agreeable enough to be read with pleasure.'²⁹¹ Spence notes that what Pope referred to as his 'Moral Epistles' at this point later became the *Essay*.²⁹² It makes sense that Pope leaned towards this metaphor in the early stages of his work because at this point he had thought that the *Essay* would be completed in one epistle. There is room for consideration, however, as to how far the final four-epistle version of the *Essay* retains this function of 'what a scale is to a book of maps' in relation to the rest of the incomplete *opus magnum*. The 'map' aspect of the original 1730 metaphor seems to have migrated to 'the Design' of the published version of the *Essay* which describes the latter 'as a general map of Man' but with no reference to Spence's original 'scale of miles'. Although the *Essay* is still described as being in some way scalar, this time the metaphor is divorced from its initial reference to cartography and, I think, refers to an altogether different sense of 'scale'.

I think the earlier metrological function of 'what a scale is to a book of maps' is implicitly and in effect transferred to *An Epistle to Cobham*, which was written when the *opus magnum*'s methodological shortcomings were fast becoming evident. Pope seems to have realised that it did not make sense to create a scale in its cartographic sense without having traversed through its bounding regions and checked that it suited the map to which it was to belong. The January 1739 edition of *An Essay on Man* disassociated the *Essay* (then still titled 'the First Book of Ethic Epistles') from what was previously known as 'Ethic Epistles, the Second Book' (now '*Epistles to Several Persons*') and also added a range of notes to the essay. Of particular interest is the note added to the couplet: 'Far as Creation's ample range extends, | The scale of sensual mental pow'rs ascends' (l.207-208), which explains that 'The Extent, Limits, and Use of Human Reason and Science, the Author design'd as the subject of his next Book of Ethic Epistles'. This indicates that the 'Moral Essays' were originally intended to form the completed second book of the *opus magnum*. However, it also points to *Cobham* in particular, the only poem the annotation 'Extent, Limits,

²⁹¹ *Anecdotes*, pp.129-130.

²⁹² *Ibid.*, p.130.

and Use of Human Reason' could possibly describe, as the true 'scale of sensual mental pow'rs' in its mathematical sense.

This concept of a scale is useful to understanding why *To Cobham* may be intentionally less polished than the other epistles. If a map is drawn to scale, the scale (even when absent) may still be deduced through the travelling experiences of the map-reader. As there is no scale to the scale itself, *To Cobham* acts as a tool which the reader can use to recalibrate their thinking and tune themselves as interpreters of the 'map' of the *opus magnum*. *To Cobham* is ranked by Bateson among others as the least successful of the four epistles of the projected second book but, as the *de facto* scale, it necessarily follows a different metric of success than the rest.²⁹³ The poem's argumentative structure is easier to understand in paraphrase than in the experience of reading it. This gap between experience and summary is the space in which the mathematical scale connecting the reader to Pope's landscape of mankind can be realised. Pope prevents his advocacy of seemingly epigrammatic values from appearing perfunctory by inducing us as readers into emotionally identifying with the epistemological vices he describes, and thus allowing our readings of the poem to be predicated to some degree on those vices' specific calibrations in us. In this way, as the 'scale' to the *opus magnum*, *To Cobham* manages to further resolve the initial epistemological disagreement between Cobham and Pope by presenting itself as an amphibious medium that can unite the worlds of (readerly) experience and (poetic) theory. Pope's 'few clear points', the generalities the poem gravitates to, gain their power in *To Cobham* from the particularities they cannot explain.²⁹⁴

To Bathurst and the value of words

So far we have explored how *To Cobham* uses the diachronic nature of poetry to map the tension between the mutability of human nature and the instinctual desire in readers for order and pattern. The reader's struggle to traverse the interpretive possibilities of *To Cobham* enables them to realise the poem's larger message. Pope thus manages to use Lucilius' 'muddy' style, that is, his perceived lack of revision, for the betterment of *To Cobham*'s true

²⁹³ TE, III.ii, p.xx.

²⁹⁴ TE, III.i, p.7.

argument. *To Bathurst* develops *To Cobham*'s epistemological tensions in a way that may make us question how we can therefore read and use long works. We may read for consistency, a ruling passion that correlates different factors; however, Pope has shown that we can also be surprisingly tolerant of its absence when it suits our purposes. As John Barrell and Harriet Guest have argued in their work on the eighteenth-century long poem, the lack of a stringent organising principle or design in a long work need not be a failing. On the contrary, it can signal other potential virtues of the kind suggested in the 'deathbed' epigraph, such as copiousness and virtuosity.²⁹⁵ The acknowledgment of the limits of readerly attention in the eighteenth century suggests that there was also to some extent a tacit agreement that such long pieces could be read more self-servingly. Barrell and Guest invoke Jean-Baptiste Du Bos' remark that a didactic poem can scarcely be read for a second time with the same satisfaction as for the first.²⁹⁶ There was therefore a permission to skip passages and scour the remainder for whatever proved pleasing, striking, or worthy of note. We see this phenomenon in Johnson's appreciation of *An Essay on Man* for the beauties of its 'splendid amplifications and sparkling sentences' and its value as a 'manual of practical piety'.²⁹⁷

The repercussions of this expectation of selectively attentive readings are especially pertinent to every epistle following *To Cobham*. When we reach *To Bathurst*, Pope has already explicitly demonstrated the mind's limited ability to attend consistently to instructive passages between re-readings. He has already shown how easily ideas can be warped by readers' compulsive 'double dipping' of previously read passages. Barrell and Guest posit that, given these practical limitations, long poems in the eighteenth century were afforded a tacit permission to contradict themselves. They attribute this phenomenon to the century's new economic contexts. The eighteenth-century long poem, they maintain, is a 'knotting' together of disparate discourses that provides a representative form for a new commercial society which had never been in the representational remit of traditional forms such as epic and pastoral.²⁹⁸ These older forms could not capture the diverse occupational interests of modern European society as they had the pre-commercial eras. Barrell and Guest contend that mixed-genre verse that incorporated a range of digressive genres such as the epistle, satire, and the georgic or philosophical didactic poem was more accommodating and reflective of

²⁹⁵ John Barrell and Harriet Guest, 'On the use of contradiction: Economics and Morality in the Eighteenth-Century Long Poem', in *The New Eighteenth Century: Theory, Politics, English Literature*, ed. by Felicity Nussbaum and Laura Brown, (New York: Methuen, 1987) pp.121-143.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.140.

²⁹⁷ *Lives*, IV, p.40.

²⁹⁸ Barrell and Guest, 'On the use of contradiction', pp.131-133.

this new economic status quo. By contrast, I argue that, in the case of *To Bathurst*, this leniency towards self-contradiction has less to do with economics than with the nature of mankind outlined in *To Cobham*. Pope's placement of Bathurst after his two epistles about the characters of men and women allows this lasting impression of the instability of human consciousness to leak into the topic of the 'Use of Riches'. Having established this shared understanding of what mankind is like and what reading might be like, Pope gives readers an appreciation of the long poem, particularly its utility as a space where disassociation, forgetfulness, and inattention can be freely accommodated in language. In fact, the virtue of any abiding inconsistency is that its existence enables the articulation of the contradictory components of human thinking where perhaps a more refined, streamlined discourse would reduce such complexities.

Pope seems to have designed *To Bathurst*, the longest of his *Epistles*, with this concept of selective reading in mind. In a letter dated 7 June 1732 he explains to the publisher Jacob Tonson that the portrait of the Man of Ross, for which Tonson had been one source of information, gains most of its poetic traction from its placement in *To Bathurst*, without which, Pope believes, the sketch would lose most of its intended effects.

To send you any of the particular verses will be much to the prejudice of the whole; which if it has any beauty, derives it from the manner in which it is placed, and the contrast (as the painters call it) in which it stands, with the pompous figures of famous, or rich, or high-born men.²⁹⁹

Pope's prioritisation of the contextual significance of the portrait, which may have been intended to rouse Tonson's interest in the rest of the poem, is demonstrative of the poet's anxiety to both prevent another Timon incident and redeploy the aesthetic ideals in *To Burlington* that had gone unappreciated due to that scandal. Pope had become hyperaware of the way in which his poems could be misconstrued in the wake of the controversy surrounding the character of Timon, who was widely believed to be based on James Brydges, the Duke of Chandos, despite Pope's emphatic insistence on the contrary. The undue attention paid to the Timon figure took away from the rest of *To Burlington*, whose salient points were altogether dwarfed by the fury triggered by Pope's supposed betrayal of Chandos. While modern criticism has absolved Pope of having had Chandos in particular in mind for Timon, the unexpected backlash Pope endured had important repercussions on his poetic strategy in *To Bathurst*. If the problem with *To Cobham* was that it persuaded too well at first,

²⁹⁹ *Correspondence*, III, p.290.

and so on the whole persuaded inconsistently, the problem emerging with *To Burlington* was that readers identified themselves with its ethical message too well and, to Pope's distress, went so far as to misapply his words through a process of free association beyond his control. Such were the concerns in Pope's mind when writing *To Bathurst* that he wrote of forestalling the printing of the poem until he could be sure that the use of examples could 'occasion no slander'. He even added a note to the third edition of *To Burlington* that he would be avoiding multiplying 'ill-natur'd Applications' by using 'Real Names' instead of 'Fictitious Ones' in his next work.³⁰⁰ Pope is more strategic in *To Bathurst* about the experience he is constructing for his readers. Having become cognisant of the ways in which readers might (mis)guide themselves in spite of his intentions, Pope is more mindful of the interpretations he is guiding them towards. By suggesting that the Man of Ross portrait's intended significance depends more on the portrait's interrelations with the rest of the poem than its own constituent parts, Pope not only advocates for the kind of selective reading Barrell and Guest describe, but also indicates that much of the epistle relies on invisible economies of comparison and contrast, ironically the very play of association and assumption that inadvertently contributed to the Timon controversy and is expatiated in that previous poem's artistic principles of 'Proportion and Harmony of the whole'.³⁰¹

It became evident after the issue of *To Burlington* that Pope's need to exercise greater control over how his works were interpreted required a reworking of one of the signature qualities of Popean work: its susceptibility to being co-opted for other purposes. Reuben Brower describes the phenomenon piercingly in his examination of the difficulties of deciphering the designs of the *Epistles to Several Persons*, which he observes are exasperated by the fact that 'it is easier to extract from [Pope's] paragraphs an argument or a formal arrangement of parts which may be 'there', but which is very different from the poetic connexions made by using the full resources of words'.³⁰² This is, of course, in keeping with the kind of self-interested readings expected of long poems. As Brower points out, some degree of this phenomenon is evident in all poetry. However, it is so characteristic of the challenge and reward of Pope's works that it is not reductive to explicitly state the point in his case. As my analysis of *To Cobham* suggests, what makes this indescribable quality latent in all Popean work especially worthy of note in the *Epistles* is that it is something that is consciously *written into* the epistles, almost as if to provide an in-joke for the knowing Pope

³⁰⁰ *TE*, III.ii, p.xxxii.

³⁰¹ *TE*, III.ii, p.133.

³⁰² Brower, *Poetry of Allusion*, p.243.

aficionado. The ruling passion concept, as it is described in *To Cobham*, also emphasises the point that it is easier to generate a plausible frame of argument for Pope's poems (and his character portraits) by grouping together different isolated sections and constructing an interpretation around them than it is to confront his work in a way that accounts for its entirety.

To Bathurst affords readers a chance to reflect once more on their experiences of *To Cobham* by beginning with the proposition that scholarly debate ultimately effects no real change. Whereas the first lines of *To Cobham* and *To a Lady* immediately consider the merits of their respective addressees' point of view ('Yes, you despise the man to Books confin'd' and 'Nothing so true as what you once let fall'), *To Bathurst* opens with a question that directly undermines it. The opening couplet reveals that not only do Bathurst and Pope disagree about the titular 'Use of Riches' but, in the absence of both religious and philosophical consensus, their own rationalisations do not hold much weight: 'Who shall decide, when Doctors disagree, | And soundest Casuists doubt, like you and me?'³⁰³ This is a devastating realisation for the poem because its titular focus on 'use' demands a kind of instructive teaching that Pope cannot provide. Despite his attempts to generate clear guidance regarding the topic, including a series of scriptural references, Pope struggles to reconcile this vacuum of authority in *To Bathurst* with, variously, his contempt for the corruption of moneyed society, his own vested interests in the economy beyond his literary entrepreneurship, and his continuing determination to 'vindicate the ways of God to Man' (*An Essay on Man*, i.16). As a result, readers too feel the difficulty with which the epistle's many functions have been forced to coexist. We are left with Ruffhead's sense that this work has been 'labour'd into ease',³⁰⁴ or Bateson's speculation that *To Bathurst* 'might have been a better poem if rather less care had been taken with it'.³⁰⁵

This apparent disagreement between Pope and Bathurst functions as a sample menu for the poem's multiple approaches to the concept of the 'Use of Riches'. The opening vignette merits comment precisely because, as we shall see, it defies ready paraphrase. Bathurst suggests that riches are God-given props that enable and expose the absurdity of human behaviour but do not directly cause it. Riches, according to Bathurst, are used for the purposes of divine entertainment, theatrical property in a heaven-sanctioned stage-play. Pope,

³⁰³ 'Epistle to Allen Lord Bathurst', in *TE*, III.ii, pp.75-125, I.1 (p.83). Further references to this poem are given after quotations in the text.

³⁰⁴ Owen Ruffhead, *The Life of Alexander Pope* (1769), p.293.

³⁰⁵ *TE*, III.ii, p.xxxiv.

on the other hand, perceiving Bathurst's stance to be overly misanthropic, contends that gold was originally hidden underground by Nature out of kindness for humanity. For Pope, it was mankind's own labour, the choice to dig up the gold and create a monetary system of trade, that furnished the environment for the misuse of riches as it is seen today, not some heaven-manufactured jest. Pope's theory is explicitly framed under an assumption of providentialism that is absent in Bathurst's, and is perhaps even misleadingly framed tangentially to it. For Pope, it is the squanderers and misers that are 'Heav'n supply'd' (l.13), not the gold. As a testament to the rehearsed and fiercely stage-handled nature of this introductory interaction, these discrepancies are not allowed to fester. As soon as they are mentioned they are quickly cast aside. We see the 'Pope' voice seek solace in the belief that both arguments end with the same observation: whether created or discovered, wealth generally results in the creation of prodigality (those who 'throw' or 'squander') and miserliness (those who 'heap' and 'hide'). Following this, Pope abruptly concludes that both he and Bathurst agree (that is, for the moment) that riches do not truly confer value or grace. As a result, towards the end of the disagreement the opening couplet is answered with another — 'Like Doctors thus, when much dispute has passed, | We find our tenets just the same at last' (ll.15-16).

Only the disagreement is not truly over. This surprisingly sudden and facile resolution to the argument is one on which the rest of the poem repeatedly casts doubt. While using similar terms, Bathurst and Pope appear to be debating different subjects. On closer inspection we find that, beyond their different visions of the role of the divine, the Bathurst and Pope of this exordium vignette have entirely different interpretations of the 'Use of Riches'. The Bathurst-character's interpretation of 'use' seems to align with purpose — the objective of having riches — which for him seems to be divine amusement and the food of satire. This introductory Bathurst's viewpoint, which Pope playfully satirises his Pope-character as mistaking for misanthropy, resurrects some of *An Essay on Man*'s descriptions of mankind as a spectacle for study and amusement, the 'glory, jest, and riddle of the world' (ii.18). The Pope-character, on the other hand, in a turn away from the *Essay*, cannot survey man with the same degree of apparent detachment as his friend and so adopts a rather different version of 'use'. Pope's interpretation of 'use' focuses on the action of utilising money, how it is saved and deployed by different kinds of men and the consequences that this might have. Hence, while Bathurst's argument references divine purpose in sending gold, Pope's concentrates on Man's employment of it, whether that means to excavate it or to trade it, and (taking a cue from Bathurst's reference to heapers of gold in l.6) the materiality and

visibility of different forms of wealth now that it is no longer ‘hid underground’ but can be hidden in other ways as a papered product. The Pope-character’s focus on use might be self-depreciatively referencing the poet’s own entanglement with the new paper economy as an investor involved in the South Sea Bubble debacle and as a literary businessman in his own right.³⁰⁶

Due to these unaddressed differences in interpretation of the topic, from the Pope-character’s perspective, Bathurst’s description of ‘use’ appears to be the misanthropic pagan counterpart to his Christian defence of a benevolent God.³⁰⁷ The Pope-character’s defensiveness of the dignity of man in this instance is not to be taken entirely seriously because it is informed by a misinterpretation of Bathurst’s idea of ‘use’. The same can be said of the Pope-character’s insistence on portraying the dichotomy between himself and Bathurst as one with a distinctively religious versus pagan bent. Having read *To Cobham*, we might wonder if the Pope avatar of the introductory debate is parodying the poet’s own ruling passion in the context of the *opus magnum* vision: the need to ‘vindicate the ways of God to Man’. However, there is a peculiarly strained atmosphere underlying the unspoken conceptual disagreements in the opening vignette. Wasserman suggests ‘we are to imagine the speaker and his friend engaged in easy, intimate conversation on some warmly familiar occasion’,³⁰⁸ but such a characterisation skips over the undercurrents of tension in Pope’s insistence that Bathurst and he are at last in agreement. Bathurst’s voice has been co-opted, and his reticence, coupled with Pope’s hasty attempt to forge a sense of consensus, suggests a tension between the two men that is preventing them from engaging in a genuine, mutually instructive, intellectual conversation. The skit Pope narrates between Bathurst’s position and his own seems to be an attempt to diffuse a latent hostility surrounding the potential motives behind each friend’s stance. Instead of Wasserman’s overly-romantic ‘intimate conversation’ we might imagine a very slightly flustered Pope awkwardly plastering over the frictions

³⁰⁶ The South Sea Company was founded under the premise that the country would trade slaves with Spanish America once the War of the Spanish Succession was settled and a treaty was decided. However this treaty, the Treaty of Utrecht, when agreed, was nowhere near as favourable towards trade as anticipated. It imposed a tax on imported slaves and restricted the company to sending only one ship annually for general trade. These issues were pushed into the background when King George I was appointed governor of the company in 1718. This created a boost of confidence in the company resulting in a boom in the stock in the 1720s, which was further augmented by the company’s proposal to take over the national debt that had been incurred over the wars in the seventeenth century. The debt was exchanged for shares in the South Sea Company. False claims of success resulted in further inflations in the price of the stock and cancelled more national debt. The rising prices stirred up a speculative frenzy, one which Pope, Gay, and Swift have been recorded to have participated in. For analysis of the references in *To Bathurst* to the South Sea Bubble see Vincent Caretta, ‘Pope’s “Epistle to Bathurst” and the South Sea Bubble’, *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 77.2 (1978), 212-231.

