

IRONY IN ALEXANDER POPE'S
FIVE MAJOR EPISTLES

by

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department
of
English

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SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

April, 1968

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ABSTRACT

The thesis examines Pope's major epistles to show the range and intention of his irony. Throughout the thesis is an analysis of the methods and devices Pope uses in order to achieve irony. There is a discussion of the mock-epic and of classical and Biblical allusions which serve to contrast the values of Pope's age with those of other times. The irony of tones is examined to show the contrast between what the tone implies and the language or image suggests. Irony of manner is discussed through a study of the detachment of the speaker, whose attitude may be one of polite wonder or self-abnegation and apparent tolerance. Verbal irony, one of the main themes, is discussed as denotative, connotative, or associative irony, as well as pun, juxtaposition and zeugma.

The first part, a general introduction to Pope's irony, shows that it is irony both of form and matter, and that his method is one of contrast--the contrast between expression and meaning, between appearance and reality, and between the actual and the ideal. The second, which discusses the remarkable fusion between Pope's thought and image, shows that Pope speaks through his images, rather than just using them to illustrate a point. The following three chapters examine the portraits in detail to show that Pope uses his characters to portray the qualities and habits he wishes to castigate.

The first deals with the misers and spendthrifts in the epistles to Bathurst and Burlington, the second with inconsistency and the Ruling Passion in the epistles to a Lady and Cobham, and the last with bad poets and critics in the epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot.

The last section is simply a conclusion which notes the relation between irony and value in Pope's epistles, and shows that his irony is not just negation, but that it has a core of central values and an implied moral and social judgment.

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INTRODUCTION

Irony is a criticism of life. And that is the intention behind the irony in Alexander Pope's five major epistles. In them he criticizes society through vital characterizations that represent opposing faults and the Golden Mean, and does so by means of thoughtful laughter. In each of his epistles he attacks a vice or folly with which the writers of his day were concerned. In the "Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot," it is dullness and pedantry and bad taste; in the "Epistle to Cobham" and "To a Lady," it is moral depravity, selfishness, and irrationality; in the "Epistle to Burlington," it is the lavish vulgarity of tasteless opulence; and in the "Epistle to Bathurst," it is the evils of misused wealth measured not so much against the standards of good taste as against the true faith of religion. In all there is a criticism, real or implied, of the debasement of society, and in most, at least a hint of political corruption.

When Pope decided to "stoop to truth" and moralize his song, he turned to Horace for a model. In Roman literature the great vehicle for poetry of a moralizing kind had been satire, and this satire was generally characterized by a gloomy tone, with a regret for a simpler, manlier past and a (condemnation of a slight, self-indulgent present?) Horace's satire shares this regret, this looking back to a golden age, but not the gloom because he writes with a sense of humor. Since the Restoration, and particularly after the death of Queen Anne, satire had again become a prominent literary genre in England, and in choosing to

write satire Pope was following in that tradition. When he set out to write satire Pope chose to use irony as his weapon, because irony is more entertaining, more delightful, and more subtle than the direct attack, and because, of course, it was his nature to write with wit and point and pungency. Generally he did not set himself up as the formal, indignant castigator of the vices and follies of mankind, and thus his instrument is the rapier more often than the whip.

That there was cause for concern cannot be doubted. England's vast industrial and mercantile development had been attended with many social ills. Although society attempted a veneer of elegance, there was dissipation, grossness, and corruption everywhere. The moral tone of England had declined under the long regime of Walpole, and the purchase of elections, the dismissal of able men from government, and the appointment of favorites to high positions were common practice. Bribery of government officials had been exposed by investigations into the South-sea Company and the Charitable Corporation. The kings after the death of Queen Anne had shown a degeneration in morals and learning. The church shared the degeneration, raising, as Robert W. Rogers has said, the middle class virtues of thrift and craft to heavenly ones, and ignoring the traditional concepts of sin and redemption.¹ In fact, the whole moral fibre of society and the sense of order upon which it depended seemed threatened.

Certainly Pope's was not the only voice in the struggle against the decadence of the times. As Louis I. Bredvold puts it, "poets and

satirists alike show the age involved in darkness."² The writers of the eighteenth century considered it their duty to maintain standards in taste, morality, and manners. This was Addison's and Steele's avowed purpose in the Spectator, and English writers even until the time of Wordsworth and Coleridge held that poetry should instruct as well as delight. In his epistles Pope makes it his responsibility to help keep his readers continually and completely aware of their half-conscious beliefs, and makes it his function to disturb the complacency with which they regarded their civilization.

To accomplish his purpose, Pope uses irony in diverse and skillful ways. There is, first of all, a pervasive irony. His method is usually one of contrast; there is the contrast between expression and meaning, between appearance and reality, and between the actual and the ideal. Thus the irony is not only one of form but also of matter. Then, too, there is a kind of structural irony, in the tones and the language. He uses many devices--the mock-heroic, understatement, and blame by praise. Not the least of these devices is that of verbal irony, of saying one thing and meaning another. No kind of irony is separate and distinct from the others. They all intermingle and make for the overall irony of the epistles. Tone clashes with image, language with tone, and manner with meaning.

Constantly in the epistles the irony is supported by the speaker's ironic manner. He poses as a sophisticated man of the world as he chats with Burlington about good taste in architecture and gardening,

and the use of money with Bathurst, or the Ruling Passion with Cobham. He is amused, detached, politely wondering as he regards the inconsistencies of women. In all he is civilized, urbane, dispassionate, his mood one of cool disengagement. In the "Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot," he is modest, self-deprecating, reasonable, and tolerant of the viciousness and folly of others. Consistently in the five epistles he is the man of taste, of good sense, judicious and authoritative, governed by intellectual discipline rather than mere emotionalism. By convincing us of his truthfulness, fairness, and justice, he makes his irony more effective because what he says appears to be the truth, not just an attack because of prejudice or dislike.

As J. A. K. Thomson points out, the ironic speaker does not run on, adding one simple sentence after another; he has to speak in periods so organized that each clause balances another in its meaning, its rhythm, and even its sound.³ He will, therefore, use the complex sentence rather than the simple, the balanced clause or phrase more often than the loose:

Peace to all such! but were there One whose fires
True Genius kindles, and fair Fame inspires,
Blest with each Talent and each Art to please,
And born to write, converse, and live with ease;
Shou'd such a man, too fond to rule alone,
Bear, like the Turk, no brother near the throne,
View him with scornful, yet with jealous eyes,
And hate for Arts that caus'd himself to rise;

("Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot," ll. 193-200)

Almost the entire portrait of Atticus is one periodic sentence, yet the closure of the heroic couplet and the complete control give the balanced

assessment necessary for irony. The long periodic sentence also begins the portrait of the Duke of Buckingham:

In the worst inn's worst room, with mat half-hung,
The floors of plaister, and the walls of dung,
On once a flock-bed, but repair'd with straw,
With tape-ty'd curtains, never meant to draw,
The George and Garter dangling from that bed
Where tawdry yellow strove with dirty red,
Great Villers lies.

("Epistle to Bathurst," ll. 299-305)

Here the details are set down phrase after phrase, the parts beautifully balanced, as he leads up to a climax; the whole is done with perfect compression and control.

Pope's irony often suggests by restraint. A master of economy of phrase, he often makes one smiting remark and then is silent:

Narcissa's nature, tolerably mild,
To make a wash, would hardly stew a child;

("Epistle to a Lady," ll. 53-54)

Think we all these are for himself? no more
Than his fine Wife, alas! or finer Whore.

("Epistle to Burlington," ll. 11-12)

The implication is that there is no more to be said on these particular matters, and so he goes on to talk of something else. The irony of it is that there is a great deal more to be thought and felt. This economy of expression is again apparent in the "Epistle to a Lady":

See Sin in State, majestically drunk,
Proud as a Peeress, prouder as a Punk;
Chaste to her Husband, frank to all beside,
A teeming Mistress, but a barren Bride.

(ll. 69-72)

The balance of paradox in the last three lines and the complexity and condensation in the first exemplify Pope's ability to say as little and mean as much as possible.

In their broader outlines the epistles are similar to the satires of Horace: the brief character sketches in the earlier part of the poem, the concentration on the worse characters in the latter part, and the noble opposite, the ideal other case, usually at the end--the Man of Ross in the "Epistle to Bathurst" is the notable exception. There is a mixture of moralizing and satire with its attendant ironies, and a campaign against bad taste and immorality. There is a general fictive situation of the opposition between good and evil, but there is no plot. Also Horatian are the casual little interpolations of doctrine:

To Heirs unknown descends th'unguarded store
Or wanders, Heav'n-directed, to the Poor.
("Epistle to a Lady," ll. 149-150)

Yet hence the Poor are cloath'd, the Hungry fed;
Health to himself, and to his Infants bread
The Lab'rer bears: What his hard Heart denies,
His charitable Vanity supplies.
("Epistle to Burlington," ll. 169-172)

But the more subtly Horatian quality is the craftsmanship in the variation of tones and the resulting ironies. The tone is often mock-heroic, often colloquial and conversational, but there is a constant shifting between widely contrasting tones--the elevated, the contemporary, the slangy and low, the tone of emotion or of high comic indignation. Frequently the tone is in sharp contrast with the actual attitude of the speaker,

and this clash of tone and mood produces irony. In the "Epistle to Burlington," for instance, tones of wonder and admiration clash constantly with the speaker's real contempt, thus giving it ironical emphasis:

My Lord advances with majestic mien,
Smit with the mighty pleasure, to be seen.
(ll. 127-128)

At Timon's Villa let us pass a day,
Where all cry out, "What sums are thrown away!"
So proud, so grand, of what stupendous air,
Soft and agreeable come never there.
(ll. 99-102)

The politely wondering tone is maintained almost throughout the "Epistle to a Lady," and reflects the ironical attitude of the speaker. It is as if he were continually amazed and constantly struggling to understand these utterly incomprehensible creatures.

Say, what can cause such impotence of mind?
A Spark too fickle, or a Spouse too kind.
(ll. 91-92)

Pictures like these, dear Madam, to design,
Asks no firm hand, and no unerring line;
Some wand'ring touches, some reflected light,
Some flying strokes alone can hit 'em right:
For how should equal Colours do the knack?
Chameleons who can paint in white and black?
(ll. 151-156)

But the wondering tone is also present, perhaps less abundantly, elsewhere in the epistles:

Behold! If Fortune, or a Mistress frowns,
Some plunge in bus'ness, others shave their crowns:
To ease the Soul of one oppressive weight,
This quits an Empire, that embroils a State;
(*"Epistle to Cobham,"* ll. 55-58)

And if we count among the Needs of life
 Another's Toil, why not another's Wife?
 ("Epistle to Bathurst," ll. 27-28)

One of the finest ways of achieving irony is the use of the mock-heroic tone. Here Pope uses pompous expressions for slight characters and low actions to produce an especially brilliant effect:

Let peals of Laughter, Codrus! round thee break,
 Thou unconcern'd canst hear the mighty Crack.
 Pit, Box and Gall'ry in convulsions hurl'd,
 Thou stand'st unshook amidst a bursting World.
 ("Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot," ll. 85-88)

But hark! the chiming Clocks to dinner call;
 A hundred footsteps scrape the marble Hall;
 The rich Buffet well-colour'd Serpents grace,
 And gaping Tritons spew to wash your face.
 ("Epistle to Burlington," ll. 151-154)

In sharp opposition to this elevated tone is the cosy, conversational tone especially evident at the beginnings of the epistles, but present throughout as well. In each of the four of the Epistles to Several Persons, Pope's tone is intimate as if he were actually talking with a friend. His mood is casual. The "Epistle to Cobham" begins "Yes, you despise the man to Books confin'd," and the "Yes" gives the sense of his conceding a point already made. In the "Epistle to a Lady" there is a similar intimacy of tone, polite and discreetly complimentary, as her opinions are recalled and accepted as actual truths:

Nothing so true as what you once let fall,
 "Most Women have no Characters at all."

The irony here, as Reuben Arthur Brower has observed, is that the sense of the epistle soon shows that women do indeed have characters

in the less pleasant sense of the term.⁴ The "Epistle to Bathurst"

likewise begins on a conversational note, this time with witty informality;

Who shall decide, when Doctors disagree,
And soundest Casuists doubt, like you and me?

The easy atmosphere of talk suggests the comfort of the drawing room.

The "Epistle to Burlington" opens in the same casual way, beginning with a concession and going right on into the argument:

'Tis strange, the Miser should his Cares employ,
To gain those Riches he can ne'er enjoy:
Is it less strange, the Prodigal should wast
His wealth, to purchase what he ne'er can taste?

Each of the foregoing epistles opened as if something had been going on before--talks about books, women, or human nature. The "Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot" opens with an urgent order to the servant, "Shut, shut the door, good John!" to keep out the poetasters and bad critics, but it, too, has an everyday colloquial tone, and the sense of something continuing. The voice of the speaker goes on throughout the epistles, ranging from a colloquial and casual tone to one of high dignity or racy indelicacy. The effect of the conversational asides is to suggest that the poet and his audience are one.

Tones of cool detachment, particularly abundant in the "Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot," are the epitome of the ironical pose:

And he, who now to sense, now nonsense leaning,
Means not, but blunders round about a meaning:
And he, whose Fustian's so sublimely bad,
It is not Poetry, but Prose run mad:
All these, my modest Satire bad translate,
And own'd, that nine such Poets made a Tate.

(ll. 185-190)

Here the aloof, judicious tone implies that the speaker is taking a reasonable approach, and he thus convinces us of his good judgment. There is the suggestion of the careful consideration of the expert judge, and then the well-thought-out solution. Pope uses various other devices to achieve impersonality of tone: the use of the third person when he is obviously speaking of himself in the epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot, the use of the ambiguous "you" in that to Burlington, and the general "our" in the epistle to Cobham. All imply the detachment of manner that is so important a pose of the ironist; for it is a pose--he is not aloof but really concerned, busy with the affairs of the day.

Sometimes, but rarely, Pope's tone is persuasive and sincere, as in his praise of the Man of Ross; occasionally, he uses a tone of indignation. In fact this simultaneity of tonal layers is one of the main contributions to the overall irony of the epistles. Nowhere are the tonal qualities better illustrated than in the section on Timon's Villa in the "Epistle to Burlington." There is the cultivated voice as of a guide speaking, politely commenting,

And now the Chapel's silver bell you hear,
followed by the pompous announcement,

That summons you to all the Pride of Pray'r;
and then the facetious tone of

Light quirks of Musick, broken and uneven,
Make the soul dance upon a Jig to Heaven.

Next come tones of Miltonic awe:

On gilded clouds in fair expansion lie,
And bring all Paradise before your eye.

And a little later, the tones are those of Roman oratory, and of politely exaggerated wonder:

Is this a dinner? this a Genial room?
No, 'tis a Temple, and a Hecatomb.

Finally, the formal balance gives way to the personal, petulant tone:

Treated, caress'd, and tir'd, I take my leave,
Sick of his civil Pride from Morn to Eve;
I curse such lavish cost, and little skill,
And swear no Day was ever past so ill.

All of these diverse tones make for irony, not only because they are in themselves incongruous with what they are describing, but also because they clash with one another.⁵

As well as this clash between tones, the clash between tone and image is especially effective. Throughout the epistles is the irony of the mock-heroic metaphor which is created by holding the tone and sometimes the circumstances of heroic poetry against the pettiness and viciousness of the characters and their activities:

Come then, the colours and the ground prepare!
Dip in the Rainbow, trick her off in Air,
Chuse a firm Cloud, before it fall, and in it
Catch, ere she change, the Cynthia of this minute.
("Epistle to a Lady," ll. 17-20)

The high imperative and assumed air of grandeur, set off against the sordidness of the portraits that follow, is ironic. The suggestion, too, of painting the women with rainbow tints and cloud stuff is a far cry from the acid that is often used. Occasionally, as in the "Epistle to

Dr. Arbuthnot," the mock-serious tone and epic imagery combine with his mood of high comic indignation and serve to make his enemies look ridiculous:

What Walls can guard me, or what Shades can hide?
They pierce my Thickets, thro' my Grot they glide;
By land, by water, they renew the charge,
They stop the Chariot, and they board the Barge.
(ll. 6-10)

By constant adjustment of the two planes, the mock-heroic and the casual, Pope moves from ridicule to moral comment and social criticism. His portraits, couched so often in elegant language, keep before the reader an atmosphere of admiration and praise--an atmosphere that belies the facts about the characters as he gradually sets them out in detail:

Proud, as Apollo on his forked hill,
Sate full-blown Bufo, puff'd by ev'ry quill;
Fed with soft Dedications all day long,
Horace and he went hand in hand in song.
("Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot," ll. 231-234)

As he continues to characterize him, Pope leaves no doubt that Bufo is not an admirable character:

Till grown more frugal in his riper days,
He pay'd some Bards with Port, and some with Praise,
To some a dry Rehearsal was assign'd,
And others (harder still) he pay'd in kind.
(ll. 241-244)

Unlike tragedy, irony does not want noble figures for its characters: the meaner and dingier the heroes and the more elegant the language, the more successful the irony.

