HE RAPE OF THE LOCK plays with epic in a much different way than MacFlecknoe. Traditional wisdom calls them both mock epic; the name is accurate enough as long as we realize that the mock can attach itself in many fashions to the epic. The Rape of the Lock is not the same kind of mock epic as MacFlecknoe, no more than it is the same kind of mock epic as The Dunciad. If we have been dealing, in MacFlecknoe and Abasalom (and, I plan to argue, in The Dunciad), with poems that appropriate to themselves a whole chunk of what we can legitimately describe as epic matter, the Rape aligns itself with epic essentially through its manner: its content is the "trivial things" from which "mighty contests rise."

The poem announces its separation of form and content from the outset. If the first line's generality of reference prods us to think momentarily of Troy and Helen and that "dire Offence" that "from am'rous Causes springs" (1), the second line quickly deflates that. The verse of The Rape characteristically proceeds in this manner, both in style and in substance. It jostles the reader back and forth between the contrary motions of epic expansion and mock-epic contraction. Ariel threatens his fellow sylphs with pseudo-Miltonic punishments if they fail their charge, concluding with an image that splendidly reconciles epic grandeur with the sylph's fragility:
Or as *Ixion* fix'd, the Wretch shall feel
The giddy Motion of the whirling Mill,
In Fumes of burning Chocolate shall glow,
And tremble at the Sea that froths below!

(2.133–36)

The rhetoric leaves no resting place, no firm ground from which to see and judge, but rather hurls us from one extreme viewpoint to another, from Ixion's hellish torment to the aroma of the tea table. This rhetoric provides the stylistic equivalent of what Pope's use of zeugma accomplishes grammatically and what Belinda's toilet, or the card game, or the battle of the belles and beaux, offers narratively. This manipulation of perspectives provides a sense of continuous flux, of constant becoming, in which the potentialities for grandeur and for absurdity exist simultaneously and can be realized at the same instant in the same act. It makes a world neither tragic nor comic, neither heroic nor silly — merely confused by its own capacity for all four. *The Rape* differs from almost all other mock epics in this way: even *MacFlecknoe*, for all of the multiplicities of possible vantage points it offers, never wavers in the value judgments it makes of its protagonists. *The Rape* does: *The Rape* insists on its own ambivalence.

*The Rape* remains ambivalent toward its protagonists and its subject matter for a clear and explicable reason, because it treats in an epic manner things that are not epic matter. "Slight is the Subject" (5) it says overtly and covertly — overtly in its honest dismissal of importance, covertly in its allusive claim for a particular kind of importance.

Slight is the Subject, but not so the Praise,
If She inspire, and He approve my Lays.

(1.5–6)

Pope draws these lines (by way of Dryden's translation) from Virgil's fourth Georgic:

Slight is the Subject, but the Praise not small,
If Heav'n assist, and *Phoebus* hear my Call.

(4.8–9)
In tenui labor; at tenius non gloria, si quem
numina laeva sinunt auditque vocatus Apollo.

(4.6–7)

Pope reinforces the importance of the allusion to the fourth Georgic by using another in lines 11 and 12:

In Tasks so bold, can Little Men engage,
And in soft Bosoms dwells such mighty Rage?

This seems to pick up Virgil’s “ingentis animos angusto in pectore versant” (Georgic 4.83). The fourth is the apiary georgic, and Virgil’s description of the colorful fragility of the bees and the ferocity of their quarrels — the last quoted Virgilian line describes the tiny warriors on the eve of battle — has a lovely ironic propriety as a framework for Pope’s equally colorful, fragile, and fierce cast. There are other allusions to the Georgics in The Rape, notably during the game of Ombre (usually to Georgic 4, and frequently by way of Dryden’s translation), but the position and prominence of these two make them the most important.

What they both do, of course, is focus the poem and us on the disparity between — ignoring the pun — tenors and vehicles, forms and contents — slight subjects, great praise; bold tasks, little men; soft bosoms, mighty rage. They focus us as well on Virgil’s precedent in using epic language, epic style, to describe the mundane activities of the farm. Virgil used the Georgics as a dry run for his epic, as a chance to test his skills; Pope certainly knew of the precedent and his own georgic reflects it.¹ I view Pope’s use of these allusions here as a direct announcement that the poem that follows will use the epic manner to talk about things that are not epic matter, and that the central point of the poem is precisely the kind of disjunction that this initial separation of form and content accomplishes — the disjunction of artistic form from artistic content, of social form from social content, of sexual form from sexual content, of cosmological form from cosmological content. That is why he employs this sort of mock epic and invokes the Georgics — not because he is describing the perversion of an epic ideal or of anything that has any real connection with epic, but because he is delineating the
shattering of connections, the separation of ideas from the vehicles that should embody them. Like Swift's tub, *The Rape* is a container that contains nothing, a form deliberately inappropriate to its content. This is not to say that the poem is a failure. I hope to argue eventually that this inappropriateness is the highest form of propriety for Pope's purposes.

Technically speaking, this sort of impropriety constitutes a formal breach of decorum, and the poem seems to devote a good deal of itself to the three related conceptions of inappropriateness, impropriety, and indecorousness and their positive opposites. That is to say, Pope makes an indecorous poem reflect an improper world, a world whose citizens behave according to inappropriate codes of conduct. When Belinda, triumphing at Ombre, lets out her war whoop, she — it needs no subtlety to see — is being unladylike; when the Baron compares the scissors that snipped Belinda's lock to the swords that leveled "th' Imperial Tow'rs of Troy" (3.174), he is appealing to an inappropriate standard; when the poem describes a queen who "Dost sometimes Counsel take — and sometimes Tea" (3.8), either the poem or the queen is guilty of impropriety in distributing emphases. *The Rape* forms out of such disparities as these its own essential mode: it proceeds by exploring them, revealing their built-in tensions and showing their inevitable breakdown, and reassembling their shattered materials into a more decorous, more appropriate world that turns out to be, by Popean sleight-of-hand, itself.

In Pope's view — at least Pope's view of 1714 — order always defeats chaos, and art triumphs over artifice. The problems presented by *The Rape* are, whose order and whose art? Belinda and her attendants, both physical and metaphysical, offer an order and a corollary aesthetic; these amount, in the poem, to an alternative cosmology, a Belindacentric universe competing with, and almost eclipsing, the heliocentric world of "reality." Belinda unquestionably replaces the sun in her world: she is "the Rival of his Beams" (2.3):

Bright as the Sun, her Eyes the Gazers strike,
And, like the Sun, they shine on all alike.

(2.13-14)
All through the poem, Pope associates Belinda’s actions with the motions of the sun:

\[
\text{Sol thro’ white Curtains shot a tim’rous Ray,} \\
\text{And op’d those Eyes that must eclipse the Day} \\
(1.13–14)
\]

The sun “declining from the Noon of Day / . . . obliquely shoots his burning Ray” (3.19–20) while Belinda triumphs at the card table; and when she loses at the coffee table, at “that sad moment . . . / Umbriel, a dusky melancholy Spright, / As ever sully’d the fair face of Light” (4.11–14) does as his name implies and clouds Belinda’s radiance.

All that, of course, is no more than the extension into interesting detail of one of the most hackneyed metaphors of love poetry — but is it? Is the sun metaphor for Belinda? Or Belinda metaphor for the sun? Or both for something else? All the old analogies hover around this poem — man: woman::sun: earth::reason: passion::head: body::king: state::god: universe — and Belinda dominates the puny males of the poem (she wins at cards and becomes the Ombre, the man) and is in turn dominated by the vicissitudes of her emotions; a queen rules England and strangely mixes matters of state and trivia, while statesmen divide their attention between foreign affairs and sexual affairs (3.1–8). Belinda momentarily becomes the god of this confused universe — “\text{Let Spades be Trumps!} she said, and Trumps they were” (3.46) — and creates an order she can almost perfectly dominate, in which she can almost literally become “the man,” exulting over her fallen foe (3.99–100). But this is all false, and because it is false, Belinda cannot sustain it. She may win at cards, but the “real world” defeats her — the Baron cuts her lock; Umbriel uses her; her looks, as Clarissa warns, will fade; and she, too, as Pope warns, will die. \text{Soles occidere et redire possunt,} but for her, \text{nox est perpetua una dormienda.} The sun can set and rise again, but not Belinda, and therefore Belinda’s eyes — and Belinda herself — are nothing like the sun.
For, after all the Murders of your Eye,
When, after Millions slain, your self shall die;
When those fair Suns shall sett, as sett they must,
And all those Tresses shall be laid in Dust;
This Lock, the Muse shall consecrate to Fame,
And mid'st the Stars inscribe Belinda's name!

Belinda's immortality and her importance are peripheral, not central, and her place is as one star among many rather than as the single sun of the world. Pope's Muse, a woman with a better sense of order than Belinda, puts her in her place most firmly: we must "trust the Muse" (5.123) for the truth of the lock's metamorphosis, just as Belinda must trust the Muse's inscription of her name "mid'st the Stars" for the eminence she so woefully fails to attain for herself.

The Muse and her "quick Poetic Eyes" (5.124) form the precise counterpoint to Belinda. Belinda, knowingly or not, espouses, defends, embodies an order and an aesthetic that Pope and his Muse connive at, display in this poem, only to transform as the lock is transformed. When Belinda takes her place before the mirror, she begins a creative act — an artistic act — that reaches its logical conclusion in the game of Ombre.

And now, unveil'd the Toilet stands display'd,
Each Silver Vase in mystic Order laid.
First, rob'd in White, the Nymph intent adores
With Head uncover'd, the Cosmetic Pow'rs.
A heav'nly Image in the Glass appears,
To that she bends, to that her Eyes she rears;
Th' inferior Priestess, at her Altar's side,
Trembling, begins the sacred Rites of Pride.
Unnumber'd Treasures ope at once, and here
The various Off'rans of the World appear;
From each she nicely culls with curious Toil,
And decks the Goddess with the glitt'ring Spoil.
This Casket India's glowing Gems unlocks,
And all Arabia breaths from Yonder Box.
The Tortoise here and Elephant unite,
Transform'd to Combs, the speckled and the white.
Here Files of Pins extend their shining Rows,
Puffs, Powders, Patches, Bibles, Billet-doux.
Now awful Beauty puts on all its Arms;
The Fair each moment rises in her Charms,
Repairs her Smiles, awakens ev'ry Grace,
And calls forth all the Wonders of her Face;
Sees by Degrees a purer Blush arise,
And keener Lightnings quicken in her Eyes.
The busy Sylphs surround their darling Care:
These set the Head, and those divide the Hair,
Some fold the sleeve, whilst others plait the Gown;
And Betty’s prais’d for Labours not her own.

