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THE
RAPE of the *LOCK*.
AN
HEROI-COMICAL
P O E M.
In FIVE CANTO'S.

Written by Mr. *POPE*.

—*A tonfo eft hoc nomen adepta capillo.*
OVID.

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THE POSTSTRUCTURAL POPE

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Ronald Schleifer

INTRODUCTION:
THE POSTSTRUCTURAL POPE

I

This collection of essays brings together rereadings of *The Rape of the Lock* in celebration of the tricentennial of Alexander Pope's birth. Its contributors have attempted to reread the *Rape* in the spirit with which we imagine Pope produced his poem almost three hundred years ago: a combination of a sense of fun, social critique and overriding good will. In pursuing this task we have tried to reread Pope in the light of the remarkable revolution in literary criticism and literary reading of the past twenty years—a revolution in reading that rivals the similar excitement of reading classical texts anew in Pope's own time.

That excitement, like our own, was governed by a strong sense of discovery and rediscovery. For Pope and his contemporaries it was the rediscovery of polity, of a contemporary voice in literature, and, perhaps most of all, the discovery of glimpses of a "future" that would be very different from the accustomed past. Such a discovery offered a national—and even imperial—future, but it also entailed a strong sense of a past by which to measure that future. When Laura Brown, in her recent rereading of Pope, argues that "Pope makes a classical 'past' out of his own present beliefs," she is describing in Pope a kind of appropriation of the past that, perhaps, is the constant gesture—and the best success—of reading and rereading "literature."¹ As many of the essays here suggest, Pope's age, like ours, was one of extraordinary change and dislocation, one that characterized itself by a host of new kinds of questions that could be brought to experience and new kinds of experience determined by those very questions.

Another way of saying this is to say that Pope's age, like our own, was an age of criticism. In fact, as a translator, an imitator, an editor, and a parodist, Pope situated himself in his career as a man of letters precisely as a literary "critic." Most

of his literary production, unlike the Romantics who followed him, were in important ways self-consciously *critical*, self-consciously "literary." In fact, one could argue that the eighteenth century invented "literature" as a self-contained object of attention, and Pope both participated in and helped determine this "invention." Pope was a great reader—one need only read the *Peri Bathos* to gain a sense of how sensitively he read his own and his contemporaries' work—and a rereading of Pope, such as we are offering here, can justly aspire to the same kind of simultaneous close attention to his language and appropriation of his language that Pope himself, as a "critical" poet, pursued.

Thus, the "rediscovery" of Pope we are attempting is, among other things, a reading of Pope's mock epic itself in relation to the wide range of new kinds of questions the criticism of the last two decades has taught us to ask about literature. As Mikhail Bakhtin noted in a very different context,

It is sometimes extremely important to expose some familiar and seemingly already well-studied phenomenon to fresh illumination by reformulating it as a problem, i.e. to illuminate new aspects of it with the aid of a set of questions that have a special bearing upon it. It is particularly important to do so in those fields where research has become bogged down in masses of meticulous and detailed—but pointless—descriptions and classifications. In the course of such a reformulation of a problem, it may turn out that what had appeared to be a limited and secondary phenomenon actually has meaning of fundamental importance for the whole field of study.²

¹Laura Brown, *Alexander Pope* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1985) 26.

²V. N. Volosinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, trans. Ladislav Matejka and I. R. Titunik (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1986) 112. For the question of attribution of Bakhtin's work, see note 4 in my essay below.

It is not my contention that studies of Pope have become "bogged down"; the bibliography included here demonstrates that important rereadings of Pope have been produced throughout the past decade. Rather, I simply want to note that the aim of this volume, like so much of Pope's own work (and especially *The Rape of the Lock*) is two-fold. It offers, I believe, an abundance of "fresh illumination" to our understanding of the *Rape*, and, at the same time, it illuminates our understanding of the breadth and usefulness of the kinds of questions literary studies have developed in the last two decades by showing (perhaps once again, but in new ways) that study of Pope's mock epic—at once a narrative, a poem, an articulation of social norms and social critique, and a "major work" in literary history and the literary canon—has "fundamental importance" for the field of literary study.

II

In this way *Poststructural Pope* volume attempts a small recapitulation of contemporary literary criticism in relation to the *Rape*. It begins with two "structuralist" studies: in "Pope and Propp," Elizabeth Hinds offers a reading of the poem in relation to the narratology of Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale*. This discussion not only attempts to situate Pope's poem in relation to contemporary narratology; more interestingly, I think, it also situates the *Rape* in relation to the "subject" of narrative in terms of character and personality. It reads narrative, as Propp does—and, as Hinds argues, Pope also does in the *Rape*—in relation to the action rather than possible motivations that could be extrapolated from that action. At the same time, Hinds "situates" Propp in relation to contemporary criticism in general: she shows how relentlessly "literal" Propp's analysis is and how it—and structuralist narratology in general—can only be understood in the context to contemporary interest in the problem of the relationship between literal and figural readings of narrative.

In a similar "structuralist" mode, Pamela Liggett attempts to account for the pleasure Pope's couplets afford through a phonemic analysis of the rhymes of the *Rape* following the lead of Roman Jakobson. In this essay, Liggett demonstrates that the power of Pope's rhymes can be understood in terms of the intricate patterning of phonemes in the poem. Here too, as in Hinds' essay, the literalness of structuralist analysis makes itself clear. Liggett begins with the

assumption that the language of the *Rape* creates the effect of pleasure. Thus "Pope's Phonemic Triangle" attempts, as Jakobson does in so much of his work, to "account for" that effect in terms of linguistic patterns and structures.

Following these more or less "introductory" essays that examine the narrative patterns and the poetic texture of *The Rape of the Lock* are essays that more fully fulfill this collection's title of *Poststructural Pope*. The first of these is David Gross's Marxist rereading of the *Rape*. Following the lead of both "post-Marxist" writers, such as Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, and earlier more orthodox Marxists, such as Christopher Caudwell and Raymond Williams, Gross attempts to situate the *Rape* in historical and social terms. Specifically, he examines the *Rape* in relation to the public and private exercise of power in the eighteenth century, what he describes as male domination in sexual relationships, best represented by the extreme case of rape, and mercantilism in socio-economic relationships, best represented by the extreme case of the slave trade.

In a similar way, my essay, "Enunciation and Genre," attempts to situate the *Rape*, and more generally the mock epic, within the Bakhtinian problematic of a *materialist* literary-historical "enunciation." This essay contrasts the synecdochical rhetoric of the *Rape*—the synecdoches by which the narrative progresses and upon which the mock-epic genre is based—with Bakhtin's materialist sense of metonymies which "answer" that rhetoric in the self-conscious dialogics of the serio-comic genre of the poem.

The next essay raises similar social questions from the points of view of feminism and feminist revisions of reader-response criticism. Kate Beard Meyers examines the *Rape* in relation to feminist reading and the possibility of recuperating more or less misogynist texts. Following Patricinio Schweickart's suggestion of a dual hermeneutics which could govern feminist reader response—both resisting and negative, but also positive in terms of a more generous mode of reading that feminism affords us—Meyers' essay both resists the assumptions that governs Pope's mock epic depiction of the war between the sexes and attempts to recover a more humane vision amid Pope's derisive laughter. In this, like so many of these essays, "Feminist Hermeneutics and Reader Response" also examines the nature of reader-response criticism and attempts to more fully place it in relation to

contemporary criticism.

The following essays continue this "situating" of both Pope's poem and of contemporary questioning of literary texts by reading the *Rape* in the contexts of deconstruction's attention to textuality and rhetoric and of the wider cultural discourse of postmodernism. Grant Holly's essay examines Pope's use of figurative language in the *Rape* and elsewhere to show the simultaneously essential and distortive nature of figurative (and figuring) language in Pope, the necessity in his work for the ambiguity and ambivalence of "mockery," the fact, in one striking instance, that "the hair, which is used as 'springes' to 'betray' birds, as fishing lines, as the line of beauty, or the brush which draws it, i.e., as part of a representational technology, [also] suggests the poetic line, Pope's verse, ringlets and couplets, cascading cantos." In a similar way, but with less attention to the close textual/rhetorical analysis Holly pursues, Tom Bowden reads the *Rape* as William Burroughs has taught us to read in his mock epic vision of contemporary life, attentive to the flatness and ironic laughter which Hugh Kenner, Fredric Jameson and Arthur Kroker have come to describe as particularly "postmodern."

The final essay of the collection, Robert Markley's discussion of the more or less mock

heroic "wars" that have inhabited studies of *The Rape of the Lock* in recent years, makes explicit the implicit thread of the collection as a whole, the ways in which reading Pope is also a reading of ourselves and our own critical preoccupations. "In one sense," Markley writes in what can be taken as a response to the passage from Bakhtin with which I began, "what is happening to Pope may be no different from what is going on elsewhere in literary studies—the questioning of what makes an author canonical. . . . But the debates about Pope seem, if anything, more contentious . . . because, I suspect, Pope—as poet, critic, translator of Homer, and editor of Shakespeare—embodied the values we have been taught to associate with the study of literature." Pope certainly does embody those values, and the fact that this collection can bring our overriding contemporary questions to *The Rape of the Lock* will, I think, prove of importance to students of Pope and of literature in general.□

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POPE AND PROPP:
NARRATIVE TRICKS IN *THE RAPE OF THE LOCK*

Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* announces itself as a "heroi-comic" epic, and from the outset critics have argued that it articulates two separate "worlds"—the one heroic, in which characters perform extraordinary, even supernatural actions, and the other comic, wherein the characters behave in an all too human manner. Recently Michael Edwards has suggested that this mock-heroic quality demands concentration on either the referential world, from which Pope borrowed the central actions of the poem, or on the world of art that gives the poem its figural form. The mock-heroic, Edwards says, "indicates a discrepancy between reality on the one hand and, on the other, poetry, language, art; or rather, it announces that reality is being changed by art."¹

By including in one fictional arena both the referential world and the world of art, *The Rape of the Lock*, Edwards insists, borders on incongruity, risking its own destruction at times by allowing two interpretive choices. In like fashion, Charles Martindale proposes two interpretive stances—that of the "child," for whom the poem reflects a literal (in Edwards' terms, "real") universe, and that of the "adult," who would concentrate on the "artistic" possibilities and thus emphasize the "mock" element of the mock-heroic.² I will argue, however, that these oppositions between art and reality, between adult and childish discourse, are subject to the same kind of analysis that Edwards' and Martindale's conclusions are based on. If the "reality" of the "adult" reading is subjected to Vladimir Propp's narrative analysis, it is revealed as being just as artificial as the "childish" discourse surrounding the poem.

In both Edwards' and Martindale's readings, the choice of interpretation turns on the notion

of "character" as a reified entity. The opposition, therefore, is always between interpretations of character—most frequently, the character of Belinda. An "adult" reading, concentrating on the "mock" element of the poem, would interpret Belinda's actions as motivated and, in a sense, premeditated; in this case, the supernatural machinery becomes nothing more than an elaborate figure for Belinda's motivations. The "child's" reading, on the other hand, interprets the supernatural characters as literal, belonging to the same world as Belinda and the other "humans." Both readings assume that "character" motivates the poem, and that the task of interpretation is to "unlock" the nature of this character. That "character, in the modern sense of the word, takes precedence over story seems natural enough after two and a half centuries of the novel," as Frank Kermode points out; however, he goes on to say, "there is nothing natural about it; it is a cultural myth."³ Character, therefore, is not necessarily prior to action in the *Rape*, and readings that engender opposition between the "art" and "reality" of Belinda's world are steeped in just this myth of character. But Pope's discourse reveals less a study of character than a game of poetic wit, in which "characters" fulfill the functions necessary to display that wit.

To mirror the two worlds that make up the "occasion" of the *Rape*, the heroic/artistic and the comic/referential, Pope includes two orders of existents: the human characters, including Belinda and Lord Petre, and the supernatural characters, Ariel, Umbriel and their circle of spiritual beings. The interpretive choice appears to encompass only two possibilities. In the childish reading, the *Rape* can be seen as a "wondertale" as defined by Vladimir Propp, a genre in which the natural and supernatural co-exist without question. If, on the other hand, the

¹Michael Edwards, "A Meaning for Mock-Heroic," *Yearbook of English Studies* 15 (1985): 48.

²Charles Martindale, "Sense and Sensibility: The Child and the Man in *The Rape of the Lock*," *Modern Language Review* 78.2 (Apr. 1983).

³Frank Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative* (Cambridge and London: Harvard Univ. Press, 1979) 76.

two worlds are incompatible, then the supernatural characters and events become nothing more than figures for the motivations of the human characters. Ariel's description of the sylphs' duties, for example, would offer two distinct readings:

Our humbler Province is to tend the Fair,
Not a less pleasing, tho' less glorious Care.
To save the Powder from too rude a Gale,
Nor let th'imprison'd Essences exhale,
To draw fresh Colours from the vernal
Flow'rs,
To steal from Rainbows ere they drop in
Show'rs
A brighter Wash; to curl their waving Hairs,
Assist their Blushes, and inspire their Airs.⁴
(2.91-98)

As long as Ariel is just one character among the humans, these lines remain literal—Ariel does just what he describes. Martindale notes that for a child, the possibility of stealing rainbows is “no absurdity at all” (277). This childlike reading, I would add, is paradoxically deadpan: it takes the supernatural to be literal, like the magic realism of García Márquez or—at a further extreme—the flatness of postmodern discourse Tom Bowden discusses in “Have a Nice Day.”⁵

To read the *Rape* from this child-like vantage point allows insight into Belinda's “character.” Belinda herself is frequently childish: for her, the world is pure possibility—if an action is conceivable, then she must follow out that possibility. Like Lord Petre, of whom Pope writes, “He saw, he wish'd, and to the Prize aspir'd,” Belinda simply knows that she desires Petre's attention and so unreflectingly sets about attaining that goal (2.30). Though Ariel warns her to “Beware of all, but most beware of Man” (1.114), as soon as Belinda receives Petre's invitation, “all the Vision vanish'd from (her) Head” (1.120). Her “reading” of the world, like the child's reading of the *Rape*, consists of absolute belief in the reality of her desires.

On the other hand, Belinda possesses an adult sensibility as well as the child's: her outburst over her stolen lock makes clear her understanding of

the “rape's” consequences. After the “rape,” she is a “marked” woman in the eyes of the world, and thus, some possibilities have vanished. She can now “read” her world with a more adult sensibility; consequently, she scorns Clarissa's advice to marry and lead a “safe” existence. Belinda's mature reading of her reputation mirrors the “adult” reading of the *Rape* in that it insists on only the practical results of actions.

Martindale believes this “adult” reading to be equally possible for the poem on the whole. The passage describing the sylphs, for instance, can be read figuratively as well as literally. That is, Ariel does not “really” exist; he is simply a figure and so his responsibility toward Belinda and her toilet becomes a symptom of her motivations. This reading cannot allow for the possibility of Ariel's reality in the human world. As a result, those who read the passage (and the entire poem) only figuratively are those “unwilling or unable to surrender themselves to fancy's maze” (Martindale 277). The methods of analysis implicated by the “adult” and “child's” readings appear incompatible: to see the spirits as real existents in a “wondertale” world allows for a strictly causal analysis, while interpreting the supernatural elements as truly supernatural—as belonging to a “separate” world of action—creates the possibility of a reading in which the supernatural exists only as a figure for the natural world.

I

If the *Rape* is read as a narrative in which the supernatural machinery operates on the same level as the human characters, it approaches Tzvetan Todorov's category of “the marvelous.”⁶ In a tale of the marvelous, supernatural characters and events are seen as “real” in that they occupy the same space and time as the natural characters and events. In this instance, the supernatural becomes part of the natural world, and participates fully in a system of narrative functions as outlined by Propp. Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* delineates the elements—dramatis personae and functions—of the wondertale. This method can reveal the false emphasis of critics like Martindale since, as it necessitates a reading of all characters and events on an identical plane of existence, it does not

⁴All quotes in this volume from *The Rape of the Lock* are taken from the Twickenham Edition of *The Rape of the Lock*, Vol. 2 of *The Poems of Alexander Pope*, 6 vols., ed. John Butt (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1940).

⁵See Tom Bowden, “Postmodern Pope: *The Rape of the Lock*; or, Have a Nice Day,” in this collection.

⁶Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, trans. Richard Howard (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1973).

allow for the opposite interpretation of the supernatural, the possibility that the spiritual might exist in a parallel but incompatible world. That is, morphological study reveals the functional value of the personae rather than a mimetic, characterological value.

Propp likened his method to "the study of the components of a plant; their mutual relationship, and the relation of the parts to the whole—in other words, the study of a plant's structure."⁷ In Propp's scheme, actions are "functions" of narrative which are prior to and determine the agents of the action. With this method, the structure of a narrative can be described by organizing or classifying its "functions," thereby describing the manner in which the agents—the personae—perform the actions necessary for the development of the plot, regardless of the existential nature of that plotted action, and whether that work is a fairy tale, a myth, a film, or a poem.

According to Propp, the characters' "identity"—or "reality," to use Edwards' term—has little to do with the formation of the wondertale; the characters simply exist to fulfill the functions of the plot and are seen as abstract agencies rather than individuals. Thus, Belinda acts as the hero of the *Rape*, the hero being that character who "directly suffers from the action in the initial plot of the villain" (Propp 50). As Lord Petre is clearly the villain—the character who abducts the "sought-for object" from the hero—then Belinda is the hero who suffers from his actions. The two personae are defined relationally rather than through "inherent" qualities of character.⁸

⁷Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, 2nd ed., trans. Laurence Scott, Indiana University Research Center in Anthropology, Folklore, and Linguistics 10 (Austin and London: Univ. of Texas Press, 1968) xxv.

⁸Propp states that he is uncertain about the morphology of a wondertale with a female hero: "Our material unfortunately does not present completely analogous cases of the realization of the lack by a princess" (78). Judging from *The Rape of the Lock*, it appears that the morphology is strikingly similar to the tale with a male hero, with the exception that the *Rape* does not end with a wedding, as do most wondertales, though it does end in an apotheosis, or "revelation" of the hero which A.J. Greimas argues is the larger category subsuming "wedding" (A.J. Greimas, *Structural Semantics: An Attempt at a Method*, trans. Daniele McDowell, Ronald Schleifer and Alan Velie [Lincoln and London: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1983]). For a discussion of the transformation of Propp's functions into functional categories, see ch. 3 of Ronald Schleifer, A. J. Greimas and the Nature of Meaning: *Linguistics, Semiotics and Discourse Theory* (London and Sydney: Croom Helm, 1987) 82-129.

The wondertale functions—Pope enumerates thirty-one—begin with the "interdiction" and "violation"; in the *Rape*, Ariel warns Belinda against going out, telling her "Beware of all, but most beware of Man" (1.114). Of course, Belinda forgets all about this warning when she wakes up to find Lord Petre's invitation. In spite of his own warning, Ariel helps her prepare for the day, performing the function of Propp's "donor," who provides the hero with a "magical agent." Belinda's magical agent is her beauty, which functions much like a talisman in its power over others. After the interdiction and violation appears a transformed "reconnaissance," in which Lord Petre receives information about Belinda from the god of Love, who grants half his wish (a transformed "delivery") and makes it possible for him to possess one lock.

The "dispatcher," according to Propp, sends the hero away from home on the journey that leads to the crisis, the "struggle." In this case, the dispatcher is also the villain, Lord Petre, who sends Belinda the invitation, prompting her to leave home. That some of these personae overlap does not preclude the morphological analysis; Propp plainly states that personae often combine to fulfill narrative functions. For instance, "the father who dispatches his son, giving him a cudgel, is at the same time a dispatcher and a donor" fulfilling two distinct "roles" as defined by different narrative functions (81). What matters in Propp's analysis, again, is not characters as reified entities, but the fact that they fulfill the tale's necessary functions.

Petre's invitation constitutes "fraud," a ploy to maneuver Belinda into a position to expose herself. Belinda complies easily ("complicity"), since the invitation appears to offer the fulfillment of her "lack." The critical function of the wondertale, Propp insists, is just this lack or villainy. "Lack" and "villainy" are the only two mutually exclusive functions, according to Propp, in that either one or the other serves as the impetus for the action. The hero either becomes aware of a lack, and goes out in search of the object to satisfy that lack, or a specific villainy occurs to prompt the hero's search.

The "rape" of the lock does not, contrary to its implications, constitute "villainy." It is, instead, a "marking" that occurs after the "struggle" of the card game, to which I will return later. The crucial function, then, is a lack: it is her desire for company, or attention, that prompts Belinda to seek the society of men, and the invitation causes her to realize her lack. Hers is not the desire of a

motivated character, but desire as manifested only through the poem's functions—Belinda's actions. As Propp writes, "the lacking object unwittingly gives away some bit of news about itself, appearing momentarily and leaving behind a clear trace of some kind, or else appearing to the hero in certain reflected forms (portraits, stories, etc.)" (76). The invitation, here, the "reflected form," brings about Belinda's consciousness of a lack.

Propp continues: "The hero . . . loses his mental equilibrium and is seized with a longing for the beauty which he beheld for barely an instant. The action of the plot develops from this directly" (76). Belinda's lack is mentioned in Canto III: "Belinda now, whom Thirst of Fame invites, / Burns to encounter two advent'rous Knights, / At Ombre singly to decide their Doom" (25-27). This lack leads eventually to her "departure," and subsequently to the "struggle," the card game in which Belinda matches her wits against Lord Petre and a third, anonymous character. Propp notes specifically, in fact, that one manifestation of the fairy tale "struggle" is often a card game (52).

Belinda does win the game ("victory"), but is shortly thereafter "marked" when Petre cuts the lock of hair. As Propp discovered, the marking of the wondertale hero is usually either an actual mark on the body or a ring or other object given the hero to wear. In light of Clarissa's speech in Canto IV advising Belinda to marry or be "branded" as an old maid, Propp's observations about marking in the wondertale become almost perfectly categorical: the functions of the story demand that Belinda become a "marked" woman (branded as a "raped" but still single woman) or marry and become respectable. At times, Propp allows, the hero can receive both a brand and a ring, and this allowance provides for Clarissa's "marriage" speech in Canto V. Belinda can still opt to marry, even though she has been marked.

Normally the hero receives the mark prior to victory over the villain, such victory resulting in the receipt of the "sought-for object." Belinda does achieve victory over Petre, and her victory liquidates the original "lack." However, the *Rape* then continues with Belinda's search for another "sought-for object," the lock of hair she has lost. Propp's morphology would term this point the pivot between two "moves": the wondertale Propp analyzes often features two similar plots, both of which revolve around a lack or villainy that must be liquidated. The second "move" in the *Rape* consists of Belinda's attempt to retrieve

her lock, her struggle with Petre, and her final "transfiguration" into a poetic object. (The *Rape* includes most of the wondertale functions, though only a few are discussed here; for a list of functions, see Table 1.)

The *Rape* follows Propp's outline of the wondertale concisely. It includes most of the functions and dramatis personae of the wondertale, though the functions do not always occur in the order Propp establishes. Propp himself is slippery on this point: he insists throughout *The Morphology* that the wondertale sequence never varies, though functions may be omitted or repeated. At times, though, he suggests that the "standard" sequence is not always present. Propp writes, for example, that "An inverted sequence gives the receipt of a helper first and then the misfortune which is liquidated by him (elements DEF before A). . . . All of these deviations do not alter the deduction concerning the typological unity and morphological kinship of fairy tales" (107-8).

While the *Rape* can be read as a wondertale, the narrative alters the sequence of events because of the added dimension of "discourse" in the "authored" text. That is, in the wondertale or myth ("folk creations," Propp calls them), only the "story" is present: as described by Gérard Genette, the "story" consists of the events that follow one another logically within the world of the characters, while the "discourse" is the author's individual rendering of that story, including flashbacks, summarized sequences, repetitions, and so forth.⁹ In an "authored" text such as the *Rape* the discourse freely alters the appearance of events in the narrative, though the "story" told by this discourse will maintain a linear, unbroken sequence. The wondertale, like most folk creations, contains little in the way of "discourse" as opposed to "story."

II

Given Propp's morphology as a means of reading *The Rape of the Lock*, the poem clearly seems to be a wondertale. However, this morphology applies only to the "childish," literal reading of the poem. Within Propp's scheme, the supernatural characters must exist on the same plane as the human, natural characters, in order to function in the same manner as the humans. At times, all of the characters *do* seem to inhabit

⁹Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1972) 27.

the same world. After Belinda's "rape," for instance, she confesses that Ariel warned her of impending doom: "A *Sylph* too warned me of the Threats of Fate, / In mystic Visions, now believed too late" (4.165-66). Here she acknowledges Ariel as a creature of her own world, one that can communicate with her.

Not only does Belinda accept the reality of the sylph, but the "narrator" of the *Rape* likewise suggests that Ariel is "real," stating that it is Ariel, "Her Guardian *Sylph*," that "prolong'd the balmy Rest" and kept Belinda from waking (1.20). Thus, the supernatural Ariel can be seen as a "naturalized" character, much in the same way that all manner of characters—horses, sprites and the like—become "naturalized" in wondertales by their communication with, and acceptance by, human characters. The other supernatural characters, Umbriel and his circle of sprites, also become naturalized by their placement alongside the human characters. The supernatural must exist in the same world as the humans to permit a morphological study in the first place.

Propp's method does not, on the other hand, allow for the opposite interpretation of the supernatural characters, that is, that these characters are truly supernatural, inhabiting a world other than our own. Read thus figuratively, they would not then function on the same plane of action as the human personae. In *The Fantastic*, Todorov calls this interpretive stance "the uncanny," wherein the supernatural exists as truly "other worldly," forcing a kind of "uninterpretability" upon that world. The supernatural, in this case, becomes alien, impenetrable. If the supernatural characters belong to a separate "world," their "reality" is not possible on the "human" plane. As a result, the functions of the supernatural personae and events cannot be explained according to "natural" laws: they become figures for, or narrative articulations of, elements in the natural world.

This alternative, "adult," reading suggests that Propp's method cannot allow for an entire plane of reading—that of the figurative. Propp himself suggests as much when he writes that, by reading a wondertale as a series of interdependent functions, "we observe that one function develops out of another with logical and artistic necessity. We see that not a single function excludes another. *They all belong to a single axis*" (64; emphasis added). In other words, all of the plot elements, including the problematical supernatural "functions," must become

"levelled" to the same plane of reading. More specifically, all elements must be viewed as syntagmatic, equal components in a cause-and-effect chain of functions relating to a single pivotal point.

While the *Rape* can be described as a wondertale, such description does not allow for the possibility that the supernatural characters and events signify figuratively—that they exist as narrative manifestations of the human characters, acting as figures for desires and motivations, just as the "frame" of the poem incorporates the "imaginary" world of the epic to figure the referential world. If these characters are seen as figures, as is often the case, then Propp's method fails to incorporate their functionality *as* figures, as existing at the same time as the action of the human characters, by insisting on a cause-and-effect relationship among all of the characters and events. By looking at the "functions" of the poem we notice, for instance, its similarity to the last part of the *Odyssey*. As Alan Dundes points out in his introduction to the second edition of the *Morphology*, functions 23-31 of the wondertale (the "unrecognized arrival" to the "wedding" or reunion) are also present at the end of the *Odyssey*.¹⁰ These similarities underscore the *Rape*'s epic structure, but the functional analysis leaves behind the figurative elements—the "mock" component of the mock-epic.

The *Rape* calls out for a figurative analysis since, being both "heroic" and "comic," it elicits a view of the action as both literal and figurative. The title itself announces this figurative intention with the incompatible terms "rape" and "lock," setting the stage for a reading of actions as something other than what they appear to be. Further, when the sylphs attend to Belinda's toilet and "create" her magical beauty, we do not have to accept them literally; the figurative interpretation allows for the possibility that Belinda is simply getting dressed. This figurative interpretation accounts for Martindale's idea of the "adult" reading of the *Rape*, according to which the actions of the supernatural creatures do not "really" exist, but are merely narrative embodiments of features of the human characters. Such a reading would account for the "mock" element of the mock-heroic.

Just as the *Rape* allows for the literal interpretation by endowing Ariel with physical form—within the perception of Belinda and the "narrator"—it also provides grounds for the

¹⁰Alan Dundes, *Introd.*, *Morphology of the Folktale* xiv.

figurative reading. Several of Pope's descriptions suggest that the supernatural elements are absent to the eyes of the ordinary world, hinting that they may, in fact, be narrative figures for states of being. In Canto II, for instance, as Ariel gathers the "Denizens of Air" to protect Belinda, the motions of the sylphs are described naturalistically: "Soft o'er the Shrouds Aerial Whispers breathe, / That seem'd but Zephyrs to the Train beneath" (56-58). As Edwards has pointed out, "the spirits are a modality of a real and indeed a local scene, the Thames from London to Hampton Court. They are a way of perceiving and describing the breezes, the lights, and the shimmering colours along the river" (59). The humans do not perceive the sylphs here, as they are "Transparent Forms, too fine for mortal Sight" (61).

Read figuratively, the supernatural characters do seem to embody Belinda's motivations. In Canto IV, to take only one example, when Belinda bursts into tears, the "cause" of those tears is described figuratively as the machinations of Umbriel and his vial of sorrows. To read the sprites as motivations, however, we must envision them as being "unreal"; that is, they inhabit a plane of understanding that cannot co-exist with the human characters. The possibility of figuration of motives is the point at which any morphological analysis breaks down. In fact, Propp's discussion of motivations illuminates the incompatibility of literal and figurative readings of supernatural characters, and the mock-epic in general: he writes that "motivations belong among the most inconstant and unstable elements of the folktale" (75). They do not, therefore, constitute "functions" in his morphology.

As long as motivations, read into the supernatural figures of the *Rape*, cannot be explained as functions, they remain outside the purview of the morphology. However, the machinery does perform functionally, carrying out the necessary actions for the narrative to function. Propp's method is capable of describing a work only when functions determine the personae, when personae do not exist as individuated, *motivated* characters. When motivations take on a life of their own, and therefore seem to determine the action, as when Umbriel in the *Rape* embodies Belinda's rage, the personae then come to anchor the narrative functions, rather than the other way around. As a result, the functional analysis points up the artificial categories of oppositions proposed by

Edwards and Martindale: in both the "childish" and "adult" readings, or, in Edwards' terms, the opposition between the poem read as "art" or "reality," personae must be read as motivated, novelistic "characters."

III

The issue of motivations determines the failure of these dichotomies of readings. The two possible readings for the supernatural characters in *The Rape of the Lock*—the literal and figurative—suggest a false interpretive dilemma, in which the supernatural characters are read as real or unreal, given the world of the poem as a ground of the "real." This implied incompatibility surfaces in Martindale's dichotomy of the "child" and "adult" readings. However, these "opposing" readings arise from the same supposition—that "character" is a reified entity in the novelistic sense. The "child's" reading gives a sense of "reality" to the supernatural, while the "adult" reading subsumes the supernatural into the "real." Both presuppose a myth of character, generated, as Kermode suggests, by "two and a half centuries of the novel" upon which "we found our conventional notions of individuality" (76-77). In Kermode's terms, this kind of character contains depth or "secrets," which become "motivations" in the adult reading. But there are no secrets in the *Rape*: it demonstrates what Todorov calls "literary *a-psychologism*," wherein "the word 'character' signifies something altogether different from psychological coherence or the description of idiosyncrasy."¹¹ Propp's method shows that each function of the narrative is realized at the level of discourse—in plain sight—allowing the poetic or artificial to become the center of attention.

The *Rape*'s personae, while they resemble motivated characters, materialize as functions or vehicles to showcase Pope's poetic wit. Like an elaborate game of cards, the *Rape* manoeuvres its personae into positions of artificial importance, "tricking" its readers into provisional belief in their three-dimensional reality. Reduced to its morphological functions, though, the poem reveals its game-like qualities. In fact, Claude Lévi-Strauss translates Propp's term "move" as *partie*, meaning, as Lévi-Strauss says, "both the principal division of a tale and a card or chess game"—the trick upon which the poem is

¹¹Tzvetan Todorov, *The Poetics of Prose*, trans. Richard Howard (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1977) 66.

established.¹² *The Rape of the Lock* pivots on the move of the card game, between Belinda and Petre, at the same time the entire poem behaves as a card game, shuffling both "human" and supernatural personae around to fulfill first one and then another function of the narrative.

The rhetorical strategy most strongly disruptive of the "character" myth is Pope's heroic couplet, in which repetition undermines any sense of the poetic action's mimetic "reality." From the first lines of the poem, a near-exact repetition draws attention to the narrative surface at the expense of depth of content. "What dire Offense from am'rous Causes springs, / What mighty Contests rise from trivial Things" could be subjected to Martindale's dichotomy of the "adult" and "childish" readings, wherein the first verb, "springs," recalls an "adult," heroic action, while the second, "rise," reduces the action to the mundane. Yet, on the surface of things, the second line provides only a new line to display Pope's wares: the heroic couplet in Pope delays any real "progression" of narrative enough to call attention to its qualities as poetry. The *Rape* is filled with such rhetorical play, as in Ariel's lines

They shift the moving Toyshop of their
Heart;
Where Wigs with Wigs, with Sword-knots
Sword-knots strive,
Beaus banish Beaus, and Coaches Coaches
drive.

(1.100-102)

Here, the repetition and inversions overpower any possible mimetic content. The "trick," for Pope, is to convince his readers of the personae's value as characters against such linguistic display.

Emphasis on "character" has pervaded criticism of the poem to the extent that the fiction

has reached the status of myth. Both Edwards and Martindale, descendents of Cleanth Brooks and the New Critics, concentrate on the possible paradigmatic features of Pope's personae, as though these "characters" had a three-dimensional reality outside the poem. Yet, as Kermode reveals, the fiction of character became established as a myth only after the advent of the novel, significantly after the *Rape's* appearance, at which point novelistic character began to perform symbolically rather than allegorically. As Paul de Man writes, the development of the symbolic occurred during "the growth of an aesthetics that refus(ed) to distinguish between experience and the representation of this experience."¹³ The result was a mythologizing of character and a concurrent forgetting of surface rhetorical possibilities. Christopher Norris points out the necessity of reconstructing a rhetorical reading in order to "deconstruct this mystification of language by ceaselessly revealing the rhetorical sleights of hand upon which its claims are ultimately based."¹⁴ Pope's "characters" function, along with other rhetorical devices, at the surface of the *Rape*, where they perform necessary functions, just as face cards, though given privileged status, function within the same system of rules as number cards. By ignoring their representational value, by taking representation for reality, readings from "character" succumb to Pope's rhetorical trick of character. □

¹³Paul de Man, "The Rhetoric of Temporality," *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1983) 188.

¹⁴Christopher Norris, "Pope Among the Formalists," *Post-structuralist Readings of English Poetry*, eds. Richard Machin and Christopher Norris (Cambridge and London: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1987) 153.

¹²Claude Lévi-Strauss, "Structure and Form: Reflections on a Work by Vladimir Propp," *Structural Anthropology II*, trans. Monique Layton (New York: Basic Books, 1976) 124. Significantly, *partie* can also refer to an entire game as well as one move.

