The Play and Place of Criticism

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Contrary to the usual impression, recent critical approaches to literature, at their most valuable, need not restrict themselves to the ivory tower of formalism, in which analytical ingenuity is paraded for its own sake. Elsewhere, arguing from aesthetic principles, I have tried to prove that, far from stifling extra-literary relations, the so-called new criticism can allow literature to be uniquely revelatory of life, to give us a new rendering of the stuff of experience. But here I should like to venture even further in an effort to correct the common misconception that sees modern criticism as no more than formalistic. For despite the fact that this criticism grew up largely in opposition to the historical disciplines, I shall here attempt to show how literature—if it is seen thoroughly and with new-critical care as literature—can illuminate in a rather special way even so un-new-critical an area as the history of ideas.¹

To this end I should like to conduct a somewhat reckless allegorical excursion in order to assure myself the freedom I need to explore an extraordinary dramatic relation between perhaps the two greatest poems of the eighteenth century, "The Rape of the Lock" and *The Dunciad*. It may be that I shall have to construct a kind of mythology of idealized generaliza-

¹Perhaps I shall be, in part, answering Roy Harvey Pearce's challenge to my book *The New Apologists for Poetry*, in his essay in the *Kenyon Review* of Autumn, 1958 ("Historicism Once More," pp. 554–91). There he asks me to extend my methodology into a new historicism, one that would move from my acknowledgment of the creative role of language in the making of the poem to an insistence on the historical dimension of this creatively endowed language. Consequently this language would be seen as expressing the inner stance of its author as a man in time and in culture: poetry would come to be treated as a kind of existential anthropology. While this essay was written before I saw Pearce's, it may very well have been his kind of objective that I have been looking toward.
tions which is to pass for the psychological history of the tensions of the eighteenth-century artist by allowing certain ideological commonplaces to bear more weight than the more careful historian may believe they can sustain. And I may end by doing violence to other more widely accepted commonplaces of the orthodox historian. But surely this is one of the chief functions of poetry, this violation of the commonplace. Finally, my claims may be seen to ignore the significance of the chronological relations among "The Rape of the Lock," An Essay on Man, and The Dunciad by assuming something like a simultaneity among poems spread over three decades. I hope that the facts of chronology will not be seen to disturb more essential dialectical relations among the works of this single poet. Let me add only this further apology: that I mean to suggest these dramatic and allegorical extensions of the poems no more than tentatively, even hypothetically—hoping only that by being suggestive they may be especially illuminating in a way that a more literal transcription would prefer to ignore, perhaps (let me admit the possibility) because the latter, in its scholarly caution, is more anxious to avoid being wrong. But the extensions that follow—at the worst—would have been nice if they were there to be justly read this way. They do make for an exciting drama of the eighteenth-century mind at work.

I

It is by this late date not at all original to claim that Pope's "The Rape of the Lock" is double-edged throughout, that in it he celebrates the artificial world of eighteenth-century social convention even as he satirizes it. Even Geoffrey Tillotson, the rather orthodox editor of the poem in the Twickenham Edition, acknowledges:

The social mockery of the Rape of the Lock is not simple, does not make a pat contribution to single-mindedness. The world of the poem is vast and complicated. It draws no line of cleavage between its "seriousness" and its mockery. Belinda is not closed up in a rigid coterie which Clarissa and the rest of the poem mock at. Pope, fierce and tender by turns, knows no more than Hazlitt, "whether to laugh or weep" over the poem. He is aware of values which transcend his satire:

Belinda smil'd, and all the World was gay

and

If to her share some Female Errors fall,
Look on her Face, and you'll forget 'em all.

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The poem provides a picture rather than a criticism; or, rather, the criticism is so elaborate, shifting, constellated, that the intellect is baffled and demoralized by the emotions. One is left looking at the face of the poem as at Belinda's.