(1.121–48)

This scene of Belinda’s toilet furnishes an elaborate and important use of the mirror image. Here Belinda engages in a complex artifice that parodies the process of true art and produces a very corporeal version of the golden world of art as she “sees by Degrees a purer Blush arise, / And keener Lightnings quicken in her Eyes” (143–44). The “heav’nly Image” (125) she sees in the glass imitates and debases the idea seen in the mirror of the mind and reproduced in the mirror of art — a conception that forms the basis of most Neoplatonic aesthetics. The whole situation simply literalizes the metaphor of the mirror of art and reifies the art work. Significantly, the art work in this case is not the mirror itself, nor is it in the mirror, but is rather Belinda herself. She performs a completely tautological, reflexive act, beginning and ending in herself; she is both priestess and goddess of her own cult, worshiper and worshiped, artist and artifact. Such an artifact not only distorts Sidney’s Neoplatonic version of the art work but re-creates quite exactly the kind of art that Plato banned from his republic. Belinda explictly imitates an imitation, the ironically “heav’nly Image” she sees in the mirror. We cannot forget at this point that Plato pejoratively linked art and the mirror as both illusory, both representers of a falsely seeming reality, so that Belinda’s adornment of the mirror image removes her yet further from the ideally conceived real. Let me quote the concluding remarks of this section of Plato’s argument:
We may conclude, then, that all poetry, from Homer onwards, consists in representing a semblance of its subject, whatever it may be, including any kind of human excellence, with no grasp of the reality... Strip what the poet has to say of its poetical coloring, and I think you must have seen what it comes to in plain prose. It is like a face which was never really handsome, when it has lost the fresh bloom of youth.³

Plato's judgment is far too harsh to be applied literally to the fragile Belinda, but it does force another perspective on Pope's ambiguous use of comparatives in "keener Lightnings" and "purer Blush."

Taken in its widest implication, this passage parodies the whole late Renaissance notion of the poet and his relation to the corporeal and the ideal worlds. Belinda is explicitly a creator god whose fiat "calls forth all the Wonders of her Face" (42), and she engages in the same kind of world-building that Renaissance poets saw as the highest reach of their craft.⁴ This lies behind her invoking "the Cosmetic" — rather than cosmic — "Pow'rs" (124) and her selecting from "The various Offerings of the World" (130). It accounts, too, for the presence here of the united tortoise and elephant, miniaturized into combs: although they are only superficial artifacts here, they bring with them echoes of their famous appearance in Locke's discussion of false notions of substance as an illusory explanation of the structure of the universe.⁵ Here their union forms a step in the formation of a false world of false art that extends from the general disorder of "Unnumbered Treasures" (129) and "The various Offerings of the World" (130) to the fully realized but still disordered plenitude of "Here Files of Pins extend their shining Rows, / Puffs, Powders, Patches, Bibles, Billet-doux" (137–38). Belinda creates a Whiggish world, a highly ornamented, unpatterned plenitude of which she is center and exemplar — which is precisely, in small, her role in the whole of The Rape.⁶

The same confusion of artist and artifact that we saw in MacFlecknoe lies at the core of Pope's passage: Belinda paints, and what she paints is herself. The mirror only returns a surface appearance: what is affected is not the intellectual vision, but only the corporeal surface, of Belinda's
face. Pope's lines make prominent also another aspect of this web of ideas: the reflexive nature of bad art. It is always, in the language of *MacFlecknoe*, tautological. It begins and ends in itself. I cannot emphasize this point too much, because it is so antithetical to what we have all been taught to recognize as a virtue in poetry. By these standards of judgment, poetry fails when it does not go outside itself, when it is self-contained, when it is the subjective expression of a subjective world — like Belinda's — even when that world is internally consistent and self-supporting — like Belinda's. (Perhaps this is why epic tries so often to exceed its purely linguistic bounds: it is attempting to validate itself by contact and correspondence with reality.) Pope elegantly insists on this insufficiency at the end of *The Rape* when the Muse, with "quick Poetic Eyes," sees Belinda's lock metamorphosed into a star. Belinda, who has been the sun in her own miscreated universe, is moved by proper poetry, by Pope's own Muse, from center to circumference, from false divinity to true poetic immortality. The poem opens with "those Eyes that must eclipse the Day" (1.14) and Belinda's vision of the "heav'nly Image in the Glass" (1.125); it closes with the setting of "those fair Suns" (5.147) and the inscription of Belinda's name "midst the Stars" (5.150) by the Muse.

The game of Ombre shows the full extent of Belinda's ability to miscreate. Here she acts completely the part of the creator-god, calling into being an ordered and hierarchical cosmos, ludicrously miniaturized, by means of a parodically deflated version of the divine fiat: "Let Spades be Trumps! she said, and Trumps they were" (3.46). The card game that follows is a model of order, as all such rigidly ruled games must be: card triumphs over card in proper hierarchical succession, and Belinda's paradoxical victory, the victory that makes her "the Man," is achieved by the king of hearts who "mourn'd his captive Queen" (3.96) and "springs to Vengeance with an eager pace" (3.97). In effect, the lesson is there for Belinda to learn in the world she has created: the cards act their parts properly — the queen's "hands sustain a flow'r, / Th' expressive Emblem of their softer Pow'r" (3.39–40); the kings are their consorts, protectors, and superiors. In the center of the pseudo-mock-epic *Rape* lies a real mock epic, a heroic combat played out by
pasteboard kings and queens, that counterpoints and criticizes the later and disturbingly non-heroic combat Belinda will provoke. It offers us, in a single moment, a miniaturized remembrance of heroic grandeur, a glimpse of sensible, natural, and possible order, and the age's sad and funny insensitivity to these.

An *Ace* of Hearts steps forth: The *King* unseen
Lurk'd in her Hand, and mourn'd his captive *Queen*.
He springs to Vengeance with an eager pace,
And falls like Thunder on the prostrate *Ace*.
The Nymph exulting fills with Shouts the Sky,
The Walls, the Woods, and long Canals reply.

(3.95–100)

If the content, which is Belinda, is inappropriate to the form of epic heroism, this central point of the poem returns us to Pope's opening pronouncements of the disjunction of the tenor and the vehicle he intends to employ. Belinda herself is the trivial thing from which mighty contests rise, and the mighty contest that does in fact take place in the fifth canto enacts, in a fine Popean paradox, this radical separation of style and meaning. Its sustained doubleness of vision also beautifully typifies Belinda's "immortal longings"—

No common Weapons in their Hands are found,
Like Gods they fight, nor dread a mortal Wound.

(5.43–44)

Belinda's world reduces the battles of the *Iliad* to explicitly literary contests of cliché. She ignores Sarpedon's heroic rhetoric, transmitted and transmuted through the commonsensical Clarissa, and chooses the tired metaphors of shopworn love poetry — doubly ironic, of course, in the light of her reaction to her lover's advances.

While thro' the Press enrag'd *Thalestris* flies,
And scatters Deaths around from both her Eyes,
*A Beau* and *Willing* perish'd in the Throng.
One dy'd in Metaphor, and one in Song.
O cruel Nymph! a living Death I bear,
Cry'd Dapperwit, and sunk beside his Chair.
A mournful Glance Sir Fofling upwards cast,
Those Eyes are made so Killing — was his last:
Thus on Meander's flow'ry Margin lies
Th'expiring Swan, and as he sings he dies.

When bold Sir Plume had drawn Clarissa down,
Chloe stept in, and kill'd him with a Frown;
She smil'd to see the doughty Hero slain,
But at her Smile, the Beau reviv'd again

See fierce Belinda on the Baron flies,
With more than usual Lightning in her Eyes;
Nor fear'd the Chief th' unequal Fight to try,
Who sought no more than on his Foe to die.
But this bold Lord, with manly Strength indu'd,
She with one Finger and a Thumb subdu'd:
Just where the Breath of Life his Nostrils drew,
A Charge of Snuff the wily Virgin threw;
The Gnomes direct, to ev'ry Atome just,
The Pungent Gains of titillating Dust.
Sudden, with starting Tears each Eye o'erflows,
And the high Dome re-echoes to his Nose

Boast not my Fall (he cry'd) insulting Foe!
Thou by some other shalt be laid as low.
Nor think, to die dejects my lofty Mind;
All that I dread, is leaving you behind!
Rather than so, ah let me still survive,
And burn in Cupid's Flames, — but burn alive.

(5.57–102)

Double entendre is omnipresent, because the sexuality of Belinda's
world is just as real as its heroism — and both are, in the most pejorative
sense, literary. Epic is epic, and sex is sex, and rape is simple enough,
except when artifice is substituted for art, sneezes for orgasms, and the
rape of a lock for “Hairs less in sight, or any Hairs but these” (4.176). What has come into being, in the course of The Rape, is a totally self-contained, totally artificial world, a literal reflection in large of Belinda at the mirror. “To die” is metaphor — death the vehicle, climax the tenor — but in this battle the metaphor “to die” is used reflexively: climax is the vehicle, death the tenor. The beaux and belles turn language upon itself as Belinda turned painting upon herself. Pope’s awareness of the ironies he here heaps up runs deep, just as his own notion of the disjunction between artifice and art holds firm. He laconically annotates Sir Fopling’s time-worn “Those Eyes are made so killing” (5.64) with “The Words in a Song in the Opera of Camilla.” The Virgilian Camilla was a “fierce Virago” (5.37) not unlike Thalestris, which is quite appropriate since Fopling’s line is addressed to her. But here are the lyrics of the song:

Those eyes are made so killing,
That all who look must dye;
To art I’m nothing owing,
From art I nothing want;
These graces genuin flowing
Despise the help of paint.
’Tis Musick but to hear me,
’Tis fatal to come near me,
For death is in my eyes.7

Irony on ironies. A tissue of artificialities dispraises art, and the art described is the very one Belinda practiced when she “call[ed] forth all the Wonders of her Face” and saw “keener Lightnings quicken in her Eyes” (1.142, 144). Pope concentrates all of his awareness of what is wrong with his society here in this use of artifice to mock artifice. He does not damn Belinda; she is herself as much an artifact as an artificer, as fragile and perishable as the lock she lost. The blame — if there is any — is on something missing, an absence at the core: the failure of society at large to preserve the dignity and decorum that can be glimpsed, fleetingly and ironically, only in a game of cards. Belinda cannot sustain the weight of the roles she must play — worshiper and goddess, artist and
artwork, chaste maiden and coquette — no more than the baron can play virile Paris to her Helen or triumphant Odysseus to her Troy. They are too small, too vulnerable, like the lock itself — surrogate for Belinda’s chastity, surrogate for Belinda, bait, snare, and victim in one: the lock must be severed and lost, as Belinda must age and die, because the demands made upon them are disproportionate to their strength. The continuing grandeur of heroic ideals in the face of simple human inability to realize them is the final and central impropriety of *The Rape of the Lock*.

Only the Muse succeeds. The Muse can at least transform part of Belinda into what she would be, can move her out of this mutable sublunary world into “the shining Sphere” (5.142) of the fixed stars. The Muse and her poet accomplish this by the one truly heroic act in the whole poem: by telling Belinda the truth — that she is *not* the center of the world, that she is *not* immortal — they restore the world and value. By their final, elegiac lines, they raise Belinda beyond the need for elegy.

II

The preceding remarks about *The Rape of the Lock* have contained several implications about its structure that now need elaboration. With disorder and disproportion occupying so much of his attention, Pope seems to have devoted understandable pains to eliminating both from his poem: *The Rape* is a masterpiece of achieved symmetry, of order imposed on chaos. Indeed, as I have hinted before, the final paradox and the ultimate triumph of *The Rape* lies in the simple fact that in it, while dealing with a whole world of disparities and disjunctions of form and content, Pope manages to fuse his own form and his own content into aesthetic unity. Belinda’s world was reflexive in the precise sense that it mirrored only her; everywhere she looked she saw reflections of Belinda. *The Rape* is a transitive mirror: it reflects itself to enable us to pass through itself. The reflexive act provides the building blocks of the poem.
We can see this in the way in which the poem organizes itself around the nuclear events of the third canto, which function — to continue the terms I have used above — both as mirror and transition. There, at the heart of the poem, Belinda both triumphs and falls: the card game and the rape, Belinda and the Baron, dramatize the apparently polar extremities of the poem. This bifurcation of the canto both reflects the structure of the cantos that have gone before it and predicts that of those that will follow.