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TABLE 1

PROPP'S FUNCTIONS	THE RAPE PLOT ELEMENTS
1. INITIAL SITUATION	Belinda's vanity: initially, 1.15-114
2. INTERDICTION: An interdiction is addressed to the hero	Ariel warns Belinda to beware of men: 1.107-14
3. VIOLATION: The interdiction is violated	Belinda forgets the warning when she sees the invitation: 1.117-20
4. RECONNAISSANCE: The villain makes an attempt at reconnaissance	Petre prays to Love to possess Belinda's lock: 2.35-44
5. DELIVERY: The villain receives information about his victim	Love grants Petre half his wish: 2.45-46
6. FRAUD: The villain attempts to deceive his victim in order to take possession of him or of his belongings	Petre sends Belinda the invitation: prior to the poem
7. COMPLICITY: The victim submits to deception and thereby unwittingly helps the enemy	Belinda decides to accept the invitation: 1.119-20
8a. LACK: One member of a family lacks something or desires to have something	Belinda lacks the company of men from the beginning; the poem expresses her lack at 3.25-27
9. MEDIATION, THE CONNECTIVE MOMENT: Misfortune or shortage is made known: the hero is either approached with a request and responds to it of his own accord, or is commanded and dispatched	Belinda receives the invitation (also #6, FRAUD): 1.117
10. BEGINNING COUNTERACTION: The seeker (hero) agrees to or decides upon counteraction	Belinda dresses to meet Petre: 1.121-48
11. DEPARTURE: The hero leaves home	Belinda goes to meet Petre: between Cantos I and II
12. FIRST FUNCTION OF THE DONOR: The hero is tested, interrogated, attacked, etc. in preparation for receiving either a magical agent or helper	Ariel looks at Belinda's heart just prior to the "rape" to see if she merits his protection: 3.139-42*
13. HERO'S REACTION: The hero reacts to the actions of the future donor	Belinda harbors an "earthly Lover" in her heart; thus, Ariel abandons her (she fails the test): 3.143-47

*When Ariel "tests" Belinda, finding an "earthly Lover" and subsequently deserting her, his action, while it constitutes the "First Function of the Donor," does not constitute the first

help he has offered Belinda. Ariel has previously assisted Belinda with her toilette; however, function #12 reveals the first time Ariel has "tested" Belinda.

14. THE PROVISION, RECEIPT OF A MAGICAL AGENT: A magical agent at the disposal of the hero	Ariel does not provide Belinda with protection; no magical agent received
15. SPATIAL TRANSLOCATION: The hero is transferred, reaches or is led to the whereabouts of an object of search	Belinda meets Petre and others; boating on the Thames: 2.47-52.
16. STRUGGLE: The hero and villain join in direct combat	Belinda and Petre play cards: 3.29-100
17. BRANDING, MARKING: The hero is branded	Petre cuts Belinda's lock: 3.147-54
18. VICTORY: The villain is defeated	Belinda defeats Petre at cards: 3.99-100
19. LACK LIQUIDATED: The initial misfortune or lack is liquidated	Belinda receives attention from Petre: 2.47-end and all of Canto III
20. RETURN: The hero returns	Belinda returns home: between Cantos III and IV
21. PURSUIT, CHASE: The hero is pursued	Umbriel unleashes the bag of Spleen (4.90-94) and bag of Sorrows (4.142-45) over Belinda
22. RESCUE: The hero is rescued from pursuit	Sir Plume tries, but fails, to retrieve the lock and ease Belinda's sorrow: 4.123-30
23. UNRECOGNIZED ARRIVAL: The hero, unrecognized, arrives home or in another country	Belinda appears, dishevelled, to chastise Petre: 4.144-76
24. LACK: The hero again experiences a lack	Belinda loses her lock and is "opprest": 4.1-10
25. DIFFICULT TASK: A difficult task is proposed to the hero	At Thalestris' prompting, Belinda tries to "subdue" Petre with snuff and a "deadly bodkin": 5.75-96
26. SOLUTION: A task is accomplished	Petre is subdued: 5.97-98
27. RECOGNITION: The hero is recognized	Belinda is recognized immediately upon showing her new appearance: 4.144-76
28. EXPOSURE: The false hero or villain is exposed	Thalestris argues with Clarissa's notions about marriage: 5.35-36
29. TRANSFIGURATION: The hero is given a new appearance	The lock ascends and becomes a star: 5.123-32; Belinda is also promised transfiguration through poetry: 5.146-50
30. PUNISHMENT: The villain is punished	Petre loses the lock he insisted on keeping: 5.109-12
31. WEDDING: The hero is married and ascends to the throne	Belinda does not marry, but she is transfigured to the world of poetry: 5.146-50

POPE'S PHONEMIC TRIANGLES:
THE HEROIC COUPLET IN *THE RAPE OF THE LOCK*

Contemporary English is not so different from eighteenth-century language that readers have lost the remarkable rhythmical and intellectual effects of Alexander Pope's verse. In regard to "rhyme and reason," "sound and sense," G. S. Rousseau writes,

We can only guess at the effect of Pope's poem [*The Rape of the Lock*] upon his contemporaries. It probably had a wholly pleasing effect on the eighteenth-century reader.¹

Part of why Rousseau thought eighteenth-century readers experienced pleasing effects is because *he* experienced pleasing effects—and he knows other readers experience them also. He says, in fact, that "If sound and sense are wedded, so, too, is the relation of rhyme and reason" (11). Pope's achievement in his famous narrative poem has been described as unifying "the narrator's viewpoint by holding a light and brilliant tone."² How has criticism accounted for the "brilliant tone" and pleasurable effects of *The Rape of the Lock*? Tradition tells us that Pope's satire is a heroic-comical epic composed of five cantos written in rhymed iambic pentameter. Thus, readers know that the subject is light-hearted and patterned after an epic; they know that the lines are structured as heroic couplets. Is the subject really non-serious? Does the term "heroic couplet" really explain the rhythmical effects? I think the answer to both of these is no.

In fact, those issues and this essay pose the question: How can the effects of reading *The Rape of the Lock* be more completely accounted for? What is the intuitive "givenness" that Roman Jakobson says is evident to every speaker?³ What occurs when a reader sees Pope's genius in the

lines, "But see how oft Ambitious Aims are cross'd,/ And Chiefs contend 'till all the Prize is lost!" (5.107-8)? What factors exist in those lines to make them roll off the tongue and stay in the mind? Is alliteration in both line 107 and 108, and the end rhyme enough to explain the effect? How do we account for what Rousseau calls Pope's "technical virtuosity" (4)? William Frost thinks that "in *The Rape of the Lock* every poetic and logical energy is brought into focus, no syllable giving the effect of having been placed or selected at random."⁴ This well-chosen syllable is the point where I want to begin to find some of the answers.

Roman Jakobson gave modern readers a method to find such answers when he performed extensive poetic analyses. These analyses provide a linguistic approach, specifically a phonemic one, that I want to use as a critical tool. Jakobson's intensive work with poems of different languages brought him to believe that the pleasurable effects of poetry are produced by subliminal verbal patterning:

The immediate and spontaneous grasp of effects without rational elicitation of the processes by which they are produced is not confined to the oral tradition and its transmitters [i.e., effects can be produced in writing]. Intuition may act as the main or, not seldom, even sole designer of the complicated phonological and grammatical structures in the writings of individual poets. Such structures . . . can function . . . both in the poet's creative work and in its perception by the sensitive reader.⁵

Thus, Jakobson believes that structures which are

¹G. S. Rousseau, *Twentieth Century Interpretations of The Rape of the Lock* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1969) 11.

²John A. Jones, *Pope's Couplet Art* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio Univ. Press, 1969) 81.

³Elmar Holenstein, *Roman Jakobson's Approach to Language: Phenomenological Structuralism*, trans. Catherine Schelbert and Tarcisius Schelbert (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1976) 60.

⁴William Frost, "The Rape of the Lock and Pope's Homer," *Philological Quarterly* 8 (1947): 328.

unrecognizable on the conscious level account for effects in the reader's perception. The purpose of this study is to discover what phonemic structures exist to which readers respond.

I do not believe this analysis will increase general appreciation of Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*. Rather, the analysis seeks to explain the appreciation readers already experience. As Jonathan Culler says in his critique of Roman Jakobson,

It is only by starting with the effects of a poem and attempting to see how grammatical structures contribute to and help to account for those effects that one can avoid the mistakes which result if one thinks of grammatical analysis as an interpretive method.⁶

Beginning then with the effects produced in the reader or Jakobson's "mental givenness," a reader can examine the fifth canto of Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* and see that complex, multi-layered phonemic correspondences or structures are in place, particularly in regard to rhymes. The nature of these structures and how they operate is the central issue here. The first step is to locate the structures.

Pope used every identifiable form of rhyme in his verse. Alliteration, assonance and consonance, evident in lines 107 and 108, pervade his mock epic as does the powerful end rhyme. Hugh Kenner speaks of the most "complete form of rhyme" as the pun: "Not merely the vowels, not merely the terminal consonants, but every phoneme in two words will coincide."⁷ That puns are rhymes in the most fundamental and complete way, especially in phonemic correspondence, is a linguistic description. Kenner later says of Pope,

He paid nearly unprecedented attention to what each of two rhyme-words meant, since to build a structure of some intricacy on their meaning was one way to forestall the suspicion that nothing better than "the troublesom and modern bondage of

Rimeing" had produced them.

(78)

The key phrase from that statement is "to build a structure of some intricacy." To note in *The Rape of the Lock* the heroic couplet with its composition of binary opposition or caesura, in two rhymed lines, or to note alliteration, consonance and assonance in the lines, only begins to explain the effects of Pope's verse. What does a close phonemic analysis reveal?

In Canto V, two main phonemic structures operate in the verse: a quadrilateral one, often composed of binary oppositions, and a triangular one, or three-element matrix. The most common structure, the quadrilateral one, is simply the repetition of one phoneme four times in two lines. Two of the phonemes are in one line and two are in the next line. For example, the phoneme /θ/ is repeated in the quadrilateral pattern in the following couplet:

But this bold Lord, with manly Strength indu'd,
She with ~~one Finger and a Thumb~~ subdu'd:
(5.79-80)

Every reader notices the couplet not only rhymes, but also that each line is highly monosyllabic (each line has just two bisyllabic words—"manly," "indued" in line 79 and "finger" and "subdued" in line 80). One thing that reinforces the relationship between the lines, however, is more subtle: the presence of the phoneme /θ/ in a quadrilateral relationship. The "th" in "with" in line 79 corresponds not only to the "th" in "strength" but also to the "th" in "with" in line 80 and "th" in "thumb." The relationship described graphically by the lines between the phonemes reveals the quadrilateral.

Many of these quadrilateral relationships exist throughout Canto V. All of them are not the same shape, however. Some are more irregular, as in the next example:

There ~~broken Vows, and Death-bed~~ Alms are found,
And Lovers' Hearts with ~~Ends of Riband~~ bound,
(5.117-18)

In this instance, the phoneme /b/ is found near the beginning of line 117 in "broken," and in the mid-section with "deathbed." Yet in line 118, /b/ is found at the end in "riband" and "bound." Those phonemic placements create a non-symmetrical quadrilateral that is described by the lines joining the /b/ phoneme. It is also of interest that "broken" in line 117 contains the phoneme

⁶Roman Jakobson, *Verbal Art, Verbal Sign, Verbal Time*, eds. Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minneapolis Press, 1985) 68.

⁷Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics* (New York: Cornell Univ. Press, 1975) 73.

⁸Hugh Kenner, "Pope's Reasonable Rhymes," *ELH* 41 (1974): 74.

in an initial position and so does "bound" at the end of line 118. The two placements create a kind of opposition that is indicated in the following example:

There broken Vows, and Death-bed Alms are found,
And Lovers' Hearts with ~~Ends of Riband~~ bound,

Another quadrilateral also exists in the couplet and is indicated by the following lines:

There broken Vows, and ~~Death-bed Alms~~ are found,
And Lovers' Hearts with ~~Ends of Riband~~ bound,

In this instance the quadrilateral is a rectangular shape formed by the phoneme /d/ in the terminal position of "Deathbed," "found," on the upper side, and "Ends," "Riband" and "bound" on the lower side. This quadrilateral serves to create forces that connect the couplet in ways other than end rhyme. In addition, line 118, which contains three repeating phonemes compared to the two of line 117, is weighted by means of sounds in a way that is not described graphically.

Other examples include,

~~What then remains but well our Pow'r to use,~~
And keep good Humour still ~~whate'er we lose?~~
(5.29-30)

In these lines the quadrilateral is formed by the phoneme /w/. Other quadrilateral relationships exist throughout the canto, and some involve particular binary oppositions. For example,

Why deck'd with all that Land and Sea afford,
Why Angels call'd, and Angel-like ador'd?
(5.11-12)

In this instance the phoneme /l/ is in a final syllable position in "all" and "called" in lines 11 and 12, and in the initial position in "Land" and "like." Through the opposition, Pope achieves a kind of unity between elements of line 11 to elements of line 12 that simultaneously pulls the beginnings of each line from the ends, yet joins the beginnings and ends of the two lines to each other. I have indicated that relationship with dashed lines. Further examples help illustrate the pattern:

This Lock, the ~~Muse~~ shall consecrate to Fame,
And ~~midst~~ the Stars inscribe ~~Belinda's~~ Name.
(5.149-50)

In this instance, one pair of the binaries is formed by the initial consonant of /m/ in "Muse" and

"mid'st" of the two lines and the opposing binaries are terminal phonemes /m/ in "Fame" and "Name."

Another example of the phonemic correspondence that exists within the canto is in the following lines:

Not half so fixt the Trojan cou'd remain,
While Anna begg'd and ~~Dido rag'd~~ in vain,
Then ~~grave Charissa~~ graceful way'd her Fan;
Silence ensu'd, and thus the Nymph began.
(5.5-8)

Here are two couplets, lines 5 and 6 forming the first, and lines 7 and 8 forming the second. The two interior lines which are not couplets demonstrate, however, in a two-line package, three additional techniques in Pope's verse. First, the arrangement of phoneme /g/ in "begg'd," "rag'd," "grave," and "graceful" seems to form a neat quadrilateral. Graphemically it does. But phonemically only three of the sounds are truly /g/—those of "begged," "grave" and "graceful"; the "g" in "raged" is the phoneme /j/ and thus does not belong in the same category as the other "g"s. We now have a triangular group of forces composed of the phoneme /g/. A second triangular configuration also exists between lines 6 and 7 involving the phoneme /v/. "Vain," "grave" and "waved" form another matrix to connect the verse in ways they would not otherwise be paired. These structures explain the third significant feature of the example: Pope used sounds as well as meaning to support the unity of his verse *between* couplets as well as within them. The meaning of his poem is arranged over these structures in much the same way that exterior surfaces are placed over support structures in architecture.

Do triangular forces occur within couplets? The answer is yes—to the same degree, if not more, than between. For example,

How vain are all ~~these Glories~~, all our Pains,
Unless good Sense preserve what ~~Beauty~~ gains:
(5.15-16)

In this couplet the phoneme /g/ occurs in one triangle and the adjacent phonemes, /e/ and /n/, represented by "ain" appears in another. Many more examples appear in Canto V:

Nor think, ~~to die~~ dejects my Lofty mind;
All that I ~~dread~~, is leaving you behind!
(5.99-100)

"Say, why are Beauties prais'd and ~~honour'd~~ most,
The wise ~~Man's~~ Passion, and the vain Man's Toast?
(5.9-10)

That Men may say, when we the Front-box grace,
Behold the ~~first in Virtue, as in face!~~

(5.17-18)

And hence th' Egregious Wizard ~~shall~~ foredoom
The ~~fate of Louis, and the fall of Rome.~~

(5.138-39)

These examples all demonstrate initial-consonant triangular correspondence. But internal-consonant and terminal-consonant triangles exist as well,

So when bold ~~Home~~ makes the Gods engage,
And heav'nly Breasts with ~~human~~ Passions rage;

(5.45-46)

When bold Sir ~~Plume~~ had drawn ~~Clarissa~~ down,
~~Chloe~~ stepped in, and kill'd him with a ~~Frown;~~

(5.66-67)

Among these phonemic triangles a particular kind emerges that explains in part another feature of Pope's verse—why the end rhyme is so appealing to the reader's ear. In 34 of 150 lines in Canto V, one end-rhyme word in a couplet will be a consecutive combination of phonemes found in the preceding or following line of the couplet. This means that in a couplet, one rhyme word will be the combination of phonemes found in the other line. For example,

Then grave ~~Clarissa~~ graceful wav'd her ~~Fan~~;
Silence ensu'd, and thus the ~~Nymph~~ began.

(5.7-8)

In this instance, the word "Fan" is composed of the phonemes /f/, /ae/ and /n/. The correspondence with "began" is obvious because we are taught to see it. This is true in much the way that Stanley Fish says that structure affects our perceptions. "The patterns the ear hears (like the patterns the eye sees) are the patterns its perceptual habits make available."⁸ But in this couplet, an unobvious relationship is in place. The "ph" in "nymph" contributes the /f/ phoneme to the force of the end rhyme in the next line and thus, through a triangular relationship of "ph," "an" and "f," the phonemes contribute an important element to the effect of the rhyme. Here is another instance,

Say, why are Beauties prais'd and honour'd most,
The wise Man's Passion, and the vain ~~Man's~~ Toast?

(5.9-10)

⁸Stanley E. Fish, "Interpreting the *Variorum*," *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, ed. Robert Con Davis (New York: Longman, 1986) 404.

In these lines, the sounds in "most" are repeated in "man's" and "toast."

This kind of rhyme pattern is reminiscent of the fun Lewis Carroll had in forming new words by mentally overlapping the sounds of one word to form another—such as "lithe" and "slimy" to make "slithy." Pope, of course, is not interested in that kind of experimenting. Instead, he uses specific phonemic patterns to have fun on a semantic level. The "wit" or cleverness that emerges from Pope's verse on a pure sound level is what contributes to the pleasure of reading the poem. Other triangular patterns of phonemes demonstrate Pope's extensive use of the combining device:

To patch, nay ogle, might become a ~~Saint~~,
Nor cou'd it sure be such a ~~Sin~~ to paint.

(5.23-24)

/s/ from "sin" and "aint" from "paint" combine to produce "saint." Here each of the phonemes also comes at an accented syllable, and in the following examples:

Not half so fixt the ~~Trojan~~ cou'd remain,
While ~~Anna~~ begg'd and ~~Dido~~ rag'd in vain.

(5.5-6)

/r/ from "raged" and "ain" from "vain" combine to form "remain."

"To Arms, to Arms!" the fierce ~~Virago~~ cries,
And swift as Lightning to the ~~Combat~~ flies.

(37-38)

/c/ from "combat" and "ies" from "flies" combine to form "cries." Pope transforms the liquid phoneme /r/ in "cries" to another liquid, /l/, in "flies."

This even happens when the combination is inverted, as in the next two examples,

Safe from the treach'rous Friend, the daring ~~Spark~~,
The Glance by Day, the Whisper in the ~~Dark~~.

(1.73-74)

/d/ from "daring" and "ark" from "spark" combine to form "dark."

That Men may say, when we the Front-box grace,
Behold the first in Virtue, as in ~~Face!~~

(5.17-18)

/f/ from "front" and "ace" from "grace" combine to form "face."

The complexes of triangles formed by these groups of phonemes support the relationship

between the two lines of so many couplets in Pope's verse that they visually suggest the effect of an architectural structure. Another example particularly rich in triangles illustrates the point:

~~Why round our Coaches crowd the white-glov'd Beaux,~~
~~Why bows the Side-box from its inmost Rows?~~

(5.13-14)

The /w/ phoneme in "Why" of lines 13 and 14 forms a triangle with the /w/ of "white-gloved."

~~Why round our Coaches crowd the white-glov'd Beaux,~~
~~Why bows the Side-box from its inmost Rows?~~

In this instance the /o/ of "Coaches," "Beaux" and "Rows" forms a second triangle in the same couplet.

~~Why round our Coaches crowd the white-glov'd Beaux,~~
~~Why bows the Side-box from its inmost Rows?~~

And here the /b/ of "bows," "box" and "Beaux" forms a third triangle. These triangles of sound, however, occur simultaneously, and visually the effect looks like this:

~~Why round our Coaches crowd the white-glov'd Beaux,~~
~~Why bows the Side-box from its inmost Rows?~~

This visual array of triangles is analogous to the architectural principle of the geodesic dome which is based on the fact that the strongest structure is the triangle. Prenis says, "The triangle is the only truly rigid shape. It is the basis for all structures."⁹ More cogent to this study, however, are the statements of Hugh Kenner in the introduction to *Geodesic Math* where he explains that "Geodesics is a technique for making structures . . . by exploiting a three-way grid of tensile forces."¹⁰ Geodesics as "forces" that are exploited is a convenient metaphor for a structuralist's view of *The Rape of the Lock* in which relationships are discovered. The architectural principle that operates in poetry supports Jakobson's assertion that "natural language and mathematics serve as metalanguage for each other" (Holenstein 188). Thus, in Pope's poem the phonemic triangle performs in a way to give a kind of tensile strength to all parts of his verse

⁹John Prenis, *The Dome Builders Handbook* (Philadelphia: Running Press, 1973) 3.

¹⁰Hugh Kenner, *Geodesic Math and How to Use It* (Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1976) vii.

that are otherwise only accounted for in linear ways—vertical rhyme and horizontal alliteration or assonance. This tensile strength is a key part of what readers respond to in the poem.

I believe these visual effects also exist on the sound level. In fact, Jakobson argues that

Any unbiased, attentive, exhaustive, total description of the selection, distribution and interrelation of diverse morphological classes and syntactic constructions in a given poem surprises the examiner himself by unexpected, striking symmetries and anti-symmetries, balanced structures, efficient accumulation of equivalent forms and salient contrasts, finally by rigid restrictions in the repertory of morphological and syntactic constituents used in the poem, eliminations which, on the other hand, permit us to follow the masterly interplay of the actualized constructions.¹¹

Jakobson offers linguistic examiners a rich opportunity to discover and implement ways in which poetry can be read. His observation that "a given poem surprises the examiner himself by unexpected, striking symmetries and anti-symmetries" is a truly accurate description of analysis. Ultimately, in the *The Rape of the Lock* the profusion of relationships—triangles, quadrilaterals, heroic couplets, alliterations, assonances, and consonants—are joined by other features which are not described here.

For example, the /s/ and its sister phoneme /z/ (both are alveolar spirants) are not used in the graphic analyses of this essay because, during an analysis, it becomes obvious to the examiner that there are so many repetitions of the /s/, the phoneme assumes a different kind of importance. To be specific, of the 150 lines in Canto V, all but three contain /s/. Nearly all of those 147 lines have two /s/ phonemes and most have more than three. It is clear that Canto V, perhaps the whole poem, is highly sibilant. This observation raises several questions such as, how could critics overlook this dominant feature? And what does its presence mean to the sense of parody in the poem? I suggest that on one level, the /s/ phoneme is a sound that allows for a verbal smoothness which, for example, stops and fricatives prevent. And I suggest that on the semantic level the /s/ phoneme contributes to the

¹¹Roman Jakobson, "Poetry of Grammar and Grammar of Poetry," *Lingua* 21 (1968): 603.

generally high degree of activity within the canto that is performed by the sylphs and gnomes. /s/ is also the most common initial phoneme in the English language and structurally is the most common designation for the plural. Any judicious look at frequency of the /s/ phoneme must account for these last two facts.

Jakobson's convincing and exhaustive work in phonology is critical in understanding the efficacy of Pope's poetry. Because Jakobson's close analytic techniques produce identifiable structures, the evidence—in this case the triangular couplet structure—makes clear what was before merely intuitive. Several studies of Pope's couplets have been, as George Amis says, "often illuminating" but "rather impressionistic."¹² I believe such illuminating studies can be described in non-impressionistic ways. John Jones writes that "The couplets of *The Rape of the Lock* brilliantly climax all of Pope's earlier couplet structures" and that the narrative

¹²George T. Amis, "The Structure of the Augustan Couplet," *Genre* 9 (Spring 1976): 37.

format of the poem required "a couplet strategy of the highest poetic order" (80). Such accolades deserve the best justification an "examiner" can provide, and Jakobson's structuralist methods go far in providing that justification. Through an explanation of subliminal poetic effects, in this case, phonemic triangles, we can discover what elements are successful in creating effects in a reader. As Barthes observes, "it [the text] produces, in me, the best pleasure if it manages to make itself heard indirectly."¹³ This phonemic analysis accounts for some of the indirect, pleasurable effects of Pope's verse on a reader, and in doing so it contributes to a body of knowledge that allows readers to understand what affects human response.□

¹³Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975) 24.

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"THE CONQU'RING FORCE OF UNRESISTED STEEL":
POPE AND POWER IN *THE RAPE OF THE LOCK*

I

I propose in this essay to consider *The Rape of the Lock* from a Marxist perspective. It seems evident to me that the implications of Marxism and the specific nature of Pope's poem are such as to demand, eventually, a focus on questions of both political and personal power. I will want to discuss, in the tradition of Raymond Williams and others, the domination in a capitalist system just coming into existence in Pope's day of exchange value and capital accumulation over all other values or ideological formations we may see manifested in a culture, whether spiritual, ethical or existential. More specifically, I find that I must foreground questions of imperialist geo-political domination based on race and slavery, and personal, social domination based on gender in my account of how questions of power and desire, politics and culture are manifested and contemplated in *The Rape of the Lock*.

I shall begin with some preliminary considerations with regard to Marxism, criticism, Pope's long poem, and the literary canon. To bring them together, in this age of postmodernism and late capitalism, seems to lead to some important issues which are, I hope, not without significance for the direction of cultural studies in our day, especially when such investigations choose to focus on Pope and the beginnings of the era in which we now live and work.

Like any of the fruits of cultural practice, Pope's "herio-comical poem" is embedded in the thickly-textured moment of its writing and in the history of what preceded it, what has followed it, and what has yet to happen. And *The Rape of the Lock* has added interest and complexity as an anomalous and yet high-ranking component of the canon. Its canonical status is far from simple or self-evident; it is based in part on the ideological concerns which always function in canon-formation and maintenance, matters of legitimation and cultural reproduction which are always operating when certain works are viewed as masterpieces or cultural treasures. But the

poem also does display that "merit"—those complexities, ambivalences, "depths," and evidences of great intelligence and writerly skill—which the "Right" in our intellectual world like to claim as the only basis for inclusion in the canon.

"Marxism" in the humanities has always been an ill-defined, complex and controversial matter. This is even more true now, in an age when "post-Marxists" like Mouffe and Laclau have moved our thinking in one direction, while inheritors of surrealism and anarchism like Arthur Kroker deconstruct Marxism in a non-hostile way from "the left" in ways which have to affect any open, alive Marxist thinking about culture.¹ Meanwhile, the status of Marxism as the unsurpassed core of a broader movement of "oppositional" thought and "cultural studies" is higher than ever.

The recent death of Raymond Williams is a great loss, but the cultural studies approach he did most to found and develop has gained great influence. In this country, Fredric Jameson has been most important and influential in developing a Marxist position which includes many of the most important "non-Marxist" currents in modern thought—showing their more or less overt or hidden affinities and compatibilities with the oppositional, Marxist position. Thus Marxism in the intellectual world of postmodernism is a complex, contradictory phenomenon; it has expanded in strange and interesting ways to include most disparate positions, and it maintains a position of intellectual theoretical leadership in an oppositional criticism which is steadily gaining influence.

To look at Pope and *The Rape of the Lock* "as a

¹Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, trans. Winston Moore and Paul Cammack (London: Verso, 1985). Arthur Kroker and David Cook, *The Postmodern Scene: Excremental Culture and Hyper-Aesthetics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986).

Marxist," now, could mean many things. In the 1930s it would seem to have been non-problematical for Christopher Caudwell, the most important British voice in the Marxist criticism of that time, to say that Pope's own view of his social role "imposes on him the obligation to speak the language of his paymasters. . . ."² Caudwell's "plumpes denken" position remains largely persuasive. But contemporary Marxist views demand a more nuanced position, based on theories of language, textuality and ideology which recognize more subtleties and contradictions in literary texts, and call into question any simple claims of representational accuracy or "truth" as key criterion of excellence—along with reductionist dismissive assessments of a writer in terms of his class alliances and allegiances.

I want to argue here that Brecht's injunction to "think crudely" does properly demand that a Marxist reading of Pope insist on the centrality of Pope's relations to power relations of his day, to a developing mercantile imperialist order and to patterns of male domination in gender relations. Complexities begin to develop immediately in the relation between Pope as spokesman for the powerful as implied by Caudwell's phrase and his role as social critic, as occupying a space of relative autonomy from which he surveys and represents the social and sexual scene with the intent not necessarily of ratifying or legitimating it.

I will move the farthest from a simple denunciation of Pope as the spokesman for an imperialist and patriarchal order based on forceful oppression when I acknowledge the complexities and contradictions evident in the specific functioning of *The Rape of the Lock* as language, as discourse. On this level the generic conventions of satire are but one means by which Pope can assert, even while denying it, the inherent supremacy of men and the right of the English to rule the world, and can expose, even while concealing it, the moral falsity and emptiness of a world already becoming marked by the domination of a commodity fetishism which became so hegemonic in the period of high and late capitalism many years after Pope's time.

²Christopher Caudwell, "English Poets: (I) The Period of Primitive Accumulation," *Illusion and Reality: A Study of the Sources of Poetry* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1946 [Macmillan, 1937]) 86. This essay is often reprinted as a representative example of better "vulgar Marxist" criticism, as in Penguin's well-known *Marxists on Literature* anthology, ed. David Craig (1975) 95-109.

At the same time he implicitly condones and accepts the rise of such a world, and even can be said to celebrate its birth and its bounties.

For me then, the properly Marxist reading of Pope is one which includes in a single dialectical apprehension both the ethical-political denunciation of Pope as apologist for a world of unjust commercial and sexual domination, and a recognition that his long poem—like all texts worthy of careful critical scrutiny—is rife with ambiguities and contradictions which undercut any non-dialectical, reductionist views which would simply dismiss Pope as sexist and pro-capitalist.

II

In the introduction to her recent study of Pope, Laura Brown acknowledges the validity of a view of Pope such as Caudwell's, calling him "a consistent advocate of the beliefs and ambitions of the capitalist landlords and of an imperialist consensus."³ Prior to studying *The Rape of the Lock* and reading in the Pope scholarship in preparing this essay, my main contact with Pope in the last twenty years has been in teaching *The Essay on Man* out of a world masterpieces anthology in a course in world literature. In that context I saw him as the embodiment or even the prototype of a hegemonic ideology of (law and) order, the advocate of stasis, of the ruler's right to rule—that whatever is (including, especially, capitalism and patriarchy) is right. I still think that view is basically accurate; the triumphant conclusion to *The Essay on Man* to which I just alluded means "don't make revolution, don't seek to alter existing social relations."

Yet the matter is a good deal more complex, in that the particular, historically specific capitalist order for which my simpler view would want to see Pope as an apologist was just coming into existence in Pope's time. He was witness to a great deal of change in the social order, the changes which constituted the early stages of the rise of capitalism, and such developments seem to have both fascinated and repelled him. I do think that in the final analysis *The Rape of the Lock* is on the side of the powerful like *The Essay on Man*, but it is also the case that Pope evidences an awareness that the preoccupations of the privileged in this new order might constitute a

³Laura Brown, *Alexander Pope* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985) 3.

serious ethical problem and a waste of precious existential resources.

Belinda with her commodity fetishism occupies at the dawn of capitalism the classic position of a Balzac heroine in the period of high capitalism. In his article on *The Rape of the Lock* C. E. Nicholson compares Pope's Belinda to Moll Flanders: "Moll's vigorous scramble for commodities is transformed, in Belinda's couplet-world of ease and elegance into a fetishised sexuality, so that the 'thinghood' which Moll sees as the index of success enters Belinda's soul and recreates that soul in its own image. Belinda, recognizable as the classic portrait of woman in the new rentier class, becomes an object of voyeurism not only for others, but in her own eyes also."⁴

Nicholson comments as well that "practically every couplet in the poem infers unnatural connections between social life and the world of objects" (106). He asserts that the poem as a whole "provides a poetic grammar whereby relations between people acquire the characteristics of being relations between things" (107).

Certainly any reading of the poem must recognize the centrality in it of the process of reification which Marx was to label as "the fetishism of commodities" more than one hundred years later. This is a complex matter, and the destructive, leveling power of the newly dominant commodification in production and consumption which Marx was to understand as one of the most characteristic and significantly negative aspects of capitalism cannot be properly understood except in relation to the rise of wage labor and various other aspects of capital accumulation and development. But just as the display of commodities which are so carefully (Homerically) catalogued on Belinda's dressing table and which furnish her boudoir were the fruit of a nascent imperialism based on systematic colonial expropriation and exploitation, backed by force (of which more below), so does the commodity fetishism and reification which Marx and generations of subsequent social critics have seen as increasingly characteristic of social existence under capitalism help explain the artificiality and leveling trivialization of life which Pope expresses, satirizes throughout the poem, through his zeugmas, and in the juxtapositions in his famous description of Belinda's dressing

table as littered with "Puffs, Powders, Patches, Bibles, Billet-doux."—a line which expresses brilliantly, without need of editorial comment, the trivialization and effective neutralization of all other values by exchange value, in a world based on money and commodities (1.138).

This is the representational realism and social satire in the poem, that which led Pope himself to describe his work as constituting "a pretty complete picture of the life of our modern ladies in this idle town" (cited by Nicholson 104). It is not a simple matter, as Pope can also be said to have celebrated the bounty of commodities and the preoccupation with them which he at the same time condemned morally. But whether because he saw the rise of capitalism in part from the aristocratic, residual perspective which of course liked to see the greedy preoccupations of the marketplace and its devotees with distaste, or because such ironic deflation flowed naturally from his comico-heroic task in this poem, one impulse in it is certainly to critique the idleness and artificiality of the privileged, leisured life which Pope chooses as the debased Augustan equivalent of the age of Homeric heroism.

But on the other hand, his implied critique of "trade" or commerce is based at least in part on a hypocritical, nostalgic identification with aristocratic values which ignores the bases of the power of that earlier dominant order. Certainly some of that self-serving bad faith—a moral critique of the dominant economic order combined with the evident willingness to share in the benefits of it—can be seen in Pope and in the residual values of Neo-Classicism generally.

In a sense the satire in *The Rape of the Lock* can be said to condone the corruption, indolence and commodity fetishism it satirizes; it demonstrates that trivializing, leveling cynicism, the pessimism about human nature, about any and all virtue, claim to ethical values, whose traces exist in all satire and irony and provide a key ideological enabling condition of possibility for social and economic injustice. To the extent that that element (strain, thread, strand, position) predominates—this in terms of the social function of the poem—Pope does speak the language of the paymaster.

But at the same time in this poem there seems to coexist a genuine, good-faith moral critique of a life of luxury which has its basis in systematic emiseration and exploitation of huge parts of the globe and of the undermining of all ethical and moral values by those of commercial gain, profit. Raymond Williams makes a brilliant case in that

⁴C. E. Nicholson, "A World of Artefacts: *The Rape of the Lock* as Social History," *Alexander Pope*, ed. Harold Bloom (N.Y.: Chelsea House, 1986) 106.

regard in *The Country and the City*.⁵ As Williams sees it, it was the ideological task of several centuries of British literature to explore the devastating ethical implications of the brutal, inhuman cultural logic of nascent capitalism.

In the works of women writers especially, from Jane Austen through George Eliot and Virginia Woolf, the matter of the corruption of all ethics by what Laura Brown calls "moral anarchy," the law of the jungle of capitalism and Adam Smith's invisible and, certainly, inhuman hand, has been represented and questioned. Just as the Romantic poets, in what Williams calls their "green language," sought to assert an alternative belief or value system to that of the cash nexus and naked individualism, so the female writers and many others sought to call into question the available forms of social existence, which placed wealth, accumulation, and conspicuous consumption (all of which can be subsumed under the category of exchange value) as the universal index of human value in any relationship.

Such writers sought to assert existential honesty and personal integrity in male-female relations as some alternative to the London "marriage market" which was so evident in Restoration dramas, where personal and familial wealth and holdings were absolute in their determination of all other kinds of value. For all the distancing irony of *The Rape of the Lock*, the poem can be said to have participated in that critique, while at the same time it also seems to condone if not endorse the amoral vision that underlies this new capitalist sensibility which women writers like Austen and Eliot found so troubling.

