Chapter III

Apologia pro vita sua: An Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot

A N EPISTLE TO DR. ARBUTHNOT belongs to the same literary tradition as Pope's Imitation of Sat. II.i., and shares with it many interests and themes. Pope appears to have worked at both poems simultaneously, and the manuscripts of the Epistle contain many passages that were eventually fitted into the Imitation. Structurally, the two poems are strikingly alike: the Epistle borrows its dialogue format and general plan from the Horatian satire, and the adversarius Arbuthnot is himself manipulated in much the same way as his predecessor Fortescue, and frequently echoes his lines.1 Both poems are concerned with defending Pope and his writings from false and vicious allegations. The Epistle is a more elaborate defense of the satirist's calling than Pope's Imitation, but is nevertheless a defense articulated by similar means and in the same mode.

The major difference between the two poems is that of scope. Where the Imitation focused clearly on a satire and Pope's use of it, the field of vision of the Arbuthnot encompasses almost the whole of Pope's literary life. This difference in range causes, naturally enough, a shift in emphasis: for the Fortescue's predominant concern with ethical literature, the Arbuthnot substitutes an overriding interest in literary ethics. Faced with the problem of justifying not simply his conduct in one literary genre but the conduct of his whole life, Pope grounds his defense on morality rather than on esthetics, and triumphs through his virtue rather than his artistry—or so, at least, his artistry would have it seem.

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An Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot announces its intentions and its methods at the outset. Pope endures not simply the assaults of hacks and would-be poets but of scribblers who derive lineally from the pests who plagued Horace and Juvenal: “The Dog-star rages” (3), and with it the rhymers who were its concomitant in Juvenal’s complaint. Pope’s use of classical reminiscences establishes nicely his cultural and poetic respectability while it renders his opponent more certainly contemptible. The presence of a classical name, such as Pitholeon (49) or Codrus (85), calls to mind the similarities existing between his enemies and the versifiers who plagued the Roman poets, and simultaneously, by virtue of the parallel, vindicates Pope’s position while it more fully damns the dunce in question. A good many of Pope’s targets share this classical pedigree:

Is there, who lock’d from Ink and Paper, scrawls
With desp’rate Charcoal round his darken’d walls?

(19–20)

This particular unfortunate was condemned for literary eternity in an epigram of Martial’s that Pope’s couplet echoes. He and his fellows “rave, recite, and madden round the land” (6); the line recalls the end of the Ars Poetica, wherein Horace satirizes a representative of the inept poets who plagued him and his city; it partially establishes the nature of the world in which Pope and his poem must live. Imperial Rome provides the background for the Arbuthnot, and Juvenal, Persius, and Horace, the elements of the character Pope has chosen for himself. He is the true poet, cast solidly in their mold, suffering the same fate they endured: the constant assault of favor-seekers and libelers.

These opening lines accomplish more than this, however; if half the poetic landscape of the Arbuthnot derives from
classical literature, the other half proceeds from the corpus of Christian polemical writings. Pope very carefully convicts the poetasters of impiety:

No place is sacred, not the Church is free,
Ev’n Sunday shines no Sabbath-day to me:
Then from the Mint walks forth the Man of Ryme,
Happy! to catch me, just at Dinner-time.

(11-14)

And they are guilty of sacrilege too.

Is there a Parson, much be-mus’d in Beer,
A maudlin Poetess, a ryming Peer,
A Clerk, foredoom’d his Father’s soul to cross,
Who pens a Stanza when he should engross?
Is there, who lock’d from Ink and Paper, scrawls
With desp’rate Charcoal round his darken’d walls?
All fly to Twit’nam, and in humble strain
Apply to me, to keep them mad or vain.
Arthur, whose giddy Son neglects the Laws,
Imputes to me and my damn’d works the cause:
Poor Cornus sees his frantic Wife elope,
And curses Wit, and Poetry, and Pope.

(15-26)

The poet who seeks his muse in beer sins just as enormously as the parson who searches for inspiration in drunkenness, and Pope has joined the two in one figure (15) to establish the symbolic identity of literary and theological offense in the cosmos of his poem.

But the real keys to the poem’s dialectic are initially provided by the hapless clerk and by Arthur’s “giddy Son.” The lines devoted to them sound themes that would have inescapably recalled to eighteenth-century readers contemporary religious issues: “foredoom’d his Father’s soul to cross,” “neglects the Laws,” “imputes,” “damn’d works”—
all these touch on ideas intricately involved in the predes­
tinarian controversy and in the argument about the efficacy
of good works as opposed to faith. All echo phrases from
St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, which provided the
canonical fuel for that sectarian fire.5

Pope’s allusions to St. Paul’s epistle at the beginning of
his own indicate the context into which his argument is
going to fit. Arthur’s false imputation and his reference to
Pope’s “damn’d works” align him with the Calvinist dis­s­
senters (at the time the Arbuthnot was written, perhaps
specifically with the “enthusiastic” Methodists), in which
group it also appears logical to place the predestined hack
of line 17. At the same time, Arthur’s concern for “the
Laws” also associates him and Pope’s other enemies with
St. Paul’s opponents, and involves them in the orthodox
condemnation consequent upon that fact. Pope has con­
glomerated eighteenth-century dissenters with the proto­
heretics of apostolic times: further, he has linked the
poetically inept with the religiously heterodox and sym­
bolically equated poetasters with dissenters, so that they
have become the concrete images of anarchy in both culture
and religion. Pope becomes by this same means both symbol
and champion of orthodoxy, and his “damn’d works” should
be understood as a metaphorically apostolic act, the same
sort of preaching of the truth for which St. Paul was
attacked by first-century lovers of “the Laws.”

Pope has cast himself as true Christian and true poet:
the task of the Epistle to Arbuthnot is to validate both
claims. The poem accomplishes this through a dialectic of
works, distinguishing Pope’s meritorious poetic works from
the chaotic deeds of the dunces. The materials Pope has
drawn from the Epistle to the Romans must therefore be
kept in a careful and exact perspective. The sin of the
poetasters is at once poetic and theological: “the Laws”
that Arthur’s son neglects are as much those of poetry as
they are those of the Mosaic code to which St. Paul refers;
the abuse of poetry by the parson, Arthur’s son, and the
rhyming peer constitutes the degradation of a way of life and a potential means of salvation. The clerk's case is identical: he is sinful because he has no real calling to poetry; his proper task is to engross. Against this background, the main arguments of the Arbuthnot attempt to disentangle Pope's works from the charges of the dunces, to free them and Pope from a false imputation of damnation and win for them the imputation of righteousness they have merited. The real goal of the poem is to explain the full meaning of the "virtue's better end" that Pope has served throughout his literary career: this conception of virtue is most fully presented in the portrait of Pope's father that climaxes the poem. The Arbuthnot completes its own work when its audience agrees that "Thus far was right, the rest belongs to Heav'n."

II

Perhaps it is easiest to determine precisely what Pope is defending by first analyzing what he attacks. Of all his targets, none is more famous than Sporus, and, equally, none is more liable to misconstruction than this satiric vision of the lie made flesh. The characteristics Pope enumerates form the composite picture of Satan, the father of lies, in human shape, engaged in his eternal work of deceit and corruption. Pope's sketch does not describe Hervey or any other specific person, though it is also a condemnation of Hervey in so far as he corresponds to the description. Nevertheless, the picture remains irreducibly that of Sporus, and Sporus is depravity in human form.

Whether in florid Impotence he speaks,
And, as the Prompter breathes, the Puppet squeaks;
Or at the Ear of Eve, familiar Toad,
Half Froth, half Venom, spits himself abroad,
In Puns, or Politicks, or Tales, or Lyes,
Or Spite, or Smut, or Rymes, or Blasphemies.
His Wit all see-saw between that and this,
Now high, now low, now Master up, now Miss,
And he himself one vile Antithesis.
Amphibious Thing! that acting either Part,
The trifling Head, or the corrupted Heart!
Fop at the Toilet, Flatterer at the Board,
Now trips a Lady, and now struts a Lord.
Eve's Tempter thus the Rabbins have exprest,
A Cherub's face, a Reptile all the rest;
Beauty that shocks you, Parts that none will trust,
Wit that can creep, and Pride that licks the dust.

(317-33)

Sporus is the embodiment of total disharmony, a jangling heap of discordant elements that reveal him as a complete perversion of God's harmonic being. His every action contradicts its predecessor. The phrases that describe this chaos most succinctly spill over out of the balanced couplet form into the only triplet of the poem, portraying in themselves the imbalance and disorder of the creature they describe—"himself one vile Antithesis," the very reverse of the divine reconciliation of opposites. Sporus, like Milton's Satan, becomes a grotesque parody of the God he rebels against.