³⁰⁷ See Earl R. Wasserman’s reading of the poem in *Pope’s Epistle to Bathurst: A Critical Reading with an Edition of the Manuscripts* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1960).

³⁰⁸ Ibid., p.12.

between his perspective and that of Bathurst while his would-be conversation partner contributes only an edgy silence. The ‘But I, who think more highly of our kind, | (And surely, Heav’n and I are of a mind)’ (ll.7-8) constitutes one of a series of small efforts on Pope’s part to mitigate the tension created by the political and religious contingencies of their points of view. Yet, even this attempt does not truly dispel the uneasiness of the conversation. Questions of theology and conscience raised by the reference to ‘Casuists’ and ‘Doctors’ infect the abstract empiricist-scholar dichotomy of *To Cobham* with sectional interests whose unacknowledged presence threatens the discussion’s potential for intellectual objectivity. The conspicuousness of this contextual backdrop adds to the awkwardness of Pope’s rushed overview of his and Bathurst’s respective opinions and the forced accord that much too quickly follows. It is only after Pope’s revelation about man’s own ‘audacious labour’ (l.11) and the different sorts of men keeping the economy suspended that the short-lived discussion is forced into its premature conclusions. This might be read as a hurried attempt to redirect attention away from Pope and Bathurst’s use of their own wealth. Overall, the mini-conversation is not only dissatisfying for the reader, but we feel it must also be so for the participants.

Emrys Jones has suggested that this tension in the friendship between Bathurst and Pope arises in part from their shared politics. Bathurst ‘is an opponent of Walpole’s government who at no point seeks to restrain his friend’s righteous anger, but instead bears witness to it, almost casually, unaware of his own culpability as a politician’.³⁰⁹ Their unwillingness to acknowledge this bias contributes to the wandering focus of the poem overall and especially the unearned ‘agreement’ of the opening vignette. What is more striking about the social awkwardness of Pope and Bathurst’s poetic interactions is that this avoidance of confrontation results in not only misunderstandings but miscommunications. By doing away with the awkwardness and friction of social interactions that is necessary to better control and moderate the passions, money makes it difficult to allow for these miscommunications to become discoveries that would enable further intellectual progress in the debate. Pope frames gold as ‘the rival to, its Sire, the Sun’ (l.12), but we understand that the true rivalry exists elsewhere. As a result of this abstracting quality of money and the unaddressed tension between Pope and Bathurst, we are left without a sense of resolution, both in the case of the vignette and in the poem as a whole. We may sift through the menu of possible ‘uses’ on offer but none of them has the power to singlehandedly provide an

³⁰⁹ Emrys Jones, *Friendship and Allegiance in Eighteenth-Century Literature* (London: Palgrave, 2013), p.73.

absolutist, non-contingent rubric for morality, the decisive reference point for moral instruction that the epistle ambitiously tries to set itself as providing.

The differences in interpretation of the titular subject that are seemingly overlooked in the opening recur in different guises over the course of the poem. These initial miscommunications, in fact, may be said to serve as a prelude for the epistle, which begins in earnest in the verses that follow. Pope's implication that the actions of spendthrifts and the overly frugal have a mutually balancing effect is fully elaborated in ll.161-170:

Hear then the truth: "'Tis Heav'n each Passion sends,
"And diff'rent men directs to diff'rent ends.
"Extremes in Nature equal good produce,
"Extremes in Man concur to gen'ral use."
Ask we what makes one keep, and one bestow?
That POW'R who bids the Ocean ebb and flow,
Bids seed-time, harvest, equal course maintain,
Thro' reconcil'd extremes of drought and rain,
Builds Life on Death, on Change Duration founds,
And gives th'eternal wheels to know their rounds.

The opposing forces of 'ebb and flow', keeping and bestowing, seed-time and harvest, and drought and rain maintain order through their mutually moderating opposition. We notice that the resulting state of harmony-in-motion is a function of the net movement (or lack thereof) of these individual forces rather than their individual tendencies towards one extremity or the other. By framing the mechanism of God's plan in this way, Pope implies that such a *discordia concors* is a more sustainable form of order than the forcible maintenance of a strict mid-point at the centre of the same extremes. To only allow the centre-most in-between of these various pairs of opposites would be to collapse their mutually defining nature, and in denying that relationship, to in some way deny their very existence individually. Pope's vision of harmony in nature depends on perpetual self-adjustment. By referring to something as irregular as drought and flooding, Pope implies that this self-monitoring process may be improvised according to the need of the moment.

Even if he cannot say for certain how best to make use of riches, Pope tries to co-opt his ‘ruling passion’ idea so it can preserve some incentive against fatalism. We get an idea of this when Bathurst’s sense of ‘use’ as purpose returns in Pope’s later reintroduction of the ruling passion concept. We see Pope describe the ruling passion as being at its most dangerous when an aimless force:

“The ruling Passion, be it what it will,
“The ruling Passion conquers Reason still.”
Less mad the wildest whimsey we can frame,
Than ev’n that Passion, if it has no Aim;
For tho’ such motives Folly you may call,
The Folly’s greater to have none at all (ll.155-160).

The Twickenham editors note that Pope had insisted on leaving this passage unchanged despite Warburton’s recommendations of revision. Pope explained that ‘concerning the Extravagant motives of avarice, [he] meant to show those which were Real were yet as mad or madder than those which are Imaginary’.³¹⁰ While suggesting that ultimately the ruling Passion cannot be moderated through reason, Pope maintains that it can still be informed by reasoning — whether wishful or ‘imaginary’ or real. This cautionary emphasis on the degree of control that one still has over the thoughts informing one’s actions is significant. Pope is trying to suggest that even if reason cannot overcome the ruling passion, it is a virtue in itself to think through one’s actions (and so attempt to moderate them) despite the fact that this may effect no change. As an exemplar of this, Pope then describes God’s motive in instilling these ruling passions in people (ll.161-70 above): that is, in order to keep a self-balancing ecosystem of passions in motion such that no individual vice exists without a counterpart that can counteract it. Pope’s attempt at a line of argumentation defending private vices may not be entirely convincing as we cannot be wholly certain that Cotta’s son or Sir Balaam’s downfall were meant to exemplify carelessness on their part or sheer stupidity. However, Pope’s point here may be that it is better to build such an economy of explanations and rationalisations, attempting to theorise different ways in which one can better use riches, even if these are ‘the wildest whimsey we can frame’, than to act without any forethought. The poem’s uncertainty asserts the needs to resist the performance of assurance that a perhaps more philosophically single-minded and perfected theory about the use of money would

³¹⁰TE, III.ii, p.106, n.153-160.

provide. As in the case of *To Cobham*, the poem asks us to realise that we often do take ‘second qualities for first’, in other words, it is necessary to revise and review our ideas until we approach the first qualities we seek. The rare satisfaction of sense-making should for this reason always be held with suspicion. It is possible that if it had been, the misunderstanding of the opening vignette would not have occurred.

To look even more closely at ll.161-170, the reconciliation of extremes — ‘Extremes in Nature equal good produce, | Extremes in Man concur to gen’ral use’ — evocatively echoes a couplet in *An Essay on Man*: ‘Extremes in Nature equal ends produce, | In Man they join to some mysterious use’ (ii.205-206). A key difference between the two forms of the couplet is that while *An Essay on Man* relegates the extremes within the mind to a ‘mysterious [(presumably Godly)] use’ likely outside the individual’s control, the social perspective of the *Bathurst* couplet suggests that these passions are also being manipulated by society itself, specifically the social infrastructures that then go on to put them to ‘gen’ral use’. This difference is important because it suggests that while God provides direction to the inconsistency of human nature through the provision of ruling passions, there is a part for humanity to play in the plan in making the most of the situation. We notice in Pope’s careful description of the ‘truth’ that the God-given direction provided by the ruling passions does not function entirely independently of human labour but merely directs it. The word ‘directs’ need not necessarily amount to absolute determinism in a way that completely erases individual agency. Direction does not suggest final destination. A useful contrast to draw here is with the following passage from the story of Balaam:

The Tempter saw his time; the work he ply’d;
 Stocks and Subscriptions pour on ev’ry side,
 ’Till all the Daemon makes his full descent,
 In one abundant show’r of Cent. per Cent.,
 Sinks deep within him, and possesses whole,
 Then dubs Director, and secures his soul (ll.369-374).

The pun ‘Director’ marks Satan’s usurping of Balaam’s agency over his own actions. The juxtaposition between Balaam’s bodily possession and God’s gentle and suggestive supervising direction, the Passions that are sent, underlines that humans are still afforded their free will within the locus of a God-given direction. It is only when they are unable to ‘ease’ (l.230) God’s burden by emulating the self-monitoring harmonising described of Nature that they become victims of their own indiscipline. In this way, God may act like a

supervisor but he is not entirely a puppet master. Extremes in Man ‘concur to gen’ral use’ but they do need to be *used* for ‘good’ to be produced as it is in the natural world. Indeed, Wasserman has usefully related the question of ‘ends’ in the Man of Ross story (‘proved by the ends of being to have been’) to the tradition in the parish register to record only the dates of birth and death as testimony of existence. Wasserman suggests that it is the space between these ‘ends’ that permits one to fulfil one’s true ‘ends’.³¹¹ In the light of this allusion, we can better appreciate how the notion that God ‘diff’rent men directs to diff’rent ends’ suspends a level of ambiguity as to what extent God directs our existence. Is this ‘end’ simply death or is it an unknown purpose?

To Bathurst deals less with truisms than with interconnecting gestures of justification and attempts at explanation. The reference to agricultural practices informed by seasonal changes — ‘seed-time’ and ‘harvest’— is therefore particularly important because, without explicitly declaring a space for human agency, it hints that the benefits of God’s plan are best reaped and most visible in the collaboration between divine creation and human industry. The references to ‘seed-time and harvest’ are redolent of Genesis 8:22 (‘While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease’). This allusion might easily be taken to indicate a certain level of predestination if it did not also implicate the importance of humanity’s role as workers furthering heaven’s plan for the world (Genesis 2:15 ‘The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to till it and keep it’). Pope was undoubtedly aware of the particulars of the agricultural advances that developed in the first half of the century. We see him referencing the popularisation of four-field crop rotation and turnip cultivation by Viscount Charles Townshend in his imitation of Horace’s *Epistle* 2.2. (l.273). Bearing in mind that the eighteenth century was a period characterised by its agricultural ‘enterprise, experiment, [and] mobility’,³¹² the mentioning of farming practices implicates the ingenuity of human labour in the formula for *concordia discors* that God has created. The ‘extremes of drought and rain’, which in themselves may be seen as undesirable, are made useful through their motivation of the implementation of agricultural practices adapted to those conditions. Thus, while mankind takes its cue from ‘th’ eternal wheels’ engineered by God, not unlike the relationship between Horace and Lucilius, their own innovations help uncover the wisdom of those extremes that may otherwise be

³¹¹ Wasserman, p.43.

³¹² T.S. Ashton, *An Economic History of England: The Eighteenth Century* (1955) p.32, quoted in Dorothy Marshall, *Eighteenth Century England* (London: Longman, 1974), p.8.

mistaken for being purely malicious. The ruling passion thus has an additional educational advantage. Mankind's labour makes divine wisdom more legible.

By thus expanding on the exordium's hints about the two types of men that heaven supplies, Pope quietly affirms the value of human initiative in adapting to and learning from the divine plan. This is why there is a conspicuous absence of a true model of the 'use of riches' in the poem beyond a range of scattered suggestions. It appears that 'Use' is to be discovered as heuristically as it is discussed in the poem.

We see that overall the poem firmly resists critical attempts at schematisation, perhaps to suggest that there is no one-size-fits-all solution to the 'use of riches'; rather, the knottiness of the question is its own reward. If we do not reap more benefits of God's plan it is because we do not yet understand it well enough. Pope's description of the ideal use of riches, as apparently exemplified by Bathurst, promotes a balancing of self-care with community spirit yet does so in a way that expresses the overwhelming enormity of the task:

The Sense to value Riches, with the Art
T' enjoy them, and the Virtue to impart,
Not meanly, nor ambitiously pursu'd,
Not sunk by sloth, nor rais'd by servitude;
To balance Fortune by a just expence,
Join with Oeconomy , Magnificence;
With splendour, charity; with plenty, health;
Oh teach us, Bathurst! yet unspoil'd by wealth!
That secret rare, between th' extremes to move
Of mad Good-nature, and of mean Self-love (ll.219-228).

While God may direct, it is mankind's role to act. As this ideal is incrementally described from clause to clause it appears less and less achievable. The 'yet unspoil'd' both underlines the inevitability of Bathurst's eventual tainting by wealth (when taken in the sense of 'as yet') and the fact that Bathurst is 'still' unspoiled. It also references Pope's own misgivings about Bathurst's spending habits. Bathurst was the owner of two enormous estates (Riskins Park and Cirencester Park) which he had inherited from his father in 1704, and to which he dedicated a great deal of time in the wake of the collapse of his political prospects after

Queen Anne's death.³¹³ The fall of the Tory government saw Bathurst redirecting his focus from politics to gardening. In a letter to Bathurst dated September 1728, Pope had admonished Bathurst for deforesting a part of his favourite haunt in Cirencester, Oakley Wood, in the previous month. Disturbed by Bathurst's impulsive and lackadaisical takedown of the trees, Pope bemoaned the wastefulness of the act. Pope complained that he could already tell from looking at the 'bare Prospect' Bathurst had created that his friend would eventually erect some other building to occupy the space. Pope imagined that this building would in due course be found too small and then demolished to erect one 'bigger & more adequate'.³¹⁴ The irate Pope suggested erecting 'a solid Pyramid of 100ft square' instead so that 'there may be Something solid and Lasting of your works'. Pope himself was no exemplar of self-discipline. The incident with Oakley Wood did not prevent him from suggesting further improvements to the estate in 1734 that Bathurst could not pay for. We find Bathurst complaining in 1734 that 'instead of admiring (as he ought to do) what is already executed' Pope was 'every day drawing me a plan for some new building or other, and then is violently angry that it is not set up the next morning'.³¹⁵ For these reasons it is quite unclear to what extent we are to take Bathurst seriously as a prospective authority on the use of riches. We might think Pope himself Janus-faced for his own spending habits, not least his involvement in the South Sea Bubble. As the exact degree of self-determination anyone has at any given moment is unknowable, it is difficult to teach moderation. Perhaps in feeling his way through all the variables involved in the process over the course of the poem, Pope does suggest we can slowly understand moderation, if not learn it.

The purposes of this re-statement of the ruling passion after its incarnation in *To Cobham* is important because Pope needed to show that his ruling passion hypothesis need not be about identifying extremes. The dependence on a singular ruling passion subjectively discerned by the reader could easily predispose the reader to drawing caricatures. The intelligence of the concept as a hypothesis is cheapened if it is taken for a form of caricaturing or as being in some way synonymous with or derivative of Pope's own signature practice of satirical lampooning. After walking through the portrait gallery that serves Pope's satirical purposes in *To a Lady*, there is a necessity to prevent the ruling passion from

³¹³ Peter Martin, *Pursuing Innocent Pleasures: The Gardening World of Alexander Pope* (Hamden: Archon, 1984), pp.62-3.

³¹⁴ *Correspondence*, IV, p.40.

³¹⁵ Peter Martin, *Pursuing Innocent Pleasures*, p.89.

seeming too simplistic, a formula for satirical caricature rather than a multi-faceted philosophy.

These linguistic niceties in the poem are important as they speak to *To Bathurst's* wider interest in the use not only of monetary riches but also of linguistic riches, especially as they pertain to the *opus magnum* vision. The Huntington Library manuscript drafts HM6008 and HM6007 both feature slightly different versions of the opening couplet. HM6007 reads 'What can be judg'd, when Doctours disagree | And the most thoughtful doubt, like you and me?' After considering alternatives to 'What can be judg'd', including 'What can be clear' and 'Who can decide', HM6008 settles on 'Who shall decide, when Doctors disagree, | And the most Thoughtful and soundest casuists doubt, like you & me?'³¹⁶ The absence of 'Thoughtful' in the final version is significant because intensity of thought is not only evident in Pope's many crossings out in these manuscripts but in the excessive use of parentheses which clearly shows thought as something written into the script to be read. We know that *To Bathurst* was composed very delicately and the poet even confessed to Swift in a letter dated February 1732/3 that he 'never took more care in [his] life of any [other] poem'.³¹⁷ However, this excess of caution is only evident after repeated readings. '(And surely, Heav'n and I are of a mind)' is the only parenthetical comment out of the five in the opening segment of HM 6007 (ll.1-15) to both remain in parentheses and make it to the published version. The loss of the unusual cluster of bracketed phrasing in these early drafts may suggest that Pope at one point wanted to explicitly show that this argument was also 'thoughtful' in the sense of being very self-reflective. The lack of a similar excess of parentheses in the final version leaves us without the disruption of asides and explanations which would have likely made Bathurst and Pope's differences of interpretation and overall sense of disagreement more obvious. Instead of revealing these anxieties from the outset, Pope lets readers determine the nature of Bathurst and Pope's dispute in the hindsight of the rest of the poem and incrementally in further readings. It is up to the reader, empowered by the experience of reading *To Cobham*, to independently discern not only that Bathurst and Pope disagree but also that their arguments may not be entirely incompatible. This is not because the Pope-character has decided to artificially resolve the argument but because they may be discussing slightly different things. The irony that of all the parentheses it is only '(And surely, Heav'n and I are

³¹⁶The manuscripts have been made accessible in Earl R. Wasserman, *Pope's Epistle to Bathurst: A Critical Reading with an Edition of the Manuscripts* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press), pp.59-134. See p.73 for the quote from HM6007 and p.105 for the quote from HM6008.