To analyze the structure of *The Rape* properly, we must cast away notions of plot; it is far more useful to trace the articulation of episodes — taking that word in its broadest and most neutral sense — and their relation to each other. That is to say, rather than examining event A to determine how it gives rise to event B, we should examine the content and shape of event A to discover how it corresponds to, or differs from, events B, C, and D: that investigation will free us from the story and bring to light the structure of the piece. To this end, episodes — even when there are causal relationships among them — should be regarded as entities in themselves, subject to even further reductive analysis, right down to the level of stylistic and grammatical investigation. I am suggesting, in effect, that we imitate Fulgentius's and Bernardus's mode of treating the *Aeneid*. Such a notion will, I think, bring us much closer to what Augustan critics and their predecessors meant to designate by the word "episode."

*The Rape* makes such analysis easy by the brevity and clarity of its episodes. Putting aside for the moment the short invocational and epilogous sections spoken directly by the poet, we can break down the content of the five cantos roughly as follows:

**Canto 1**
Belinda (briefly) / Ariel and the dream / Belinda's toilet

**Canto 2**
Belinda (briefly) / the Baron's prayer / Council of Sylphs / Belinda (briefly)

**Canto 3**
Hampton Court Setting / Ombre / Coffee setting / the Rape
Canto 4
Belinda (briefly) / Umbriel and the Cave of Spleen / Thalestris
and Sir Plume / Belinda

Canto 5
Belinda (briefly) / Clarissa / Battle / Transformation of Lock

Mechanical though it is, such a schema helps us to consider in an isolated fashion the content of the various episodes. Canto 1 consists of three clearly distinct parts: the introduction of the heroine; Ariel's urging a course of conduct upon her; and her first action in the poem. Belinda's toilet, it must be remembered, is totally disjunct from Ariel's admonitions: he tells her to "most beware of Man" (1.114), but he is then interrupted and totally forgotten as Belinda prepares herself for Man:

He said: when Shock, who thought she slept too long,
Leapt up, and wak'd his Mistress with his Tongue.
'Twas then Belinda! if Report say true,
Thy Eyes first open'd on a Billet-doux;
Wounds, Charms, and Ardors, were no sooner read,
But all the Vision vanish'd from thy Head.

(1.115–20)

Belinda appears in this canto peripherally to the central action of Ariel's exegesis of the Rosicrucian system and warning to her, although she clearly remains the center of interest. The same state of affairs remains roughly true of canto 2: Belinda is the cause and source of all the actions of the canto even though, once again, her actual appearances in it are distinctly peripheral. The two major actions relate closely to each other: the Baron's prayer informs us of the nature of the threat to Belinda, and the Council of the Sylphs informs of the steps taken to meet the (to them still unknown) threat. In the first half of canto 3, Belinda acts in a manner parallel to her performance in canto 1. There she armed herself for battle; here she battles. There she played goddess; here she plays god. There she prepared for Man; here she becomes Man. And just as Belinda's careful tending of her locks in canto 1 may be said to provoke
the Baron's desire to cut them in canto 2, so here her action in the card game may legitimately be said to provoke the Baron's reaction in the second half of the canto. The actions are closely related, but are presented narratively as disjunct: Pope prefaces each, sets the scene for each, by a description of a ritualized setting (Hampton Court and the coffee table). His point, I believe, is to make us see them as separate in the way that Belinda no doubt sees them. Just as for Belinda the toilet was a self-contained reflexive act, for Belinda the game of Ombre is a completion of that act, equally reflexive and lacking meaning for anyone but herself. We, of course, who have heard the Baron's prayer, know that in this poem no act can be truly self-contained and therefore can perceive the connection between Belinda's action and the Baron's reaction. The snipping of the lock stands as direct counterpoint to the careful tending of it in the mirror episode and strips Belinda of her putative divinity. Canto 4, as can be seen even in the outline, returns to the structural pattern of canto 2. Belinda appears once more only at the periphery, although she is still the passive source and cause of the two major actions. The appearance of Umbriel and his journey to the Cave of Spleen (carefully synchronized in the text with the appearance of the earthly lover in Belinda's heart and Ariel's withdrawal [4.11-16]) may at first glance appear to correspond with Ariel's appearance to Belinda in canto 1 or to the Council of the Sylphs in canto 2, but its actual content parallels much more closely the Baron's appearance in canto 2. Both episodes involve a prayer to a god or goddess; both involve designs upon Belinda. And the consequent episodes in each case — the Council of the Sylphs and the appearances of Thalestris and Sir Plume — involve actions taken ostensibly on behalf of Belinda. That is to say, canto 4 structurally answers canto 2 with a reverse or mirror image of itself — even down to the details of Belinda's role. Her depression in 4.1-10 reverses her exaltation in 2.1-18; her lament for what has already come to pass (4.147-76) parallels the anxiety about the future at the end of canto 2 (137-42). Clarissa's speech in canto 5 tallies with Ariel's in canto 1 in that both offer Belinda advice about prudential modes of conduct — advice that is in both cases disregarded. The battle of the beaux and the belles antithesizes Belinda's toilet point for point. There she created an
arbitrary order; here disorder reigns — and the disappearance of the lock shows the impossibility of reestablishing that previous, fragile order. There “awful Beauty [put] on all its Arms” (1.139); here the metaphor is ludicrously realized. There Belinda saw “keener Lightnings quicken in her Eyes” (1.144); here “Fierce Belinda on the Baron flies, / With more than usual Lightning in her Eyes” (5.75–76). Canto 1 raised its subject matter by metaphor; canto 5 reduces it by the facts that correspond to those metaphors. The metamorphosis of the lock into a comet and thence into a star offers Pope’s alternative — and the only viable one — to Belinda’s attempt to translate herself into divinity. This final transformation answers fully the transformation Belinda attempted in canto 1 and replaces the Belindacentric order that Ariel and Belinda attempted with a new and workable order, with Belinda factually and metaphorically (star rather than sun) peripheral rather than central — as she has indeed been in the structure of the poem all along. The Rape has contained throughout and embodied throughout the order it finally establishes: its form and content, meaning and expression, are totally one.

The mirror expresses the nature of this sort of structure wherein, in a curious scholastic manner, parts correspond to parts across the nexus of a central rearrangement or redefinition of those parts. The Rape schematizes in the following fashion: i ii (i-ii) II I. The poem encloses itself, and its various components are to be understood by virtue of their relation to each other and not by virtue of anything outside the poem — e.g., the few lines about Queen Anne (3.7–8) are to be explicated not by Pope’s known attitude toward Queen Anne but by her relations to Belinda and the Muse and the queens in the card game; thus in this poem the fact of a woman ruling England offers a sign of the other inversions the poem deals with. This does not mean that one cannot go outside the poem on the track of allusions; allusions are very much in the poem — as the ubiquity of Catullus should testify. Part of the point of the poem, after all, is made by the simultaneous presences of Homer, Virgil, and Catullus in the same poem. But the poem itself, by the kind of internal relationships it sets up, decides what is relevant, and by appeal to, and consonance with, these we can judge the relevance and importance of
our notions about it. All this is simply to say that epic, like satire, is not a static thing, but exists more in a relation than as an absolute: they define themselves not in se but by a network of relationships inter partes. The final paradox remains, of course, that in the case of epic at least these relationships are internal and reflexive and that by this means the poem also defines itself in se. Ultimately, it mirrors itself. In a final sense, the real nature of the mock epic in The Rape of the Lock lies in the enclosure of everything by epic.

This reflexivity should be by now familiar. It is exactly the same structural relationship I described in MacFlecknoe. It reappears in Absalom and Achitophel, where the central metaphors of fathers and sons define themselves first as the relation of king and subjects, pass through the nuclear realignment of the disquisition on liberty that redefines them by virtue of Adam's relation to his posterity, and finally emerge in the light of the all-encompassing divine paternity. More than this, this reflexivity is exactly the same phenomenon that the commentators I discussed in chapter one discerned in the Aeneid. The triad formed by The Rape (i ii [i–ii] II I) corresponds in more than mere outline to the circular pattern of thought as described by Medieval thinkers or to what Wind calls a "Platonic emanating triad," and it just as strongly resembles the pattern of rites of initiation and what Jung names "Enantiodromia." None of this is accidental; I believe it presents a paradigm case of cultural conservatism, in which a pattern of psychological discovery, a way of knowing and enlightenment, was early affiliated with a mode of literature deeply concerned with the same problems. The centrality and importance of the subject matter ensured the survival of the form — ensured, in fact, that the form would be constantly reinterpreted and rearticulated in the light of each civilization's definitions of knowledge and wisdom — as long as it could continue to bear the weight put upon it and as long, of course, as the relation of the container to its contents was understood. Let me be perfectly clear about what I am suggesting here: I want to say that the reflexive, triadic, and palindromic pattern I have described above is, in effect, the skeleton key to epic. It is the basic structural form that
constituted an implicit part of the notion of the genre of epic, and it appears to have been understood as such for at least 1,700 years. It is the grammar of the genre, over which a good many syntaxes and rhetorics have been laid.

The *Faerie Queene* and *Paradise Lost* display both the persistence of the structural framework and the variety of styles it will support. This is not the place for any extended analysis of either poem, so I will only try here to map out some of the broader structural relations that employ the pattern we are interested in.

In the *Faerie Queene*, certain large correspondences present themselves immediately. Whatever Spenser's encompassing plan for his projected twelve books may have been, the six we have fit easily into the triadic pattern. The intertwined and interlocking events of books 3 and 4 have been frequently commented upon and need no particular mention here. These two central books treat a private virtue and a public one, chastity and friendship, and unite them thematically as well as narratively through a generous Renaissance conception of love and constancy. Spenser works these concerns out through the quests of individuals for individuals; he symmetrically arranges on either side of them quests involving the fate of cities or kingdoms. Both books 2 and 5 culminate in parallel and simultaneous actions carried out by the titular hero of the book and Arthur. In book 2, this involves Arthur's slaying of Maleger and raising the siege on Alma's castle while Guyon sails to Acrasia's island, destroys the Bower of Bliss, and restores her thralls to their proper forms. In book 5, Arthur defeats Geryoneo and frees Belge from virtual imprisonment in her castle while Artegal sails to Irena's land, defeats Grantorto, and restores justice. Discordant events close both books: Grill berates the successful Guyon, and Envy, Detraction, and the Blatant Beast set upon the triumphant Artegal. In both cases, the heroes accomplish the purgation of a kingdom and the restoration of what had been distorted (human souls and justice) to its proper form. In both books, too, Spenser invokes the figure of Hercules. Arthur's battle with Maleger parallels very closely Hercules' battle with Anteus, and Guyon's conquest of Acrasia and destruction of her power over men
seems a clear ideological reversal of Hercules' subservience to Omphale, an episode that forms the basis of Artegal's capture by Radigund in book 5.17