But this is all he has to say. He follows his hunch no further. In a well-known essay, Cleanth Brooks argues in a more extensive and highly detailed fashion that our awareness, through Pope's double meanings, of the biological facts that lie just beneath the artful façade of the poem and of the social mannerisms of Belinda's world creates a two-way irony that admires even as it patronizes. Thus for Brooks also the poem does more than mock at a "tempest in a teapot." Many of my observations about the poem will be all too obviously related to his. But even he has not quite pursued his approach to this poem to a unified conclusion, resting content—as he all too often does in The Well Wrought Urn—with merely complicating the dimensions of the poem and of the irony it exploits and so leaving it, exposed but not regrouped, in all its multiplicity. Allen Tate, in an analysis he has never to my knowledge published, moves from Brooks' scattered insights to an over-all conception of the poem as metonymy and thus as what William Empson has defined as pastoral. It is this notion I should like to develop here.

Insofar as we view the poem as a mockery of the self-conscious seriousness displayed by trivial characters over a trivial occurrence, we see them, in their self-importance, indulging the logical fallacy of metonymy: they have mistaken the lock of hair, actually incapable of being violated, for the lady's body—vulnerable but unassaulted by the baron. Similarly, they have taken their rarefied and pomaded world of conventional play for the great world, that changeable heroic world of princes and states in which rape brings vengeance and catastrophe lurks. Hence the mock-epic. Granted that these are the delusions of the complacency fostered by an artificial society and that Pope forces us to see them as such. But surely, for all its absurdities, this self-contained and inconsequential "toyshop" world can manage an aesthetic perfection and (from the standpoint of an ugly, lurking reality) a disinvolution that allow it a purity along with its thinness.

We may rightly smile—perhaps in envy as well as in disdain—at the metonymic wigs that are fighting in this world of decorum instead of the gory, if more glorious, lords of heroic mold; for, as Pope so brilliantly arranges things, the disembodied wigs fight, properly, with sword-knots instead of swords ("Where wigs with wigs, with sword-knots sword-knots strive"). The "toyshop" society that self-importantly mistakes itself for
reality is defender, too, of "honor," that fashionable word out of Restoration comedy which so befits this world of fashion. Appearance is all. The lock of hair is to this world what the actual body is to the real world, except that the former is even more to be cherished since reputation is the only value in the world of fashion. So the rape of the lock is more to be avoided in honor's world than are the more sordid, but less openly proclaimed, assaults in classical legend and in London back alleys. Belinda, perhaps unconsciously, acknowledges as much in her lament to the baron:

Oh badst thou, cruel! been content to seize
Hairs less in sight, or any hairs but these!

In honor's world the lock is the woman as the wig is the man and the sword-knot his weapon. There simply are no flesh and blood in these people—or rather in these artificially created shadows of people—so that, even without looking to John Milton, we should understand why it is fitting that

No common weapons in their hands are found,
Like Gods they fight, nor dread a mortal wound.

And of course not Belinda herself is flesh and blood—at least not the artful and perfected abstraction that Belinda creates of herself in administering "the sacred rites of pride." It is a brilliant stroke in this dressing-table passage that the real Belinda is only the priestess at the altar and that the goddess whom she decorates as she worships is her reflection in the mirror. She worships not fleshly or cosmic but "cosmetic pow'rs" whose kingdom is not of this world but of the elegant world of appearance. The Belinda who, fully created in artifice, is to enter honor's world on the Thames and in Hampton Court is not a woman but a goddess, a disembodied image: she is the insubstantial Belinda, composed of smiles that have been repaired and of the "purer blush." Deprived of the imperfections that mar—even as they humanize—flesh-and-blood reality, the painted blush is indeed aesthetically purer than a natural blush, an improvement upon it. And it is morally purer too, for it is caused not by blood—by any natural, unmaidenly immodesty—but by the cool calculations of art. It is far less spontaneous, or suggestive, than the blush earlier induced in her dreams by the disguised Ariel:

A Youth more glitt'ring than a Birth-night Beau
(That ev'n in slumber caus'd her cheek to glow).
The "Frail China Jar"

This world of images, from which—as in Yeats' Byzantium—the fury and the mire of human veins are excluded, is also the world of play and, thus, of innocence. And it is the sense of play that justifies Pope's frequent and brilliant use of zeugma in the poem. When Ariel suggests to his "sylphs and sylphids" what catastrophes may threaten Belinda, he couples\(^2\) "real" dangers with merely fashionable ones:

\[
\text{Whether the nymph shall break Diana's law,} \\
\text{Or some frail China jar receive a flaw;} \\
\text{Or stain her honour, or her new brocade;} \\
\text{Forget her pray'rs, or miss a masquerade.}
\]