³¹⁷*Correspondence*, III, p.348.

of a mind)’ that survives into the final version of the poem is deepened when we realise that Pope and Bathurst are also not ‘of a mind’. You cannot hear brackets, and so their relative absence in later versions of the text also draws less attention to the very written-ness of the work, the dimension of the poem that only the reader can see, and which plays an important role in the rest of the epistle. In the line, ‘What Nature wants (a phrase I much distrust)’ – another example of where, as in the case of an aside, the fourth wall of the conversation between Pope and Bathurst is broken to reveal another Pope – the craftsman Pope uses the scenario of the friends’ supposed disagreement to make a point pertinent to the poem at large. In this case, the second instance of the phrase ‘What Nature wants’ (the first being l.21) indicates a shift between necessities that Nature does not provide (and thus that ‘commodious Gold bestows’) and perceived deficiencies in Nature that are more a reflection of human desires — ‘Luxury’ and ‘Lust’ (l.22) — than genuine needs.

We notice the subtlety of Pope’s language most when attempting to trace the genealogy of the demise of Balaam, whose fall from grace seems to have been accelerated by the imaginative suggestion of both his peers and himself. We see the first potential shift in Balaam’s character go unnoticed in the following verse:

Sir Balaam now, he lives like other folks,
 He takes his chirping pint, and cracks his jokes:
 “Live like yourself,” was soon my Lady’s word;
 And lo! Two puddings smoak’d upon the board (ll.357-360).

The journey from ‘lives like other folks’ to ‘live like yourself’ sees a corresponding shift in Balaam’s actions. His merry jokes and sociably ‘chirping’ pint is replaced by a decadent ‘Two puddings’ at the Lady’s encouragement. The passing of time between ‘now’ and ‘soon’ is foreshortened by the compactness of the lines in between. As a result, the change in Balaam seems so instant as to appear inconsequential, perhaps even innocent. Yet our knowledge of the Devil’s presence, which is revealed in l.349, leads us to look at even this seemingly innocuous choice for a larger portion as the first lapse into greed. Whereas before he could only afford one week-day meal and an added pudding only on Sundays (ll.345-6), now he can enjoy two puddings on their own. While this seems a yet innocuous change, the insinuation that the extra money was acquired from the shipwrecks in l.356 renders his sudden wealth morally dubious. Yet we cannot say if it was the Lady’s encouragement that made him act on the impulse he had not yet ceded to in l.357, his own inclination, or that of the watching Devil.

In this manner, *To Bathurst*'s implicit assumption that the use of riches is a problem that needs to be resolved emphasises the futility of the pursuit of resolution in the form of an absolute moral standard. Pope's efforts to revise one's assumptions *in media res* describe the unease and unknowing that in many ways define what it is like to be alive and to wish to live both morally and well. Through 'use' *To Bathurst* looks at human knowledge in its social sense, as collective, generationally-built knowledge that has to be produced in writing to be shared, acknowledged, and further developed. This requires Pope to overcome the anxiety of revealing his own uncertainty whilst maintaining enough control to avoid a Timon-incident. This combination of motives means that the poem often gives the impression of being both overwhelmed and undermined by its universalising efforts. This epistemological problem, described and confronted most straightforwardly and directly in *To Cobham*, never truly disappears and casts a shadow across the other remnants of the *opus magnum* frame. We are made to assess Pope's careful choice of platitudes and generalisations in order to compare their value to the anxiety and intensity of effort which they demand in their sometimes unnatural-seeming placements as a whole. This is labour-intensive work and requires a lot of re-reading. Even if many of Pope's explanations self-destruct in the face of their own totalising efforts, at last, we are left with something of 'use': a poetry of approaches and angles.

Pope's carefulness in *To Bathurst* may be trying to enact the moderation described in his imitation of Horace's *Satire* 2.1:

My Head and Heart thus flowing thro' my Quill,
 Verse-man or Prose-man, term me which you will,
 Papist or Protestant, or both between,
 Like good *Erasmus* in an honest Mean,
 In Moderation placing all my Glory,
 While Tories call me Whig, and Whigs a Tory (ll.63-68).

As the imitation was published in 1733, the same year as *To Bathurst*, it is unsurprising to see it describe the same ecology of preoccupations that hangs over the caution burdening the *Epistle*. Pope's goal in *To Bathurst* is compendiousness of the kind described by Berkeley as distilling generations of accumulated wisdom into a clear, comprehensive, and concise, yet palatable whole. But as opposed to completely 'abridg[ing] the labor of study and making

human sciences more clear, compendious, and attainable than they were before',³¹⁸ Pope wants to maintain some degree of labour or excursion on the part of the reader insofar as such labour is demonstrative of the principles it derives. For all its isolated declarative meanings, *To Bathurst* in fact defers conclusion and places judgment in the creative hands of the reader. The superficial sense of conviction in some of Pope's points across the epistles may seem unnerving in its forced sanguinity but when these points are placed in contrast with one another we get the impression of a poet perched precariously at the edge of several conflicting viewpoints and attempting with a sense of futility to bring them together. We must lean heavily on the heuristic, social character of the poems as epistles if we are to be satisfied with them at all. The *opus magnum* both continues *An Essay on Man* in new directions and dilates the themes of the four epistles that already exist, discussing the place of humanity and human intelligence with respect to the universe, the extent and limits of human reason in and of itself, and human value in society and on a personal level.

This reliance on association exists on both an intratextual and intertextual level. Pope wrote to Swift in February 1732/3 that the 'plain connexion' between *To Bathurst* and the rest of the *Epistles* would become evident 'if you read them in the order just contrary to that they were published in'; 'I imitate those cunning tradesmen, who show their best silks last [...] Often, those parts which attract most at first sight, will appear to be not the most, but the least considerable'.³¹⁹ The letter to Swift suggests that the poems are in a sense intentionally difficult. The *Epistles to Several Persons* are not all equally well composed and, evidentially, it is not in their interests to be so. The preface to the *Miscellanies*, which is also referred to in the letter to Swift, is significant for the way it admits the possibility for 'any Author to write below himself' and provides speculative reasons for this underperformance that are quite similar to the deathbed advertisement's explanation for the dissolution of the *opus magnum*:

[...] either his Subject not proving so fruitful, or so fitted for him, as he at first imagined; or his Health, or his Humour, and the present Disposition of his Mind, unqualifying him at that Juncture: However if he possessed any distinguishing Marks of style or Peculiarity of Thinking, there would remain in his least successful Writings, some few Tokens, whereby Persons of Taste might discover him.³²⁰

The parallels to the *opus magnum* 'Advertisement' for the deathbed edition are glaring. Here, too, we are to understand that the author might still be recovered from his least successful

³¹⁸ George Berkeley, *Principles of Human Knowledge and Three Dialogues*, ed. by Howard Robinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), I.134, p.84.

³¹⁹ *Correspondence*, p.348

³²⁰ *Prose Works*, II, p.90.

writings even if, as in the apparent case of the *opus magnum*, unforeseen circumstances impede that work's full realisation. The letter to Swift redeploys some of the language of the preface when it admits that 'this whole collection, in a manner, consists of what we not only thought unlikely to reach the future, but unworthy even of the present age; not our studies, but our follies; not our works, but our idlenesses.'

Miriam Leranbaum's analysis of the manuscript history of *Bathurst* in *Opus Magnum* concludes with a suggestion that *To Bathurst* may be described as a 'hard-won and precarious achievement'.³²¹ In the light of Pope's correspondence with Swift, this may be less a reflection of the completed poem than Pope's method of realising it, and method and result may not be all that unrelated. Warburton's title 'Moral Essays' puts undue emphasis on the didactic qualities of the poems, something that seems at first to undermine their collective Horatian strengths as non-prescriptive, conversational philosophical ruminations. The poems' palpable struggle to achieve coherence as a connected unit suggests that as a connected system they might have been actively counteracting their own didacticism. The ironic benefit of considering the epistles under the title 'Moral Essays' is that it makes Pope's uncertainty about his own ideas — that they were not nearly as focused or ethically-minded as he at times indicates they ought to be — that much more apparent. Their need to revise and be revised thus becomes part of their persuasive strength.

³²¹Leranbaum, *Opus Magnum*, pp.89-90.

***An Essay on Man* and the ‘power of rejecting his own thoughts’**

The irony of the ‘power of rejecting’

‘[...]no one qualification is so likely to make a good writer, as the power of rejecting his own thoughts’³²²

There is a deceptive complexity to the idea that Pope’s chief merit as a writer lies in ‘the power of rejecting his own thoughts’. The phrase, which was briefly introduced in the introduction of this thesis, has a way of suggesting a wide range of processes within and beyond the most straightforward sense of ‘rewriting’. These processes could include the kinds of ‘rejections’ we have seen in the *Epistles to Several Persons*: the ‘rejections’ of one’s own preferred or habitual verbal collocations (‘rewording’, ‘redrafting’, ‘refining’, ‘editing’) and the entertainment of ideas countering one’s ‘own’ beliefs (‘rethinking’, ‘scepticising’, ‘doubting’) or better instincts. Alternatively, ‘rejections’ could also indicate various kinds of self-rejection, for instance the imitation of other poetic voices over one’s ‘own’. Such self-rejection could extend to Pope’s ventriloquism of other identities in *Eloisa to Abelard* and the ‘The Epistle to Miss Blount, on her leaving the town, after the coronation’. In its own way the phrase summarises the kind of holistic understanding of revision that this thesis has been arguing for. By revisiting it again, this final chapter aims to conclude the thesis with a sense of how a more holistic understanding of composition might serve readers of *An Essay on Man*.

³²² *TE*, I, p.2.

We must first acknowledge that the idea of Pope as a poet of revision contains an inherent tension. Pope's emphasis on 'power' in the 'power' of rejecting might appear highly ironic. Edwin Abbott has observed that Pope's own works take that same 'power of rejecting' away from the reader: 'he has expressed the common-places of criticism and of morality in such language as is recognised to be not only the best, but, now, the only possible way of expressing them.'³²³ Abbott's concern is that Pope's revisions are *too* effective. It appears at times that Pope has corrected his verse to the point that it can neither be further improved upon nor memorably refigured in paraphrase. Instead of soliciting our agency, Pope's words overpower it. Abbott suggests that, without recourse to any more 'useful', 'entertaining', or 'reputable' paraphrase that can achieve the same results as efficiently, the reader is potentially trapped into using the same seductive phraseology as the poet. The underlying question behind Abbott's remark is whether the creation of such poetic earworms is destructive to the relationship between poet and readers, whether it robs the reader in some way of the sense of having consciously understood, thought through, and accepted Pope's point.

Indeed, we can glean from Abbott something of the hint of dissatisfaction that closes Samuel Johnson's characterisation of Pope's meticulous verse practice:

Pope was not content to satisfy, he desired to excel; and therefore always endeavoured to do his best: he did not court the candour, but dared the judgment, of his reader, and, expecting no indulgence from others, he shewed none to himself. He examined lines and words with minute and punctilious observation, and retouched every part with indefatigable diligence, till he had left nothing to be forgiven.³²⁴

Despite his clear admiration for Pope's 'diligence', it is difficult not to suspect that Johnson would have quite liked it if more had been left 'to be forgiven'. Like Abbott, Johnson's praise seems to fall just short of suggesting that the cost of such apparently perfected work is the lost social opportunity of some blunder or awkwardness to be pardoned. The irony is only strengthened when we consider Pope's comments on critical forgiveness in *An Essay on Criticism*. Pope urges his readers to avoid separating their 'Good-Nature' from their 'Good-Sense', '[n]or in the *Critick* let the *Man* be lost': 'To Err is *Humane*; to Forgive, *Divine*' (ll.523-525). In revising too much, and relying too heavily on the creation of good sense, there is a danger that one will err too little and so take away from the social rapport built between the reader and the writer. In a twisted way, it seems somewhat impolite and even

³²³ Edwin Abbott, *A Concordance to the Works of Alexander Pope* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1875), p.v.

³²⁴ *Lives*, IV, p.271.

selfish to deprive readers of the opportunity to exercise a form of divinity in identifying and forgiving errors, even if they may be one's own. In denying them in this way, it seems that Pope impairs in some sense the social relationship underlying the exchange between reader and writer. This apparent rudeness is only exasperated by Pope's unique and, as we know, well-publicised ability to correct or 'forgive' snippets of the work of others while preventing others from doing the same for him. We might consider Abbott's remark curious because it quite sets aside the fact that much of Pope's work has been marked for its lack of originality and its borrowings from other writers. As the Twickenham notes reveal, Pope's coupling of 'good sense' and 'nature' is itself derived from Dryden.³²⁵ As Abbott and Johnson both imply, knowing how Pope himself enjoyed correcting his predecessors, to not offer future readers some openings of error to carry such ideas forward would appear unfair.

What is more, the reduction of the reader's role in this way might represent only the milder kind of reduction of power that Abbott and Johnson are hinting at. Both Abbott and Johnson's comments betray a wariness of finding lines that are so diligently put together that they approach becoming thought-terminating even if they are not clichés. Pope's decision to begin a new verse-paragraph following 'To Err is Humane; to Forgive, Divine' in all later editions of *On Criticism* from the 1727 *Miscellany Poems* onwards expresses how the weight of that now idiomatic expression gradually began to burden the poem with a sense of precocious finality. The heavy-handedness of Pope's attempt to keep the poem in motion after that line is captured perfectly in the words that immediately follow it: 'But if in Noble Minds some Dregs remain [...]' (l.526). Despite the volta's valiant attempts at redirecting and recharging the poem, it is evident that the 'Dregs' that are carrying *On Criticism* forward at this point have, at least for the moment, more to do with Pope's own desire to continue his argument than the show-stopping satisfaction provided by the previous line. Ironically, the reason 'To Err is Humane; to Forgive, Divine' needed to be distinguished from its succeeding lines was so that there would be enough space for it to be forgiven for being so unforgiving in and of itself.

What I would like to go on to suggest is that if Pope presents to his readers work that so robs them of the power to forgive errors, as Abbott and Johnson note, it might be in order to expose the very expectations underlying the reader-poet relationship that he subverts. The following passage from *On Criticism* demonstrates such a moment where Pope manages to

³²⁵TE,I, p.297, n.524.

capture the power-play involved in maintaining a balance between correction and error in order to accommodate the forgiving reader. Notice how Pope's epigrammatic terseness cleverly obscures the ambiguity of his language by using the very kinds of overpowering correction Abbott and Johnson describe:

*True Wit is Nature to Advantage drest;
What oft was Thought, but ne'er so well Exprest;
Something, whose Truth convinced at Sight we find
That gives us back the Image of our Mind* (An Essay on Criticism, ll. 297-300.)

If Pope does give 'back the Image of our Mind' it is precisely because of the disturbing quickness with which we might be 'convinced at sight' by the apparent reasonableness of the first couplet. By ambiguously referring to any number of different kinds of 'wit', 'nature' and 'truth', Pope leaves the awkwardness of discerning the most appropriate combination of the three to the persuasion of our own minds. Whatever we assume these abstractions mean naturally becomes 'the' image we are given back by the poem. Moreover, the assumption we make is made more unquestionable by the aphoristic gaiety with which the verse proceeds; there is no time for interruptive definition here. As Robert Lund and John Sitter remind us, to the readily credulous ear the epigrammatic confidence of Pope's style quite obscures the controversy surrounding the definitions of these abstractions.³²⁶ The verse is more persuasive because it uses the verbal flair of stylistic 'wit' against our own thinking 'wits' in this manner. Because the ambiguity of the passage holds a mirror to our own 'good Sense' (l.25), we cannot fault it without drawing attention to the way Pope has constructed the verse to do exactly that.³²⁷ By thus trapping us in his words he draws attention to the kind of interaction they subtend. We begin to wonder if the young poet, too, by creating this mirror effect in his verse, is not trying to differentiate the 'Image' of his own mind from like sentiments written by Dryden, Boileau, Quintilian and others that the verse has been linked to.³²⁸ Pope's claim to originality here lies in his ability to direct the reader into experiencing the same effect he describes.

³²⁶See Roger Lund, 'Wit, Judgement, and the Misprisions of Similitude', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 65.1 (2004) 53-74 and John Sitter, 'About Wit: Locke, Jakobson, and Augustan Ideas', in *Arguments of Augustan Wit*, Cambridge Studies in Eighteenth-Century English Literature and Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp.49-88.

³²⁷ *An Essay on Criticism*, l. 25, l.524.

³²⁸ See *TE*, i, p.272-273, n.297, n.298.