III

In the last essay he wrote before his death in 1940, Walter Benjamin proposed a brilliant image to deconstruct the traditionalist humanist glorification of high culture. The passage is often cited, especially its final sentence. He has been discussing the attitude of traditional historicists toward the past, their consistent empathy with "the victors." Since "all rulers are the heirs of those who conquered before them," "Empathy with the victor invariably benefits the rulers":

Whoever has emerged victorious participates

⁵Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1973).

to this day in the triumphal procession in which the present rulers step over those who are lying prostrate. According to traditional practice, the spoils are carried along in the procession. They are called cultural treasures, and a historical materialist views them with cautious detachment. For without exception the cultural treasures he surveys have an origin which he cannot contemplate without horror. They owe their existence not only to the efforts of the great minds and talents who have created them, but also to the anonymous toil of their contemporaries. There is no document of civilization which is not also a document of barbarism.⁶

Benjamin observes next that such barbarism "taints also the manner" in which such "documents" or "treasures" are transmitted. Such tainting in the transmission can stand as a figure for the discourse-specific aspects of the influence of relations grounded in force and power which Benjamin is demanding that we acknowledge. The powerful ethical critique implied in the passage from Benjamin is perhaps the most important aspect of the Marxist historical vision.

Throughout his works, Fredric Jameson has insisted on the significance of such a view of history. Perhaps his most eloquent statement on the subject is in his 1979 article, "Marxism and Historicism":

The ultimate form of the "nightmare of history" is . . . the fact of labor itself, and the intolerable spectacle of the backbreaking millennial toil of millions of people from the earliest moments of human history. The more existential versions of this dizzying and properly unthinkable, unimaginable spectacle—as in horror at the endless succession of "dying generations," at the ceaseless wheel of life, or at the irrevocable passage of Time itself—are themselves only disguises for this ultimately scandalous fact of mindless alienated work and of the irremediable loss and waste of human energies, a scandal to which no metaphysical categories can give a meaning. This scandal is everywhere known, everywhere repressed—*un secret de tous connu*.⁷

⁶Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969) 256.

In pondering the relation of Pope and his work to the issues raised by Jameson and Benjamin, both the status of *The Rape of the Lock* among our "cultural treasures" and the values within it which I have been discussing are relevant. The canonical status of the poem provides a key context for an examination of issues within the text and in Pope's relations to a neo-classical elegance and power based on scandal and barbarism.

Laura Brown uses Christopher Hill's historical account of the period to make us realize just how crucial force, power and even especially its most extreme case, slavery, was to early capitalism, to the world of accumulation, leisure and luxurious consumption which Pope both satirizes and celebrates.⁸ In the early eighteenth-century time of Pope's poem, London had become the center of world commerce. Over one fourth of the city's population worked directly in the port-trade area. The East India company was England's biggest business (Brown 15-16). The huge profits generated by Empire generally and especially by the slave trade constituted a gigantic step for the nation of Britain in capital accumulation and development of global patterns of imperial domination. Britain's industrial development in the nineteenth century was made possible by the fruits garnered by the greatest commercial empire of Pope's century.

Britishers of Pope's day were not unaware of the rise in world stature of their small nation. In that context, the relation between the world of the Roman empire and the goings on in *The Rape of the Lock* is not only one of deflating irony. Brown goes so far as to say that the "straight," heroic level in the poem "claims that the incipient English empire is a modern version of the great age of Rome, fighting the same grand battles, and creating an equivalent cultural edifice; the two imperial missions are the same. From this perspective, Belinda's spoils are not amoral commodities but the glowing emblems of that mission" (21).

Support for Brown's position can be found throughout the poem, and not only when the commodities and activities of Empire are the focus of the poem. In the second canto, for example, where the war of the sexes theme is

predominant, it is "Man's Imperial Race" which is subject to the destructive influence of female beauty (2.27). And when the "Sylphs" which occupy such a prominent place in the poem seek the most extreme contrast in "the spirit world" for their tasks involving tending beautiful women, they cite these spirits in charge of the general care of mankind, who:

Watch all their Ways, and all their Actions
guide:
Of these the Chief the Care of Nations own,
And guard with Arms Divine the British
Throne.

(2.88-90)

Later in her essay, Brown argues that "the convergence of imperialist ideologies" involving England and ancient Rome was a key feature of neoclassicism. "The neo-classical material in Pope's poem in part simply gives prestige to the notion of empire; to the extent that the contemporary English are like the heroic Romans, their national project must be as valuable as the construction of the roman empire." Thus for Pope, says Brown, the classical epic poems on which he drew constitute "an active agent in shaping and shoring up his central fantasies about his society" (23).

It is in the context of this connection between eighteenth-century England and Imperial Rome that Benjamin's image of "cultural treasures" as the plundered spoils and booty of Empire displayed as part of the victory procession seems so compelling. Lest one imagine that the early modern British version of Empire was somehow more benign, less brutal, Brown assembles a two page "document of barbarism" with regard to England and the eighteenth-century slave trade. According to Brown the slave trade was "a crucial source of English prosperity" (16). England became in the early eighteenth century the major European slave trading nation. Estimates of yearly volume "in the boom years after 1713 range from 40,000 to 100,000." Death rates on slave ships were sometimes twenty per cent or more, but this "posed little problem to entrepreneurs who could sell their cargo to Caribbean plantations at five times their cost." The average life expectancy of the "cargo" on entering a West Indian plantation was ten years or less (17).

What Benjamin calls "sympathy for the victor" is then for Pope and neo-classicism that which gives voice to the language of the paymaster, the

⁷Fredric Jameson, "Marxism and Historicism," *New Literary History* 11.1 (Autumn 1979): 56.

⁸Christopher Hill, *The Century of Revolution 1603-1714* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1966), cited in Brown 16.

endorsement of a racist exploitation based on force and rationalized by means of myths of male and white superiority and deserved supremacy. The ruthless deconstruction of the notion of "high" timeless, universal cultural treasures, initiated by Marx, continued by Nietzsche and given its most eloquent expression in Benjamin's great dialectical images, suggests the link between sex and politics which joins two threads of my reading of Pope and his significance and combines to form the basis of a Marxist-feminist oppositional view.

For just as rape stands as the archetypal instance of male strength and force exerted over women—power and control asserted at the material base-line of the body—so does slavery stand as the emblem for history as exploitation and oppression. I have concentrated up to now on political and economic aspects and their implications in trying to build and present a Marxist "take" on Pope. But I accept from Mouffe and Laclau's "post-Marxism" that—at the same time that we, contrarily, try to think crudely—modern Marxism must avoid any automatic privileging of the economic, just as we refrain from any notion of historical inevitability and closed notions of determination by economic or any other forces. Thus I would argue that the most important aspect of *The Rape of the Lock* for the sort of Marxism I would want to defend and employ is the question of gender and male-domination based on force which is the inevitable "subject" of the poem, starting from the title.

The title of the poem declares that it is about sex, desire. Unlike, say, *The Essay on Man*, libidinal energy gives the poem its power. It carries an implicit possibility of the violation of decorum, of civilization. But, of course, the poem turns out to be almost equally about restraint on that desire, about chastity or abstinence as the reassuring limit to any invitation to transgression. So the poem turns out to be not "about" sex but about repression, about *not* gratifying desire. And the title brings up not only sex, desire, but also *rape*—force, violence, the aggressive, ruthless exercise of male domination.

Needless to say, there are still more reflexive levels or "twists," like the fact that it is only a lock of hair which is at issue, that Belinda is not abducted and raped, cities sacked, as in the non-"comico" epic material being imitated, parodied, satirized. Always in satire, responsibility can be denied on the basis that the matter is not meant to be taken seriously. Thus since there is no "serious" violation, the argument would run,

since the poem is so clearly "playful," and it is, after all, only a lock of hair which is at issue, there is nothing offensive about this poem, for which the only logical short title (which I have avoided using up to now) is the *Rape*, since it is only much ado about nothing, not *serious* about any threat to women, constitutes in no way any ratification of power, of the aggressive assertion of mastery through bodily force.

But, in the first place, discourse is not that simple or univalent in its function or effects; the "rape" in the title retains some of its malignant force, cannot help to be in some ways legitimated by the poem as a whole—just as slavery, its equivalent, receives a degree of legitimation, as I have already argued. However, the feminist gender issues raised by the poem are not confined to the implications of the title, of the question of rape. In her feminist reading of the *Rape*, Ellen Pollak carefully demonstrates the many ways in which Pope builds into the structure, the style and even the ontology of the poem the idea that Belinda's chastity is "unnatural," and that her desire for any autonomy is a doomed attempt to avoid wedlock and the subjugation which is her "natural" fate.⁹ This rationalization for the acceptance of power and domination which is unjust on the face of it, based as it is on force and the fact of gender alone, is perhaps the crucial ideological bottom line in Pope's poem.

Pollak links gender questions to those of imperial power which I discussed earlier in her characterization of Belinda's position as coquette amid the commodities at her dressing table: "The belle's vain indulgences at the mirror of her toilette, as Pope only half-ironically asserts, are her form of idle 'Labours' (III,24) in a vision of society where female self-involvement is ultimately justified and, in the process, robbed of independent force by being brought into line with male economic needs. Woman's display of beauty is identified with man's display of booty . . ." (96). Pollak's phrasing resonates beautifully with Benjamin's figure of imperial display. She explicitly connects the question of power in the poem with the ethical violence which results when exchange value attains such predominance in society when she suggests that "Pope is engaging in extended play on the notion . . . that woman's entire value is tied up with her identity as a piece of property transferable among

⁹Ellen Pollak, *The Poetics of Sexual Myth: Gender and Ideology in the Verse of Swift and Pope* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1985) 92.

men" (96-97).

The strength of Pollak's argument and the stakes which are involved in this argument for a patriarchal tradition of power is indicated by Brian Hammond's recent attack on her view of *The Rape of the Lock*.¹⁰ "Militant feminists," says Hammond, "do not approve of the poem" (161). He discusses Pollak's interpretation at some length, and concludes that "it is not quite fair to the poem" (162). He hopes readers will not share "the narrow puritanism of this type of approach, crushing the joy out of the undeniable beauty and pleasure that is also present" (165). Hammond argues that life of luxury and idleness of the poem and the abdication of genuine morality it presents is without feminist implications: "This view certainly need not establish that the poem is sexist, of course, because all of the characters participate equally in the trivialization of human conduct implied." To say nothing of the difficulty of demonstrating the claim implied by his "equally," Hammond's bland assurance in assuming that satiric representation in some simple way produces a non-dialogical, univalent discourse in which the leveling effect of satire is total flies in the face of the more dialectical views of the same subject put forward by Nicholson, Brown and others. His conclusion is that while Pope would surely not condone rape, "girls are girls and boys, boys" (171) in the poem, in which Pope wants us to recognize and accept sexual relations as they are, since "to borrow a phrase from Shakespeare, 'the world must be peopled'" (168).

Hammond's position seems to me to be damning in the extreme for the anti-feminist cause. His advocacy of genial tolerance, the implication that we should bear and forbear in a world that countenances both rape and slavery, is a perfect example of what Herbert Marcuse labeled "repressive tolerance" in his classic critique of the liberal position toward imperialism. The position is disingenuous. As Laura Brown argues, the poem presents a much more ambivalent ideological position than Hammond is willing to recognize. After all the twists and turns of irony and reflexivity, the *Rape* does, finally, ratify (lets itself be used for the ratification, legitimation of) male control and

domination based on force or violence.

IV

Early in Eugene Genovese's famous study of slavery, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, he cites together Mao's famous dictum that "political power grows out of the barrel of a gun" and Max Weber's observation that "the decisive means for politics is violence."¹¹ As I said before, rape and slavery are the extreme cases of a far more generalized and generally diffuse and partially sublimated violence in society. The work of Michel Foucault is highly relevant in this regard, his view that the function of discourse and all other institutions is to mediate between power and desire through hierarchy, exclusion, domination, and subordination. (I've always found revealing the very name of the sin/crime of "insubordination.")

The very title of *Discipline and Punish* points toward the relevance of Foucault to the view I am presenting, especially when are added the resonances of the French title, *Surveiller et punir*. The notion is based on sight. In fact without the "over," the "sur," the French *veiller* means to sit up with, to watch over: vigilant watchfulness. But when it becomes *surveillance* the watching becomes "panoptic," and total, brutish control is implied—the dystopian vision of a totalitarian, totally administered society. Foucault's ideas in this regard are close to the position of the Frankfurt school toward rationalism and the Enlightenment. The argument of Adorno and Horkheimer in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* concerning the obsessive rationalism of the early Enlightenment (Blake's "Urizenic" single vision) is most relevant to Pope, focusing on the real basis and chilling implications of the "Order" he so stoutly defended and which he embodied in the cool and precise stasis of his endlessly repeating rhyming couplets.¹²

The passage in the *Rape* which most directly brings up the issues I am discussing occurs at the very end of Canto III, immediately after the "rape" has been accomplished:

What Time wou'd spare, from Steel receives
its date,
And Monuments, like Men, submit to Fate!
Steel cou'd the Labour of the Gods destroy,
And strike to Dust th'Imperial Towers of

¹⁰Brian Hammond, "Pope and Women," *Pope* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1986).

¹¹Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1976) 25.

¹²Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (London: Allen Lane, 1973 [1944]).

Troy;
 Steel cou'd the Works of mortal Pride
 confound,
 And hew Triumphal Arches to the Ground.
 What Wonder then, fair Nymph! thy Hairs
 shou'd feel,
 The conqu'ring Force of unresisted Steel?
 (3.171-78)

"Steel" in that passage is, quite simply, weaponry, the sword. During almost all the era before Pope and even in his time steel was not yet important technologically except as weapon. The meaning of steel in the coming era of high capitalism extends the metaphor in a fascinating way: factories, railroads, internal combustion engines, the industrial city itself, all depend on steel and manifest their power through it. But for Pope steel was still the sword, the weapon, that which makes man lethal, able to terrorize, dominate, subdue, and, if necessary, destroy. Of course, the steel specifically referred to in the *Rape* is scissors, a domesticated pair of daggers of generally innocent use and significance. And only a lock of hair is cut: once again, the disclaimer of satire and irony.

But it is not scissors evoked by the synecdochical use of "Steel" four times in that passage. "The conqu'ring Force of unresisted Steel" is a powerful phrase, evoking naked power, seeming to suggest almost the science fiction dystopian nightmare of man and machine combined in a living, lethal human agent of a film like *Robo-Cop*. And underneath the image, of course, to fuse the different signifiers of power, is the whole world of sexual symbolism, the sword as phallic symbol: power and desire.

Though the usual resonance of such an image is with potency, in Pope's formulation it is not Eros but Thanatos; power is anti-desire, in the sense that "Steel" destroys everything before it, from Hellenic civilization and the labor of the gods to Belinda's lock of hair. But unusually for Pope, that connection between the world-

historical or even mythical level and that of Belinda's lock of hair is not established by means of a zeugma in this passage. There seems to be little irony in this movement from conflicts among the mighty to a vulnerable, even defenseless individual female's physical being.

The final burden of Pope's vision, then, would seem to be that everywhere, including this world of indolence and artifice, power, force is very real. One lesson to be derived from this is that desire, like other forces, must be restrained, resisted because it is so strong. But on the other hand, the exercise of power, even force, is "natural," inevitable. Male domination and slavery are simply evidences of the way of the world, and are necessary if Order is to prevail.

Pope sees these matters from the side of the beneficiaries of the rapacious ruthlessness of imperialism. But by connecting cruel power and male sexual desire he also lends voice to a powerful argument in behalf of the restraint or repression of desire. What results in the *Rape* is a contradictory and complicated vision, but one which ultimately does constitute a part of the repressive apparatus of discipline and punish. A Marxist view of this poem is one which recognizes that the language of the paymaster, like all instances of discourse, is a complex, ambivalent tongue, but that Caudwell, like Benjamin, was right to suggest that it is the language of force and domination. *The Rape of the Lock* may contain passages, threads which work against the very systems of power it evokes and represents, but Pope stands finally with those holders of power which it is the task of Marxist and all oppositional criticism to represent with the purpose of changing. □

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ENUNCIATION AND GENRE:
MIKHAIL BAKHTIN AND THE "DOUBLE-VOICED NARRATION"
OF THE RAPE OF THE LOCK

I

In the last few years the concept of linguistic "enunciation" has come to be the object of significant linguistic and cultural inquiry. Enunciation is a complex and difficult concept because it attempts to describe without figuring what Ferdinand de Saussure described as language "taken as a whole." The whole of language, Saussure noted, "is many-sided and heterogeneous; straddling several areas simultaneously—physical, physiological, psychological—it belongs both to the individual and to society; we cannot put it into any category of human facts, for we cannot discover its unity."¹ Saussure goes on to argue that, as a consequence of the many-sided phenomena of language, the linguist has to abstract the system of language, which he called "*la langue*," from the heterogeneity of language in order to discover the "self-contained whole and principle of classification" which is immanent, synecdochically, within language (9). In other words, language manifests itself in unique articulations of discourse, "*la parole*" which Saussure opposed to "*la langue*," but it is recognizable as language—as discourse—only because these unique language-events somehow articulate and repeat the encoded patterns of *la langue*.

Enunciation is clearly an aspect of language—as our parents say, we should strive to "enunciate" our words—yet it is neither a synonym for the whole of language nor reducible to any particular part. Enunciation cannot be understood as a synecdoche for language in the way that Saussure suggests that *la langue* is a self-contained part by which the heterogeneous whole of language can be classified and understood. But neither is it *la parole* in the way that Saussure understands *parole* as idiosyncratic and random, "individual" (as opposed to social)

and "more or less accidental" (as opposed to essential) (14). Perhaps it is closer to *parole*, but even here it is not a manifestation in relation to what is immanent—another synecdochical representation (not as the essence, but as an example). Rather enunciations are *occurrences* of language which are "self-contained" and "whole," but not "complete" or "finalized." In this way the concept of "enunciation," like language itself, is not quite "pure" but rather inhabits a grey area—what I will call a "third voice"—between linguistic immanence and manifestation, neither essence nor example.

In *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle* Tzvetan Todorov offers a concise description of the problem of enunciation which will help to define a specific Bakhtinian sense of genre that can help us to read and understand Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* by allowing us, as I will argue in the next section, to situate the mock epic—and genre more generally—beyond the essentialist (or, as Bakhtin says, the "philological") readings of its narrative, its verse form, its very diction.

Between the generality of the meaning of words, such as we find them in the dictionary, and that of the rules of grammar, and, on the other hand, the uniqueness of the acoustic event that occurs when an utterance is proffered, there takes place a process that permits the linkage of the two, which we call *enunciation*. This process does not suppose the simple existence of two physical bodies, those of the sender and the receiver, but the presence of two (or more) social entities, that translate the *voice* of the sender and the *horizon* of the receiver. The time and the space in which enunciation occurs also aren't purely physical categories, but a historical time and a social space. Human intersubjectivity is actualized through particular utterances.²

¹Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Wade Badkin (New York: McGraw Hill, 1959) 9.

As this suggests, "enunciation" is of utmost importance in the "dialogic" poetics of Mikhail Bakhtin. Enunciation calls attention to the starting point of linguistics, the fact that the many-sided heterogeneity of language creates effects of wholeness, of meaning which seems to be more than the sum of its parts and which, for this reason, seems to transcend its historical time and social space. But while linguistics attempts to understand this paradox of language by dividing language into what is essential and what is accidental—*langue* and *parole* (on the social level) and "competence" and "performance" (on the level of the individual)—Bakhtin attempts to understand the whole of language without recourse to the opposition between essence and accident (and the synecdochic representation it implies).³

Instead of seeing the "parts" of language as parts of an abstract "whole" of meaning, in *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* Bakhtin/Voloshinov argues that the relationship between "meaning" and "theme" in discourse—terms which Bakhtin later more clearly distinguishes as "meaning" in general and the "specific sense" of a discourse—is a relationship between different entities: "the wholeness of utterance," he writes, "is subject neither to grammatical nor to abstract semantic definition."⁴ Thus the distinction between the dictionary "meaning" (or signification) of words and the "theme" (or global "meaning") of the text formed by the words is absolute. "Theme," Bakhtin notes,

is the upper, actual limit of linguistic significance; in essence, only theme means something

definite. Meaning is the lower limit of linguistic significance. Meaning, in essence, means nothing; it only possesses potentiality—the possibility of having a meaning within a concrete theme.

(MPL 101)

In this distinction the central problem of structuralist linguistic studies, such as Saussure's *Course* or Greimas's *Structural Semantics*, is made clear: the "abstract objectivism" of such linguistics leaves out the essence of the phenomenon of language, the historically situated "definite" meanings of discourse. It does so by assuming the meaningful whole of discourse is simply another hierarchical level of language formed by and parallel to (or "isomorphic" with) other linguistic levels. In this way structural linguistics (and, later, structuralism itself) proceeds on the assumption that linguistic phenomena are synecdochically analyzable in which any part can stand for the whole of language.

Such a synecdochical understanding of "meaning" mystifies and dematerializes language. It makes meaning some kind of "spirit" hovering behind and within discourse. In Coleridge's phrase, describing the essentially synecdochical conception of Romantic symbolism, "the symbol is characterized by the translucence of the special in the individual, or of the general in the special, or of the universal in the general; above all by the translucence of the eternal through and in the temporal."⁵ In this, as Paul de Man has argued, not only is the symbol "always a part of the

³Tzvetan Todorov, *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogic Imagination*, trans. Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1984) 39-40. For additional discussion of enunciation, see the entries in A. J. Greimas and J. Courtés, *Semiotics and Language*, trans. Larry Crist et al. (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1982); and Oswald Ducrot and Tzvetan Todorov, *Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Sciences of Language*, trans. Catherine Porter (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1979). See also Ronald Schleifer, A. J. Greimas and the Nature of Meaning (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1987) 164-68, and "Lacan's Enunciation and the Cure of Mortality," *College English* 49 (1987): 801-15.

⁴These are Noam Chomsky's terms which are parallel to those of Saussure, yet transform the "social" description of language to a "psychological" one. John Lyons notes that "any psychological model of the way [Chomsky's] competence is put to use in actual performance will have to take into account a number of additional factors, which the linguist deliberately ignores in his definition of the notion of grammaticality" (Noam Chomsky [New York: Penguin Books, 1977] 107). See also Schleifer, *Greimas* 82-83.

⁵V. N. Voloshinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, trans. Ladislav Matejka and I. R. Titunik (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1986) 101. Hereafter cited as MPL. (I am following Todorov's procedure of joint attribution for those texts associated with Bakhtin that were published under someone else's name. For a discussion of the question of attribution, see Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin* [Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1984] ch. 6.) Bakhtin's later redefinition of these terms occurs in "The Problem of Speech Genres," in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, trans. Vern McGee (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1986) 86. In Todorov, Wlad Godzich more accurately translates Bakhtin's terms as "signification" and "meaning." Michael Holquist describes this distinction in "Answering as Authoring: Mikhail Bakhtin's Trans-Linguistics," *Bakhtin: Essays and Dialogues on His Work*, ed. Gary Saul Morson (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1986): "Bakhtin argues that words in the realm of language belong to no one, for they have only significance (*znacenie*), a typical sense, whereas real meaning (*smysl*), which is what words acquire in the realm of utterance, involves particular people in actual social and historical situations" (64). The definition of "utterance" appears in "Speech Genres" 76.

totality that it represents"; more remarkably, in synecdoche "the material substantiality [of a symbol] dissolves and becomes a mere reflection of a more original unity that does not exist in the material world" (176, 177). In this way, through synecdoche, language creates the effect of an essential "whole" that transcends its parts and its particular instances of enunciation.

For Bakhtin, however, understanding can *only* take place in the particular historical time and social space of an enunciatory situation. Thus he argues that

any true understanding is dialogic in nature. Understanding is to utterance as one line of a dialogue is to the next. Understanding strives to match the speaker's word with a counter word. Only in understanding a word in a foreign tongue is the attempt made to match it with the "same" word in one's own language.

(MPL 102)

Such a "counter word" is not a part for the whole, but a kind of radical metonymy in which word answers word, not with its "essence," but with a kind of materialism that fully situates discourse as many-sided and heterogeneous—situates it in relation to the "other" rather than the "same." For this reason Bakhtin objects to the oppositions between a word's "usual" and "occasional" meanings, "between its central and lateral meanings, between its denotation and connotation, etc." (MPL 102): for Bakhtin *all* meanings are "occasional," and all occasions are material-historical.

Throughout *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* Bakhtin/Voloshinov distinguishes synchronic linguistics which attempted to articulate the synecdochical invariants of language—what he calls here the "same"—from the study of "living speech as actually and continuously generated." Traditional linguistics, he argues, is "guided by philological need" and so "has always taken as its point of departure the finished monologic utterance—the ancient written monument, considering it the ultimate realium" (72); the "basis of the of linguistic thought" has always been attention "on the study of defunct, alien languages preserved in written monuments," in an attempt to "revive" "the

cadavers of written languages" (72, 71).

Such a resurrection in language clearly marks the dematerializing force of synecdoche: it offers an immaterial "essence" of meaning that transcends its occasion just as the theological figure Bakhtin employs answers the problem of *what* precisely is resurrected, what part of the individual life becomes the whole of everlasting life, with its concept of the immaterial soul. But such a concept, like the synecdochical definitions in a dictionary, in some ways betrays what we must mean by "life" when we talk of the everlasting life of resurrection. My grandmother articulated this problem when she told me that she would be resurrected as a thirty-five year old woman, strong in body as well as soul. I have a picture of her at that age carrying a pail of milk and possessing the healthy look of a kind of peasant angel (which is to say a *situated* angel).

Synecdoche, however, abstracts a "representative" part from such placeable situations and creates the effect of the monological—of the "same"—signification from its various contexts. But even the monological, as Bakhtin says, possesses "an inseverable element of verbal communication," which is to say an element of the larger metonymies of language. "Any utterance," he goes on, "—the finished, written utterance not excepted—makes response to something and is calculated to be responded to in turn. . . . Each monument carries on the work of its predecessors, polemicizing with them, expecting active, responsive understanding, and anticipating such understanding in return" (MPL 72).

Of course, defining "understanding" in terms of a metonymic "counter word" in language hardly solves the problem of the relationship between *langue* and *parole*, competence and performance in enunciation. But it resituates the problem on the level of metonymy—which is to say the level of history. In this way Bakhtin presents a historical-material conception of language that envisions particular situated utterances as "whole" but never "finalized": language, like the material world, is without end, and its speaker "is not the biblical Adam, dealing only with virgin and still unnamed objects," but rather speaking to others about things that have "already been articulated, disputed, elucidated, and evaluated in various ways" ("Speech Genres" 93). "Therefore," Bakhtin concludes, "the subject of his speech itself inevitably becomes the arena where his opinions meet those of his partners" (94).

Such a material-historical understanding of

⁵Cited by Paul de Man, "The Rhetoric of Temporality," in *Interpretation: Theory and Practice*, ed. Charles Singleton (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1969) 177.

discourse is directly relevant to an understanding of the mock epic of Alexander Pope, and the larger question of generic tradition—of the appropriation and transmission of texts mock epic effects. In "Discourse in the Novel" Bakhtin explicitly addresses this question. "When verbal disciplines are taught in school," he writes,

two basic modes are recognized for the appropriation and transmission—simultaneously—of another's words (a text, a rule, a model): "reciting by heart" and "retelling in one's own words." The latter mode poses on a small scale the task implicit in all prose stylistics: retelling a text in one's own words is to a certain extent a double-voiced narration of another's words, for indeed "one's own words" must not completely dilute the quality that makes another's words unique; a retelling in one's own words should have a mixed character, able when necessary to reproduce the style and expressions of the transmitted text.⁶

In this passage—as in the essay as a whole—Bakhtin is articulating the "dialogics" of discourse, his sense that discursive significance is always and only to be understood as historically and socially situated *enunciated* discourse, that language always "retells" in the speaker's own words the social forms and genres of discourse, and that such a sense of language, as he says here, always has a double-voiced, mixed character. Such double voicing, however, is significantly different from the doubling of *langue* versus *parole* in Saussure's understanding of language. Here the double voices contend in polyphonous strife, what Ken Hirschkop has called the "condition of fierce social struggle outlined by Bakhtin in 'Discourse in the Novel,' in which the dialogical forces of language actively contest the social and political centralization of their culture."⁷ In this we can see (and "hear") a wide range of senses of "enunciation": to enunciate means to say it again, more clearly, to make it clear in this particular instance of discourse, to situate "meaning" within a "concrete theme," and to create a particular occasion for a "counter word," a dialogue.

⁶Mikhail Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," *The Dialogic Imagination*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1985) 341.

⁷Ken Hirschkop, "A Response to the Forum on Mikhail Bakhtin," in Morson 74.

But as well as such polyphonous strife, the doubling of discourse also presents the possibility of "the appropriation and transmission—simultaneously—of another's words." In this we can discover a *material* sense of genre in which the "habitual" modes of speech interchange—its "habits" being governed by recurrence of more or less "accidental" (that is, historically determined) social situations—help to determine the "unfinalized whole" of an utterance. Such a whole is a function of genre, but because it is not finalized, such "wholeness" is not synecdochically analyzable: it cannot be represented by a part—especially a "nonmaterial" part such as traditional transcendental conceptions of genre.⁸ Rather, the wholeness of genre is the unity of a *position* of discourse that is defined as responsive to other generic positions in a kind of metonymic strife. As Bakhtin/Medvedev say in *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship* echoing *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, while the theme of discourse "always transcends" the abstract meanings of language, "the thematic unity of the work and its real place in life organically grow together in genre" (133). They do so not because genre is itself self-contained or a transcendental principle of classification. Rather, they do so because genre, in its accidental and historically determined "forms"—forms which function, Bakhtin says, as a kind of collective memory—allows discursive utterances to *function* as wholes—as "finalized structuredness" [*zavershenie*]⁹—in particular situations (FMS 129, 184). That is, a genre is an "enunciation," a dialogic moment, within the historically determined development of genres.

It is with a similar understanding of genre and discourse—a *nonsynecdochical* understanding—

⁸M.M. Bakhtin/P.N. Medvedev argues that "genre is the typical form of the whole work, the whole utterance" (*The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship*, trans. Albert Wehrle [Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1985] 129. Hereafter cited as FMS). He argues that genre is "a finished and resolved whole," but the problem of its "finalization" remains central to genre theory. This problem, I believe, is that "thematically" genre creates the "effect" of finalization, but as an historical, "real-life" phenomenon genre cannot ever be "finalized." For a formalist discussion of genre that defines it synecdochically in terms of Wittgenstein's "family resemblance," see Alastair Fowler, *Kinds of Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1982). For a structuralist discussion that defines genre synecdochically in terms of the "receiver" actant of narrative, see Ronald Schleifer and Alan Velie, "Genre and Structure: Toward an Actantial Typology of Narrative Genres and Modes," *MLN* 102 (1987): 1123-50. Neither of these approaches situates genre in relation to the historical time and social space of enunciation.

that Jacques Derrida asserts that "every text participates in one or several genres, there is no genreless text; there is always a genre and genres, yet such participation never amounts to belonging."⁹ Genre, like the iteration of language Derrida discusses elsewhere (itself a nonsynecdochical description of enunciation), is never "pure"; it is always marked by "disruptions."¹⁰ "One might even say," Derrida goes on to say, the disruptions of genre are engendered "by citation or re-citation (*re-cit*). . . . A citation in the strict sense implies all sorts of contextual conventions, precautions, and protocols in the mode of reiteration, of coded signs, such as quotation marks or other typographical devices used for writing a citation" ("Law" 58).

Genre, then, for Derrida, like the classroom recitation Bakhtin describes, is a simultaneously global and metonymic category that participates in the same "impurity" of all discourse, its "internal division . . . , impurity, corruption, contamination, decomposition, perversion, deformation, even cancerization, generous proliferation, or degenerescence" ("Law" 57). For Bakhtin the "impurity" of discourse and genre—like the "impurity" of contingent material historical accident—is, in fact, a "generous proliferation": as a Marxist he wants the possibility of future transformation, even radical transformation, on all levels of human social life. Thus for him language, like history, offers the possibility of change and development precisely because it is many-sided and heterogeneous. As he notes in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, generic tradition exists but "is reborn and renewed in each [particular author] in its own way, that is, in a unique and unrepeatable way."¹¹ Thus

⁹Jacques Derrida, "The Law of Genre," trans. Avital Ronell, *Critl* 7 (1980): 65.

¹⁰Jacques Derrida pursues the same problematic of enunciated genre in examining the function of "iteration" in "Limited Inc," trans. Samuel Weber, *Glyph* 2 (1977). "Iterability," he writes, "supposes a minimal remainder (as well as a minimum of idealization) in order that the identity of the *selfsame* be repeatable and identifiable in, through, and even in view of its alteration. For the structure of iteration—and this is another of its decisive traits—implies both identity and difference. Iteration in its 'purest' form—and it is always impure—contains in itself the discrepancy of a difference that constitutes it as iteration" (190). The different "specific senses" of enunciated iteration cannot be reduced to one meaning by any synecdochical principle of classification. They are, as Derrida says elsewhere, "irreducibly nonsimple" ("Differance," in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass [Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1982] 13).

"genre" allows for the very kind of "cluttered" materialist understanding of discourse that Derrida's project calls for, a kind of "heteroglossia" of discourse that irreducibly confuses the heterogeneity of voices in discourse, such as the confusion of "genre" and "gender" in Derrida's discussion, or the mocking double-voiced discourse of Alexander Pope's "heriocomical" poem.

II

I have spent so much time discussing enunciation and genre in relation to Bakhtin's dialogics because such a discussion offers a way of understanding both the particular form and the more general genre of Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*. As a mock epic the *Rape*, of course, is a kind of hybrid genre that is, in its very intention, "double-voiced." It "re-cites" the elements of epic discourse (including its narrative events, its "high" style, its particular conventional verse forms, its very diction) in its own words, and in so doing it explicitly enacts the dialogic principle by self-consciously situating the "wholeness" of the epic genre in all sorts of non-heroic contexts. Moreover, like satire itself which subsumes mock epic, it cannot distinguish between its "matter" (what it treats) and its discursive "manner," the attitude it presents towards that "matter." As I shall argue in a moment, its very generic mode is one of unfinalized crisis.

As this suggests, as a mock epic the *Rape* includes a philological impulse that attempts to enact (even if in parody) the resurrection of a dead language. Many scholars—most notably, I think, Earl Wasserman—have pursued this philological enterprise and traced both specific and general "borrowings" from and "influences" of classical and Miltonic epic in the *Rape* (and even Pope's own translations of Homer).¹² For instance, Wasserman notes that Belinda is "equated with Juno at the very beginning of the poem when the poet asked, 'And in soft Bosoms dwells such mighty rage?' (I, 12), for the line

¹¹Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1984) 159. Hereafter cited as *PDP*.

¹²Earl Wasserman, "The Limits of Allusion in *The Rape of the Lock*," *JEGP* 65 (1966): 425-44. See also William Frost, "The Rape of the Lock and Pope's Homer," *MLQ* 8 (1947): 342-54; and Rebecca Ferguson, *The Unbalanced Mind: Pope and the Rule of Passion* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1986) ch. 2.

echoes Virgil's 'tantaene animis caelestibus irae?' (*Aeneid*, I, 11)" (435). Such examples can (and have) been multiplied throughout readings of the *Rape*: as Wasserman says, "the entire poem is a tissue of such classical echoes," many of which are conveniently noted in Tillotson's notes to the Twickenham edition (426).