Repeatedly in the epistles there is an implied contrast between the

healthy activities of the classical age and the depravity of present times. In the "Epistle to Bathurst" there is in the allusion to the epic games the suggestion of physical prowess and keen, healthy competition, and opposed to this is the modern kind of competition-- the gambling at White's, the common rendezvous of the professional sharpers and wealthy cullies:

His Grace will game: to White's a Bull be led,
 With spurning heels and with a butting head,
 To White's be carried, as to ancient games,
 Fair Coursers, Vases, and alluring Dames.
 Shall then Uxorio, if the stakes he sweep,
 Bear home six Whores, and make his Lady weep?
 Or soft Adonis, so perfum'd and fine,
 Drive to St. James's a whole herd of swine?
 (ll. 55-62)

Again in the same epistle there is the grand imagery and the dignified diction of the epic contradicting the meaning of the verse:

What slaughter'd hecatombs, what floods of wine,
 Fill the capacious Squire, and deep Divine!
 (ll. 203-204)

One pictures the tremendous feasts, the sacrifices, and the drinking of libations, and then is shocked into realization with the second line. The food and drink are not for Homeric celebrations, but only to glut the enormous appetites of the country squire and the priest. The ostentation of the language makes one expect something noble, and then "capacious" and "deep" with their connotations of largeness and grandness applied to the capacities of the squire and priest make for an incongruity that shocks and then delights.

The mock-heroic is abundantly present in the epistles, and manifests itself in various ways. A mere phrase can suggest it, as, for instance, "alas! how chang'd from him" in the "Epistle to Bathurst." The Miltonic echo applied to the wretched Villers, dying in the filthy bed and sordid surroundings, is utterly incongruous. Again in the "Epistle to a Lady," the epic echo of Heaven's "last best work" applied to women after Pope's dissections of them is bitingly ironical. Sometimes only a word or two is enough to set the mock-heroic in motion: the sprinkling of "lo," "behold," "say," "see," and "come" again suggests the tones of the epic. Or Pope may address the Muse directly, "Rise, honest Muse, and sing the Man of Ross." However it is used, the mock-heroic always accentuates the disparities between the nobility and grandeur of epic themes and the slightness and depravity of present times.

Closely related to the use of the mock-heroic metaphor to achieve ironic comparison is that of setting classical allusion side by side with modern realism. Nowhere is this more evident than in the "Epistle to Burlington." Pope constantly juxtaposes symbols of classical times with modern ugliness--Tritons "spew" and Cupids "squirt." And as he talks of Quincunxes and Espaliers, Gladiators and Dryads, he uses common, almost crude language: the visitors "sweat" through the hot passage, and "drag" their thighs up the steps, and "stare" at the Saints as they "sprawl." Occasionally, too, there is the incongruous mingling of the learned

obscurity, the classical allusion, with the colloquial style:

The Dog-star rages! nay 'tis past a doubt,
 All Bedlam, or Parnassus, is let out:
 Fire in each eye, and Papers in each hand,
 They rave, recite, and madden round the land.

("An Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot," ll. 3-6)

As Norman Callan points out, this passage illustrates an irony that is typical of Pope's later verse.⁶ A learned reference is being deliberately set off against a casual, conversational tone. The dog-star is a conscious reference to Horace, while the phrasing is just as consciously colloquial. The two attitudes are combined, but both are sophisticated, both adult and fully aware.

Verbal irony, which is so important a part of Pope's satires, is used continually with other forms to emphasize the irony of the situation. Through its use Pope can epitomize an attitude or pillorize a social fault in a few words. An excellent example of the use of verbal irony is in the wizard's prophecy to Blount:

"At length Corruption, like a gen'ral flood,
 "(So long by watchful Ministers withstood)
 "Shall deluge all; and Av'rice creeping on,
 "Spread like a low-born mist, and blot the Sun;
 "Statesman and Patriot ply alike the stocks,
 "Peeress and Butler share alike the Box,
 "And Judges job, and Bishops bite the town,
 "And mighty Dukes pack cards for half a crown.
 "See Britain sunk in lucre's sordid charms,
 "And France revenged of ANNE's and EDWARD's arms."

("Epistle to Bathurst," ll. 137-146)

The total implication is that there will be no distinction between high and low born--in politics, in society, in religion, in the judiciary--all will be united in avarice and cupidity. Thus "general" is literally

true--corruption will be general in England. The parenthetical line sounds at first like a compliment to the government, until one realizes that it was past, not present, ministers who were watchful. But it is in "low-born" that the irony blossoms out fully. The pun suggests that the new-rich have acquired wealth but not breeding. But there are several layers of meaning besides the obvious one. The prophecy that "Peeress and Butler share alike the Box" suggests that the common lust after money will obliterate class distinctions, and this Pope would consider a real threat to the hierarchial structure of society. The Box, however, can mean the dice box, in which case butler and peeress will alike be swindling and cheating; or it can mean the theatre box, in which case the implication is simply that there will no longer be observed the proper segregation of the classes in the theatre, an indication of the state of things in society generally. The sexual pun on box, too, as Earl Wasserman points out, is altogether possible in view of the recurrent tales of eighteenth century noble ladies finding illicit pleasures with their footmen or butlers.⁷ This interpretation is reinforced in "Dukes pack cards for half a crown," this amount being the customary charge for prostitution.⁸ It is again given force by the double meaning of "arms" as munitions or as a physical embrace, and in "lucre's sordid charms." The whole unites to suggest the prostitution of values and principles for the sake of money.

Throughout the epistles Pope uses verbal irony in three main ways. First of all, he uses it in its most obvious sense, saying the

opposite of what is meant. In all of the epistles the word "great" is constantly being used ironically:

But what are these to great Atossa's mind?
Scarce once herself, by turns all Womankind!
Who, with herself, or others, from her birth
Finds all her life one warfare upon earth.

("Epistle to a Lady," ll. 115-118)

But still the Great have kindness in reserve,
He help'd to bury whom he help'd to starve.

("Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot," ll. 247-248)

Often Pope uses epithets ironically, and sometimes the substantives they modify. Such words as "wise," "modest," and "glorious" are used continually in an ironical sense. This is easily recognized in the following passage:

Wise Peter sees the World's respect for Gold,
And therefore hopes this Nation may be sold:
Glorious Ambition! Peter, swell thy store,
And be what Rome's great Didius was before.

The Crown of Poland, venal twice an age,
To just three millions stinted modest Gage.
But nobler scenes Maria's dreams unfold,
Hereditary Realms, and worlds of Gold.
Congenial souls! whose life one Av'rice joins,
And one fate buries in th' Asturian Mines.

("Epistle to Bathurst," ll. 125-134)

Here the complimentary epithets combine with the tone of admiration to produce obvious irony. As well as this first, denotative irony, there is a second kind introduced in "congenial souls." Maria and Gage are congenial in the sense that they are alike in avarice and cupidity, but the word "congenial" also has connotations of agreeableness and pleasantness; and "souls," of course, connotes spirituality, and is therefore

hardly the term to describe these materialists.

This connotative use of irony is a much subtler one than the denotative. Pope often uses the terms of religion in discussing material matters; for instance the word "bless" or "blessing":

Then full against his Cornish lands they roar,
And two rich ship-wrecks bless the lucky shore.
(*"Epistle to Bathurst,"* ll. 355-356)

Blest paper-credit! last and best supply!
That lends Corruption lighter wings to fly!
(ll. 69-70)

This device is often repeated in the *"Epistle to Bathurst,"* particularly in the story of Balaam, but is present also in the portrait of Hopkins. After a description of his niggardliness and parsimoniousness, Pope ends with the couplet:

Behold what blessings Wealth to life can lend!
And see, what comfort it affords our end.
(ll. 297-298)

There is a fine and purposeful confusion of terms here: Pope uses the word "blessing," properly a spiritual term, with the word "wealth," properly material; and, conversely, "lend" and "affords," each properly material, with "life" and "comfort," both certainly more spiritual than material. Pope often uses the language of finance and barter to telling advantage where the context would seem to require an entirely different word, with the result of a complete sudden twist in meaning. In the portrait of Flavia, he shows the futility of her wretched wisdom and wit:

Wise Wretch! with Pleasures too refin'd to please,
 With too much Spirit to be e'er at ease,
 With too much Quickness ever to be taught,
 With too much Thinking to have common Thought:
 You purchase Pain with all that Joy can give,
 And die of nothing but a Rage to live.

("Epistle to a Lady," ll. 95-100)

Here the word "purchase" combines with the "too much" phrases to suggest an opulence which makes "nothing" in the last line all the more devastating.

The equation of disparates is always a sure method of irony in Pope's epistles. There is the lady whose "life the Church and Scandal share" ("Epistle to a Lady," l. 105), and Balaam who is "Constant at Church and Change" and his daughter who "bears a Coronet and P-x for life" ("Epistle to Bathurst," l. 347, l. 392), and there is the unsuccessful playwright who prints early because he is "Oblig'd by hunger and Request of friends" ("Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot," l. 44). This surreptitious conciseness is present elsewhere as well. Speaking of women, Pope says,

The daily Anodyne, and nightly Draught,
 To kill those foes to Fair ones, Time and Thought.

("Epistle to a Lady," ll. 111-112)

No one would deny that time is a foe to a woman, but few would admit that thoughts are.

Pope's third use of verbal irony is associative. In a fairly straightforward passage, irony is created by a word or phrase which refers to something already said:

A Knave's a Knave, to me, in ev'ry State,
 Alike my scorn, if he succeed or fail,
Sporus at Court, or Japhet in a Jayl,
 A hireling Scribler, or a hireling Peer,
 Knight of the Post corrupt, or of the Shire,
 If on a Pillory, or near a Throne,
 He gain his Prince's Ear, or lose his own.

("Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot," ll. 361-367)

Here it is the word "Ear" which carries associations with what has gone before. One is reminded of Sporus at the ear of Eve, Hervey as the favorite and confidant of the Queen, and of Japhet's having lost his ears as punishment for forgery. Added to this is the tale of Midas, in which Pope obliquely attacks Walpole, Queen Caroline, and the King:

'Tis sung, when Midas' Ears began to spring,
 (Midas, a sacred Person and a King)
 His very Minister who spy'd them first,
 (Some say his Queen) was forc'd to speak, or burst,
 And is not mine, my Friend, a sorer case,
 When ev'ry Coxcomb perks them in my face?

("Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot," ll. 69-73)

At first this passage seems to be simply Pope's vindication of himself for writing satire--he is forced into speaking by the attacks of his enemies. But the allusion to the Minister and the Queen suggests their alliance and their influence over the King; and then the allusion to Midas, who was so arrogant and inept as to judge Pan winner of the musical competition over Apollo, the true god of music, points at the arrogance and ineptitude of George II. By association of all this then, with the word "Ear" we are given a picture in little of conditions in the government of England.

When Pope set out to satirize the conditions that he saw around him, he had to solve the problem of giving his irony direction and interest. How better to do this than by the use of the fictitious character, which he could give the qualities and habits that he wished to castigate? The portraits are not individuals, but types, frequently suggested by Pope's acquaintances, often a combination of two or more vicious characters. Interest would have died long since in his characters if he had not portrayed universal human frailties. The portraits are, then, the fiction that is the vehicle of the ironies, and Pope's characters are noteworthy because of their concentration and brilliance, abundance and range. In portraying them he seldom descends to mere invective--even when he calls Atossa a fool, she is the "wisest Fool much Time has ever made." Nor does he often use sarcasm--his mood is too light for that. Even when he remarks that Cloe's good breeding keeps her attentive to the decencies--except when she forgets--it is the little amusing touch that saves the thrust from sarcasm. The irony in his poetry takes the tone of the society in which it operates, and therefore tends to express itself with an exquisite urbanity.

Finally, along with his many devices for achieving irony, Pope uses imagery to produce often startling effects. He may combine the grotesque image with epic echoes:

And ev'ry child hates Shylock, tho' his soul
 Still sits at squat, and peeps not from its hole.
 ("Epistle to Cobham," ll. 114-115)

Sometimes he uses a grandiose tone with a macabre image:

As Hags hold Sabbaths, less for joy than spight,
 So these their merry, miserable Night.
 ("Epistle to a Lady," ll. 239-240)

Often he combines a classical allusion with a ridiculous image:

His Grace will game: to White's a Bull be led,
 With spurning heels and with a butting head.
 ("Epistle to Bathurst," ll. 55-56)

And in the combination there is again a reminder of the trivial and
 corrupt present being / mocked by an image of an enlightened past.

FOOTNOTES

Introduction

¹ The Major Satires of Alexander Pope (Urbania, 1955), p. 3.

² "The Gloom of the Tory Satirists," Eighteenth Century English Literature: Modern Essays in Criticism, ed. James L. Clifford (New York, 1959), p. 13.

³ Irony: An Historical Introduction (London, 1926), p. 138.

⁴ Alexander Pope: The Poetry of Allusion (Oxford, 1959), p. 266.

⁵ I owe this discussion of tonal irony in the "Epistle to Burlington" to Reuben Arthur Brower, in The Fields of Light: An Experiment in Critical Reading (New York, 1951), p. 146.

⁶ "Alexander Pope," From Dryden to Johnson, ed. Boris Ford (Middlesex, 1957), p. 352.

⁷ Pope's Epistle to Bathurst: A Critical Reading with an Edition of the Manuscripts (Baltimore, 1960), p. 33.

⁸ From a note in The Poems of Alexander Pope: A one-volume edition of the Twickenham text with selected annotations, ed. John Butt (London, 1965), p. 604.

CHAPTER I

IRONY IN POPE'S IMAGES

The composite quality of Pope's poetry has been noted by Geoffrey Tillotson.¹ In fact, he remarks that Pope is seldom doing only one thing at a time, but is usually engineering a combination of simultaneous effects, combining verbal coloring with invention in syntax and phrasal echoes of older poetry. And along with these effects Pope makes imagery work to express some feeling or emotion or thought, or to exemplify some aspect of life. Perhaps this composite quality of his poetry accounts for his being criticized so often for lack of imagery. After his early work Pope seldom indulges in imagery, as for instance Shelley does, merely for its own sake. This is not to say that his images are not beautiful in themselves, for they sometimes are. Consider, for example,

Tho' the same Sun with all-diffusive rays
Blush in the Rose, and in the Diamond blaze,
We prize the stronger effort of his pow'r,
And justly set the Gem above the Flow'r.

("Epistle to Cobham," ll. 97-100)

This is a fair illustration of Pope's use of imagery: pleasing in itself, his image is not divorced from the thought he is trying to express. He has already remarked that "'Tis from high life high Characters are drawn," and,

immediately suspecting that he is not serious in this contention, we anticipate that his argument will refute itself. The lovely image of the first two lines--the "all-diffusive rays" of the sun blushing in the rose and blazing in the diamond--is turned to ironical advantage in the second couplet by the choice of the word "justly." Here we have two sets of attitude--the pastoral, which would value the flower, and the commercial, which would value the diamond. That Pope does not consider the judgment just is made abundantly clear when we look at the foregoing passage: "a Saint in Crape is twice a Saint in Lawn," a Chancellor, because his estate is higher, more just than a judge, and a King is "More wise, more learn'd, more just, more ev'rything." The flippant "more ev'rything" makes the judgment ridiculous. Court virtues are, Pope says, above other virtues, even though born where "Heav'n's influence scarce can penetrate." They are of the earth, then, yet superior to Heaven, since they are beyond the reach of its influence. The play on just and judgment in the final line points up the irony.

But the sense of the image and the judgment go on into the verse paragraph which follows: the vulgar error that precious metals and stones are created by the sun's rays is equated with another notion prevalent in neoclassical times that all members of a profession share the same characteristics.

Boastful and rough, your first son is a 'Squire:
 The next a Tradesman, meek, and much a lyar;
 Tom struts a soldier, open, bold, and brave;
 Will sneaks a Scriv'ner, an exceeding knave:
 Is he a Churchman? then he's fond of pow'r:
 A Quaker? sly: A Presbyterian? sow'r.

(ll. 102-107)

Pope has made one observation, that high characters come from high life, and has continued to make only positive comments, but in the end everyone knows that he is saying something other than what he means, that he is being ironical.

One of the loveliest images in the epistles, a painting image from the "Epistle to a Lady," is likewise ironical:

Come then, the colours and the ground prepare! –
 Dip in the Rainbow, trick her off in Air,
 Chuse a firm Cloud, before it fall, and in it
 Catch, ere she change, the Cynthia of this minute.

(ll. 17-20)

The imperative is heroic in tone, but the attitude is flippant, and the rhythm and language too light for the heroic. This lightness of mood and verse has a purpose: linking his Cynthia with the air, the rainbow, and the cloud--all evanescent imagery--Pope suggests the transient quality of her beauty and even of her life. The inharmonious "firm" in "Chuse a firm Cloud" is subtly ironic: Pope is hinting that although a woman may be a chaste Cynthia now, she may soon change. Even as her beauty is transient, so may her chastity be. And the probable shortness of the period of chastity is caught up precisely in the light monosyllables and the quick little feminine endings of the second couplet

where "in it" rhymes with "minute" and sounds like the tick of a watch.