It is my contention that such moments where Pope appears to leave nothing to be forgiven are designed to reveal something about the nature of poetic communication. Looking at the case of *On Criticism*, we can see how this might be to the benefit of the argument. We know from Spence's *Anecdotes* that Pope was well aware that the imperfect nature of the process of reading and listening meant that a reader's judgment could be a closer reflection of their own state of mind than of the quality of the work they have perused. Spence recounts that during a reading of Pope's translation of Homer at the earl of Halifax's residence Halifax would stop Pope 'very civilly' to point out places where he had found the passage less than pleasing. This was so that Pope could 'give it a better turn' in the future. After struggling to identify what exactly Halifax had found lacking in his translations, Pope took Garth's advice to read the same passages to Halifax a couple of months later as if they had been improved. After the translated verses were read out again in a few months' time, Halifax, who believed them to have been altered, found himself 'extremely pleased with them and cried out: 'Ay, now they are perfectly right! Nothing can be better.'³²⁹

One might argue that Halifax's misconception arose because he had originally offered feedback for the sake of appearing more knowledgeable about Homer than he truly was. However, the incident demonstrates Pope's growing awareness over the years of how imperfectly his poetry would be read. In such cases, being a 'good writer' did not necessarily mean writing well. While little can be done to prevent such awkward misreadings, assuming that readers are imperfect, exposing their capacity for error, and taking advantage of such confusions like the description of 'True Wit' in *An Essay on Criticism* cleverly does goes a long way in clarifying one's argument. Pope's 'power', in this sense, also lies in his ability to take advantage of the social aspects of print culture that (at this date) had yet to be smoothened out and perfected, and to use this possibility of miscommunication to his advantage. Part of his success in this sphere might lie in his willingness to recognise that it is not just poetry but the inexact science of reading itself that needs to be corrected, rejected, or in some way addressed. Pope's rejoinder to Abbott and Johnson's complaint might therefore be that in leaving nothing to be forgiven he is able to draw attention to a factor that will always be imperfect: the social interaction of reading itself. By diminishing our ability to paraphrase, Pope redirects us to reflect on our own roles as readers. At the same time, by reading how we are primed to interact with his work we are able to find another level of meaning within it. The 'power of rejecting' therefore not only entails various kind of broadly

³²⁹ *Anecdotes*, p.88.

editorial revisions, but also reflects Pope's ability to invite meta-readings of his work, readings that look beyond ('reject') the particularities of specific written 'thoughts' in order to find meaning in how they are constructed and read. As the rest of this chapter will demonstrate, nowhere was this more necessary than in negotiating the wild ambition of *An Essay on Man*.

Manuscript, Variant, and In-text rejections in *An Essay on Man*

The two autograph manuscripts of *An Essay on Man* that have survived have been made widely accessible by Maynard Mack's 1962 published reproductions. They comprise the Pierpont Morgan Library manuscript (hereafter MLM), which is the earliest version of the *Essay* to have survived, and the Houghton Library manuscript (hereafter HLM), which represents a more developed version of the essay. The four epistles of *An Essay on Man* were initially addressed to 'a friend' when first released one by one between February 1733 and January 1734. Their initial success spurred such a flurry of imitations and allusions that the *Essay* is now characterised by Eric Slauter as 'the most internalised work of social and political thought of the eighteenth century'.³³⁰ Anthony Nuttall, too, describes it as 'the philosophical poem of the age in that it assembles, in a sort of brilliant disarray, the fractured systems of the age'.³³¹

An Essay on Man is, I think, unfairly burdened by readings that read it for philosophical consistency, or rather its lack thereof. There seems to be a fundamental dislocation between the critical culture surrounding the essay, with its tendency to search for patterns of consistency around which to defend its coherence, and the poem itself, which measures its own merit against ideas of inconsistency, chaos, 'quick effluvia' (i.199), and worlds 'hurled' (i.89). J.M. Cameron suggests that Pope's opening elaborations on the limitations of mankind's intelligence, the fact that knowledge of the great majority of the universe is simply beyond the scope of man's limited role within it (i.21-22, i.32), seems to clash with the rest of the poem's arguments that 'the situation of man vis-à-vis the forces of

³³⁰ Quoted in *An Essay on Man*, ed. by Tom Jones (Princeton University Press, 2016), p.xvi.

³³¹ A.D. Nuttall, *Pope's 'Essay on Man'* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1984), p.192.

nature and the brutes are arranged with a view to the good of the individual and the whole'.³³² How can the good of the individual also contribute to the good of the whole if man has only a limited part to play? How would Pope, a man with finite, human intelligence, know otherwise? Wilson Knight tries to interpret such contradictions as an active choice, stating that 'the planning, or structure [of the *Essay*] is the philosophy',³³³ while Maynard Mack takes it as partially a result of poor construction — 'Pope's fluency [...] fails him oftener in the essay than in any other poem' — and says this was excusable considering that it was present in the 'majority of ethical treatises, particularly those of Pope's day'.³³⁴ As Leranbaum points out, 'some scholars concentrate on the poem's ideas; others focus almost entirely on its rhetorical patterning, even those attempting an overview often find it most convenient to illustrate their points from a single epistle' and ultimately the essay 'tends to resist integrated analysis'.³³⁵ The poem adopts what James Noggle calls an 'unassuming tolerance of a diversity of opinion'; while it insists that mankind can perceive only a part of the universe and not the 'whole', it 'adopts a perspective transcending this sphere to make our limitation to it seem providentially "right"'.³³⁶ These conflicting forces within the poem, from the seemingly meticulous structure of its paraphrased prose arguments, to the meandering turns of its verse, test the reader's capacity not only to demonstrate and tolerate, but also to be persuaded by conflicting viewpoints. It would be a mistake, however, to assume that the poem believes itself to have achieved any sense of doctrinal finality. As G. Wilson Knight states, 'we are not asked to choose one [perspective] and reject the other, but rather to accept both, and build from them a new totality'.³³⁷ Like Pope's prefatory statement in the *Works*, *An Essay on Man*, too, judges itself according to its ability to reject its own thoughts and so steer between extremes. I would like to posit that, like Pope's description of 'True Wit' in *An Essay on Criticism*, *An Essay on Man*'s strength comes from using the 'power of rejecting' that so comprehensively expresses Pope's career-long interest in composition to involve the interpretive dialectic between reader and poet in its own argument. Where my argument diverges most from previous readings of the poem is in the fact that it sees Pope's career-long

³³² J.M. Cameron, 'Doctrinal to an Age: Notes towards a revaluation of Pope's *Essay on Man*', in *Essential Articles for the Study of Alexander Pope*, ed. by Maynard Mack (Hamden: Archon Books, 1964), pp.356-7.

³³³ G. Wilson Knight, *The Poetry of Pope: Laureate of Peace* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965), pp.169-170.

³³⁴ *TE*, III.i, n. i.145-8 (p.33), pp.xli-xlii.

³³⁵ Leranbaum, p.38.

³³⁶ Noggle, *The Skeptical Sublime*, p.97.

³³⁷ Knight, *The Poetry of Pope*, p.170.

interest in matters of revision, composition, and especially miscommunication as central to the structure the poem pursues.

Indeed, *An Essay on Man* itself is interspersed with references to its own revision process. Pope's self-identified purpose for writing the essay — 'to vindicate the ways of God to man' (i.16) — is famously redolent of the objective of Milton's *Paradise Lost* which was to 'justify' those ways. Vindication is, however, a more involved concept than justification. Whereas justification can be unprompted and gratuitous, an idea reinforced by its Christian theological connotations, vindication implies the need for a defence against a backdrop of pre-existing criticism, scepticism, or even hostility. This is especially so considering its senses allied with vengeance. In virtually all of its senses the verb 'vindicate' presumes that it must fend against some kind of pre-existing counter-argument. It is already on the defensive.

For this reason it should be no surprise that Pope spends a great deal of time describing the nature of his investigation. 'The Design' of *An Essay on Man* asks that the poem's inquiry into human nature be considered as a '*general Map of MAN*'.³³⁸ This cartographic metaphor which continues into the body of the poem and, as the previous chapter has shown, the *Epistles to Several Persons* as well, seems to suggest that Pope's role in writing the *Essay* is merely, as has so far been suggested, exploratory in nature. It appears, at least at first, that he will be tracing different paths of argument, their connections, and their limits without necessarily intervening to advocate for any one or the other. However, as this metaphor continues over the course of 'The Design' it becomes difficult to differentiate exploration from cultivation, discovery from design. In the same paragraph as the 'map' comparison, Pope momentarily departs from his role as a cartographer of man's role in the universe and becomes a landscape architect 'opening the *fountains*, and clearing the passage' of the many disciplines the poem explores. The task of 'marking out' a landscape is quite different from making a mark on it by 'opening the fountains'. Pope could simply be talking about opening the fountains of conversation rather than continuing the 'map' conceit. However, the likely deliberate ambiguity of his wording is indicative of the concomitant ambiguity of Pope's role throughout the poem. He is both a humble cartographer-explorer of the various anthropological disciplines on which the poem comments and a landmark in his own right, a 'fountain' or 'passage' that needs exploration and mapping itself. The act of traversing the terrain he describes thus becomes entangled with that of making it. This

³³⁸ *TE*, III.i, pp.7-8.

blurring of the boundaries between discovery and creation already shows the improvisational, self-rejecting aspects of the poem in effect. The process of composition and re-composition seems underway from the design itself.

Pope confesses that he chose to write in verse because it enabled him to express himself more concisely and in a more memorable manner than prose would have done. The poem's exploratory approach to its subject, already indicated by 'The Design', makes it particularly responsive to Pope's characteristic penchant for revision and review, so much so that revision could be seen as a kind of philosophy in the poem in and of itself. When following the genealogy of some of the poem's most memorable lines we can see how much of the final result preserves the narrative scaffolding of 'The Design'. We can see an instance of this in the opening lines of the poem which continue the geographical language of 'The Design'. Pope's note on the margin of ll.6-16 in the HLM reveals that he thought of these opening lines of the poem as another introductory-esque moment where he could provide a programme for the subjects of the *Essay*. He states that 'the 6th, 7th, and 8th lines allude to the Subjects of This Book, the General Order and Design of Providence; the Constitution of the human Mind, whose Passions, cultivated, are Virtues, neg[lected], Vices; the Temptations of misapplied Selflove, and wrong pursuits of Power, Pleasure and false Happiness.'³³⁹ These allusions take the form of various gardening figures:

Expatriate free o'er all this Scene of Man;
A mighty Maze! but not without a Plan;
A Wild, where Weeds and Flow'rs promiscuous shoot,
Or Garden, tempting with forbidden Fruit (i.5-8).

The lines do not immediately respond to Pope's marginal notation but it is possible that the different kinds of topography referenced – 'Maze', 'Wild', and 'Garden' — could have something to do with the 'General Order and Design of Providence' Pope mentions. Similarly, the 'promiscuous' flowers and the Edenic 'forbidden Fruit' might refer to the cultivation of virtues and vices and the application of self-love. However, even with these possible connections, the lines' relations to the marginal note would still seem to be a little strained. The most striking thing about the marginal note is that it suggests that Pope wanted not only to provide a further introduction to the structure of the poem, but also to show the various ways in which the essay could be read. He keeps the boundaries between design, discovery,

³³⁹Mack, *The Last and Greatest Art*, p.313.

and improvisation blurred by suggesting that there are a variety of ways in which the poem could be traversed, whether this means intentional navigation to a particular goal ('maze'), exploratory wandering ('garden'), or outright bushwhacking ('wild'). 'Plan' itself could be variously interpreted. Is he searching for a divine plan or a manmade idea of a plan of the world? The various topographical features referenced could signify both the providential order as it is experienced by man and the ways in which it is perceived and approached by mankind's fallible understanding — a 'maze' to be solved, or a 'wild' to be tamed. At the same time these landscape structures describe the different ways in which Pope could have structured the poem formally — a confusing though well-trimmed maze, an unpredictable wild, or a familiar garden, just to give a few examples. The question of planning ('without a plan') is important because it speaks to both the idea of a divine plan which exists and might be discovered, and mankind's approach to perusing it, the latter of which also brings to the forefront Pope's methodology in mapping out a possible method. It appears that God's plan, man's idea of it, and Pope's plan of the plan are all being discussed at once. It is also unclear if the 'not without a plan' is something of a rejection of 'The Design', which only appeared in editions of the poem from 1734 onwards. The use of the word 'Or' is ambiguous enough to suggest both that Pope is offering a metaphorical buffet of perspectives, and that he is changing his mind about the nature of the 'scene' he is creating as he goes along. It might very well be that he finds 'garden' comprehensive enough to contain all the landscapes described before.

Indeed, the effect of the passage might seek to correspond to Pope's observations of lines 457-464 in Book 14 of the *Iliad*, which he responds to with the following comment:

This passage cannot be thought justly liable to the objections which have been made against heaping comparisons one upon another, whereby the principal object is lost amidst too great a variety of different images. In this case the principal image is more strongly impressed on the mind by a multiplication of similes, which are the natural product of an imagination laboring to express something very vast, but, finding no single idea sufficient to answer its conceptions, it endeavors by redoubling the comparisons to supply this defect: the different sounds of waters, winds, and flames being as it were united in one. We have several instances of this sort even in so castigated and reserved a writer as Virgil.³⁴⁰

Pope's recognition and admiration for the 'imagination laboring' when faced with a large conception illustrates why he is so eager in the *Essay* to offer as many impressions as

³⁴⁰ *Literary Criticism of Alexander Pope*, ed. by Bertrand Goldgar (University of Nebraska Press, 1965), p.142.

possible. We cannot tell if he is laying out plans for readers to choose from or rapidly going through various options.

Indeed, the overlapping between different processes — Pope's writing out of the poem, the reader's exploration of the poem, as well as the idea of an overarching Godly plan — becomes even more evident when we consider variant editions of the *Essay*. The sixth line appears as 'A mighty Maze! of Walks without a Plan'³⁴¹ in the MLM and the 1733 anonymous edition of the first epistle. It is revised in the later HLM to 'A mighty Maze! but not without a Plan', which is the definitive version of the line in all subsequent editions. The 'maze' is admittedly an unhelpfully prolific metaphor. However, the initial suggestion that there are numerous 'Walks' one can take discounts — at least in the 1733 edition — the sense of 'maze' pertaining to a puzzle to which there is only one definitive solution. It actually suggests the word's second predominant geographical sense, 'a complex network of paths or streets; a bewildering mass of things (material or immaterial), in which the individual components are difficult to separate or make out' (OED). This kind of maze has multiple solutions. Moreover, even though the paths are complex and confusing in their number — not unlike the bewildering 'Maze of Schools' mentioned in *An Essay on Criticism* — it does not mean that they are unplanned.³⁴² The qualification 'but not without a Plan' in the final version of the line is an improvement because it creates an ambiguity as to which kind of 'maze' is being referred to whilst creating a striking juxtaposition between the intimidating image of the 'mighty maze' and the reassurance that it is not completely undecipherable. This prevents the evocativeness of the image of a maze from over-systematising Pope's approach (the puzzle denotation) or making it seem directionless (the 'maze' of walks). However, it also retains a sense that the poem is still deciding what it is, especially as the phrase 'but not' itself indicates a changing of mind, a rejection *in media res*. Pope and Bolingbroke are still discovering and learning more about their chosen subject, and the reader is entering into a discourse that is ever open to reinterpretation.

When reading these topographic conceits we might think of how in *Spectator* no. 476 Addison uses geographic metaphors to describe the different reading and writing experiences produced by different forms of literature. The article, which quotes Horace's *Ars poetica* in its motto ('*lucidus Ordo...*'; 'His Method will be clear'), comments on how writing that has been written 'with Regularity and Method' creates composition and reading experiences

³⁴¹ *The Last and Greatest Art: Some Unpublished Poetical Manuscripts of Alexander Pope*, ed. by Maynard Mack (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1984), pp.206-207.

³⁴² *An Essay on Man*, 1.26.

different from other writing styles, like essays, that follow no particular method and find it sufficient to simply have ‘several Thoughts on a Subject’.³⁴³ Addison observes that when reading essays he ‘fanc[ies] [him] self in a Wood that abounds with a great many noble Objects, rising among one another in the greatest Confusion and Disorder’, whereas in a ‘Methodical Discourse’, which he describes as being best exemplified by Tully and Aristotle, he thinks himself in a ‘regular Plantation, and can place my self in its several Centers, so as to make a view of all the Lines and Walks that are struck from them.’ He summarises the different effects in the following way:

You may ramble in the [essay] a whole day together and every moment discover something or other that is new to you; but when you have done, you will have but a confused, imperfect notion of the place; in the [methodological discourse], your Eye commands the whole Prospect, and gives you such an Idea of it, as is not easily worn out of the Memory.

An Essay on Man is not quite the wild essay Addison describes as it does take pains to outline its winding arguments at the beginning of each verse. It also has an ambition of reaching an understanding of man that is methodical — a complete map rather than a tentative first sketch. However, because of the enormity of the subject, the Sisyphean task of unravelling a solution to all mankind’s questions about humanity’s purpose, place, and state in the context of the universe, the poem always knows that it cannot be anything like Addison’s methodological discourse which allows ‘the whole Prospect’ to be seen at once. To quote *An Essay on Criticism*, ‘Th’ increasing prospect tires our wand’ring eyes, | Hills peep o’er hills, and Alps on Alps arise!’ (ll.231-232). Such a work would let ‘a part contain the whole’ (i.32) or be one that ‘sees with equal eye, as God of all’ (i.87). However, this does not mean that the poem altogether gives up on the idea. By using this concept of an explorer struggling to make sense of poorly charted land, Pope maps not only what is known but also the feeling of disorientation, hope, and unknowing that fills all the map’s empty spaces. As a reflection of this gap between ambition and ability *An Essay on Man* presents itself as a hybrid form between Addison’s ‘Wood’ and ‘Plantation’: ‘a mighty maze but not without a plan’. ‘Maze’, ‘Wild’, and ‘Garden’ better describe the qualitative experience of reading the poem, of following the preliminary ‘map’ of issues that Pope has laid out, and that of being the figurative cartographer who has written it, than the ‘true’ nature of God’s plan or blueprint of the world.

³⁴³ ‘No. 476, Friday, September 5 1712’, *The Spectator*, IV, pp.185-188.