Sporus-Satan most threatens the man of letters in his capacity as father of lies, for the act of lying corrupts the channels of communication and subverts the very function of language. Thus Pope identifies Sporus' speech as venom, and defines that venom as a heterogeneous and chaotic mixture of truth and untruth, seeming poetry and irreligion, "Puns, or Politicks, or Tales, or Lyes,/ Or Spite, or Smut, or Rymes, or Blasphemies." Sporus' aim is Satan's, to corrupt the imaginative faculty (both the well-spring and the receptor of poetry) and to reproduce in his victim his own sin of pride—in Milton's words,

Assaying by his Devilish art to reach
The Organs of her Fancy, and with them forge
Illusions as he list, Phantasms and Dreams,
Or if, inspiring venom, he might taint
Th' animal spirits that from pure blood arise
Like gentle breaths from Rivers pure, thence raise
At least distemper'd, discontented thoughts,
Vain hopes, vain aims, inordinate desires,
Blown up with high conceits ingend'ring pride.

(PL. IV. 801-9)

As the Epistle to Arbuthnot evidences, Sporus succeeds in every way: Eve does fall, and with her, her fatuous husband (in Pope's poem, George II); the world order is shattered, and all other mortals share in the pride that generated this original sin and the discordant effects consequent upon it. The fallen world is the cosmos of the Epistle to Arbuthnot.

In Milton's poem, of course, Satan's success is a hollow one, made void by Christ's redemptive act. The rebellious demon's attempt to disrupt creation is nullified by God's providential order. Pope shared this conception: in his Epistle to Bathurst, for instance, the extremes of evil are reconciled by God's ordered government of the world into a harmonious pattern of balanced opposites. In this poem, Sporus is characterized by "florid Impotence," in distinct contrast to God's omnipotence. This idea also explains Pope's choice of the name Sporus: Nero's castrated favorite is the fitting symbol of the master-miss's complete discord and sterility. Not accidentally, the Sporus passage concludes with the biblical and Miltonic curse pronounced upon Satan and the punishment visited upon him in the shape in which he sinned. Like Satan, Sporus is condemned for all eternity, and his punishment embodies in itself the discord of which he is the source: his high-aspiring pride is forced into the lowly shape of the serpent—"Pride that licks the dust" (333). In the Epistle to Arbuthnot, Pope wreaks this divine vengeance upon Sporus and reveals the satanic toad in his true form. Imagistically, his satire has become the divine weapon, the Ithuriel's spear, which exposes and punishes this literary manifestation of the Christian's eternal enemy.
The simple fact that his verse reproduces the punishment exacted by divine justice is a guarantee of his essential righteousness, and the best possible defense of his satire. Its justice is confirmed by its correspondence with the divine decree.⁸

Sporus, then, is the poem’s emblem of the basic sin of pride, and its representation of the forces of total disorder. He climaxes a long series of similar and lesser offenders whose trespasses have all involved these same elements. From the early, light strokes at Bentley and the poetasters, through Atticus and Bufo, pride has been designated as the besetting sin of these dunces, both great and small. It is, in Christian tradition, the original offense from which all others flow; in Pope’s world system and critical plan, it is the sin that destroys the world order and the order of art.⁹ Thus it is finally embodied in a vision of the great prototype of pride incarnate, and Pope’s verbal laceration of it in that form places him squarely in the ranks of the proponents of virtue and orthodoxy.

That Bufo and Sporus share the same basic sin explains why they also share similar traits: they embody different aspects of the same offense, and are ideologically identical. Bufo is, as his name proclaims, the toad whose form Sporus-Satan adopts; he too swells with sinful pride.

Proud, as Apollo on his forked hill,
Sate full-blown Bufo, puff’d by ev’ry quill;
Fed with soft Dedication all day long,
Horace and he went hand in hand in song.
His Library, (where Busts of Poets dead
And a true Pindar stood without a head)
Receiv’d of Wits an undistinguish’d race,
Who first his Judgment ask’d, and then a Place:
Much they extoll’d his Pictures, much his Seat,
And flatter’d ev’ry day, and some days eat:
Till grown more frugal in his riper days,
He pay'd some Bards with Port, and some with Praise,
To some a dry Rehearsal was assign'd,
And others (harder still) he pay'd in kind.

Dryden alone (what wonder?) came not nigh,
Dryden alone escap'd this judging eye:
But still the Great have kindness in reserve,
He help'd to bury whom he help'd to starve.

(231-48)

Like Sporus, Bufo attempts to undo God's work by diabolically usurping his place: he becomes a satanic false god. The comparison of him to Apollo, for instance, involves many layers of analogous perversion. Apollo is both sun god and god of poetry, and, in the opinion of most mythographers, a symbol of Christ. Bufo, of course, falls as far short of Apollo as he does of Christ. He is Satan in the guise of an angel of light, Lucifer impersonating the sun of righteousness, the false god of poetry who usurps the place and role of a rightful patron and set himself up instead as a protector of poetasters. For this reason, Dryden alone, synecdoche for all true poets, escaped "this judging eye." Iconographical tradition commonly attributes the all-seeing eye of judgment to God, whose prerogative Bufo has seized: he is attempting to substitute his own order (or disorder) for God's providence and his own taste (or lack of it) for God's wisdom.

Bufo, Sporus, and Satan are further linked by the common purpose of their various pursuits. The effects of Bufo's patronage, in particular, parallel the aims of Milton's toad. In a grim parody of Satan's explosion to his true height at the touch of Ithuriel's spear, Bufo is "puff'd by ev'ry quill" of his train of flatterers. Because they misuse the craft of writing, they become by a curious perversion parodies of Ithuriel, fallen angels who are themselves simultaneously victims and tempters, their own pens inflating the false god's pride yet higher. Bufo too is his own victim: like
Satan, he is self-tempted. At the opening of Pope's passage, he is presented as already fallen, already "blown up with high conceits ingend'ring pride," and actively engaged in corrupting the "Organs of Fancy" in others. Bufo and his hacks, Sporus, and Satan are all caught up in a single concerted attempt to undo the established order of the world—both literary and moral—by perversion and usurpation.\(^{12}\)

In the context of literature, the combination of Bufo and Sporus effects a total corruption of the "whole Castalian State" (230). Sporus destroys the meaning and efficacy of true poetry: he has tainted the imaginative faculty and debased it. Bufo eliminates the possibility of true poets surviving or even existing: he patronizes flatterers and starves Dryden. This is the significance of Pope's abandoning to him the "whole Castalian state": the proper and equitable relationship between poet and patron constitutes an ordered state in little, a hierarchic and harmonious kingdom of letters; and it is this good order and concord that the false patron, Bufo, has effectively subverted. Bufo and Sporus, like the satanic toad whose nature they share between them, have with their "froth and venom" thoroughly polluted the symbol and source of poetic inspiration, the Castalian stream that flows from Mt. Parnassus—the "forked hill" that Bufo has usurped. Between them, they have destroyed both the poetic life and the poetic act.

Bufo and Sporus stand at the apex of a ladder of pride and disharmony that reaches far back into the poem. Just as the chaotic materials of Sporus' talk and writings signify his interior disharmony and depravity, so, too, in a lesser degree, the works of minor offenders function as the external symbol of their degradation. The sketch of Atticus is a case in point. He does not fully partake of the total evil that is Sporus, but is described rather as a man of true genius who has, through pride, abused his gift. Consequently, because he does not exercise his abilities rightly, his actions reflect some of the disorder that is the essence of Sporus:
Peace to all such! but were there One whose fires
True Genius kindles, and fair Fame inspires,
Blest with each Talent and each Art to please,
And born to write, converse, and live with ease:
Shou'd such a man, too fond to rule alone,
Bear, like the Turk, no brother near the throne,
View him with scornful, yet with jealous eyes,
And hate for Arts that caus'd himself to rise;
Damn with faint praise, assent with civil leer,
And without sneering, teach the rest to sneer;
Willing to wound, and yet afraid to strike,
Just hint a fault, and hesitate dislike;
Alike reserv'd to blame, or to commend,
A tim'rous foe, and a suspicious friend,
Dreading ev'n fools, by Flatterers besieg'd,
And so obliging that he ne'er oblig'd;
Like Cato, give his little Senate laws,
And sit attentive to his own applause;
While Wits and Templers ev'ry sentence raise,
And wonder with a foolish face of praise.
Who but must laugh, if such a man there be?
Who would not weep, if Atticus were he!
(193-214)

The clash of Atticus' contradictory actions and attitudes in this portrait parallels the mixture of conflicting elements in Sporus that revealed his satanic nature. This is not to say that Atticus is as malignant as Pope's "vile Antithesis," but that every man of letters who misuses his talents is to that same degree perverting a gift of God and joining the devil's party. Pope makes this position clear when he refers to Atticus as "Blest with each Talent." The linking of "blessing" and "talent" points directly toward the biblical parable of the talents, an obvious statement of the necessity of good works for salvation. It provides an exact analogue to Atticus' case in the account of the servant who buried his talent rather than use it. The entire parable, of course,
was interpreted as an exemplum of what God expects the faithful to do with his gifts: they are not to lie stagnant but to be used in charity and increased. The exegetes explained the talent itself to stand for opes et facultates, so that Pope's application of the term and the parable at this point is hardly farfetched, and is certainly consistent with his view of the poetic life. The final irony of the passage lies in styling this worldly seeker after human praise Atticus: the eighteenth century knew the original Atticus, the correspondent of Cicero, as an exemplar of the retired life—an ideal of self-sufficiency and contemplation that this Atticus completely ignores.