In the passage immediately preceding this, there is a series of images, each one giving a double view:

How many pictures of one Nymph we view,
 All how unlike each other, all how true!
 Arcadia's Countess, here, in ermin'd pride,
 Is there, Pastora by a fountain side:
 Here Fannia, leering on her own good man,
 Is there, a naked Leda with a Swan.
 Let then the Fair one beautifully cry,
 In Magdalen's loose hair and lifted eye,
 Or drest in smiles of sweet Cecilia shine,
 With simp'ring Angels, Palms, and Harps divine;
 Whether the Charmer sinner it, or saint it,
 If Folly grows romantic, I must paint it.

(ll. 5-16)

Immediately the pictures are introduced so is the irony. The subtle hint of the pastoral in the word "nymph" is taken up in the ironic contrast of the Countess, portrayed first in the formal regalia of her rank, and next in the simple dress of a shepherdess. She is harmless enough in her inconsistency, but in the portraits that follow inconsistency gives way to hypocrisy.

Fannia's leering is in dispute. Reuben Brower considers it an example of finely compact irony with several possible meanings: she may be smiling fondly at her husband, she may be affecting a smile to hide her lack of proper devotion, and she may be leering lustfully.²

F. W. Bateson accepts "leering" as merely an innocent side-glance, while Ruffhead says that "leering" marks the lubricity of Fannia.³

Pope is most likely using it in the latter sense, as its meaning seems

to be rather more derogatory than approving in his day.⁴ In any event, the next line is not in doubt: Fannia can also be a "naked Leda with a Swan." Magdalen's description, too, has a double meaning: the first, of a religious painting in which her hair is falling loosely about her face and her eyes lifted heavenward in contrition; but "lifted eye" can also suggest bold glances, and "loose" again can suggest lubricity. "Simp'ring" in the following lines is also inharmonious with angels, palms, and divine harps. The over-sweetness of the last lines adds to the suggestion of hypocrisy throughout and emphasizes the discrepancy between people as they appear and as they really are. Finally, the colloquial "sinner it or saint it" set off against the classical allusion of Leda with a swan establishes a mood of contrasts.

Again in the "Epistle to a Lady" the great section on dowagers which climaxes the poem has a haunting and sensuous beauty, not only in the imagery but in the choice of words:

At last to follies youth could scarce defend,
 It grows their Age's prudence to pretend;
 Asham'd to own they gave delight before,
 Reduc'd to feign it, when they give no more,
 As Hags hold Sabbaths, less for joy than spight,
 So these their merry, miserable Night;
 Still round and round the Ghosts of Beauty glide,
 And haunt the Places where their Honour dy'd.

(ll. 235-242)

The sonorous quality of the rhyme on "more" and "before," the alliteration, in "prudence" and "pretend" and especially in the beautiful and paradoxical "merry, miserable," the repetition in "round and round"--

all contribute to the pleasure of the image which has its culmination in the last two lines.

This section has proved puzzling to more than one commentator. Thomas R. Edwards, Jr. considers these lines tragic: even though the women are foolish, he says, they are somewhat heroic in their hopeless struggle against time and the world's indifference; and, he continues, at the climax of the poem, we are squarely confronted with the moral childishness of these women and the pathos of their situation.⁵

And Reuben Arthur Brower finds the passage "a revelation of the hell of mechanical society activity, and the slavery of pretended passion."⁶

Both opinions are right, of course; it has some pathos, but it has more irony. Just as irony sharpens our perceptions of the villainy of villains, so it does of the pathos of the pathetic, and of the paradoxes of the human situation. It is the irony that injects a grim humor into this unhappy fate of "a whole Sex of Queens."

There is a peculiar beauty in the image of the last couplet. On a first reading, we visualize the ghosts of beauty gliding round and round as though circling a dance floor to the music of the lines. And then the sense of the words sinks in, and we realize that ghosts are not beautiful, that these women are old and graceless and ugly, and that not only their beauty but their honor is dead. William Empson has made a perceptive observation on this point and on the ambiguity in the use of the word "Ghosts."⁷ First, he says, these ghosts are

those of the dead beauty of the women, and as such they continue to dance, echoing what was done in life. Next, he continues, they are the ghosts of the women's dead honor, and haunt only a place. The result for Empson is that one has to translate the two meanings back into something said about the old women. But, he argues, one is accustomed to this kind of translation only in verses of flowery and graceful ornament, so that the style is a parody on the manner in which compliments would have been made. In other words, it is irony.

There are, as usual, inner ironies as well. Is Pope simply equating honor with beauty, or does he mean that the dowagers, the ghosts of beauty, still haunt the places where they lost their honor in youth? And does "dy'd" mean to color as with cosmetics, or has it the meaning that Empson gives it--to cease to be--or both? Finally, Pope has stated earlier in the epistle that the love of pleasure is the Ruling Passion of women. The extent to which this love is engrained in the sex is subtly suggested by the paradoxical use of the word "prudence." The women's pretense is not prudent in the least, but the love of pleasure is so strong that the veterans, who have outlived their beauty, cannot face the harsh reality that their lives are consequently devoid of essential meaning.

The whole irony of their lives is in the following passage:

See how the World its Veterans rewards!
 A Youth of Frolics, an old Age of Cards;
 Fair to no purpose, artful to no end,
 Young without Lovers, old without a Friend;
 A Fop their Passion, but their Prize a Sot,
 Alive, ridiculous, and dead, forgot!
 (ll. 243-248)

Young, the women have dissipated their energies in a mad search for pleasure and have realized nothing enduring; and old, they are without even a friend. Their passion has been for a "fop," nothing worth while in the first place, and their prize is even less, a drunken "sot." The two flat little words add to the effect of the futility, and, as Mr. Tillotson has pointed out, the splendid strut of the inversion makes the let-down even more severe.⁸ The change from "fop" to "sot" is not from good to bad, but from one kind of bad to a worse. And the terrible contempt of the last line is the epitaph of the women: "Alive, ridiculous, and dead, forgot!" In those five words, Pope expresses the irony of their foolish and wasted lives.

The images in Pope's satires are seldom beautiful; often his imagery is purposefully ugly. He is fascinated with small, mean insects, and uses them as an image to express contempt. Near the beginning of the "Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot," the ceaseless industry of the scribblers described as spiders spinning webs demonstrates what Norman Callan has called Pope's "exquisite sense of equivalence between thought and image."⁹ Unlike Donne, for instance, who develops an image over a number of lines, Pope compresses his images into a

couplet or two. With Donne, the details that develop the image are as important as the conclusion. With Pope, as Mr. Callan has said, it is the terminals that matter; the greater the speed of the spark between them, the greater the shock to the reader:

Who shames a Scribbler? break one cobweb thro'.
 He spins the slight, self-pleasing thread anew;
 Destroy his Fib, or Sophistry; in vain,
 The Creature's at his dirty work again;
 Thron'd in the Centre of his thin designs;
 Proud of a vast Extent of flimzy lines.

(ll. 89-94)

Here with complete economy and utter restraint he gives us the image of scribblers as spiders, not speaking of them separately but of both at once. The result is that we are left meditating the thought itself rather than the image which has driven it home. The result is, too, that we see the scribblers as Pope wants us to see them--busy, pompous, and self-important, but also slight, insignificant, and unclean. The reference to "dirty work" is reminiscent of Swift's fable in The Battle of the Books in which the bee calls the spider's cobweb castle "excrement and venom."

There is an implicit irony in making the scribblers insects.

Here they are spiders; there they are, most likely, flies, insignificant and troublesome. Pope does not exalt them to a stature worthy of his heavy fire. They descend like a swarm of flies on Twickenham, buzzing and stinging, and all Pope does is slap at them in self-defense. Bentley and Theobald come in for attack for their respective restora-

tions of Milton and Shakespeare. Nothing in themselves, Pope implies, they have hoped to be preserved to posterity in the old masters' names:

Pretty! in Amber to observe the forms
Of hairs, or straws, or dirt, or grubs, or worms;
The things, we know, are neither rich nor rare,
But wonder how the Devil they got there?

(11.169-172)

But they remain insignificant and disgusting and nasty in spite of the beauty of the preservative amber. Bentley, not reading, but scanning and spelling Milton, has slashed away at Paradise Lost, and "pidling Tibbald" has fussed over "commas and points" and ignored the larger issue, the sense of Shakespeare. They are like spiders catching flies-- "Each word-catcher that lives on syllables." There is a kind of irony running through the passage:

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

(11. 159-162)

The irony lies in the words that Pope chooses: "just pretence," "exactly right," and "Preserv'd in Milton's or in Shakespeare's name." But he takes away more than he gives them. There is a delicate irony, too, in the pun on mite: lacking spirit, taste, and common sense, their worth is infinitesimally small as critics and editors of poetry, but still one would not want to rob them of what little "might" they have--the ability to correct the prosaic elements, such as the punctuation.

They are like flies in the infant stage with all of the associations

of dirt and filth that go with that stage--hairs, straws, and dirt, and grubs and worms. In Sappho, too, there is the same pervasive imagery.

She is like the bluebottle fly, shining and dirty.

. . . Sappho's diamonds with her dirty smock,
Or Sappho at her toilet's greazy task,
With Sappho fragrant at an evening Mask:
So morning Insects that in muck begun,
Shine, buzz, and fly-blow in the setting-sun.

("Epistle to a Lady," ll. 24-28)

As Mr. Tillotson has remarked, Pope makes use of onomatopoeia to sharpen his irony.¹⁰ Insects shine and buzz, but fly-blow adds a new dimension in thought. Sappho, Pope is saying, is like an insect which begins in muck in the morning and buzzes and lays its eggs by sunset. The ugliness of the image is intensified by the use of the words "dirty," "greazy," "muck," and "fly-blow," and by other words which focus attention on them: "diamonds," "fragrant," "mask," and "buzz." After the metamorphosis of the boudoir, Sappho shines and buzzes at the evening mask. Like the fly she is filthy, insignificant, noisy, and a nuisance.¹¹ The lascivious nature of her character is implicit in "fly-blow"--she has no more morals than an insect. Since the historical Sappho was an ancient Greek poetess renowned for her easy morals, the attack is almost surely one on Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, also a poet, and notoriously slovenly.¹² The attack is satire, of course, but irony is its weapon and its tool.

Pope's insect imagery, however, does not always make his persons seem dirty and obscene; it may make them appear only insignificant.

This is the case with Timon--Timon who surrounds himself with all the grandeur and magnificence wealth can provide, whose "building is a Town," whose "pond an Ocean," and "parterre a Down"--Timon who giantlike has built all "Brobdingnag" for himself. But is he monarch of all he surveys? No, he is a pygmy, dwarfed by his own creation:

Who but must laugh, the Master when he sees,
A puny insect, shiv'ring at a breeze!
(*"Epistle to Burlington," ll. 107-108*)

The insect image is used to point up ironically the littleness and insignificance of the man, and the wording, "the Master," emphasizes the irony. Puffed with pride and possessed with wealth, but without taste or common sense, Timon has created an estate which is a travesty of nature. Where nature had intended a windbreak, the lake behind the house serves only to improve the "keenness of the Northern wind." Where nature had planned a "harmonious confusion," a diverse wildness,

Grove nods at grove, each Alley has a brother,
And half the platform just reflects the other.
(*ll. 117-118*)

It is a monotony that dulls one into sleep, as "nod" and the versification suggest. Instead of a judicious and pleasing use of them, statues are thick as trees; instead of their natural appearance, trees are cut to resemble statues. And the inversion of the line emphasizes the inversion in nature. Where there should be water, there are dust and bird droppings in Nilus' Urn. Where there should have been an artful, natural

beauty, there is instead an "inverted nature" that makes the eye suffer:

The suff'ring eye inverted Nature sees,
 Trees cut to Statues, Statues thick as trees,
 With here a Fountain, never to be play'd,
 And there a Summer-house, that knows no shade;
 Here Amphitrite sails thro' myrtle bow'rs;
 There Gladiators fight, or die, in flow'rs;
 Un-water'd see the drooping sea-horse mourn,
 And swallows roost in Nilus' dusty Urn.

(ll. 119-126)

Timon has thrown sums away in order to build this pretentious mansion, these tremendous grounds, and in so doing aggrandize himself, and has ended with only "huge heaps of littleness" and a dwarfed owner. Between the intention and the realization is a great and ironical gap.

One of the most profound ironies in the Timon's passage is at the end:

Another age shall see the golden Ear
 Imbrown the Slope, and nod on the Parterre,
 Deep Harvests bury all his pride has plann'd,
 And laughing Ceres re-assume the land.

(ll. 173-176)

This is the law of nature reasserting itself. Here is nature taking over the land and putting it to its proper use, instead of continuing the waste and impropriety of Timon's monstrosities. Timon's estate, sterile while he lived, will be returned to fertility by natural laws after his death. Two types of irony are at work here: the insignificance of pompous man in the larger scheme of things, and the irony that the

most powerful men alive have no power over their own deaths, or over their possessions beyond death--let no man dream of influence beyond his life.

The beautiful aptness of the "laughing Ceres" image has been remarked by Tillotson, who sees in it a Christian allusion. He quotes from Psalm LXV, 14 in the Prayer Book: "The vallies. . . stand so thick with corn, that they shall laugh and sing." Finding the innocent sense of pleasure so satisfying, he rejects Rebecca Price Parkin's reading of a double meaning into "laughing Ceres."¹³ The double meaning seems necessary to me here: there is Ceres' innocent laughter of delight in the growth and fertility of the land, and her, or at least the speaker's, contemptuous laughter at her triumph over Timon. There is, in this way of looking at it, a double pleasure--first, in the glow of the imagery, and then, in finding a layer of meaning behind a seemingly straightforward image. The final irony of the whole is that of man's situation in the universe--he must work with, not against, nature. In the great plan of things man has a place; but when he works against the plan, he succeeds only in making himself mean and contemptible, a puny insect.

The insect imagery is used with a somewhat different purpose in the discussions of riches and corruption in the "Epistle to Bathurst." In the discussion of riches there is a return to the sense of the "Pretty in Amber" passage--here riches are like insects in the infant stage:

Riches, like insects, when conceal'd they lie,
Wait but for wings, and in their season fly.

(ll. 171-172)

And it is here that one of the fundamental beliefs of Pope is exemplified in image form, that in God's great plan "Extremes in Nature equal good produce, /Extremes in Man concur to general use" (ll. 163-164).

His argument that extremes, whether in man or in nature, work against each other to produce ultimate good, need not be too logical. Caught up in the sheer beauty of his imagery, the grandeur of his tone, and the power of his language, the reader forgets to consider the reasonableness of the assumptions too deeply. Pope continues with his argument--pale Mammon sitting, hoarding money, will be succeeded by his prodigal heir, and the former will be as a reservoir, storing the water that will spout through the fountain, the heir:

In lavish streams to quench a Country's thirst,
And men and dogs shall drink him 'till they burst.

(ll. 177-178)

The irony here lies in the contrasting tones and language. Immediately before this passage Pope's tone has been quite different:

Ask we what makes one keep, and one bestow?
That pow'r who bids the Ocean ebb and flow,
Bids seed-time, harvest, equal course maintain,
Thro' reconcil'd extremes of drought and rain,
Builds Life on Death, on Change Duration founds,
And gives th' eternal wheels to know their rounds.

(ll. 165-170)

After this heroic tone Pope descends to bathos, and the grotesque image

in the couplet is in complete contrast to all expectations. It seems, too, that Pope is more interested in the satire than in the poor, else why should "dogs" as well as men drink him, and why "burst"?