As these deliberately ambiguous cartographic metaphors forewarn, there is an intentionality underlying the failures of ‘fluency’ seen in the body of *An Essay on Man*. Pope’s manuscripts show that he constructed the poem to foster the sense of openness to change and readerly participation emphasised by the ‘power of rejecting’. Sometimes Pope’s phrasal adjustments look to direct focus on certain words rather than others. The line ‘’Tis but a part we see, and not a whole’ (i.60) concludes a verse paragraph concerning mankind’s limited ability to effect change compared to the divine. However, the line was originally ‘We see, but here a Part &, not a Whole.’³⁴⁴ By beginning with ‘We see’, the MLM version places an inordinate amount of focus on ‘We’. This would seem to go directly against the line’s intention of humbling the reader with a sense of their relative insignificance in the context of the universe. The eventual bifurcation of the line between the clause concerning ‘parts’ and that pertaining to ‘wholes’ puts into the background the fact that parts and wholes are things we perceive. This enables the line to engage more directly with the theory of how parts and wholes might be related without directly implicating ‘our’ role within it, and thus undercutting the message of the lines that precede it. As a result of the alteration, the line seems less specific to what Pope or Bolingbroke or the reader might ‘see’ in their own lives or in the maze of the poem than it might be in practice. This allows it to engender the same mirror effect constructed by ‘True Wit’ in *On Criticism* whilst at the same time camouflaging the fact that its thinking thus relies on the readerly imagination, what they think ‘parts’ and ‘wholes’ mean. The line thus becomes more aphoristic, an idea that can have multiple applications in multiple contexts.

Pope’s revisions in *On Man* thus make the work more cogent by leaving the argument to the intuition of the reader. Pope appeals to instinct by creating linguistic parallels between different syntactic structures and replacing words that are too specific and self-limiting with those that are broad and speculative enough to allow for subsequent pivoting, backtracking, and changes of mind. We see Pope appeal to aesthetic instinct when he changes his initial introduction of the ‘Two Principles’ that ‘in human nature reign’ (ii.53) from ‘One spurs, one reins; this Reason, that Self-Love’ to ‘Selflove, to urge, & Reason, to restrain’ (ii.54).³⁴⁵ The initial draft seems to make it difficult to imagine how reason and self-love might work together since their actions seem so disjointed in the syntactical structure of the sentence. The elegance of the sentence in the later draft is derived from its more measured and less dramatic

³⁴⁴ Mack, *The Last and Greatest Art*, p.211

³⁴⁵ Ibid., p.237.

distribution of emphasis, a factor that makes it more in keeping with the exploratory style of the poem. Here again the construction of the poem is designed to echo that of the description of 'True Wit' in *On Criticism*: to give readers back an image of their minds (and not simply Pope's first instinct). By rejecting his own initial wordings in this way, Pope allows the practice of reading the poem to become a greater part of its meaning. The reader is made to feel that they are 'essaying' the field of man with him.

Indeed, some particular verbal changes are designed to give a sense of immediacy to the poem, a sense of how far along the 'map' of man Pope and the reader have travelled. We see this when 'See the poor Indian' becomes 'Lo! [etc. ...].' (i.109).³⁴⁶ The deliberateness of Pope's diction becomes clearer when we notice how the abandonment of 'see' relates to Pope's description of the 'poor Indian' 'See[ing] God in Clouds'. The MLM shows that Pope originally wrote 'Seeks God in Clouds, or on the Wings of Wind' before changing his wording to 'Sees God in Clouds, or hears him in the Wind'. The simplification of 'Seeks' to 'Sees' differentiates the simple Indian from the explorer Pope, the one who cries 'Lo!' on his grand intellectual Odyssey and is actively searching for a vindication of God. The passive quality of 'see' would likely have been a more apt description for the Indian in Pope's mind as it emphasises the sensory abilities of the Indian rather than the intellectual. 'Seeks' and 'Lo' suggest an active search whereas 'Sees' does not. The phrase 'hears him in the Wind' also provides a more appropriately passive ('hears') version of the fantastical 'Wings of Wind'. Indeed, the spirited 'Wings of Wind' would not fit the idea of someone contented with the God within things as they are.

Pope makes such changes visible to readers of the finished text by including a 'Postscript' of variant readings in volume two of the 1735 folio and quarto editions of his works. We can see how the alterations made in the manuscript are selectively revealed for the benefit of readers. 'What then imports it whether here or there?' becomes the familiar 'What matter, soon or late, or here or there?' (i.74) in the MLM.³⁴⁷ We will notice that the 'soon or late' and 'here or there' of the syntax of the line itself naturally invites the reader to associate the 'state and place' of Man (i.71) with a sense of order. At the same time, it also asserts a sense of (false?) comfort. While we are not aware of what exists beyond the 'point' and 'moment' (i.72) of man's orbit of intelligence, we can be soothed by our ability to state our problem with a symmetry and proportionality that we cannot attain when trying to solve it.

³⁴⁶Mack, *The Last and Greatest Art*, p.212

³⁴⁷Ibid., p.211

Abbott and Johnson would be sceptical of the elegance of the line here, but that scepticism is itself a window into the divided state of mind it is in the interest of the poem to convey: that of the human poet attempting to map out his own nature whilst being unable to overcome it. While seeing how the final revision came about in the manuscript makes the intentionality of Pope's compositional choices clearer, they can also be read directly from the postscript. The postscript notes that the following passage was removed altogether after the 1733 folio edition that had been 'Corrected by the Author':

If to be perfect in a certain State,
 What matter, here or there, or soon or late?
 He that is blest to day, as fully so,
 As who began ten thousand years ago.³⁴⁸

By appending his rejected thoughts to the finished poem, Pope draws attention to how, divorced from its contexts, the sense of the poem relies on associations made between vague generalities. The acknowledgement of this abandoned verses emphasises the abstractness of 'here or there', 'soon or late', 'to day', and 'ten thousand years ago'. These lines could be inserted into multiple parts of the text. In fact, the passage appeared at i.98 as well as i.72 before being omitted entirely in later editions.

Pope's manuscripts reveal that the ability to accommodate a plurality of interpretations of man's role in the universe was hard-won and required regular reinforcing. The notes about variant editions that make such changes visible to readers indicate that this difficulty was also something Pope wished would be 'read'. We can see in the manuscripts how the poet needed to backtrack at times to stop himself from being too forthcoming about his own motives and biases in writing the poem. Pope seems to have had to cross out many moments where he was unduly loquacious. The line 'Behind his cloud-topt Hills he frames a Heaven' ('humbler Heaven' in the final publication) was at one point followed by a gratuitous depiction of what that heaven would look like: 'Some Happier World, which Woods on Woods infold, | Where never Christian pierced for thirst of Gold.'³⁴⁹ It is likely that Pope would have thought such a description both unproductively tangential, and too self-serving and presumptuous. In this way, he prevents *An Essay on Man* from fully succumbing

³⁴⁸ *The Works of Mr. Alexander Pope: Volume II*, (London: Printed by J. Wright, for Lawton Gilliver, 1735), pp.196-199., in *Eighteenth Century Collections Online* <link.gale.com/apps/doc/CW0110574284/ECCO?u=cambuni&sid=bookmark-ECCO&xid=e3d63ec1&pg=467> [accessed 28 September 2021]

³⁴⁹ *The Last and Greatest Art*, p.213.

to the fallacy of inconsistency that Cameron and Mack find it guilty of, by being as abstract and non-committal as possible. We also see Pope try to make his meaning more open to interpretation by replacing the words that will have come most immediately to him with a more diffident substitute. Such is the case with the several instances where ‘must’ is replaced with ‘may’ in the MLM: ‘Above, how high progressive Life ~~must~~ may go?’; ‘On superior Pow’rs | Were we to press, inferior ~~must~~ might on ours.’³⁵⁰ Similarly, ‘Self-love the spring of motion, acts the soul’ (i.59) began as ‘Self-love, the spring of action lends the force’ (MLM).³⁵¹ The substitution of ‘action’ with ‘motion’ makes the line more inclusive, allowing for a wider variety of movements including those that are not self-initiated or necessarily executed with a purpose in mind. At the same time, ‘force’ is substituted with the less assertive ‘soul’ to complete the line’s chain of sibilance. The thinking behind these changes is indicated in the recording of variants, where Pope reveals that ‘The proper Study of Mankind is Man’ was in a previous edition ‘The only Science of Mankind is Man’.³⁵² The abandonment of ‘only’, which might have made too bold a statement for Pope’s purposes, and ‘Science’, which would have been similarly restrictive, enables Pope to say more whilst also saying less. ‘Proper’ indicates suitability rather than a lack of choice (‘only’), suggesting that while there are many ‘Sciences’ the most appropriate one, perhaps because it is within the confines of mankind’s limited sphere of knowledge, is that of ‘Man’. The use of ‘Study’ instead of ‘Sciences’ similarly prevents the poem from being overly dogmatic. ‘Science’ implies a definitive state of knowing whereas ‘Study’ expresses an effort to know. When ‘Science’ is used it is deployed with caution, as in ii.43 —‘Trace Science, with Modesty thy guide;’—, which comes at the beginning of a passage added to the 1743 edition of the text. These small changes, made visible by Pope, provide useful hints about how the poem has been revised and therefore the kinds of exploratory, open readings it prefers.

Rejected and rejecting

Taken together, the poem’s deliberate promotion of an openness of argument exemplifies how the ‘power of rejecting’ that Pope lauds in *The Works* is different from

³⁵⁰ Mack, *The Last and Greatest Art*, p.223.

³⁵¹ Ibid., p.237.

³⁵² *The Works of Mr. Alexander Pope: Volume II* (1735), p.197.

outright rejection or even ‘rejecting’ in its present participle sense. The ‘power of rejecting’ does not seem limited to everything that is definitively rejected. What Pope’s ‘power of rejecting’ brings to the fore, as the previous chapters have variously shown from different angles, is a perspective of his work as a body of compositional decisions that can still be appreciated for the story it tells of those decisions in the same instant that it is judged for its results. The ‘power of rejecting’ points to the patinas created by the intangible wear and tear of literary labour. It recognises that writing is oxidised and stressed by repeated thought and sometimes even designed to seem as such. As the Abbott-Johnson observation suggests, the ‘power’ of rejecting may also be a readerly power, the power to appraise how the retention of these snippets of rejected forms adds poetic value to Pope’s oeuvre. We can see that in *An Essay on Man* the ‘power of rejecting’ holds the finality of a ‘rejection’ at ransom, knowing that it *could* renounce, revise, withdraw, and discard but that it does not have to. It can always safeguard its omitted lines in the purgatorial space of the ‘Postscript’ of variants or revise its own thinking *in media res*. If *An Essay on Man* succeeds in its endeavour to steer between extremes it is because of its ability to define itself by the same principle of changeability that underlies Pope’s self-proclaimed redemptive quality as a poet: the ‘power of rejecting’. When reading the poem it is difficult not to feel that the *Essay* would be less compelling and far more fallible if the argument took itself more seriously by presenting itself as a solution to any philosophical problems it explores. Like ‘True Wit’ in *An Essay on Criticism*, *On Man* invites us to persuade ourselves, to ‘Try what the open, what the covert yield’ (i.10). It can be a buffet if it is found unconvincing as a guided tour. Pope’s inquisitive, informal, epistolary approach to his subject matter uses ‘the power of rejection’ as a way of thinking out the many ‘extremes of doctrines’ he moves in between. The poem provides a medley of options and ideas, reassurances and doubts, about man’s place in the world and how one might think of it, whether as a walk, a garden, a maze, a wild, a sphere, a bubble, a rippling lake, a hierarchical chain of being, or some other general frame. The poem prefers to provide a sense of the full gamut of competing visions of the world that could be had rather than to advocate for the ‘best’ one.

This is where Locke’s understanding of ‘power’ in *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* will prove of use to us. Locke suggests that the mind notices not only that some things ‘come to an end’ and others ‘begin to exist’ but also that there exists in things ‘the possibility of having any of its simple *Ideas* changed’ and ‘the possibility of making that change’. Locke reasons that such observations of the changeability of things internal and

external to our minds lead us to infer that ‘like Changes will for the future be made, in the same things, by the like Agents, and by the like ways.’ Taking this deduction forward, Locke first defines ‘power’, broadly, as ‘the change of perceivable ideas’, including the ability to change the sensible ideas of something else or to have them be changed in oneself (*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, II.21.1-2). This two-fold definition considers the ability to make change as an ‘active’ power and the capacity to be changed as a ‘passive’ power.³⁵³ For our purposes in looking at Pope’s use of the ‘power of rejecting’, it is useful to consider Locke’s remarks on ‘uneasiness’ as an influence of change, particularly in relation to the resistance that Pope illustrates his ‘power of rejecting’ must overcome. This includes his own ‘self-love’ that would too readily ‘forgive [itself] some particular lines for the sake of the whole poem, and *vice versa* a whole poem for the sake of some particular lines.’³⁵⁴ Locke identifies uneasiness as the primary motive for making change and as being a necessary pressure to keep men in motion and looking after themselves (II.21.33-34). When multiple feelings of uneasiness coexist the strongest and most unbearable determines the choice of the will, that is, unless the mind intervenes by exercising its power. Locke describes power in this case as the ability to overcome the influence of uneasiness and examine the problem through the lens of reason (II.21.48). The resistance and tension Pope indicates between his self-love and his duty to the whole work could thus be read as requiring the ‘power’ not only of rejecting in an ‘active’ way — of imposing changes on the piece on a material level — but also of rejecting in a more ‘passive’ way: of allowing not only ‘mean things’ to be receptive of change but also those that he ‘thought tolerable’.³⁵⁵ The ‘power of rejecting’ need not be the action of rejecting. It can also be the suspending and elongating of the revision process so that there is ample time for competing uneasinesses of desire to express themselves, whether in manuscripts or variant published editions. ‘Power’ need not be exercised in a visible or conventionally active sense. As Locke’s delineation of ‘active’ power recognises, the ‘power of rejecting’ does not always have to be in motion:

³⁵³ See Raymond Polin, ‘John Locke’s conception of freedom’ in *John Locke: Problems and Perspectives*, ed. by John Yolton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969) pp.1-18 for a full discussion of Locke’s theory of power and its relationship to his ideas of political ‘freedom’ in the *Treatises of Civil Government*. The self-contradictory nature of Locke’s numerous definitions of ‘power’ beyond this initial suggestion of changeability is sadly beyond the scope of this thesis. Patrick Connolly has argued, I think successfully, that Locke’s exploration of the concept might be more persuasive as a description of different kinds of ideas of power rather than a single all-encompassing definition. See Patrick J. Connolly, ‘The Idea of Power and Locke’s Taxonomy of Ideas’, *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 95.1 (2017), 1–16.

³⁵⁴ *TE*, I, p.8.

³⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.8.

To avoid multiplying of words, I would crave leave here, under the word *Action*, to comprehend the forbearance too of any Action proposed; *sitting still*, or *holding one's peace*, when *walking* or *speaking* are pro-pos'd, though mere forbearances, requiring as much the determination of the *Will*, and being often as weighty in their consequences, as the contrary Actions, may, on that consideration, well enough pass for Actions too [...].³⁵⁶

We need not take the 'power of rejecting' too literally as being exclusively about rejecting writing that has already been written out; it could mean forbearing from continuing to write, leaving portions of work completely untouched from an initial draft, or returning to a prior stage of composition to resolve a persisting doubt. The 'power of rejecting' need not be a dismissive form of rejection for something that was poorly done. It could also illustrate a form of restraint, a resistance against the very human urge to finish, settle, or be readily satisfied.

Pope expresses this anxiety about needing the 'power' to, as Locke suggests, sit still, hold one's peace and generally exercise restraint in multiple ways across his other works. We might think of a particular moment in book four of *The Dunciad* where Pope takes issue with how composition is taught through the memorisation of classic poets. While this 'furnishes them with endless matter for Conversation, and Verbal amusement for their whole lives'³⁵⁷ it is also presented as a somewhat restrictive force that constrains the mind to the suggestion of a prefabricated pattern. Pope's disapproval here of automatic and uncontrolled uses of language reveals why the 'power' to exercise restraint and not speak, compose, or revise is so important to him. Pope ventriloquises the 'Spectre' of Dr Richard Busby, who was the Westminster School headmaster behind the education of Locke, Dryden, and Matthew Prior among others, to describe the constraints placed by a system of education centred entirely on words:

Since Man from beast by Words is known,
Words are Man's province, Words we teach alone.
When Reason doubtful, like the Samian letter,
Points him two ways, the narrower is the better.
Plac'd at the door of Learning, youth to guide,
We never suffer it to stand too wide.
To ask, to guess, to know, as they commence,

³⁵⁶ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, II.21.28, p.248.

³⁵⁷ Pope's note to l.153.

As Fancy opens the quick springs of Sense,
 We ply the Memory, we load the brain,
 Bind rebel Wit, and double chain on chain,
 Confine the thought, to exercise the breath;
 And keep them in the pale of Words till death.
 Whate'er the talents, or howe'er design'd,
 We hang one jingling padlock on the mind:
 A Poet the first day, he dips his quill;
 And what the last? A very Poet still.
 Pity! the charm works only in our wall,
 Lost, too soon in yonder House or Hall. (*Dunciad in Four Books* iv.149-166)

As Valerie Rumbold notes, Pope's take on education in *The Dunciad*, whilst clearly embittered by his exclusion from public education, is further incensed by the limitations of eighteenth-century educational practice, in particular its emphasis on the rote learning of classical oratory and rhetoric. Pope draws attention to the inadequacy of an educational system that is so fixated on memorisation that it fails to prepare its students for other tasks of life and so stifles their creativity (Fancy's blossoming 'quick springs of Sense'). According to Pope, these lines were intended to introduce a 'recapitulation of the whole Course of Modern Education' which establishes 'Slavery and Error in Literature, Philosophy, and Politics'.³⁵⁸ The slavery symbolised by the 'jingling padlock on the mind' leads to 'youth being used like Pack-horses and beaten on under a heavy load of Words.' And 'lest they should tire, their instructors contrive to make the Words jingle in rhyme or metre'.³⁵⁹ The irony is that however much one believes words to be the 'province' of Man they are taught in a way that relegates the learner once more to the life of the 'beast'. The note to the line 'Confine the thought, to exercise the breath' explains that by learning the classic poets by heart students gain 'endless matter for Conversation, and Verbal amusement for their whole lives.' Behind this admission of an advantage of rote learning is the implication that students are still 'confined' to a classical precedent that they might not wholly understand or that is irrelevant to their practical needs in a changing society. Without the 'power of rejecting' such rote learning is of little use.