Elsewhere "the virgin's cheek" pales in a fear that yokes maidenly dishonor to the loss of the card game:

\[
\text{She sees, and trembles at the approaching ill,} \\
\text{Just in the jaws of ruin, and Codille.}
\]

Or kings captured in battle are yoked to aging virgins, fierce and unrepentant tyrants to an imperfectly dressed young lady. To be sure, these and similar instances emphasize the triviality of the action and thus the poem's mock-heroic aspect. But given this world where images and wigs and sword-knots replace real men and women, where fashion replaces emotion, where "honor" replaces moral earnestness, this very triviality should alone be taken seriously. Utterly inconsequential in contrast to both the heroic world and the sordid everyday world, the insubstantial quality of the world in which woman is recognized as woman only by the clothes she wears and the way her hair is dressed makes it actually unworldly. As a world of play and of art, it is utterly self-contained, self-justified. Absurd as it may be from the standpoint of the heroic and of the everyday world, it is yet an idyllic world whose very purity gives it a unique value—thus Tate's characterization of it as pastoral. Even as Pope condescends to its creatures, may he not envy them? May he not be suggesting his admiration of a world in which dress is more significant than tyranny, maidenly attitudes more significant than

\(^2\) I am using the term zeugma in a broader sense than its strict grammatical meaning would permit. For example, in the two couplets I quote in what follows, only the line "Or stain her honour, or her new brocade" is an actual instance of it. Obviously it is only a triangular affair, so that the two objects must be yoked by the single, double-visioned verb. In this sense, the other lines are merely antitheses of four distinct parts, with each object controlled by its own verb. My point is, however, that in a rhetorical if not a grammatical sense, there is a similar yoking of two disparate worlds in all these instances. In rare cases this yoking is reflected in the short-circuited perfection of the grammatical device; the other cases are effective but less complete and thus less brilliant examples yielding the same rhetorical effect.
victories and defeats of princes—and more to the point, the flawing of a china jar more significant than the violation of a virgin? How precious and delicate a world, if utterly thin, irresponsible, and unreal! Or should I not say precious and delicate because utterly thin, irresponsible, and unreal? The price of substance, responsibility, and reality—of conscientious social significance—Pope knew only too well, as we do. He computed it for us in the bitterness of his satire elsewhere, and especially in The Dunciad. It is as if, seeing as Henry James later did that "life persistently blunders and deviates, loses herself in the sand," the artist Pope, like James, wanted to preserve "his grain of gold." And part of him wanted, as a devotee of art for art’s sake, or of the world for art’s sake, to salvage the world of fashion as that grain of gold.

II

We must ask, then, whether the epic tone and machinery are so easily and so uniformly seen as incongruous as our normal understanding of the mockheroic would have us believe. Belinda, seen repeatedly as rival to the sun, is treated throughout as a goddess. Now of course this is absurd, as it is meant to be. But is it only absurd? Is it not really, as we have seen, that it is the image of Belinda that appears as the goddess, a kind of sun-goddess? And to the extent that we see her as the world of fashion does—as disembodied and thus not of the dull world of substance and consequence—is she perhaps not in some sense a goddess after all even while she remains the shallow fool of social convention? We have seen already that in a strange sense the terms in which Milton’s airy beings do battle are not totally inapplicable here. When early in the poem our humorist asks, "In tasks so bold, can little men engage?" he may be playing a more complex game than that of mere mockery.

Belinda, of course, is warrior-goddess, too. From the time her "awful beauty puts on all its arms," we know that the war between the sexes—limited by the rules of the drawing room rather than of any Geneva convention—is on. All is directed to the final superhuman battle at the end. We learn that her locks of hair are "nourish’d" and nourished "to the destruction of mankind"; and we are warned by the general claim

Fair tresses man’s imperial race ensnare
And beauty draws us with a single hair.