The discussion that leads up to the convenience of paper money as a means for bribery is attended with comic and ironic images. Here Pope, having made it clear that gold is a too-convenient instrument for bribery, ironically invokes a Golden Age of barter, in which

A Statesman's slumbers how this speech would spoil!
 "Sir, Spain has sent a thousand jars of oil;
 "Huge bales of British cloth blockade the door;
 "A hundred oxen at your levee roar."
 (ll. 43-46)

Certainly the image is comic--the perfidy of the Statesman would be all too apparent with such masses of supplies as bales and jars, and the roaring of a hundred oxen. The mock-heroic tone is held throughout: in the same way that the ancient heroes in the Iliad were awarded female captives for their prowess in the games, so will Uxorio, the passionately fond husband, be awarded six whores for his prowess in gaming, hardly a heroic pastime, and will take them home to "make his Lady weep." And the effeminate Adonis, "so perfum'd and fine," will take a herd of swine to St. James's Palace, where as Vice-Chamberlain, Hervey had official quarters. And, like Virgil's Pollio, His Grace, the Duke of Bedford (who had lost an enormous sum gaming at White's in 1731) will take home a bull:

His Grace will game: to White's a Bull be led,
 With spurning heels and with a butting head.
 (ll. 55-56)

Here is the implied ironic comment on the contrast between the ancient civilizations described by Virgil and Homer with their noble characters and heroic games and innocent pastimes, and his own age with its mean heroes, and its gaming, waste, and bribery--a comment on the cultural gulf between the two civilizations. Here also is satire against Pope's contemporaries--Hervey, Lord Bristol, and the Duke of Bedford. There is a fine, gentle irony in the last two lines of this passage, with the extravagance of the language over a slight game of cards:

Oh filthy check on all industrious skill,
To spoil the nation's last great trade, Quadrille!
(ll. 63-64)

Other imagery bound up with the discussion of paper money is amusingly ironic. Suppose all trade were again done by barter:

Poor Avarice one torment more would find;
Nor could Profusion squander all in kind.
Astride his cheese Sir Morgan might we meet,
And Worldly crying coals from street to street,
(Whom with a wig so wild, and mien so maz'd,
Pity mistakes for some poor tradesman craz'd).
Had Colepepper's whole wealth been hops and hogs,
Could he himself have sent it to the dogs?
(ll. 47-54)

And the images which follow prove the terrible embarrassment that would result. Sir Morgan astride his cheese is even funnier than the Welshman in John Philips "The Splendid Shilling" who rode atop his cheese as he went to market to vend it. It is the word "astride" which gives added point to the image. Worldly, peddling his coals from street to street like any street vendor, with his wig all awry and his

manner wild, is satire against Lady Mary's penurious husband, of course; but it is also a comment on the proprietors of coal mines who had formed a syndicate to keep the prices on coal up to an exorbitant level. Pope is attacking the viciousness of money-grabbing that would freeze the poor. The last couplet is an allusion to Sir William Colepepper, who lost all his inherited wealth at the gaming tables. It is only the wording which gives it the little ironic twist at the end--"to the dogs" can mean "going to waste" in a colloquial sense, but it can also mean that the men who got his wealth were "dogs." And at the beginning of the quotation, there is a delightful irony in Avarice finding the thing that gives him his pleasure in life, his wealth, a torment.

The last in the catalogue of persons who would be affected by the lack of quiet paper money is Old Cato, the Patriot, whose bag of gold broke as he came secretly down the back stairs after an interview with the King, and discovered his perfidy to everyone who was near enough to hear the jingling coins. The word "Patriot" here is double-edged: Cato appears to be a patriot to his King, but hardly to his country, else why would the transaction have to be so secret? If "Patriot" is intended to mean, as it certainly does later in the poem, "a member of the Opposition," the sense is also ironical, since he is anything but loyal to the Opposition.

Next follows the mock-exaltation of the actual operation of paper-credit in the world, the flitting leaves giving unlimited power to knaves. The ironic strategy here, as Paul J. Alpers has observed, is that in order to attack corruption Pope has assumed the pose of the politician, whose praise of paper credit would be real:¹⁴

Blest paper-credit! last and best supply!
 That lends Corruption lighter wings to fly!
 Gold imp'd by thee, can compass hardest things,
 Can pocket States, can fetch or carry Kings;
 A single leaf shall waft an Army o'er,
 Or ship off Senates to a distant Shore;
 A leaf, like Sibyl's, scatter to and fro
 Our fates and fortunes, as the winds shall blow:
 Pregnant with thousands flits the Scrap unseen,
 And silent sells a King, or buys a Queen.

(ll. 69-78)

The mock-heroic tone, along with the catalogue of the glorious accomplishments and supernatural power of paper money, deepens the irony. Pope points out, too, with subtle irony that paper-credit "lends" Corruption wings, that it can "pocket" States, and "sell" a King, or "buy" a Queen. Using the language of monetary exchange is a brilliant touch. Implicit in these remarks, also, is the sense of his concern over corruption in England: bribery seems possible in the whole leadership and aristocracy of the country, even to the King and Queen; the latter was suspected of duplicity in the dealings of the South-sea Company, in which many persons, including Pope, lost fortunes. Of course, the double meaning of "Queen" is equally possible, and this would be an implied comment on the nation's morals.

Added to Pope's catalogue of the enormities that money has accomplished is his expression of the ironic similarity between the power of the leaves of paper money and the leaves of the Cumean Sibyl, whom men in the Aeneid begged:

But, oh! commit not thy Prophetick Mind
To flitting leaves, the sport of ev'ry Wind,
Lest they disperse in Air our empty Fate;
Write not, but, what the Pow'rs ordain, relate.

(Dryden's translation of the Aeneid VI, ll. 116-119)

Pope recognizes that men have made their fates subject to the winds of chance by recording their fortunes on the leaves of paper currency. As mentioned earlier, this passage on paper-credit is reminiscent of that on Riches. The irony of both is enhanced by their Biblical echo in Proverbs XXIII, 5: "Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly as an eagle toward heaven." The grandeur of tone in the paper-credit passage suggests flying with something of the nobility of the eagle rather than with the meanness of the insect, and Corruption, like Sporus, is enlarged in bad eminence.

The whole portrait of Sporus is a tissue of mean images, partly insect and partly animal, finally elevated to greatness in his comparison to Satan--but ironically, because elevated in vice. He is first called "that Thing of silk," suggesting his smoothness, his polish, the slightness of his character. Pope evidently drew hints from several sources for this: Jonson's "On Court-Worm," the anony-

mous "The Lord H-r-y's first speech in the House of Lords," in which the speaker is described as a "skein of silk," with a face that is a "perfect curd of ass's milk," and from Shakespeare's Troilus and Cressida, in which Thersistes rails at Patroclus, Achilles' "male varlet. . . his masculine whore," calling him a "water-fly," a "flap of a sore eye," and "an immaterial skein of sleeve silk" (V. i, 34). This last source is particularly apt in view of the name Sporus. The original Sporus was an emasculated favorite at Nero's court, and was described in Suetonius as the "Eunuch-Love" of Nero (De Vita Caesarum, VI, xxviii). Hervey, Pope's Sporus, is also a favorite at Court, being unofficial adviser, entertainer, and confidant to Queen Caroline. Evidently effeminate, he was described by the Duchess of Marlborough as "wretched, profligate, and ridiculous, with a painted face, and not a tooth in his head."¹⁵ The metaphorical insinuation in his name is substantiated in the phrases "florid Impotence," and "now Master up, now Miss," and "Beauty that shocks you, Parts that none will trust." It is further strengthened in the couplet:

Fop at the Toilet, Flatt'rer at the Board,
Now trips a Lady, and now struts a Lord.

("Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot," ll. 328-329)

His succeeding metamorphoses in the portrait include a butterfly, a "Bug with gilded wings," a "Child of Dirt," a puppet, a familiar Toad, squatting at the ear of Eve--a reference to his familiarity with the Queen--and a serpent--a second metamorphosis of Milton's Satan.

The bug image, conveying his filth and his capacity to sting, is drawn with clever irony from Hervey's own attack on Pope in "Verses to an Imitator of Horace," ". . . like the self-blown praise, thy scandal flies, / And as we're told of wasps it stings and dies" (ll. 87-88).

One of the cleverest things Pope does is lash his enemies with their own whips.

He lashes Hervey, too, with elaborate description and similes:

So well-bred Spaniels civilly delight
 In mumbling of the Game they dare not bite.
 Eternal Smiles his Emptiness betray,
 As shallow streams run dimpling all the way.
 (ll. 313-316)

And with startling metaphors he changes him from insect to animal to an incarnation of the Devil:

Yet let me flap this Bug with gilded wings,
 This painted Child of Dirt that stinks and stings;
 (ll. 309-310)

Or at the Ear of Eve, familiar Toad,
 Half Froth, half Venom, spits himself abroad.
 (ll. 319-320)

The verbals chosen convey as much as the metaphors: Sporus buzzes and stinks and stings, flatters, and smiles and dimples, mumbles, and squeaks, and trips and struts. The adjectives are just as damning: he is a "vile Antithesis," and "Amphibious Thing"; he has a "trifling Head," and a "corrupted Heart." The unkindest cuts come at the end where they give extra punch: "Wit that can creep, and Pride that licks the dust." The earlier echo from Paradise Lost of Satan as a toad at

Eve's ear whispering temptation into her sleeping mind is repeated here in the allusion to Satan's punishment at the end of the epic where he falls to his belly in the dust.

Notice that it is Hervey's character that is attacked--his corruption, his fawning for favor, his hypocrisy, his lack of pride, his emptiness, and his slandering of others. Pope seldom attacks the physical characteristics of his victims: it is the ironies of the soul which interest him. In the portrait of Sporus there is a fine mood of contrasts set up. Sporus smiles and dimples, he is a painted child, a butterfly--all suggestive of prettiness; but he is a "Child of Dirt," he stings and stinks, he fawns because he fears to bite; he is a bug, a spitting toad; he has a cherub's face, but he is a "Reptile all the rest." One must read the description whole to appreciate the symmetry and precision of balance in the conflicting ideas:

Yet let me flap this Bug with gilded wings,
 This painted Child of Dirt that stinks and stings;
 Whose Buzz the Witty and the Fair annoys,
 Yet Wit ne'er tastes, and Beauty ne'er enjoys,
 So well-bred Spaniels civilly delight
 In mumbling of the Game they dare not bite.
 Eternal smiles his Emptiness betray,
 As shallow streams run dimpling all the way.
 Whether in florid Impotence he speaks,
 And, as the Prompter breathes, the Puppet squeaks;
 Or at the Ear of Eve, familiar Toad,
 Half Froth, half Venom, spits himself abroad,
 In Puns or Politicks, or Tales, or Lyes,
 Or Spite, or Smut, or Rymes, or Blasphemies.
 His Wit all see-saw between that and this,
 Now high, now low, now Master up, now Miss,
 And he himself one vile Antithesis.

Amphibious Thing! that acting either Part,
 The trifling Head, or the corrupted Heart!
 Fop at the Toilet, Flatt'rer at the Board,
 Now trips a Lady, and now struts a Lord.
Eve's Tempter thus the Rabbins have exprest,
 A Cherub's face, a Reptile all the rest;
 Beauty that shocks you, Parts that none will trust,
 Wit that can creep, and Pride that licks the dust.
 (ll. 309-333)

It is the mood of contrasts that establishes the irony in the portrait. The "Beauty that shocks you" is so enmeshed with the ugliness that it adds to the repugnance of the total effect. There are other shocks as well: the clashing of the pastoral simile "As shallow streams run dimpling all the way," with the squeaking of the puppet, and the spitting of the toad. The "vile Antithesis" that is Sporus is beautifully illustrated by the whole method of the description: it, like Sporus, is an antithesis. This is one of Pope's poetic strengths, that he makes a statement about a character, and then demonstrates it with his own art--that is, the enunciation and the illustration are as one. The bright contradictions of the closing lines of the portrait illustrate the incongruities of the man. Obviously his character contradicts his appearance, and the contrast between the outward person and the inward man is the very essence of Socratic irony.

FOOTNOTES

Chapter I

¹On the Poetry of Pope (Oxford, 1938), p. 141.

²Alexander Pope: The Poetry of Allusion, p. 267.

³From a note in the Twickenham Edition of The Poems of Alexander Pope, III, ii, Epistles to Several Persons (Moral Essays), ed. F. W. Bateson (London, 1951), p. 58.

⁴Pope himself uses it thus in the "Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot," l. 201; and Fielding speaks of "so wanton a leer," in Jonathan Wild III, VII.

⁵This Dark Estate: A Reading of Pope (Berkeley, 1963), p. 74.

⁶The Poetry of Allusion, p. 267.

⁷Seven Types of Ambiguity (London, 1956), p. 150.

⁸On the Poetry of Pope, p. 151.

⁹"Alexander Pope," From Dryden to Johnson, ed. Boris Ford (Middlesex, 1965), p. 265.

¹⁰On the Poetry of Pope, p. 121.

¹¹Rebecca Price Parkin makes a similar observation in her essay, "The Role of Time in Alexander Pope's Epistle to a Lady," English Literary History XXXII (1965), p. 493.

¹²Edith Sitwell, not too convincingly, suggests other possibilities for identification of Sappho. She points out that a matron, Sappho Thomas, had incurred Pope's displeasure; and further that Sappho was a common name for "bedraggled ladies, and especially those who indulged in a little verse-making." From Alexander Pope (London, 1930), p. 170.

¹³Pope and Human Nature (Oxford, 1958), p. 255.

¹⁴"Pope's To Bathurst and the Mandevillian State," English Literary History, XXV (1958), p. 33.

¹⁵From a note in the Twickenham Edition, The Poems of Alexander Pope, IV, Imitations of Horace, ed. John Butt (London, 1939), p. 118.

CHAPTER II

THE IRONIES IN THE PORTRAITS:

TWO KINDS OF MEN

Pope begins his discussion of the two kinds of men, miser and spendthrift, in the "Epistle to Bathurst." Speaking of gold, he opines that in the beginning nature had hidden the "shining mischief" underground, but that man's "audacious labour" had dug it up again, and to compensate for this "careful Heav'n" had supplied "two sorts of Men, /To squander these and those to hide agen." In this epistle Pope deals with both kinds of men, beginning with brief portraits of the statesmen, politicians, and speculators who had become rich by means of bribery and corruption. Next he places the longer portraits of the misers back to back with those of the prodigal, and finally portrays Balaam who is both. In the centre he gives us the Man of Ross, the Golden Mean between the two extremes.

In this discussion of the avaricious men, Pope makes it quite clear that they have not received their gold as a token of God's grace for their Christian virtue, but that gold comes to men indiscriminately, and may often go to the unworthy:

Giv'n to the Fool, the Mad, the Vain, the Evil,
To Ward, to Waters, Chartres, and the Devil.

(ll. 19-20)

With their gold, he continues, these men are able to provide for themselves without any effort on their part the needs of life:

What Nature wants, commodious Gold bestows,
'Tis thus we eat the bread another sows:
But how unequal it bestows, observe,
'Tis thus we riot, while who sow it starve.

(ll. 21-24)

And he pursues his argument to its ironical conclusion:

And if we count among the Needs of life
Another's Toil, why not another's Wife?

(ll. 27-28)

Then with customary irony he determines to be just to these "poor men of pelf." He assumes with ironic charity that certain men-- including the directors of the Charitable Corporation for the Relief of the Industrious Poor, who had made themselves rich by embezzlement of the company's funds--are actually more religious than we are, having had "Some Revelation hid from you and me," and it is this revelation which accounts for their seeming avarice. He continues his ironical justification: Shylock's supernatural vision has made him foresee that a "Loaf will rise to fifty pound." Thus he starves now to save his money that he will not be hungry later. Implicit in the name Shylock, since that character was a relentless money-lender in Shakespeare's Merchant of Venice, is the certainty that he has already an abundance of wealth. The Directors who cheated

in South-sea year, too, are not to be blamed: they knew by revelation that "venison would be sold so dear." Venison is an excellent choice--they could manage without that luxury. And just as the men are given this divine revelation so are Phryne and Sappho equally seers:

Ask you why Phryne the whole Auction buys?
 Phryne foresees a general Excise.
 Why she and Sappho raise that monstrous sum?
 Alas! they fear a man will cost a plum.
 (ll. 121-124)

There are several suggestions in the allusion to Phryne--her revelation, rather than a divine one is more likely to have come from Walpole (Maria Skerret was his mistress), and suggests that the other revelations had a similar earthly origin. The "General Excise" relates Walpole even more clearly to the revelation as it refers to his unpopular Excise Bill of 1733 which, because it thoroughly alarmed the public, had been repealed.

Following these short sketches, a number of rich men are briefly satirized. It is one of the tenets of Christian literature that the rich man is responsible as the divinely appointed steward for the poor, and the persons Pope deals with here are shown in their various unchristian attitudes of rejecting that stewardship. With a brilliant sense of irony he chooses two of them, Bond and Sutton, from the directors of the Charitable Corporation which professed to help, but in reality harmed the poor.

Perhaps you think the Poor might have their part?
 Bond damns the Poor, and hates them from his heart:
 The grave Sir Gilbert holds it for a rule,
 That "every man in want is knave or fool:"
 "God cannot love (says Blunt, with tearless eyes)
 "The wretch he starves"--and piously denies:
 But the good Bishop, with a meeker air,
 Admits, and leaves them, Providence's care.
 (ll. 101-108)

It is Pope's cleverness that lets these men condemn themselves out of their own mouths. Bond had, in fact, said, "Damn the Poor, let us go into the City, where we can make money."¹ Blunt piously attributes their poverty to God's will, and Sir Gilbert to man's stupidity or his wickedness, and thus both escape personal responsibility. The connotations of self-righteousness clash comically with their real moral position. The finest irony is in the attitude of the Bishop: unlike Blunt who "piously denies" the poor any help, this hypocrite meekly admits that they are pitiable, and then shrugs them off to Providence's care.

Pope, as Earl Wasserman has remarked, is ironically just to these misers, granting that they obey the logic if not the letter and spirit of the Second Commandment--not loving but hating their neighbors as themselves.² However, Wasserman denies any irony to the next couplet:

Damn'd to the Mines, an equal fate betides
 The Slave that digs it, and the Slave that hides.
 (ll. 111-112)

Read as an eternal punishment for the covetous man to be "Damn'd to the Mines," the lines contain an irony in the use of the word "Slave." Granted that the man who digs gold can be a slave, but how can he be equated with the man who hoards it? The one is a slave in the physical sense only, with his body, the other in the moral, with his soul. It is ironical, too, that the man who spends his life hoarding money--which Pope has already labeled a torment (l. 47)--shall enjoy it no more than the man who spends his life digging it for someone else.