³⁵⁸ Rumbold, *Dunciad in Four Books*, Pope's note to line 501.

³⁵⁹ Ibid., Pope's note to line 162.

Indeed, the variously absurd and grotesque challenges set by Dulness show that duncery, too, is defined by a language that relies too much on the body and too little on the mind. In Book II, line 221, Dulness beseeches her worshipers to learn ‘the wond’rous pow’r of Noise’:

To move, to raise, to ravish ev’ry heart,
With Shakespear’s nature, or with Johnson’s art,
Let others aim: ’Tis yours to shake the soul
With Thunder rumbling from the mustard bowl,
With horns and trumpets now to madness swell,
Now sink in sorrows with a tolling bell;
Such happy arts attention can command,
When fancy flags, and sense is at a stand.
Improve we these. [...]

(*Dunciad in Four Books* II.223-231)

Shakespeare’s ability to use atmospheric noise for thematic effect is detailed in *Spectator* no. 44 which describes ‘Thunder and Lightning’ as being among the foremost artifices exercised by poets ‘to fill the Minds of an Audience with Terroure’.³⁶⁰ In his note to line 228, which is only included in the four-book version of the *Dunciad*, Pope describes such strategic percussion as ‘A mechanical help to the Pathetic, not unuseful to the modern writers of Tragedy’. Pope makes it clear that such effects can be laudable when ‘introduced with Skill, and accompanied by proportionable Sentiments and Expressions in the Writing’.³⁶¹ However, it is implied that the kinds of ‘noise’ Dulness has in mind are designed to conceal a play’s deficiencies (when ‘fancy flags, and sense is at a stand’) rather than to genuinely contribute to the audience’s experience. As the tale of the contest continues we see the participants compete against one another to outdo the ‘mechanical help’ created at the playhouse with their own voices:

[...] Three Cat-calls be the bribe
Of him, whose chatt’ring shames the Monkey tribe:
And his this Drum, whose hoarse heroic base
Drowns the loud clarion of the braying Ass.

Now thousand tongues are heard in one loud din:

³⁶⁰ *The Spectator*, ed. Bond, I, p.185, which is attributed to Pope in *The Prose Works*, I.

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*, i, p.187.

The Monkey-mimics rush discordant in;
 'Twas chatt'ring, grinning, mouthing, jabb'ring all,
 And Noise and Norton, Brangling and Breval,
 Dennis and Dissonance, and captious Art,
 And Snip-snap short, and Interruption smart,
 And Demonstration thin, and Theses thick,
 And Major, Minor, and Conclusion quick. (*Dunciad in Four Books* II.231-242)

As Valerie Rumbold notes, one prize is offered for the gibberish that best captures the mindless sound-making of monkeys, a species that appears to mimic human language without any understanding of it; the other prize is to be given for the bass voice that can drown out the fabled stupidity of the 'braying Ass'. As soon as the prizes are announced the games commence. The playful noise-making of the passage sees what begins as 'chatt'ring' and 'grinning' erode into simple 'mouthing' and 'jabb'ring'. The likes of Benjamin 'Norton' Defoe, John 'Dennis', and John Durant 'Breval' are so deftly integrated into this 'loud din' of onomatopoeic nonsense that their names are made synonymous to the absurd array of babble they are consonant with. The passage ends here in the *Dunciad Variorum*; however it continues in the four-book *Dunciad* of 1743. Towards the end of the list of sounds in the *Dunciad in Four Books*, Pope shifts register and introduces terms of formal argument as they were taught in schools: 'Theses', 'Demonstration', and the three parts of a syllogism, the 'Major' premise, the 'Minor' premise, and the 'Conclusion'. This quick succession of technical language acts as a placeholder for arguments that never come. In fact, further argumentation might strike us as completely unnecessary considering that the listing could easily end at 'captious Art' (as it does prior to 1743) without having any real effect on the poem's course of events. Nevertheless, by labelling where the would-be 'Theses' and 'Demonstration' would go, Pope fits into this extra space a subtle shift of perspective. It is as if we have momentarily withdrawn from the scene of the game to the desk of its would-be playwright. The potential continuation *ad nauseum* of further kinds of nonsensical sounds has been stopped in its tracks so Pope can ground himself in his own 'power' and, in Locke's terms, 'forbear' from succumbing to the temptation to go on in an endless tirade of nonsensical sounds. The 'snip-snap' interruption breaks the poet from his vengeful reverie. The inclusion of specialist terms creates a template which 'bad' writers can use to fit more blabbering 'mechanical help' into their works while still maintaining a (false) semblance of structure. By explicitly delineating the written scaffolding holding up such lazy writing, Pope

underlines exactly how hollow it is and asserts his objective distance from it. He differentiates himself from the ‘bad’ writer who would follow this template rather than exercise the ‘power of rejecting his own thoughts’. Not only this, but Pope also demonstrates the undue power such perfunctory additions of thesis and syllogism may exercise both despite and because of their meaninglessness. The speediness with which these technical words are passed over reflects the speediness with which Norton, Dennis, and Breval have been reduced to their auditory effects. Pope illustrates his own wariness of the persuasiveness of sound by suggesting that here, too, the ‘Demonstration’ (proof), however entertaining and biting, is thin. We have been wittingly yet unwittingly seduced by another ‘jingling padlock on the Mind’.

Pope’s cautionary references to the ways in which communication can degrade into mere reflex or automata is important when considering the intentionality of Pope’s revision process. Pope’s poetic is such that it assumes a poem to be every bit as much a process of speculation and discovery as it is a result of those very same endeavours. As Maynard Mack aptly describes, ‘though [the quintessential Pope poem is] determinate in the sense of having shape, [it also] remains capable of change and growth without loss of identity’. Pope’s conception of poetry is in this sense ‘not history, but a form of action within history that has a history’. This sense is only advanced by the idea that revision does not stop at the level of manuscript alterations but is something that can be read in the finished text. Most revealingly, his finished works do not set out to pose as the results of divine revelation but ‘as a configuration of elements arranged in dramatic and dynamic poise by an entirely human wit that is ever susceptible to second (and even third) thoughts.’³⁶² Pope’s poetic style of presenting his poems as works-in-progress makes it difficult to imagine the ‘power of rejecting’ thoughts as having any decisive force. It seems that, for Pope, the power of rejecting might mean the power to keep rejecting as well as having rejected, of presenting a poem where no individual moment is so precious that it cannot be erased to improve the work’s overall impression or to further the poet’s intentions.

Many of the correction habits in *On Man* might stem from Pope’s awareness of his own critical heritage. Joseph Guerinot, drawing from R.H. Griffith’s article ‘Pope editing Pope’, tallies six alterations to *An Essay on Criticism* that were made by Pope in response to

³⁶² *The Last and Greatest Art*, p.16.

John Dennis' remarks in the *Reflections*.³⁶³ Some of these corrections involved the addition of extra comparative adverbs –‘oft’ and ‘often’— to address lines that were too absolutist and so gave Dennis the opportunity to find exceptions. After Dennis commented that Homer and Horace are examples of people able to marry a talent for elevated literary styles with a flair for pleasantries, the couplet ‘Not only bounded to *peculiar Arts*, | But ev’n in *those*, confin’d to *single Parts*’ became ‘... | But oft in *those*, confin’d to *single Parts*’ (l.63). Similarly, the line ‘For *Wit and Judgment* ever are at strife’, which Dennis argued was nonsensical since wit and judgment are not always conversant (‘they cannot be at strife sure, after they are parted, after Wit has made an Elopement, or has been barbarously forsaken by Judgment, or turn’d to separate maintenance!’),³⁶⁴ was revised to ‘For *Wit and Judgment* often are at strife’ (l.82). Likewise, ‘There are whom Heav’n has blest with store of Wit, | Yet want as much again to manage it’ was refined to ‘Some, to whom Heav’n in wit has been profuse, | Want as much more, to turn it to its use’ (ll.80-81), this time in response to Dennis’ quibble with the way it ‘hobble[s] so damnably’.³⁶⁵ While these changes are in answer to Dennis’ comments on *An Essay on Criticism* you can see how the thinking behind them seems similar to that informing the revisions of *An Essay on Man*.

All in all, these moments of self-moderation at different levels of *On Man* show a Pope who had to regularly reconsider his first words and linguistic habits. Pope’s style of allowing the logic of the poem to unfold through a network of associations prepares the reader for the idea, derived from Ovid, Boethius, and Dryden among others,³⁶⁶ about the interconnectivity of life that begins in the third epistle:

Nothing is foreign: Parts relate to whole;
One all-extending, all-preserving Soul
Connects each being, greatest with the least (iii.21-23).

The notion that the creative powers of God create a richly interlinked world where nothing is wasted is more persuasive when the poem itself attempts to flesh out a similar interconnectedness. Indeed, we might experience a sense of déjà vu in reading this discussion of ‘parts’ and ‘wholes’ as it is reminiscent of the close of the first epistle (‘All are but parts of

³⁶³ Joseph V. Guerinot, *Pamphlet attacks on Alexander Pope, 1711-1744: a descriptive bibliography* (New York: New York University Press, 1969), pp.7-11. See also R.H. Griffith, ‘Pope Editing Pope’.

³⁶⁴ John Dennis, *Reflections Critical and Satyrical, upon a late Rhapsody, call’d, An Essay on Criticism* (1711), repr. in *Pope: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by John Barnard, p.74.

³⁶⁵ Guerinot, *Pamphlet Attacks*, p.8.

³⁶⁶ See *TE*, III.i, n.7-26.

one stupendous whole, | Whose body Nature is, and God the soul', i.267) and will itself take up a new form in the fourth ('God loves from Whole to Parts: but human soul | Must rise from Individual to Whole, iv.361-2). This in turn foretells the poem's conclusion, where 'erring Pride' (iv.394) is at last shown that 'Whatever is, is right' (i.294, iv.145, iv.394). Pope's associative logic, combined with the mirror effect first seen in the 'True Wit' passage in *An Essay on Criticism*, enables 'whatever is' to appear right through 'Wit's false mirror': readers' own explanations of how the parts of the poem fit into a whole.

The way in which Pope tries to make his word choices foresee his next turns of thought, as if by chance, or divine intervention, buoys up the hope that a greater understanding of the world may exist somewhere in the ether or at the end of an infinite number of further revisions. The poem deals with statements that aesthetically mimic the level of orderliness it hopes to reach. Yet, we know from its use of exploratory language that it is still aware that these statements will inevitably need to be revised and repurposed as provisional 'plans'. As aforementioned, we find that Pope's alterations tend to try to make the poem as amenable to as many kinds of readerly interpretation as possible. 'From which to reason, or to which refer?',³⁶⁷ was originally 'From which to argue, or to which refer?' in the MLM. 'Reason' may be a better choice because it records the subtle shift in thought from the question of the preceding couplet, 'Say first, of God above, or Man below, | What can we reason but from what we know?' The word 'reason' creates a neat parallel with both 'refer' and the 'reason' 'from which' we are to 'reason' in the previous couplet. However, the train of thought has now switched gears. While his original rhetorical question seems to lean towards the suggestion that we have no choice but to reason from what we know, the small distance 'from' point of reason ('from what we know') 'to' point of reference ('to which refer') shows how narrow the scope of 'man's station' is in comparison to the 'world unbounded' that God is said to know in the next line. Indeed, the word 'know' itself, which is emphasised in the HLM manuscript version of 'What can we reason, but from what we know?' (i.2), suggests both personal and collective knowledge, as well as less certain forms of knowledge such as conjecture, thesis, perception, or experience. The word 'reason' might suit Pope's purposes much better than 'argue' as it does not distract readers with ideas of formal argument. Its ability to link back to the previous couplet lends it an illusion of serendipity that exemplifies what is meant by the idea that Pope still engenders a feeling of approaching his ambitious goal.

³⁶⁷ MLM, p.4, *The Last and Greatest Art*, p.208-9.

This hybrid nature of the *Essay* as both an epistle and an essay is important because it allows us to enhance a common line of defence for the poem: that claim that it is not in the nature of the epistolary style of the *Essay* to provide serious expository logic. The idea that the poem was never intended to be read as an exposition of a thesis can be further nuanced by the sense that Pope still imagined the existence of an exhaustive, logically sound, divine ‘plan’ even if it is unfair to judge the *Essay* as having one. The poem’s (impossible) ambition of reaching a panoptical understanding of mankind might have had to take the digressive, unintentionally repetitive route of an essayistic poem; however, it still contains in its painstakingly wrought coincidences of sound and sense the imagined existence of an exhaustive, logically coherent, divine ‘plan’. The maze is ‘not without a plan’ because the poem is always ‘not without’ the hope of finding one. This means that while we can agree with Geoffrey Tillotson’s characterisation of the dynamic of the *Essay* — ‘Man was a riddle, and Pope aimed at guessing at solutions’ — insofar as it describes the poem as dealing with possibilities and conjectures, we can also add that Pope did believe in and anticipate a master solution to his riddle.³⁶⁸ In the intricacies of Pope’s localised revisions, his conscientiousness about the conciseness and poetic force of his language, we can feel the poem’s enduring anticipation of the existence of a divine master plan. We can experience in Pope’s carefully architected coincidences of sound and sense an excitement for discovery. This is even more the case when these heavily contrived aesthetic pleasures co-exist with the method-free essayistic approach that Addison describes. The ebb and flow between a series of intensely memorable, pithy lines — ‘All Nature’s difference keeps all Nature’s peace’ (iv.56), ‘“Whatever is, is right.” — This world, ‘tis true’ (iv.145), — and other, more carefully considered and speculative turns of thought — ‘Trace Science then, with Modesty thy guide’ (ii.43) — builds a sense of impending revelation. This is a belief in a formula for all possible solutions to the riddle of mankind, a master algorithm just beyond the horizon. The effort with which the poem has so carefully been structured, in spite of its essayistic limits, gives the sense that the moment of epiphany or revelation may still yet be on the tip of one’s tongue.

It is too easy to marvel at what a big difference these minute alterations can make to both the overall sense and aesthetic effect of the poem. To misremember or half-remember the characteristically aphoristic Popean line, is to find it lacking something its parts already foresee as, in Abbott’s terms, the only possible way of saying it. As Etienne de Silhouette notes, the least paraphrase threatens to weaken its integrity as a whole: ‘La moindre

³⁶⁸ Tillotson, *Pope and Human Nature*, p.134.

paraphrase enerve sa vigueur, lache & dissout pour ainsi dire un corps entierement solide & serre.³⁶⁹ Yet, as *An Essay on Man* demonstrates, the apparent closure of an aphorism need not be as definitive as it seems. Pope has an ability to generate through his precision, through his creation of this network of balance, connection, and connectivity between sounds and sense, the feeling of being on the verge of discovering something at any given moment. He allows a sense of excitement, of effort, of potential to survive the poem's alleged inconsistencies and even dominate them. Through his careful revision of the poem Pope oddly creates the comfort that something is 'right' in this speculative map, even if it is simply the joy of thinking out, and even if much remains to be figured out and even if this will, by definition of our very station as human beings, most likely always be so. Whether this reflects a faith in God or a faith in the power of revision to ultimately yield an 'unforgivable' solution may not be entirely clear. However, the way in which the poem derives its force, its power, from its ability to reject itself, whether in its verse or through the insertion of four extra *Epistles to Several Persons* years later, shows how seriously Pope took revision, not only as a way of writing, or a way of thinking, but as a way of understanding the world.

From Correction to Revision

Maynard Mack has argued, I think rightly, that the 1717 *Preface* is best read against the mixed reputation Pope had built throughout his career up to that point.³⁷⁰ Pope had by then faced six or so years of attacks against his character and religion including vicious charges that he was a Jacobite, a plagiarist, 'a conceited and empty versifier' with a greed for money, a monster cursed by God with deformity, a 'Creature not of our Original' (Dennis' *Reflections*), and someone vain and deceitful enough to write praises for himself under Wycherley's name.³⁷¹ The most recent barrage of attacks in this career-long onslaught included John Dennis' *A True Character of Mr Pope and His Writings* (1716), which acted as something of a rejoinder to Pope's own *The Narrative of Dr. Robert Norris* (1713).³⁷² Mack argues that, given his growing reputation as a troublemaker and the anti-Catholic sentiment

³⁶⁹ Etienne de Silhouette, *Essais sur la critique et sur l'homme* (Paris, 1737), p.13.

³⁷⁰ See Maynard Mack, 'Pope's 1717 *Preface* with a Transcription of the Manuscript in *Augustan Worlds: Essays in Honour of A. R. Humphreys*, ed. J. C. Hilson et al. (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1978), 85-106.

³⁷¹ See Guerinot (ed.), *Pamphlet Attacks on Pope*, especially xxi-xxiii.

³⁷² All these accusations are indirectly referenced in the concluding paragraph of the preface to the *Works*, especially *TE*, I, p.10, ll.200-215.

that had spread after the 1715 Jacobite rebellion, Pope needed to ‘sweep the mountebank quite under the rug’ and re-present himself as a respectable man of letters, at least for the sake of the continued success of the *Iliad*, the third volume of which was to be released at the same time as *The Works*, if not for his public image.