We begin to suspect that Belinda, Amazon as well as nymph, may be the aggressor as well as the assaulted in the war of love. For after all, the
The "Frail China Jar"

realistic, common-sense view that Pope forces before us, too (and that Clarissa later so painfully represents), makes us recognize that behind the masque of the drawing room lurk the biological and domestic facts of life. The war is finally but a game that disguises the uninspiring realities of the social and sexual mating urge. Since the war is only symbolic and as innocent as mere war-games, no wonder no one is harmed. In Canto V, when the issue is joined, we see death being scattered around by the eyes of various nymphs with wits dying in metaphor and in song and reviving as the lady's frowns change to smiles. Allusions to the sexual act abound in secondary meanings even as on the surface, in the living deaths and the burnings in the flames of love, the stale love-song clichés—dull remnants of a long-outworn Petrarchan convention—continue the melodramatic pretense on a heroic scale. The players must take the game seriously, play it as war—though happily a war without war's consequences—in order to preserve that artful and idyllic purity of their innocent make-believe. Yet, of course, this final battle is not the only one in the poem. To pile absurdity upon absurdity, Pope prepares us for the war-game at the close with the "combat on the velvet plain"—the game of Ombre, that earlier military maneuver disguising sexual reality, in which Belinda barely escaped "the jaws of ruin, and Codille." The card game is a symbolic prophecy of the final battle which, ironically, is itself only symbolic. The earlier battle, symbol behind the symbol, proves the game-like quality of the later: it establishes the later one as pure nonsense, as pure as itself, as pure as games alone are. If all this reminds us of the play-theory of art, it reminds us also of my earlier claim that Pope loves Belinda's world as a true aesthete.

Of course, the unaesthetic world of biological and domestic fact lurks always beneath. Pope is not afraid for us to see it beneath his language, since he wants us to know that he can cherish Belinda's world only in continual awareness of its evasions and delusions: it evades the real world by deluding itself about its own reality. Indeed, Pope is so anxious for us to be aware of his awareness of the real world that he forces an explicit representative of it upon us by inserting Clarissa's speech into a later edition of the poem. But he has shown this awareness to us all along in the sexual secondary meanings of phrase after phrase and in the "serious" half of zeugma after zeugma. We must remember also the suggestion that Belinda after all is the aggressor, and that at the crucial moment, before the baron acts, Ariel is rendered powerless by viewing

... in spite of all her art,
An earthly Lover lurking at her heart.
Surely this is the baron, so that Pope is suggesting that on one level—that of flesh-and-blood reality—Belinda is, to say the least, a willing victim, shrewd enough to know the truth of the pronouncement later made by "grave Clarissa": "... she who scorns a man, must die a maid." But Belinda also—or at least her painted image—is dedicated to the game and will play it through at all costs. So the show of resistance must be maintained, with the mock-battle of love and its sexually suggestive overtones as its proper consequence.

Once Pope feels secure that he has established Belinda's world as one we can cherish, but always with a chuckle, he dares introduce materials from other and realer worlds more openly as if to prove the power of his delicate creation. Thus the biological realities are paraded in the Cave of Spleen whose queen, be it noted, rules "the sex to fifty from fifteen." Or earlier Pope introduces figures of the great world—"Britain's statesmen" and "great Anna"—only to reduce them through zeugma to the pastoral level of his central action, the statesmen foredooming the fall "Of Foreign Tyrants and of Nymphs at home" and Anne, in the famous line, taking tea as well as counsel. Is the great world being transformed to the petty or the petty to the great? A question appropriate to the double-edged nature of the mock-heroic. Surely it can increase the stature of normally trivial subject matter by playing up that within it that surprises us with its hidden grandeur. There is also Pope's daring glance at the sordid everyday world in which

The hungry Judges soon the sentence sign,
And wretches hang that jurymen may dine.

But this break into Belinda's world is no defect. It rather reinforces the wonderfully inconsequential pastoralism of that world. This brief, terrorizing glance at the alternative should send us clutching at the innocuous grace of the "toyshop," where we need fear neither hunger nor execution though we may have the make-believe equivalent of each. And, as if to prove the point, Pope turns almost at once to Belinda, who like the statesman wants victory in war and more important, like the judge, wants to assign her own arbitrary sentence of execution: she will "foredoom" in her own way:

Belinda now, whom thirst of fame invites,
Burns to encounter two advent'rous Knights,
At Ombre singly to decide their doom.