The action pattern of book 6 practically repeats that of book 1, but the men and women of the poem have somewhat exchanged roles. In book 1, Red Crosse Knight is imprisoned by the giant Orgoglio and rescued through the efforts of Una, who brings Arthur to his aid. In book 6, Pastorella is imprisoned by the brigands and rescued by Calidore. Spenser attaches to Pastorella a modified version of Red Crosse Knight's personal history: both are foundlings; both are left in a field, and both bear names derived from the circumstances of their abandonment and adoption (George and Pastorella); both in the course of the poem discover their true identities. Spenser utilizes some direct correspondences as well. The Salvage Man answers to Satyrane, Defetto, Decetto, and Despetto to the Sans Brothers. The remedies the holy Hermit applies correspond to those Red Crosse Knight received at the House of Holi­ness. Both Calidore and Red Crosse Knight temporarily forget their quests, and both receive visions, on the Mount of Contemplation and on Mount Acidale, respectively (both visions take place in the tenth canto, by the way). Both reunite a daughter and her parents, both engage a great beast, and — most important of all — both nearly achieve the reestab­lishment of a pastoral, prelapsarian existence — Red Crosse Knight by the liberation of Eden and the freeing of Una's parents, Calidore by the restitution of Pastorella to her parents, the defeat of the brigands, and the capture of the Blatant Beast. Both accomplishments are similarly marred by the predicted escapes of Archimago and the Blatant Beast (and, in the case of book 1, by the continued freedom of Duessa). There are also important parallels between the ideological conceptions and functions of Archimago-Duessa and the Blatant Beast, but this discussion should already be long enough to show the presence of the kind of symmetrical structure we are interested in. Put briefly, the action pattern of book 1 of the Faerie Queene parallels the action of 6, that of 2 parallels 5, and 3 and 4 are completely intertwined and function as the narrative and ideological nexus of the whole poem. I think — though this is not the place to demonstrate it — that the same sort of palindromic, triadic structure informs each of the individual books of The Faerie Queene, so
that the relationship between whole and part in the poem is a shifting relationship of metonomy and synecdoche: whole and parts are simultaneously container and contained.

The same relationship holds true for *Paradise Lost*, where the circularity of the structure reinforces the simultaneity of the events of the poem. Books 6 and 7 provide the crossover point for all of *Paradise Lost*, moving the action of the poem irrevocably out of the divine sphere and into the human. These books mirror each other exactly: the same characters — Adam, Eve, and Raphael — figure in the same situation — Raphael is instructing Adam and Eve about events in heaven before their creation. In book 6, he describes the war in heaven, the Son's entrance into the fight, the defeat and expulsion of Satan's legions, the Son's triumphal return, and the heavenly jubilation. Book 7 parallels and antithesizes that by presenting the work of creation rather than destruction. Raphael describes God's intention to repopulate the heavens with a new race, the Son's entrance into chaos, its replacement by the newly created universe, and, once again, the Son's triumphal return and the heavenly jubilation. The other books arrange themselves symmetrically like types and antitypes around these two. Some examples are in order.

Book 5 opens with Raphael's arrival in Paradise; 8 closes with his departure. Both books contain his crucial warnings to Adam about Satan's plans. Book 5 also recounts the beginnings of Satan's rebellion against the dominion of God and the kingship of the Son; 8 nicely counterpoints that with Adam's account of his own creation and his immediate recognition of the necessity of "some great Maker" (8.278; cf. particularly 5.852 ff.). Books 4 and 9: in 4, Satan adopts the form of a toad, in 9, that of a serpent. In the earlier book, he discovers the prohibition placed upon the fruit of the tree; in the latter he utilizes that knowledge. Book 4 contains the first temptation of Eve, in her dream; 9 contains the successful temptation in actuality. Both books close with a quarrel: 4, between Satan and Gabriel; 9, between Adam and Eve. More examples:

*Book 3*

Prediction that man will sin
The Son offers to satisfy divine justice

*Book 10*

Announcement that man has sinned
The Son judges the sinners
Sin and Death proceed toward earth
A hellish triumphal council, ending in hisses

**Book 11**
Heavenly council
Sentence of death pronounced on Adam and Eve; Adam sees consequences of his sin in his son Abel’s death
Adam’s first glimpse of new world he has made

Satan proceeds toward earth
A heavenly council, ending triumphantly in hosannahs

**Book 2**
Council of Demons
Satan meets Sin and Death; sees consequences of his own sin in his son
Satan’s first glimpse of newly created world

Books 1 and 12 complete the process and round the poem: book 1 begins with the expulsion of Satan and 12 ends with the expulsion of Adam and Eve. Babel, Nimrod, and the blasphemous city dwellers of 12 correspond to Pandemonium and its inhabitants. The catalog of patriarchs and prophets in the last book answers the catalog of devils and false gods in the first. The demonic speculation about Adam and Eve in book 1 is confuted by the announcement of advent of the second Adam in 12. Earth is “but the shadow of Heav’n” (5.575), and the poem ends as it began with the near-total defeat of Satan.

Within this overall structure, the two halves of the poem also break down into repetitions of this pattern, books 1 through 6 and 7 through 12 constituting smaller repetitions of the original structure. I will list the parallels briefly (and not exhaustively, as the preceding view of the entirety of the poem has also been only partial). Book 1 opens, as 6 climaxes, with the fall of Satan. Somewhat informal satanic councils take place in each book, and the demonic artifacts, associated in both cases with wind, match each other — Pandemonium in 1 and cannon in 6. The Son’s triumphal entry into the heavenly court at the end of the sixth book counterpoints the entry of Satan into council at Pandemonium. Both books 2 and 5 contain formal demonic councils, but beyond this the correspondences exist more as antitheses than parallels: Satan leaves hell to attack Adam and Eve, and this is counterpointed in
book 5 both by Raphael's departure for earth to warn them and by Abdiel's leaving the rebel camp to warn God. Raphael's flight through creation to earth answers Satan's journey through chaos to earth in the same manner that Adam's and Eve's prayers and tasks in book 5 correspond to the diversions of the demons in book 2. At the center of this, in 3 and 4, we have the same sort of mirroring that we saw more grandly in 6 and 7, and the same sort of crossover from heaven to earth, also less grandly. Satan seen approaching the earth in 3 is counterbalanced by Satan captured in Paradise in 4; the revelation of the second Adam in 3 anticipates the appearance of the first Adam in 4; Satan's use of the form of a lesser angel in 3 prepares for his diminishment into the shapes of cormorant and toad in 4 — even his dialogue with Uriel about the wonders of God's new creation anticipates his monologue of self-doubt and wonderment at his first sight of Adam and Eve in 4.

So also in the unit formed by books 7–12 — but by this point, it would probably be best only to list the parallels:

### Book 7
- Creation of new world to replace loss of Satan and his followers
- Sabbath of Creation
- Opening of Paradise

### Book 8
- Adam denied knowledge of physical heavens
- Creation of Adam and Eve; their dominion in Paradise
- Departure of Raphael from earth

### Book 9
- Adam and Eve discuss their labors
- Satan tempts Eve in form of serpent
- The fall and the sympathetic fall of earth
- Adam and Eve clothe themselves

### Book 10
- Adam and Eve discuss penitence
- Satan forced into form of serpent
- Sin and Death start toward earth
- The Son clothes Adam and Eve

### Book 11
- Adam gains knowledge of life on earth
- Announcement of the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise
- Arrival of Michael in Earth

### Book 12
- New beginning of the human race from Noah
- The Second Coming
- Closing of Paradise
In addition to all these uses of the epic pattern, *Paradise Lost* falls into a triad of four-book units. Each has its own protagonist and its own pervasive locale: in the first four books, Satan initiates all of the major actions, and Hell — which Satan carries with him — provides the setting; in the second four, the Son performs the crucial acts and Heaven furnishes the stage; in the last four books Man — particularly Adam, but also the idea of Man — dominates events and earth serves as landscape. Particular episodic correspondences will probably stand out from what has already been said, but there are important correspondences of large actions as well. In each unit of the triad, the first two books deal in a paradoxical manner with the work of destruction. In books 1 and 2, the devils build Pandemonium and hold their Grand Conference, which results in the plans for the fall of Adam and Eve; under the guise of physical (Pandemonium) and political (Satanic empire) creation, the demons begin the task of undoing God's creation. Conversely, books 5 and 6 apparently describe destruction — the defeat and expulsion of Satan and his legions from Heaven — but what is destroyed is the principle of destruction itself, which the Son negates and exiles. Books 9 and 10 return to the original paradox with the fall of Adam and Eve and the creation of the empire of Sin and Death. Correspondingly, the second two books of each unit deal with the workings of Providence: 3 and 4 describe God's foreknowledge and concern for Man and the steps he takes to safeguard Adam and Eve; 7 and 8 describe his creative activity in restoring the heavenly balance Satan sought to disrupt; 11 and 12 present this latter activity functioning in exactly the same way in time rather than in space.

Milton's subject matter and theme also create a paradox in the relation of the units of the triad. As we have discussed it so far, the pattern consists of a processional series of events leading up to a point of conversion, a nexus, that capsulizes and alters them and leads in turn to a recessional series of events that mirror the first — the Red Crosse Knight fights the dragon Error badly, is enlightened at the House of Contemplation, and fights the great dragon well. This still remains true in *Paradise Lost*: God's Providence in capturing Satan at Eve's ear is
matched by God's Providence working itself out in the historical process of redemption, and both relate to God's bringing good out of evil by his creation of the world. But it is much more proper and more accurate, in the case of *Paradise Lost*, to see events i and I not as mirroring each other but as both mirroring the events encapsulated in (i–ii). The central unit of *Paradise Lost* is God and God's works, which can be adequately mirrored only by his Son, the Logos, and not by the human word. He is the source and end of all the reality that art is supposed to mirror, and as such cannot reflect anything himself: all other things reflect him. So the real mirrors in *Paradise Lost* are the first and last units of the poem, and what they mirror is the center. Satan, of course, is a distorting mirror. What he does in his attempts to emulate God is a travesty of him: darkness visible is not the equivalent of light invisible. In that sense, Satan and Hell are high burlesque; they are the possibility of mock epic — and perhaps the direction of it — already contained within the epic. Adam and Earth are the legitimate mirrors of the poem; created in God's image and bearing his impress, they are the high art our "erected wits" still let us reach to, though our "infected wills" will not let us attain them. This is why, I believe, the poem ends at a point that corresponds to book 6 of the *Aeneid*: Adam has been illuminated, his goal has been explained, and his real epic works — and ours — are about to begin. Everything before has been prologue; what follows is "the better fortitude / of Patience and Heroic Martyrdom" (9.31–32) and the "argument / Not less but more Heroic than the wrath / Of stern *Achilles*" (9.13–15). What it offered was a viable direction for epic, if only epicists had known it. None but Fielding seems to.