However, looking at what *was* ‘burn’d’ from his initial manuscript for the preface to the *Works* the final result, including his own experiences of revision — ‘What I thought incorrect, I suppressd; & what I thought most finishd, I never publishd but with fear and trembling’ (ll.219-221) — it might be that Pope’s sober reflections on the difficulty of writing, ‘rejecting his own thoughts’, and being a ‘good writer’ in the *Preface* sought something more subtle than a heavy-handed changing of tune. Indeed, after having read the *Preface* ‘twice with Pleasure’ Bishop Atterbury wrote to Pope that he had found it commendable for its ‘modesty and good sense’, and he advised the young poet not to delay printing it ‘provided that there is nothing said there, which you have Occasion to unsay here after: of which you your self are the best and the only Judge’.³⁷³ The caveat that Pope ought to tread with caution and avoid publishing anything that might later be used against him was written as early as December 1716 when Pope had yet to solidify how well he could use the censure of others opportunistically for his own benefit. Bearing in mind that Atterbury was also the adviser behind Pope’s burning of his epic *Alcander, Prince of Rhodes*, which Pope expresses regret in destroying in the manuscript preface, we can see how the finality of the prospect of ‘unsaying’ his previous arguments for the sake of the *Iliad* might have become undesirable to Pope.³⁷⁴ Johnson, who praises the *Preface* for its ‘sprightliness and elegance,’ shows how quickly the chance to ‘unsay’ became an opportunity for Pope, remarking that while Waller thought ‘poets lose half their praise, because the reader knows not what they have blotted’, ‘Pope’s voracity of fame taught him the art of obtaining the accumulated honour, both of what he had published, and of what he had suppressed’.³⁷⁵ Perhaps the surest way to piece together the different sides of his poetic character, his flair for high and low styles, the Hogarthian as well as the Horatian, and the Homeric, was to step back and reflect philosophically on the composition process itself and that which Pope calls the only method a poet has of judging the scope of their own talents: ‘experiment[ing] by writing’.³⁷⁶

³⁷³ *Correspondence*, I, p.378.

³⁷⁴ Maynard Mack, ‘Pope’s 1717 Preface with a Transcription of the Manuscript Text’, p.104.

³⁷⁵ *Lives*, iv, p.28.

³⁷⁶ *Prose Works*, I, 290.

In the spirit of the preface, this thesis has sought to present revision as a uniting factor across Pope's career. In doing so it has also tried to bridge the gap between the thematic and practical purposes of revision in Pope's work by considering revision holistically as both a means of arriving at a 'final' revised text and a general word for actions of reconsideration, rethinking, and reviewing in his work. It has been my intention to show that ideas of writing and re-writing, thinking and rethinking are recurring themes in the poet's work that deserve attention for their own sake, not exclusively for their role in the creation of the final text, or as an esoteric aspect of literary scholarship reserved to the obscurity of the 'making of' the publication. It might be said that whereas the Wordsworthian composer follows a 'spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings', the Popean composer exercises his power to reject and re-reject many inter-competing ideas, in the knowledge that the 'o'erflowings of the mind',³⁷⁷ 'always investigating, always aspiring',³⁷⁸ with second (third and fourth) 'thoughts', are not necessarily conducive to the completion of a definitive final composition.

The efforts of twentieth-century scholarship had been rooted in re-establishing Pope as a mainstay in eighteenth-century studies. The twentieth-century rediscovery of Pope, which was buoyed up by the publication of the Twickenham edition of his works, as well as the enormous scholarly contributions of Maynard Mack, John Butt, and George Sherburn among others, has secured Pope's reputation so effectively that it is easy to forget that it was not long ago, in the late nineteenth century, that Pope's popularity was at its nadir. While mid-twentieth-century scholarship took a necessarily defensive and sympathetic stance towards the poet in its enthusiasm to rehabilitate him, twenty-first-century scholarship, no longer under pressure to safeguard Pope's literary status, has branched out from the New Critical interest in Pope's versification that originally accelerated his revival a hundred years ago. Twenty-first century Popean criticism has moved further and further away from discussions of the couplet art that enchanted mid-twentieth century critics, preferring to pursue, now that a firm foundation for further research has been set, the historical, social, and political contexts that surrounded Pope's work, from his friendships and enmities, to his ill-health, sexuality, Jacobitism, and Catholicism. This has led to a greater diversity of scholarship. Philip Connell has examined Pope's literary career through the lens of the poet's complicated and evolving positions on Catholicism, freethinking, impiety, and the

³⁷⁷ *An Essay on Man*, III.i, iv.369 .

³⁷⁸ Samuel Johnson's description of Pope's mind in *The Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets: With Critical Observations on Their Works*, ed. by Roger Lonsdale, 4 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), IV, p.62.

Hanoverian Church.³⁷⁹ Abigail Williams has demonstrated how ‘issues of literary merit were inextricable from those of political affiliation’ and argued that the work of ‘writers such as Pope, Swift, Gay, and John Arbuthnot is best understood by considering their shared cultural agenda’.³⁸⁰ Most recently, Joseph Hone’s *Alexander Pope in the Making* has traced Pope’s early relationship with Buckingham, Landsowne, Bolingbroke, Finch, and other lesser known friends in order to challenge the longstanding assumption that Pope’s early poems were largely influenced by members of the Scriblerus Club. Hone’s work, in particular, notes the tendency of twenty-first-century scholarship to situate Pope’s verse ideologically within the political climate of its publication. Hone finds the non-partisan, politically neutral poet that was recovered by mid-twentieth-century revivers a consequence of Pope’s ‘in many ways devious and dishonest’ early efforts to distance himself from politics and his early promise as a would-be ‘Stuart laureate’ by seeking classical status.³⁸¹ The sense that the scholars of Maynard Mack’s twentieth-century tradition have missed the depth of Pope’s participation in contemporary politics and controversy is echoed throughout most such recent studies of Pope.

While these efforts to uncover a complicated, sometimes duplicitous Pope sidelined by mid-twentieth century readings have provoked interesting insights into his relationships with his contemporaries and his role in history, they do little to mitigate some of the text-based assumptions we have also inherited from our twentieth-century predecessors. Recent projects designed to update the Twickenham Edition of Pope’s works in the light of half a century of scholarly advancements offer us a chance to retrace our steps and disentangle some of the more basic textual paradigms that have still survived unchallenged. The ongoing Longman Annotated English Poets edition of the poems, which will be the first to present all of Pope’s poems in the order in which they were published, and the commissioned *Oxford Edition of the Writings of Alexander Pope*, which will provide the first comprehensive edition of all his works, including his prose and correspondence, offer us the occasion to look back, in particular, at assumptions surrounding Pope’s revision practices.

³⁷⁹ Philip Connell, ‘Alexander Pope and the Modes of Faith’, in *Secular Chains: Poetry and the Politics of Religion from Milton to Pope* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016). Oxford Scholarship Online. <10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199269587.001.0001> [accessed 28 September 2021]

³⁸⁰ Abigail Williams, ‘The Tory critique of Whig literature’, in *Poetry and the Creation of a Whig Literary Culture 1618-1714* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). Oxford Scholarship Online. <10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199255207.001.0001> [accessed 28 September 2021]

³⁸¹ Joseph Hone, ‘Conclusion’ in *Alexander Pope in the Making* (Oxford University Press, 2021), 189-195, p.192. Oxford Scholarship Online.

Both new editions' efforts to represent Pope's texts in the light of modern scholarship, particularly the Oxford edition's efforts to bring Pope's work together as 'Writings', as opposed to just works, signal the importance now of revising not only the Twickenham texts but the ways in which we have imagined Pope 'writing' since his posthumous reception. In assuming that Pope only revised for the sake of publication we predispose ourselves to carrying the dregs of the very antiquated views of Pope that gradually led to his ebb in popularity in the nineteenth century. The assumption underlying Wordsworth's description of Pope as the poet who 'bewitched the nation by his melody, and dazzled it by his polished style, and was himself blinded by his own success' is that Pope's industry as a versifier was more of a quirk than a strategy, and that too an unthinking one. This interpretation of Pope presents him as being 'blinded by his own success' to the point of being 'blind' to his own processes.³⁸² And yet, to quote Pat Rogers, '[i]f everyone can agree on one thing about Alexander Pope, it is that he could not resist tinkering.'³⁸³ As this thesis has demonstrated, there is a misleading facility to the notion that Pope was simply a manic reviser. The idea that one would need some level of 'power' to reject one's 'own' thoughts suggests that Pope could, indeed, 'resist tinkering', and in fact was well aware of, and arguably fascinated by, the dynamics of restraint and excess involved in poetic invention. This assumption that revision was only a work of habit for Pope makes it difficult to see the links between the master versifier resurrected in the mid-twentieth century and the opportunistic satirical Pope emphasised by the twenty-first. Ideas of compositional refiguring extend from his manuscripts to his changing public self-presentation. His longevity as an aspiring classical author is based on this ability to adapt and be adapted: on revision.

Indeed, my examination of Pope's revision as a theme throughout Pope's career finds further support in Henry Brooke's November 1739 letter to Pope, in which he explains why he had underestimated Pope's work in the past. The letter is invaluable for its description of how Brooke learned to appreciate Pope's work over time. This is not least because Brooke's explanation is remarkably similar to Pope's own implorations to Swift that his works are 'much more to be liked and understood when considered in the relation they bear with each other' than on their own:³⁸⁴

³⁸² William Wordsworth, *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. by W. J. B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), III, p.72.

³⁸³ Pat Rogers, 'Revisions to Pope's Prose Works in the Mischellanies (1732)', *The Review of English Studies*, 57.232 (2006), 701-706 (p.701).

³⁸⁴ *Correspondence* III, p.348.

I had not then entered into the spirit of your works, and I believe there are few who have [...] Any one of your original writings is indisputably a more finished and perfect piece than has been wrote by any other man; there is one great and consistent genius evident through the whole of your works, but that genius seems smaller by being divided, by being looked upon only in parts, and that deception makes greatly against you; you are truly but one man through many volumes, and yet the eye can attend you but in one single view; each distinct performance is as the performance of a separate author, and no one being large enough to contain you in your full dimensions, though perfectly drawn, you appear too much in miniature; your genius is like your sense; one is too crowded for a common eye, and the other for a common reader [...] I wish all the profits of Homer were sunk in the sea, provided you had never improved him, but spent your time in excelling him his own way.³⁸⁵

This idea that Pope's works need to be read in relation to one another and as being completed by their relationship to one another productively complicates our view of the 'power of rejection' by suggesting the importance of inter-work revision. This is also corroborated by Pope's correspondence with Swift in February 1732/33: 'my works will in one respect be like the works of Nature, much more to be liked and understood when consider'd in the relation they bear with each other, than when ignorantly look'd upon one by one'.³⁸⁶ The idea of seeing Pope as 'one man in many volumes' invites the question of how the revision or introduction of one work might have an impact on other, seemingly unrelated pieces. There are, of course, examples of images recurring across Pope's works that respond to Brooke's evocative idea of Pope's 'divided' genius representing 'one man through many volumes'. The lines describing the spreading ripples of sleep that close Book II of the *Dunciad* (II.405-410), for instance, famously parallel the ripples of self-love that close epistle four of the *Essay on Man* (IV.363-72). These in turn echo an earlier rendition of the simile in the *Temple of Fame* where sound waves are described as communicating gossip, scandal, rumours, and news spreading circle by circle. This favourite image of the rippling lake seems to have been inspired, in turn, by a scatological image in *Temple, Aesop at the Bear Garden* (1715).³⁸⁷ Indeed, Spence describes how Pope salvaged and revived some lines from his lost juvenile epic *Alcander* in his later works; he gives *The Dunciad* III.47-8 as an example of lines used word for word from the earlier work: 'As man's meanders to the vital spring | Roll all their tides, then back their circles bring'.³⁸⁸

At the same time, without an appreciation for the Pope's desire to revise himself, we find it difficult to see the connections between what we consider Pope's early works (pre-

³⁸⁵ *Correspondence* IV, p.199.

³⁸⁶ *Correspondence* III, p.348.

³⁸⁷ See Valerie Rumbold's detailed note on the history of the image and Laura Brown's description in *Alexander Pope* (Oxford; New York: Blackwell, 1985), pp.147-155.

³⁸⁸ *Anecdotes*, pp.16, 19.

1728) and what we consider Pope's later ones. The common quotation used to support this narrative of a perceived change in Pope's style before and after the first *Dunciad* has been from *An Epistle to Arbuthnot*: 'That not in Fancy's Maze he wander'd long, | But stoop'd to Truth, and moraliz'd his song' (ll.340-341). When considering revision as a career-long factor in Pope's work it becomes easier to see how this stooping to 'Truth' might be referring back to previous iterations of 'Truth' in Pope's works, such as the discussion of 'True Wit' in *On Criticism*. Similarly, we can see how the 'Maze' might correspond to that in *On Man*. The autobiographical reflections of *Arbuthnot* might be working together to indicate continuity in Pope's career rather than change. Even when stooping to 'Truth' Pope cannot help but reference its capacity to be reinvented.

In paying closer attention to the role the composition process plays on a thematic as well as an interpretive and mechanical level in Pope's work, this thesis naturally encourages readers to be more mindful of the terminology we use when discussing Popean revision, whether it is 'correcting', 'editing', or 'refining', while bearing in mind how ideas of composition are used and referenced by the poet himself throughout his career. There are nuances here that have yet to be unravelled in relation to Pope's varied use of revision. Correction, which is perhaps the term most frequently used in relation to Pope, inherently suggests that the second, overriding draft ought to have been the first. A 'superfoetation', in this sense, cannot be described as a correction. Revision, on the other hand, indicates a viewing again, which implies an inherent value to the first thought in defining and building the second. Whereas correction essentially erases the first 'mistake', revision simply builds on top of it and is understood against the memory of whatever it overrides. The kind of accumulative understanding developed through 'revision' corresponds to what we have seen in Pope's commentary on superfoetation in Shakespeare, his portrayal of Eloisa's changing state of mind, his structuring of *Cobham*, as well as his speculative, searching voice in *On Man*. It stresses, as we have seen Pope do, the value of not only visible but readable revision as a contributor to the meaning of his work. It is telling that Pope's first major success, *An Essay on Criticism*, ends on the note that the 'Learn'd' can be identified by their openness to self-improvement — 'Not *free* from Faults, nor yet too vain to *mend*' (l.744). Once it is established that the 'Learn'd' are not 'too vain to mend', any outstanding 'Faults' take on a different meaning. Suddenly, the 'revisability' of work, the fact that it can withstand further revision, yet appear complete despite the endurance of some choice 'Faults', could be

considered a mark of its virtue.³⁸⁹ Such faults are no longer straightforward marks of deficiency on the writer's part but might be thought of as somewhat intentional: the 'Learn'd' are distinguished by both their ability and willingness to revise their own pieces and their choice not to. It has been my argument that manuscript, interpretive, and biographical approaches to Pope's work can be united using this holistic concept of revision. By linking Pope's various textual and extra-textual revision efforts to his long-standing interest in the compositional process we provide ourselves with a way of revising twentieth-century Popean scholarship rather than merely correcting it.

³⁸⁹ Julian Ferraro and Paul Baines (eds.) *The Poems of Alexander Pope: Volume One* (London: Routledge, 2019) p.289, line 745.

Bibliography

Primary Works

Addison, Joseph, and Richard Steele, *The Spectator*, ed. by Donald F. Bond., 5 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

Bacon, Francis, *The Advancement of Learning*, ed. by Michael Kiernan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000)

Berkeley, George, *Principles of Human Knowledge and Three Dialogues*, ed. by Howard Robinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999)

Burthogge, Richard, *Organum vetus & novum, or, A discourse of reason and truth wherein the natural logick common to mankinde is briefly and plainly described* (London: Printed for Sam. Crouch, 1678)

Cowper, William, *The Works of William Cowper*, ed. by R. Southey, 15 vols. (London, 1836)

Dennis, John, *The Critical Works of John Dennis*, ed. by Edward Niles Hooker, 2 vols. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1939-1943)

———, *Reflections Critical and Satyrical, upon a late Rhapsody, call'd, An Essay upon Criticism* (1711)

De Quincey, Thomas, *Theological Essays and other papers*, 2 vols. (Boston: Ticknor, Reed, and Fields, 1854)

Descartes, Rene, *Discourse on Method and the Meditations*, trans. by F.E. Sutcliffe (London: Penguin, 1968)

de Silhouette, Etienne, *Essais sur la critique et sur l'homme* (Paris, 1737)

Donne, John, *John Donne: The Major Works*, ed. by John Carey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990)

———, *John Donne: Selected Letters*, ed. by P.M. Oliver (New York: Routledge, 2002)

- Dryden, John, *Of Dramatic Poesy and Other Critical Essays*, ed. George Watson, 2 vols. (London: 1962)
- , *Poems, 1649-1680*, ed. by E.N. Hooker, H.T. Swendenberg, and V.A. Dearing (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972)
- , *The Works of John Dryden*, ed. by H.T. Swedenberg, jr. *et al.*, 20 vols. (University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1956-2002)
- , *The Works of Virgil in English, 1697*, ed. by W. Frost and V.A. Dearing (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987)
- Fulwood, William, *The Enemy of Idleness* (London: Leonard Maylard, 1568)
- Gildon, Charles, *A Grammar of the English Tongue, With Notes, Giving the Grounds and Reason of Grammar in General* (London, 1711)
- Horace, *Horace: Satires I*, ed. by P. Michael Brown (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993)
- , *Satires, Epistles, The Art of Poetry*, trans. by H. Rushton Fairclough, Loeb Classical Library 194 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926)
- Johnson, Samuel, *A Dictionary of the English Language; in which the words are deduced from their originals and illustrated in their different significations by examples from the best writers. To which are prefixed, a history of the language, and an English grammar*, ed. by Samuel Johnson, 2 vols. (London: W. Strahan, 1755)
- , *The Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets: With Critical Observations on Their Works*, ed. by Roger Lonsdale, 4 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006)
- Letters to Abelard and Heloise, To Which is prefix'd, A Particular Account of their Lives, Amours, and Misfortunes, Extracted Chiefly from Monsieur Bayle. Translated from the French*, trans. by John Hughes, 5th edn. (London, 1729)
- Locke, John, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. by Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975)
- , *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, ed. by J.W. Yolton and J.S. Yolton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989)