Of course, it is Clarissa who furnishes the most serious intrusion upon Belinda's world by the alien world of undeluded common-sense reality. It is
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she, Pope tells us in his note, who is "to open more clearly the moral of the poem." How inspired a touch that earlier it was Clarissa who perversely furnished the baron with the scissors he used to commit his assault. By all means let her be the earlier Clarissa who even then, in her anti-pastoralism, plotted the downfall of the make-believe world of artifice. In her speech she breaks all the rules, says all that is unmentionable, shatters the mirror in order to replace the painted image with the flesh-and-blood creature of fleeting charms who marries, breeds, ages, wears, and has all sorts of dire consequences—eventually dust and the grave. Of course, she alone speaks only the truth. And so she does open the moral, but only to make us recognize its price. No wonder that "no applause ensu'd." She is intolerable even if she is right. In Belinda's world the fancy cheats too well to be abandoned for its grim alternative.

Even the sylphs, Pope's magnificent addition to his heroic machinery, are implicated, at least by negation, in the quarrel Belinda's world has with Clarissa. We have seen that Ariel first appears to Belinda in her dream as so attractive a youth as to cause in her a blush of desire. And we may see him throughout the poem as an unearthly rival to the baron, the "earthly Lover." It is Ariel who speaks the magnificent couplet

Know further yet; whoever fair and chaste Rejects mankind, is by some Sylph embrac'd.

What a stroke to rhyme "chaste" with "embrac'd"! Surely the latter word is to retain its fully sexual flavor here as Ariel is in effect telling Belinda to save herself for him. And as we turn to Pope's words in his dedicatory epistle to Arabella Fermor, his Belinda, we note the different, the more-than-mortal sort of embrace that sylphs are capable of. How uproariously he toyed with the poor girl:

For they say, any Mortals may enjoy the most intimate Familiarities with these gentle Spirits, upon a Condition very easie to all true Adepts, an inviolate Preservation of Chastity.

This embrace, then, is the empty equivalent of the sexual act in that rarefied world of fashion guarded by the decorous sylphs. Ariel is warning Belinda away from flesh and blood, from yielding to the realistic truths of life and marriage and death attested to by Clarissa. As an image, eternalized in art, dehumanized in perfection, she must remain Ariel's alone. It is he, anxious

Although Pope in this note speaks of her as a new character, he must mean, as Tillotson supposes, that she is new as a speaking character.
to protect his own, who keeps her safe from assault and seduction. And so, as he tells Belinda, he comes to represent "honor," the word used by us "men below" to characterize the maidenly purity the sylph has ensured. No wonder, then, that he is so solicitous and that, once he spies

\begin{quote}
An earthly Lover lurking at her heart.
Amaz'd, confus'd, he found his pow'r expir'd,
Resign'd to fate, and with a sigh retir'd.
\end{quote}

He must, with Belinda, yield the field to the baron. But she yields only the metonymic symbol rather than the thing itself; and she yields only momentarily, since she returns to Ariel's world of honor by calling for war. The sylphs, then, "wondrous fond of place," with their innumerable ranks reflecting all the levels of cosmic and human order, are the ideal superhuman attendants of the empty and yet perfect world of fashionable decorum. And they are as ineffectual, their airiness being an extension of the airiness of that disembodied world whose integrity they claim to protect.

As his translation of Homer shows Pope to have viewed it, in the old and revered heroic tradition the world of serious significance and consequence and the world of high play and the grand manner were one. Actuality was somehow hospitable to decorum. But in the dwarfed mock-heroic world Pope sees about him, actuality, in becoming sordid, rejects all style: its insolent insistence allows decorum to make only a comic appearance as its pale reflection. Instead of the all-accomplishing Homeric heroes, Pope must accept either the jurymen and wretches or the wigs and sword-knots, either Clarissa's breeder or Ariel's nymph of the "purer blush."

All this must return us to my earlier insistence that insofar as Pope values Belinda's world, which from the standpoint of reality he must satirize, he values it for an aesthetic purity that frees it from ugliness even as it leaves it utterly insignificant. It is, as I have said, a world created for art's sake, one in which the zeugma can finally create a miraculous inversion, so that the "frail China jar" becomes more precious than virginity—in effect comes to be not merely a symbol for virginity, but even an artificial substitute for it in this world of artifice.