Pursuing such "echoes" marks an explicit (if sometimes ironic) philological reading of the *Rape* in its attempt to "match" the classical texts with "the 'same' word in one's own language" (MPL 102). But it misses an important side of Bakhtin's understanding of language, the difficult sense of the combination of identity and difference in enunciation and genre, the problematic of the concept of the *same*. That is, the enunciation of the *Rape*—and enunciated language in general as opposed to the "signification" of linguistic elements—bears what Susan Stewart calls "a complex and contradictory set of historical elements. In this sense," she continues, "Bakhtin observes, *all* speech is reported speech, for all speech carries with it a history of use and interpretation by which it achieves both identity and difference."¹³ In uncovering allusive "echoes" in the *Rape* scholars are simply using linguistic elements—particular lexical (i.e., "dictionary") elements—in the same way linguistics isolate "invariant" elements of language without pursuing the *discursive* functioning of such elements. Such a procedure leads critics as perceptive Linda Hutcheon to repeatedly assert that "neo-classical mock epic in general, in fact, is . . . directed . . . not against the epic model but against contemporary customs or politics."¹⁴ Such an assertion, like Wasserman's assertion that "Homer's words . . . provide a standard of simple dignity against which Pope ironically measures degeneracy of his own civilization," fails to take into account the "inner contact" of Pope's double-voiced narrative, its relationship to "reality" (428).

Still, the epic "borrowings" in *The Rape of the Lock* are an explicit form of synecdoche Pope pursues. They are a form of synecdoche in the discursive "manner" of the poem which is parallel to the narrative "matter" of the poem, the "rape" of Belinda's synecdochical lock. Yet these synecdochical allusions fail in the poem; the

individuals and events Pope represents do not participate in and come to synecdochically represent (even negatively) an ancient, larger "heroic" whole, in the same way the narrative synecdoches fail: thus the lock at the end ceases to be "part" of Belinda and comes to represent, metonymically, the "quick Poetic Eyes" of the Muse (5.123-24). This, in fact, is what mock epic does: it transforms the ancient heroic order from a principle of classification into another element of contemporary vulgar clutter, the synecdochical symbol into another object in the world. And philological reading does the opposite: it attempts to recover a synecdochical "principle of classification" to make sense of the chaotic world of mock epic. Thus W. K. Wimsatt concludes his late discussion of the ways the card game in the poem should be understood as a (synecdochical) example of epic "play" by arguing that the Ombre "episode is a microcosm of the whole poem, a brilliant epitome of the combat between the sexes which is the themes of the whole"; and on a different linguistic level John Jones argues that within the famous clutter on Belinda's dressing-table—"Puff, Powders, Patches, Bibles, Billet-doux" (1.138)—a synecdochical "principle of classification" can be discovered, namely that "the voiceless *p* sound continues throughout the line, merely changing to its voiced equivalent *b* sound."¹⁵

Such philological readings of the *Rape* fail to take into account the *generic* and *formal* articulation of mock epic and the historical-material crisis of its situation. Throughout the *Rape* Pope thematizes the double voicing in which he articulates his mock epic by making it the object of satire. This can be seen (and I will discuss it at length in a moment) in Pope's use of the heroic couplet, the literal rhyming of two discourses. But the poem also realizes a *narrative* thematization of the double-voiced discourse which makes *The Rape of the Lock*, I believe, a kind of standard generic example of the mock epic. Throughout, the poem presents narrative doubling in describing its own action. It does so, most literally, in its repeated narrated echoes repeating the "same" words ("O wretched Maid! she spread her Hands, and cry'd, / (While Hampton's Ecchos, wretched Maid! reply'd)" (4.95-96; see also 3.99-100; 5.103-4). But it does so

¹³Susan Stewart, "Shouts in the Street: Bakhtin's Anti-Linguistics," in Morson 53.

¹⁴Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody* (New York: Methuen, 1985) 80.

¹⁵W. K. Wimsatt, "Belinda Ludens: Strife and Play *The Rape of the Lock*," *Pope: Recent Essays*, eds. Maynard Mack and James Winn (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1980) 222; John Jones, *Pope's Couplet Art* (Athens: Ohio Univ. Press, 1969) 106.

in repeated narrative actions as well. At the dressing table the poem presents two priestesses, inferior and superior, as well as two blushes; and the Baron in his "Altar" to Love includes "three Garters, half a Pair of Gloves; / And all the Trophies of his former Loves" (2.38-39). That Pope uses the synecdochic figure of "half a pair of gloves" is, I think, revealing in just the way Bakhtin suggests that doubled-voiced narrative reveals itself: it posits the absence of something that was once there whose ghostly shadow is "semantically bonded" with what the discourse does present. The "two" blushes and priestesses are presented in the same way: Belinda "Sees by Degrees a purer Blush arise" (1.143), and "Th' inferior Priestess" implies the superior (1.127). The most telling example of this narrative doubling, of course, is the fact that Belinda "Nourish'd two Locks, which graceful hung behind / In equal Curls" (1.20-21). It is the "ravishing" of this pair—this doubling—that constitutes the crisis of the mock heroic action of the poem. This "ravishing" consists in literally detaching the part from the whole, a multiplication of parts run wild, the transformation of synecdoche into metonymy.

Moreover, the double voicing of mock epic enunciates *different* moments of time and space in a single discourse in a markedly non-philological way. In *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Bakhtin argues that "two equally weighted discourses on one and the same theme, once having come together, must inevitably orient themselves to one another. Two embodied meanings cannot lie side by side like two objects—they must come into inner contact; that is, they must enter into a semantic bond" (189). Such a bond, as he says, is "dialogic," and an author can aim for such a linguistic effect; that is, an author can "make use of someone else's discourse for his own purposes, by inserting a new semantic intention into a discourse which already has, and retains, an intention of its own. . . . In one discourse, two semantic intentions appear, two voices" (189). Serio-comic genres especially exhibit this quality of language: they are deliberately "multi-styled and hetero-voiced," so that within them "alongside the representing word there appears the *represented* word" (108). Thus the mock heroic explicitly presents a "new relationship to reality: [its] subject, or—what is more important—[its] starting point for understanding, evaluating, and shaping reality, is the living *present*, often even the very day" (108). In this, the mock heroic creates a semantic bond between epic discourse

and "contemporary" discourse beyond the synecdochical allusion which encompasses epic itself simply as a moment. Such an epic moment is thematically coherent. As Bakhtin says, it is characterized by three "constitutive features": its subject is a "national epic past"; it focusses on national tradition as opposed to personal experience; and "an absolute epic distance separates the epic world from contemporary reality."¹⁶

In *The Rape of the Lock* contemporary discourse is diametrically opposed to such (philologically recoverable) epic discourse. The *Rape*, like the novel to which Bakhtin opposes the epic, opens a "zone of maximal contact with the present (with contemporary reality) in all its openendedness" ("Epic" 11). As Bakhtin goes on to conclude, "in ancient literature it is memory, and not knowledge, that serves as the source and power for the creative impulse." The novel, by contrast, "is determined by experience, knowledge and practice (the future). . . . In the era of Hellenism . . . [e]pic material is transposed into novelistic material, into precisely that zone of contact that passes through the intermediate stages of familiarization and laughter" (15).

Despite such heterogeneity, however, the serio-comic genres possess what Bakhtin calls "deep internal [generic] integrity" (PDP 119). They do so because in the serio-comic thematic unity and its real place in life grow together. The Menippean satire, in the major instance that Bakhtin educes, responded to an age of great crisis, "an epoch of intense struggle among numerous and heterogeneous religious and philosophical schools and movements, when disputes over 'ultimate questions' of worldview had become an everyday mass phenomenon. . . . [It responded to] the epoch of preparation and formation of a new world religion: Christianity" (PDP 119). In such *responsiveness* genre brings together discursive theme and historical reality. In the same way Pope's mock epic responds to an epoch of extraordinary crisis and change, preparing for the formation of Britain's laissez faire capitalist order, and his "ambivalent laughter," like that of Dostoevsky and Thomas Mann Bakhtin describes in the context of later historical developments, responds to a world of crisis even if Pope, unlike these latter writers, fails to *sustain* the carnivalized laughter of Dostoevsky or Mann.

That is, the mock heroic is a negative moment

¹⁶"Epic and Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination* 12.

in the serio-comic genres, one in which the "thematic unity" of discourse and the "real place" of that discourse in life coincide in the failure of synecdoche, the figure of hierarchic and nonmaterial order, to function discursively and ideologically. In the very fact that the mock epic attempts to "recite," philologically, the monological discourse of an ancient epic language marks the difference between its discourse and that of the novel Bakhtin describes. The dialogics of Dostoevsky's novels, as Bakhtin describes it, responds to a world that is unfinalized and new, in which "*nothing conclusive has yet taken place . . . , the ultimate word of the world and about the world has not yet been spoken, the world is open and free, everything is still in the future and will always be in the future*" (PDP 166). *The Rape of the Lock*, on the other hand, responds to a world that is less "unfinalized" than "uncreated," falling apart, in which ultimate words—*epic* words—have already been spoken but cannot find responses that might bind themselves, synecdochically, to that past. It is a poem whose represented action and presented discourse are self-consciously synecdochical even while its inherited synecdoches do not function.

In this way the *Rape* emphasizes the difference between the mock epic and the more fully dialogical novel in its very form. In other words, in the heroic couplets of Pope's poem can be heard the play between monological and dialogical conceptions of language, between synecdoche and metonymy. Take, for instance, the first lines of the poem:

What dire Offense from am'rous Causes
springs,
What mighty Contests rise from trivial
Things,
I sing—

(1.1-2)

The first line of the poem could serve many epics: *The Iliad*, *The Aeneid*, *Paradise Lost*. The most dire epic offenses have, indeed, sprung from amorous causes. But the second line repeats the first in other words, rhyming the first line's verb with a flat, nondescript noun and transforming the ideology of cause and effect of the first line—an ideology of epic *first* causes of the most dire effects which, willy-nilly, are the "responsibility" of women—into the simple contemporary "happening" of the second.

In this way the poem "answers" what Bakhtin calls the "absolute past" of epic with a

contemporary zone of contact. Even the syntax of Pope's opening, the bathos of "I sing—," which also rhymes with "springs" and "things," reinforces this sense. In this, the heroic couplet—and more concisely the zeugma—enacts the clash of discourses, the difference between the "significations" of dictionary language and the "meanings" of enunciated discourse. That is, the "coupled" discourses of the mock heroic—best seen in what Hugh Kenner calls the "rhyming" of concepts in puns¹⁷—function in the same way as "the alternating lines of a dialogue [in which] the same word may figure in two mutually clashing contexts. . . . Contexts do not stand side by side in a row, as if unaware of one another, but are in a state of constant tension, or incessant interaction and conflict" (MPL 80).

Even the first, "epic" line, however, is dialogic in its import. To translate the "causes" of dire offense from the "national" heroic pursuits to "private" sexual relationships—from Achilles' rage to Paris's "rape," from arms and the man, Aeneas, to his relationship with Dido, from Adam's first disobedience to Eve's frailty—understands the central concern of these epics as "personal" rather than "public." In relation to *The Rape of the Lock* this is particularly clear. As David Morris has argued, citing "Belinda's ceremonious dressing or the Baron's sacrificing alone before dawn, the imitation of epic ceremonies now emphasizes private ends."¹⁸ More specifically, the world represented in the poem is characterized by the privacies of narcissism and fetishism: at least in part, Morris argues, Belinda performs the role of the coquette who "best fulfills Freud's description of female narcissism: the woman simultaneously attractive and invulnerable" (93); and "the Baron, as befits a figure of heroic refinement, has transmuted the rudeness of natural desire into an elegant and effete fetishism" (92).

In other words, even the single opening line of Pope's mock epic enunciates the social and cultural contexts of early eighteenth-century England: the privatization of public life Richard Sennett has described, the relationship between an ideology of privacy and the "systematised fetishism" of sexuality and literary production Jon Stratton has described, the "mercantilization"

¹⁷Hugh Kenner, "Pope's Reasonable Rhymes," in Mack and Winn 63-79.

¹⁸David Morris, *Alexander Pope: The Genius of Sense* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1984) 95.

of discourse—including the striking ambivalence between public trade and private consumption—Louis Landa, C. E. Nicholson and Laura Brown examine in the poem's "the rhetoric of acquisition."¹⁹ Morris hears such a context in the more general "celebration of commerce" in the eighteenth-century which supplies Pope and his contemporary writers with "a set of economic metaphors for literary production at a time when literature was just beginning to redefine itself as a commodity" (7). In his discussion, Morris quotes Dryden in terms that point out the monological and philological element in the dialogics of Pope's mock epic: "if [re]sounding words are not of our growth and manufacture," Dryden wrote, "who shall hinder me to import them from a foreign country? . . . what I bring from Italy, I spend in England: here it remains, and here it circulates." For Dryden, unlike Bakhtin, "trade both with the living and the dead" enriches "our native language" (cited in Morris 8, 7).

Pope, unlike Dryden—who, it can be argued, unambivalently valorizes the past over the present—articulates the dialogic element in contemporary mercantile figures: "a mutual commerce makes Poetry flourish; but then, Poets like Merchants, shou'd repay with something of their own what they take from others; not like Pyrates, make prize of all they meet" (cited in Morris 9). Morris goes on to argue that the mode of "repayment" in Pope is his sense of "refinement," which is not simply the indiscriminate "polishing" of what poets take from others. Rather, the "purpose" of refinement "is to enhance value already existing in an original material" (9). Morris describes Pope's own "refinement" of the *Rape* in his careful revisions of the poem between 1712 and the later versions (1714, 1717). But most importantly for my purposes, he describes refinement and revision in terms of an unphilological "commerce" with other texts that closely parallels Bakhtin's description of the dialogics of discourse.

¹⁹Laura Brown, *Alexander Pope* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985) 12. See also Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man: The Social Psychology of Capitalism* (New York: Vintage, 1977), esp. ch. 5; Jon Stratton, *The Virgin Text: Fiction, Sexuality, and Ideology* (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1987) 21; Louis Landa, "Pope's Belinda, The General Emporie of the World, and the Wondrous Worm," in Mack and Winn 177-200; and C. E. Nicholson, "A World of Artefacts: *The Rape of the Lock* as Social History," in *Alexander Pope*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1986) 103-15.

Perhaps the most general examination of the social context of the *Rape* also implicit in the juxtapositions of the heroic couplet is Murray Krieger's discussion of "the rude hand of chaos" in relation to the poem. In this essay, Krieger examines the social phenomena that the *Rape* responds to as defined by Pope's *The Dunciad*. Thus, Krieger describes chaos itself as precisely the lack of a synecdochical coherence in the world, which is now simply a fetishized clutter of things. "What is chaos for Pope," Krieger asks, "but the multiplication of parts run wild? Discord is no longer resolvable into harmony, or partial evil into universal good."²⁰ Such chaos, Kenner has argued, is embodied in the new science of the early eighteenth century, the nascent materialist positivism that envisions a metonymic world of interchangeable and mechanical parts rather than a hierarchical, synecdochical world of embodied values.²¹ It is a world, to paraphrase Bakhtin, in preparation and formation of the new world order of capitalism. In such a world the clutter of things replaces the hierarchical order, an "epic" order; yet it is a world in which the ghostly synecdochical traces of an epic order still remain. Thus it is no accident that Krieger can demonstrate the close relationship between *The Rape of the Lock* and *The Dunciad*. The "fullest measure of Pope's utterance" in the *Rape*, he concludes,

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.

(315)

The felt presence of such "subterranean" meanings is, I believe, a function of the metonymic enunciations of Pope's couplets and, more generally, of the generic type of discourse he chose.

²⁰Murray Krieger, "The 'Frail China Jar' and the Rude Hand of Chaos," *Essential Articles for the Study of Alexander Pope*, ed. Maynard Mack (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1968) 314.

²¹Hugh Kenner, *The Counterfeiters* (New York: Anchor Books, 1973) ch. 1.

In other ways the language of Pope's poem enunciates this crisis in the dialogical "semantic bond" self-consciously present in mock epic. That is, clashing contexts of the poem's discourse can be seen in units smaller than the couplet and the line I have been examining. In the *Rape*, in an instance that has been widely commented upon, the "clashing contexts" in which *honour* is found can stand as an example of how fully the thematic unity of the work and its real place in life organically grow together. Most critics have examined what Hugo Reichard has called the "shades of meaning in the spectrum of *honour*."²² But they do so, as Reichard does, philologically, in relation to a word "securely established in the terminology of the Restoration dramatists and the essayists."²³ The poem, however, offers a host of clashing contexts for the word: it first appears as pure designation when Ariel equates the word "*Honour*" with the activity of Sylphs (1.78); next it means "good reputation" in Ariel's zeugma speculating on what "dire disaster" is fated to happen to Belinda ("Or stain her Honour, or her new Brocade" [2.107]), and later in Thalestris' speech ("Already see you a degraded Toast / And all your Honour in a Whisper lost!" [4.109-10]). In another context it appears to mean "trophy," referring to the spoils of the card game in an anonymous apostrophe by the narrator (3.103); and again in Canto III in the speech of the Baron it appears to mean public, as opposed to private, reputation ("While Nymphs take Treats, or Assignations give, / So long my Honour, Name, and Praise shall live!" [3.169-70]). It also exists as a kind of personification Thalestris uses ("*Honour* forbid! at whose unrival'd Shrine / Ease, Pleasure, Virtue, All, our Sex resign" [4.105-6]); and, again in the Baron's speech, it signifies an ornament on Belinda's head ("The long-contended Honours of her Head" [4.140; cf. 135]). Finally, in Clarissa's speech, it appears in the sense Johnson offers in his dictionary, that of "nobleness of mind" (cited in Reichard 892): "Say, why are Beauties prais'd and honour'd most" (5.9).

These "repetitions" of the word emphasize, as do Pope's more explicit rhyming and punning, the *materiality* of language by calling attention to what Kenner calls the "annoying" fact of language—the "chaotic" fact—that seemingly

universal and transcendental meanings are bound in discourse to the "empty coincidence" of the acoustical sounds of words ("Rhyme" 64, 68, 65). It is precisely to avoid such annoying chaos that critics seek a synecdochical principle of classification. Thus Reichard says that the various occurrences of the "same" word "take us in the right direction—toward the vulgarization of honor" (892), and Bakhtin would certainly agree, arguing only over the "specific sense" of "vulgarization": while Reichard implies in his very intonation that vulgarization is a coarsening falling off from Johnson's high philological definition of the word, Bakhtin argues that the nature of *living* language is precisely the vulgarization—the "popularization"—of discourse.

Such popularization, according to Bakhtin, is a function of "enunciated" language: "in intonation," Bakhtin/Voloshinov writes in "Discourse in Life and Discourse in Art," "discourse comes directly into contact with life."²⁴ Moreover, such intonation marks "emotionally charged behavioral speech," and it "proceeds as if it addressed, behind inanimate objects and phenomena, animate participants and agents in life; in other words, it has an inherent *tendency toward personification*" (103). The *Rape* enacts such "intonation" in its clashing uses of "honour": every instance (including the narrator's apostrophe) is marked from a particular discursive position within the narrative. Rather than presenting a ratified meaning and fallings off from that meaning—that is, rather than presenting "*usual and occasional meanings*" the relationship between which is governed by synecdoche (MPL 102)—the poem presents a wide "zone of contact" among these clashing understandings. Thus, for instance, in another couplet Pope repeats descriptions of defeat without presenting a synecdochical repetition: "She sees, and trembles at th' approaching Ill, / Just in the Jaws of Ruin, and Codille" (3.91-92). The paratactic joining of the figure, "Jaws of Ruin," and the literal technical term for losing a trick at Ombre, "Codille," do not quite join a general concept and its "part." Rather, the line—like so many others in the *Rape*, like Pope's puns, like the very mock-heroic description of a game of cards, like the various enunciations of "honour"—joins clashing orders

²²Hugh Reichard, "The Love Affair in Pope's *Rape of the Lock*," PMLA 69 (1954): 892.

²³James Preston, "'Th' Informing Soul': Creative Irony in *The Rape of the Lock*," Durham University Journal 58 (1966): 126.

²⁴Mikhail Bakhtin, "Discourse in Life and Discourse in Art (Concerning Sociological Poetics)," in V. N. Voloshinov, *Freudianism*, trans. I. R. Titunik (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1987) 102.

of understanding, clashing intonations.

III

In this way Pope's narrative (as well as the elements of his narrative: the allusions, couplets, and particular words) proceeds by a metonymic discourse inhabited by the ghost of synecdoche. Such metonymic discourse, I think, is the method of Bakhtin's materialist dialogics. In *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* Bakhtin/Voloshinov spends half the book describing problems in reported speech. More specifically, this text describes quasi-direct discourse. This discourse allows a text to join two different attitudes in a particular utterance: in Joyce or Flaubert or, in Bakhtin's example, Dostoevsky, it offers words which "might be enclosed in quotation marks as 'another's speech,' the reported speech of Nikiforov. But they belong not only to him. After all, the story is being told by a narrator." "Thus," Bakhtin/Voloshinov concludes, "almost every word in the narrative . . . figures simultaneously in two intersecting contexts, two speech acts: in the speech of the author-narrator (ironic and mocking) and the speech of the hero (who is far removed from irony)" (136). Such a description of quasi-direct discourse accounts for the curious double discourse of Pope's mock epic, the fact, as Ellen Pollak has argued, that so much of the *Rape* "is alternatively serious and ironic, at one moment in synchrony with Belinda's valuation of her own divine beauty, and the next casting sardonic aspersions on the artificiality and superficiality of her external adornments."²⁵

Yet unlike the novel, the mock epic genre doesn't so much enact a dialogical principle as it educes it and allegorizes it. In other words, while the novel Bakhtin describes *uses* dialogic discourse to capture the "living" language Bakhtin constantly valorizes—the language of radical metonymy—Pope's mock epic *thematizes* such discourse to show how "dead" heroic language constantly escapes its discourse, can only be realized within ghostly synecdochical laughter. In this way, the *Rape* makes the lack of the possibility of "dialogue"—both in the beau monde which cannot seem beyond its own, "fetishized" values and in the epic it continually "recites" without quotations marks but in the "same" (not other) words—the motor of its own

discourse. In other words, what the poem finally mocks is the kind of monological discourse that it uses and transforms, but finally cannot hear beyond (as Dostoevsky and the novel hear beyond traditional genres).

It creates such thematization by narrating the discursive transformation it utilizes: the repeated cutting off of pairs, of replacing the doubles of the narrative (the curls and gloves and its own juxtaposition of *two* discourses) with multiplications figured as "threes"—the "Thrice" ringing bell that wakes Belinda, the Baron's "three am'rous Sighs" (2.41), the three-handed game of Ombre, the warning the Sylphs attempt ("And thrice they twitch'd the Diamond in her Ear, / Thrice she look'd back, and thrice the Foe drew near" [3.135-36]), and finally the ghostly articulation of the third personage of the goddess at the dressing table where only two were before. It thematizes the transformation from synecdochical hierarchy to metonymic accident and chaos, but doing so, finally, it valorizes synecdoche by not being able to see the disorder of metonymy, the crisis of its time, in any other terms than the negation of synecdochical order. Unlike Stevens and unlike Bakhtin, Pope is no connoisseur of chaos.

The Rape of the Lock, in other words, presents the elements of the serio-comical, but it never achieves that third voice—the radical negativity of the quasi-direct discourse Bakhtin/Voloshinov describes—that lets all voices have their say. Instead, it reduces the non-epic voice of the beau monde simply to inarticulate noise. The only discourse in the poem cited in what Derrida calls the "contextual conventions" of quotation marks is that of Sir Plume:

. . . 'My Lord, why, what the Devil?
Z--ds! damn the Lock! 'fore Gad, you must
be civil!
Plague on't? 'tis past a Jest—nay prithee,
Pox!
Give her the Hair—he spoke, and rapp'd his
Box.

(4.127-30)

Here discourse is reduced to noise; Sir Plume's cliché-ridden discourse, unlike Joyce's or Dostoevsky's characters', is not "unfinalized" and ongoing, but reduced to something less than language: "heteroglossia" with a vengeance. That is, Pope finally cannot imagine that language is heterogeneous and *still in the future, always in the future*. Rather, Sir Plume's noise is, finally,

²⁵Ellen Pollak, *The Poetics of Sexual Myth: Gender and Ideology in the Verse of Swift and Pope* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1985) 83.

synecdochical, standing, satirically, as a part of the beau monde for the whole of its values. Those values are measured doubly, not triply, against a possibility of hierarchy and order whose existence Pope questions and builds upon in the

not quite enunciated third voice of metonymy in *The Rape of the Lock*.²⁶□

²⁶I would to thank Robert Con Davis and James Comas for helpful comments on an earlier draft of this essay.

FEMINIST HERMENEUTICS AND READER RESPONSE: THE ROLE OF GENDER IN READING *THE RAPE OF THE LOCK*

The Rape of the Lock has been read traditionally as a mock-heroic attack on the artificial society in which Alexander Pope lived—a society poised precariously on the edge of chaos. When the “hero” “rapes” the lock of the egotistical Belinda, he figuratively exposes—castrates—an already emasculated (“effeminate”) social group. Belinda is the butt of the joke—her lock (representative of her virginity) is her most important possession; she is “lost” without it. Her lack of a lock is “funny.” Readers trained in western culture consistently have interpreted *The Rape of the Lock* from this phallogocentric perspective. Reader-response theorists have lent credence to such readings by envisioning “the reader” as, at worst, male and, at best, neutered. But the reader of any text is always one gender or the other; to overlook that fact is, as Annette Kolodny suggests, to deny the pleasure of the text to “half the population”—it is to imply that the “other” reader “lacks” the ability to read correctly.¹ Canonical texts like *The Rape of the Lock* must be re-read by women (and men) from a feminist perspective. Such a re-reading of Pope’s “epic” produces a considerably different story than the traditional one and reveals a new layer in an already multi-layered text.

I

The basic premise of most reader-response criticism is the belief that the text, by itself, is unable to produce meaning. Meaning is produced as a result of interaction between the text and the reader. The reader is “at once interpreter and interpretation” and is always already “situated inside a system of language, inside a context of discursive practices in which are inscribed values, interests, attitudes, beliefs.”² The reader applies the intertext of her/

his own experience to the text, trying to “naturalize” (make intelligible) its content by finding a “common world of reference” that will allow the text to “communicate” (Freund 81).

Leading reader-response theorists generally assume one of two positions: either the text controls the reader or the reader controls the text. Michael Riffaterre, Georges Poulet and Wolfgang Iser acknowledge the “creative role of the reader” but ultimately believe the text to be the “dominant force” in reading; David Bleich, Norman Holland and Stanley Fish insist that the reader holds the “controlling interest” in the reading process.³ None of these critics recognizes the role of gender in reading, ignoring the fact that, although male and female readers may seem to use the same language system, the “values, interests, attitudes, beliefs” they bring to that system often are vastly different. To discount the relevance of differences between male and female readers is to exhibit the sort of “ignorance” Hélène Cixous finds in those critics who “hesitate to admit or deny outright the possibility or the pertinence of a distinction between feminine and masculine writing.”⁴ Bleich, who has at least acknowledged that the question of gender and reading deserves consideration, denies the difference between male and female readers because “associat[ing] the idea of ‘gender’ with reading . . . [would be] saying that the readers are in some generic sense biologically defined”—which, of course, they must be.⁵ Many of Bleich’s remarks—such as “it seems almost too obvious to mention that men and women speak to one another in the ‘same’ language” (234); and “the

³Patrocínio Schweickart, “Reading Ourselves: Toward a Feminist Theory of Reading,” in *Gender and Reading: Essays on Readers, Texts, and Contexts*, eds. Elizabeth Flynn and Patrocínio Schweickart (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1986) 36.

⁴Hélène Cixous, “The Laugh of the Medusa,” in *The Signs Reader* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1983) 287.

⁵David Bleich, “Gender Interests in Reading and Language,” in *Gender and Reading* 234.

¹Annette Kolodny, “Dancing through the Minefield: Some Observations on the Theory, Practice and Politics of a Feminist Literary Criticism,” *Feminist Studies* 6 (Spring 1980): 19.

²Elizabeth Freund, *The Return of the Reader: Reader-Response Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1987) 109.

language foundation of both sexes is maternal"(238)—are simplistic and patronizing. More important, such remarks beg the big question: of course they can speak the same language; of course they are both born of woman and learn language from her, but *whose language is it?* It is the phallogocentric language of the Fathers, used to perpetuate the "powerlessness" that "characterize[s] woman's experience of reading."⁶

Women, as readers, teachers and scholars, have been "immasculated" by their training in the academy. They have been taught, as Judith Fetterley says, "to think as men, to identify with a male point of view, and to accept as normal and legitimate a male system of values, one of whose central principles is misogyny" (xx). Rather than "impart[ing] virile power" to the woman reader by allowing her to participate equally in a dialogue with male critics, the centuries-long process of immascultation has actually "double[d] her oppression" (Schweickart, "Reading" 42). She not only experiences the "powerlessness" that "derives from not seeing one's experience articulated, clarified, and legitimized in art," she also experiences the powerlessness that "results from the endless division of self against self, the consequence of the invocation to identify as male while being reminded that to be male . . . is to be *not female*" (Fetterley xiii). Though she learns to speak with the "logic of 'phallic' discourse," the woman who knows the difference must always struggle against her training, wondering, like Nancy K. Miller, what it is possible for a woman to read "in a universe . . . where the rules of aesthetic reception and indeed of the hermeneutic act itself are mapped onto a phallomorphic regime of production."⁷ Keeping in mind that literary history is a "fiction," that what is engaged in reading are not "texts" but "paradigms," and that the "grounds upon which aesthetic value [is assigned] to texts are never infallible, unchangeable, or universal" (Kolodny 8), feminist readers, who know that the meaning of a text is dependent upon the interpretive strategy applied to it, must take control of the

reading experience, "reading the text as it was *not* meant to be read, in fact reading it against itself" (Schweickart, "Reading" 50).

II

"Every writer," says Edward Said, "knows that the choice of a beginning for what he will write is crucial not only because it determines much of what follows but also because a work's beginning is . . . the main entrance to what it offers": the beginning is "*the first step in the intentional production of meaning*."⁸ A close feminist re-reading of *The Rape of the Lock*, one that illustrates both feminist "resistance" to the text and the feminist ideal of recuperating female value in its human configuration through sympathy with the heroine, must begin, then, at the *real* beginning—the letter to Arabella Fermor that precedes the text of the poem:

It will be in vain to deny that I have some Regard for this Piece, since I Dedicate it to You. Yet You may bear me Witness, it was intended only to divert a few young Ladies, who have good Sense and good Humor enough to laugh not only at their Sex's little unguarded Follies, but at their own. But as it was communicated with the Air of a Secret, it soon found its Way into the World. An imperfect Copy having been offer'd to a Bookseller, You had the Good-Nature for my Sake to consent to the Publication of one more correct: This I was forc'd to before I had executed half my Design, for the *machinery* was entirely wanting to compleat it.

The *Machinery*, Madam, is a Term invented by the Criticks, to signify that Part which the Deities, Angels, or Daemons, are made to act in a Poem: For the ancient Poets are in one respect like many modern Ladies; Let an Action be never so trivial in it self, they always make it appear of the utmost Importance. These Machines I determin'd to raise on a very new and odd Foundation, the *Rosicrucian* Doctrine of Spirits.

I know how disagreeable it is to make use of hard Words before a Lady; but 'tis so much the Concern of a Poet to have his Works understood, and particularly by your Sex, that You must give me leave to explain two or three difficult Terms.

⁶Judith Fetterley, *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1978) xiii.

⁷Susan Suleiman, "(Re)Writing the Body: The Politics and Poetics of Female Eroticism"; and Nancy K. Miller, "Rereading as a Woman: The Body in Practice," both in *The Female Body in Western Culture*, ed. Susan Suleiman (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1986) 13, 359.

⁸Edward Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1985) 3, 5.

The *Rosicrucians* are a People I must bring You acquainted with. The best Account I know of them is in a French Book call'd *Le Comte de Gabalis*, which both in its Title and Size is so like a *Novel*, that many of the Fair Sex have read it for one by Mistake. According to these Gentlemen, the four Elements are inhabited by Spirits, which they call *Sylphs*, *Gnomes*, *Nymphs*, and *Salamanders*. The *Gnomes*, or Daemons of Earth, delight in mischief; but the *Sylphs*, whose Habitation is in the Air, are the best-condition'd Creatures imaginable. 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.

As to the following Canto's, all the Passages of them are as Fabulous, as the Vision at the Beginning, or the Transformation at the End; (except the Loss of your Hair, which I always mention with Reverence). The Human Persons are as Fictitious as the Airy ones; and the Character of *Belinda*, as it is now manag'd, resembles You in nothing but in Beauty. . . .

Addressed to Arabella, the letter is undoubtedly intended as an apologia to Pope's feminist readers. Following what Susan Schibanoff calls the "well-established *topos* of manuscript literature," Pope hoped to "relieve the problems that the anti-feminist text [might cause] the female reader."⁹ But, rather than relieving problems, the letter actually makes the poem more offensive:

Authorial apologies to the female reader for anti-feminist texts are . . . something other than heart-felt laments. They are attempts both to intimidate her and . . . to emasculate her. They warn her that the written traditions of antifeminism have contemporary guardians and custodians who will not allow these texts to disappear. (Schibanoff 85)

Pope's duplicity is apparent from the first sentence. His claim that the poem is written for Arabella is false. The person to whom Pope actually addresses the poem is his friend John

⁹Susan Schibanoff, "Taking the Gold Out of Egypt: The Art of Reading as a Woman," in *Gender and Reading* 85.

Caryll (see 1.3). Arabella's story, told to Pope by Caryll, may have "inspired" the poem, but it is Caryll and other males who are his "intended readers" (see 1.6).¹⁰ Pope's antifeminism appears full-blown in the second sentence: the poem is intended to "divert a few young ladies, who have good sense and good humor enough to laugh not only at their sex's little unguarded follies, but at their own." The choice of "divert" is perfect: Pope hopes to divert attention away from his act of misogynous judgment and focus it on what he calls the "folly" of female *nature*. Like the more or less formalist readers with whom reader-response criticism argues, Pope attempts to present activity and relationship as some reified, unchanging "nature." At this point the feminist reader must begin the "succession of decisions" that ultimately will determine her interpretation of the text (Fish 174). She must resist the text's seduction by referring to her own field of experience, becoming what might be called an "unintended reader"—the reader the text is designed to mislead.

Pope claims that his intention in revising *The Rape of the Lock* is to complete the poem by adding the "*Machinery*." Rather than simply explaining the change, Pope uses the revisions as an excuse to position and define his female readers in such a way that their only recourse is to imagine themselves as male readers—to "emasculate" themselves. He explains to his uneducated female readers the workings of "*Machinery*," which he uses in imitation of the "ancient Poets," whose tendency to blow trivialities out of proportion is reminiscent of "modern Ladies." His audience for such a statement is not Arabella; rather it defines the readers as men who will appreciate the joke. When he explains the "hard Words" that women readers probably will not understand, this "male" laughter increases. The resisting reader knows, however, that Pope's humor illustrates the fact that women did not know the esoteric terminology of epic machinery because they were denied the opportunity to learn it. Only a small percentage of Pope's female readers could have had any training in the classics. Pope is not doing women readers a favor; he is openly ridiculing women for a lack created

¹⁰I am using Stanley Fish's definition of the "intended reader," stated in "Interpreting the *Variorum*," *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism*, ed. Jane Tompkins (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1980) 174: "the reader whose education, opinions, concerns, linguistic competences, etc. make him capable of having the experience the author wished to provide."

by the patriarchal society he represents and inviting *all* his readers to join in his misogyny. The laughter becomes louder as the "lessons" continue. Pope cannot identify his Rosicrucian source without a condescending reference to women's novel-reading, an activity that has made them so silly they might read non-fiction with a novelistic title and not know the difference.