Following the catalogue of "poor men of pelf," who act on "motives powerful, tho' unknown," Pope introduces Blunt. The catalogue having made it quite clear that the men's motives are known, and that the men are acting in self-interest and avarice, Pope now appears to be introducing the ideal other case. Here is Blunt, much misunderstood, much maligned, but obviously very noble:

No mean Court-badge, great Scriv'ner! fir'd thy brain,
 Nor lordly Luxury, nor City Gain:
 No, 'twas thy righteous end, asham'd to see
 Senates degen'rate, Patriots disagree,
 And nobly wishing Party-rage to cease,
 To buy both sides, and give thy Country peace.
 (ll. 147-152)

These lines make it perfectly clear that the sympathy in the first line of the passage, "Much injur'd Blunt! why bears he Britain's hate?" is a mockery. The sentiments describing Blunt are double-edged, noble and ignoble: he is great, and unaffected by "lordly Luxury"

or "city Gain"; he is ashamed to see disagreement in his country, and he nobly wishes the cessation of party strife and the establishment of peace. But the elevated salute and the noble sentiments do not make much of a hero out of him: he is not a great man but a great scrivener, a moneylender, one of the most notorious offenders of the new-moneyed society; and his "righteous end" to "buy both sides" smacks of double-dealing rather than patriotism.

Like Noah, he has had a revelation, foretelling a general flood, not of water but of corruption, money, and avarice. But unlike Noah whose revelation came from God, he received his revelation from a wizard:

"At length Corruption, like a gen'ral flood,
 "(So long by watchful Ministers withstood)
 "Shall deluge all; and Av'rice creeping on,
 "Spread like a low-born mist, and blot the Sun;
 "Statesman and Patriot ply alike the stocks,
 "Peeress and Butler share alike the Box,
 "And Judges job, and Bishops bite the town,
 "And mighty Dukes pack cards for half a crown.
 "See Britain sunk in lucre's sordid charms,
 "And France reveng'd of ANNE's and EDWARD's arms!"
 (ll. 137-146)

This passage has a double purpose. First, it is a prophetic indictment of a nation which has tolerated such immoral use of wealth: nothing will be exempt from corruption--not the state, not the judiciary, not the Church, not the aristocracy. The whole structure of society will crumble, and Britain in her weakened state will be an easy prey to France, the traditional foe, so often humbled by England in the past.

The picture of corruption, with its implications of prostitution of the nation's principles, is valid, and so Pope can use it to lash at corruption in his time. The point is, though, that Blunt himself is corrupt, and thus his lashing at corruption is hypocrisy, a pretended piety and concern, since he is lashing the vices of which he is guilty. Pope notes also that the prophetic words of the wizard are an echo of the style in which Blunt was constantly declaiming against the luxury and corruption of the age.³ Particularly eloquent on the subject of avarice in great persons, he had nevertheless used his own position as director of the South-sea Company to cheat the public out of a large sum. Thus we are given a double view of Blunt, the man he professes to be and the man he really is.

Besides the irony of the mock-sympathy and the double-edged language, there is the added irony caused by the delaying presentation. The fine torrent of rhetoric on the corruption of the country with all its suggestions of dire consequences has the effect of leading one to believe that Blunt is a good man injured by corrupt men. However, the high Biblical tone contrasts sharply with the commonness of some of the words and the vulgar suggestiveness of the end of the prophecy, and the elevation of tone is incongruous with a mere wizard's prophecy. The conclusion of the passage reveals Pope's real opinion of Blunt. "'Twas thy righteous end" need not mean that it was Blunt's righteous plan; it is more likely to mean that he came to his righteous end when

he was punished for fraud in the South-sea Company.

The delaying presentation is also used in the portrait of Old Cotta. The unfavorable statement in the first line is followed by a mock argument which pretends to show the invalidity of the assertion:

Old Cotta sham'd his fortune and his birth,
 Yet was not Cotta void of wit or worth:
 What tho' (the use of barb'rous spits forgot)
 His kitchen vy'd in coolness with his grot?
 His court with nettles, moats with cresses stor'd,
 With soups unbought and sallads blest his board.
 If Cotta liv'd on pulse, it was no more
 Than Bramins, Saints, and Sages did before;
 To cram the Rich was prodigal expence,
 And who would take the Poor from Providence?
 (ll. 179-188)

And continuing from here with the description of silence and fasts, "smoakless chimneys," and saved candles, and the growling mastiff, there is no longer any doubt of Cotta's inhospitality and penuriousness:

Like some lone Chartreux stands the good old Hall,
 Silence without, and Fasts within the wall;
 No rafter'd roofs with dance and tabor sound,
 No noontide-bell invites the country round;
 Tenants with sighs the smoakless tow'rs survey,
 And turn th' unwilling steeds another way:
 Benighted wanderers, the forest o'er,
 Curse the sav'd candle, and unop'ning door;
 While the gaunt mastiff growling at the gate,
 Affrights the beggar whom he longs to eat.
 (ll. 189-198)

Old Cotta is, among other things, the antithesis of the hospitable medieval host. Instead of the welcome at the gate for weary travelers there is the "unop'ning door," and instead of the intimacy and geniality

of country life, there is "Silence without, and Fasts within the wall." The proper relationship between tenant and feudal lord is lacking; and there is no charity for the beggar, who is turned away by the gaunt mastiff, himself hungry enough to eat the man. The ideal of charity, deeply rooted in Christianity, is completely violated, and Cotta is exemplified as an utterly inhuman creature whose only concern is to save money. Even the choice of his name is ironical: Cotta was the name of a bounteous giver in Juvenal's fifth satire.

The arrangement of the entire portrait is cleverly conceived. After the declamatory first line, the second begins with the argument: "Yet was not Cotta void of wit and worth." And the following lines prove this statement: he had wit enough to exist on almost nothing, and worth enough in terms of hoarded wealth if not in terms of moral value. What if he cooked no meat? The immediate implication is that meat-eating is barbarous anyway:

If Cotta lived on pulse, it was no more
Than Bramins, Saints, and Sages did before.
(ll. 183-184)

This sounds like a justification, in fact like more than a justification--like praise. Coupling his abstention from meat with that of Bramins, Saints, and Sages gives it an appearance of sacrifice for the sake of faith, but we know that it is stinginess. There is a further irony buried in this passage: what can riches give us? Pope has inquired. And the answer is "Meat, Fire, and Cloaths." Pressing for an exten-

sion on this, he receives the answer "Meat, Cloaths, and Fire" (.82). The implication is that Cotta is depriving himself of the essentials of life in order to store up wealth which, if used, could really provide no more than those essentials.

The line, "With soups unbought and sallads blest his board," is an ironical comparison with the old Corycian gardener in Virgil's fourth Georgic, who having only a few acres of barren, rocky ground was yet able to eke out an existence and find real contentment in his self-sufficiency. This line taken directly from Virgil and applied to Cotta is ironical: his self-sufficiency and self-denial come from parsimony and avarice, not need, and there is no evidence that he has found contentment. Unlike the old gardener Cotta is sterile rather than productive, and the whole portrait is a travesty of the virtuous country life.

It is characteristic of Pope's subtle allusiveness that a passing reference, buried in a single line, is able to create so much ironic suggestion. In "Like some old Chartreux stands the good old Hall," Pope is ironically equating Cotta with the Carthusian monks. Like Cotta, these monks did not eat meat, but lived on whatever vegetables they themselves could grow; and like Cotta, each monk lived in solitude--each to his own cell. But the Carthusians lived in this way out of motives of dedicated piety, for the greater glory of God, and to show their abhorrence of cupidity and avarice. Cotta lives like this out of

parsimony, and for the greater enrichment of himself. The Carthusians performed notable acts of charity; but Cotta dispenses no such charity, even starving his tenants and his dog. Cotta, then, by his avarice nurtures the very avarice the monks were set against. By bringing the Corycian gardener and the Carthusian monks together in similar ironic comparisons with him, Pope shows that Cotta is guilty of base selfishness by any standards, pagan or Christian.

In the next two lines, Cotta's niggardliness is rationalized:

To cram the Rich was prodigal expence,
And who would take the Poor from Providence ?

This is one of the high points of irony in the portrait. Cotta can justify himself both ways. Granted there is no need to go to the expense of cramming the rich with food, but one would hardly expect the poor to go to Hell if they get enough to eat. The ironic question echoes the smug hypocrisy of Bond, Sir Gilbert, and Blunt.

After the case of the miserly father, Pope gives us that of the spendthrift son. But the career of Cotta's son is not a blessing, and private vices are not public benefits. Indeed, the extremes in these two men do not "concur to general use." Cotta's son is presented in "an ironic revelation, modern in detail, to contrast with a semi-medieval picture of the old father."⁴ Old Cotta has ruined the traditional tone of the natural life, but the son destroys its tangible being, selling the forests, the livestock, and finally even the lands. This is

done, though, for "no mean motive"; it seems it is done in patriotism, for the sake of his country. Yet there is something wrong with every act of patriotism: "floods of wine" and "slaughter'd hecatombs" and "capacious squires" and "deep Divine" suggest high living, drunkenness, rapine, and sacrilege rather than the honest use of one's resources to meet a country's needs. And the couplet, "'Tis GEORGE and LIBERTY that crowns the cup, /And Zeal for that great House which eats him up," suggests not only patriotism and loyalty to the King, but the extravagant drinking of toasts, and drunkenness. The "Zeal of thine own House" in the Bible is a dedication to the true religion;⁵ here it is to the House of Hanover, a parody of the true worship, the worship of God. The final outcome of Young Cotta's lavish expenditure is implied in "that great House which eats him up"--he will eventually lose all he owns, be eaten up. The double meaning in "Last for his Country's love, he sells his Lands" is ironic also: is it because he loves his country he has sold his lands, or does he sell them in a last endeavor to buy his country's love?

At any rate, he goes all out in his efforts. After selling his land he goes to London, joins the Train-bands, and even burns the Pope in effigy to show that he is not only a patriot but a follower of the true religion as well. Since he has lost all he owns, seemingly in his country's cause, his case should be pathetic, and we should feel sympathy for him when "In vain at Court the Bankrupt pleads his cause, /His thankless

Country leaves him to her Laws" (ll. 217-218). But pity is a response of the emotions, and irony a response of the mind to the perplexities of life, and there is a grim humor here instead of pity.

Set against the two Cottas, miser and spendthrift, is the Man of Ross, the ideal other case. He is neither kind of man, but he is necessary to the portraits for several reasons. Bathurst is not the ideal other case, not exactly. The formal compliment paid him in the grand style is undercut slightly by a few words in which there is a touch of irony: he is "yet unspoil'd by wealth!" There is danger then that he will be spoiled. And there is irony, too, in Pope's question:

Is there a Lord, who knows a cheerful noon
Without a Fiddler, Flatt'rer, or Buffoon?
Whose table, Wit, or modest Merit share,
Un-elbow'd by a Gamester, Pimp, or Play'r?
Who copies Your's, or OXFORD's better part,
To ease th' oppress'd, and raise the sinking heart?
(ll. 239-244)

The graceful compliment to Bathurst has a little ironic turn in "better part." His kindness to the poor and the oppressed is one side, the better, of his character, but there is also a worse. This is gentle irony, of course, almost obscured in the compliment.

The first four lines of the passage just quoted are a criticism of the aristocracy--obviously the lords of the realm need either flattery or constant entertainment, often of the grossest kind. As well as this, the introduction of the Man of Ross is an oblique slur on the aristocracy. Pope is intimating that in order to find a Christian philanthropist he has

to move down the social ladder into the middle class, for he makes it quite clear that the Man of Ross is not of the moneyed class:

Of Debts, and Taxes, Wife and Children clear,
This man possest--five hundred pounds a year.
Blush, Grandeur, blush! proud Courts, withdraw your blaze!
Ye little Stars! hide your diminish'd rays.
(ll. 279-282)

Beyond doubt Pope is eulogizing the Man of Ross: he is Christ-like, having driven out the quacks and the vile attornies as Christ drove the money changers out of the temple; he helps maids and orphans, gives to the aged and the needy, cures the sick, and "divides the weekly bread." The imagery arouses admiration for his Christian benevolence, and the heroic tone with its invocation to the Muse, the Miltonic echoes, and the Latinate inversions--all belong to the grand style of eulogy. One always suspects Pope when he exaggerates, however, and especially when he does so in praise. The whole portrait is just too perfect. And in a passage of such high tones, there is something unappealing and mocking in the exaggerated pastoral image of the Severn's applauding itself hoarse. There is simply too much exaggeration in the portrait for it to be convincing. When the Man of Ross builds a church, this is told in the most grandiloquent language--the church is personified, taught by the Man of Ross to aspire to Heaven:

Who taught that heav'n-directed spire to rise?
The MAN of ROSS, each lisp'ing babe replies.
(ll. 261-262)

The last line of this couplet, resembling the babes' Hosannas to the son of David, is Biblical in tone, but it does not ring true. It is too farfetched, and smacks of the bathetic. In his despair that man will not be reasonably benevolent, Pope makes his man unreasonably so.

In the main, though, the passage is meant for praise of the Man of Ross. The satire, where there is any, is directed against men, not against any particular man. This fact is made too clear for anyone to doubt:

"Thrice happy man! enabled to pursue
 "What all so wish, but want the pow'r to do!
 (ll. 275-276)

Pope means exactly the opposite of what he says: he has made it perfectly clear that all do not wish, nor do some lack, the power to do; and he has made it equally clear that the Man of Ross is not a wealthy man, and is therefore not "enabled to pursue" these ends, but does what he does out of his benevolence and unselfishness.

One of the purposes of Pope's introducing the Man of Ross is to show that he, in contrast with such persons as Timon and Balaam, has no wish for self-aggrandizement or reputation. Pope makes him a shadowy creature--he calls him the Man of Ross rather than his name while he is living and performing his great deeds, and in death he leaves him equally anonymous. This man has built his Church to God, not to fame, and has no desire to be immortalized in stone--he will be known and remembered by his acts.

Hopkins is the diametric opposite. While he lived he was so penurious that he "sav'd a candle's end," and was, by implication, entirely without charity. But wanting to be sure that he would be remembered after death, he has provided for a big funeral with a "thousand lights" attending his body, and for a statue to be made of him. Now his "live-long wig" caught eternally in stone like the serpent-hair of the Gorgon, he stands "should'ring God's altar," as if he expects to be worshipped instead of God. And his hands are ironically extended as if in benevolence and charity, belying what he was in life.

Pope has shown the death of the miser, and he now shows the death of his contrast, the gay profligate blade, the Duke of Buckingham, here called Villers.

In the worst inn's worst room, with mat half-hung,
 The floors of plaister, and the walls of dung,
 On once a flock-bed, but repair'd with straw,
 With tape-ty'd curtains, never meant to draw,
 The George and Garter dangling from that bed
 Where tawdry yellow strove with dirty red,
 Great Villers lies--alas! how chang'd from him,
 That life of pleasure, and that soul of whim!
 Gallant and gay, in Cliveden's proud alcove,
 The bow'r of wanton Shrewsbury and love;
 Or just as gay, at Council, in a ring
 Of mimick'd Statesmen, and their merry King.
 No Wit to flatter, left of all his store!
 No Fool to laugh at, which he valu'd more.
 There, Victor of his health, of fortune, friends,
 And fame; this lord of useless thousands ends.

(ll. 299-314)

The long periodic construction, the piling up of detail, the stately movement of the lines, and the slowness of the pace--all contribute to the suspense. Who, we wonder, is in the room? After six lines of this description of meanness, we get the answer, ironic because of the epithet--great Villers. And, following the description of the wretched room, the ironic effect is intensified by the Miltonic echo in the phrase "how chang'd from him."

The tawdriness of the room is set up by the use of repetition, "In the worst inn's worst room," and by the piling up of the ugly details-- a "mat half-hung," cheap curtains "never meant to draw," the plaster floors, the "walls of dung," the cheap flock-bed repaired with straw, the dangling George and Garter, the "dirty red," the "tawdry yellow." This is a classic in compression. The meanness of the room is intensified immediately by the description of Buckingham's former "gallant and gay" life. The contrast is pointed up in the repetition of "gay" and the choice of words connoting merriment and lightheartedness--"life of pleasure," "gallant and gay," "merry," and "wanton Shrewsbury and love." The last suggests immorality and lust also. And as well as the phrases suggestive of the gay life, there are those that suggest status and position--"Cliveden's proud alcove," Council, Statesmen, and King. These two glimpses of him, the one at the zenith of his career, the other at his wretched end, give a great deal of information. Possessed of every aid to success, he has wasted

all his opportunities, throwing himself away on extravagance, selfishness, and immoral living. Now, bereft of everything that matters--friends, health, fortune, and fame--he lies dying in the filthy room of an alehouse. And the irony is in the waste of so much promise.