This is a long way about to *The Rape of the Lock*, but it returns us to it with sharper insight. The structure of *The Rape*, not the subject of it, is what indissolubly links it to epic, and the self-enclosure and symmetry of that structure should now be apparent and meaningful. The parallelisms of the structure naturally lend themselves to the expression of allegorical and analogical ideas, and its repetitions and reflexiveness make it a natural vehicle for the depiction of simultaneous events. The notion of synchronicity seems tied up very closely with it. The marshaling of villains and heroes in *Absalom and Achitophel* occurs simultaneously.
MacFlecknoe transpires in a no-time of tautological prophecy. At the center of The Rape, Ariel’s abandonment of Belinda, the cutting of the lock, and the mission of Umbriel to the Cave of Spleen happen at the same moment. The various quests of the Faerie Queene are simultaneous. In Paradise Lost, the falls of Satan and of Man take place in eternity that contains in the same instant and forever the triumph of the Son and the triumph of Christ: the poem ends a few minutes after it began, for time only starts with the Fall and the expulsion from the garden. The palindromatic pattern makes possible the solution of Milton’s central problem in Paradise Lost: the expression in sequential terms of what occurred instantaneously and simultaneously. This perhaps explains somewhat the phrase ut pictura poesis: poetry is only able to articulate the simultaneous, which painting can present simultaneously through spatial organization, by a sequential verbal construct that rounds upon itself, provides its own borders and frame, and by parallelism and repetition of incident links events that painting would group by line and form. Painting is metaphor for the linguistic conversion of extension into sequence, of space into time; conversely, space, in poetry, is the nexus that converts eternity into time and time into eternity. In Paradise Lost, God first creates a paradise in space and then re-creates it in time. Human history is the palette with which he sequentially rebuilds what he originally made instantaneously and plastically. Indeed, human history is in Paradise Lost conceived of as a verbal construct, an exposition of the promise made to Adam and renewed to Abraham, redeemed by the Word and fulfilled in the second coming of the Word. Human time is divine space, and poetry that breaks through the merely phenomenal into the realm of plan and pattern reproduces, in human, sequential terms (the terms Raphael had to use to tell Adam of the war in Heaven) a picture of the divine, of eternity, of infinite correspondence — of an infinity of mirrors reflecting an inexhaustible oneness. In exactly that sense, poetry is a speaking picture. And in exactly that sense, The Rape of the Lock locates Belinda spatially at the end of the poem and by doing so deifies her: by making her peripheral, the Muse makes her eternal. The shift in human space reveals the true pattern of divine time and frees Belinda and the poem itself from the traps
of sequence, succession, and change. It reconstitutes a meaningful order, which, it seems, it is the formal and thematic goal of epic to posit. Achilles guarantees the fall of Troy. Odysseus restores the proper succession of dominion on Ithaca. The many heroes of the *Faerie Queene* strive against the continuing effects of the Fall. Providential history will culminate in the reestablishment of Paradise. David restores proper rule to Israel. And Belinda finds her humbler but proper place in the great pattern. That pattern was left awry by Adam's fall, and its restitution is the heroic task of all men and all poets since, as Milton realized. That restitution is the form and meaning of epic.

Aubrey Williams has explained the basic relation of *The Dunciad* to classical epic and has particularly elucidated its adaptation of the *Aeneid* to its own poetic uses. My own study of *The Dunciad* is in many particulars indebted to Williams's seminal work. Pope's use of the notion of the *translatio imperii* and its analogue the *translatio studii* to shadow the spread of Dulness's empire fulfills the idea of restitution we discussed before: in his model, the transference of power involved the restitution of the Trojan empire through Rome; in his own poem, Dulness moves outward from the English Troyovant to reestablish the ancient hegemony of her parents, Chaos and Night. That comprehends the essential action of the poem. The precise means by which Dulness and her dunces accomplish that action are not so easily pinned down.

That Dulness employs Cibber as the spearhead of her campaign is clear. He is the mortal manifestation of Dulness; she sees "her Image full exprest, / . . . chief in Bays's monster-breeding breast" (1.107–8). The precise relationship between Dulness and Cibber is quite crucial to an understanding of the poem, because it is conceived in exact and consistent terms, terms comparable to those Dryden used to conceptualize Flecknoe and Shadwell. Cibber is the Messiah; Dulness is a direct parody of Sapientia, who is most commonly identified with Christ as the Son, the Logos. Thus they are the mortal and immortal forms of the same entity. Evidences of the theological basis of the relationship
abound in the poem, from the lines quoted above to Cibber’s coronation as “the Antichrist of wit” (2.16) and beyond. This relationship bears relevantly on the action of the poem in that Cibber’s status, at the outset, resembles Christ’s at the beginning of Paradise Regained or Aeneas’s before his descent to hell: all these heroes stand at turning points of their lives, aware that in some way they are called, but unclear and unsure to what or for what, and most uncertain about their own identities and roles. None knows he is a hero; none knows what his task will be. Like Paradise Regained and the first half of the Aeneid, The Dunciad centers its interest on the gradual revelation of its hero’s identity and mission.

Cibber’s first — and almost his only — action in The Dunciad consists of his praying to Dulness to illumine him about his course of action.

What can I now? my Fletcher cast aside,
Take up the Bible, once my better guide?
Or tread the path by venturous Heroes trod,
This Box my Thunder, this right hand my God?
Or chaired at White’s amidst the Doctors sit,
Teach Oaths to Gamesters, and to Nobles Wit?

(1. 199–204)

The poem has before this identified Cibber as an incarnation of Dulness (1. 107–8, quoted above); this passage ironically adds to that identification by forcing us to see Cibber, “chair’d. . . amidst the Doctors,” as the young Christ in the temple “sitting in the midst of the doctors” (Luke 2:46). The irony does not lie so much in the simple juxtaposition of Christ and Cibber and the inversion of values that represents as it does in Cibber’s unawareness of what he has said. The biblical episode includes Christ’s direct acknowledgment of his messianic role: “Know ye not that I must be about my father’s business?” (Luke 2:49). The whole was traditionally regarded as a foreshadowing of Christ’s public life. Cibber, as a true son of Dulness, remains sublimely unaware of the significance of what he is saying. He remains indomitably the private individual, the self-contained and reflexive:
What then remains? Ourself. Still, still remain
Cibberian forehead, and Cibberian brain.
This brazen Brightness, to the Squire so dear;
This polished Hardness, that reflects the Peer:
This arch Absurd, that wit and fool delights;
This Mess, tossed up of Hockley Hole and White's;
Where Dukes and Butchers join to wreathe my crown,
At once the Bear and Fiddle of the town.

(1.217-24)

This privateness and reflexiveness are the very qualities that make him
the perfect public exponent of Dulness. There follows this prayer a series
of recognitions or expositions of Cibber's identity and role. First Dulness
responds to his prayer by transporting him to "her sacred Dome" (1.265)
where "she plann'd th' Imperial seat of Fools" (1.272). Cibber responds
to this by recognizing a correspondence between himself and the place:

Well pleased he entered, and confessed his home.
So Spirits ending their terrestrial race,
Ascend, and recognize their Native Place.

(1.266-68)

The book ends with further adumbration of his role. Dulness anoints and
crowns him in a ceremony that simultaneously parodies royal coronations (and should remind us of the corresponding scene in MacFlecknoe
and the linking there between the protagonists and their locus) and the
baptism of Christ.

The Goddess then, o'er his anointed head,
With mystic words, the sacred Opium shed.
And lo! her bird, (a monster of a fowl,
Something betwixt a Heideggre and owl,)
Perch'd on his crown. 'All hail! and hail again,
My son! the promis'd land expects thy reign.'

(1.288-92)
The baptism of Christ signaled the beginning of his public career; Dulness develops the broadest implications of this aspect of the event in her half-question, half-exhortation —

'O! when shall rise a Monarch all our own,
And I, a Nursing-mother, rock the throne,
'Twixt Prince and People close the Curtain draw,
Shade him from Light, and cover him from Law;
Fatten the Courtier, starve the learned band,
And suckle Armies, and dry-nurse the land:
'Till Senates nod to Lullabies divine,
And all be sleep, as at an Ode of thine.'

(1.311–18)

Book 2 offers at least a partial realization of Dulness's hope as "the soft gifts of Sleep conclude the day" (2.419) of heroic exercises. The book as a whole functions as a kind of confirmation and beginning of Cibber's public mission. He opens the book enthroned in ludicrous parallel to Satan's "bad eminence":

High on a gorgeous seat, that far out-shone
Henley's gilt tub, or Fleckno's Irish throne,
Or that where on her Curls the Public pours,
All-bounteous, fragrant Grains and Golden show'rs,
Great Cibber sate . . .

(2.1–5)

An extended simile makes quite explicit what is implicit above:

Not with more glee, by hands Pontific crown'd,
With scarlet hats wide-waving circled round,
Rome in her Capitol saw Querno sit,
Thron'd on sev'n hills, the Antichrist of wit.

(2.13–16)

The games that follow this stand in the same relation to Dulness's real purposes that the games in the Aeneid do to the tasks of epic heroes: they
were rehearsals, exercises in heroic virtue in small — here, almost symbolic adumbrations of the real work of the dunces. The vacuity, the obscenity, the scatology are only signs of what is to come, just as the slumber that closes the book is only a foreshadowing, a miniature, of the great darkness that will close the fourth book. The events of book 2 contain the seeds of this later growth in the form of their presentation. The outward spread of sleep, seemingly confined here to the dunces themselves and only to those under the explicit sway of Dulness, grows in implicit importance when juxtaposed with the passage it parodies:

Who sate the nearest, by the words o'ercome,
Slept first; the distant nodded to the hum.
Then down are rolled the books; stretched o'er 'em lies
Each gentle clerk, and muttering seals his eyes.
As what a Dutchman plumps into the lakes,
One circle first, and then a second makes;
What Dulness dropped among her sons imprest
Like motion from one circle to the rest;
So from the midmost the nutation spreads
Round and more round, o'er all the sea of Heads.

(2.401-10)

God loves from Whole to Parts: But human soul
Must rise from Individual to the Whole.
Self-love but serves the virtuous mind to wake,
As the small pebble stirs the peaceful lake;
The centre moved, a circle straight succeeds,
Another still, and still another spreads;
Friend, parent, neighbour, first it will embrace;
His country next; and next all human race;
Wide and more wide, th' o'erflowings of the mind
Take every creature in, of every kind;
Earth smiles around, with boundless bounty blest,
And Heav'n beholds its image in his breast.

(Essay on Man, 4.361-72)
Dulness converts the expansive flow of love into an expanding tide of inertia, and the circular images in both passages unite in making both acts cosmic or cosmogonic. *The Dunciad* anticipates and supports this in advance by casting Cibber as the sun of his world and by linking that image to a part of Raphael’s description of creation in *Paradise Lost*. Here is Pope’s image, followed by the passage from Milton:

All eyes direct their rays  
On him, and crowds turn Coxcombs as they gaze.  
His Peers shine round him with reflected grace,  
New edge their dulness, and new bronze their face.  
So from the Sun’s broad beam, in shallow urns  
Heav’ns twinkling Sparks draw light, and point their horns.  

(2.7–12)

Hither as to thir Fountain other Stars  
Repairing, in thir gold’n Urns draw Light,  
And hence the Morning Planet gilds her horns  

(*Paradise Lost*, 7.364–66)

Cibber’s role is a public one, and his coronation here only forms a small part of the function he is to perform. That coronation stands as the first foreshadowing of his real task and eminence, just as the games contain implicitly the real nature of the heroic tasks the dunces are called to.

Book 3 reproduces the conditions of the sixth book of the *Aeneid* and so offers the final and fullest explanation of the hero’s goal. Cibber, sound asleep and “refin’d from Reason” (3.6), “on Fancy’s easy wing” (3.13) tours the underworld and hears his Anchises, Elkanah Settle, explain the coming wonders of his reign. Like Michael and Adam, they ascend a hill from which they view in space what will transpire in time. They see an ever increasing barbarism spreading out from Cibber (“All nonsense thus, of old or modern date, / Shall in thee centre, from thee circulate” (3.59–60)) to engulf nations, arts, and culture. Goths and Huns enact in kingdoms what modern dunces do in genres, and just as they poured from the frozen north into civilized Europe, so the dunces,
with Cibber at their head, erupt from the world of the stage into the stage of the world.