Buried near the end of the letter is Pope's most revealing comment—a comment that ties him, and his poem, to the eighteenth-century "cult of passive womanhood."¹¹ His linking of Belinda to the Sylphs can be read as a warning to all women that they will only enjoy the protection of male society as long as they co-operate in the "inviolable preservation" of their chastity. The woman who strays loses the protection of the same society that led her astray in the first place.

Ironically, it is the strength of Pope's determination to preserve the status quo that most clearly reveals his weakness. He does not insult woman because she is inferior but because he fears the power her "otherness" symbolizes—those "secret Truths" known only to "Maids and Children" (1.37-38). The site of her chastity is a dark place that men can only visit, leaving fragments of themselves and getting momentary pleasure in return. Woman's "chastity" represents a gap in her access to the mysterious powers of Nature. As long as she is kept chaste, the object of male desire, woman cannot know her own innate power as subject. If, as Sherry Ortner convincingly asserts, "Culture" is associated with the male and "Nature" with the female, the greatest fear of a phallogocentric Culture, with only a tenuous hold on its power, must be that Nature will someday regain her supremacy.¹² This is why Pope must stress such points as the artificiality of Belinda's "purer" blushes, created by rouge, not by Nature (1.143). It is crucial that woman be separated from Nature—kept in her place, threatened with ostracism, convinced of her ignorance, denied knowledge of her strength beyond cultural forms.

Once the phallogocentric code of Pope's letter has been broken, reading the text of the poem itself produces a field of meaning quite different from

the traditional interpretation. Rather than identifying with the "hero" who restores order to the (male) text and disapproving of Belinda, as the immasculated reader might have done, the de-immasculated reader's allegiance is reversed. She no longer reads against herself as "other" but with Belinda, the "other" against whom Pope writes.

III

To read "with" Belinda is difficult—everything in Pope's poem resists such reading—yet such a reading can reveal what Patrocínio Schweickart calls the "dual hermeneutic" of feminist reader-response: "a negative hermeneutic that discloses [male writers'] complicity with patriarchal ideology, and a positive hermeneutic that recuperates the utopian moment . . . from which they draw a significant portion of their emotional power" ("Reading" 43-44). In Pope, the feminist negative hermeneutic is quite easily deployed because, in part, the mock-epic is a layered text that self-consciously uses its own negative moment satirically. In mock-epic, one layer, the "story" (or stories), is applied on top of a second, the "epic" implied by the form of the "discourse." In *The Rape of the Lock*, the primary story concerns an attack on the person of the vain Belinda, who worships at the altar of her toilet (1.121-48). Belinda goes on a day's outing—after spending hours in preparation. She expects a relaxing day of cards and gossip. In the midst of an innocent game of ombre, Belinda is attacked by an "admirer" who snips off one of her locks (3.147-54)—one of two designed to show off her "smooth Iv'ry Neck" (2.22). Pandemonium reigns. Belinda demands the return of the lock; she appeals to her foppish beau, Sir Plume, for assistance, but he, of the "unthinking Face," can only rap his snuffbox and mumble to himself (4.121-30). Ultimately, after much ado about nothing the lock rises magically into the heavens, to inscribe "mid'st the Stars" the name of Belinda (5.141-50). The uppity woman is put in her place; the status quo is restored.

At the level of the discourse, however, this rather unextraordinary plot is elevated to a higher plane. Belinda is not an ordinary woman but an earthly goddess, watched over by a "Guardian Sylph" (1.20), who is able to enlist the aid of all modes of divine "machinery." From the Vergilian invocation ("What dire Offence from am'rous Causes springs, / What mighty Contests rise from

¹¹This phrase is borrowed from Ellen Pollak, *The Poetics of Sexual Myth: Gender and Ideology in the Verse of Swift and Pope* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1985).

¹²See Sherry Ortner, "Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?" in *Woman, Culture, and Society*, eds. Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1974) 67-88.

trivial Things,/ I sing" [1.1-3]) to the Ovidian metamorphosis of the lock at the end of the poem, Pope superimposes the trivial story of Belinda onto the classical epic format. Belinda's toilet, for instance, has religious significance and magical powers. As Aeneas was "armed" with the power to conquer his enemies, so Belinda is armed with "Files of Pins" that "extend their shining Rows" and regiments of "Puffs, Powder, Patches, Bibles, [and] Billet-doux" (1.137-38). As Aeneas was protected by his shield, Belinda is protected by her petticoats—a "sev'nfold Fence," "arm'd with Ribs of Whale" (2.119-20). Canto III contains the epic digression of the Games, followed by the fatal attack on the lock that forces Belinda (as Achilles was forced by the death of Patroclus) to take arms and rally her troops against the sea of trouble stirred up by her attacker. Canto V is the final battle:

Fans clap, Silks rustle, and tough
Whalebones crack;
Heroes' and Heroines' shouts confus'dly
rise,
And bass and treble Voices strike the Skies.
No common Weapons in their Hands are
found;
Like Gods they fight, nor dread a mortal
Wound.

(5.40-44)

Finally, the gods intervene and, in imitation of the story of Romulus who ascended to the heavens during a rainstorm, carry the sacred lock heavenward.

On this level, the story is trite; attaching it to a classical form of discourse makes it seem even more superficial. Society has proved to be vain, frivolous, wasteful, lazy, and shallow. Waging "war" over a lock of hair highlights the effeminate character of a social system peopled by emasculated men and uppity women, all of whom have forgotten their "natural" places. The popularity of *The Rape of the Lock* has lasted for nearly three centuries because of Pope's masterful use of the heroic couplet, because of the cleverness with which he layered the trivial, momentary story onto the universal, timeless epic, and because the poem is based on a phallogocentric "joke" that readers of both sexes have been taught to understand as "funny"—a reading perpetuated in the twentieth century by the New Critics. Cleanth Brooks, for example, suggests that Belinda's "histrionics" are merely a "passing show, the product of an overwrought virginal mind whose hypocrisies her male

admirers . . . can afford to treat with humorous indulgence."¹³

IV

The negative satirical reading of Pope's poem, however, can be resisted by a self-conscious feminist reading that aims, through its negative hermeneutic, to uncover the more or less unconscious misogyny that governs *The Rape of the Lock*. The immasculated reader is easily seduced by Pope's phallogocentric satire. Taught to read as a man, she unwittingly elevates "male difference" to the level of "universality" and reduces "female difference" to "otherness" (Schweickart, "Reading" 42). Because her interpretation of the text is regulated by her need to belong to a male-dominated academic/intellectual community, she reads against herself—against her otherness. In reading *The Rape of the Lock* the immasculated reader identifies with the "hero" who restores order to the (male) text, rather than with Belinda, the other who refuses to be silent. Even the most "liberated" immasculated reader may be victimized by her own liberation. Belinda is, after all, hardly a sympathetic figure—she is the epitome of unliberated womanhood; her values run counter to any sort of "feminist" ideology. Perhaps, in some way, she deserves what she gets. By thus indicting Belinda's otherness, condoning her loss of power, the immasculated reader increases her own lack of power. She participates, figuratively, in her own castration.

The feminist reader must develop an even more powerful instrument than the "lost" phallus—a double-edged sword with which she can resist the text's intention and read it from both phallogocentric and gynocentric perspectives. Just as the coded "apology" of Pope's letter to Arabella can be understood beyond the literal apology, so the poem itself can be reread from the perspective of its heroine. By running her sword between the layers of the male text, the feminist reader can locate the sub-text(s) that evade the immasculated reader.

A feminist re-reading of *The Rape of the Lock* exposes a sub-text layered in between the primary story and the epic form of the discourse, a sub-text that articulates female power in its very

¹³Quoted in Christopher Norris, "Pope Among the Formalists: Textual Politics and 'The Rape of the Lock,'" in *Post-structuralist Readings of English Poetry*, eds. Richard Machin and Christopher Norris (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1987) 142.

otherness. Belinda, whose locks give her a great deal of power, is raped (with scissors) by a "hero" who lacks power. By figuratively castrating Belinda—the "other" who (at least in western culture) should *lack* power—the "hero" regains control of his society. This is the root of the phallogocentric joke: Belinda, the woman who has appropriated masculine power, is put in her place; the threat to the eighteenth century's "myth of passive womanhood" has been eliminated. From the feminist reader's perspective, however, the joke is not on Belinda but on the "man's man" who thinks he can destroy her power by merely cutting off an imaginary penis. Or, rather, there is no "joke" at all, but rather the *marked* difference between human desire (including blushes) and the narrow and life-denying range of possible articulations of that desire presented in the poem. Pope moves epic contests to the arena of sexual relations as a joke, but within this joke there is, I will argue, an unrealized "utopian" possibility of humanizing, by sexualizing, human relations.

Such lost possibilities are suggested by the very insistence of Pope's negative hermeneutic. *The Rape of the Lock* seems to be centered around an insignificant battle in the war between the sexes. Both men and women characters are made to look foolish; no one is actually hurt physically. But that center does not hold: the "joke" is played out at the expense of Belinda, and all women who forget their "places"; the underlying message of the joke is deadly serious. Belinda has learned well the lessons taught her by a male-dominated society. She is vain, lazy, superficial, and artificial. She knows it is only her outward appearance in which men are interested, and she gains power by making herself as attractive an object as possible. Like the women Luce Irigaray describes in *This Sex Which is Not One*, Belinda has been conditioned to believe that "the penis [is] the only sexual organ of recognized value," and, thus, she has taken advantage of "every means available to appropriate that organ for herself."¹⁴ She knows that her power lies in an outward display of sexuality, figuratively represented by two locks which "graceful hung behind" (2.20); Pope's negative hermeneutic is grotesque in its insistence: rather than one sex organ, Belinda has grown two. Like the "universal," supposedly "ungendered" reader Pope's discourse implies, she not only has the sexual power of the female,

but she has appropriated that of the male as well.

Such grotesquery calls for the "mock" violence of the poem, which reveals the powerful violence that is the price of the "universal" man lurking below the joke: the Baron, the hero who re-feminizes Belinda and restores the fictive community to its "rightful" order, is applauded for his action because his victim "asks for it." Such violence is so usual that a critic like Brooks can say, "Pope knows that the rape has in it more of compliment than of insult" (Norris 143). In this way, in mockery, we are taught that the Baron is not "predestined to be a rake at heart"; he is just momentarily overwhelmed by Belinda's female beauty, which Pope feared as a form of "sexual aggression," believing that female sexuality inspired desire in members of both sexes (Pollak 89, 94).

But rape is not a "compliment"; it is, as Margaret Higonnet asserts, an attempt to destroy a woman by attacking the thing that gives her her identity as a woman:

Much like love or lost love, rape has been affiliated with the breakdown of a woman's identity. The focus on chastity, of course, involves that precisely which distinguishes woman as woman, and does so in terms of possession by a man, fetishistically. If woman is taken to be a commodity, rape means total devaluation: reified, then stolen, she has no essence left to justify her continuing existence.¹⁵

The "hero" realizes that the only way he can possess the most prized possession of the powerful Belinda is through "Fraud or Force"—a solution Pope (and his masculine and immasculated readers) presumably condoned (2.31-34). The Baron takes out his scissors—an instrument that unites in its design the phallus (closed) and the vagina (opened). Imitating his version of the female power he so fears—the woman who can cut him off from Nature, just by closing her legs together—the Baron "spreads the glitt'ring *Forfex* wide,/ T'inclose the Lock; now joins it, to divide" (3.147-48). In a sort of reverse rape, the hero castrates the too-powerful female, returning her to a position of powerlessness. She will not even be allowed to retain the remaining lock, which now hangs limp and "the fatal Shears demands" (4.173). What the negative

¹⁴Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1985) 23.

¹⁵Margaret Higonnet, "Speaking Silences: Women's Suicide," in *The Female Body in Western Culture* 74.

hermeneutic reveals is a kind of Hobbesian reduction of all nature to warfare, all power to control.

Toward the end of the poem, the "nymph" Clarissa steps forward to deliver a sermon on the theme of *carpe diem*, reminding Belinda that

To patch, nay ogle, might become a Saint,
Nor could it sure be such a Sin to paint.
But since, alas! frail Beauty must decay,
Curl'd or uncurl'd, since Locks will turn to
grey;
Since painted or not painted, all shall fade,
And she who scorns a Man, must die a Maid;
What then remains, but well our pow'r to
use,
And keep good Humour still whate'er we
lose?

(5.23-30)

This would seem to be a good lesson—why should women worry about anything so silly as their hair? And from the male perspective—in this world of war of all against all—it is silly. Men grow more powerful with age; grey hair becomes a sign of maturity, experience and increased value. When a woman's hair changes to grey, however, she loses value in the eyes of those same men. She is old, used up, less valuable as a commodity. It is not the lesson of *carpe diem* but that of the age-old double standard that Clarissa's speech teaches and Pope's readers have accepted. Jove, the male god (of course), is sent to decide the fate of Belinda and her lock. He "[w]eighs the Men's Wits against the Lady's Hair;/ The doubtful Beam long nods from side to side;/ At length the Wits mount up, the Hairs subside" (5.71-74). In defiance, the women still insist on the return of the lock, but Jove's "machinery" intercedes to remove it permanently from woman's grasp. The raped lock will hang forever in the heavens, a "universal," unattainable prize. Intended to remind women of Belinda's heavenly reprimand, the astro-lock becomes, for the resisting reader, a symbol of the lengths to which the guardians of a phallogocentric culture will go to retain control of the "sex which is not one."

V

This reading of *The Rape of the Lock* as a story of reverse penis envy is "resistant" in that it turns the violence and almost palpable misogyny of the poem back on itself. Thus, it is hard to imagine how a positive and sympathetic feminist reading

might recuperate a more generous vision of human life in Pope's narrative. Readers could, as Fetterley says, identify with the male power of Pope's world, but now more widely conceived in its "utopian power." That is, the feminist reader can find within Pope's mocking violence the possibility of imaging "nature" very different from the dominant discourse of Pope's age. Such a reading is negative in that it seeks to outline "the thing which was not" (to quote Swift's Houyhnhnms) in the way Pope saw the world—but in imagining a sexual rather than a bloody epic as the overriding metaphor for human life (as Blake did later in the century), it is possible in Schweickart's "utopian" sense. In other words, the very fact that Pope translates epic warfare into sexual warfare contains within it the possibility of reconceiving human life and "nature" in terms of "utopian" love rather than universal strife. Of course, Pope literally cannot conceive of such a reading, but a feminist rereading can apply a positive hermeneutic even to Pope.

Such a reading suggests what Schweickart calls "domination-free discourse."¹⁶ In her essay "Engendering Critical Discourse," Schweickart re-evaluates, from a feminist perspective, the "ideal speech situation" outlined by Jürgen Habermas in "Wahrheitstheorien." According to Habermas, the ideal speech situation exists if "the opportunity to select and employ speech acts [is] equitably distributed among all the participants of the discourse," with "no internal or external structures that impose nonreciprocal obligations on the participants or allow some of them to dominate others"; and if there are no "constraints on communication . . . [e]verything—specific assertions, theoretical explanations, language-systems, and theories of knowledge—must be open to question" (Schweickart, "Engendering" 299-300). The result of discourse occurring under these circumstances is, Habermas believes, as close to truth (or at least true consensus) as it is possible to come.

The difficulty Schweickart finds in this model is that it is based on the ideals of the Enlightenment, with the "universality" that is the foundation of Pope's irony:

It links rationality and truth with liberty,
equality . . . and fraternity. It is, in short, an

¹⁶Patrocínio Schweickart, "Engendering Critical Discourse," in *The Current in Criticism: Essays on the Present and Future of Literary Theory*, eds. Clayton Koelb and Virgil Lokke (West Lafayette, Ind.: Purdue Univ. Press, 1987) 300.

ideal that has been abstracted from the discourse of the brotherhood . . . [embodying] masculine interests and intuitions—a masculine sense of self and the intersubjectivity or man-to-man relationships.

(“Engendering” 302)

Habermas, like Pope and most male reader-response theorists, supposes a commonality of knowledge, a supposition that does not take into account the question of sexual difference. In the critical discourse surrounding reader-response theory, gender must be recognized as a “locus both of difference and power” in the act of interpretation (Schweickart, “Engendering” 311). Sexual difference must be acknowledged as legitimate grounds for literary interpretation; the power of validation must be distributed equally

among all participants. The recognition of gender as a major factor in the reading process will help capture at least a glimmer of a different world—Schweickart’s “utopian moment.” It will also help generate the kind of “playful pluralism” Kolodny sees as crucial to recognizing the “various systems of meaning and their interaction” within a text (19). Such pluralism will not only aid in the de-immasculation of women readers but will help make up for anything that might be lacking in the male reader’s reading experience as well. □

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PROSOPOP(E)OEIA

There is an old story going around these days; a colleague told it to me last year, William James stars in an earlier version of it, and I see in a recent *New York Review of Books* that Stephen Hawking begins his *A Brief History of Time* with it.¹ In its latest redaction, it concerns the confrontation of a young male physicist and an older lady (the gender mythos of the story is rich and unexamined) with certain far eastern tendencies. The young physicist has just completed a lecture on the Big Bang Theory, when the older lady, obviously annoyed, approaches him and says "Young man, you know you've got it all wrong." "How's that?" he replies, barely humoring her. "The universe," she says with an air of absolute authority, "rests on the back of a great elephant, and that elephant rests on the back of a great turtle." "Aha!" says the young man, pouncing on her argument with all his youthful vigor, "and just what do you suppose that turtle is resting on?" "You're not as clever as you think, young man," the woman answers, clearly unshaken, "it's turtles all the way down."

Among the lovely things about this story is the resilience of the older lady. We might not believe it's turtles all the way down, but we come to realize, face to face with her answer, that not only do we not know what it is, but the very rhetorical structure of our understanding is open to question. What is "down?" "Down" to "what?"—something other than turtles? Then what would "it" be? Is there "a way," much less "the way," and how can we know when "all" of it has been traced? These are, of course, questions underscored by the history of the discussion and analysis of the physical world, where the search for the fundamental has followed Xeno's paradox, mincing the infinitely small into the infinitely smaller, infinitely.

They are also questions that have an ancient history in the human sciences, but in some periods especially, such as the eighteenth century, they seem to deploy the tensions that

constitute the problematic of the time. Swift was fascinated by these kinds of formations. The beau stripped, and the lady flayed of the *Tale* problematize the question of "down" to "what?" just as the following lines from his "On Poetry: A Rhapsody" perpetually undermine our point of view:

So, Nat'ralists observe, a Flea
Hath smaller Fleas that on him prey,
And these have smaller Fleas to bite 'em'
And so proceed *ad infinitum*. . . .
(2.337-40)

The subject is trivial, but triviality itself is part of the Scriblerean tradition of the endlessly degrading text, in which the constant subversion of meanings leaves fragments of new ones in its wake. It has been pointed out that literature as an institution, i.e., as a socially described realm in which the identity of authors and the integrity of works are legally constituted, emerges in the eighteenth century.² What needs to be added is that it is at this same moment that these ideas are subject to greater duress than they will be again until our own time. The productions of the Scriblereans, some of them communal, all of them pluralistic, are strangely postmodern in their conception and form. They certainly belie the Bakhtinian injunction against the dialogic in poetry; though it must be admitted they also confuse the very notion of genre. The mock heroic style of *The Rape of the Lock* confuses its relationship to other literature and problematizes its own significance, in the same way that "mock," meaning both to copy and to ridicule, is a problematic term. What is *The Dunciad*: poem, argument, epic, pastiche? What does it say about the relationship between poetry and prose, between the original and the repeated, between Pope's voice, the voices he impersonates, the voices he quotes, between the text and the notes?

As the work of satire, *The Dunciad* is

¹Martin Gardner, "The Ultimate Turtle," rev. of *A Brief History of Time*, by Stephen W. Hawking, *The New York Review of Books* 35.10 (16 June 1988): 17.

²See Frank Lentricchia, *Criticism and Social Change* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1983) 54. Lentricchia puts this observation in the context of discussions by Foucault and Raymond Williams.

disconcerting for the way it performs what it criticizes. In Book III, for example, what are we to say about Pope's gloss of lines twenty-eight to thirty—"The allegory of the souls of dull coming forth in the form of books, dressed in calf's leather, and being let abroad in vast numbers by Booksellers, is sufficiently intelligible"—except perhaps that we will not mention it? In Book I, in a different kind of example, but one that, nevertheless, thematizes Pope's own use of notes, Dulness comes forward:

Here to her Chosen all her work she shows;
Prose swell'd to verse, verse loit'ring into
prose:
How random thoughts now meaning chance
to find,
Now leave all memory of sense behind:
How Prologues into Prefaces decay,
And these to notes are fritter'd quite away:
(1.273-78)

The Dunciad is perforce the mirror of the works of Dulness. Presumably dullness is the most prosaic of subjects; *The Dunciad* is, therefore, "prose swell'd to verse." A theme of the poem is the way the random, trivial productions of the dull are dignified with significance by their association with "true" works of literature. *The Dunciad*, in a paradox which cannot be resolved—for how can a "true" work establish its identity by immortalizing "false" work?—perpetuates that state of affairs. Nor is it merely that the works of the dull are referred to through the medium of a poetry that always manages to keep its subject somehow out of sight. On the contrary, and again paradoxically, images "which leave all memory of sense behind" are invented for the poem, in honor of dullness, which they immortalize, and to which they grant a certain beauty—and not only because they are presented through the rich and perfect cadences of Pope's verse:

Thence a new world to Nature's laws
unknown,
Breaks out refulgent, with a heav'n its own:
Another Cynthia her new journey runs,
And other planets circle other suns.
The forests dance, the rivers upwards rise,
Whales sport in woods, and dolphins in the
skies. . . .

(3.241-46)

As Dulness goes on to say, "Son; what thou seek'st is in thee! Look, and find/ Each Monster

meets its likeness in thy mind," it becomes clear that these lines invoke Marvell's:

The mind, that ocean where each kind
Does straight its own resemblance find;
Yet it creates, transcending these,
Far other worlds and other seas,
Annihilating all that's made
To a green thought in a green shade.

In part this invocation is parodic, but not entirely. The "new world . . . refulgent," the vastness of the cosmic vision, the fascination with "otherness," the metamorphoses that produce dancing trees, woodland whales, airborne dolphins, are very much in the spirit of Marvell's poetry, and Pope's poetry, as well. Even the relation between "The mind, that ocean where each kind,/ Does straight its own resemblance find," and "Each monster meets its likeness in thy mind" is not entirely parodic. Monsters, as I shall argue, are very much part of Pope's vision—and not merely as the targets of his scorn. They are integral to his text, so that as we try to distinguish the "bad other" which the work attacks, we find that otherness itself is that out of which the text is made, and the edge of the "poem," i.e., the boundary between what is said and what is meant, turtles downward through prefaces and prologues, readings and rereadings, notes true and false, true when false, false when true, etc., through a continuing textuality that finally leads off the page into the endless realms of gossip and speculation.

It is along the axis of interpretation that these problems assert themselves. The distinctions between signifier and signified, sign and referent, interpreter and object, work and commentary—distinctions that are crucial to the dynamic of interpretation—are precisely what are being subverted in the imagining of a structure in which the ultimate is repeatedly transformed into the penultimate. Such structures recur at every level in Pope's poetry. Cosmologically, he produces this God's eye view in *An Essay on Man*:

He, who through vast immensity can pierce,
See worlds on worlds compose one universe,
Observe how system into system runs,
What other planets circle other suns. . . .
(1.23-26)

In the first place, this passage illustrates Pope's dependence on the structures of infinite progress (or infinite regress). This move is important, for

it opens the way to our seeing Pope's poetry on a shifting base of interlocking and potentially equivalent structures, ranging "From the green myriads in the peopled grass," to "what vary'd being peoples ev'ry star," to the limitless concatenation of beyonds we have just witnessed. The passage's relation to such structures is not merely illustrative, or ekphrastic (as if description were ever a simple matter), however; it does not simply describe the decay or expansion of the edge, but also acts out that phenomenon, both in the context of this section of the *Essay*, and in the context of Pope's poetry in general. In the lines immediately preceding the ones just quoted, the *Essay* is establishing the limits of human perspective:

What can we reason, but from what we
know?
Of Man what see we, but his station here,
From which to reason, or to which refer?
Thro' worlds unnumber'd tho' the God be
known,
'Tis ours to trace him only in our own.
(1.18-22)

The rhetorical figure exemplified in Pope's description of the cosmos in lines 23-26 is prosopographia, the construction of a scene which may be absent or nonexistent. When we put that description in the context of the lines that precede it, we see how powerful the figure is. Lines 18-22 set the limits of what can be seen and what can be known: we can only see, we can only know about what is here, i.e., in us and in our world. In lines 23-26 those limits (edges) are immediately and spectacularly transgressed. The "worlds on worlds," the systems running into systems, the "other planets" circling "other suns," all as powerful and convincing poetic imagery as any in the poem, are special cases of prosopographia. It is not that we have here a description of the absent or even of the nonexistent. What we have is a picture of what we were told could not be pictured, an example of saying and describing what cannot be said or seen.

The status of such a description is at least curious. What does it mean for us to have read that which could not have been written? Of course anything could be written. Truth value is not a criterion for what can be described, and that is precisely the point. We cannot tell the difference between the true and the false descriptions. The uncertainty produced by that

state of affairs is clearly an important feature in the working of art. What, for example, we might ask, is the difference in a novel between the description of a landscape painting and the description of the scene the painting represents? What is the difference between the description of a character and the description of a portrait of that character? We call Odysseus' account of his identity to his father a lie, but, in terms of the regulations and devices of narrative, it is identical to his other stories. In portraits by Velasquez or Rubens, Venus at her toilette presents her back to us. We say we see her face "reflected" in a mirror, when in fact the mirror, even to its frame, is merely a surface for another portrait.

To bring the discussion directly back to Pope, what is the difference in the *Rape* between the personified cards, the characters that play (who are after all characters in the literal sense), and the sylphs who watch? The artificial, which the poem mocks, is also what animates and is animated in every part of it. The card game is, of course, *Ombre*, Man. The poem is populated by a series of bizarre personifications—walking, talking metonymies, synecdoches, catachreses—that concatenate representations one upon the other. The sylphs allegorize this state of affairs: signs and symptoms of their former selves, which is to say not identities, they constitute an endless circle of semiotic exchange, between the living and the dead (to renew the question which began this part of the discussion, what does it mean to say the Baron, whose name, after all, at least could be allegorical, is more real than the animated cards he plays?), the absent and the present, etc.

In the midst of this disjunctive allegory, the hair plays the part of the Derridean trace. Intact, it is difference, the marks that figure Belinda's white neck; displaced—"Oh hadst thou, Cruel! been content to seize/ Hairs less in sight, or any Hairs but these!"—it suggests the biological trace, i.e., the loss of what we might call, playfully, the hair/heir apparent (the play on the sounds hair/air in the poem in the context of the theme of sexual activity vs. celibacy is frequent and important); vanished, it defines the line between presence and absence—the *vanitas* trope or . . . hair today. . . .

In addition, hair, which is used as "sprindges" to "betray" birds, as fishing lines, as the line of beauty, or the brush which draws it, i.e., as part of a representational technology of lure and likeness, suggests the poetic line, Pope's verse, ringlets and couplets, cascading cantos (of which in the poem's first version, as we know, there

were two) (2.25-29).

In each of these examples, we see the techniques of representation, of figuration, relentlessly reasserting themselves as objects of our interest or of our concern, at the very point we thought they would disappear for the sake of what they represented. In the "Epistle to Mr. Jervas," Pope, exploring the cooperative creations of the sister arts, writes: "How oft' our slowly-growing works impart,/ While images reflect from art to art?" (19-20). The sense would seem at first to be a description of the way the mutual influence of painter and poet helps each in the process of representing his subject, of making it known, recognizable, of revealing it. The point of images reflecting "from art to art" is that something else, the reality that art serves, is imparted. But the rhyming word "impart," which imparts the sense of the boundary between representation and the thing represented, which, because it points to reality, would like finally to part company from art, is caught in a rhyme with art and cannot escape. "Impart" rhymes with art that reflects art—but not only that; it also turns out to be the image of "imp art." What started out as an analysis (of the sister arts) has become a performance. The word "impart" has had its meaning subverted, has been made into a pun, which is to say it has become a picture of the syntagm, "imp art." That which makes something known, merely imp art. The concept of knowledge, *per se*, is thrown into question. The process of the images reflecting from art to art does not lead beyond art but back to art.

In terms of Pope's poetry as a whole, we might say that at some point we cannot tell the difference between the visions of the just and the visions of the dunces. The cosmological vision of the *Essay*, the God's eye view, looks forward to the passage from *The Dunciad* that we have already discussed. Their similarity extends even to their both being manifestations of the impossible: in *The Dunciad*, an impossible nature, nevertheless bodied forth; in the *Essay*, a logically unknowable scene, nevertheless known.

As the edge that separates Pope's poetry as a signifying structure from that which it signifies is repeatedly overwhelmed, and overwhelmed, as I have tried to show, by the very logic that seeks to produce the edge in the first place, so are the readings that depend upon that edge for their analysis. Chiefly, such readings attempt to locate the norm of the poetry, and in so doing develop a characterization, explicit or implicit, of Pope himself as the Wise One, one who is a repository

of moral wisdom, who does not suffer fools gladly, and with whom the reader shares values and identifies (the point I am about to make holds for readings that see Pope as being in the wrong, as well). I would go so far as to say that such readings include all readings, to a degree. In the first place, the rhetorical structure of satire implies a position outside the text, since the text is peopled by fools, where values are intact and from which judgments can be rendered. Even an attempt, such as this one, to deconstruct that realm of transcendence, must have responded to it. Presumably the author occupies that place. One of the agendas of criticism is for the critic to show that he or she is there too.

There is something strikingly infantile about this critical scenario, in the technical sense that it recapitulates the scene of Lacan's mirror stage.³ The reflection from a mirror, both in the technological sense of an actual mirror and in the cultural sense of parental response, imprints a self on the infant, giving it an image and an imago. This intersection of the cultural and the technological is important. Both create an unachievable image of coherence that becomes the locus of longing and lack, the dynamics of desire. Both imitate the fragility of the self that is after all a reflection of the other, and produce the attendant anxiety of dismemberment, the body in pieces. The focus of this anxiety is castration, the name of the lack in a patriarchal culture; the means of coping with that anxiety is the development of what Lacan calls the "symbolic order," the order of culture, of language, and the law—an order that fetishizes and inscribes castration within itself since it is the order of substitutions—substitutions which stand for the phallus, and in their standing for it, for the precariousness of the phallus. The self is a prosthesis—the addition that denotes an absence, a prosopopoeia—the lack behind the mask, "prose swell'd to verse." Patriarchal culture operates by manipulating the symbolic order, exchanging the phallus, which is to say by making meaning—under the sign of castration, to be sure (the slash of the sign—Sr/Sd—allegorizes castration—the disjunctiveness of allegory, which I will discuss later, allegorizes castration, etc.)—but in such a way that the threat

³The following discussion of Lacan is drawn from a general reading of his works, including: *Écrits*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W.W. Norton, 1977) esp. "The Mirror Stage" 1-7; and *Feminine Sexuality*, trans. Jacqueline Rose, eds. Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose, including the introductions by each of the editors.

of castration can remain unacknowledged.

Reading reenacts this scene. The challenge is to see in the text, which is clearly a concatenation of substitutes (even realism, as Barthes points out, is the reflection of a representational technique), an admirable coherence and wholeness.⁴ The text is treated as a transparency, or a veil; the technology of mark and space is ignored for the sake of a transcendental signified: the unified meaning of the work, the philosophy it promulgates, its hidden message, the image of the author, etc. In identifying this transcendental signified, the reader, like the infant looking in the mirror, takes on an identity, and perpetuates the patriarchal order.

I am not arguing here against the specific insights readers have had into Pope's texts. What I take issue with is the unexamined idea that insight restores texts to their original clarity (if they were clear in the first place, why do we need insight?), that texts are not always already different, other, problematic, but somehow exist whole—articulate but not articulated. Insight into a text always involves distortion—if only because insight, in order to be that, must convince itself and us that what it presents was once absent, hidden, obscure.

It is impossible, for example, to read Pope for long without coming across powerful articulations of the *via media* philosophy. Critics have argued that the problem in *The Rape of the Lock* is that the combatants cannot or will not compromise. This philosophy would appear to be the epitome of a transcendental view, a stable point beyond the text to which the text refers. When we look carefully at Pope's handling of this view, however, it becomes utterly problematic. Consider, for example, this way of locating the human: "Plac'd on this isthmus of a middle state, / A being darkly wise, and rudely great . . ." (*Essay on Man* 2.3-4). The word "middle" is definitive. It is a single point. To bifurcate it with an "isthmus" asks us to imagine an impossibility, which, of course, we do. But having done that, we are in no position to deny that if a middle can have an isthmus, then that isthmus can have a middle, which can have an isthmus, which can have a middle, and so on.

Only such a reading can confront the problematic of Pope's poetry. The definitive ground of our being, caught in the logic of the figure that presents it, "isthmus of a middle,"

slips endlessly away from the pursuing imagination. The stable point between extremes has itself become an extreme. This is a "state" with no place to stand. The oxymora that express the nature of our being continue the problematic. "Darkly wise," for example, does not admit of paraphrase or translation, and continually evades our understanding. It does not seem to mean "to have dark wisdom," i.e., to have wisdom about hidden things, the occult, or the mysterious. It may want to mean that as beings we are wise, but we are in the dark about how, or when, or about what we are wise. That this is an ancient idea, going back to Socrates' "Myth of Ur" and the doctrine that all knowledge is recollection, makes it no less problematic. What is the meaning of wisdom without self-awareness? Socrates had a method, the dialectic, for imparting knowledge, for recovering what had been forgotten—though his dependence on art, on the figured forms of myth and parable that he had rejected as misleading, undermines it. Pope has no such method. Just as he inherited the oxymoron from Milton without the framework of religious conviction that can resolve it in the realm of the transcendental signified (Milton writes an epic; Pope writes an essay), and the heroic from earlier traditions, which he mocks with the innumerable masks of parody, so he has taken the doctrine of recollection without a theory of recollection and produced a wisdom without the possibility of self-awareness. "Whatever is" may be "right," but in ways we cannot understand.

Similarly, though virtue appears to be of unquestioned value in Pope's poetry, the test of fitness and beauty, it is frequently linked to the corrupt and the grotesque. We see this in *The Dunciad*, where, as Dustin Griffin has shown, the Poet's efforts on behalf of virtue may not be entirely virtuous.⁵ We see it in "Satire II.i":

Could Laureate Dryden Pimp and Fry'r
engage,
Yet neither *Charles* nor *James* be in a Rage?
And I not strip the Gilding off a Knave,
Un-plac'd, un-pension'd, no Man's Heir, or
Slave?
I will, or perish in the gen'rous Cause.
Hear this, and tremble! you, who 'scape the
Laws.
Yes while I live, no rich or noble knave
Shall walk the World, in credit, to his grave.

⁴Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller, pref. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974) 54-56, 60-61.

⁵Dustin Griffin, *Alexander Pope: The Poet in the Poems* (N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press) 13.

TO VIRTUE ONLY AND HER FRIENDS, A
FRIEND,
The World beside may murmur, or
commend.
Know, all the distant Din the World can keep
Rolls o'er my *Grotto*, and but sooths my
Sleep.
There, my Retreat the best Companions
grace,
Chiefs, out of War, and Statesmen, out of
Place.