The irony is evident in other ways as well. There is an irony that is visual. A comment on his character is implicit in the contrast between the Garter, a noble badge of his earlier glory, and the wretchedness of the inn room. And there is an irony that is both visual and allusive. In "tawdry yellow strove with dirty red" there is an echo of Dryden's translation of Virgil: Viller's death is measured against another occasion of death, the funeral games of Anchises at which Cloanthus' victory is rewarded with a mantle "where Gold and Purple strive in equal Rows" (Aeneid, v. 326).⁶ The tawdry present is being weighed against a past in which values were finer and cleaner.

The whole portrait, of course, is a parody of the classical elegist mourning the death of a hero, and although the tone is right--eloquent, often nobly oratorical--the hero is all wrong, the one-time aristocrat dying like a drab. And the word "Victor" in the last line just emphasizes the irony.

Sage Cutler--the epithet is ironic, as the portrait will show--had advised the profligate Villers to live like him. Thus Pope begins Cutler's portrait with mock-modest questioning as though he is trying to get at the truth of what is the best way of life:

Resolve me, Reason, which of these is worse,
 Want with a full, or with an empty purse?
 (ll. 319-320)

The question that he has pretended to be examining throughout the epistle, what blessing can wealth "lend" to life (examined in the two Cottas from the standpoint of miser and spendthrift), and what comfort can it "afford" our end (examined in Villers and Hopkins, from the standpoint of prodigal and niggard), is to be answered now in the portrait of Cutler, a rich London merchant whose personal parsimoniousness had become a legend.

Thy life more wretched, Cutler, was confess'd,
 Arise, and tell me, was thy death more bless'd?
 (ll. 321-322)

Pope asks the question in a detached manner, as if he were only a humble seeker after the truth. And then he proceeds to characterize Cutler as a man who sacrificed people: tenants, along with their houses, because he was too stingy to build a wall; his daughter to a stranger, because he was too niggardly to afford her a dowry; and even himself, because he was too parsimonious to ease his dying. The sacrificing of self to greed is recurrent irony in this epistle; it is selfishness that makes Cutler deprive others so that he can hoard his money, yet even for himself he will not spend it, nor does he get any benefit from it at any time. The same is true of Shylock, who starves himself although he has plenty of money; and of Mammon pining amidst his store; and of Old Cotta, who lives on pulse

because it is free.

The ambiguity of the word "want" and the repetition of the phrases containing it add to the irony. First, there is the triple refrain:

For very want; he could not build a wall. (l. 324)

For very want; he could not pay a dow'r. (l. 326)

'Twas very want that sold them for two pound. (l. 328)

Here, as in the question that begins the portrait, "want" means need. Then, when we have grown accustomed to the refrain and expect "want" to reappear, it does, twice in one couplet, but with the meaning different in the last case:

What but a want, which you perhaps think mad,
 Yet numbers feel, the want of what he had.
 (ll. 331-332)

Our expectation is satisfied, but our shock at the change in meaning of "want" is greater. This is one of the ways that Pope achieves irony. By the play on one word, he has made it clear that Cutler's want is, in fact, not lack of money but of the essential human decency that would make his wealth of use.

The abrupt ending is extremely effective, coupling Brutus' noble death with Cutler's demise, and equating wealth with virtue:

Cutler and Brutus, dying both exclaim,
 "Virtue! and Wealth! what are ye but a name!"
 (ll. 333-334)

And the terrible irony is that what Cutler has to say about wealth is literally true for him: for his wealth is only a name, is completely meaningless, because he has divorced it from everything of real value, because he has valued it and sacrificed people. Virtue and wealth are equated again in the word "worth" in the ironic question,

Say, for such worth are other worlds prepar'd?

Virtue Brutus most probably had, but wealth is Cutler's only worth. As well as that, the question, epic in tone, is in the form of a compliment. But Hell might have to prepare for Cutler; certainly Heaven would not.

And then we are presented with the story of Balaam in which virtue and wealth are equated constantly. The tone here is important; the speaker makes it sound as if he has tired the reader with his types and the questions he poses. And so, because his audience is tired, and because he has raised this "knotty point," he offers to tell a tale. His air of graceful negligence is deceiving, however, as the intention of the tale is something more than pure entertainment. There is the delicate irony of indirection in this pretense.

In the story of Balaam, Pope has inverted the Biblical story of Job: he has Satan tempt Balaam by making him rich instead of poor, has a whirlwind take not his children but his father (which, incidentally, seems more of a blessing to Balaam than a trial, since he inherits), has him take rather than reject his wife's advice, and, most important,

has him succumb to rather than resist the Devil. The beginning of his story fulfils the formula for identification in the Book of Job.⁷ "There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil." The person concerned is a man, a citizen; his name is given, and then his qualities. Now let us look at the portrait of Balaam:

Where London's column, pointing at the skies
Like a tall bully, lifts the head, and lyes;
There dwelt a Citizen of sober fame,
A plain good man, and Balaam was his name;
Religious, punctual, frugal, and so forth;
His word would pass for more than he was worth.
(ll. 339-344)

In locating Balaam's abode under the monument with the inscription blaming the Papists for the Fire of London, Pope places him in the heart of the Whig merchant Dissenters. As well as this, everyone knew that their doctrine justified their capitalistic morality.⁸ This fact is basic to the irony of the whole tale. In Pope's pretended justification and actual exposure of Balaam, he is attacking the religious hypocrisy of the commercial virtues of the Calvinists. Balaam is simply a further example of the discrepancy between men's appearance and reality, of their outward profession and inward intention.

That his name comes from another Balaam in the Scriptures adds complexity to the story--his is not simply the inversion of the story of Job, but that and something else. The name Balaam comes from a story in the Book of Numbers and in the New Testament. The Scriptures identi-

fied Balaam as an avaricious man who employed dishonest means, but was yet used by God to utter a true prophecy.⁹ St. Jerome allows that he was a good man and a true prophet among pagans but by succumbing to avarice fell from grace, while others insist that he was a false prophet and a wizard from the beginning. Pope accepts the former on the surface and the latter in fact. It is only by oblique and ironic reference that this ambiguous character of Pope's Balaam is made clear.

The first part of the tale of Balaam sounds like praise, and it is as if Pope is giving us the St. Jerome version of the story--a good man tempted into sin. But the introduction only sounds like praise. Balaam is a citizen of "sober fame," Pope says, "a plain good man." He has the approved Puritan virtues of religion, punctuality, and frugality. All three of these are quite ambiguous terms, however; religion can be only mechanical piety, and Johnson's Dictionary defines punctuality as exactness (in what is Balaam exact?), and Pope often uses "frugal" as meaning "stingy."¹⁰ Thus these terms can be taken two ways--as a compliment for or a criticism of Balaam. Balaam practises self-denial, without doubt, eating only one solid dish on week days; but he also imposes denial on his family, which smacks of penuriousness. Besides, other characters far from praiseworthy--Cutler, Cotta, and Shylock--also practised self-denial.

Constant at Church, and Change; his gains were sure,
His givings rare, save farthings to the poor.

(ll. 347-348)

These lines make matters clear: he is stingy, then, giving only to the poor, and giving little to them; and the equating of his constancy at church and the Exchange leaves no doubt of his character. He is to be applauded for attending church regularly; he is not to be blamed for desiring to gain wealth--but one does not serve Mammon in the same breath, and with the same devotion, as he serves God. His values, the sense of the importance of things, are utterly confused. Note how little mention there is of the church and how much more there is of monetary matters in the lines just quoted. The imbalance here is a reflection of the imbalance in his values.

The ambiguity of much of the language makes it possible constantly to read all this on several levels--the first or surface meaning, and several other, often ironical ones. "His word would pass for more than he was worth": This sounds like a compliment, surely--to be judged so honest. But it may mean only that his credit is good--still something of a compliment, on a lower level. But "worth" can mean, as it surely has meant already in the poem, not wealth but virtue--he is a hypocrite then, pretending real worth. Again taking "worth" as meaning virtue, he may not be worth anything, and it is no compliment then to say his word would pass for more than he is worth. The "would pass" is ambiguous, too, again suggesting hypocrisy. As well

as this, there is the use of terms usually associated with matters religious incongruously applied here to worldly activities. One does not "solemnize" the Lord's Day with an "added pudding," penuriousness is not "Saintship," and "Shipwrecks" do not "bless" a lucky shore. "Bless" is doubly ironical: a religious term, it is not the term to use even for the beneficiaries of the shipwreck, and a blessing is a far cry from what the luckless victims of the disaster would feel.

Now as the "Prince of Air" takes possession of Balaam's soul, the language changes tone, becoming more colloquial, more common:

Sir Balaam now, he lives like other folks,
He takes his chirping pint, and cracks his jokes.
(ll. 357-358)

Implicit in "he lives like other folks" is the suggestion that Balaam, now that he has a title, is on friendly, even intimate terms with the aristocracy, drinking his cheering pint and cracking jokes with them. His wife makes the adjustment less easily: she can think only of extra food to mark their new dignity, or perhaps she has enough to eat at last.

The Devil, once started, soon takes possession of a soul which had only a thin veneer of religion in the first place. An "honest factor"--at least as honest as Balaam had been plain and good--steals a gem from an Indian, and Sir Balaam cheats him of it. The knight's conscience bothers him a little, but his guilt is soon assuaged:

. . . thus he eas'd his thought,
 "I'll now give six-pence where I gave a groat,
 "Where once I went to church, I'll now go twice--
 "And am so clear too of all other vice."
 (ll. 365-368)

His meagre charity, and his body in church will atone for what he has done; or does the last line mean "will clear him of all future vice" as well?

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

The classical allusion to the myth of Danae, in which Jove turned himself into a golden shower and beamed his rays into her lap as she sat in her barred and guarded room, is particularly effective here. With a shower of gold, too, Satan possesses Sir Balaam whole.

No longer does Balaam think in terms of religious matters to describe his affairs. In his new pride, he calls "Wit" what he had once called a "blessing," and God's good Providence he calls luck. It is hard to see, however, where God's good Providence comes in at all, since the Devil has been arranging everything. Pope observes sardonically that "Things change their titles, as our manners turn." This is implicit comment on the manners at a Court that would reward Balaam's kind of virtue with a knighthood.

Now, like Dryden's Shimei, who "never broke the Sabbath but for gain" (Absalom and Achitophel, " l. 588), Sir Balaam is too busy counting his money to go to church, but he duly sends his family, where

. . . one Christmas-tide
My good old Lady catch'd a cold, and dy'd.
(ll. 383-384)

And the line seems to skip at this happy misfortune. Events happen rapidly after this:

A Nymph of Quality admires our Knight;
He marries, bows at Court, and grows polite:
Leaves the dull Cits, and joins (to please the fair)
The well-bred cuckolds in St. James's air:
First, for his Son a gay Commission buys,
Who drinks, whores, fights, and in a duel dies:
His daughter flaunts a Viscount's tawdry wife;
She bears a Coronet and a P-x for life.
In Britain's Senate he a seat obtains,
And one more Pensioner St. Stephen gains.
(ll. 385-394)

His escape from London into St. Stephen and the House of Commons is a conscious echo of Juvenal's third satire in which, to escape the avarice of the government in Rome and the corruption of the old culture, Umbritius flees to the agrarian community and culture of Cumae, where "one more citizen the Sybil gains." The irony here is, of course, that in escaping the corruption of London, he has fled to the source of that corruption. At St. Stephen, the meeting place of the House, Walpole made men his pensioners so that they would be his tools.

Sir Balaam becomes a cuckold, and his son, having disgraced himself, dies. The daughter's fate is even less happy--she has her Hell on earth:

His daughter flaunts a Viscount's tawdry wife;
She bears a Coronet and P-x for life.

There is a fine irony in the use of zeugma in this couplet. Her bearing a coronet would generally be expected to contribute to the family honor and her own dignity; it can hardly be equated with the shame and wretchedness of her bearing a pox.

Treason is Balaam's last crime, and for it he hangs, and the tale ends abruptly:

Wife, son, and daughter, Satan, are thy own,
His wealth, yet dearer, forfeit to the Crown:
The Devil and the King divide the prize,
And sad Sir Balaam curses God and dies.

(ll. 399-402)

The prize must be his wife, son, and daughter, who with his soul go to Satan, and his wealth, which goes to the Crown. The King gets the better part since the Devil already has his soul, and, no matter what meaning one takes, whether it be "more valuable," "more important," or "more cherished," his wealth is "yet dearer" than his family. The story of Job is picked up again in the reverse in the last line, as Balaam takes Job's wife's advice, "Curse God and die."

The portraits in the "Epistle to Bathurst" have dealt with two kinds of men, miser and spendthrift, and their reactions to life and

death. The "Epistle to Burlington" carries on the discussion of only one kind, the squanderer. Just as it is an irony that the miser wastes his life heaping up riches that he is too niggardly to use for his enjoyment, so it is an irony that the spendthrift wastes his wealth spending lavishly on things that he has not the taste to enjoy.

Not for himself he sees, or hears, or eats;
 Artists must chuse his Pictures, Music, Meats:
 He buys for Topham, Drawings and Designs,
 For Pembroke Statues, dirty Gods, and Coins;
 Rare monkish Manuscripts for Hearne alone,
 And Books for Mead, and Butterflies for Sloane.
 Think we all these are for himself? no more
 Than his fine Wife, alas! or finer Whore.

(ll. 5-12)

The keynote in the portrait of the Prodigal, the spendthrift, is pride. He must have beautiful and rare and priceless objects, not for their intrinsic worth, but for display. He does not have any real appreciation for good music, for fine art, even for excellent food. His taste is all sham; the value of everything he buys is based on the judgment of others--Pembroke, Hearne, Topham, Sloane, all men he thinks are connoisseurs. And he collects without discrimination--rare manuscripts, statues, pictures, books, and butterflies.

All of the first ten lines is adverse criticism of the tasteless Prodigal; only one word in it is ironical. Pope quite often plays this trick on his readers: in an otherwise straightforward text he will introduce a phrase or a word that injects a note of irony into the whole. The word "dirty" in this case contrasts sharply with the symbols of

earlier civilizations in which the statues were valued for their own sake, not because they were expensive. And the whole sense of the last couplet is ironic. Our feeling of shock at a man's valuing his wife as a possession only, dressing her in finery, for show, is only eclipsed by our shock in the next three words, "or finer Whore." There is a shock to the reader not in the idea of a man keeping a whore, which is after all not such an uncommon practice, but in his valuing her for display, and in that finding her more valuable than his wife.

After the rather general portrait of the Prodigal, Pope moves on to more specific ones. The lesser portraits are barely sketched, but they introduce the main theme that "sums are thrown away" in building pretentious dwelling places and planting extravagant gardens that are monuments to bad taste. Bubo, the "pawn of sportive fate," is pushed by his pride into building, but he has no more judgment in selecting an architect than in anything else, and so his building is a "standing sermon" on tasteless waste. Building not for themselves, not for their own enjoyment and use, but for show, Virro and Visto have hidden with ornament their lack of art. Lacking common sense, the "gift of Heav'n," the one thing they cannot imitate, these men take "random drawings" from Burlington's plans and "from one beauty many blunders make." Each of them in his affectation of elegance has only shown his own deplorable lack of taste.

For what has Virro painted, built, and planted?
 Only to show, how many Tastes he wanted.
 What brought Sir Visto's ill got wealth to waste?
 Some Daemon whisper'd, "Visto! have a Taste."
 Heav'n visits with a Taste the wealthy fool,
 And needs no Rod but Ripley with a Rule.

(ll. 13-18)

Since Sir Visto is obviously a rascal, having "ill got wealth," it is surprising that Heaven concerns itself with sending him help. But the taste Heaven sends is only in the form of Ripley with his rule. Pope adds a note informing us that Ripley was a carpenter employed by Walpole, who raised him to architect, and after "some wretched proofs of his insufficiency in public Buildings, made him Comptroller of the Board of Works."¹¹ It is an irony then to send Ripley. And the last line has the double meaning that is so essentially a part of irony. It can simply be an image of Ripley dashing about with a rod and rule, measuring and laying out everything to exactitude, without any consideration of the "Genius of the Place." Or Pope may be using "Rod," as he so often does, as "punishment."¹² The irony of this is that Heaven would be visiting a punishment on the fool who thought he was getting help.

The atrocities that these "Imitating Fools" commit against good taste are enumerated by Pope:

Load some vain Church with old Theatric state,
 Turn Arcs of triumph to a garden-gate;
 Reverse your Ornaments, and hang them all
 On some patch'd dog-hole ek'd with ends of wall,
 Then clap four slices of Pilaster on't,
 That, lac'd with bits of rustic, makes a Front.