III

But is there not, in Pope's day, a larger and more important, if equally unreal world, created for art's sake: the world of Epistle I of An Essay on Man? (I call a halt after Epistle I, since Pope opens Epistle II with those brilliant and tragic lines on man's middle nature.) Here, the aesthetic
perfection of the universe is set forth and adored. In the conclusion to the epistle, we are warned in our blindness not to claim any imperfection in the infallible order that enfolds all. And in these famous lines occur the parallel oppositions that are to fade as we recognize the full and true cosmos:

All Nature is but Art, unknown to thee;  
All Chance, Direction which thou canst not see;  
All Discord, Harmony not understood;  
All partial Evil, universal Good.

Is not such a universe decorum itself, decorum erected into a cosmic principle, all the spheres and the links in the chain of being taking and keeping their places with a propriety resembling that of the sylphs, and of the drawing room? And the seeming disturbances within it are seeming only: the discord that is a false front for harmony reminds us of the battles in "The Rape of the Lock" that are only decorous and conventional mock-battles, war-games that secure rather than threaten the world of fashion. The dangerous casualty of flesh and blood gives way to the controlled inevitability of art.

In An Essay on Man we are given a kind of ersatz and decapitated replica of the unified, catholic, psychologically and aesthetically soothing thirteenth-century universe. It is a replica that represents a last, desperate, brilliant postulation in the face of the devastations of the Renaissance and of modern science that left the medieval world (or dream world) a shambles. It even rationalizes the static generalizations of early modern science by analogizing them and coming up with the "Newtonian world-machine." It thus represents also a supreme act of human will, the will to order—and to sanity. It is, finally then, an aesthetic construct only—hence Pope's insistence in these final lines of Epistle I that we leave this delicately created china jar unflawed. (One can, of course, see the same forces, the same insistence on order at all costs, reflected in Pope's indiscriminate reduction of the troublesome dimensions of his world to the uniformity of his perfected version of the heroic couplet.) As the Humes and Kants convincingly reveal in shattering the false, dogmatic security of this world, the price of the construct is a metaphysical flimsiness—a naiveté, the reverse side of its symmetrical delicacy—that made it easy prey to the rigors of critical philosophy and the ravages of social-economic revolution.

Is it not, however, rather smug of us to assume that minds as sensitive and probing as Pope's could believe in their dream world so utterly and simply, that they could rest so secure in an unquestioning acceptance of this
architecturally perfect model universe? Perhaps at some level of their consciousness they were alive to the ultimate futility of their desperate postulation. Nevertheless, postulate they had to in Western man's final attempt to resist universal disintegration. But in this last assertion of cosmic solidarity there may have been the insecurity that was aware of its vulnerability and of the surrounding hordes of modernism already closing in. I am here suggesting, of course, that "The Rape of the Lock" is Pope's testament of the aesthetic universe, one that reveals a nostalgic yearning for it along with a critical acknowledgment of its impracticability, and that *The Dunciad* is his bleak acceptance of the chaotic forces he most feared.

One can account in a general way for the enlightenment's ethic and metaphysic as well as for its aesthetic by treating as synonyms for what is to be avoided all the first terms in the two couplets I have quoted from *An Essay on Man*, and as synonyms for what is to be sought all the second terms: thus nature, chance, discord, yielding partial evil; and art, direction, harmony, yielding universal good. And it is clear why the unchanging permanence of art must be preferred to the dynamic casualty of history, the china jar to unpredictable flesh and blood. But the spirit of Clarissa has been abroad and it leads away from art to the realities of history. It is ultimately to the last book of *The Dunciad* that she points, to Pope's prophecy of the chaos that modern historical reality brings. Perhaps we can reinterpret a couplet from this last book for our own purposes:

*But sober History restrain'd her rage,*  
*And promis'd Vengeance on a barb'rous age.*

Here in the victory of Dullness is her vengeance, what she has saved for us in the world of jurymen and wretches.