(113-26)

What is striking here is the combination of community and alienation.⁶ Pope cannot be outdone by Dryden in boldness, because he is slave to no one, to be sure, but also because, being without place or pension, being no one's heir (and having none of his own, for that matter), being discriminated against for his religion, among other things, he has less to lose. The community that emerges to defend virtue has an unmistakable grotesqueness about it. It is a community of outcasts described in the rich bravado of the paranoid: "Hear this, and tremble!"; it is a community that comes together in a cave.

It is a point worth making that without the fools and the knaves, without the grotesques, Pope's poetry would virtually disappear. He needs their voices and their images for his own. Here we can also go farther and say that this need is not merely for contrast. The "Cave of poverty and poetry" in *The Dunciad*, the "cave of spleen" in *The Rape of the Lock*, and Pope's grotto are the same place. The monstrous and the distorted are the characteristics of the figure *qua* figure. The "nameless somethings," in "the cave of poverty and poetry," asleep in their causes, allegorize the process whereby the devices of rhetoric, twisted and confusing or resisting shape themselves—chiasmus, zeugma, metaphor, prosopopoeia, the mask that precedes the face—figure and trope a world into being.⁷ The cave of spleen and the bizarre animations that inhabit it are not at the antipodes of the *Rape*. Rather they are the

epitome of the figuration that is always taking place in the poem.

G. Douglas Atkins seems to me to be exactly right when he says that difference and opposition in Pope's poetry can be thought of in terms of these lines from "To a Lady": Atossa, "Scarce once herself, by turns all Womankind!" "Shines, in exposing Knaves, and painting Fools,/ Yet is, whate'er she hates and ridicules" (116, 119-20).⁸ We have here an allegory for Pope's relation to his poetry, not in the simple sense of allegory as algebra, the recipe for a single reading, but in the profound sense developed by Paul de Man and described by Jacques Derrida in his *Memories for Paul de Man*. Derrida's text is de Man's discussion of Hegel's *Aesthetics*. Hegel dismisses allegory; de Man shows that he is dependent on it. "What allegory narrates," de Man writes, "is . . . , in Hegel's own words, 'the separation or disarticulation of subject from predicate.'"⁹ Once that disarticulation occurs, it recurs endlessly. Allegory, we might say, is "darkly wise." It is other than itself, and, therefore, right in ways it cannot understand, which is to say, disjunctively. Allegory can always be an allegory of its own disjunction, and, as Derrida puts it, "If allegory is disjunctive, an allegory of disjunction will always remain a disjoined reflexivity, an allegory of allegory that can never, in its specular self-reflection, rejoin itself, fit itself to itself" (76). The disjunction between subject and predicate describes Atossa quite precisely. Her being is intact, but, paradoxically, as non-being. She is an oxymoron: she is, not herself; she is, "by turns," all others; she is, what she hates. Her identity is established as difference. The implications of this paradox take us deep into the complexities of Pope's poetry. The disjunctive nature of Atossa's being allegorizes figuration. As a figure, prosopopoeia, she is most herself when she becomes other(s); that is what figures do. A nameless name, a shapeless shape, a something that is not yet something, the figure exists, like Atossa, by becoming the other, and the significance of this transformation is not that otherness is transcended through identity, but that otherness is overdetermined in the overdetermination of the figure. Atossa is Atossa by virtue of her being others. Personification

⁶Maynard Mack, *The Garden and the City* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1969) 62-67.

⁷See Paul de Man, "Hypogram and Inscription," in *Resistance to Theory*, foreword Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1986) 44, 47: ". . . *prosopon poiein* means to give a face and therefore implies that the original face can be missing or nonexistent." It is in this essay that de Man calls prosopopoeia "the master trope of poetic discourse."

⁸G. Douglas Atkins, *Quests of Difference: Reading Pope's Poems* (Lexington: The Univ. Press of Kentucky, 1986) 64-65.

⁹Quoted in Derrida, *Memories for Paul de Man* (New York: Columbia, 1986) 72.

yields other personifications.

In the disjunctive sense, then, Atossa is an allegory for Pope himself. To say that Pope figures in his verse as figure, as that which becomes other, is also to point to Pope's disfigurement.¹⁰ I will not make the argument that Pope is not a misogynist, but I will say that Pope figures in his verse as woman, for woman is other to Pope, and Pope, the hunchback cripple who was always representing himself otherwise, was other to and in himself. Women in "To a Lady," "have no Characters at all," and are chameleons—about whom the poet asks, "Chameleons who can paint in white and black?" (1.156). Maynard Mack refers to "Pope the chameleon putting on a face to meet the faces that he meets. . . ."¹¹ Dustin Griffin has given a good account of Pope the chameleon, under the heading of "self-formation," ranging from Johnson's "He hardly drank tea without a stratagem" to the flattering portraits he had painted (25 ff.). My argument is that Pope is related to the image he presents in the same manner that the normative images in his poetry are related to the grotesque strategies of the figure. In a letter of 1714 or 1715, Pope writes to a woman (one of the Blount sisters) in the guise of her brother, because "none but a Brother" could "gratify [her] curiosity" on this subject "with decency." The subject is Pope's examination of an hermaphrodite. "You know," he says, "few proficient have a greater genius for Monsters than my self. . . ."¹² As the letter progresses it takes on the characteristics of a joke—Pope takes a clergyman and a doctor (no rabbi), both of whom perform according to stereotype, to help him with the examination. But the scenario, even if it is a phantasy, perhaps especially if it is a phantasy, is revealing: Pope clearly identifies with the monstrous. He is fascinated here by its chameleon ambiguity, by the riddle of juxtaposed sexual difference—a kind of zeugma, by the way it becomes masculine in the company of women and feminine in the company of men—a kind of living chiasmus. What Pope shares with the hermaphrodite is the

monster's ability to transform its being different into difference, and to become the figure.

The world that Pope mocks is fundamental, not antithetical, to his poetry: because to mock is not only to make fun of but to figure, and the process of mocking mocks the possibility of the fundamental—repeatedly creating and destroying it. The mock poet fashioned by Dulness in Book II of *The Dunciad* in the form of James Moore Smythe, "this image of well-body'd air," this "tall Nothing," dramatizes the status of all poetic characters:

And empty words she gave, and sounding
strain,
But senseless, lifeless! idol void and vain!
Never was dash'd out, at one lucky hit,
A fool, so just a copy of a wit;
So like, that critics said, and courtiers swore,
A wit it was, and called the phantom More.
(2.45-50)

Characters are always senseless and lifeless, void idols, and yet lifelike, just as, in Pope's slippery phrase, a fool can be, or perhaps is, a just copy of a wit. Justice seems to be served by erasing the distinction between fool and wit. Both are equally phantoms that we call More, as in James Moore Smythe, that we call more, in that we *continue* to call upon characters/letters to be *more* than phantoms, i.e., to be an identity.

Resisting identity, or repeatedly changing it, emphasizing the figure over the figured, disclosing the way the present is made of the absent, the whole of parts and fragments, reveals the little man behind the curtain, to use a Lacanian formation, at the expense of the mighty Oz, and subverts the patriarchal order. Pope, a little man ("In Tasks so bold, can Little Men engage . . ."), identifies with the figure. Indeed, as I have argued, it is not a question of finding Pope behind or beyond his poems, in a set of values or views; he is figured in the figures themselves.

We see, for example, the relation between the poet and writing. In "Satire II.i" "Fools rush into my Head, and so I write" (1.14), or again, "My Head and Heart thus flowing thro' my Quill . . ." (1.63). In the "Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot," these curious and poignant lines:

Why did I write? what sin to me unknown
Dipt me in Ink, my Parents', or my own?
As yet a Child, nor yet Fool to Fame,
I lisp'd in Numbers, for the Numbers came.

¹⁰See Paul de Man, "Shelley Disfigured," in *Deconstruction and Criticism*, ed. Harold Bloom et al. (New York: Continuum, 1984) 39-73.

¹¹Maynard Mack, *Alexander Pope: A Life* (New Haven: W.W. Norton and Yale Press, 1986) 63.

¹²*The Correspondence of Alexander Pope*, ed. George Sherburn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956) 1: 277-79.

I left no Calling for this idle trade,
 No duty broke, no Father dis-obey'd.
 The Muse but serv'd to ease some Friend, not
 Wife,
 To help me thro' this long Disease, my Life,
 To second, ARBUTHNOT! thy Art and Care,
 And teach, the Being you preserv'd, to bear.
 (11.125-34)

Often quoted, this passage deserves to be thought about in the context of this discussion. As in the lines from "Satire II.i," the Scriblerian phantasy of the self being constituted by the apparatus of writing is what we might call here the technology of the figure—remembering that technology comes from the same root as text, and, therefore, carries with it the sense of the brokenness (of the weave) and substitution (prosthesis), that defines text. The self here, like Tristram Shandy's, is not merely a personification, but the figure of that figure, a prosopopoeia of prosopopoeia, growing out of a primal scene, the imagining of the technology of one's own figuration: "sin to me unknown . . . , my Parents' or my own?" " . . . Ink, My Parents', or my own?"¹³ The self, dipped in ink, is figured as the pen that will draw the self, that will speak Pope's voice, or give Pope's "character," as it is doing here. We should recall that figure comes from *ingere*, to mold or fashion (in clay). A figure of speech is, therefore, already at least doubly figurative, an allegory for the sculpture that figures the subject—for Lacan, infinitely figurative, since the subject, in the mirror stage, has been figured by a figure, and continues to be so—caught in what we might call an infinite couplet.

Figure also means face. Like the drawings by Escher or Steinberg of the hand drawing the hand which draws the hand, or Carlo Maria Mariani's *Il mano Ubbidisce all'Intelletto* (The Hand Submits to the Intellect) in which what appear to be two paintings of sculpted figures, are painting—have painted one another—*ingere* is both the finger (and by metonymy, the tool it holds) and the drawn face.¹⁴

¹³For an important discussion of the relationship of primal scenes, prosopopoeia and historical consciousness, see Ned Lukacher, *Primal Scenes: Literature, Philosophy, Psychoanalysis* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1986).

¹⁴I am currently involved in a study of the relation between the neoclassicism of the eighteenth century and what Charles Jencks calls the new classicism of postmodernity. See Jencks, *Post-Modernism: The New Classicism in Art and Architecture* (New York: Rizzoli, 1987).

The passage continues to identify Pope with the figure. "Numbers" precede his lispings them, as if the difference of metrics constituted the rhythm of his being. His life hangs in apposition to a metaphor, "this long Disease," a metaphor which is in apposition to itself, since disease, unlike health, is not a steady state or self-sufficient, but a process of decay defined by the shifting allegory of the symptomatic.

We frequently see Pope playing with his name. Again, in the "Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot":

Arthur, whose giddy Son neglects the Laws,
 Imputes to me and my damn'd works the
 cause:
 Poor Cornus sees his frantic wife elope,
 And curses Wit, and Poetry, and Pope.
 (11.23-26)

In the first couplet, the poet and the work are identified; in the second, Pope draws that phonological connection between his name and poetry. Both are examples of Pope's entering a kind of textuality, but I choose this example because it demonstrates the intertextuality of Pope's existence, as well. Arthur's "giddy son" is none other than James Moore Smythe from *The Dunciad*. Here he has plagiarized some of Pope's verses, hence "neglects the Laws." As part of the equation which emphasizes textuality, plagiarizing and eloping are equated, i.e., running off with a man's wife or with his verses are equated, as are Pope and poetry.

In *The Dunciad*, the relationship is continued. The phantom image of "More" is distinguished by being an "image of well-body'd air," and "No meager muse-rid mope, adust and thin" (2.37; emphasis mine). But as we have seen, More is less; now less is a "muse-rid mope," which suggests Pope in image ("adust and thin") and in rhyme, and because "mope" is an anagram for "poem."

Critics have read Pope's inclusion of Dennis's vicious attacks on him in *The Dunciad* as Pope's attempt to humiliate Dennis and gain deserved sympathy for himself. The argument, I think, is weak. He must have known that some, perhaps many, would laugh privately at Dennis's jokes, whatever they might say about them publicly. I think Pope quoted Dennis because it is out of grotesqueness, his own and that of the figure, that he produced himself and his work. Pope cannot really object to Dennis's play on his name because it is precisely the sort of thing Pope did to Durfy in his "Verses Occasioned by an &." In

some sense, then, Dennis is right. A. Pope, the author's standard signature, does suggest A. _pe (1.63 n.). In *Collected in Himself*, Maynard Mack documents what he calls Pope's "harsh realism" about his physical condition. The words are Pope's: "an ugly body (. . . stands much in the way of any Friendship, when it is between different Sexes)." To the Blount sisters: "I did not care to force so fine a woman (whom Lord Harcourt had proposed that Pope marry) to give the finishing stroke to all my deformities, by the last mark of a Beast, horns." And to a young friend whom he asks to find him female companionship: ". . . if you do know one particular Nymph that can carry herself and me, whom you can give upon your word, pray acquaint me, that I may wear her Chain forthwith; I fancy my Size and Abilities may qualify me to match her Monkey very well."¹⁵ In fact, Dennis has said nothing that Pope had not thought of himself, a point that should not surprise us, for Pope was the better poet, and the poet is the one whose wit is relentlessly in search of figurative possibilities. Let us consider, once again, A. Pope: A. Pope, a father without children; ape hope, whose potential for progeny is figured in his investment in mimesis. The *Rape* as the R ape, i.e., the heir ape—the poem as progeny, an ancient tradition which is here accompanied by its elegaic shadow, the err or air ape, the sense in which mimesis proliferates the presence of absence. A. Pope, then, apostrophizes both the poet himself and *The Rape of the Lock*, for the lacuna between A. and Pope is an apostrophe to lexander: lex and er, legs and air, locks and hair, lex/law and heir. A.—meaning without, . . . legs and air—gives us the image of the poet, lame and short of breath—but in a way that figures back and forth from Pope's life to the poem (perhaps all writing is autobiographical, i.e., it represents life as the rewriting of one's name). Alexander, then, becomes A (without) legs and air, alocks and hair, alex and heir,

¹⁵Maynard Mack, *Collected in Himself* (Newark: Univ. of Delaware Press, 1982) 372-78.

configurations in which the audible and visual lack of the lacuna, the cut that constitutes the figure, the graphic enactment of raped, bereft of, is overdetermined.

We are reminded that the root, *leg*, leads both to the law and to reading, that the lack of legal enfranchisement which characterizes Pope, from the Pope burnings of his childhood to the grotto plots of his maturity, also leads away from the name of the father—an unlocking—to the unauthorized discourse of pun and play, and a certain illegibility—the Greek, *alexia*—produced, in this case, by the poem's stubborn plurality of what are often contradictory significations. This latter, we might say, is announced by the perfect conundrum of the epigram from Martial. I use the translation in Aubrey Williams' edition of the poem: "I did not wish, Belinda, to profane your locks, but it pleases me to have granted this to your prayers." Very briefly, what faces us here are a series of what we could only call contradictory equivalences: as if what was not wished for, gives pleasure, fulfills wishes; as if, therefore, the negative is positive; as if, in a paradox we may find more comprehensible, profanations answer prayers. What leads these readings down the garden path is the mysterious and fickle "this," which will accompany any one of them, but be true to none alone.

Through all this, Alexander is marked by the X of chiasmus, across which shuttles this play of meanings, and the audible Z of zeugma, preserving the figure's essential imbalance: locks and heir.

"Alas! how little from the grave we claim," writes Pope at the end of "The Epistle to Mr. Jervas," "Thou but preserv'st a Face and I a Name." Pope rises in the imbalance of the figure. In it, though Pope the poet is absent, we can see his face and hear his name, even as "Men, Monkeys, Lap-dogs, Parrots, perish all!"□

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Tom Bowden

POSTMODERN POPE: *THE RAPE OF THE LOCK*;
OR, HAVE A NICE DAY

*Buying is more American than thinking and I'm as American
as they come.*

—Andy Warhol, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol*:
From A to B and Back Again

*"The perfect product, gentlemen, has precise molecular
affinity for its client of predilection. Someone urges the
manufacture and sale of products that wear out? This is not
the way of competitive elimination. Our product never leaves
the customer. We sell the Servicing and all Trak products have
precise need of Trak servicing The servicing of a
competitor would act like antibiotic, offering to our noble
Trak-strain services inedible counterpart This is not
just another habit-forming drug this is the habit-forming drug
takes over all functions from the addict including his
completely unnecessary under the uh circumstances and
cumbersome skeleton. Reducing him ultimately to the helpless
condition of a larva. He may be said then to owe his very life
such as it is to Trak servicing."*

—William S. Burroughs, *The Soft Machine*

*Think not, when Woman's transient Breath is fled,
That all her Vanities at once are dead:
Succeeding Vanities she still regards. . . .
Her Joy in gilded Chariots, when alive,
And Love of Ombre, after Death survive.*

—Alexander Pope, *The Rape of the Lock* (1.51-56)

I

Alexander Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* depicts a mechanistic world in which a system of commodification controls men and women for contrary ends, resulting in a perpetual war of the sexes. It is mechanistic in the sense that "[a] human specialization, sufficiently well observed, is mechanically reproducible and when a man has become his specialization, that man . . . is himself mechanically reproducible. . . ." ¹ To be

reproducible is to be replaceable; to be replaceable is to be commodified, subject to the forces of the marketplace. And when people live as products of commodification, like brocades and china, then no substantive difference between people and store-bought goods prevails, so that a reproducible commodity representing a specialized activity (such as a Lord or a Lady) collapses psychological motivation. One simply does or does not commit specific acts because such acts exist strictly inside or outside of one's specialization and so simply are or are not done.

¹Hugh Kenner, *The Counterfeiters: An Historical Comedy* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1968) 25.

Once motivation collapses, so does thought. "Systems expect that we will comply with them; and in a society which forces man to behave like a rational animal . . . human behavior, *human artifacts*, will be by definition phases of satire" (Kenner 41; emphasis added).

Pope's poem suggests that the ignorant and vain Belinda, motivated by a life lived for the fun of it, acts simultaneously as an object for fun and as an object seeking fun. "Her lively Looks a sprightly Mind disclose, / Quick as her Eyes, and as unfix'd as those" (2.9-10), suggesting that her flirtatiousness toward men and simultaneous disdain of them occurs as part of her "pleasurable voyage under the sign of 'viciousness for fun.'"²

Words are no longer necessary; merely the seductive pose which entices the eye of the tourist. Codes are no longer required, as long as silence is eliminated. . . . Besides, we are having a nice day, maybe a thousand nice days. . . . And beneath the forgetting there is only . . . another heterogeneity of excess to mark the upturned orb of the pineal eye. (Kroker 27)

Belinda makes no distinction between flirtatiousness and disdain, between loss of honor and loss of hair, because she equates them; for her no difference prevails. Her world turns on pleasant, vacuous chats, finery in dress, games of ombre, on "having a nice day." As long as the babble of speech displaces silence, babble camouflages the silence of nothingness. And behind Belinda's extravagances of clothing and courtly life lies the trace of a lost sensibility that distinguishes between honor and hair, between spirit and spangles.

When read as a parody exploiting depthlessness—gibing at characters for whom all is material surface, for whom all is interchangeable commodity, for whom a stained honor is exchangeable with a stained brocade—*The Rape of the Lock* compares with the perspective of William S. Burroughs' *The Soft Machine*. Both Pope and Burroughs mock commodification and the mechanization of human life, which erase differences between literal and metaphorical, between material and non-material. Both authors fight against sensibilities that see people as interchangeable cogs in systems of commodification.

²Arthur Kroker and David Cook, *The Postmodern Scene: Excremental Culture and Hyper-Aesthetics* (New York: St. Martin's, 1986) 27.

This paper attempts to locate the tensions implied by the forms of parody used by Pope and Burroughs in their recastings and mimickings of received opinions and codified activities, tensions created by the materialism by which their characters measure themselves and others. To help flesh out these examples, I will apply Hugh Kenner's and Fredric Jameson's concepts of parody to show how "aesthetic production today has become integrated into commodity production generally."³ By focusing on Alexander Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*, I shall contrast these parodied conflicts with *The Soft Machine* by William S. Burroughs and paintings by Andy Warhol to demonstrate the contemporaneity of the concerns of Pope's poem, making salient also the fact that conflicts concerning the commodification and mechanization of human life existed at the dawn of industrialism in Pope's age in a form similar to that of our post-industrial age.

II

Hugh Kenner's *The Counterfeiters*, which discusses modern and eighteenth-century parody, describes contemporary parody as taking one or more of the following modes:

1) *Counterfeiting*: This mode eschews parody's traditional reliance on distortion and exaggeration in favor of creating a simulacrum for the sake of seeing how long it can pass as a viable thing in itself, exemplified for Kenner by the creation of "a nonexistent student, who by outwitting the System's punchcards may be carried from Freshman English to Senior Math (Phys Ed being the dangerous salient) and at last installed, in full Bachelorhood, on the Alumni mailing-list" (11).

Kenner argues that *The Rape of the Lock* ironically counterfeits bad poetry, "*verse which has been published by mistake*"—that is, poetry with an awfulness that eluded its author during its draftings and proofreadings, and that eluded its author's friends and printer from recognizing its awfulness (49). Such mistakes include questionable antecedents ("On her white Breast a sparkling Cross she wore, / Which *Jews* might kiss, and Infidels adore" [2.7-8]); questionable imagery ("To that she *bends*, to that her Eyes she *rears*" [1.126; emphasis added], "What tender maid but must a victim fall / To one man's treat, but for another's ball?" [1.95-96]); and the poem's opening itself ("What dire Offense from am'rous

³Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review* 146 (July-Aug. 1984): 56.

Causes springs, / What mighty Contests rise from trivial Things / I sing . . . "[1.1-3]). Kenner suggests that *The Rape of the Lock* succeeds so perfectly in being a (deliberately) bad poem, that if we did not know Pope's intentions, the poem would have failed miserably as a serious effort. "Work has no inherent virtue; it is valued as it is aimed" (56).

Such a viewpoint, however, denies the poem contains in itself signposts giving away its mock seriousness: from its persistent bathos beginning with the poem's title, to its admission in the second line of the first canto that it concerns "trivial things," to its last lines which "consecrate to Fame" a lock of hair. This viewpoint also denies the poem's very craftsmanship as a signpost, from the complete grammatical unit of nearly every line, to the poem's plentitude of exact rhymes that belie the clunkiness of its opening. That the poem wonderfully counterfeits bad poetry (which would probably never be so exacting in awfulness) is doubtless; but close, internal examination gives away the parody, which does not depend on its author's proclamation of intent.

2) *Phosphorescent Quotation*: Again, and in the third mode as well, this eschews the distortion and exaggeration of its subject's traits. Phosphorescent quotation parody quotes its subject verbatim because the subject parodies himself or herself: "Things are more like they are now than they ever were before," Dwight D. Eisenhower once observed in the midst of characteristically "[s]tumbling and slipping on syntactical banana peels, doggedly toiling through thickets of subordinate clauses without emerging into a sentence. . . ." ⁴ Kenner's example of the phosphorescent quotation is Pop Art, which often brings to our attention a common object as an art object in itself (11).

In lines 9-34 of Canto V, Pope phosphorescently quotes from his translation of Sarpedon's speech to Glaucus in the *Iliad*, with only minor changes to fit the social milieu of Belinda's group, and by so doing "transmute[s], to the point of destruction, the old ritual genres, tragedy, comedy, epic, which were proper to an older universe" (Kenner 13). By transposing a speech in a tragic text to a mock-heroic context, changing only a few words, Pope both transformed high drama into parody and gave equal exchange-value to the two forms of work, turning his

twenty-five line passage into a tradeable commodity, making it do the same work for different ends in each setting. According to Kenner, Pope was "at the leading edge of an age which was moving toward an age like our own, at home with the machine and with utter ambivalence" (13). In theory at least, Pope could manufacture passage after similar, equivalent, and exchangeable passage, and by so doing blur the distinction between and the significance of both context and the forms of literary genres (tragedy and parody in this case), and imply the paradoxical simultaneity of contrary interpretation of those passages, resulting in a literature of ambivalence.

3) *Connoisseurship*: What Kenner calls "amusing scraps of dead languages"—items revered for reasons of bad taste, camp or kitsch (11). Kenner applies the term connoisseurship to worthless, useless antiques, but in the twenty years since Kenner wrote his book, kitsch now also includes articles deliberately designed to be worthless and useless, made for and sold to an extensive network of deliberately silly people. Although echoing and reverberating (Kenner 12) the *Iliad*'s poetic grandeur of vision and human tragedy, *The Rape of the Lock* nevertheless becomes an artifact of kitsch—a tragedy ill-transcribed, and because of its author's stumbling re-telling and translation, reduced to bathos: a counterfeit, a flawed second-generation copy.

In contrast, Fredric Jameson posits a special form of parody he calls pastiche,

a neutral practice of . . . mimicry, without any of parody's ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter and of any conviction that alongside the abnormal tongue you have momentarily borrowed, some healthy linguistic normality still exists. Pastiche is thus blank parody. . . .

(65)

Pastiche differs from phosphorescent quotation in that a pastiche may solely satirize a type rather than appropriate a preexisting statement for a parodic context. Thus, "Here Britain's statesmen oft the fall foredoom / Of Foreign Tyrants and of Nymphs at home" is "blank parody" "devoid of laughter," a pastiche (3.5-6). The subjects, "Britain's statesmen," are shown as a type whose use of language describes women the statesmen find troublesome as equal a problem as political despots, thereby blurring the distinction between international conflict and domestic disharmony, and erasing any sense of comparative norms

⁴Dwight Macdonald, *Parodies: An Anthology from Chaucer to Beerbohm—and After* (New York: Random House, 1960) 448.

against which tyrants and termagants may be evaluated.⁵ Lines 9-34 of Canto V, on the other hand, qualify as phosphorescent quotation because Pope quotes himself virtually verbatim from his translation of the *Iliad*, changing primarily the context the passage finds itself in. Both pastiche and phosphorescent quotations share the sense that the sheer awfulness of an idea or activity makes that particular idea or activity funny, just as the movie *Dr. Strangelove* makes nuclear holocaust serve as the punchline to the jokey muscle-flexing and duplicity between Moscow and Washington, with the sentimental song "We'll Meet Again" at the film's end serving as a throw-away aside (pastiche). The film *The Atomic Cafe*, on the other hand, collects government propaganda film shorts which tell of nuclear warfare's relative innocuousness. In one short, school children learn the proper way to react to atomic bombings in the bouncy song "Duck and Cover" (phosphorescent quotation).

But pastiche also manifests "consumers' appetite for a world transformed into sheer images of itself," producing what Jameson calls

the culture of the simulacrum [which] comes to life in a society where exchange-value has been generalized to the point at which the very memory of use-value is effaced, a society of which Guy Debord has observed . . . that in it 'the image has become the final form of commodity reification' . . .

(66)

Image then dislocates itself from temporal referents, it being only in and of and for itself.

[T]he breakdown of temporality suddenly releases . . . present time from all the activities and the intentionalities that might focus it . . . suddenly engulf[ing] the subject with undescribable vividness, a materiality of perception properly overwhelming, which effectively dramatizes the power of the material . . . Signifier in isolation. This . . . material signifier comes before the subject

⁵See also Earl Wasserman's article "The Limits of Allusion in *The Rape of the Lock*," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 65 (1966), for a discussion of the difference between Pope's use of equivocation for parodic purposes, which is similar to that of the pastiche, and lines 21-24 of Canto III ("The hungry Judges soon the Sentence sign . . ."), which resist classification as blank parody because of their allusion to lines from Homer's *Odyssey* that "provide a standard of simple dignity against which Pope ironically measures the degeneracy of his own civilization" (427-28).

with heightened intensity, bearing a mysterious charge of affect. . .

(73)

In both *The Rape of the Lock* and *The Soft Machine*, characters (subjects) are denied their historical uniqueness and individuality, and are viewed as things to be acted upon, as reduced to exchange-value. Subjects that somehow break free of temporal forces, break free of historical value, becoming material items prone to commodification, to the tradings of a constant now.

In *The Soft Machine*, characters break free of temporal forces in three ways. A car ride south achieves it in the chapter "Who Am I to Be Critical?" by taking the characters further back in time the further south they drive, until they encounter Mayan civilization in Mexico City. In another scene time acts as a function of film speed.⁶ And throughout the novel Burroughs subjects time to cut-ups: scenes already read and yet to come are cut up into sentence fragments, rearranged and spliced together, creating both a disjunction within the immediate narrative and a conjunction with previous and future narrative, creating a sense that sequence does not matter to the overall narrative, that the past does not differ from the present. All actions remain essentially similar; all results of those actions remain essentially similar, whether or not a sense of cause-and-effect is ever engendered: actions and reactions are nonoriginary, subject only to the forces of exchange-value. Time and space are equivalent, interchangeable. Similarly, in the commodified world of *The Rape of the Lock*, Pope's couplets act as interchangeable cogs within the mechanization of his poem:

Not with more Glories, in th' Ethereal
Plain,
The Sun first rises o'er the purpled Main,
But trust the Muse—she saw it upward rise,
Tho' mark'd by none but quick Poetic Eyes:
While ev'ry Beam new transient Colours
flings,
Colours that change whene'er they wave
their Wings.

(2.1-2; 5.123-24; 2.67-68)

Ultimately, it does not matter that the Baron of this poem cuts off Belinda's lock. In their commodified world, any Baron can cut off any

⁶William S. Burroughs, *The Soft Machine* (New York: Grove Press, 1966) 83.

lock from any Lady. This is part of what makes *The Rape of the Lock* and *The Soft Machine* jarring, humorous readings: they represent the sheer absurdity of worlds in which people, objects, time, and space lack substantive differences from each other.

If in commodification the selling or exchange-value of a process makes that process interchangeable and material, any self that can perform that process will do. In *The Soft Machine*, commodification as a system of control takes such forms as drug addiction and compulsive shopping under the imperative of "INVADE. DAMAGE. OCCUPY" (11). In *The Rape of the Lock*, Belinda is intellectually invaded, damaged and occupied by the notion that appearance matters more than the unseen. In fact, the unseen has no exchange-value for her, for when she cries out "Oh, hadst thou, Cruel! been content to seize / Hairs less in sight, or any Hairs but these!" it is less convincing to believe that she values her looks over her chastity than that she solely values her looks and that the unseen is inconsequential (4.175-76).

III

In *The Rape of the Lock*, a system of commodification controls and makes a product of Belinda, preying upon and encouraging her ignorance and vanity. Narrating a situation in which divine intervention will supposedly protect her from the men lured to her by her coiffure and dress, Pope creates a character who resists that intervention, for whom a stained honor means less than a stained brocade because honor is invisible. But by assigning the invisible Sylphs to material objects, the mock-spiritual world of *The Rape of the Lock* can claim both that spirits inhabit Belinda's hair and dress, and that each spirit is named, each is personified, in correspondence to each of her garments and accessories—her diamond earrings are named *Brillante*, her watch *Momentilla*, and "her fav'rite Lock" *Crispissa*—and in that way Belinda becomes unable to distinguish between personal names and commodities, between invisible Sylphs and her wardrobe, just as she is unable to distinguish between the double message she sends the Baron of welcoming flirtatiousness and off-putting disdain (2.115). She is having fun yet. She is having a nice day.

Although by cutting off a lock of her hair the Baron intends to make fun of Belinda for her self-absorption, he too commodifies the spiritual,

non-material, affective, and human. In an act of simony, he burns the billet-doux of former lovers to the God of Love in exchange for the prize of Belinda's locks. As a prize she is solely, by the Baron's way of thinking, another commodity to be had—as the tokens of previous ravishments littering his apartment testify.

By Force to ravish, or by Fraud betray;
For when Success a Lover's Toil attends,
Few ask, if Fraud or Force attain'd his Ends.
(2.33-35)

Such sentiments do not refer to love because love's got nothing to do with it. This poem takes for granted the use of force or fraud because the use of either matters less than "getting" the "goods"—the abstraction of love is not a material commodity subject to the forces of exchange. In a world where hair matters more than honor, where commodification denies any value to things which are non-material and unexchangeable with things material, the Baron can elicit shame and anger from women who measure in part their worth and the worth of other women by the symmetry of their coiffures. And, as suggested by *Clarissa's* speech, some women even show a willingness to exchange carnal love (and perhaps marriage) for the security of maintaining their exquisitely manicured appearances. By the poem's end, the battle of the sexes and the question of exchange—to what extent are Belinda and the Baron willing to commodify themselves—are emblemized as universal constants, reified in the heavens as a constellation in the shape of Belinda's lock. The mechanization and commodifications that create and perpetuate the conditions in which such a "rape" could occur go unacknowledged by Belinda and the Baron.

In Burroughsian terms, *The Soft Machine's* nameless public agent differs little from the Sylph Ariel.

A word about my work. The Human Issue has been called in by the Home Office. Engineering flaws you know. There is the work of getting it off the shelves and that is what I do. We are not interested in the individual models, but in the mold, the human die. This must be broken. You never see any live ones up here in Freelandt. Too many patrols. It's a dull territory unless you enjoy shooting a paralyzed swan in a cesspool. Of course there are always the

Outsiders. And the young ones I dig special.
Long Pigs I call them. Give myself a treat and
do it slow just feeding on the subject's hate
and fear and the white stuff oozes out when
they crack sweet as a lobster claw . . . I hate
to put out the eyes because they are my water
hole. They call me the Meat Handler. Among
other things.

(34-35)

Of all the "various Tasks assign'd" (2.75), Ariel
comes to Belinda because of her "engineering
flaws":

To save the Powder from too rude a Gale,
Nor let th' imprison'd Essences exhale,
To draw fresh Colours from the vernal
Flow'rs,
To steal from Rainbows e'er they drop in
Show'rs
A brighter Wash; to curl their waving Hairs,
Assist their Blushes, and inspire their Airs . . .

To change a Flounce, or add a Furbelo.

(2.93-100)

Like a salesman from Trak Servicing, Ariel
compensates Belinda for what she lacks in
individual beauty by providing her with make-
up, curls and fine attire so that she may achieve
a simulacrum of ideal beauty (Burroughs 46-47).
Belinda interests Ariel not as an "individual
model," but as one woman in a class of "Fair"
(2.91). By providing her with diamond earrings,
birds and fish for her "Fair Tresses" (2.28), he
breaks "the human die," displacing her
uniqueness with a "heterogeneity of excess"
(Kroker 27).

And just as Ariel commodifies Belinda into an
interchangeable product, he himself is also
somewhat interchangeable:

For Spirits, freed from mortal Laws, with
ease
Assume what Sexes and what Shapes they
please.

(1.69-70)

Sylphs as interchangeable commodities differ
little from Burroughs' junkies, for both Sylphs
and junkies are manifestations of consumption
cultures, both desiring as close an assimilation
with specific commodities as possible. Hence,
Brillante represents diamond earrings just as a
junkie represents the "junk" he or she is addicted
to.

[A]ll these scorpion junkies began to glow in
the dark and if they didn't score on the hour
metamorphosed into scorpions straight
away—So there was a spot of bother and we
had to move on disguised as young junkies
on the way to Lexington—Bill and Johnny
we sorted out the names but they keep
changing like one day I would wake up as Bill
the next day as Johnny—So there we are in
the train compartment shivering junk sick
our eyes watering and burning.

(Burroughs 15-16)

Pope's Sylphs take the form of either sex—
exchange-value being equal—as easily as
Burroughs' junkies exchange bodies. Self-identity
becomes meaningless where no self exists that is
not exchangeable with some other self.

Pope maintains the blur between person and
marketable object, between material object and
non-material ideals in the following passages:

On her white Breast a sparkling Cross she
wore,
Which *Jews* might kiss, and Infidels adore.

(2.7-8)

But what, or where, the Fates have wrapt in
Night.

Whether the Nymph shall break *Diana's* law,
Or some frail *China* Jar receive a Flaw,
Or stain her Honour or her new Brocade,
Forget her Pray'rs, or miss a Masquerade,
Or lose her Heart, or Necklace, at a Ball;
Or whether Heav'n has doom'd that *Shock*
must fall.