(ll. 29-34)

Irony plays all through this passage. First there is the incongruity of loading a church, which should be a simple place for worship, with the brazenness of a theatre, or making a simple garden gate look like a noble arch of triumph. Both are fine examples of vanity outstripping taste. There is next the delightful exaggeration of a "patch'd dog-hole" lengthened with a wall, clapped with columns and laced with bits of rustic, to simulate a ruin. Added to this are Burlington's ornaments, but reversed, which is bad enough in itself, but when not some but all of them are hung on one ruin that is the height of absurdity. This is an ironic thrust at the pretensions to magnificence of many rich men. And in the last four lines there is the deflation of all images of grandeur conjured up by such phrases as "long Arcades," and "Palladian," and "Venetian door" by linking them immediately with something completely prosaic and inelegant:

Or call the winds thro' long Arcades to roar,
 Proud to catch cold at a Venetian door;
 Conscious they act a true Palladian part,
 And if they starve, they starve by rules of art.
 (ll. 35-38)

This explosion in the last couplet or two of any vision of grandeur is a consistent feature of the portraits of the "Epistle to Burlington." These portraits follow a general pattern. At the beginning there are often exclamations of ironic wonder:

See! sportive fate, to punish aukward pride,
 Bids Bubo build, and sends him such a Guide.
 (ll. 19-20)

Behold Villario's ten-years toil compleat;
 (l. 79)

At Timon's Villa let us pass a day,
 Where all cry out, "What sums are thrown away!"
 (ll. 99-100)

Or the portrait may begin with a rhetorical question, followed immediately by a shocking answer:

For what has Virro painted, built, and planted?
 Only to show, how many Tastes he wanted.
 (ll. 13-14)

In every case Pope seems to be alerting us for something of nobility, some wonderful achievement, but he immediately dashes our expectations. In these portraits, and in the several paragraphs of Timon's portrait, there is this continual ironic clash between the expectation and the event, between the cultural ideal and the reality. After this solemn, oratorical opening with its semi-heroic tone, there is toward the middle of the portrait, a pictorial phase with its balanced beauties which can easily become balanced incongruities.¹³ And in the final couplets the beauty and consistency are no longer attributed, as the nobility and the politeness of the tone disappear. The close is most often on a semi-vulgar, or at least a colloquial and conversational tone.

This pattern is carried out in both the portraits of Villario and Sabinus. The portrait of Villario opens on a note of ironic wonder, "Behold Villario's ten-yearstoil compleat." Then the pictorial phase follows. Nature has coöperated with his ten years'toil and "united the parts": the trees of his quincunxes grow, the branches spread, and light and shade are proportioned attractively. The language is reminiscent of the pastoral:

His quincunx darkens, his Espaliers meet,
The Wood supports the Plain, the parts unite,
And strength of Shade contends with Strength of Light;
A waving Glow his bloomy beds display,
Blushing in bright diversities of day,
With silver-quiv'ring rills mæander'd o'er--
(ll. 80-85)

It is deliberately flowery, parodying earlier garden poetry, including Pope's own youthful imitations of Cowley. Notice the multiplicity of pretty images--"waving Glow," "bloomy beds," "blushing," "bright diversities of day," and, finally, the "silver-quiv'ring rills" meandering. There is a subtle irony in this use of language: it is artificial, like the planned garden of Villario. A further, more obvious irony is in the observation at the end of the portrait, introduced by the direct imperative:

Enjoy them, you! Villario can no more;
Tir'd of the scene Parterres and Fountains yield,
He finds at last he better likes a Field.
(ll. 86-88)

His has been a ritual of conspicuous waste. He has been imposing on

nature merely for the sake of a transient whim.

Nature has coöperated also with Sabinus, thickening the shade in his young woods and sending out healthy new shoots every year. But his son's "fine" taste reverses the whole process causing the noble trees to be cut down and replaced by a "mournful family of Yews" on a "boundless Green." Like Timon, he is working directly against nature. He plants the yew trees out in stiff rows, resembling a funeral procession, and makes what was a wood into a boundless lawn or a flowery carpet. The last couplet is the crowning irony of his despoliation: the noble trees have been made into ignoble broomsticks:

The thriving plants ignoble broomsticks made,
Now sweep those Alleys they were born to shade.
(ll. 97-98)

Ironically the goodly trees are again things of use; but not in the sense that Pope would approve.

The prevailing tone throughout the short portraits of this epistle has been the Roman oratorical tone, with exclamations and exhortations, wondering questions and answers, and the same tone and pattern are followed through in the verse paragraphs of Timon's portrait. The description of Timon's garden opens on a note of ironic wonder:

At Timon's Villa let us pass a day,
Where all cry out, "What sums are thrown away!"

The reader's attitude is ambivalent: the tone is one of approbation, but the words imply criticism. Pope continues in a tone of exaggerated compliment:

So proud, so grand, of that stupendous air,
 but the next line makes it plain that in spite of its imposing appearance Timon's villa offers neither comfort nor pleasure:

Soft and Agreeable come never there.

The tone of compliment is still present, however, in the following couplet with its high Miltonic echo:

Greatness, with Timon, dwells in such a draught
 As brings all Brobdingnag before your thought.

But the words are all wrong. Timon's villa brings not Heaven but Brobdingnag before your thought. And the sense of vastness and gargantuan magnificence is built up in the disproportion of everything--the house as large as a town, the pond as an ocean, the parterre as a down.

Following the picture of the master, "a puny insect, shiv'ring at a breeze," the language gives way to expressions of grossness and vulgarity: the whole scene is a "labour'd Quarry above ground," and "two Cupids squirt" before the house. These expressions are matched with exclamations and an oratorical tone appropriate to a feeling of admiration and awe:

Lo, what huge heaps of littleness around! (l. 109)

On ev'ry side you look, behold the Wall! (l. 114)

The tone is completely incongruous with the content, with the words expressing contempt, and this is what makes the irony. Conversely,

words that show approval are used in the wrong places: the keenness of the northern wind is "improved" not accentuated, by the lake.

Following this is a straightforward description of the tedious regularity of the garden where

Grove nods at grove, each Alley has a brother,
And half the platform just reflects the other.
(ll. 117-118)

And Pope brilliantly matches the symmetry of the garden in the monotonous regularity of his verse. The description of the garden continues, showing Timon's ostentatious display and his utter lack of taste and sense. There are fountains where there is no water, and a summer house where there is no shade; there are trees cut to resemble statues, and statues as thick as trees. It is obvious that there is a dearth of water in this garden--the drooping sea-horse, the dust-filled urn, and the dry fountains. Ironically, much of the ornament is associated with water--Amphitrite, the sea goddess, Nilus' Urn, and the "sea-horse" tree.

Having described the gardens, Pope takes us next into the house. He gives us first a glimpse of the owner:

My Lord advances with majestic mien,
Smit with the mighty pleasure, to be seen.
(ll. 127-128)

Following such grandiose expressions as "majestic mien" and "mighty pleasure," we are shocked with the bathos in "to be seen." After such a buildup we expect something grander than this. There are two kinds of irony working here actually: the more obvious one being this discrepancy between expectation and result; and the other being irony in the larger sense. As Timon struts forth in boundless self-assurance, he is watched and analyzed by a somewhat supercilious observer who, before he is done, will strip him of all his pretenses.

Timon's penchant for discomfort and unpleasantness does not stop with his gardens. Instead of a door opening at the visitors' approach, there is a roundabout entry into the house:

First thro' the length of yon hot Terrace sweat,
And when up ten steep slopes you've dragg'd your thighs,
Just at his Study-door he'll bless your eyes.

(ll. 130-132)

The coarseness of the language with its "sweat" and "dragg'd," and the long line of monosyllables echo the misery and discomfort of the climb, and then the word "bless" appears in ironic contrast to what these visitors must be feeling about Timon at this moment.

Within the mansion there is no improvement in Timon's taste. He has books in his study, not for their contents, not for pleasure in their use, but for the pride he can take in showing their binding, their printing, their age. As far as the books are concerned they may as

well be sham, made of wood. Because Timon has no taste, he cannot judge authors for himself, and because modern authors have not yet been given the stamp of approval by authority, he has no modern works on his shelves. Here, Pope is making a little ironic aside on the practice of his day that prefers reputations already made.

Inside Timon's villa is the same inversion as without. The chiming clocks call the guests to a dinner that is more like a Roman sacrifice or a Christian Mass than a gracious and leisurely meal. There is no ease or pleasure at the dinner table--all is done like a ritual. There is an abundance of food, but not enough time to eat.

But hark! the chiming Clocks to dinner call;
A hundred footsteps scrape the marble Hall:
The rich Buffet well-colour'd Serpents grace,
And gaping Tritons spew to wash your face.

(ll. 151-154)

The tone and language intensify the irony. The scene opens with a heroic announcement which clashes outrageously with the diction and images of the next lines. Earl Wasserman has already noted the Biblical echo in the second line,¹⁴ and the image of the hundred faithful praying in God's dining room offers a sharp contrast with the numerous servants scraping their feet along Timon's marble floor. The harshness of the word "scrape" gives way to the incongruity and brash ugliness of "well-colour'd serpents" gracing the buffet, and this is eclipsed only with the vulgarity of gaping and spewing Tritons. It is indeed no accident that Pope has used the word "grace"--it

merely adds to the incongruity. A more subtle irony is created by the rhetorical questions and the awe-filled answers:

Is this a dinner? this a Genial room?
 No, 'tis a Temple, and a Hecatomb.
 (ll. 155-156)

Paradoxically, the comfort and ease which should have been found at the dining table are present in the chapel. The chapel should be a place of meditation and spiritual devotion; instead it is more like a ballroom with its flamboyant paintings and sprightly music, more like a sitting room with its soft cushions and invitation to rest. Soft cushions do not suggest kneeling in prayer, and soft Deans do not suggest repentance. One does not expect loose, light music in a church; and one does not "devoutly stare" at painted ceilings. Finally, one does not pray with pride, but with humility. The words are all wrong, all inappropriate for a place of worship; but so is the atmosphere:

And now the Chapel's silver bell you hear,
 That summons you to all the Pride of Pray'r:
 Light quirks of Musick, broken and uneven,
 Make the soul dance upon a Jig to Heaven.
 On painted Cielings you devoutly stare,
 Where sprawl the Saints of Verrio or Laguerre,
 On gilded clouds in fair expansion lie,
 And bring all Paradise before your eye.
 To rest, the Cushion and soft Dean invite,
 Who never mentions Hell to ears polite.
 (ll. 141-150)

There is something shocking about a soul dancing a jig to Heaven, and about saints sprawling anywhere. It is hard to know whether the "gilded

clouds" lie or the saints sprawl in "fair expansion." In any event, the word "sprawl" is suggestive of voluptuousness and vulgarity--neither usually associated with saints. Not the spirituality of the soul but the physical grossness of the body is accommodated in this chapel. "Stare," too, is normally associated with bad manners and indecency, not with devotion. And the passage that ends the description of the room caps the irony of the various incongruities. The line, "And bring all Paradise before your eye," lifted almost directly from Milton's "Il Penseroso," is completely incompatible with the earthiness and vulgarity of the scene Pope has described. The whole is done in a voice of praise--it is the incongruity of the words chosen that makes it so obviously ironic.

Besides the irony that lurks in this incongruity of the language, there is that present in the various tones. The aloofness of the "You" and "your" suggests an observer standing aside with an oblique, detached interest. Most of the time, however, the tone is that of Roman cultivation. The rhetorical questions and answers, the pompous exclamations presaged with "lo," "see," and "But hark"--all are associated with the Roman prophetic style, all are reminders of that civilization. Set side by side with these are the common vulgarities--"squirt," "scrape," "sweat," "sprawl," and "spew"--that serve to point up the essential vulgarity of Timon and his ilk in aspiring to nobility. With

Timon as with Villario, Sabinus, and the others, the irony is in this incongruity of Roman tone and modern grossness. And by giving these men Latin names, by constantly surrounding them with Amphitrites and Dryads, or quincunxes and pilasters, Pope has symbolized the culture that they lack even while they try to ape it.¹⁵

FOOTNOTES

Chapter II

¹From Pope's note in the Twickenham Edition, III, ii, p. 96.

²Pope's Epistle to Bathurst, p. 27.

³The Twickenham Edition, III, ii, p. 102.

⁴Benjamin Boyce, The Character Sketches in Pope's Poems (Durham, 1962), p. 102.

⁵Earl Wasserman, Pope's Epistle to Bathurst, p. 30.

⁶This observation has been made by Thomas R. Edwards, Jr. in This Dark Estate, p. 55.

⁷I owe this observation to Wasserman, Pope's Epistle, p. 50.

⁸Wasserman, p. 45.

⁹Wasserman, p. 46.

¹⁰In, for instance, the "Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot," l. 247, and the "Epistle to Cobham," l. 242.

¹¹The Twickenham Edition, III, ii, p. 137.

¹²In the "Essay on Man," I, l. 121, and IV, l. 139; as well as "Epilogue to the Satires," l. 195.

¹³R. A. Brower makes this observation in The Fields of Light (New York, 1951), p. 158.

¹⁴Pope's Epistle, p. 38.

¹⁵Brower makes this observation in The Fields of Light, p. 154.

CHAPTER III

THE IRONIES IN THE PORTRAITS: INCONSISTENCY AND THE RULING PASSION

In the epistles to Bathurst and Burlington, Pope has dealt with qualities that belong to some men, miserliness and prodigality; but in those to Cobham and Martha Blount, he discusses the characteristics that, according to him, are common to every human being, inconsistency and the Ruling Passion. He begins his argument in the "Epistle to Cobham," solemnly contending that even as one man differs from another, so he "varies from himself no less," that we, as observers, are not to be trusted since we "grow more partial for th' observer's sake," and that, in any case, it is beyond our depth to understand man since he is not what he seems. After all this, paradoxically, he tells us to

Search then the Ruling Passion: There, alone,
The Wild are constant, and the Cunning known;
The Fool consistent, and the False sincere;
Priests, Princes, Women, no dissemblers here.
(ll. 174-177)

Surely, one would think, this means that Pope has solved the riddle of man. But has he? Immediately he warns us that we must be careful

not to mistake appearance for reality, not to mistake a secondary trait for the Ruling Passion. Although, he says, Caesar may have appeared to be a victim of his appetites, to be motivated by lust and corrupted by drink, his Ruling Passion was actually his ambition and a thirst for glory. And having assured us of all this, Pope, with his usual irony, admits that Caesar sacrificed the "world's great empire for a Punk."

Much of the liveliness of the satire in the "Epistle to Cobham" is gained from the hasty sketches. Presented objectively, often dramatically, they give us vivid glimpses of human vices and follies. Although Coleridge accused Pope of giving the pith of a character at the outset of a portrait, the remainder being only evidence to substantiate the vice or folly named at the beginning,¹ one need only look at the portraits in this epistle to disprove his statement. The techniques that Pope uses in the short sketches are quite varied. Sometimes he uses the plain method that Coleridge accused him of, at other times he uses a dramatic one involving dialogue, or a plain method with an ironic revelation at the end, or a combination of two or more methods. Sometimes he exposes his characters deliberately and gradually. The portrait of Old Euclio is a case in point. The smooth Courtier, servile to the last, asks Euclio if he can still serve his master where they are both going--as if anyone could serve him there.

"I give and I devise, (old Euclio said,
And sigh'd) "My lands and tenements to Ned."

This sounds quite normal for a death scene, the language like that of a will. Euclio's sighing, too, is understandable: he may be sighing because he hates to leave life, or because he hates to leave Ned. The dramatic presentation continues:

Your money, Sir? "My money, Sir, what all?
"Why, --if I must--(then wept) I give it Paul."

The "what all?" is the giveaway. Now we know the sighs and tears are because he hates to part with his possessions. But there is still the dearest left:

The Manor, Sir?--"The Manor! hold," he cry'd,
"Not that, --I cannot part with that"--and dy'd.
(ll. 256-261)

The "hold" is intended to stop all this giving. Gradually, Pope has presented the miser who wants to hold his belongings even after death. The irony, aided by the delaying presentation, coalesces in the last line. Powerful he may be, but not powerful enough to keep anything after death--he will go out of life naked even as he came in.

Helluo's death is arranged for surprise. It begins as if Pope were adopting the plain straightforward method:

A salmon's belly, Helluo, was thy fate:
The Doctor call'd, declares all help too late.

Helluo is dying of overindulgence, whether from eating too much of the salmon or from poisoning by it, or, if the salmon were served as an

aphrodisiac, from sexual gluttony. The rest of the portrait is revealed dramatically, through dialogue:

Mercy! cries Helluo, mercy on my soul!
Is there no hope!--then bring the jowl.
(ll. 234-237)

"Mercy on my soul" is a conventional deathbed expression, but it is ironical that a man who has thought only of the appetites of his body should consider the state of his soul as he approaches death. The real shock, however, comes in the last line, where "bring the jowl" clashes with what one is led to expect. Helluo has asked for mercy on his soul and the next step would logically be to call for the priest, not for more food.

Dialogue, prevalent in the portraits of both Helluo and Euclio, makes up almost the whole of the portrait of Narcissa:

"Odious! in Woollen! 'twould a Saint provoke,
(Were the last words that poor Narcissa spoke)
"No, let a charming Chintz, and Brussels lace
"Wrap my cold limbs, and shade my lifeless face:
"One would not, sure, be frightful when one's dead--
"And--Betty--give this Cheek a little Red."
(ll. 242-247)

Here, as Maynard Mack has remarked, is the irony of identity refusing to be erased.² It seems particularly petty for Narcissa not to be concerned with the real fact of death itself, not with the prospects of what lies beyond, but only with her appearance in the coffin. The irony is increased also by the double meaning in some of the words. When Narcissa says she does not want to look "frightful" in death, she is

using the word in a fashionable, slangy sense; but there is also the literal meaning to take into consideration, that of "causing fright." The word "charming," too, is ambiguous: there is nothing charming about a corpse regardless of its wrappings, and try as one will one cannot charm away death. "Saint" is comically ironic. Narcissa, the self-lover, is a long way from a saint.