Poetasters and petty critics also share with Sporus the ubiquitous sin of pride and its consequent disordering effects:

A man’s true merit ’tis not hard to find,
But each man’s secret standard in his mind,
That Casting-weight Pride adds to Emptiness,
This, who can gratify? for who can guess?
The Bard whom pilfer’d Pastorals renown,
Who turns a Persian Tale for half a crown,
Just writes to make his barrenness appear,
And strains from hard-bound brains eight lines-a-year:
He, who still wanting tho’ he lives on theft,
Steals much, spends little, yet has nothing left:
And he, who now to sense, now nonsense leaning,
Means not, but blunders round about a meaning:
And he, whose Fustian’s so sublimely bad,
It is not Poetry, but Prose run mad:
All these, my modest Satire bad translate,
And own’d, that nine such Poets made a Tate.

(175-90)

The quality of the dunces’ poetry is revealed succinctly by the scatological significance of “And strains from hard-bound brains eight lines-a-year,” while the couplets imme-
diately following go on to record once again the familiar clash of discordant opposites and its resultant chaos. Poetic (and pecuniary) poverty outwardly shows their spiritual bankruptcy and disorder; through self-seeking pride, they too overreach themselves, imbalance the microcosm that is man and—in part at least—upset the world order. Pride tips the careful balance of opposites, here concisely represented in the metaphor of the scales (175–78). The minds of the dunces are discordant, unbalanced, and their works reflect the extremes into which their private hells have thrown them. This is analogous to the cosmic imbalance caused by original sin (in the world of Pope’s poem, by the successful lies of Sporus); it is the defining characteristic of the fallen world and of unregenerate mankind. The dunces stand as Pope’s image for this: they are the pseudo-elect, literary and religious “enthusiasts,” who impute damnation to his active charity and label him one of the devil’s agents.

Pains, reading, study are their just pretence,
And all they want is spirit, taste, and sense.
Comma’s and points they set exactly right,
And ’twere a sin to rob them of their Mite.

(159–62)

Their proper scope lies in attending to commas and points, and Pope ironically provides employment for them by leaving them one to set right in the same line that tells them what their talents really are. This is their puny mite (the pun on “might” is, of course, operative); and it is all they possess. As with the phrase “Blest with each Talent” in the Atticus passage, the mention of “sin” and “Mite” here indicates a reference to the biblical widow’s mite, the tiny sum of her possessions, which, given in charity, merited highly (Mark 12:41–44)—another meritorious work that returns the poem once again to its underlying argument. Consistent with the pattern of inversions of Scripture and
religion Pope has woven into the poem, the dunces selfishly retain their mite, just as Atticus has selfishly retained his talent instead of employing and increasing it. All of the literary offenders that Pope is concerned with, from Bentley and Theobald through to Sporus, sin in the same basic manner: they pervert the work they were meant to do. The dunces are lesser offenders because their abilities are slight; Atticus is a greater evil-doer because his talent is real and estimable. Such a dialectic of evil inevitably culminates in the concrete vision of the source of sin himself, dressed in human flesh, and, in keeping with the interests of the poem, in the guise of a totally depraved poet.

III

All this has been as true of those who flattered Pope as of those who reviled him: even these, because they praise insincerely and for the wrong reasons, share the essentially evil nature of Sporus: their works too are perverse.

One Flatt'rer's worse than all;
Of all mad Creatures, if the Learn'd are right,
It is the Slaver kills, and not the Bite.
A Fool quite angry is quite innocent;
Alas! 'tis ten times worse when they repent.

(104-8)

The “Slaver” is much the same poison as the “Half Froth half Venom” that Sporus spits abroad, and it links Pope's flatterers imagistically and ethically with Eve's tempter. Even their religion, in keeping with the pattern, is an inversion of orthodoxy: anger with them is innocence; real guilt enters with their repentence. Their interior disharmony is mirrored in their writings; in the confusion of genres of “high Heroic prose” (109); in the fact that a defense from one of them is an actual insult (111-12); in their selection
of "All that disgrac'd my Betters" (120) for praise. They share fully in the essential discord that marks all who misuse the faculty of language and degrade the function of literature, and that is further adumbrated by their parallel perversion of man's religious condition.

This section of the Arbuthnot builds to a reverberating crescendo in Pope's adaptation of the Midas story, a passage that manages to concentrate and focus most of the major themes of the poem's confirmatio:

'Tis sung, when Midas' Ears began to spring,
(Midas, a sacred Person and a King)
His very Minister who spy'd them first,
(Some say his Queen) was forc'd to speak, or burst.
And is not mine, my Friend, a sorer case,
When ev'ry Coxcomb perks them in my face?
"Good friend forbear! you deal in dang'rous things,
"I'd never name Queens, Ministers, or Kings;
"Keep close to Ears, and those let Asses prick,
"Tis nothing"—Nothing? if they bite and kick?
Out with it, Dunciad! let the secret pass,
That Secret to each Fool, that he's an Ass:
The truth once told, (and wherefore shou'd we lie?)
The Queen of Midas slept, and so may I.

(69-82)

Pope frequently in this poem utilizes segments of classical works to establish effective and prestigious sanctions for his judgments. In this case, his lines imitate fairly closely, in form and content, the following passage from Persius:

Men' mutire nefas? nec clam, nec cum scrobe?—Nusquam!—
Heic tamen infodiam: Vidi, vidi ipse, libelle:
Auriculas asini quis non habet? Hoc ego opertum,
Hoc ridere meum, tam nil, nulla tibi vendo
Iliade.

(I. 119-23)\textsuperscript{16}

[87]
These lines occur in Persius' own apology for writing satire. He has based his defense on the fact that the complete corruption of literature and taste demands satire: the Midas passage is the culmination of this argument. Everyone has ass's ears; no one can recognize true poetry. Pope's adaptation of this to his own circumstances, with specific mention of his Dunciad, places his own works in a direct line of descent from Persius' libellus, and shows them to be every bit as necessary: taste and literature in his time are fully as degenerate as in Persius'.

The Midas of fable won his ass's ears by preferring the music of Pan to that of Apollo, a fact that indicated far more to the Renaissance than mere bad taste. In his specific capacity as god of music, Apollo was closely identified with the music of the spheres, that universal harmony which, in Christian terms, is analogous to the harmony that constitutes God's essence. It is this very same harmony of which Midas is oblivious that Sporus attempts to destroy and Bufo to subvert. As king, Midas' position in the human hierarchy parallels God's eminence in the spiritual, and the simple fact of his deafness to that universal harmony whose human exemplar he should be convicts him of the same sort of perversion of his role that marks all the other dunces. Like Bufo, Midas denies Apollo his rightful place and turns a deaf ear to true poetry.

This allusion also enables Pope to extend the scope of his attack beyond the confines of literature and ethics, by pointing to political and cultural disorder as well. The Renaissance firmly believed that Persius' satires contained many veiled strictures upon Nero (this accounts in large part for his reputation for obscurity), and that, in particular, Midas in this passage signified Nero himself. Pope's own lines emphasize Midas' kingship—"Midas, a sacred Person and a King" (70)—and the mention, immediately following, of minister and queen would definitely pinpoint the Hanoverian court as the target of his stroke. The juxtaposition of George II with the despotic emperor and
degenerate poetaster Nero is damning enough, but the commentary tradition provides yet more damaging indictments. It is practically a commonplace there that Midas represents the imprudence and arrogance of princes, their bad administration of state affairs, their avarice and ignorance. Pope's note, which points to Dryden's retelling of the story in his modernization of the *Wife of Bath's Tale*, serves the same purpose: Dryden too emphasizes Midas' kingly failings:

_Midas the King, as in his Book appears,_  
_By Phoebus was endow'd with Asses Ears,_  
_Which under his long Locks, he well conceal'd,_  
_(As Monarch's Vices must not be reveal'd)_  
_For fear the People have 'em in the Wind,_  
_Who long ago were neither Dumb nor Blind;_  
_Nor apt to think from Heav'n their Title springs,_  
_Since Jove and Mars left off begetting Kings._

In Dryden, this last is probably a gratuitous stroke at William; in Pope's context, it is undoubtedly a slap at the Hanoverians and their conspicuous lack of divine right to the throne. All the political connotations of the Midas figure enable Pope to imply quite strongly that political corruption and poetic degeneracy are as intimately related as the latter is to religious disorder, and that all three have their fountainhead in the fatuous, boorish king of England. Persius' Midas and England's George unite in a single symbol of total cultural depravity, with Nero's—and George's—minion, Sporus, as its vicious mouthpiece.

This all-pervasive disorder provides the background against which the drama of the poem is played out, and Pope recalls its presence from time to time to keep his situation in perspective. Immediately on the heels of the Midas passage, for instance, he presents what can only be described as a classical parody, designed to show that the dunces pervert culture and literature and classical ideals
in exactly the same way and to exactly the same degree as they pervert religion.