(2.104-10)

The joke of Pope's mock-epic tells us that his
characters do not distinguish between kissing a
cross and kissing a breast, and that for Belinda no
meaningful difference exists between missing a
dance and forgetting to pray. Two-hundred fifty
years later the blur between objects and people
remains:

Well the traffic builds up and boosters falling
in with jackets shirts and ties, kids with a
radio torn from the *living car* trailing tubes
and wires, lush-workers flash rings and wrist
watches *falling in sick* all hours.

(Burroughs 11; emphasis added)

Cars live and questionable antecedents make it
unclear as to who or what falls in sick: watches

and rings or lush-workers or both. Commodification today is of course more automated than in Pope's age, but it is just as regulated.

"It's like with the festivals and the f---ing corn they know what everybody will see and hear and smell and taste and that's what thought is and these thought units are represented by symbols in their books and they rotate the symbols around and around on the calendar."

(Burroughs 23)

The rotated symbols of Belinda's world tell her that it is time to ride the "gilt Chariot" (4.155); time to "taste bohea" (4.156); time for ombre; time to "a Victim fall / To one Man's Treat, but for another's Ball" (1.95-96). Time to have a nice day.

Even though "The hungry Judges soon the Sentence sign, / And Wretches hang that Jury-men may Dine," hangings create and exist alongside someone's pleasurable gain (3.21-22). Burroughs, in *The Soft Machine*, narrates page after page of hangings committed for the spectacle of watching the hanged come to orgasm when their necks break. Sure it's ritual murder, but it's sexy, too. Burroughs equates sex and death just as Pope equates death and fine living. (In fact, if one sees Belinda as a willing participant in her "rape," then she herself equates sex with violence-oriented, life-threatening pleasures [the rape itself]—by-products of her fine living.) Hangings pleasurably excite the hangmen, who enjoy watching the hanged come to orgasm, while the hanged supposedly enjoy their orgasms. Everybody is having a nice day. Any judge, hangman and wretch will do as long as death occurs and the system continues unquestioned, feeding off the inertia of the historicity of ritual while simultaneously and paradoxically denying the historical uniqueness of the hanged, reducing their exchange-value to the level of a replenishable fuel that feeds and perpetuates the ritual sacrifices.

Through product consumption—jewelry, make-up and accessories—Belinda maintains her own stock of replenishable fuels that feed and lead to the sacrifice of her lock, as both victim and as willing participant. As willing participant she revels in her excess of trove and commodification—India and Arabia reified and bought up, tortoise and elephant life extinguished in exchange for comb metempsychosis. As victim, these adornments she assigns to and associates herself with form a commodity of cumulative

value from which she is inseparable in the Baron's eye, a bit of a connoisseur himself.

Unnumber'd Treasures ope at once, and here
The various Off'rings 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* breathes 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.

(1.129-38)

This image of product consumption finds its counterpart in Andy Warhol's "Soup Cans" series, each canvas of which depicts as many as a hundred cans, depicting a type of contemporary "still life." These slices of life take previous still life subjects—say, a bowl of grapes, a loaf of bread, and a block of cheese, painted in warm tones—and transform them into row after row of products as if displayed along fluorescent-lit aisles, an excess of homogeneity. Going from the excess and homogeneity of the supermarket to a make-up and toiletry supply section of a department store, and one finds the descendants of Belinda's vanity.

Now awful Beauty puts on all its Arms;
The Fair each moment rises in her Charms,
Repairs here 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. . . .

(1.139-47)

Natural looks (Beauty) and added commodities (the *Sylphs*) unite the ends of their labors—for Belinda to be attractive to herself and to others. The idea of comeliness is personified by Beauty, and the commodities of clothes are abstracted by the *Sylphs*. In Warhol's "Marilyn" series he uses the same image of Marilyn Monroe's face as he did the soup cans, up to a hundred per canvas. His theme now becomes the commodification of

a human being, image as reified being: Marilyn Monroe—her private life made public by countless books, memoirs and interviews; her public life made private by individuals who buy her auctioned stage clothes—on the covers of magazines and “preserved” in the films she made, shown on television, in repertory theater houses, and on video—“Think not, when Woman’s transient Breath is fled, / That all her Vanities at once are dead . . .”(1.51-52).

The differences between the hundreds of silk-screened “Marilyn” canvases lay in the various production “mistakes” (screens set off-register, “too much” or “too little” paint added to the various screens—the human touch: machines do not make mistakes, people do) and in the choice of colors for the different screens. The signifier of that image called Marilyn Monroe remains distinguishable and unalterable despite the variations in “mistakes” and colors—the image remains recognizably the same. Similarly, Belinda’s beauty products, from the make-up on her face to the birds and fish in her hair, may be bought anywhere by anyone—the Sylphs will tend to the vanities of any woman. Commodified Marilyn equals commodified Belinda. And the rueful way in which these different-colored versions of the same subject allow a collector to buy a canvas that best matches his or her home interior—usually considered a pandering to the “sofa painting” crowd—is similar to the way men are allowed to use force or fraud in their collecting of lovers: when one discusses women as merely the arrangement and selection of garments and ornaments, one discusses women merely as aspects of product differentiation.⁷ But Pope’s poem allows one to see that in a world where both men and women commodify and are commodified, where exchange-value makes men and women interchangeable with other things and other people, there they are all different-colored versions of the same subject, there they

are all phenomena of product differentiation, having chosen from among the thousands of clothes and accouterments to create a “unique” image. In such a world the excess of homogeneity and the homogeneity of excess spontaneously generate, hand-in-hand.

Belinda may assign commodities to herself to shape her physical and figurative appearance to others, her commodities acting as signs telling others how to read her, engendering product recognition. By assigning commodities to herself, she wishes to assimilate as much as possible those products in hopes of reifying and making visible an array of absent or invisible qualities with which she desires associations—a certain way of life and economic standing, and a fine sense of taste and discrimination. In short, she hopes to convey the sense that she knows how to choose and measure the value of other commodities. Burroughs once wrote, “Whoever holds a frying pan owns death.” In the commodification of Belinda’s self, she allows herself to dangle a tempting lock in front of and be held hostage by whoever holds a pair of scissors. The Baron gains pleasure under the sign of viciousness for fun while gaining everything spiritual and non-material the commodified and commodifying Belinda assigns her material goods, everything on which she decides her value rests: a nice day!□

⁷“Frederick: Please forget it! I don’t have any interest in selling anything!

“Dusty: I ask you if you have something with a little puce in it, you gotta fly off the handle!

“Frederick: This is degrading! You don’t buy paintings to blend in with the sofa!

“Dusty: It’s not a sofa, it’s an ottoman!” (Woody Allen, *Hannah and Her Sisters* [New York: Vintage, 1986] 82).

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BEYOND CONSENSUS: *THE RAPE OF THE LOCK*
AND THE FATE OF READING EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY LITERATURE

A student of mine recently remarked that trying to explain the literary "significance" of *The Rape of the Lock* was a bit like trying to explain a dirty joke to a group of divinity students. "You either get it," she said, shaking her head, "or you don't." This is, I have come to think, a more probing assessment than it first seems. Underlying it is a basic premise of much of the traditional criticism of Pope's poem: the assumption that "it"—meaning, significance, or satiric intention—is self-evident; in other words, the poem both describes and enacts the literary and cultural values that we have been instructed to attribute to Pope: balance, irony, the satire of human foibles, and so on. In this sense, "you either get it or you don't" can be read as a laconic twentieth-century version of what is implied by Pope's remark in the *Essay on Criticism* that sound must echo sense—if we take "it" or "sense" to encompass not simply "self-evident" literary platitudes but a set of complex ideological factors that inform both Pope's poetry and the critical values that, over the past fifty years or so, have been both extrapolated from and read into his work.

The history of Pope studies in recent years, and particularly criticism of *The Rape of the Lock*, suggests that a fair number of recent scholars—among them marxists, feminists and deconstructionists—are questioning exactly what the "it" is that we are supposed to "get." In one sense, what is happening to Pope may be no different from what is going on elsewhere in literary studies—the questioning of what makes an author canonical, of the values that allow us to "get" certain authors and to walk away, shaking our heads, from others. But the debates about Pope seem, if anything, more contentious, less given to scholarly mediation than those that swirl around other figures because, I suspect, Pope—as poet, critic, translator of Homer, and editor of Shakespeare—embodies the values we have been taught to associate with the study of literature.¹ For this reason, debates about seemingly trivial things in his verse are ultimately

broader and value-laden debates about the great things that trouble our profession. My interest in investigating the metacritical debates about *The Rape of the Lock*, in this regard, does not lie in the fruitless task of trying to decide who "gets it" and who doesn't but in examining the significance of these debates for teaching and writing about Pope, for the eighteenth century, and at least by implication for literature itself. More specifically, my purpose in focussing primarily on reviews is intended to demonstrate three points: that the process of reviewing the works of our colleagues (traditionally a suspect, almost sub-critical mini-genre) has in recent years become increasingly fragmented, politicized and chaotic; that the rhetoric of disinterested assessments of others' works masks deep-seated political disagreements about the nature and purpose of literary study; and that our models of what literary criticism should be—reverent, objective and rational—are in need of a serious overhaul.

At the risk of simplifying a complex process, we might say that the purpose of any critical account of Pope's poem—or that of any canonical work—is to demonstrate its "value," its potential to instruct us about something, whether life, manners, human vanity, the nature of women, or the sources of the cosmetics on Belinda's table. In turn, the strategies by which Pope has been rendered "significant"—an object worthy of intense critical speculation—tell us a good deal about the values of the literary culture and the critical profession that value the *Rape*. My assumption is that neither Pope nor his poem has an *intrinsic* literary worth, that is, a value on which theoretically "all" scholars can agree. Rather, as the recent criticism demonstrates, Pope's poems have become the site of dialogical debates about the values he has been traditionally

¹On the ideological assumptions of Pope's formalist critics see Christopher Norris, "Pope Among the Formalists," in *Post-Structuralist Readings of English Poetry*, eds. Richard Machin and Christopher Norris (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1987) 134-61.

taken to represent. "Dialogical" debates, though, need to be differentiated from the anything-goes pluralism of much contemporary criticism.² Obviously critics have always disagreed about specific interpretations of Pope and about specific problems in reading his verse: note, for example, the various responses to Clarissa in *The Rape of the Lock*. But these disagreements have taken place on fairly narrow grounds that, I would argue, ultimately lead to an implicit acceptance by most critics and their readers of liberal-humanist values. What distinguishes contemporary debates about Pope from the controversies of the 1960s and 1970s is precisely the challenge that some marxist and feminist readings pose to the values that underlie traditional readings of individual poems. The dialogical forces at work in contemporary Pope criticism, in this regard, cannot be easily tamed or assimilated into familiar assumptions about literature, criticism and culture. As the books and reviews that I shall discuss below indicate, we seem to have arrived at a point beyond consensus from which there may not be an easy way back to the collegiality of old-fashioned scholarly debate.

In the past few years there have been a number of critical studies of Pope that, in one way or another, seek deliberately to challenge conventional ways of reading his work.³ Two of the more controversial—and significant—of these rereadings call into question rather than simply reaffirm the nature of the poet's achievement. Rather than contenting themselves with reworking the interpretations of previous studies, they seek to reassess the assumptions and values of the critical culture that celebrates Pope's significance as a canonical poet. Ellen Pollak's *The Poetics of Sexual Myth: Gender and Ideology in the Verse of Swift and Pope* (1985) and Laura Brown's *Alexander Pope* (1985) both offer rereadings of Pope and, in a larger sense, of the problem of assessing literary value. I would strongly recommend both books, and not simply

for what I see as their critical virtues. Anyone who neglects to read them and merely skims the reviews of these two studies is likely to come away far more puzzled than enlightened. Particularly in the case of Pollak's study, the reviews offer a troubling variety of contradictory and self-contradictory assessments, vapid generalizations, miscitations, and distortions of the author's arguments that suggest many reviewers cannot be bothered to examine critically either her theoretical framework or her polemical purpose. Both self-confessed and closet conservatives, in reviewing Pollak's and Brown's books, frequently retreat to the battlements to protect Pope as though he were a religious icon to be saved from the post-structuralist hordes. In a recent review essay of full-length studies of Pope, John M. Aden begins by condemning what he calls "a new species of Pope Burnings, in effigies of cause ranging from feminist outrage, Marxist defacement, deconstructionist sabotage to a pedantry of microscopic dismemberment and incrimination."⁴ Mixed metaphors aside, this sentence is noteworthy both for the vehemence of its attack and for the certainty with which it links Pope criticism to a nearly apocalyptic vision of humanist literary culture under siege. But the responses to Brown's and Pollak's studies do more than reveal a straightforward "us-versus-them" mentality. Comments like Aden's testify to fundamental ideological divisions within eighteenth-century studies and within academe at large.

Laura Brown's *Alexander Pope* appears in the Blackwell series "Rereading Literature" edited by Terry Eagleton. In his preface to Brown's study Eagleton concisely sums up her argument: Brown produces "a Pope whose poetry is less magically free of social and ideological contradiction than in part constituted by it; a Pope whose writing, in the very act of lending its voice to imperialist power and social oppression, finds itself curiously, unwittingly diverted into affirming something very like the opposite" (vii). As the title of Eagleton's series, "Rereading Literature," implies, Brown is concerned to reassess Pope's poetry from a materialist or marxist perspective. In re-examining the canonical work of a canonical poet, she subjects Pope to a dialectical analysis which demonstrates that the very form of his poetry registers the contradictions within the ideology of eighteenth-century mercantile

²On the dialogical nature of criticism see Don H. Bialostosky, "Dialogics As an Art of Discourse in Literary Criticism," *PMLA* 101 (1986): 788-97.

³See particularly G. Douglas Atkins, *Quests of Difference: Reading Pope's Poems* (Lexington: Univ. of Kentucky Press, 1986); A. D. Nuttall, *Pope's "Essay on Man"* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1984); Laura Brown, *Alexander Pope* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985); and Ellen Pollak, *The Poetics of Sexual Myth: Gender and Ideology in the Verse of Swift and Pope* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1985). The fact that I concentrate in this review on Brown's and Pollak's studies should not be taken, in any way, as a slighting of Atkins' or Nuttall's studies.

⁴John M. Aden, "Alexander Pope: Ave Atque Vale," *Sewanee Review* 95 (1987): 661.

expansionism. To some, like Aden, this attempt at "demystification" can have only one purpose—"the unmasking of the capitalist pig lurking behind all the major poems" (662). Aden's metaphor here is interesting (even if one resists trying to visualize a pig suddenly being unmasked). He presupposes that there is a fundamental distinction between ideology and poetry, that Brown is imposing ahistorical and irrelevant notions of class antagonism and conflict on a text that should be approached with sympathy and humility, if not reverence. Yet this is precisely what Brown says she is not doing: her "critique is not an attack on Pope from the outside, from the wiser perspective of a later historical moment. It seeks instead to find in *Pope's poems themselves* the signs of their ideology, to define the structures of belief by which their systems of value are sustained" (3; emphasis added). For Brown, as for Eagleton and all other marxists, poetry and ideology cannot be neatly separated or compartmentalized; in fact, as Michael McKeon argues, poetry *is* ideology.⁵ Aden's wrath is directed ultimately not merely at Brown's treatment of Pope but at what he perceives is the cause that she represents—a deterministic marxism.

In addition to the fundamental difference in their views of what poetry is, Aden and Brown also differ about what the purpose of her study or of any of the "new species" of Pope criticism is or should be. After indicating that he finds Brown's "whole account . . . a tissue of Marx-speak," Aden concludes that the only purpose of so radical a study must be defilement of the poet and all who appreciate him: "It is not enough to discredit Pope: one must discredit his critical following as well" (662). But if he assumes that Brown's purpose is another public burning, it is surprising that he does not note that the fires she supposedly seeks to kindle never quite get going. Brown states explicitly that

Pope has been the centre of the canon in traditional eighteenth-century literary history for good reason, it seems. This study keeps him there. But it keeps him as a subversive, as a lever against the whole canon of eighteenth-century studies. In that sense my reading is not a last word or a full or final evaluation, but barely a beginning,

⁵Michael McKeon, "Marxist Criticism and *Marriage a la Mode*," *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation* 24 (1983): 141-62.

an essay towards that subversion.

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This is a suspiciously inadequate way to discredit either Pope or his admirers, unless one backpedals and accuses Brown (as Aden implies) of a covert hatred for the eighteenth-century canon, for poetry, and ultimately for literature itself. But to make this rhetorical move, one would have to close one's edition of Pope before one chances upon *The Dunciad*, which itself displays (among its other attributes) something of an animus for much of the writing that was going on between 1726 and 1744. In fact, Brown's argument hinges on her reading of Pope's poetry as performing a complex double function. *The Rape of the Lock*, for example, satirically "attack[s] commodities [specifically the array on Belinda's dressing table] and their cultural consequences while it extols imperialism. It can praise the battles of imperial expansion while it condemns the consequences of capitalist accumulation" (22). As this passage suggests, far from seeking to discredit Pope, Brown is intent on reassessing the reasons for his central position in the canon of eighteenth-century studies. In this regard, she is more detailed and specific in arguing for Pope's historical and ideological significance than many of his earlier critics—Cleansh Brooks, Aubrey Williams and Earl Wasserman, for example—who assume that Pope's technical skill is evidence enough of his sociohistorical importance as well as his literary merit.⁶ Her analysis of the *Rape* is grounded in her belief that Pope develops a sophisticated poetic mode for registering the political as well as social complexities of the early eighteenth century.

The Pope who emerges in Brown's study is not the miniaturist, the technical virtuoso, or the craftsman who refurbishes classical values and poetic modes but instead the self-divided genius who creates an "elegant fantasy" about the culture of his day that paradoxically creates a "classical 'past' out of his own present beliefs" (26). Pope is drawn to the *Aeneid*, for example, not

⁶Brooks, *The Well-Wrought Urn* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1947) 146-52; Williams, "The 'Fall' of China," rpt. in *"The Rape of the Lock": A Casebook*, ed. John Dixon Hunt (London: Macmillan, 1968) 220-36; Wasserman, "The Limits of Allusion in *The Rape of the Lock*," *JEGP* 65 (1966): 425-44. See also Donna Landry's comments on Brown's study in her review of Brean Hammond's *Pope* (Brighton and Atlantic Highlands, N. J.: Humanities Press International, 1986) and Rebecca Ferguson's *The Unbalanced Mind: Alexander Pope and the Rule of Passion* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1986), in *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 21 (1988): 385.

because he is searching for models or seeking to display his learning but because the "very ambiguities" in Virgil's poem offer "a subliminal and subversive [model] . . . for the implicit ambivalence of Pope's imperialist poems" (27). Pope the champion of drawing room civility is replaced by Pope the incisive commentator on the political ambiguities of his day. By inserting *The Rape of the Lock* into the history of mercantile expansion, Brown seeks to demonstrate that the poem becomes an active constituent of the ideological "reality" of the early eighteenth century rather than a passive if witty reflection of the vagaries of upper-class existence. In this respect, her historicizing of Pope's poetry may be seen as a strategy of re-valuing rather than re-evaluating it, of offering a new means by which to account for the significance of the poem and the poet. In fact, if there is an ideological criticism which could be made of Brown's study it would not be that it has burned or discredited Pope but that it has not gone far enough in demystifying him as an exemplar of English culture in the eighteenth century. My guess is that Brown and Aden basically agree about how crucial a poet Pope is for the study of Augustan literature; the basis of his attack on her book is political: same poet, different ideological perspectives.

Pollak's *The Poetics of Sexual Myth* in both its execution and implications seems more radical—at least as concerns the problem of literary value—than Brown's. Its basic premise is that Pope's poetry plays an important role in codifying antifeminist ideology in the eighteenth century, what she terms the "myth of passive womanhood." The question that her study raises—one which has led at least some of the book's reviewers to condemn it in fairly violent terms—focuses on the relationship between canonical poetry and repressive values: can Pope be both a great poet and a misogynist? Where Brown re-evaluates the reasons for Pope's being at the center of the canon of eighteenth-century literature, Pollak insists that we ask ourselves what happens to Pope, to eighteenth-century verse, and implicitly to the canon if we find that ideologically the center cannot hold. In some respects, then, her book seems paradigmatic of the challenges which radical feminist criticism poses for the study of literature: can we value aesthetically what we condemn politically? In general, the responses to this question—and, as significantly, the refusals to confront it—that one could glean from the reviews of Pollak's study suggest that as a discipline we are ill-equipped to

deal with fundamental problems of political value and literary evaluation. The reviewers' widely divergent views of what Pollak has or has not accomplished ultimately result less from disagreements about her abilities as a reader of Pope and Swift than from disagreements about the extent to which literary criticism can tolerate challenges to the equation of moral and literary values that underlies our notion of the canon.

Early in her study, Pollak rejects the myth of the "ideological innocence" of literature in order to explore "the question of how the 'personal' is itself shaped by conventional ideological imperatives" (19). Like Brown, she refuses to drive a wedge between art and ideology, arguing that rather than passively reflecting the ways of the world a poem such as *The Rape of the Lock* actively constitutes the ways in which individuals perceive themselves and respond to their socioeconomic environment. Pope's satire in the *Rape*, she argues, does not merely poke fun at the superficial values of eighteenth-century society; it participates in shaping attitudes towards the relationship between men and women within a world of "sterile fetishism." For Pollak, "Pope's satire on a culture that objectifies individuals is itself a pretext for his own objectification of the female" (77). Therefore, the poet's "ironies function monologically" (90) to emphasize the fetishized nature of the female as an object of desire, not to call into question the ideology of masculine prerogatives that symbolically turn Belinda into "a complex manifestation of male prowess itself—its inspiration, its conquered object, its result" (96). Ultimately, Pollak argues that those qualities of balance and good humor that have traditionally been invoked to praise *The Rape of the Lock* are themselves dependent on the poet's metaphorically turning women into an ornament, a trophy, a symbol of male vanity: "although Pope criticizes the sterility of a world in which the signs of things have become substitutes for things themselves, indeed where people live in a materialistic and metonymic void, he never does controvert the premise that female sexuality is a material property over which man has a natural claim" (97). In effect, the "metonymic void" of the material world is, in part, predicated on the ideological make-up of a patrilineal society that reduces women to the determinant existence of sexual objects.

For defenders of the orthodox critical faith, Pollak's reading of the *Rape* poses an enormous difficulty: to attack it, one must defend Pope by arguing that the poem is in fact not basically

antifeminist, that the satire of Belinda is not gender-specific, that she does not have to have an "interiority" of character given the generic conventions of the poem, that she is not really the butt of the satire, or some combination of or variation on these themes. Aden tries to finesse the problem by insisting on the separation of art and sexual ideology: Pollak, he asserts, "is interested not in poetry but in sexism"; she "writes abundantly by buzz-word"; she never encourages us "to think of Swift and Pope as poets, but only as exhibits in the history of sexual miscreance" (662). Pope apparently cannot be a sexist because he is, well, Pope, the canonical poet. An equally spirited, even violent, attack on Pollak's feminist critique is launched by Nora Crow Jaffe.⁷ Pollak, she claims,

has only one context in mind: the condition of women. Her narrowness and her ordering of priorities leave room for a dismaying innocence about the rest of history, especially literary history, and for perverse and anachronistic readings that precipitate her own feminist and Marxist program into defeat. Worse yet, her tendentiousness endangers the efforts of those who wish to combine feminist goals with a sympathetic and responsible appreciation for poets like Swift and Pope.

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To attack Pollak's "unsympathetic" and "irresponsible" treatment of Swift and Pope, Jaffe invokes "common sense interpretation[s]" of the two poets that invariably turn on the minutiae of where commas should or should not be, first versus second definitions in the OED, and melodramatic condemnations of Pollak's "relentless driving toward ideological goals" (247) and alleged lack of knowledge about "eighteenth-century ideas about mock-epic, epic, and history" (248). To drive home her point, Jaffe closes by implying that Pollak's reading "plays into the hands of those who deny a woman's autonomy by offering to relieve her of responsibility for the choices she has made" (248). Presumably, *The Poetics of Sexual Myth* represents "irresponsible" feminist inquiry because it fails to demonstrate its "responsible appreciation" for canonical poetry and the values that support it. Pollak, then, is not simply mistaken in her

readings of particular poems; her work "endangers" efforts to bring "feminist goals" into the fold of humanist inquiry. These "goals," for Jaffe, however, seem to be restricted to concocting new ways of praising what has already been praised, new ways of shielding Pope and Swift—under the guise of "eighteenth-century ideas"—from ideological critique.

Jaffe's attack is typical of what happens when conservatively oriented critics turn a perjured eye from the implications of radical questions asked by marxist and feminist criticism. Her purpose—in effect to reclaim Swift and Pope for one version of feminism and from another—represents another version of Aden's attempt to insulate poetry from politics. By condemning Pollak's "irresponsible" brand of feminism, Jaffe must also cast beyond the pale of "responsible" "feminist goals" those critics who praise Pollak's study: Terry Castle ("*The Poetics of Sexual Myth* is intelligently conceived, beautifully written, and approaches its difficult, incendiary subject with a fine balance of scholarly scrupulousness and critical daring"); Catharine Stimpson ("A deft and subtle text, [this study] balances intellectual energy and grace"); Kristina Straub ("[Pollak's] book is pleasurable to read as well as an excellent argument for the importance and credibility of incorporating an awareness of the political problems of gender in our understanding of eighteenth-century texts"); David Nokes ("Pollak's book . . . is one of the most persuasive and stimulating works of feminist literary criticism that I have encountered"); Anne Himmelfarb ("A lucid, sometimes brilliant application of feminist theory to a group of poems not usually treated by feminists"); Brean Hammond ("a highly intelligent and challenging book, the first to bring to its subject the resources of an adequately theorized feminism"); Janet Todd ("an extremely enlightening and enlivening work which, on the whole, skillfully draws on the insights and language of modern formalist criticisms to illuminate the ultimately historical problem of the representation of women"); and Harold Weber ("Pollak's book is exhilarating . . . not only for its own contribution to eighteenth-century studies, but because it promises a renewed energy in the field as scholars attempt to come to terms with Pollak's method and conclusions").⁸ Underlying Jaffe's objections to, say, Pollak's reading of the word "affectation" as an attribute (according to Steele) of both the coquette and prude is a fundamental difference between these two critics about what we mean by

⁷Nora Crow Jaffe, rev. of *The Poetics of Sexual Myth*, in *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 20 (1986-87): 244-48.

feminism, ideology, poetry, and criticism. Although Jaffe accuses Pollak of driving towards ideological goals, her review is no less committed, no less ideological than *The Poetics of Sexual Myth*. But where Pollak combines a re-reading of Pope with a metacritical examination of traditional critical methods and values—of the nature of ideology and masculinist discourse—Jaffe retreats to the bulwarks of common sense and embattled humanist ideals to avoid precisely the issue which Pollak's study confronts: what is the relationship between canonical poetry and repressive ideologies?

The radical nature of this question virtually ensures that it can be answered (or evaded) from other critical perspectives. In marked contrast to Jaffe's insistence that Pollak, laden with her ideological cargo, has sailed off the edge of the earth, Felicity Nussbaum, while praising Pollak's readings as "scholarly, energetic, and engaging in their conviction," argues that she has not gone far enough: her "use of authorial intention," for example, "conventionalizes Pollak's vigorous readings and threatens her compelling thesis."⁹ Although Nussbaum acknowledges that Pollak "raises issues which are crucial, even urgent, for eighteenth-century scholars and for the humanities," she nonetheless laments that *The Poetics of Sexual Myth* "steps back from forging a new historicism which would acknowledge the way writing narratives of history is an interpretive act, and the way representations of reality . . . construct as well as reflect a material world" (369). In other words, what for Aden and Jaffe is dangerously radical is for Nussbaum too conventional. And yet Nussbaum's review is not simply a case of one critic trying to outflank

another on the fashionable critical left, what we might call the "leftier-than-thou" mode which, over the past few years, has increasingly pitted literary critics against each other to test the limits of political tolerance within academe. Nussbaum's earlier study, *The Brink of All We Hate: English Satires on Women, 1660-1750*, has been castigated by reviewers for its lack of theoretical sophistication and criticized by Pollak (208, n. 9) for its attempt to redeem Pope's *Rape* and the "Epistle to a Lady" from charges of misogyny by arguing a Jaffe-like position that "each [poem] is ambiguous and complex in its use of eighteenth-century conventions and commonplaces" about women.¹⁰ The difference in theoretical orientation between Nussbaum's book on satire and her review of Pollak's study involves more than an individual critic's move to a more ideologically self-conscious position. In her review, Nussbaum is, in effect, reformulating the problem of poetic value in ideological rather than (as in her earlier study) formalist terms. The constructivist position that she implicitly maintains in her critique of Pollak does not so much question the relationship between poetic value and ideology as equate them. In effect, Nussbaum, even as she praises Pollak's readings of Pope, invites us to see *The Poetics of Sexual Myth* as a kind of catalyst that, having demystified the workings of gender and ideology in *The Rape of the Lock* and other poems, needs itself to be challenged for its supposed failure to call into question the notion of authorial intention.

As the incompatible responses of Jaffe and Nussbaum suggest, Pollak's feminist critique, perhaps even more than Brown's marxist study, asks its readers to take sides, to examine their own positions on the problems of misogyny and poetic value. This is not simply a matter of declaring a straightforward political allegiance, as Aden, Jaffe and Nussbaum, although in very different ways, maintain. It is significant, in this regard, that reviewers' attitudes towards the Pope and Swift chapters in Pollak's work differ depending on their critical allegiances to one or the other of the poets. Aden, for example, having lambasted Pollak's reading of Pope is willing

⁹Castle, cited on the dust jacket of *The Poetics of Sexual Myth* (Ellen Pollak confirms that Professor Castle was one of the readers of her manuscript for the Univ. of Chicago Press and that her comment originally appeared in her reader's report); Stimpson, Foreward, *The Poetics of Sexual Myth* xi; Straub, "Feminism, Formalism, and Historical Consciousness," *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation* 28 (1987): 186-92; Nokes, "Wielding the Gendered Shears," *Times Literary Supplement* 20 Feb. 1987: 9; Himmelfarb, rev. in *The Johnsonian Newsletter* 46.1 (Mar. 1986): 12; Hammond, "Poetry of Gender," *Times Higher Education Supplement* 14 Feb. 1986: 12; Todd, rev. in *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 10 (1987): 233; Weber, rev. in *South Atlantic Review* 51.3 (1986): 86-87.

¹⁰Felicity Nussbaum, rev. of *The Poetics of Sexual Myth*, in *Southern Humanities Review* 21 (1987): 367-69. For arguments similar to those advanced by Nussbaum see the review of Pollak's study by Donna Landry in *Choice* Feb. 1986: 872, and by Melinda Alliker Rabb in *Philological Quarterly* 66 (1987): 544-47.

¹⁰Felicity Nussbaum, *The Brink of All We Hate: English Satires on Women, 1660-1750* (Lexington: Univ. of Kentucky Press, 1984) 140. For two critiques of this work for its lack of theoretical and historical sophistication, see Ruth Perry, "Patriarchy's Poetry," *Women's Review of Books* 1.9 (June 1984): 16-17, and Laurie A. Finke, "The Ideologies of Feminism," *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation* 27 (1986): 287-92.

to grant Pollak at least this much. She finds in Swift something that gives her comfort doctrinally, and so—save where he still comes off ever so psychopathic and, what is worse, an admirer of Pope—he fares pretty well at her hands. Her reading of *Cadenus and Vanessa* is a good and useful commentary on that poem and one deserving of commendation.

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Contrast his praise to Nussbaum's terse comment: Pollak's "interpretations of Swift's verse are less convincing" than her readings of Pope (*Southern Humanities Review* 368). Although Nussbaum is not really explicit about why they are less convincing, the implication is that they rely too heavily on a notion of authorial intention. Jaffe, who published her own book on Swift in 1977, takes time out from her scattershot attack to acknowledge that Pollak's chapter on *The Rape of the Lock* is "vivid and interesting," although not focused enough on the issue of eighteenth-century notions of mock-epic.¹¹ The pattern that emerges as one reads through the reviews of Pollak's study is that Popeans are uncomfortable with a feminist critique of Pope, Swiftians with a radical rereading of Swift. The most forthright acknowledgment of this dilemma is John Sitter's in his review of Pollak's book: "For reasons having less to do with differences of methodological commitment than of poetic sympathy (but which I trust are nonetheless arguable), I find the Popean middle of Ms. Pollak's study less persuasive and helpful than the chapters on gender debates or on Swift's poetry."¹² He then accurately sums up Pollak's contrast of Pope the "bourgeois liberal" to Swift the "radical," but goes on to charge her with violating her own theoretical agenda in her readings of Pope's poems when she asks for "an interiority of character generically improbable then and theoretically suspect now" (61). But the "interiority" that Pollak finds lacking does not seem to me to be an assertion on her part that violates eighteenth-century conceptions of genre or twentieth-century conceptions of the de-centered self; it is a relational idea that she refers, quite sensibly, I think, to the explicit distinctions that Pope makes between the characters of men

and women in the *Moral Essays*. In short, as Sitter recognizes, his critique of the book's sections on Pope rests on differences in "poetic sympathy." Even as he recognizes the bases and biases of his response, Sitter seeks a means both to praise Pollak's study—"an intelligent and important contribution"—and to recuperate Pope's reputation. (60).

At this juncture, having surveyed a variety of reactions to two important critical works, we might find ourselves tempted by scholarly convention to intone solemn platitudes about the pluralistic nature of the profession, the wide variety of responses that "great" poetry can still provoke, and the need for further studies to clarify this unfortunately muddled situation. But the usual pieties cannot paper over the fundamental differences that separate Jaffe from Pollak and Straub or Aden from Brown. In an important essay that introduces a special issue of *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation* devoted to Pope, David Morris argues persuasively that no single theory can possibly "sum up" or "capture" Pope, that the poet, like any great writer, is complex enough to resist being co-opted by a single critical or theoretical perspective.¹³ The analogy he makes is a fascinating one: the criticism of Pope is likened to the "Bootstrap Theory" of the Berkeley physicist Geoffrey Chew, who argues that our notion of single theories to explain the subatomic structure of matter should give way to a series of interlocking theories—bootstrap theories. Each theory seeks to explain only a portion of the relevant data; at its boundaries of explanation it gives way to other theories which, in turn, explain different sets of data or anomalies in the original theory. Chew's image of bootstrap theory is finally one of a grand mosaic, though constantly redefining the relationships among its constituent elements, and never quite offering a firm teleological hope that the "truth" is just around the corner, over the horizon, or beyond the next experiment.

Morris's view of Pope criticism as a dynamic and incomplete mosaic is, I think, both brilliantly evocative and historically plausible. It provides a valuable means to theorize a mass of otherwise contradictory and self-contradictory commentary that turns Pope into a Rorschach test for various critical "-isms." And yet, as Morris notes, in

¹¹Nora Crow Jaffe, *The Poet Swift* (Hanover, N.H.: Univ. Press of New England, 1977).

¹²John Sitter, rev. of *The Poetics of Sexual Myth*, in *The Scriblerian* 20 (1987): 60-62.