It is clear that *The Dunciad* extends in its satirical range far beyond the literary world to the ethical and metaphysical. It is clear also that to the mock-epic quality of the poem is joined a more serious, a not much less than epic—almost Dantesque—quality. There is nothing slight about the Empire of Dullness. The significance of its action is hardly beneath heroic treatment. For these creatures literally absorb all the world. Unlike the action of "The Rape of the Lock," their action has consequences indeed, woeful ones. Their action is heroic in scope; it is repulsive and base on the very grandest scale. While it reverses all heroic values, it does so in heroic terms:

*Then rose the Seed of Chaos, and of Night,*  
*To blot out Order, and extinguish Light.*

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The delicate world for art's sake is overcome by ponderous dullness, by what James termed "clumsy Life again at her stupid work." Throughout the last book of *The Dunciad* it is the discord of partiality that acts the role of destroyer: "Joy to great Chaos! let Division reign." We find the dunces, like their Laputan cousins in Swift, divorcing words from things and thought, cherishing minute parts for their own sakes, refusing to relate them to any whole. Division indeed, and subdivision. And what is chaos for Pope but the multiplication of parts run wild? Discord is no longer resolvable into harmony, or partial evil into universal good. Pope is looking forward to the destruction of totality, to the destruction of the long vogue of naive philosophical Realism, by critical philosophy—and ever more critical philosophy even down to our contemporary Oxford school. The increasing attractions of partiality to man's microscopic tendencies and the dogged dedication to immediate truth replace the dream world with a piecemeal chaos.

In *The Dunciad* Pope sees this infinitely divided world, the modern world, as the one finally suited to man, imperfect and partial as he prefers to be. Pope sees the wholeness and sameness and sanity of the art-world as beyond man, now with the placid classic vision no longer his. Man will prefer to be Clarissa, who would destroy an aesthetically satisfying world for the dull truths of homely reality and utilitarian candor. Perhaps Pope comes to feel that he has hoped for too much from man: the capacity for a willful naiveté that will leave undisturbed the golden world, well wrought like the china jar. Perhaps this is part of what Pope had in mind in dedicating *The Dunciad* to Swift who, in a famous letter in 1725, had chided Pope and Bolingbroke for a rationalistic optimism that rated man too high and that could result only in an unreasoning hatred of man for falling short. Swift was ready from the start to settle for less, to acknowledge the sordid, to avoid fabricating a purified, pastoral, anti-Clarissa world, as a comparison of the dressing rooms of his poetic heroines with that of Belinda will readily testify. Perhaps Pope's dedication was his way of acknowledging that Swift was right and that the poem which was to follow is a testament of hatred to those who have proved him wrong, even as he had always feared himself to be. For the usual picture of Pope as pure rationalist must be balanced by that of the subterranean Pope who is the pure and frightened skeptic. By the time of *The Dunciad*, Book the Fourth, Pope may know the dream is shortly to be smashed forever. But his was not a dogmatic slumber, or a slumber at all. It was an artful delusion—of himself and of us—by a mind too
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aesthetically fine to accept the universe as less than a work of art. He would have the china jar, no matter how frail, although the prophet within forced from him at last the poem that acknowledged its destruction by the rude hands swinging out from the motley mob that clutters *The Dunciad*.

IV

My fullest measure of Pope's utterance, then, would find a voice given to the felt subterranean pressures that moved his age despite his and its overt assurances—pressures generated by the tensions between rationalism and empiricism, between classicism and modernism, between confidence in a mechanism that roots the hospitable universe and anxiety about the unknown alien something or nothing that may finally lurk underneath everything out there. As a poet, through the plasticity of his brilliantly controlled and maneuvered language, Pope reached into the unvoiced capacities for praise and wonder and laughter and lament in his world and surmounted the ideological commonplaces of his time to voice all at once; even, of course, while never yielding his finally classical hold on the things of life, those precious if dainty things that in their arbitrary and nonsensical way order life and preserve sanity—and civilization. For these are the things that shape a culture even as they create its vulnerability, the transience that is built into it as one of its most charming features.