Let Peals of Laughter, Codrus! round thee break,
Thou unconcern'd canst hear the mighty Crack,
Pit, Box and Gall'ry in convulsions hurl'd,
Thou stand'st unshook amidst a bursting World.

(85–88)

Codrus is a type-name for a hack poet, drawn from Juvenal's third satire; but this is the least important aspect of the passage. As Pope's note points out, these lines allude to Horace's Od.III.iii.:

Justum & tenacem propositi virum
Non civium ardor prava jubentium,
Non vultis instantis tyranni
Mente quatit solida, neque Auster
Dux inquieti turbidus Hadriae;
Nec fulminantis magna Jovis manus.
Si fractus illabatur orbis,
Impavidum ferient ruinae.

(1–8)

Pope's adaptation of the lines follows closely Addison's translation, which he had already criticized in the _Peri Bathous_ as an example of poetic vulgarity. But it is more than literary ineptitude that Pope is attacking, although that forms an important part of his satire. To understand the full significance of this allusion, it is necessary to have in mind the complete Horatian context. There "the Man resolv'd and steady to his trust" in the name of virtue faces unperturbed "the rude rabble's insolence" and "the tyrant's fierceness," the might of aroused nature and even the ultimate dissolution of the world itself. Such "godlike
arts” as these, Horace claims, have gained for Augustus “a place among the gods.” In such a context, Pope’s Codrus becomes a total perversion of Horace’s man of firm resolve in righteous cause. Pope has turned upside down the traditional conception of the world as a stage, and has reduced the cataclysmic fall of nature that the virtuous man is to withstand to the petty compass of an audience’s yawn and laugh at Codrus’ theatrical inability. Codrus, steadfast only in complacency and incompetence, falls as far short of his classical prototype as George II does of the deified Augustus. Both destroy the good order of government and poetry and invert a classical ideal, in the same way that Bufo and Sporus corrupt the relations of poet and patron.

Pope exemplifies this once again in his picture of the spider-scribbler, which unites all three primary aspects of corruption—literary, religious, and political—in one image of universal evil.

Who shames a Scribler? break one cobweb thro’,
He spins the slight, self-pleasing thread anew;
Destroy his Fib, or Sophistry; in vain,
The Creature’s at his dirty work again;
Thron’d in the Centre of his thin designs;
Proud of a vast Extent of flimzy lines.
Whom have I hurt? has Poet yet, or Peer,
Lost the arch’d eye-brow, or Parnassian sneer?
And has not Colly still his Lord, and Whore?
His Butchers Henley, his Free-masons Moor?
Does not one Table Bavins still admit?
Still to one Bishop Philips seem a Wit?

(89-100)

This spider obviously stems from the same breed as the one in Swift’s Battle of the Books, a brash innovator whose compositions are spun out of his own internal venom. The salient fact is that he sits “thron’d” and kinglike in the
center of his evil works: like George, the spider symbolizes the outward spread of corruption from its radial center, the crown. Significantly enough, the first dunce named is the poet laureate Cibber, whose “Lord” is, of course, George. This citation identifies George indisputably as the ultimate source of political and cultural depravity. The remaining names show the extent of that depravity: the corruption of religion and taste, for instance, is revealed by the association of one poetaster with Masonry and another with a bishop. Taken together, all these are the “mad Creatures” (105) whose deadly slaver imagistically unites them with their spiritual kin, the totally evil Sporus. Like him, they also pander to the tastes of Midas-Nero-George.

As with morality and poetry, politics and poetry have in effect become interchangeable metaphors, so that mention of one implies the other, and none is ever really absent from the poem. Because of this, Pope can relegate politics itself to a background function in the Arbuthnot, touching on it lightly now and again as a sort of leitmotif. Of this nature are Pope’s references to his own condescension to ministers (265-66), his refusal to flatter even kings (338), and George’s obliviousness to poetry (222). The seemingly neutral allusion to the innocence of his own early poetry is also part of this pattern of political reference:

Soft were my Numbers, who could take offense
While pure Description held the place of Sense?
Like gentle Fanny’s was my flow’ry Theme,
A painted Mistress, or a purling Stream.

(147-50)

This last line is drawn, as Pope’s note carefully indicates, from “a Verse of Mr. Addison,” and it is just as pertinent as his earlier use of Addison’s Horatian translation. It echoes quite closely one of the closing lines of A Letter from Italy, a verse epistle in which Addison praised Eng-
lish liberty and Britain's strong position in Europe—praise that, however valid in 1701 under the Stuart Queen Anne, must have sounded somewhat hollow in 1735 with George II on the throne and Walpole's peace policies undermining English prestige. And if the general referent of this whole passage is Pope's own praise (in *Windsor Forest*) of England's power in its harmonious, balanced condition under Anne, the satire then cuts even deeper. The process of deterioration since that time has ended in almost complete discord under George.

Like so many of the poem's concerns, the theme of political corruption also reaches its climax in the portrait of Sporus, where it merges with all the other aspects of contemporary degeneracy that caught Pope's attention. There the corruption that, in the cosmos of the poem, began with the symbolic identification of George, Midas, and Nero, concentrates itself in the person of Nero's—and George's—favorite. Sporus pours his poison into the queen's ear—like Midas', the external sign of her cultural depravity—which, in the reality of eighteenth-century politics, was the portal of actual power in the kingdom. Persius' Midas passage has served Pope as the starting point for an imagistic pattern that further unites the poetasters and links them in the bonds of a common boorishness, much as St. Paul's epistle has provided him with the chains that bind them in the common sin of pride. Ears—all of them lengthened by means of the Midas allusion—are gained, lost, pricked, and perked throughout the *Epistle to Arbuthnot*. Pope fears the whisper that "perhaps, yet vibrates on his Sovereign's Ear" (357). He unflinchingly damn[s] the corrupt politician, whether "on a Pillory, or near a Throne,/ He gain his Prince's Ear, or lose his own" (366-67). Eve's ear, and these, and Midas', are all overt symbols of a literary and political corruption that cannot be hidden: the true poet, like Persius and like Pope, can discern it and must tell it—*auriculas asini quis non habet*? [93]
Just as the dunces have shown themselves anarchists in literature, religion, and government, Pope's defense of himself focuses on his cultural, political, and theological orthodoxy. The dialectic of the *Epistle to Arbuthnot* demands that an absolute distinction be drawn, at all points, at all stages of his life, between the products of the hacks and the accomplishments of the genuine poet. To a large extent, the Arbuthnot's mode of procedure dictates how this must be done: since the poetasters offend against the canons of classical taste, Pope will have to prove his rightful place in his cultural and literary heritage; since their works reflect the disorder of pride, his will have to reveal the humility and charity of a rightly disposed Christian.

Surprisingly few lines of the main body of the *Arbuthnot* are actually assigned to presenting Pope's own defense, but he uses those few tellingly. Their concentration, their density of theme and reference, unmistakably confirms his case in the terms that he has chosen. He begins his defense of his literary career *ab ovo*, or almost so, by explaining his childhood propensity for verse:

Why did I write? what sin to me unknown  
Dipt me in Ink, my Parents', or my own?  
As yet a Child, nor yet a Fool to Fame,  
I lisp'd in Numbers, for the Numbers came.  
I left no Calling for this idle trade,  
No Duty broke, no Father dis-obey'd.  
The Muse but serv'd to ease some Friend, not Wife,  
To help me thro' this long Disease, my Life,  
To second, arbuthnot! thy Art and Care,  
And teach, the Being you preserv'd, to bear.  

But why then publish? Granville the polite,  
And knowing Walsh, would tell me I could write;  
Well-natur'd Garth inflam'd with early praise,  
And Congreve lov'd, and Swift endur'd my Lays;
These lines go far beyond the mere mention of Pope's natural aptitude for verse, and their argument implies far more about Pope's ethical attitude toward literature than the seeming innocence of their surface statement indicates. His dipping in ink constitutes a metaphoric baptism into literature and provides the ethical incipit for his whole career. Pope elaborates and clarifies his meaning by alluding, in the same lines, to a famous New Testament episode:

And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him. I must work the works of him who sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work. (John 9:1–3)

The argument at this point is both complex and important. Pope has asked why he writes, what sin has forced him to this burdensome way of life; and the answer demanded is obviously the one Christ gives. He writes, not because of any sin, but that the works of God may be made manifest in him. Pope's echo of the apostles' question points to a conceptual linking of his poetry and the tribulations it brings him with the blind man's affliction. In both cases, a life of illness and affliction provides the means of showing forth the glory of God: in the case of the blind
man, his miraculous cure accomplishes this; Pope manages it through the agency of his poetry—at once his affliction, his cure, and his work.