His never-blushing head he turn'd aside,
(Not half so pleas'd when Goodman prophesy'd)
And look'd, and saw a sable Sorc'rer rise,
Swift to whose hand a winged volume flies:
All sudden, Gorgons hiss, and Dragons glare,
And ten-born'd fiends and Giants rush to war.
Hell rises, Heav'n descends, and dance on Earth:
Gods, imps, and monsters, music, rage, and mirth,
A fire, a jig, a battle, and a ball,
Till one wide conflagration swallows all.

Thence a new world to Nature's laws unknown,
Breaks out refulgent, with a heav'n of its own:
Another Cynthia her new journey runs,
And other planets circle other suns.
The forests dance, the rivers upward rise,
Whales sport in woods, and dolphins in the skies;
And last, to give the whole creation grace,
Lo! one vast Egg produces human race.

These lines describe the creation of an anti-nature, a parody of the apocalyptical new heavens and new earth, conceived of in the terms Horace uses in the *Ars Poetica* to describe the artistic misbegotten. But the process does not stop with art; its spills over into life, into what we call reality. The relationship between the two here is the same as it was in *MacFlecknoe*: bad art distorts fact, remakes reality in its own image. Pope first depicted the process early in book 1 when, in describing Dulness's cave, he also traced the growth of miscreation step by step from hints to sounds, to words, to images, to genres and out beyond these to the world itself.

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 newborn nonsense first is taught to cry,
Maggots half-form'd in rhyme exactly meet,
And learn to crawl upon poetic feet.
Here one poor word an hundred clenches makes,
And ductile dulness new meanders takes:
There motley Images her fancy strike,
Figures ill pair'd, and Similies unlike.
She sees a Mob of Metaphors advance,
Pleas'd with the madness of the mazy dance;
How Tragedy and Comedy embrace;
How Farce and Epic get a jumbled race
How Time himself stands still at her command,
Realms shift their place, and Ocean turns to land.
Here gay Description Egypt glads with show'rs,
Or gives to Zembla fruits, to Barca flow'rs;
Glitt'ring with ice here hoary hills are seen,
There painted vallies of eternal green,
In cold December fragrant chaplets blow,
And heavy harvests nod beneath the snow.

(1.55–78)

This is the ultimate aim of Dulness — the submission of the universe, the
enunciation of the uncreating word. For this task, Cibber is esential: he is
the wonder child, the messiah of Dulness who will introduce the "new
Saturnian age of Lead" (1.28) — or as Settle phrases it, in a gross
inversion of Virgil's messianic eclogue,

This, this is he, foretold by ancient rhymes:
Th'Augustus born to bring Saturnian times.
Signs following signs lead on the mighty year!
See! the dull stars roll round and re-appear.
See, see, our own true Phoebus wears the bays!

(3.319–23)

This explains fully what it means to be the anti-Christ of wit: Cibber must
undo Christ’s work both as spiritual redeemer and agent of creation. He
must reduce the human mind and the universe to inertia by the destruc-
tion of form and the subtraction of meaning — no more, no less.

Book 3 leaves us at the same point as book 6 of the Aeneid: the hero at
last knows the full dimensions of his task, and it now remains for him to
fulfill it. Both books 1 and 3 have focused on Cibber’s growing awareness
of what he must do. Book 2 shadowed some of his works. Book 4
describes the body that cast that shadow and completes the realization of
Dulness’s kingdom. It is the totally false world created by the false vision
that passes through the Ivory Gate of the first three books.

Book 4 presents its vision of chaos within the framework of a perfect
symmetry. Pope’s opening plea to Dulness to “Suspend a while your
Force inertly strong” (4.7) parallels his final futile plea to the Muse to
“Relate, who first, who last resign’d to rest” (4.621), after which Dulness
“Then take[s] at once the Poet and the Song” (4.8) as “Universal
Darkness buries All” (4.656). Inside that outermost frame, matching
er enumerations of various arts, all extinguished or about to be extin-
guished, confine and define the action of the poem (4.17–44 and 4.
626–56). The center of the poem opens with the appearance of the
“Harlot form” (4.45) of Opera; she pleads with Dulness to banish
Handel, to separate sound from sense, to reduce all music, all harmony,
to “One Trill’ (4.57) so that “To the same notes thy sons shall hum, or
snore, / And all thy yawning daughters cry, encore” (4.59–60). The
central action of the poem ends when Dulness accomplishes exactly that
by her yawn (4.605 ff.). Between these two points, The Dunciad maps
the point-by-point spread of Dulness from the private life to the public,
from theory to practice, from personal aberration to cultural derange-
ment.

The action begins with Opera’s plea because of the metaphoric value
of the notions of music and harmony. The universe is God’s poem, God’s
song, and in desiring to silence the Muses and “let Division reign”
(4.53), Opera is seeking to banish the aesthetic and intellectual dimen-
sions of the created universe. She wants to reduce the world to mere
physical phenomena — sound without sense, noises of no meaning. The
blast of “Fame’s posterior Trumpet” (4.71) appropriately follows her
speech and summons the dunces to their goddess. Dulness has in them already accomplished part of Opera's prayer: the dunces respond mechanically to physical laws; their motions are governed by physical phenomena.

None need a guide, by sure Attraction led,
And strong impulsive gravity of Head:
None want a place, for all their Centre found,
Hung to the Goddess, and coher'd around.
Not closer, orb in orb, conglob'd are seen
The buzzing Bees about their dusk'y Queen.

The gath'ring number, as it moves along,
Involves a vast involuntary throng,
Who gently drawn, and struggling less and less,
Roll in her Vortex, and her pow'r confess.

(4.75–84)

Pope puns insistently on words like “Attraction,” “gravity,” “Centre,” and “Vortex” to demonstrate the process by which Dulness succeeds. The puns move ambiguously between a semi-metaphorical and intellectual meaning and one that is “scientific” and physical. The dunces themselves are tracing exactly the same movement, behaving less and less like rational beings and more and more like simple bodies in motion. They enact the substitution of mechanics for metaphysics, of Descartes's and Newton's world for Aquinas's and Hooker's. The language of Pope's note to the lines makes this process and its implications very clear:

It ought to be observed that here are three classes in this assembly. The first of men absolutely and avowedly dull, who naturally adhere to the Goddess, and are imaged in the simile of the Bees about their Queen. The second involuntarily drawn to her, tho' not caring to own her influence, from ver. 81 to 90. The third of such, as, tho' not members of her state, yet advance her service by flattering Dulness, cultivating mistaken talents, patronizing vile scriblers, discouraging living merit, or setting up for wits, and Men of taste in arts
they understand not; from ver. 91 to 101. In this new world of Dulness each of these three classes hath its appointed station, as best suits its nature, and concurs to the harmony of the System. The first drawn only by the strong and simple impulse of Attraction, are represented as falling directly down into her; as conglobed into her substance, and resting in her centre.

---All their centre found,
_Hung to the Goddess, and coher'd around._

The second, tho' within the sphere of her attraction, yet having at the same time a different motion, they are carried, by the composition of these two, in planetary revolutions round her centre, some nearer to it, some further off:

_Who gently drawn, and struggling less and less,_
_Roll in her Vortex, and her pow'r confess._

The third are properly excentrical, and no constant members of her state or system: sometimes at an immense distance from her influence, and sometimes again almost on the surface of her broad effulgence. Their use in their Perihelion, or nearest approach to Dulness, is the same in the moral World, as that of Comets in the natural, namely to refresh and recreate the Dryness and decays of the system; in the manner marked out from ver. 91 to 98.

The interplay of the poem and its note make explicit here the cosmogonic implications of the allusion at the beginning of book 2. Dulness is genuinely engaged in world-building, in the substitution of her own cosmos for God's. What startles me about this (and I suspect it startled eighteenth century readers as well) is that she undertakes this task as a perfectly orthodox Cartesian. The kinds of planetary motion described, and particularly the presence of the concept of the vortex, are quite sufficient to identify the source of the system described as Descartes's.\textsuperscript{25} The question to be answered, of course, is, Why Descartes? To what end? The answer seems to lie in the de facto Cartesian separation of mind from matter and in Descartes's resolutely materialistic explanation of the
origin of the universe — the same process that Pope here attributes to Dulness. Descartes provides the theoretical base for Dulness's practice by positing the radical disjunction of mind and matter, thought and thing. For this reason, the dunces' bodies obey the laws of Cartesian physics while their minds — as we shall see — share the essential solipsism of Cartesian philosophy.

The address of the specter-schoolmaster illuminates the process by which comprehension is narrowed and imagination stifled through a further disjunction. His method of education separates words from the substantial meanings they ought to convey; it separates, that is, rhetoric from dialectic and logic.

Then thus. "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, As Fancy opens the quick springs of Sense, We ply the Memory, we load the brain, Bind rebel Wit, and double chain on chain; Confine the thought, to exercise the breath; And keep them in the pale of Words till death. Whate'er the talents, or howe'er designed, We hang one jingling padlock on the mind: 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, lost too soon in yonder House or Hall. There truant WYNDHAM ev'ry Muse gave o'er, There TALBOT sunk, and was a Wit no more! How sweet an Ovid, MURRAY was our boast! How many Martials were in PULT'NEY lost! Else sure some Bard, to our eternal praise, In twice ten thousand rhyming nights and days,
Had reach'd the Work, the All that mortal can;  
And South beheld that Master-piece of Man."

(4.149–74)

The attributes Pope gives to the speaker of these lines help define his role. He is a specter (4.149), Moloch-like ("Dropping with Infant's Blood, and Mother's tears" [4.142]), and he bears Mercury's caduceus (4.140 and Pope's note) — the first of several figures in the poem who shall do so (see 4.347 and 4.637). He is a specter because, literally, he represents the ghost of learning, the disembodiment of education; he is Moloch-like because to his whims children are sacrificed; he bears the caduceus because, like Mercury, with it he guides the souls of the dead, because, like Mercury, he is the mediator, the messenger, between gods and men, and finally because, like Mercury, he is a god both of eloquence and of lies, of, in effect, false wit.27 His position as schoolmaster enables him to warp the mind right at the outset of education and provide a bias toward words in themselves that will prevent his students from ever reaching behind them to ideas — so his fitness as mediator between Dulness and men. More than this, his function, although primarily to corrupt the private life and destroy the processes of individual thinking, also spills over to corrupt the public life, as his effect upon "The pale Boy-Senator" (4.147) shows. Dulness recognizes this aspect of his work in her reply to him by exclaiming happily about the blessings of "some pedant Reign" (4.175) and the doctrine "which my Priests, and mine alone, maintain... The RIGHT DIVINE of Kings to govern wrong" (4.185–88). At this point in the poem, Pope does not stress this matter, but one of the poem’s tacit assumptions remains that corruption of education and the private life will inescapably culminate in corruption of the public life, of government, and of human society in general.

Bentley-Aristarchus carries the undermining of education yet further. Speaking for the critics and simultaneously for the colleges, he describes the reduction of learning from the level of the word to the level of the letter:

Roman and Greek Grammarians! know your Better:
Author of something yet more great than Letter;
While tow'ring o'er your Alphabet, like Saul,
Stands our Digamma, and o'ertops them all.
'Tis true, on Words is still our whole debate,
Disputes of Me or Te, or aut or at,
To sound or sink in cano, O or A,
Or give up Cicero to C or K.