¹³David Morris, "Bootstrap Theory: Pope, Physics, and Interpretation," *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation* 29 (1988): 101-21.

theoretical physics nowadays bootstrap theory (first advanced by Chew some twenty years ago) is old hat—certainly not disproved, certainly not contradicted by new sets of data, but simply unfashionable.¹⁴ While literary critics ponder the metaphoric richness of bootstrap theory, theoretical physicists are caught up in the quest for a unified field theory—a single formulation to explain *all* the workings of matter, gravity, strong and weak forces on the subatomic level, and electromagnetism. No one has formulated a unified field theory; no one knows what one will look like. But the lure of comprehensiveness, of mystical truth, of a final summation of everything we know hovers over the enterprise of theoretical physics probably to no less of an extent than it haunts the dreams of literary critics. For the latter, the buzzwords that define critical praise are never those of bootstrap theory but of that teleological phantom, the definitive interpretation. Note, for example, Aden's assessment (in my mind, quite accurate) of Morris's *Alexander Pope: The Genius of Sense*: "unquestionably the most original and seminal overview of Pope's poetry as a whole that, Maynard Mack excepted, I can recall" (667-68).¹⁵ Yet another of the ironies of criticism in the eighties: Morris, the critic most fascinated by the issue of Pope's seemingly infinite variety, is the one labelled as the most capable of providing an overarching view of the poet's work as a consistent, humanistically-based "whole."

But any theory of Pope criticism—or of literary criticism, in general—that attempts to hold widely divergent views in some form of dialectical cohesion may be too optimistic. On the level of praxis, of what goes on in the classroom, the differences among Pollak, Jaffe and Nussbaum seem too fundamental to subsume under a convenient rubric such as "feminism" or "eighteenth-century studies." Suppose, for example, that you had an eighteen year-old daughter, intending to major in English, whose choice of colleges came down to Smith and Syracuse. Suppose further that your daughter, having whizzed through the Advance Placement exam in literature, walks in on her first day of college to a survey of eighteenth-century literature taught either by Jaffe (at Smith) or Nussbaum (at Syracuse). The vocabulary of these

two professors might be the same—Pope, eighteenth-century society, role of women, literature, and so on. But if their responses to Pollak's study are any indication, the courses that they teach would be vastly different: Jaffe presumably would seek to confirm Pope's status as a canonical poet, Nussbaum to identify and demystify the patriarchal ideologies which her colleague at Smith would either pass over in silence or indicate were somehow part of what Pope was satirizing rather than promoting. Depending on her choice of colleges, then, your daughter would be getting fundamentally different views of Pope—and of the process of reading literature. My point here is not necessarily to indicate that in some absolute sense one of these critics is "right" and the other "wrong" but to indicate that there may finally be no way to reconcile their views either of Pollak's study or of eighteenth-century literature, no way to subsume their differences within a unifying rhetoric of scholarly consensus.

There may be, however, other metaphors besides Morris's invoking of bootstrap theory to explain what is occurring in Pope criticism and in the criticism of eighteenth-century literature in general. Like other variants of quantum physics, bootstrap theory is now being, in part, supplanted by contemporary chaos theory.¹⁶ Chaos theory cuts across conventional boundaries of physical and mathematical research and redefines a number of scientific disciplines: fractal geometry, meteorology, non-linear dynamics, irreversible thermodynamics, and many others. In effect, chaos theory studies the transformation of systems from order to randomness, the ways in which minute differences in input (in computer-generated sequences of "pseudo-random" numbers, for example) can relatively quickly (within the space of a few hundred iterations) lead to vast differences in output. In effect, then, chaos theory does not simply redefine relationships between order and disorder; it calls into question both philosophically and mathematically the "common sense" definitions of order and disorder themselves. Chaos theory has the attraction for scientists and mathematicians of employing sophisticated theories and complex models to investigate everyday phenomena, of applying computer-gener-

¹⁴I am indebted to Evelyn Fox Keller and David Mermin for their helpful explanations of some of the complexities of contemporary bootstrap and quantum theory.

¹⁵David Morris, *Alexander Pope: The Genius of Sense* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1984).

¹⁶For an accessible discussion of chaos theory see James Gleick, *Chaos: Making a New Science* (New York: Viking, 1987). I am indebted to N. Katherine Hayles for allowing me to read parts of her work in progress on chaos theory and contemporary literary theory.

ated functions to problems of predicting the weather, of describing the clouds that cigarette smoke makes in the air, of reassessing the information that can be gleaned from the eye movements of schizophrenics.

And, for us, perhaps the seeming unpredictability of literary criticism. The critics of *The Rape of the Lock* whom I have dealt with in this essay presumably begin from the same data, the Twickenham edition of Pope's poem. Yet what appear to be minute, even trivial, differences in reading single words or lines can and do generate profound differences in interpretations. There is, I think, no way to establish a consensus among Brown, Aden, Pollak, Nussbaum, Straub, and Sitter: in the words of Firesign Theater, you can't get there from here. But I should note that chaos theory does *not* presuppose the kind of nihilistic entropy that Aden laments has overtaken Pope criticism. Anyone who has looked at the fractal geometric constructions of Benoit Mandelbrot recognizes that chaos theory presupposes a kind of Blakean generative energy rather than anomie. For chaos theorists, the true sterility is predictability, the refusal to acknowledge the productive function of iteration, the close-minded division of the universe into static concepts of matter, energy and information. Chaos theory—and I choose this term deliberately—deconstructs the boundaries among these entities.

The critical anticipation of chaos theory in literary studies, though, may belong more to Mikhail Bakhtin than to Derrida, who, after all, published *De la Grammatologie* twenty years after Claude Shannon published his ground-breaking articles on information theory.¹⁷ For Bakhtin, there are no denotative meanings, no single-faceted rhetorical constructs. All understanding is dialogical, our utterances always in the process of defining themselves against prior utterances and against the hostile misconstructions of our social environment. Communication, for Bakhtin, is always an unstable, precarious affair; in the metaphor of information theory, noise and information always interpenetrate in historically specific utterances. Unlike those literary theorists who struggle to pin down meaning, to offer

definitive interpretations, Bakhtin offers the dialogics of culture as a contest of competing meanings, of increasing amounts of information that lead to more ideologically various and complex attempts to articulate—and legislate—meaning. Where Bakhtin differs from a wishy-washy form of "pluralism," however, is in his insistence on the historical specificity of utterances, on their ideological nature. For Bakhtin, the exchange of information is always interested, always a political struggle.

So, too, is contemporary criticism of *The Rape of the Lock*. The reactions to Brown's and Pollak's revisionist studies of Pope indicate on one level the breakdown of scholarly consensus that, I would argue, is occurring throughout the disciplines of humanistic study. On another level, however, these books and the responses they have generated suggest that if the breakdown of consensus leads to the falling out of fashion of the heretofore "responsible appreciation" of Pope, it will be all to the good. The problem with the old-line humanist criticism represented by Aden and Jaffe is not that in some metaphysical sense it is "wrong" but that it perpetuates static, reified notions of "responsible" and "irresponsible" criticism that fail to consider the ideological interests of "responsibility." It canonizes Pope at the expense of studying him; by trying to "save" him from marxist, feminist and deconstructive analysis it renders his verse hardly worth reading by conceding, in effect, what is surely Pollak's most penetrating criticism—that the ironies of his verses on women are monological and coercive rather than, in Bakhtin's sense, dialogical. If Pope's *Rape* does not participate in and, in Foucault's sense, help to disseminate eighteenth-century views of sexuality, what ideological claims does it promote? What values does it accept as "natural"? If Pope, Richardson and other eighteenth-century writers are ideologically innocent—if canonical literature itself resists repressive ideologies—where does antifeminism come from? How is it sustained? Perhaps, to paraphrase Falstaff, misogyny lay in Pope's way and he found it. But to explain away Pope's conservatism, to refuse to interrogate the ideological structure of his verse, as Jaffe tries to do by hauling out alleged eighteenth-century "ideas" of mock-epic, is to eviscerate Pope in a way that, I suspect, would delight the targets of his satire in *The Dunciad*.

It should be obvious by now that my critical sympathies lie with Pollak and Brown rather than with their harsher critics. This does not

¹⁷I have discussed Bakhtin's significance for literary theory in *Two-Edg'd Weapons: Style and Ideology in the Comedies of Etherege, Wycherley, and Congreve* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988) 19-29. See also Laurie A. Finke, "The Rhetoric of Marginality: Why I Do Feminist Theory," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 5 (1986): 251-72, and Susan Stewart, "Shouts on the Streets: Bakhtin's Anti-Linguistics," *Critical Inquiry* 10 (1983): 265-81.

necessarily mean that I "agree" with them in every instance or that I think either of them is somehow "right" in the absolute sense that is bandied about in Aden's and Jaffe's reviews. The great virtue of their works is precisely their willingness to alter the theoretical and ideological bases on which Pope criticism has traditionally depended. Without questioning the underpinnings of "responsible appreciation" of Pope, we are stuck in a parody of a Laplacian universe, maintaining, whatever evidence to the contrary, that chaos, that dialogic struggle, does not exist. Far from imposing simplistic solutions on a complex poet, Brown's and Pollak's studies open up new levels of discourse to explore, new ways of rethinking the significance of Pope in the dissemination of ideologies which continue to shape our attitudes towards literature and the canon. We do not have to judge between, say, Morris's *The Genius of Sense* and Pollak's *The Poetics of Sexual Myth* in some absolute sense as though these studies were two boxers trying to club the other into unconsciousness, the winner to stand as the champion of definitive interpretation until the next challenger comes along. Instead, the dialogic interplay between

two books of this stature can serve as a means to reject both monological readings of Pope and the kind of mushy-headed pluralism that Morris's and my appropriations of bootstrap and chaos theories try to get us beyond. Given the kinds of comments that I have surveyed in this essay, I am a bit less optimistic than Morris in assessing the state of Pope studies because, for all the energy represented by the essays in this issue of the *New Orleans Review* and Morris's special issue of *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation*, there still seems to be a lot of bad blood and bad faith among people who write on Pope. How productive this state of chaos will be beyond the old critical consensus may very well depend on how seriously the debates provoked by the contributors to these two special issues are taken.¹⁸□

¹⁸I would like to thank David Morris and Ronald Schleifer for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

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THE RAPE OF THE LOCK IN THE 1980s:
AN ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Critical examinations of *The Rape of the Lock* have appeared ever since the *Rape* was published in 1712. One of the first was Pope's own *Key to the Lock*, and since then all sorts of biographical, appreciative and close readings have appeared. With the rise of the American New Criticism in the 1940s critics turned to the *Rape* as an ideal text for close readings: the word play, verbal battles, irony, and paradox with the *Rape* lend the poem very well to the close rhetorical readings of New Criticism.

In the decade of the 1980s there were still a good number of historical/biographical and New Critical readings of the *Rape*. However, the poem has also lent itself—more or less willingly—to a wide variety of critical approaches, including linguistic and stylistic analyses, contemporary and classical source studies, literary and social-historical approaches, figural readings, generic studies, more or less “deconstructive” readings, feminist examinations, and Marxist readings. The following is a selected bibliography of studies published since 1980 that, with one exception, focus on Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*. The breadth of this bibliography should give a strong sense of how vital Pope's poem remains nearing its fourth century.

Selected Bibliography of *The Rape of the Lock*

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- Austin, Timothy. “Prolegomenon to a Theory of Comparative Poetic Syntax.” *Language and Style* 16.4 (1983): 433-56. [This essay attempts to establish a relationship between syntax, theme and the reader's perception in a grammatical analysis of the *Rape*.]
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- [This volume studies the *Rape* in relation to Pope's translations of Homer.]
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- Guilhamet, Leon. *Satire and the Transformation of Genre*. Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1987.
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- Loftis, John E. “Speech in ‘The Rape of the Lock.’” *Neophilologus* 67 (1983): 149-59. [This essay argues that the visual world of the *Rape* is beautiful, but that the language is perverse, presumptuous and morally decayed.]
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- Martindale, Charles. “Sense and Sensibility: The Child and the Man in ‘The Rape of the Lock.’” *The Modern Language Review* 78.2 (1983): 273-84. [This essay distinguishes between an “adult's” ironic reading of the *Rape* and a “child's” imaginative reading. For a discussion of this essay, see Elizabeth Hind's essay in this collection.]
- Merrett, Robert James. “Death and Religion in ‘The Rape of the Lock.’” *Mosaic* 15.1 (1982): 29-39. [This essay relates the *Rape* to Pope's ill health and argues that Pope viewed earthly life as something to be endured.]
- Moon, Kenneth. “Pope's ‘The Rape of the Lock.’” *Explicator* 39.3 (1981): 22-26. [This essay argues that the poem is a

denial of Belinda's sexuality.]

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alludes so that the later poem helps determine the reading of the earlier works.]

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AFTERWARD: ON THE CRITICAL CHARACTER:
READING AND WRITING IN THE POST-STRUCTURAL AGE

As one who has for some years been engaged in the effort to open up eighteenth-century studies to the insights of recent theories, I am honored to contribute an Afterword to *The Poststructural Pope*. My comments, brief but wide-ranging, will by no means round off the admirable discussions of *The Rape of the Lock* nor pretend to constitute some final word about Pope. Having been stimulated by the articles assembled here to reflect on certain critical and theoretical issues, I will offer a kind of counterword, hoping to encourage dialogue. In looking through these articles rather than at them, I intend no slight of them—nor of Pope—of course; I mean to praise them for setting me thinking. I cannot help remarking the irony, surely not lost on those who proclaim “the death of the author,” that we are here (and elsewhere) celebrating the birth of the poet.

A word or two more by way of further preface: My original title was “Reading/Raping/Reaping,” for I wanted to play on the similarities of sight and sound that link *reading* with *reaping* and *reaping* with *raping*. Perhaps naturally in the context of discussions of *The Rape of the Lock*, my concern was to focus on reading while noting the very real danger that it may become a violation. But a woman who read a draft of my essay rightly objected to the linking of reading and reaping through raping. She convinced me to change my title and made me look again at my assumptions. Though I agree that my original title was inappropriate, and indeed insensitive, I think we must acknowledge, even as we deplore it, that reading *can* be a drive towards mastery that in its violence could be at least figured by the far worse violence of rape. Instead, it *should* be gentle and generous, above all welcome and solicited. My terms are sexual, but not offensively so, I hope. You don’t have to be a Barthesian to appreciate the similarities between reading and love(making): in both, slow, careful nurture and cultivation lead to reaping untold pleasures.¹

I will be talking, then, about critical attitudes, tact and skills in cultivation, focusing on the kind

of relation that exists between reader and text as well as between reader and culture and society. I will also be concerned with the form that the critic’s response takes, for the critic’s *writing* is important, far more so, I think, than we often assume. In short, I will be raising questions of critical tone and deportment—in other words, *critical character*. In this, I shall be following Pope himself, of course: “Nor in the *Critick* let the *Man* be lost!” he exclaims in *An Essay on Criticism* (523). He also contends that only those who write well themselves should instruct others in the art of writing (I accept the point while feeling its sting). So important is writing to Pope that he argues, quoting the Duke of Buckingham, that “*Nature’s chief Master-piece is writing well*” (724). At any rate, we in the poststructural age are witnessing not the birth of the critic, obviously, but perhaps the critic’s achieving majority. Critical character thus takes on considerable importance.

To begin, at last: That this volume brings together discussions written from a number of different, competing, and not necessarily compatible theoretical orientations raises important questions. What is the relation of these theories one to another? And what is the reader to do with so many choices, in the face of so much wealth? Having recently wrestled with these issues in co-editing a textbook, which consists of separate discussions by other hands of twelve theoretical positions, I am sensitive to the enormity of the questions. In introducing *Contemporary Literary Theory*, I distinguish between a *theory*, which more or less affects, via specific openings, strategies, or privileged questions, how we read texts, and *theory* itself, which Gerald Graff defines “not as a set of systematic principles, necessarily, or a founding philosophy, but simply as an inquiry into assumptions, premises, and legitimating

¹I thank Cheryl B. Torsney, of West Virginia University, for her painstaking and thoughtful commentary on this essay. She provoked further thought in me and made me aware of much I only half-knew.

principles and concepts."² A powerful mode of self-consciousness and self-reflexiveness, indeed of self-critique, theory allows us to understand how we are thinking, what we are including and excluding, losing and gaining, when we employ a particular theory. What I am doing here may be considered the work of theory.

Amid this God's plenty of theories, are we free to choose? And does it make any difference whether we opt for a structuralist "approach" rather than a Marxist, a feminist, a Bakhtinian, or a deconstructionist? Obviously it does. Whether or not it was part of the editorial intention, *The Poststructural Pope* helps make clear just what the choice of a particular theory entails. A deconstructionist, such as Grant Holly, does close, intense and rigorous reading, which may lead to exciting, occasionally surprising, even breathtaking *textual* discoveries. A Marxist, like David Gross, on the other hand, may produce a discussion in which the reading of specific texts pales in comparison but gains in the capacious questioning of basic values. Often, it seems, *readings* at least verge on formalism—at the expense of "extrinsic," or referential, concerns, which thus appear bracketed or ignored. "Activist" discussions, contrariwise, seem to slight the text, sometimes paying only lip-service to it in the rush to condemn or to take on large social issues—that is certainly the charge of hostile traditionalist reviewers of poststructuralist studies of Pope and other figures.

Though a deconstructionist need not neglect cultural and political questions any more than a Marxist need slight the text, the power theories have, each with its particular biases and inclinations, can hardly be doubted. Indicated by the articles assembled here, the choice of a theory may not just color but actually determine the reading produced. That is, the Pope we have can be, and probably is, dependent on, and a creation of, the theoretical orientation with which we read. Come with a feminist theory, and the Pope that emerges from your discussion will inevitably bear the marks of that theory. With theories like feminism, Marxism and deconstruction, the situation is particularly complex, for you will—to use my favored terms—"read against the grain," proceeding contrary to Pope's apparent intentions and producing an interpretation of him

as different: depending on your choice of theory, as different from himself or different from the values you cherish and apply.³ He will be strikingly different, in any case, from the complex craftsman, firmly in charge of his line and his meanings, the master of language, that came, lavished with elegant praise, from the influential New Critical readings of Maynard Mack, Aubrey Williams, Reuben Brower, and others. These critics and others—Earl Wasserman comes to mind—produced stately and sometimes graceful readings that were consoling in the way they managed to *contain* Pope's complexities (the idea of *concordia discors* lay ready to hand). Now Pope, even Pope, has come apart, and God only knows whether he can be put back together again. The situation has thus changed radically from that Frederick M. Keener described in 1974: "Elegant, aloof, most modern criticism of Pope reads as if it emanated not from twentieth-century America or England but from some miraculously undisturbed eighteenth-century estate, what Hugh Kenner has called 'the professional Popeans' Natchez-Augustan manor'"—a house now not so much divided against itself or in need of repair as condemned (fairly or unfairly) and apparently destined for demolition.⁴

My intention here is neither to celebrate unproblematically the new order nor, I hope it is clear, lament the passing of the old, though I do think that with the advent of the poststructuralist Pope we are experiencing losses as well as gains. Nor do I rejoice in our freedom to have (or make) any Pope we want. And I have no wish to bewail the impossibility of a theory-transcendent or theory-free practice. My remarks hereafter will, then, strike some as unduly cautious, therefore reactionary, and others as iconoclastic and extreme. Such is the power ideology can hold over us.

The relation of a theory to a produced reading is the structural equivalent of the relation of reader to text, which subsumes it, in fact. At issue remains power, control, even mastery: Who is on top? I hope I may be forgiven for repeating with some modifications my own earlier account of

²Gerald Graff, *Professing Literature: An Institutional History* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1987) 252. *Contemporary Literary Theory*, eds. Laura Morrow and G. Douglas Atkins, is due late in 1988 from the Univ. of Massachusetts Press.

³Unresolved in such perspectives is the relation of ideology and poetic value: Can we continue to praise the poetry while condemning the politics? What would be left of poetry shorn of ideology?

⁴Frederick M. Keener, *An Essay on Pope* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1974) 5. Keener cites Hugh Kenner, "In the Wake of the Anarch," *Gnomon: Essays on Contemporary Literature* (New York: McDowell, Obolensky, 1958) 176.

"the battle of wills" involved in every act of reading. To ask a question of a text, I claimed, represents an attempt to coerce a response; it is an attempt to make the respondent responsive, that is, willing to answer. But the response, I continue to believe, which is also will-ing (though not necessarily willing), is incomplete at best, and that serves mainly to raise additional questions. Imposition occurs, and it comes from text and critic alike. In this battle of wills, disturbingly dramatized in Swift's *A Tale of a Tub*, exists a dialogue of questions that is a mutual coercion. Mutually dependent on language, critic and text question each other, read each other. The single-minded drive towards mastery, even rape, I want to insist, can be transformed into a more complex relation. For even as they jockey for position, critic and text are locked—it is a fortunate fall—in a ceaseless oscillation in which neither finally dominates, acts as master to a slave-other.⁵ This situation I describe is not merely ideal, therefore; it is the structural definition of the reading process, which the willing critic may, of course, in any single enactment of that process, violate. The relation of the reader to text is like Wordsworth's understanding of the relation of mind or imagination to nature: it is one of "mutual domination" and "interchangeable supremacy."⁶

This situation entails respect for, as well as engagement with, texts. Such respect leads not to idolatry, where the text becomes, willy-nilly, a quasi-sacred object of reverence and worship, before which the awed critic prostrates himself or herself in abject subordination. The critic, I am arguing, faces the difficult task of being true to herself or himself and the text, achieving a balance between competing and willful forces, whose needs must be respected. I see no way to avoid questions of tact: the critic must take responsibility.

The criticism I find most attractive and effective shuttles between a text, which it reads closely rather than quotes closely or paraphrases, and a particular idea or issue in theory, whether that be

literary, philosophical, religious, political, or cultural. Without close attention to a text the work hardly deserves the name literary criticism; without concerned attention to extrinsic issues, the work is puerile, constituting exegesis or explication *in vacuo* and not mature criticism. In order to resist the temptation, still fairly strong, to idolize the text, without either slighting it or neglecting important external issues, the critic might, taking a cue from Blake, look *through* the text and not merely at it. Like nature as Wordsworth came to understand his "anchor," "the muse,/the guide, the guardian of [his] heart, and soul/Of all [his] moral being" (*Tintern Abbey* 11.109-11), the text leads us beyond itself, in an interpreted act of considerable generosity; in some sense, it continues to "anchor" us even as we transcend it.

The critic's task involves more than achieving and maintaining balance on what must seem, from my description, a highly unstable and even dangerous teeter-totter. It requires interpretive skill, knowledge and immersion in tradition, with its severe demands (what is the relation of the individual critical talent to both literary and critical tradition?). With a parochialism of culture, we have "operators," or processors of texts, rather than readers, and in that case we cannot help but produce impoverished readings, trained by techniques and methods to submit texts to the meat-grinder of a particular theory, from which they will come out, you can bet on it, as hamburger, only eighty percent lean. It is not, after all, "the individual poem that determines the meaning of indeterminate phrases but the poem as part of an intertextual corpus which the skilled interpreter supplies."⁷ Being intertextual, meaning lies not in individual, isolated, autonomous texts, as the New Critics thought, but in the way one text is related to another; no text is an island complete unto itself. The skilled and knowledgeable interpreter, widely read and broadly cultured, supplies the "intertextual corpus" in which the individual poem or novel or essay acquires its meaning. Thus the critic's responsibility is indeed considerable.

All of this talk of respect, generosity, tact, and responsibility may sound well and good—and even appeal to traditionalists since it embraces the human values they profess to cherish and claim

⁵I take these remarks, slightly altered, from my *Reading Deconstruction/Deconstructive Reading* (Lexington: Univ. Press of Kentucky, 1983) 87-88.

⁶By this point the influence of Geoffrey Hartman becomes clear. Currently engaged in writing a book on his "reader-responsibility criticism," I am flooded with his ideas. I want to acknowledge their presence, in small ways and large, throughout my argument, and not just in the few quotations I adduce.

⁷Geoffrey H. Hartman, *The Unremarkable Wordsworth*, foreword Donald G. Marshall (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1987) 213, vol. 34 of *Theory and History of Literature*.

to defend against the nihilist barbarians poised at the gates. But is it possible? Is it not merely an ideal, perhaps devoutly to be wished, but only a pie-in-the-sky dream, reflecting the irreducible vanity of human wishes? I don't know for certain, of course, but I believe it possible, for example, despite the lure of security and strength promised by commitment to one theory or another, to resist such seductiveness and to break the frame of meaning we (inevitably) bring to the act of reading. Otherwise, theory as I have defined it is an impossible enterprise. I remain unconvinced, in other words, that Stanley Fish's notion of "interpretive communities" tells the whole story. I doubt that they are always or inevitably determining and believe that we can break out of them. After all, we change our minds, don't we, and move from one community to another. I for instance have moved around quite a lot.

The self-critical effort I have been advocating here partakes of the indeterminacy championed by deconstruction, though some distinctions are in order. As I understand and teach it, taught by Geoffrey Hartman, "indeterminacy does not merely *delay* the determination of meaning, that is, suspend premature judgments and allow greater thoughtfulness. The delay is not heuristic alone, a device to slow reading till we appreciate . . . its complexity. The delay is intrinsic: from a certain point of view, it is thoughtfulness itself," akin, no doubt, to Keats' "negative capability": "that is," Keats explains, "when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason." Indeterminacy is, then, "a labor that aims not to overcome the negative or indeterminate but to stay within it as long as is necessary."⁸ Looking towards a "negative hermeneutics," that effort thus manifests "a structure of postponement; the doubting or delaying of closure, the insistence on remainders or of a return of the past" (Hartman, *Unremarkable* 186). There is always, it seems, something left over or neglected, another issue to be considered, another side of the question that forestalls a solution. I am suggesting here a "negative way" that allows for a more open and dialectical—a more generous—thinking than appears in the single-minded, almost totalitarian drive that

marks both much poststructuralist writing and the iron-fisted polemics of many of its opponents. Increasingly, it seems, as Robert Markley points out, we are being pressured to choose decisively, to come down definitively on one side or another, feminist, Marxist, traditional-humanist. I prefer Walter Benjamin's position as it has recently been interpreted: "The one-dimensional progressive claims of conqueror or would-be conqueror are disabled by hermeneutic reflection" (Hartman, *Wilderness* 75).

Ultimately, the question of style rears its not-so-ugly head; from one perspective, we have been discussing nothing else. In any case, I want now to be quite specific and reflect on the critic's way of writing. That reveals a good bit, of course, about the felt relation to the text commented on as well as about the critical character. We want to know, among other things, what the critic wants. It matters whether his or her own writing matters to the critic and how much. The critic too should cultivate prose, not necessarily in hopes of producing a garden of delights but at least with the expectation of removing unsightly weeds that threaten to choke the growth of the seedlings.

For me, *The Poststructural Pope* raises rather insistently the question of critical style—and not just by Robert Markley, who observes that "reverent, objective, and rational" criticism may be a thing of the past. As honorific as they sound, I'm not sure I would lament the passing of these qualities. For I agree, "the spectacle of the polite critic dealing with an extravagant literature, trying so hard to come to terms with it in his own tempered language, verges on the ludicrous" (Hartman, *Wilderness* 155). Literature represents the writer's attempt to come to terms with an extra-ordinary *event*. How much does it matter whether we are considering the extra-ordinary *event* that Yeats represented in "Leda and the Swan" or that Pope depicted as "the rape" of Arabella Fermor's lock or the extra-ordinary *language-event* that such poems are? In both cases, primary and secondary, each involving reception and response, the extra-ordinary is what matters. Demanded, one might suppose, is an *answerable* style. Should we expect (to be able) to respond to *The Divine Comedy*, *Hamlet*, or *The Rape of the Lock* in a style measured, distant and objective or, to add Markley's other terms, reverent and rational? The cool, accommodated prose of the scholarly article, the *sine qua non* of the profession, practiced by traditionalist and poststructuralist alike, may reflect a critical character potentially impoverished, perhaps repressing its artistic instincts,

⁸Geoffrey H. Hartman, *Criticism in the Wilderness: The Study of Literature Today* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1980) 270. Keats describes "negative capability" in a letter of 21-27 (?) Dec. 1817 to his brothers George and Thomas (*Selected Poems and Letters by John Keats*, ed. Douglas Bush [Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1959] 261).

and not very interesting.

Critical *writing* matters, though too few poststructuralists seem to agree, which is ironic, given all their attention to language and writing—*others'* language and writing, that is. That lack of concern constitutes, for me, a failure as well as a strategic mistake that offers aid and comfort to "the enemy." Remedy lies, I suggest, in considering our work as literary and seeking to achieve in our criticism some of those artistic qualities we admire in "primary" texts but consider out of place in our "secondary" endeavors. I am not talking, therefore, simply about clarity, which poststructuralist writing would assuredly benefit from and which traditional scholars might value a little less highly, at least in relation to other qualities. Nor am I suggesting that we pepper our prose with metaphors or load it with the pyrotechnical devices characteristic of certain "unisex" experiments in "paracriticism." My concern is that we consider our work a craft and take pride in it, as old-fashioned as that sounds. I propose only (!) that we care about the shape and rhythm of our sentences, the movement of our paragraphs, the resonances that can so please a reader, the sound and feel of our language as it strikes against the ear—and perhaps the heart.

We need, I think, to recover the tradition of the *essay*. Unfortunately, we have lost the distinction between the essay and the article. What constitutes an essay and how it differs from the form prized by the profession has recently and provocatively been described by the philosopher-novelist-essayist William H. Gass, writing spiritedly on "Emerson and the Essay." I am going to quote him at some length, though I don't agree with everything he says. The essayist, writes Gass,

is an amateur, a Virginia Woolf who has merely done a little reading up; he is not out for profit (even when paid), or promotion (even if it occurs); but is interested solely in the essay's special *art*. Meditation is the essence of it; it measures meanings; makes maps; exfoliates. The essay is unhurried (although Bacon's aren't); it browses among books; it enjoys an idea like a fine wine; it thumbs through things. It turns round and round upon its topic, exposing this aspect and then that; proposing possibilities, reciting opinions, disposing of prejudices and even of the simple truth itself—as too undeveloped, not yet of an interesting age.

Well—yes and no. The image Gass projects of the

essay recalls "the professional Popeans' Natchez-Augustan manor," and in my mind's eye I see the essayist enjoying the good life—with the obligatory mint julep—while those who make that leisure (and civilization) possible slave away. The essayist, in any case, need not be one who has "merely done a little reading up"; he or she may be a scholar—like Gass himself—who adopts a particular *critical character*. That character, I agree, is one who loves (an amateur in that sense, at least), who, meditative and reflective, cares very much about writing and the form in which he/she works, *journeying* towards understanding and enjoying the process of interpretive discovery, played out in the writing, fully as much as any destination reached.

To continue with Gass, his following remarks, on the article, seem to me closer to the mark, though still extreme. The essay, he writes,

is obviously the opposite of that awful object, "the article," which, like items picked up in shops during one's lunch hour, represents itself as the latest cleverness, a novel consequence of thought, skill, labor, and free enterprise, but never as an activity—the process, the working, the wondering. As an article, it should be striking of course, original of course, important naturally, yet without possessing either grace or charm or elegance, since these qualities will interfere with the impression of seriousness which it wishes to maintain; rather its polish is like that of the scrubbed step; but it must appear complete and straightforward and footnoted and useful and certain and is very likely a veritable Michelin of misdirection; for the article pretends that everything is clear, that its argument is unassailable, that there are no soggy patches, no illicit inferences, no illegitimate connections; it furnishes seals of approval and underwriters' guarantees; its manners are starched, stuffy, it would wear a dress suit to a barbecue, silk pajamas to the shower; it knows, with respect to every subject and point of view it is ever likely to entertain, what words to use, what form to follow, what authorities to respect; it is the careful product of a professional, and therefore it is written as only writing can be written, even if, at various times, versions have been given a dry dull voice at a conference, because, spoken aloud, it still sounds like writing written down, writing born for its immediate burial in a Journal. It is a relatively recent invention, this result of

scholarly diligence, and its appearance is proof of the presence, nearby, of the Professor, the way one might, perceiving a certain sort of speckled egg, infer that its mother was a certain sort of speckled bird. It is, after all, like the essay, modest, avoiding the vices and commitments of the lengthy volume. Articles are to be worn; they make up one's dossier the way uniforms make up a wardrobe, and it is not known—nor is it clear about uniforms either—whether the article has ever contained anything of lasting value.⁹

A strong desire of presence, as well as nostalgia, punctuates these intemperate remarks. Still, the basic distinction deserves our consideration. And I for one rather admire Gass's quirky style, informal, highly metaphorical, with surprising twists, turns, terms, and rhythms, tossed off in sentences longer than my own! I would not want us to imitate Gass's style, on any grand scale, nor do I wish to see us bound to the "silver mediocrity" of "plainstyle criticism." The choice, I hope, is not either/or: either a theoretically informed and sophisticated criticism offered in careless brown prose or an impressionistic criticism vapid in thought but oh, so well expressed.¹⁰

Despite a certain nostalgic wish, I am not so naive as to believe, or advocate, that, with the burden of knowledge we now bear, literary criticism can simply return to the traditional familiar essay for its basic form. There is now no way to avoid technical terms and difficult theoretical and philosophical ideas, many of them foreign imports. Purity of style seems no more desirable than an isolationism regarding ideas. The essay has, however, always been a protean form, capacious enough to accommodate almost anything. That from its beginnings it has been an instrument of deconstruction I find heartening in this regard. Such is the (perhaps surprising) argument of W. Wolfgang Holdheim, who argues that Montaigne, the acknowledged "father" of the essay, "was engaged in an *Abbau* of his

tradition. . . . It is an active deconstruction in the genuine sense: a clearing away of rubbish, of reified sedimentations, so that issues may once again be laid bare in their concreteness." Montaigne's "radical presentation of discontinuity," Holdheim continues, "is very much a reaction against uncritically accepted accumulations of continuity; his insistence on the uniquely diverse and particular is directed against too exclusive a concern with universals."¹¹

With so much in common, the essay and poststructuralism might work together rather than at cross purposes, as seems mainly the case at the moment. The result would be a form at once theoretical *and* artful, the familiar (essay) estranged. It might fulfill Matthew Arnold's wish for a literature of "imaginative reason," perhaps exist as a kind of "intellectual poetry." Here, too, Pope provided both incentive and example: *An Essay on Criticism* is, of course, both criticism *and* poetry. In such literary criticism, as may (again) be in the works, the critic would appear more prominently than at present, not parading his/her wares or grandstanding but acknowledging the personal involvement, stake and risk in the criticism. As it recorded the play and movement of mind, charting "the course of interpretive discovery," the critical essay might bring theory to life.¹² It would still, of course, proceed from specific textual considerations, on which it would brood, and much of its interest would perhaps lie in the way it foregrounded the relation I described earlier as existing between reader and text. Readers would respond, then, not just to the power of a particular interpretation but also to the critic's engagement with texts and ideas, his/her passion and human-heartedness, those qualities we value in other forms of art and that help make up the critical character. □

¹¹W. Wolfgang Holdheim, "Introduction: The Essay as Knowledge in Progress," *The Hermeneutic Mode: Essays on Time in Literature and Literary Theory* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1984) 21.

¹²Paul H. Fry, *The Reach of Criticism: Method and Perception in Literary Theory* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1983) 21, discussing Hartman's "personable but philologically keen, densely allusive criticism, that takes more and more diverse cues from its text than is customary." Fry believes Hartman's is "the most realistic record we have of what literate reading is like."

⁹William H. Gass, *Habitations of the Word* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1985) 25-26. At one point, at least, in the passage I quote, Gass parallels Paul de Man, who also discusses writers' various pretenses of continuity, completeness and so forth; see his Foreword to Carol Jacobs, *The Dissimulating Harmony: The Image of Interpretation in Nietzsche, Rilke, Artaud, and Benjamin* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1978) esp. ix.

¹⁰See, in a similar regard, Mark Edmundson, "A Will to Cultural Power: Deconstructing the de Man Scandal," *Harper's* (July 1988): 67-71.

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