The concept of works reverberates in the poem. The dunces impute to Pope's works damnation: their own reflect it. Now Pope claims specifically that his poetry is exactly what he implied it was in the Fortescue—a semisacramental act that mirrors the glory and holiness of God's own work of creation. This too comprises the ultimate significance of the dipping in ink: it is the fact of baptism into literature, of entering upon the craft of writing as a work of God rather than a deed of pride, that separates Pope immeasurably from the dunces. Every aspect of their lives, every action, reveals the enormity of the gulf between: Pope "No Duty broke, no Father dis-obey'd" (130); the clerk "foredoom'd his Father's soul to cross, ... pens a Stanza when he should engross" (17-18). The Cornus whose wife elopes "curses Wit, and Poetry, and Pope" (25-26), but Pope's chaste Muse pointedly "but serv'd to ease some Friend, not Wife" (131). Just as Sporus incarnates a grotesque parody of God, the dunces enact a sad perversion of the real poet. The verse of the poetasters mirrors their pride: Pope's writings furnish the vehicle by which the works of God are made manifest to a fallen world.

Impressive as Pope's presentation of his ethical case is, it still amounts to only half of the task he has set himself, and absorbs only a small part of the two verse paragraphs of his concise biographia literaria. This section of the Arbuthnot fuses the two main concerns of Pope's defense—Christian ethics and classical literary or cultural standards—into one massive vindication of his conduct and character as poet. His allusions draw just as heavily on classical sources as on scriptural. He has modeled his lines on sections of Ovid's Tristia and Ex Ponto: the forms are identical—epistle—and, far more important, the passages Pope has chosen to imitate and integrate into the Arbuthnot are those wherein the exiled Ovid attempts to justify his poetic career and clear
himself of the unjust charges brought against him. These allusions, combined with the significance of Pope’s baptism in ink, serve to round out his portrait of himself as an ideal Christian writer firmly supported by classical tradition and precedent.

Pope’s exclamation, “Why did I write?” (125), matches the banished Ovid’s *cri de cœur* in the first book of the *Ex Ponto*:

Cur igitur scribam miraris. miror & ipse:
Et mecum quaero saepe, quid inde feram.

(I.v.29–30)²⁸

Pope is drawing just as heavily on the general context of Ovid’s lines as on the significance of the lines themselves. Ovid bemoans the fact that he ever wrote poetry, because all his sufferings have sprung from that. “To the present moment,” he says in the couplet preceding the one Pope echoes, “no work of mine has brought me any profit, even though you enumerate them all; would that none had harmed me!” Pope’s troubles with favor-seekers and libelers, all of which are directly traceable to the fact of his writing, are severe enough and similar enough to validate his appropriation of Ovid’s lament, and to enable him to capitalize on the Roman author’s troubles.

The remainder of Pope’s two verse paragraphs imitate several different passages from one of the elegies of Ovid’s *Tristia*. The poem thus drawn upon is Ovid’s autobiography and defense (simultaneously, a review of his poetic career), ending in a boast of his undying fame and an assertion of his innocence of any wrong-doing. It has, quite obviously, many thematic similarities to the *Epistle to Arbuthnot*, and Pope has carefully exploited them in three key instances. His mention of his youthful inclination to poetry (127–28) parallels (as Dr. Johnson pointed out) Ovid’s account of his early vocation:

[97]
At mihi jam puero coelestia sacra placebant;
Inque suum furtim Musa trahebat opus.
Saepe pater dixit, Studium quid inutile tentas?
Maeonides nullas ipse reliquit opes.
Motus eram dictis: totoque Helicone relictus,
Scribere conabar verba soluta modis.
Sponte sua carmen numeros veniebat ad aptos:
Et, quod tentabam dicere, versus erat.

(IV.x.19-26)

The role “the Muse” played in Pope’s life as comforter, healer, and instructor (131-34) is likewise based on Ovid’s description of the consolation poetry afforded him in his adversity:

Hic ego, finitimis quamvis circumsoner armis,
Tristia, quo possum, carmina fata levo.
Quod, quamvis nemo est, cujus referatur ad aures;
Sic tamen absumo decipioque diem.
Ergo, quod vivo, durisque laboribus obsto,
Nec me sollicitae taedia lucis habent,
Gratia, Musa, tibi. nam tu solatia praebes;
Tu curae requies, tu medicina mali:
Tu dux, tu comes es: tu nos abducis ab Istro;
In medioque mihi das Helicone locum.

(IV.x.111-20)

And the catalogue of friends and companions who loved him and his poems is modeled on Ovid’s similar listing of his literary friends and the praise accorded his verses:

Temporis illius colui fovique poetas;
Quotque aderant vates, rebar adesse Deos.
Saepe suas volucres legit mihi grandior aevo,
Quaeque necet serpens, quae juven herba, Macer.
Saepe suos solitus recitare Propertius ignes;
Jure sodalitii qui mihi junctus erat.
Pope's manipulation of allusive materials from *Tristia* IV. x. has enabled him to demonstrate a classical precedent for almost every moment of his literary career, from his childhood through to his present difficulties. Besides the vindication of his true status that the similarities imply, Pope comes to share as well in Ovid's now well-proven boast that he will win immortality through his poetry. Pope's fusion of these ideas with his Christian conception of poetry as a religious life effects an elevation of the pagan's tribulations to the more lofty and more orthodox status of the just man's sufferings in a sinful world. Moreover, such a mingling of viewpoints tends to add a further dimension to the immortality the poet hopes to win by his pains.

The complaints and self-justifications that were wrung from Ovid by a harsh exile among a barbaric, uncultured people, Pope is forced to write in his own England—with consequent implications about Englishmen that appear intentional and highly unflattering. While Ovid suffered under the despotic Tiberius, Pope is maligned under the boorish and tyrannical (so, at least, the Tory polemicists would have it) George II. Ovid's exile in a barbarian land at the
whim of an absolute monarch serves as the classical analogue for Pope’s spiritual exile in a land of universal discord and corruption, ruled by a Midas-like and incompetent Hanoverian despot. Its only saving graces are the few who rise above the mob and preserve the true standards of judgment in literature, politics, and religion. These are, of course, the Tory, High Church intelligentsia who formed the core of Pope’s friends—Granville, Garth, Swift, Atterbury, and Bolingbroke—“great Dryden’s friends before.” It is from this viewpoint that Pope has worked out his apology for his literary life; it is by these standards that he damns the Hanoverian king, courtiers, literature, and influence.

Once these basic differences between himself and his enemies have been established, all Pope must do to prove his merit is to distinguish his own works from the doings of the scribblers. In just such a manner, his picture of the abuse of genuine talent in Atticus is followed immediately by an autobiographical passage repudiating Atticus’ worldliness in favor of an ideal of restraint and self-sufficiency:

What tho’ my Name stood rubric on the walls?
Or plaister’d posts, with Claps in capitals?
Or smoaking forth, a hundred Hawkers load,
On Wings of Winds came flying all abroad?
I sought no homage from the Race that write;
I kept, like Asian Monarchs, from their sight:
Poems I heeded (now be-rym’d so long)
No more than Thou! great GEORGE! a Birth-day Song.
I ne’er with Wits or Witlings past my days,
To spread about the Itch of Verse and Praise;
Nor like a Puppy daggled thro’ the Town,
To fetch and carry Sing-song up and down;
Nor at Rehearsals sweat, and mouth’d, and cry’d,
With Handkerchief and Orange at my side:
But sick of Fops, and Poetry, and Prate,
To Bufo left the whole Castalian State.

(215-30)
Atticus, “like the Turk,” can brook no rivals; Pope, “like Asian Monarchs,” keeps from public sight. Atticus gives his little senate laws; Pope “ne’er with Wits or Witlings past [his] days.” The playwright Atticus sits attentive to his own applause, while Pope emphatically disowns the theater and all its appurtenances. In direct contrast to Atticus’ concern for his reputation, Pope describes himself as so indifferent to public opinion that he does not in the least care whether his name is apotheosized (218 and Pope’s note) or whether it becomes part of a phallic and slightly diseased obscenity (215–16).

So too the description of Bufo’s abuse of the patron’s position is matched by the significant mention of Pope’s and the Duchess of Queensbury’s loyalty to Gay (256–60), which is probably intended to serve as a model for the proper poet-patron relationship. Bufo’s degradation of his poets into servile flatterers contrasts starkly with Pope’s statement of stubborn independence and total integrity (261–66). He even ironically grants Bufo and his kind something of what they claim: if they wish to play God, he will be the righteous Job who suffers their whims patiently.

Blest be the Great! for those they take away,
And those they left me—For they left me gay.

(255–56)

This parody of Job’s prayer is of a piece with Bufo’s other attempts to usurp God’s prerogatives. In this case, Pope can make himself a party to it without compromising his religious position because the actual agent of the evil that befalls Job is Satan, not God. There is an even further irony in that the evil intended by “the Great” in their neglect of true poets actually becomes a boon to Pope: their ministrations at least relieve him of some of the dunces.