- Maittaire, Michael, *The English Grammar; or, An Essay on the Art of Grammar Applied to and Exemplified in the English Tongue* (London, 1712)
- Mein, Charles, *An essay concerning rational notions* (London, 1733)
- Milton, John, *The Shorter Poems*, ed. by B. Kiefer Lewalski and E. Haan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012)
- Montaigne, *Essays*, trans. by Charles Cotton, ed. by Hazlitt (The Floating Press, 2009)
- Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. by Frank Justus Miller, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University 2014)
- Petrarch, *Letters from Petrarch*, trans. by Morris Bishop (Bloomington and London: Indiana University press, 1966)
- Pope, Alexander, *An Essay on Man*, ed. by Tom Jones (Princeton University Press, 2016)
- , *Literary Criticism of Alexander Pope*, ed. by Bertrand Goldgar (University of Nebraska Press, 1965)
- , *The Correspondence of Alexander Pope*, ed. by George Sherburn, 5 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956)
- , *The Last and Greatest Art: Some Unpublished Poetical Manuscripts of Alexander Pope*, ed. by Maynard Mack (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1984)
- , *The Poems of Alexander Pope: Volume One*, ed. by Julian Ferraro and Paul Baines, Longman Annotated English Poets (London: Routledge, 2019)
- , *The Prose Works of Alexander Pope*, ed. Norman Ault and Rosemary Cowler, 2 vols (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1936-1968), I (1939), II (1969)
- , *The Twickenham Edition of the Poems of Alexander Pope*, ed. by John Butt et al., 11 vols. (London: Methuen, 1939-69), I (1961), III.i (1950; repr.1964), IV (1939), V (1953), VI (1954), VII (1967)
- , *The Works of Mr. Alexander Pope: Volume II*, (London: Printed by J. Wright, for Lawton Gilliver, 1735), pp.196-199., in *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*

<link.gale.com/apps/doc/CW0110574284/ECCO?u=cambuni&sid=bookmark-ECCO&xid=e3d63ec1&pg=467> [accessed 28 September 2021]

Prior, Matthew, *The Literary Works of Matthew Prior*, ed. H. Bunker Wright and M.K. Spears, 2 vols., 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959)

Puttenham, George, *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589), in *Early English Books Online* <<http://name.umd.umich.edu/A68619.0001.001>> [accessed 28 September 2021]

Ruffhead, Owen, *The Life of Alexander Pope* (1769)

Seneca, *Epistles (Ad Lucilium epistulae morales)*, trans. Richard M. Grummere, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989)

Shakespeare, William, *The Works of Mr. William Shakespear in Six Volumes*, ed. by Nicholas Rowe (London: Jacob Tonson, 1709)

———, *The Works of Shakespear*, ed. by Alexander Pope, 6 vols (London: Jacob Tonson, 1725)

———, *The Works of Shakespeare*, ed. by Lewis Theobald, 7 vols (London: Printed for A. Bettesworth and C. Hitch, by J. Tonson, F. Clay, W. Feales, R. Wellington, 1733)

———, *The Works of William Shakespear, The Seventh Volume*, ed. by George Sewell (London: J. Darby, 1725)

Spence, Joseph, *Observations, Anecdotes, and Characters of Books and Men*, ed. by James M. Osborn, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966)

Swift, Jonathan, *The Poems of Jonathan Swift*, ed. by Harold Williams, 5 vols., 2nd edn. (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1958)

Theobald, Lewis, *Shakespeare Restored: or, a Specimen of the Many Errors, as well Committed, as Unamended, by Mr. Pope in his Late Edition of this Poet* (London: printed by Samuel Aris for R. Francklin, J. Woodman and D. Lyon, and Charles Davis, 1726)

The Poet finish'd in Prose, Being a Dialogue Concerning Mr. Pope and his Writings (1735)

Two dissertations concerning Sense and the Imagination with an Essay on Consciousness
(London: Tonson, 1728)

Virgil's husbandry, or an essay on the Georgics: being the second book translated into English verse. To which are added the Latin text, and Mr. Dryden's version. With notes critical, and rustick, 2nd edn. (William and John Innys, at the West End of St. Paul's, 1724)

Warton, Joseph, *An Essay on the Genius and Writing of Pope*, 2 vols. (London: Printed for J. Dodsley, 1782)

Watts, Isaac, *Logick: or, the right use of reason in the enquiry after truth, With A Variety of Rules to guard against Error, in the Affairs of Religion and Human Life, as well as in the Sciences* (London: 1725)

‘Why are Poets indifferent Critics?’, *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 10 (1821), 180-186

William Shakespeare: Volume 2, 1693-1733: The Critical Heritage, ed. by Brian Vickers
(London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 1995)

Wordsworth, William, *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. by W. J. B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974)

Secondary Works

Abbott, Edwin, *A Concordance to the Works of Alexander Pope* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1875)

Alkon, Paul, ‘Critical and Logical Concepts of Method from Addison to Coleridge’,
Eighteenth Century Studies, 5.1 (Autumn, 1971), 97-121

Barnard, John, ed., *Pope: The Critical Heritage* (London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973)

Barrell, John and Harriet Guest, ‘On the use of contradiction: Economics and Morality in the Eighteenth-Century Long Poem’, in *The New Eighteenth Century: Theory, Politics,*

- English Literature*, ed. by Felicity Nussbaum and Laura Brown, (New York : Methuen, 1987)
- Bateson, F.W, and N. Joukovsky, eds, *Alexander Pope: A Critical Anthology* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971)
- Bedford and Dilligan, *Concordance to the Poems of Alexander Pope*, 2 vols. (Detroit: Gale Research, 1972)
- Beer, Gillian, “‘Our Unnatural No-Voice’: The Heroic Epistle, Pope, and Women’s Gothic’, *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 12 (1982), 125–51
- Boulton, James, ed., *Samuel Johnson: The Critical Heritage* (London and New York: Routledge, 1971)
- Boyce, Benjamin, *The Character Sketches in Pope's Poems* (Durham, N. C., 1962)
- Brower, Reuben, *Alexander Pope: The Poetry of Allusion* (London; New York: Oxford University Press, 1968)
- Brown, Laura, *Alexander Pope* (Oxford; New York: Blackwell, 1985)
- Buickerood, James G., “‘The whole exercise of reason’: Charles Mein's Account of Rationality’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 63.4 (2002), 639-658
- Butt, John, ‘Pope’s Poetical Manuscripts’, *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 40 (1954), 23-39
- , *Pope’s Taste in Shakespeare* (London: Shakespeare Association, 1936)
- Cameron, J.M., ‘Doctrinal to an Age: Notes towards a revaluation of Pope’s *Essay on Man*’, in *Essential Articles for the Study of Alexander Pope*, ed. by Maynard Mack (Hamden: Archon Books, 1964)
- Caretta, Vincent, ‘Pope’s “Epistle to Bathurst” and the South Sea Bubble’, *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 77.2 (1978), 212-231
- Clarke, Desmond M., *Berkeley: Philosophical Writings*, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009)

- Cohen, Murray, *Sensible Words: Linguistic Practice in England 1640-1785* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977)
- Cohen, Ralph 'The Augustan Mode in English Poetry', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 1.1 (1967), 3-32
- Connell, Philip, 'Alexander Pope and the Modes of Faith', in *Secular Chains: Poetry and the Politics of Religion from Milton to Pope* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016)
Oxford Scholarship Online <10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199269587.001.0001>
[accessed 28 September 2021]
- Connolly, Patrick J., 'The Idea of Power and Locke's Taxonomy of Ideas', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 95.1 (2017), 1–16
- Crehan, Stewart. , "'The Rape of the Lock' and the Economy of 'Trivial Things'", *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 31.1 (1997), 45–68
- Cummings, Brian and Freya Sierhuis, eds, *Passions and Subjectivity in Early Modern Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016)
- Depledge, Emma, and Peter Kirwan, eds, *Canonising Shakespeare: Stationers and the Book Trade, 1640–1740* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017)
- Deutsch, Helen, *Resemblance & Disgrace: Alexander Pope and the Deformation of Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996)
- Dowling, William, *The Epistolary Moment: The Poetics of the Eighteenth-Century Verse Epistle* (Princeton University Press, 2014)
- Erlich, R. D., 'Pope's Annotations in his Copy of Dryden's Comedies, Tragedies, and Operas: An Exercise in Cryptography', *Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Theatre Research* 10 (1971), 14–24
- Erschine-Hill, Howard, 'Pope's Epigraphic Practice', *The Review of English Studies*, 62 (2011), 261-274
- , *The Augustan Idea in English Literature* (London: Edward Arnold, 1983)
- Fairer, David, *English Poetry of the Eighteenth Century 1700-1789* (London: Longman, 2003)

- , David, *Pope's Imagination* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984)
- Feilla, Cecilia A., 'From "Sainted Main" to "Wife in all her Grandeur" Translations of Heloise, 1687-1817', *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 28.2 (2004), 1-16
- Ferguson, Rebecca, *The Unbalanced Mind: Pope and the Rule of Passion* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986)
- Ferraro, Julian, 'Pope: Pen and Press', in *Literary Milieux: Essays in Texts and Context Presented to Howard Erskine-Hill*, ed. by David Womersley and Richard McCabe (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2008)
- , *Rising into Light': The Evolution of Pope's Poems in Manuscript and Print* Unpublished Dissertation (Cambridge University, 1993)
- Foxon, David, *Pope and the Early Eighteenth-Century Book Trade*, rev. by James McLaverty (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991)
- Franklin, Colin, *Shakespeare Domesticated: The Eighteenth-Century Editions* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1991),
- Griffith, R.H., 'Pope Editing Pope', *Studies in English* (1744), 5-108
- Guerinot, Joseph V., *Pamphlet attacks on Alexander Pope, 1711-1744: a descriptive bibliography* (New York: New York University Press, 1969)
- Haakonssen, Knud, ed., *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Philosophy*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006)
- Hardie, Philip, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Ovid*, Cambridge Companions to Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002)
- Hart, John A., 'Pope as Scholar-Editor,' *Studies in Bibliography*, 23 (1970), 45–59
- Hilson, J.C., M. M. B. Jones, and J. R. Watson, eds, *Augustan Worlds* (Bristol: Leicester University Press, 1978)
- Hone, Joseph, *Alexander Pope in the Making* (Oxford University Press, 2021)
- Jarvis, Simon, 'Bedlam or Parnassus: The Verse Idea', *Metaphilosophy*, 43 (2012), 71-81

- Jones, Emrys, *Friendship and Allegiance in Eighteenth-Century Literature* (London: Palgrave, 2013)
- , ‘An appetite for ambivalence: Pope studies in the twenty-first century’, *Literary Compass* 15.12(2018) <<https://doi.org/10.1111/lic3.12502>> [accessed 28 September 2021]
- Jones, Hester, “‘Religion blushing veils her sacred fires’: Pope and the Veil of Faith’, in *Literary Milieux: Essays in Text and Context Presented to Howard Erskine-Hill*, ed. by David Womersley and Richard McCabe (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2008)
- Jones, Tom, *Pope and Berkeley: The Language of Poetry and Philosophy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005)
- King, Edmund, ‘Pope’s 1723–25 Shakespear, Classical Editing, and Humanistic Reading Practices’ *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 32 (2008), 3–13
- Knight, G. Wilson, *The Poetry of Pope: Laureate of Peace* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965)
- Koon, Helene, ‘Pope’s First Editors’, *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 35.1 (1971) 19-27
- Kroll, Richard, “Pope and Drugs: The Pharmacology of ‘The Rape of the Lock’”, *ELH*, 67.1 (2000) 99–141
- Leranbaum, Miriam, *Alexander Pope’s ‘Opus Magnum’: 1729-1744* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1977)
- Longueil, Alfred, ‘The Word “Gothic” in Eighteenth-Century Criticism’, *Modern Language Notes*, 38.8 (1923), 453-460
- Lund, Roger, ‘Wit, Judgement, and the Misprisions of Similitude’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 65.1 (2004) 53-74
- Polin, Raymond, ‘John Locke’s conception of freedom’ in *John Locke: Problems and Perspectives*, ed. by John Yolton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969)

- Mack, Maynard, *Collected in Himself: Essays Critical, Biographical, Bibliographical on Pope and some of his Contemporaries* (Newark: University of Delaware Press; London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1982)
- , Maynard, *Alexander Pope: A Life*, (London: Yale University Press, 1985)
- Marder, Michael, *The Philosopher's Plant: An Intellectual Herbarium* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014)
- Marino, James J. *Owning William Shakespeare :The King's Men and Their Intellectual Property* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013)
- Marks, Emerson, 'Pope on Poetry and the Poet', *Criticism*, 12.4 (1970), 271-280
- Marsden, Jean, *The Re-Imagined Text: Shakespeare, Adaptation, and Eighteenth-Century Literary Theory* (University Press of Kentucky, 1995)
- Marshall, Dorothy, *Eighteenth Century England* (London: Longman, 1974)
- Martin, Peter, *Pursing Innocent Pleasures: The Gardening World of Alexander Pope* (Hamden: Archon, 1984)
- Massai, Sonia, *Shakespeare and the Rise of the Editor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008)
- McLaverty, James, *Pope, Print, and Meaning* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001)
- Milnes, Tim, 'On the authorship of *Two dissertations concerning sense and the imagination, with an essay on consciousness* (1728)', *Notes and Queries*, 47.2 (2000), 196–198
- Morris, David, *Pope: Genius of Sense* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2013; repr. 2014)
- Muller, Anja, *Framing childhood in eighteenth-century English periodicals and prints, 1689-1789* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009)
- Murphy, Andrew, ed, *A Concise Companion to Shakespeare and the Text*, (Wile-Blackwell, 2008)

- Murray, Kevin, and Sally O'Driscoll, eds, *Studies in Ephemera: Text and Image in Eighteenth-Century Print*, (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2013)
- Nichol, Donald W., ed, *Anniversary Essays on Alexander Pope's 'The Rape of the Lock'* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016)
- Noggle, James, *The Skeptical Sublime: Aesthetic Ideology in Pope and the Tory Satirists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001)
- Nuttall, A.D., *Pope's 'Essay on Man'* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1984)
- Parker, Fred, *Scepticism and Literature: An Essay on Pope, Hume, Sterne, and Johnson* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) Oxford Scholarship Online < 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199253180.001.0001> [accessed 28 September 2021]
- Paul, J. Gavin, 'Performance as 'Punctuation': Editing Shakespeare in the Eighteenth Century', *The Review of English Studies*, 61 (2010), 390–413
- Redford, Bruce, 'Lady Mary Wortley Montagu: The Compass of the Senecan Style', in *The Converse of the Pen: Acts of Intimacy in the Eighteenth-Century Familiar Letter*, 19–48
- Rogers, Pat, *Essays on Pope* (Cambridge University Press, 1993)
- , 'Revisions to Pope's Prose Works in the Miscellanies (1732)', *The Review of English Studies*, 57.232 (2006), 701–706
- Sherburn, George, 'Pope at Work', in *Essays on the Eighteenth Century Presented to David Nichol Smith* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954)
- , *The Early Career of Alexander Pope*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934)
- Sitter, John, 'Pope's Versification and Voice', in *The Cambridge Companion to Alexander Pope*, ed. by Pat Rogers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007)
- , Sitter, John, 'About Wit: Locke, Jakobson, and Augustan Ideas', in *Arguments of Augustan Wit*, Cambridge Studies in Eighteenth-Century English Literature and Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991)
- Skemp, J.B., 'Plants in Plato's *Timaeus*', *The Classical Quarterly*, 41.1 (1947), 53–60

- Smith, Alden, 'Fantasy, Myth, and Love Letters: Text and Tale in Ovid's 'Heroides'',
Arethusa, 27.2 (1994), 247-273
- Spencer, Jane, '“Mighty mother”: Pope and the maternal' *Studies in the Literary Imagination* ,
38.1 (2005) 163-178
- Sutherland, James R., ““The Dull Duty of an Editor””, *Review of English Studies* 21 (1945)
- Targoff, Ramie, *John Donne, Body and Soul* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008)
- Tillotson, Geoffrey, *Pope and human nature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958)
- , *The Moral Poetry of Pope* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Literary and Philosophical Society, 1946)
- Tilmouth, Christopher, 'Pope's Ethical Thinking: Passion and Irony in Dialogue', Chatterton
Lecture 2011, *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 181 (2012), 35-62
- Toor, K., ““Offspring of his Genius”: Coleridge's Pregnant Metaphors and Metamorphic
Pregnancies,' *Romanticism*, 13:3 (2007) 257-270
- Trowbridge, Hoyt, 'Pope's *Eloisa* and the *Heroides* of Ovid', *Studies in Eighteenth-Century
Culture*, 9 (1973), 11-34
- Vendler, Helen, *Poets Thinking: Pope, Whitman, Dickinson, Yeats* (Harvard University Press,
2006)
- Walsh, Marcus, *Shakespeare, Milton, and eighteenth-century literary editing* (Cambridge:
Cambridge University Press, 1997)
- Warren Austin, *Alexander Pope as Critic and Humanist* (Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1929; repr.
1963)
- , 'Pope and Ben Jonson', *Modern Language Notes*, 45 (1930), 86-88
- Wasserman, Earl R., *Pope's Epistle to Bathurst: A Critical Reading with an Edition of the
Manuscripts* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press)
- , “The Limits of Allusion in ‘The Rape of the Lock.’” *The Journal of English and
Germanic Philology*, 65.3, (1966), 425–44

Williams, Abigail, 'The Tory critique of Whig literature', in *Poetry and the Creation of a Whig Literary Culture 1618-1714* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) Oxford Scholarship Online < 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199255207.001.0001> [accessed 28 September 2021]

Wilson, Penelope, 'Reading Pope's Homer in the 1720s: The *Iliad* Notes of Philip Doddridge', *Translation and Linguistics*, 29 (2020)

Wimsatt, W.K. and Monroe C. Beardsley, *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (Lexington, 1954)

Works of Reference

Rogers, Pat, *The Alexander Pope Encyclopedia* (London: Greenwood Press, 2004)

The Oxford English Dictionary [online]