(4.215–22)

What the master critic accomplishes is the total diversion of the human
mind from entities to fragments, from language as a conveyor of meaning
to language as — literally — thing in itself. This results in the produc­
tion — in a physical sense — of words for their own sakes, words on a
page, books conceived as material body rather than repository of ideas.

For thee we dim the eyes, and stuff the head
With all such reading as was never read:
For thee explain a thing till all men doubt it,
And write about it, Goddess, and about it:
So spins the silkworm small its slender store,
And labours till it clouds itself all o'er.

(4.249–54)

Aristarchus appropriately delivers as the final proof of the efficacy of his
system the thing itself:

With the same Cement, ever sure to bind,
We bring to one dead level ev'ry mind.
Then take him to develop, if you can,
And hew the Block off, and get out the Man.
But wherefore waste I words? I see advance
Whore, Pupil, and lac'd Governor from France.

(4.267–72)

The pupil has just completed the last step in the educational process, the
grand tour. He represents the finished product of Dulness's educational
innovations, a paragon of her vertu, whom she accepts as a hero (4.335).
He has nothing to say.
His tutor does all the talking, and describes a grand tour that schools the pupil in sensuality and frivolity and erases any last traces of thought from his head. He

Dropt the dull lumber of the Latin store,
Spoil'd his own language, and acquir'd no more;
All Classic learning lost on Classic ground;
And last turn'd Air, the Echo of a Sound!
See now, half-cur'd, and perfectly well-bred,
With nothing but a Solo in his head.

(4.319-24)

He embodies the fulfillment of Opera's prayer and the total evacuation of intelligibility; he is a form without a content, a body without a mind, and a hero of Dulness's kingdom. Within the complex mock epic of *The Dunciad*, the tutor's description of his pupil's tour presents another, miniature mock epic: the pupil, "the young Aeneas" (4.290),

The Stews and Palace equally explor'd,
Intrigu'd with glory, and with spirit whor'd;
Try'd all *hors d'oeuvres*, all *liqueurs* defin'd,
Judicious drank, and greatly daring din'd

(4.315-18)

and returned at last to the court of Dulness to insure the restitution and continuance of her reign (4.330–34). Pope invokes the *Aeneid* here precisely because of the values that allegorists and commentators like Landino had seen in it: because it depicted a process of education that culminated in an individual's attainment of philosophical beatitude, because it rejected sensuality and worldly dominion for the calm of contemplation and intellectual self-mastery. This Aeneas reverses that. He represents the total corruption of the private life, the impossibility of thought. His journey offered him a series of tests that he progressively failed and brought him back to his starting point, totally vacuous, to enlist himself as another minion of Dulness. This episode marks the completion of the first half of Dulness's undertaking. Words have been
totally separated from meaning; the private life has been completely devalued. What now remains is the corresponding destruction of the public life and the undoing of things themselves.

The dunces have now completed their miseducation, and like Cibber at the end of book 1 are on the point of beginning their public lives. The poem signals this shift of focus by the presentation of another character bearing Mercury’s wand (“Annius, crafty Seer, with ebon wand” [4.346]) and explicitly linked with that deity (“taught by Hermes, and divinely bold” [4.381]). This episode apparently centers on a quarrel between Annius and Mummius about the possession of things — specifically coins — but they speak of the things as deities, matter raised to the level of divinity. Pope has his characters appropriately convey this by means of an extended image of a parodic incarnation:

Then taught by Hermes, and divinely bold,
Down his own throat he risqu’d the Grecian gold;
Receive’d each Demi-God, with pious care,
Deep in his Entrails — I rever’d them there,
I bought them, shrouded in that living shrine,
And, at their second birth, they issue mine.

(4.381–86)

Particular phrases, like “Demi-God,” “pious care,” “rever’d,” charge the passage with its special significance; “living shrine” establishes the final field of reference, since it is a formal title and salutation of Christ’s earthly mother and is used as such in the Roman Catholic litany of the Virgin. Annius’s reply to this ratifies these notions:

“Witness great Ammon! by whose horns I swore,”
(Reply’d soft Annius) “this our paunch before
Still bears them, faithful; and that thus I eat,
Is to refund the Medals with the meat.
To prove me, Goddess! clear of all design,
Bid me with Pollio sup, as well as dine:
There all the Learn’d shall at the labour stand,
And Douglas lend his soft, obstetric hand.”

(4.387–94)
They return to Pollio because he provides the conjunction of the classical and Christian traditions they are perverting: the most notable Pollio of classical literature is the Pollio of Virgil’s fourth eclogue, the messianic eclogue, in whose consulship will be born the wonder child who will reintroduce the Saturnian age. Douglas’s “soft, obstetric hand” completes the travesty: “(God’s) obstetric hand brought forth the winding serpent” (Job 26:13, Douai and Vulgate). Biblical commentators take the serpent for many things, among them Satan himself.29

The appearance of this episode at this point in The Dunciad signifies many things. By its very nature, it indicates a shift of Dulness’s activities from the private realm she has by this time totally pervaded to the public world of human activity and social intercourse. The coins themselves hint of the money obsession of that world; the emphasis on collection and acquisition demonstrates its absorption in things for themselves as separate from any meaning the things might possess. The theological and classical framework against which these are played indicates the extent to which all this opposes the spirit of Christian culture and the extent to which it is simultaneously blasphemous and inhuman. Beyond this, the allusions show in very precise detail the process Dulness is now initiating. The incarnation provides the nexus of spiritual and material: the word is made flesh. In the most literal sense, that is what the episode tokens in The Dunciad. Dulness has already thoroughly corrupted language and she is now turning her attention to the degradation of material objects. This involves the contrary but simultaneous motions of exaltation and debasement. The coins become the demigods whose images they bear and usurp a spiritual dimension to which they have no claim. At the same time, their ascension is contradicted by their incarnation, and they become excrement. Rather than bearers of life, they are the by-products of life — waste, inert matter reduced to its lowest common denominator. Exaltation of matter provides Dulness’s method; the reduction of it to lifeless extension and mass explains her goal. She seeks to parallel publicly and in matter what she has accomplished privately and in mind. All this, of course, works out in greater detail exactly the same web of ideas we have already encountered in MacFlecknoe.
Dulness forms her attack on two fronts, one the kind of specialization and fragmentariness of vision exemplified by Annius and Mummius and later by the botanist and butterfly-collector, and the other the kind of generalization that substitutes fragments for system, as does the “gloomy Clerk” (4.459). Both of these end in a corrupted conception of Nature as atomistic. Both substitute parts for wholeness — a point that Dulness herself stresses:

“O! would the Sons of Men once think their Eyes
And Reason giv'n them but to study Flies!
See Nature in some partial narrow shape,
And let the Author of the Whole escape:
Learn but to trifle; or, who most observe,
To wonder at their Maker, not to serve!”

(4.452–58)

The “gloomy Clerk” offers the theoretical basis for this in Lucretius’s indifferent deity or, alternatively, in the pervasive but amorphous object of Shaftesbury’s soft-headed enthusiasm.

Oh hide the God still more! and make us see
Such as Lucretius drew, a God like Thee:
Wrapt up in Self. a God without a Thought,
Regardless of our merit or default.
Or that bright Image to our fancy draw,
Which Theocles in raptur’d vision saw,
While thro’ Poetic scenes the Genius roves,
Or wanders wild in Academic Groves;
That Nature our Society adores.
Where Tindal dictates, and Silenus snores.

(4.483–92)

Both are projections of the human ego, extrapolations of finite conceptions that make God in man’s image rather than man in God’s.

All-seeing in thy mists, we want no guide,
Mother of Arrogance, and Source of Pride!
We nobly take the high Priori Road,
And reason downward, till we doubt of God:
Make Nature still encroach upon his plan,
And shove him off as far as e'er we can:
Thrust some Mechanic Cause into his place;
Or bind in Matter, or diffuse in Space.
Or, at one bound o'erleaping all his laws,
Make God Man's Image, Man the final Cause,
Find Virtue local, all Relation scorn,
See all in Self, and but for self be born:
Of naught so certain as our Reason still,
Of naught so doubtful as of Soul and Will.

These passages extend the process of materialization further into creation, constantly reducing the role of spirit and mind. The "Mechanic Cause" thrust into God's place links up intelligibly with the Cartesian creation that opened book 4 and marks the process by which matter usurps the function of mind. Pope parallels this in the passages in question by a simultaneous allusive retracing of the path of history, moving steadily backward toward the point of creation. From the incarnation presented in the Annius and Mummius episode, the poem jumps back to Eve's account of her creation and the first object that interested her, herself:

As I bent down to look, just opposite,
A Shape within the wat'ry gleam appear'd
Bending to look on me, I started back,
It started back, but pleas'd I soon return'd,
Pleas'd it return'd as soon with answering looks
Of sympathy and love . . .

(Paradise Lost, 4.461-65)

Pope recreates this situation in his butterfly-collector's account of the pursuit of his quarry:
I saw, and started from its vernal bow'r
The rising game, and chac'd from flow'r to flow'r.
It fled, I follow'd; now in hope, now pain;
It stopt, I stopt; it mov'd, I mov'd again.

(4.425-28)

A line in the Clerk's speech — "Or at one bound o'er-leaping all his laws" (4.477) — invokes Milton's description of Satan's entrance into Eden — "At one slight bound high overlap'd all bound" (4.181). The poem reaches the creation point with Silenus, who "shook from out his Pipe the seeds of fire" (4.494). Pope's own notes to the poem insist on Silenus's identification as the Epicurean teacher of Virgil's sixth eclogue, where he gives an Epicurean account of the creation of the world from the seeds of fire, earth, air, and water. He has a twofold function in The Dunciad: to unite in one figure and one hypothesis — atomism — all of the various theories — Cartesian, Hobbesian, Lucretian — offering "Mechanic Causes" instead of spiritual principles, and to extend the power of those causes to the work of creation itself, thus banishing mind and spirit retroactively from the origin of the universe. He brings Dulness one step closer to the total removal of God, one step closer to the state of chaos that existed before creation, before the informing word of divine wisdom imposed form on matter. To this point in the poem, Dulness has succeeded in separating thought and thing, in enmeshing thought further in the trap of language conceived of as thing, and in reducing language from expression of thought to random conglomeration of letters and sounds; she has made matter the principal component of the universe and further reduced that matter to a random conglomeration of atoms, hostile to the impress of mind and obedient only to mechanical laws. Silenus describes the same process of reduction at work in the human sphere, contracting human beings from their intellectual potentiality to a servitude to the basest forms of matter.

Then thus. "From Priest-craft happily set free,
Lo! ev'ry finish'd Son returns to thee:
First slave to Words, then vassal to a Name,
Then dupe to Party; child and man the same;
Bounded by Nature, narrow'd still by Art,
A trifling head, and a contracted heart.
Thus bred, thus taught, how many have I seen,
Smiling on all, and smil'd on by a Queen.
Mark'd out for Honours, honour'd for their Birth,
To thee the most rebellious things on earth:
Now to thy gentle shadow all are shrunk,
All melted down, in Pension, or in Punk!
So K* so B** sneak'd into the grave,
A Monarch's half, and half a Harlot's slave.
Poor W** nipt in Folly's broadest bloom,
Who praises now? his Chaplain on his Tomb.
Then take them all, oh take them to thy breast!
Thy Magus, Goddess! shall perform the rest.”