The simple enumeration of Pope’s works proves him in all circumstances the proponent of orthodoxy: “I pay my Debts, believe, and say my Pray’rs” (268)—a statement
that alludes to and fulfils the requirements of the Lord's Prayer, and demonstrates in the compass of a single line Pope's moral excellence. Immediately before he presents his portrait of the libeler, he disowns any line that can "Give Virtue scandal, Innocence a fear" (285); and immediately after he has put the finishing touches on his sketch of Sporus, he launches a long distinguo that unequivocally marks off the differences between himself and Sporus and all the lesser offenders who have preceded Sporus. This passage (334–59) marks the end of the poem's confirmatio and sums up the progress of its argument. In it, he denounces worldly ambition, specifically denies that he is guilty of pride, and repudiates flattery. He claims

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

(340–41)\(^{21}\)

and that for the sake of virtue he has endured all the slanders and calumnies that the Sporuses of this world have been able to heap upon him. This summing up links the end of the poem's argument with its beginning, and reveals just how far it has advanced. The poetasters have libeled Pope's person, defamed his morals, and "imputed" to him trash and dulness (346–53). This last charge brings the argument full circle, back to the Arthur who "Imputes to me and my damn'd works the cause" (24) of his son's hack poetry and disobedience. At this point in the poem, the success of Pope's defense can be measured by the reader's awareness of the irony of that charge in the light of the imputation of righteousness that his works have merited.

V

The final sections of the Epistle to Arbuthnot, its refutatio and peroratio, finally turn to the problem announced in the Advertisement and attempt to absolve Pope's "Person,
Morals, and Family” from the aspersions of the libelers. These charges are logically treated here, this late in the poem’s progress, because they are not the primary concern of the Arbuthnot. That concern, the real conceptual center of the poem, is literature and the literary life. Only after Pope has proved that he is an authentic poet and his enemies merely degenerate hacks can he reasonably refute their personal slanders with any semblance or honor or expectation of belief.

Arbuthnot’s question “But why insult the Poor, affront the Great?” (360) initiates this last movement of the poem and offers Pope the stimulus for his ultimate justification of his life. His immediate response details the ethical position from which he has acted throughout the poem: “A Knave’s a Knave, to me, in ev’ry State” (361)—the servant of truth is unmoved by any of the criteria of worldly success, and the dunce remains in fact a dunce whether he be in appearance peer or poet. Pope carefully enumerates the virtues that mark him off from them: he is “Foe to [Dennis’] Pride, but Friend to his Distress”; he is humble, patient, and long-suffering (368–81).

Despite this readily apparent virtue, some still malign “His Father, Mother, Body, Soul, and Muse” (381). The position of his poetry in this list identifies it nicely as a function of his soul, a spiritual and religious work, and, of course, implies the wickedness and perversity of those who attack it. Pope’s defense of his family accomplishes this same task. His own conduct and his later prayer to live up to his father’s example strongly imply that he shared his father’s pious opinion that “it was a Sin to call our Neighbour Fool” (383). The peculiar significance of this declaration to the context of the Epistle to Arbuthnot can be found in the contemporary explanations of the biblical pronouncement to which it refers:

But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger
For the exegetes, to say "Raca" is to commit the lesser sorts of insults or affronts; to call another "fool" signified all other sorts of slanders, curses, and calumnies, which were in themselves mortal sins. Pope’s incorporation of this idea here serves the dual purpose of clearing himself of the last vestiges of the charges of malignancy and libel that satire inevitably attracts, and of identifying those who have maligned him finally and irrevocably as unregenerate sinners. In the face of the idle slanders of his enemies, he celebrates the unselfish love and heroic virtue of his parents with the words Virgil uses to consecrate the deaths of Nisus and Euryalus:

Unspotted Names! and memorable long,
If there be Force in Virtue, or in Song.

(385-86)

So also Pope distinguishes his father’s and his own actions from the religious factionalism of the dissenters and from their duncical subtleties. His father lived a “Stranger to Civil and Religious Rage” (394); “he knew no Schoolman’s subtle Art” (398).

Born to no Pride, inheriting no Strife,
Nor marrying Discord in a Noble Wife,
Stranger to Civil and Religious Rage,
The good Man walk’d innoxious thro’ his Age.

(392-95)

Pope’s father was quite pointedly “Born to no Pride”—which is not merely to say that he was of humble family, but that he escaped the all-pervasive pride of the scribblers. He inherits no strife; that is, he does not share in that discordant clash of extremes and opposites that characterizes Sporus
and his party. Instead, he is himself a concordant individual, sharing in the harmony that is the nature of God and his rightly ordered and properly acting creatures. The elder Pope’s marriage is metaphor for all this. Marriage is the great traditional symbol for the harmonic resolution of opposites on all levels of the theory, and the clearly designated concordant match of line 393 is figurative shorthand for the poet’s and his father’s complete personal and social harmony. Pope’s father and, by strong implications, Pope himself, are presented as virtuous and rational men who have discerned and followed God’s plan, and who have in all instances preserved that proper concord that is the sign of his handiwork.

These lines are complicated by having another poetic pattern overlaid upon the rhetorical one into which they initially fit. This pattern functions alongside the rhetorical structure of this section, employing the same words and the same lines toward different, but complementary, ends. From line 380 to the end of the poem, Pope’s verses form a coherent and complete miniature elegy, preserving all the details of the formal elegaic pattern. This poem-within-a-poem opens with a lamentation, here specifically adapted to the larger context of which the elegy is a part, by bemoaning not simply the death of Pope’s father, but also the scribblers’ defamation of his character. It then proceeds to describe his ancestry, that is, in formal elegaic terms, his genos:

Of gentle Blood (part shed in Honour’s Cause,  
While yet in Britain Honour had Applause)  
Each Parent sprung—“What Fortune, pray?”—Their own,  
And better got than Bestia’s from the Throne.

(388-91)

The next section (392–95) presents the character (phusis) of Pope’s father, in this case that of a regenerate and concordant Christian, who shunned both the pride of the dunces and the disorder of political and religious sectarian struggles.
Pope then recounts his father’s education and accomplishments (*paideia* and *praxeis*), which are those of a man of retired and contemplative life—a consideration that has influenced even the preceding *phusis*.

No Courts he saw, no Suits would ever try,
Nor dar’d an Oath, nor hazarded a Lye:
Un-learn’d, he knew no Schoolman’s subtle Art,
No Language, but the Language of the Heart.

(396–99)

And all is concluded with the supreme moment of the Christian’s existence, the quiet and holy deathbed:

By Nature honest, by Experience wise,
Healthy by Temp’rance and by Exercise:
His Life, tho’ long, to sickness past unknown,
His Death was instant, and without a groan.
Oh grant me thus to live, and thus to die!
Who sprung from Kings shall know less joy than I.

(400–405)

This last couplet concludes Pope’s defense of his family. Its aspiration to emulate his father’s example significantly echoes Horace:

Non qui Sidonio contendere callidus ostro
Nescit Aquinatem potantia vellera fucum,
Certius accipiet damnum, propiusve medullis,
Quam qui non poterit vero distinguere falsum.
Quem res plus nimio delectavere secundae,
Mutatae quatient. Si quid mirabere, pones
Invitus. Fuge magna: licet sub paupere tecto
Reges, et regum vita praecurrere amicos.

(Ep. I. x: 26–33)

As can be seen, Horace’s lines provide Pope with more than a verbal echo or simple precedent for his feeling. Occurring
in such circumstances, in a poem devoted to the praise of the retired, temperate life, they provide in themselves a corroboration of the worth of the very attributes Pope has just eulogized in his father—his self-control, his withdrawal from public turmoil, his honesty and temperance.

In point of fact, this whole passage, beginning with line 391, is typical of the procedure of the Arbuthnot: it is a skilful fusion of classical and Christian motifs. Pope's father is described as a regenerate Christian, concordant and temperate; at the same time, and in the same terms, he is portrayed as fulfilling a classical ideal. His conduct (and, by extension, his son's) bears the justifying and ennobling marks of tradition and orthodoxy from whatever point of view it is examined. And it is, of course, no accident that the final, Horatian lines of the passage refer to the lesser happiness of those "sprung from Kings," since the entire pattern of the poem has educated the reader to recognize in England's king the source and fount of all the disorder to which the poet is here contrasting his father.

The final verse paragraph of the poem is both the Epistle's peroration and this miniature elegy's consolatio. Turning again to Arbuthnot, Pope comforts himself with the thought that his mother still survives. The ultimate Christian consolation is, of course, the reward of heaven. It is precisely this that Pope implies his father has received:

Me, let the tender Office long engage
To rock the Cradle of reposing Age.

. . . . . . . . . . . . . .

Explore the Thought, explain the asking Eye,
And keep a while one Parent from the Sky!

(408-9, 412-13)

The fullest statement of that solace comes in the final two lines of the poem, after Pope's prayers for his friend, his mother, and himself, in the Christian poet's hopeful assertion of divine approval, and in his faithful acquiescence to his Redeemer's will:

[107]
Whether that Blessing be deny'd, or given,
Thus far was right, the rest belongs to Heav'n.

(418-19)

This elegy of the pious death and holy reward of Pope's father is yet another piece in the mosaic of proof that demonstrates Pope's virtue and condemns his libelers. Its poetic and rhetorical efficacy as the conclusion of the Arbuthnot are indisputable. It welds together all of the various fragments of proof that have grown out of Pope's initial description of his argument with the poetasters as one about the relative merits of their works; it shows quite clearly the goal for which Pope himself was striving. The reward that the poet's father has won by a life of quiet and devotion is the one that his son seeks by a life of literature and suffering. Heaven's benign approval blesses the elder and younger Pope alike.