In doing all this, Pope was also proving the role and the power of poetry. He was demonstrating the special privilege of poetry to move beyond those facile propositions—drawn from a few "spokesmen" in prose and from the most obvious voice extorted from its poets—that supposedly characterize the inner "spirit of an age"; the privilege of poetry to reveal the more-than-propositional (and less-than-propositional) existential shape, the true inwardness, of that inner spirit, that which makes it of man's spirit rather than of a textbook's logic. Thus to the extent that Pope, through his maneuvers of language, becomes involved, at whatever level of consciousness, in any of the complexities of attitude and value, of hopes and frightening realizations, that I have been claiming to find—and I might call also upon the testimony of his friend Swift to support me—I would want to claim that it is in such as these that the full history of ideas in Pope and in the eighteenth century must be found; that any intellectual history which ignores these dimensions in the interest of lesser men's "documents" (and Pope himself was frequently a lesser man, as is any poet in his less than most creative moments) has sacrificed adequacy to discursive convenience. It is

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incomplete, dehumanized, forcing the true "spirit of the age" into an historian's *a priori* (or at least unexistential, pre-poetic) categories. For the ideas of an age may stem out of the more-than-ideological fullness of the poet rather than make their way into his work as a commonplace element that reduces it to themselves. And, so long as this remains a conceivable hypothesis, the historian of ideas had better worry about whether ideas—the ideas that finally come to found intellectual institutions—may not prior to their formulation as ideas be born, in an existential non-ideological form, in the fullness and the tensions of a poet's work rather than come to die there after a long, dull, existentially unchallenged institutional life of their own.

"Tott'ring . . . without a wind" by virtue of its very delicacy, Pope's aesthetic construct of a universe is unable to withstand the merest touch of the hand of reality. It now lies in the "glitt'ring dust and painted fragments" of "rich China vessels fall'n from high." But it did not only crash, though *The Dunciad* chronicles that it did. Thanks to Pope, we can cherish with him the very fragility that assured its perfection even as it guaranteed its destruction. For, like Belinda's lock, even as it ceased being a force down here, the muse "saw it upward rise." We have perhaps been too taken with the brilliance of Pope's satire and mock-heroics to sense fully the almost single-minded tribute to the lock and thus to Belinda's world contained in the moving final lines in which Pope enshrines the lock eternally in his heavens. It is, after all, one of the stars the Empire of Dullness threatens with extinction at the apocalyptic close of *The Dunciad*. So Pope's universe, seemingly destroyed, does with Belinda's lock "upward rise,"

*Though mark'd by none but quick, poetic eyes:*
(So Rome's great founder to the heav'ns withdrew,  
To Proculus alone confess'd in view)  
*A sudden Star, it shot through liquid air,  
And drew behind a radiant trail of hair.  
Not Berenice's locks first rose so bright,  
The heav'ns bespangling with dishevel'd light.  
The Sylphs behold it kindling as it flies,  
And pleas'd pursue its progress through the skies.  
This the Beau monde shall from the Mall survey,  
And hail with music its propitious ray. . . .  
Then cease, bright Nymph! to mourn thy ravish'd hair,  
Which adds new glory to the shining sphere!  
Not all the tresses that fair head can boast,  
Shall draw such envy as the Lock you lost.  
For, after all the murders of your eye,
When, after millions slain, yourself shall die;
When those fair suns shall set, as set they must,
And all those tresses shall be laid in dust,
This Lock, the Muse shall consecrate to fame,
And midst the stars inscribe Belinda's name.

As in The Dunciad Pope acknowledges the death of the art-world he has already immortalized in "The Rape of the Lock," so here he finally can afford to acknowledge Clarissa's truth about the death of the physical Belinda, but only because he is granting a resurrection to that metonymic lock which has been appropriately hailed by the "Beau monde" that it symbolizes.

For, after all the murders of your eye,
When, after millions slain, yourself shall die;
When those fair suns shall set, as set they must,
And all those tresses shall be laid in dust,
This Lock, the Muse shall consecrate to fame,
And midst the stars inscribe Belinda's name.

The poem, too, is inscribed there! And with it that illusory universe, like the "Beau monde" constructed as a work of art, whose very artificiality testifies to the persistence, the indomitable humanity of its creator's classic vision—and to his awareness that the insubstantial nature of this universe could allow it to transcend all that chaos ground into "glitt'ring dust." Powerless against chaos—that disintegrating force of historical reality whose "uncreating word" extinguished "Art after Art"—the frail universe could win immortality with the very evanescent quality that doomed it: for "quick, poetic eyes" it glows, gem-like, a sphere beyond the reach of the "universal Darkness" that buried all.