The Magus competes the task by means of his potion, which banishes consciousness totally and leaves only a human form existing in and for matter.

With that, a Wizard Old his cup extends;
Which whoso tastes, forgets his former friends,
Sire, Ancestors, Himself. One casts his eyes
Up to a Star, and like Endymion dies:
A Feather, shooting from another's head,
Extracts his brain; and Principle is fled;
Lost is his God, his Country, ev'rything;
And nothing left but Homage to a King!
The vulgar herd turn off to roll with Hogs,
To run with Horses, or to hunt with Dogs;
But, sad example! never to escape
Their Infamy, still keep the human shape.

The cup, of course, is Circe's cup, and the human shapes rolling with hogs an ironic reversal of Circe's ability to transform the body while the
mind remained untouched. In this same section, Pope quickly invokes two other episodes from Odysseus's journey — the Cimmerians and the Sirens (4.532, 541). The whole section, from the introduction of Silenus forward, corresponds to the episode of the tutor and pupil returned from the Great Tour earlier in the poem. Silenus, too, is a tutor who introduces a band of youths to the goddess and addresses her on their behalf. Pope makes the situations parallel and reintroduces the imagery of the epic journey because this later scene presents the final corruption of the public life as an exact analogue to the earlier scene's presentation of the corruption of the private. He invokes the figure of Odysseus rather than Aeneas because (in addition to the fact that he has already used Aeneas as exemplar of the private virtues) Odysseus is the one epic figure explicitly and unwaveringly loyal to country, family, and self, and the one epic figure whose final actions clearly result in the reassertion of his rightful identity and the reunification of his family and kingdom, all presided over and blessed by Wisdom herself in the form of Athene. The dunces here precisely reverse this set of values: the Magus's cup brings forgetfulness of friends, sire, ancestors, self, brain, principle, god, country, everything — “And nothing left but Homage to a King” (4.524). These lines eradicate every possibility of public virtue, of sensible government, of honorable society.

The Magus passage also marks the beginning of what Pope calls “the celebration of the greater Mysteries of the Goddess” (note to 4.517), which involve initiation and consequent transformation. The transformations involve increasingly great reductions in activity, both of mind and body, reaching toward an ultimate point of total inertia, from

\[
\text{The vulgar herd turn off to roll with Hogs,} \\
\text{To run with Horses, or to hunt with Dogs} \\
\text{(4.525–26)}
\]

down to

\[
\text{Others the Syren Sisters warble round,} \\
\text{And empty heads console with empty sound.}
\]
No more, alas! the voice of Fame they hear,
The balm of Dulness trickling in their ear.

(4.541–44)

After this, “a Priest succinct in amice white” (4.549) celebrates the ultimate mystery, the transformation and reduction of matter itself.

On some, a Priest succinct in amice white
Attends; all flesh is nothing in his sight!
Beeves, at his touch, at once to jelly turn,
And the huge Boar is shrunk into an Urn:
The board with specious miracles he loads,
Turns Hares to Larks, and Pigeons into Toads.
Another (for in all what one can shine?)
Explains the Seve and Verdeur of the Vine.
What cannot copious sacrifice atone?
Thy Treuffles, Perigord! thy Hams, Bayonne!
With French Libation, and Italian Strain,
Wash Bladen white, and expiate Hays’s stain.
Knight lifts the head, for what are crowds undone
To three essential Partriges in one?

(4.549–62)

The form of the mystery draws upon the mass, principally the consecration and transubstantiation of the Host as celebrated in the Roman rite. “Three essential partriges in one” parodies the relationship of the persons of the Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, each separate and distinct, yet all forming one being. This element is present here because in transubstantiation the Host is converted into the Body and Blood of Christ, and since Christ is both man and god, second person of the Trinity, the whole Trinity is present in the form of the Host. The appearance of the Host is unchanged, but its actuality is radically altered. The celebrant here in effect reverses the process and reaches upward through matter to alter the nature and substance of divinity. The mystery is not that he “Turns Hares to Larks, and Piegons into Toads” but that he reduces God to matter; the central mystery is the transubstan-
tiation of spirit into "three essential Partriges in one." Dulness materializes spirit, while at the same time subtracting from matter all properties save extension and mass. Everything else, everything mutable, she eliminates — a thorough Cartesian to the last. After this, there is nothing else for her to do except welcome her initiates and send them off to their final task, to extend this mystery to all creation, to find or to make the leader who "shall three Estates command. / And make one mighty dunia of the land" (4.603-4).

Dulness has reached the moment of uncreation, signaled once again in the poem by Hermes' wand, this time cosmically extinguishing the stars (IV.637-38). She yawns the uncreating word that will restore the empire of Chaos, and the yawn is the uncreating word. It antithesizes the divine fiat by which the world was created; it is unarticulated vocal breath, sound without substance or form, that subtracts form from the universe. It restores Chaos because it is chaos; yawn and gulf (chaos) share in Greek a common root, and the yawning gulf of Chaos that Pope here describes darkly translates them both. This is the way the world ends, not with a bang but a pun.

IV

The poem ends with Chaos because chaos is material and what Pope has described is a world increasingly immersed in matter. By and large, he has employed Cartesian conceptions to convey his vision of the disjunction of mind from matter and the gradual triumph of mindless matter. For this reason, the poem concludes with fully realized inertia: for Descartes, the only true property of matter is extension. Even motion is alien to it, and is consequently eliminated at the end of The Dunciad. The few brief mentions of Lucretius and Epicurus serve primarily to locate Cartesian physics within the general framework of an atheistic atomism, with its consequent implications of fragmentary and chaotic materialism, a cosmos without form or plan. But the Cartesian system offered Pope the sustaining myth or metaphor he needed to depict in orthodox epic form the complete inversion of orthodox epic subject matter. If Wisdom is the patron deity of epic heroes, Dulness is certainly her appropriate perversion, and materialism, broadly and philosophi-
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cally considered, her sustaining creed. In that sense, The Dunciad is not mock epic but epic — and its final, apocalyptic lines, the requiem for a culture, are epic in any sense. Pope was not unique either in seeing materialism as the Damoclean sword of his civilization or in perceiving the connection between the tenets of contemporary physics and the wisdom of traditional epic. Swift anticipated him in both and dealt with both even more elaborately, and it is to Swift that we must now turn our attention.

1. Pope links his Windsor Forest with Paradise Lost through his comparison of the forest with “The Groves of Eden,” which still “look green in Song” (7–8) and most explicitly through his concluding plea to Granville to write the great English national epic (423–34). Windsor Forest is, of course, itself a georgic, and is linked to Virgil’s Georgics by numerous allusions and imitations.

2. For the importance of Catullus to The Rape of the Lock, see Earl R. Wasserman’s fine “The Limits of Allusion in The Rape of the Lock,” JEGP 65 (1966): 425–44.


4. See, for example, Sidney’s Defence of Poesie, or Tasso’s remarks quoted in chapter 1.

5. Essay on Human Understanding, 2.23.2.

6. Ralph Cohen, in “The Augustan Mode in English Poetry,” Eighteenth-Century Studies 1 (1967): 3–32, argues that these lines present “an inverted prospect” (p. 12). It seems to me that the “prospect” is not inverted at all, culminating as it does in a fully realized microcosm. Rather, the serious flaw would appear to be the prospect itself, “implying a world locatable in Newtonian space and time, leading (though not necessarily) to an infinity beyond man’s comprehension” (p. 31): these are the very aspects of the prospect that Pope apparently regards with horror and that made it a natural vehicle for Belinda’s perversion of art into material, time-bound artificiality. Thus I would have to argue that in Pope’s view — and implicitly in Dryden’s and Swift’s — the prospect is not one of the major modes of Augustan poetry, but one of the threats to it.


8. The irony of this is not simply the “Earthly lover lurking at her Heart” (3.144), but also that Belinda becomes, by winning the card game, “the Man.”

9. That the metamorphosis has a linguistically sound base is, I think, part of Pope’s point. Greek komes, hair = English comet.

10. Classical scholars have discerned similar structural patterns (which they refer to as “ring composition”) in Homer, and Cedric H. Whitman, in his chapter “Geometric Structure of The Iliad” (Homer and the Heroic Tradition [Cambridge, Mass., 1958] pp. 249–84), describes a pattern very similar to the one I am positing here.

11. Compare the passage from The Sphere of Sacrobosco quoted in chapter 1, note 22.

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pp. 39 ff. An example: “To expound the system in all of its ramifications, Pico required several hundred Conclusiones. . . . All we must remember is that the bounty bestowed by the gods upon lower beings was conceived by the Neoplationists as a kind of overflowing (emanatio), which produced a vivifying rapture or conversion (called by Ficino conversio, raptio, or vivificatio) whereby the lower beings were drawn back to heaven and rejoined the gods (remeatio). The munificence of the gods having thus been unfolded in the triple rhythm of emanatio, raptio and remeatio, it was possible to recognize in this sequence the divine model of what Seneca had defined as the circle of grace: giving, accepting, and returning” (p. 40).

13. The readiest comparison is with the process Joseph Campbell and many others describe as departure, initiation, and return: see, for example, The Hero with a Thousand Faces, chapters 1 through 3.

14. “Every psychological extreme secretly contains its own opposite or stands in some sort of intimate and essential relation to it. Indeed, it is from this tension that it derives its peculiar dynamism. There is no hallowed custom that cannot on occasion turn into its opposite, and the more extreme a position is, the more easily we may expect an enantiodromia, a conversion of something into its opposite” (C. G. Jung, Symbols of Transformation [New York, 1962], vol. 2, chap. 7.581, p. 375).

15. The misunderstanding of the container starts taking place when Landino gives priority to the journey and is compounded when the aesthetics of the sublime are tacked onto epic.

16. Paradise Lost may provide a parallel: there the twelve books are palindromic, and smaller units within the whole are also, in themselves, palindromic.

17. For the importance of the Hercules myth to book 5, see the extended discussion by Thomas K. Dunseath in Spenser’s Allegory of Justice in Book Five of the Faerie Queene (Princeton, N.J., 1968).


22. The most readily available sources of information about Wisdom as theological entity are the introduction and commentary in John Donne: The Anniversaries, ed. Frank Manley (Baltimore, 1963) and Charles S. Singleton’s Dante Studies 2: Journey to Beatrice (Cambridge, Mass., 1958).

23. For a full exposition of this allusion, see David M. Vieth’s “Pope’s Dunciad, I, 203–4, and Christ among the Elders,” PLL 2 (1966): 71–73. I have here and in the following few pages made use of several of Vieth’s suggestions.


25. The passage draws particularly heavily on chapter 8 of the Traité de la Monde and on Descartes’s subsequent description of the origins of planets and comets.

26. That this is an oversimplification of Descartes’s thought I am fully aware; but it is
also quite true to the implications of his ideas.

27. See David R. Hauser's "Medea's Strain and Hermes' Wand: Pope's Use of Mythology," *MLN* 76 (1961): 224–29, for more information about Pope's use of the figure. It is important to remember in this connection that Hermes' wand appears as one of the world-extinguishing forces at the end of the poem.


29. See, for instance, Cornelius à Lapide, Commentary on Job.

30. Pope's own note to these lines calls attention to the Miltonic allusion.