VI

If there is any validity to the contention that the argument of the Epistle to Arbuthnot centers around a dialectic of works, it then remains to examine the total poem as a work in itself, a final proof in se of Pope's merit. The role of Arbuthnot in the poem illuminates this: he functions as a rhetorical adversarius much in the manner of Fortescue in Pope's Imitation of Sat.II.i. Like Fortescue, Arbuthnot is Pope's means of incorporating his audience into the poem and leading it to the conclusion he wants drawn. Arbuthnot is prudent and cautious, and shows a sensible man's fear at Pope's indiscreet mention of court figures:

"Good friend forbear! you deal in dang'rous things,
"I'd never name Queens, Ministers, or Kings;
"Keep close to Ears, and those let Asses prick,
"Tis nothing"

(75-78)
He hurriedly interrupts when it appears Pope’s anger is carrying him beyond safe limits:

“Hold! for God-sake—you’ll offend:
“No Names—he calm—learn Prudence of a Friend:
“I too could write, and I am twice as tall,
“But Foes like these!”

(101-4)

In both these instances, his caution bows before Pope’s righteous anger, and his long silence during the major part of Pope’s harangue thus becomes a sign of at least respectful neutrality, if not outright agreement. The crucial turning point in his attitude occurs at Pope’s mention of Sporus; even Arbuthnot’s prudence shatters before his disgust at “that mere white Curd of Ass’s milk” (306). Since he is the representative in the poem of responsible opinion, his interjection at this point vindicates Pope’s satire and his satiric judgments, and tenders him a carte blanche for past, present, and future activities. This agreement to the justice of Pope’s pronouncements accounts for the distinctly altered tone of Arbuthnot’s next interruption: “But why insult the Poor, affront the Great?” (360). The simple fact that his former frightened pleas for Pope to desist have now become a much milder and more traditional question about his satiric practice is in itself significant, and once more his prolonged and submissive silence as Pope takes a high moral line and demolishes his objection indicates his substantial agreement with Pope’s position. Given this pattern of increasing approval on Arbuthnot’s part, coupled with the similar use Pope has made of his former adversarius, Fortescue, it seems more than likely that Warburton had Pope’s authority for, and was correct in, assigning the last two lines of the poem to Arbuthnot. As with Fortescue’s final lines in Sat.II.i., these indicate the adversarius’ complete conversion to Pope’s point of view, his total approbation of Pope’s conduct and, particularly, of the final work Pope has set himself, that of extending “With lenient Arts . . . a Mother’s breath”
(410). From the standpoint of oratorical theory, they demonstrate the final suasion of the poem's audience that it is the function of the art of rhetoric to accomplish. If they are pronounced by Arbuthnot, rather than by Pope, they constitute the Epistle's internal validation of itself: the audience that it contains has been moved to assent to the propositions it contains, and to submit itself and its reason to the final judgment of that providential order that Pope has espoused throughout the poem.

Pope's major effort, throughout the Epistle, has been to present himself as a regenerate, concordant individual, in contrast to the depravity and disorder that mark the dunces and their works. Given this argument, it follows that it is absolutely crucial that his own works reflect the harmony he claims to possess. Pope has managed to balance one broad section of the poem against another, and to effect in himself as persona and in the poem a reconciliation of opposite concepts that makes of the poem itself a miniature of the divine harmony and a perfect expression of his own internal harmony, an ordered and self-contained world in small. First he deals with the favor-seekers, in the first part of his confirmatio; and then, in the second part, he treats the libelers. Immediately after this follows the Arbuthnot's refutatio, in which Pope depicts himself as the concordant mean between these extremes, avoiding both lying and flattery, presumptuous pride and ignoble self-abasement. Even within these larger sections, the poem proceeds by a balancing of opposites: after each passage descriptive of a particular dunce's faults, there follows a section presenting Pope's contrasted abhorrence of these errors. Classical allusion balances Christian reference; the orthodoxy of the public poet parallels the probity of the private man. By these means, the poem's structure is made to corroborate Pope's arguments, and his works—the very subject of the dispute—are molded into an integral part of the evidence that resolves the question incontestably in Pope's favor. The poem mirrors the divine plan and manifests the works of God. True poet is shown forth by true poem, and all
ends with the imputation of righteousness that Pope's work has fairly merited: "Thus far was right, the rest belongs to Heav'n."

1. The two poems are also much alike in their basic rhetorical structure. Lines 1-6 form the succinct *exordium* of the Arbuthnot, introducing Pope's plight. The *narratio* (7-26) details specifically the situation under which Pope suffers and presents the ethical terms of the poem's argument. The *partitio* is based firmly on the *narratio* and flows logically from it: Pope simply divides his concern, the plague of poetasters, into its two natural groups, would-be friends and actual enemies, favor-seekers and libelers:

What *Drop* or *Nostrum* can this Plague remove?
Or which must end me, a Fool's Wrath or Love?
A dire Dilemma! either way I'm sped,
If Foes, they write, if Friends, they read me dead.

29-32

The first section of the *confirmatio* deals with the favor-seekers (33-124). Pope then initiates, at line 125, a justification of his own literary career, from which he modulates easily into the long catalogue of his enemies, running through to line 359, which is the second half of the *confirmatio* and corresponds to the other half of his division of the poem's subject. The poem's *refutatio* (360-405) is devoted to absolving Pope, his family, and his writings from the slanders of the libelers. The final lines of the poem (406-19) are at once its *peroratio* and a concluding prayer.

2. Juvenal III.9. Here is Dryden's translation:

But worse than all the clatt'ring Tiles; and worse
Than thousand Padders, is the Poet's curse.
Rogues that in Dog-days cannot Rhime forbear;
But without Mercy read, and make you hear.

13-16

3. Martial XIII.lxii:

Versus, & breve, vividumque carmen
In te ne faciam times, Ligurra,
Et dignus cupis hoc metu videri:
Sed frustra metuas, cupisque frustra
In tauros Libyci ruunt leones,
Non sunt papilionibus molesti.
Quaeras censeo, si legi laboras,
Nigri fornicis ebrium poetam,
Qui carbene rudi, putrique creta
Scribit carmina, Quae legunt cacantes.
Frons haec stigmatic non meo notanda est.

The text of Martial quoted is the Delphine, ed. Vincentius Collesso (Paris, 1680).

4. *Ars Poetica* 457: "Hic dum sublimes versus ructatur, & errat..."
5. See Romans 3:20, 27–28; 4:1–8, 20–25; 5:11–15; 8:12–14, 28–30, and the commentaries on these passages, e.g., Cornelius à Lapide, Commentarius in Sacram Scripturam (Amsterdam, 1681–84), pt. 12, pp. 1–106, and Matthew Poole, Synopsis Criticorum Aliorumque Sacrae Scripturae Interpretum (London, 1676), V, cols. 1–330. Paul's purpose in Romans was to refute the doctrines of a body of Judaizing Christians who would have subjected proselytes to circumcision and the obligations of the Mosaic code. To this end, he emphasized the primary importance, for salvation, of faith in Christ, and pointed to Abraham as an example of one who was justified through faith rather than through the works of the Law; because of his belief, God imputed righteousness to him. The purpose of the Law, according to the apostle, was to convict mankind of sin, "for until the law sin was in the world: but sin was not imputed when there was no law" (5:13). It was to save mankind from the curse of original sin that Christ entered the world; through faith in him men are adopted as children of God and are freed from the bondage of sin. The biblical exegetes, of course, built upon this foundation. They point out that sin entered the world through Satan's and Adam's fall, and they insist upon the necessity of baptism to cleanse the faithful from the stains of original sin. They further argued that St. Paul opposed only the merely mechanical performance of the works of the Old Law, not good works done in charity. Pointing to the Epistle of St. James, they explained that the apostle's concept of faith included hope, charity, and good works done in charity; and it is by these that righteousness is imputed and salvation merited. Roman Catholic and Anglican interpretations of this epistle are in all essential points alike. See Martin C. Battestin, The Moral Basis of Fielding's Art (Middletown, Conn., 1959), pp. 14–25, for the perpetuation of this controversy in the 1730's, its contemporary importance because of the advent of Methodism, and the orthodox emphasis on good works.


8. Pope's use of the toad-snake metaphor enjoys a rhetorical efficacy distinct from, but complementary to, the effectiveness it gains from its biblical and Miltonic reverberations. This particular image occurs in the Rhetorica ad Herennium as an example of the proper use of simile in censure: "Simile is the comparison of one figure with another, implying a certain resemblance between them. This is used either for praise or censure. . . . For censure, so as to excite hatred, as follows: 'That wretch who daily glides through the middle of the Forum like a crested serpent, with curved fangs, poisonous glance, and fierce panting, looking about him on this side and that for some one to blast with venom from his throat—to smear it with his lips, to drive it in with his teeth, to spatter it with his tongue.'—IV.lxix.62 (translation by Harry Caplan in the "Loeb Classical Library" edition, pp. 385–87). Pope's adaptation and use of this image here thus becomes an exemplification of his familiarity with classical theory and his ability to employ it, and a further condemnation of Sporus through his likeness to this handbook figure of the libeler.

9. Here is Pope's expression of the idea in the Essay on Man:

In Pride, in reasoning Pride, our error lies;
All quit their sphere, and rush into the skies.

[112]
Pride still is aiming at the blest abodes,
Men would be Angels, Angels would be Gods.
Aspiring to be Gods, if Angels fell.
Aspiring to be Angels, Men rebel;
And who but wishes to invert the laws
Of order, sins against th'Eternal Cause.

(I. 125-30)

The relevance of this formulation to Pope's use of these same ideas in the Arbuthnot should be abundantly obvious. See also Maynard Mack's Introduction to the Essay, TE, III, pt. i, pp. lxx-lxxi.

10. Many of the points of Pope's description of Bufo—his avarice, his willingness to listen and applaud, but not to pay, his own penchant for poetry, his infrequent distribution of meals—are ultimately drawn from Juvenal's archetypal picture of the bad patron, Satire VII.36-49.

11. That this is the general conception with which Pope was working is suggested by a couplet deleted from the final version of the poem: "To bards reciting he vouchsafed a nod,/ And sniffed their incense like a gracious God" (noted by Courthope, The Works of Alexander Pope, eds. Whitwell Elwin and W. J. Courthope [London, 1871-86], III, 259 n. 3).

12. The essential identity of Bufo and Sporus is further indicated by the presence of characteristics of both in the portrait that forms a bridge between their sections of the poem. It is the character of the libeler as distinguished from Pope as true poet, and is imitated from Horace's similar sketch in Sat.Liv., another apologia. The lines are Arbuthnot, 287-304, and Horace, Sat.Liv.81-85.

13. Matthew 25:14-30. This reference is made even more likely by the fact that the English word "talent" is derived from the Greco-Roman weight and coin talentum, and has come to have its present meaning only through the metaphoric significance of this parable.

14. See, for example, Cornelius à Lapide, Commentarius, pt. 14, pp. 457-61.

15. See, for instance, Pope's own use of the example in Windsor Forest, 235-58.

16. Here is Dryden's translation of the passage:

Cou'd he do this, and is my Muse controll'd
By Servile Awe? Born free, and not be bold?
At least, I'll dig a hole within the Ground;
And to the trusty Earth commit the sound:
The Reeds shall tell you what the Poet fears,
King Midas has a Snout, and Asses Ears.
This mean conceit, this darling Mystery,
Which thou think'st nothing, Friend thou shalt not buy:
Nor will I change, for all the flashy Wit,
That flattering Labeo in his Iliads writ.

(239-48)

17. See, for example, Francisco Pomey's Pantheum Mythicum, seu Fabulosa Deorum Historia (Amsterdam, 1730), p. 33: "Quartum, Musica fuit [Apollo], a sole etiam non aliena: Nam medias inter planetas, numerose motu, quasi quendam concentum efficit; cyltharaque septem nervis constante canere creditus, pari numero planetis consonantibus."
18. See Casaubon's scholion on line 121 (p. 113). Dryden's note on line 244 of his translation is quite to the point: after briefly recounting the Midas story, he adds, "By Midas, the Poet meant Nero" ([Kinsley] II, 751, n. 15). It is important to recall in this connection that Sporus was the court favorite of Nero, a fact that supplies yet another link in the chain that binds the Arbuthnot's culprits together.

19. See, for example, Natali Conte's Mythologiae (Padua, 1637), pp. 521-22.

20. (Kinsley) IV, 1707-8, 157-64.


22. This is the general tenor of Warburton's annotation of the line in his edition, IV, 16: "This metamorphosing, as it were, the Scribler into a Spider is much more poetical than a comparison would have been. But Poets should be cautious how they employ this figure; for where the likeness is not very striking, instead of giving force, they become obscure. Here, everything concurs to make them run into one another. They both spin; not from the head (reason) but from the guts (passions and prejudices) and such a thread that can entangle none but creatures weaker than themselves."

23. Addison, pp. 61, 163-68:

But I've already troubled you too long
Nor dare attempt a more advent'rous song.
My humble verse demands a softer theme,
A painted meadow, or a purling stream;
Unfit for Heroes; whom immortal lays,
And lines like Virgil's, or like yours, shou'd praise.

There is an interesting gradation to Addison's appearances in the Arbuthnot, ranging from his unacknowledged but real presence in the Codrus passage (85-88), to his noted authorship here, to his full presence as the primary target of the Atticus passage.

24. Like much else in the poem, Pope's father and the concept of fatherhood have been wrenched into ambivalence: they are at once facts in themselves and metaphors for higher realities. Naturally enough, the attitudes of Pope and the dunces toward their parents and his also crystallize into the basic dichotomy that separates God's party from Satan's. The poetasters disobey their own fathers and revile Pope's, while his own proper respect and compliance to both his spiritual and his earthly father is demonstrated by the parental approval of his writings and by his final, elaborate defense of his father's reputation and character at the conclusion of the poem. Ultimately, this may all relate once again to the predestinarian controversy and to St. Paul's remarks about the spiritual paternity of God and the predestined conformity of the elect to the image of his Son. See Romans 8: 14-30.

25. All quotations from Ovid will be taken from P. Ovidii Nasonis Opera Omnia Cum Notis selectissimis Variorum studio B. Cnippingii (Amsterdam, 1683).

26. "But to me even as a boy service of the divine gave delight and stealthily the Muse was ever drawing me aside to do her work. Often my
father said, 'Why do you try a profitless pursuit? Even the Maeonian left no wealth.' I was influenced by what he said and wholly forsaking Helicon I tried to write words free from rhythm, yet all unbidden song would come upon befitting numbers and whatever I tried to write was verse.'


27. Ibid., p. 203: "Here, though close around me I hear the din of arms, I lighten my sad fate with what song I may; though there be none to hear it, yet in this wise do I employ and beguile the day. So then this living of mine, this stand against the hardness of my sufferings, this rare will to view the daylight's woes, I owe, my Muse, to thee! For thou dost lend me comfort, thou dost come as rest, as balm, to my sorrow. Thou art both guide and comrade: thou leadest me far from Hister and grantest me a place in Helicon's midst..."

28. Ibid., p. 201: "The poets of that time I fondly reverenced: all bards I thought so many present gods. Ofttimes Macer, already advanced in years, read to me of the birds he loved, of noxious snakes and healing plants. Ofttimes Propertius would declaim his flaming verse by right of the comradeship that joined him to me. Ponticus famed in epic, Bassus also, famed in iambics, were pleasant members of that friendly circle. And Horace of the many rhythms held in thrall our ears while he attuned his fine-wrought songs to the Ausonian lyre. Vergil I only saw, and to Tibullus greedy fate gave no time for friendship with me. Tibullus was thy successor, Gallus, and Propertius his; after them came I, fourth in the order of time. And as I reverenced older poets so was I reverenced by the younger, for my Thalia was not slow to become renowned. When first I read my youthful songs in public, my beard had been cut but once or twice. My genius had been stirred by her who was sung throughout the city, whom I called, not by a real name, Corinna."

29. Job 1:21-22: "And [Job] said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord. In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly."

30. Lest this allusion to Job be thought too gratuitous for the theology of even this poem to bear, it is important to note that biblical commentators had linked the blind man of St. John's gospel with Job through the similarity of their sufferings for meritorious ends: see Cornelius a Lapide, pt. 15, p. 390, col. 2. Pope's identification of himself with Job is a further elaboration of an already present theme, and yet another point of distinction between himself and the dunces.

31. Pope's stooping to truth constitutes the second half of a hawking metaphor that began when the dunces were whistled off his hands (254). The movements imaged in these two instances are precisely those moral directions of the parties to which they attributed: the dunces rise—the ascent of pride—and Pope stoops—the lowliness of humility.

32. See Cornelius a Lapide, pt. 14, p. 137, and Matthew Poole, IV, cols. 143-51. That Pope deliberately intended to echo this warning is suggested by its manuscript version, "It was a Sin to call our Brother Fool," which employs more exactly the words of the gospel account. In spite of the revision, however, the reference is still both recognizable and pertinent. See John Butt, Pope's Poetical Manuscripts, British Academy Lecture (London,
1954), plate iv, which is a photographic reproduction of Huntington MS 6006. The earlier reading of the line is clearly discernible.

33. *Aeneid* IX. 446-47: "Fortunati ambo! si quid mea carmina possunt,/ nulla dies unquam memori vos eximet aevo. . . ."

34. The history and significance of this image has been thoroughly documented in Brendan O Hehir's unpublished doctoral dissertation, "Balanced Opposites in the Poetry of Pope" (The Johns Hopkins University, 1959), pp. 201-21.

35. For a clear and concise analysis of the traditions and conventions of the elegy, see D. C. Allen, *The Harmonious Vision* (Baltimore, 1954), pp. 41-47.

36. The Twickenham editor rejects Warburton's authority here, although he has accepted it in all other similar instances in this poem.