Unlike these portraits, which have been presented dramatically, that of the "rev'rend sire" is completely descriptive:

Behold a rev'rend sire, whom want of grace
Has made the father of a nameless race,
Shov'd from the wall perhaps, or rudely press'd
By his own son, that passes by unblest'd.
(ll. 228-231)

The beginning is eloquent: "Behold" and the imperative start it on a high note, and "rev'rend sire" has all the implications of a much-honored father. But "rev'rend" is a slippery word with Pope, sometimes meaning "old," but more often used ironically.³ A third possibility, and a very probable one, is that he is a minister of the church, and this makes the remainder of the portrait all the more damning. And "sire" is certainly doubtful. "Want of grace" and "nameless race" make it clear that he has sired a family of bastards. The son is unblest in a double sense, then: he passes his father who does not bless him with either his love or his name, and the boy is unblest by the church. In turn the old man has not the son's respect, as "shov'd" and "rudely press'd" show. Even in his dotage the old father persists in his obsessive lechery. Ironically,

he finds no pleasure in his lust, however, as "he crawls on knocking knees, /And envies ev'ry sparrow that he sees."

Two other brief portraits are presented simply, the old Crone and old Politicians.

The frugal Crone, whom praying priests attend,
Still tries to save the hallow'd taper's end,
Collects her breath, as ebbing life retires,
For one puff more, and in that puff expires.
(ll. 238-241)

Since so many other words connote thrift--"save," "collects," and "frugal"--the word "hallow'd" is incongruous in the context. Its obvious meaning, of course, is "hoarded," and the word serves as an ironical comment on the equating of God and Mammon. Old Politicians are presented by means of the plain, straightforward method. The opening sentence declares the intention, and nothing is held back:

Old Politicians chew on wisdoms past,
And totter on in bus'ness to the last;

And this is the irony of it, that old politicians, experienced in the past, should have wisdom to guide others into the future, but instead they spend their last years reliving what is behind them. Pope puts this succinctly in the last couplet:

As weak, as earnest, and as gravely out,
As sober Lanesb'row dancing in the gout.
(ll. 248-251)

The three short sketches of Scoto, Patritio, and Catus adopt the plain method with an ironic revelation at the end. Scoto, Pope tells us,

is a smug fellow, in high optimism at the state of the nation and the world until his own fortunes change, and then his opinions change just as radically. Patritio seems all praiseworthy: he is a wise thinker, a virtuous man, with a "hand unstain'd" and an "uncorrupt'd heart." More than a patriot he is an internationalist since his sympathies extend beyond his own country to Europe. With so much of real worth to be proud of, his pride is in his prowess at gaming--at cards, at horse racing, at betting. Cadius is "ever moral, ever grave." Completely uncontaminated, he "Thinks who endures a knave, is next a knave" (l. 137). But his weakness is his stomach--where it is concerned he loses his high ideals, and prefers a "Rogue with Ven'son to a Saint without."

The Free-thinker is like him in that he, too, is not what he professes to be. His portrait is a tiny capsule in irony. Obviously, like all free-thinkers in all ages, he is eternally expounding his views, expounding on the various freedoms. Suddenly he becomes completely dumb. Maybe, says Pope snidely, he changed his philosophy, or perhaps a Minister frowned.

The only full-dress portrait in the epistle, that of Wharton, is a combination of biography and personality-analysis resembling the manner in which Balaam is characterized. Rogers has noted that the portrait of Wharton begins with dispassionate objectivity and ends with a series of scornful epithets describing him as a "Fool," a "Tyrant,"

and a "Rebel."⁴ The stance of the speaker at the beginning is one of detachment, weighing the qualities of Wharton, good against bad. He is the "scorn and Wonder of our days," and in this short comment is caught the whole irony of his life. He is born with the gifts that can win praise even from the wise, but not content with that he must also have approbation from the foolish and contemptible. Everything about him is a contradiction:

His Passion still, to covet gen'ral praise,
 His Life, to forfeit it a thousand ways;
 A constant Bounty which no friend has made;
 An angel Tongue, which no man can persuade;
 A Fool, with more of Wit than half mankind,
 Too quick for Thought, for Action too refin'd:
 (ll. 196-201)

All of his natural gifts are wasted because he lacks the discrimination to put them to proper use. Having much wit, he never takes the trouble to think deeply, and he is too affectedly elegant for action. Capable of so much, he accomplishes nothing. The most damning criticism is in "A constant Bounty which no friend has made." Possessed of "each gift of nature and of art," he lacks the one essential quality of humanity, the warmth of an honest heart, and thus has not the friendship of any man. When he dies a "sad out-cast of each church and state," the word "state" entails more than just a country--it includes the whole state of men.

He has to excel in everything, virtue or vice, entirely without discrimination:

Shall parts so various aim at nothing new?
 He'll shine a Tully and a Wilmot too.
 Then turns repentant, and his God adores
 With the same spirit that he drinks and whores;
 Enough if all around him but admire,
 And now the Punk applaud, and now the Fryer.

(ll. 186-191)

It is a fine irony that he adores his God with the same enthusiasm that he indulges in drunkenness and lechery. One hardly expects to find devotion to God equated with submission to vice. Having lost his ability to discriminate, he is actually nothing.

As the portrait goes on, Pope gathers force. In his personal life Wharton is utterly contemptible, even as he is in public and political life:

A Tyrant to the wife his heart approves;
 A Rebel to the very King he loves;
 He dies, sad out-cast of each church and state,
 And (harder still) flagitious, yet not great!

(ll. 202-205)

Both of the accusations are grounded on fact. His heart had certainly approved his first wife, Martha Holmes, since he married her against his father's wishes and in spite of her social inferiority.⁵ That he treated her badly was well-known, alternately doting on her and cruelly neglecting her. And he had in fact been traitor to his king. The statement "The very King he loves," however, is overtly ironical--since he had turned traitor first to George, then to the Pretender, then to George again, it is almost impossible to determine which king he loves. It is equally easy to see he was loyal to none.

The irony of his life is that his whole desire has been for praise, but he has deserved by his actions only censure. He has excelled only in vice, and yet has shunned contempt. The force, however, is less in the paradox than in Wharton's self-contradiction. With "parts so various," he dies, infamous but not famous, and the irony is that of a wasted life where there was so much promise.

In Pope's portrayal of the Duke of Wharton, as in the shorter portraits of the characters caught at the significant moment of death, the accent has been on the Ruling Passion. But inconsistencies are shown as well, certainly in Wharton, and definitely in portraits of Catius and Scoto. In the second of the epistles, "To a Lady," it is the inconsistencies of human nature that are emphasized. Here, as becomes an age that considered women slighter creatures than men, it is entirely appropriate that Pope should characterize them. And in his characterization of women, Pope moves from the slightest to the more profound, from the least harmful to the vicious, and finally to the ideal in womanhood.

The first of the portraits, the shorter ones, depict inconsistency but relative harmlessness. Silia's portrait is contradictory, but charged with double meaning and innuendo. She is Christ-like, the "Frail one's advocate, the Weak one's friend," but she can be metamorphosed in the wink of an eye into a raging shrew--over a blemish. The double edge to the meaning of the passage just quoted is also ironic: one can be

frail both physically and morally, and the weak in virtue could be already fallen. This interpretation of "weak" is reinforced in the following line, "To her, Calista prov'd her conduct nice": Callisto is the nymph in classical mythology whose nice conduct, her pregnancy by Zeus, was "proved" to her companion while bathing.

The name Papillia is also ironically appropriate. The woman is, like the butterfly from which she gets her name, a changeling, and she flutters from one longing to another, from pleasure to displeasure, as the butterfly does from place to place:

Papillia, wedded to her doating spark,
Sighs for the shades--"How charming is a Park!"
A Park is purchas'd, but the Fair he sees
All bath'd in tears--"Oh odious, odious Trees!"
(ll. 37-40)

Like Papillia, Rufa is inconsistent, but perhaps less innocently so. Her pretensions to intellectuality smack of hypocrisy, though of relatively harmless hypocrisy. Not so with Sappho. The portrait of Sappho is more studied and purposeful in its ugliness:

Rufa, whose eye quick-glancing o'er the Park,
Attracts each light gay meteor of a Spark,
Agrees as ill with Rufa studying Locke,
As Sappho's diamonds with her dirty smock,
Or Sappho at her toilet's greazy task,
With Sappho fragrant at an evening Mask:
So morning Insects that in muck begun,
Shine, buzz, and fly-blow in the setting-sun.
(ll. 21-28)

The insistence in the portrait is not on Sappho's irrationality, nor on her hypocrisy, but on her foulness and moral corruption. Papillia is

exasperating, yet somewhat amusing; Rufa is silly and pretentious, yet quite harmless; but Sappho is disgusting in the contradiction of her slovenliness and sparkle, and pernicious in her filth and depravity. The whole is an attack, and yet neatly introduced as if Pope were about to make a simple comparison. The use of the mock-epic simile in the context of ugly images and harsh sounds is a subtle irony.

The irony in the portrait of Calypso is that of damning with faint praise:

Less Wit than Mimic, more a Wit than wise. (l. 48)

Here Pope's method is to assume a scale of comparison with gradations from mimic to wit, and finally from wit to wisdom. The assumption is that the lady's wisdom must be infinitesimally small since it is at the bottom of the scale: Calypso, like the other women, is "fine by defect." Her character is peculiarly negative since she "Aw'd without Virtue, without Beauty charm'd" (l. 46), and "Was just not ugly, and was just not mad" (l. 50). In spite of this, like the sea-nymph for whom she is named and who detained Odysseus on the island Ogygia for seven years, "Her tongue bewitch'd as odly as her Eyes" (l. 47). It seems to be in her lack of virtue, deplorable as it is, that she stirs the passions. In the portraits, as in the prelude, ladies, "like variegated Tulips," show their charms in contrasting characters whose only constancy appears to be their indifference to morality.

As the poem advances into the longer portraits, inconsistency gives way to complexity, and Pope's irony becomes less mocking and more biting:

Narcissa's nature, tolerably mild,
 To make a wash, would hardly stew a child;
 Has ev'n been prov'd to grant a Lover's pray'r,
 And paid a Tradesman once to make him stare,
 Gave alms at Easter, in a Christian trim,
 And made a Widow happy, for a whim.
 Why then declare Good-nature is her scorn,
 When 'tis by that alone she can be born?
 Why pique all mortals, yet affect a name?
 A Fool to Pleasure, yet a slave to Fame:
 Now deep in Taylor and the Book of Martyrs,
 Now drinking citron with his Grace and Chartres.
 Now Conscience chills her, and now Passion burns:
 And Atheism and Religion take their turns;
 A very Heathen in the carnal part,
 Yet still a sad, good Christian at her heart.

(ll. 53-67)

By affecting to accept Narcissa's values, Pope reveals how vicious they are. The ^{m. S. 53-67}indirection of "tolerably mild" and the horrible suggestion of stewing down a child to provide fat for making soap are utterly incongruous. The studied absence of emotion in the face of this magnanimous forbearance is, of course, very successful irony. Narcissa has been known to pay a tradesman (once), has given alms at Easter (when she happened to feel like a Christian), and has made a widow happy (for a whim). It is not, then, a habit with her to be charitable. All of this has sounded like praise until we realize that each of her acts of charity has happened only once. Her charity to her lover--she has been proved to grant his prayer--is certainly open to question since it reflects on her morals, as "prov'd" and

"Lover" both suggest. Pope takes away from her more than he gives, but he does it under the guise of praise. The further contradictions of the woman are shown in various forms of irony: the disharmony between reading Taylor and the Book of Martyrs, two passionately religious books, and carousing with two of the most notorious scoundrels of the time, Wharton and Charteris; and the inconsistency of being burned by passion and chilled by conscience. The suggestion of a child's game in "take their turns" while discussing her acceptance of such very serious and adult doctrines as atheism and religion is a further incongruity. Pope has so many kinds of irony going at the same time that it is virtually impossible to separate them:

A very Heathen in the carnal part,
Yet still a sad, good Christian at her heart.

A heathen in the flesh, she is still a Christian at heart. Surely this is praise, we think; at least she is not all bad. But "sad" is a very ambivalent word: an obsolete meaning is "steadfast," a common meaning in Pope's time was "deplorably bad,"⁶ and there is still "wearied, sated," and, of course, "unhappy." To be a sad, good Christian can hardly be looked upon as a sober virtue. Ostensible praise here is actual damnation, a sure method of irony. "Why pique all mortals, yet affect a name?" According to Greek legend, Narcissus was a beautiful youth who fell in love with his own reflection in the water, pined away, and was metamorphosed into a flower. This

play on names and metamorphosis which reappears often in the epistles, is at work in the portrait of Narcissa: her nature is one of continual change, but she is far from being a delicate flower. And the contradictions in her nature are so many that she seems like two women, a split personality.

There is some disagreement whether the section on Philoméde is meant to describe one or two persons, whether Sin is the first character or just another name for Philoméde. Boyce quotes John Wilson Croker, accepting his view that two women are portrayed.⁷ What seems to disturb these critics is that Philoméde is a drunken, lustful, haughty peeress, pretending to intellectual interests, but caring little what the world thinks of her. Now, Boyce and Croker ask, if she is so indifferent to public opinion, why does she lecture mankind on refined taste and delicacy? I think their argument would amuse Pope--because she is inconsistent: that is the answer. Robert W. Rogers more reasonably argues that Philoméde is a personification of lust on an almost heroic scale,⁸ until at the conclusion the tendency of the description is revealed: like Helluo, who lectured his host on the art of good eating and yet practised none at home, Philoméde talks about social delicacy and the art of love and practises neither. I think it is because Boyce and Croker have missed the irony that they are disturbed with the incongruities.

As Helluo, late Dictator of the Feast,
 The Nose of Hautgout, and the Tip of Taste,
 Critick'd your wine, and analyz'd your meat,
 Yet on plain Pudding deign'd at-home to eat;
 So Philomedé, lect'ring all mankind
 On the soft Passion, and the Taste refin'd,
 Th' Address, the Delicacy--stoops at once,
 And makes her hearty meal upon a Dunce.

(ll. 79-86)

The mock-epic simile increases the irony of the passage, as does the comic metaphor, "makes her hearty meal upon a Dunce"--epic heroes, including the angels in Paradise Lost, always make hearty meals. The bathos of this ending, following the fine wording immediately before, "soft Passion" and "the Taste refin'd," comes like a hammer blow.

One of the devices by which Pope achieves irony in this portrait is the use of the low word, as Tillotson says, laying together strange bedfellows:⁹

See Sin in State, majestically drunk,
 Proud as a Peeress, prouder as a Punk.

(ll. 69-70)

Here Pope uses "as" to yoke together violently the dignity of title with the shabbiness of degradation, and ironically makes the latter a source of greater pride. The entire couplet links incongruously words connoting nobility and dignity--"proud," "prouder," "State," and "majestically"--with other words that connote degradation and disgust--"sin" and "punk." The splendid march of the verse and the majesty of most of the language combine with the bathetic monosyllables ending

the lines to give an ironically humorous effect.

Chaste to her Husband, frank to all beside,
 A teeming Mistress, but a barren Bride.
 What then? let Blood and Body bear the fault,
 Her Head's untouch'd, that noble Seat of Thought.
 (ll. 71-74)

Philomedé blames her promiscuity on her body and the passions of the blood, as if her mind has no government over them. "That noble Seat of Thought" is an obvious pun, placing two parts of the body, the head and seat, in sharp juxtaposition to each other, and using "seat" also as in "the seat of learning." In her inconsistency Philomedé is more sophisticated and dishonest than Narcissa: hypocritically lecturing on delicacy and refined taste, she changes nothing but fashions in her immorality, since she has an insatiable appetite for men of all stations, Caesar and Charlemagne, Charles and Tall-boy, and even sins with poets "thro' pure Love of Wit." This last quotation is delicate irony: the head is involved after all, and "pure" love is a brilliant touch.

Pope is the observer, neither railing nor throwing epithets, but always moving inward on his characters. Watching Flavia, he knows her wise wretchedness and her impotence of mind with all her wit; he sees the irony and futility of her wasted intelligence. She is a complete contradiction: she is wearied of the unwelcome attentions of a loving spouse, and jealous of the fickleness of an illicit lover; she has too much sense to have religion, and too much thought to have common

sense. Asking the stars for the blessing to "live while we live," she considers self-destruction at the same time; fearful of the transience of time, she is at the same moment wearied of life. The parallel construction at the end of the portrait builds up to a crescendo which is dashed down to nothing in the final couplet:

Wise Wretch! with Pleasures too refin'd to please,
 With too much Spirit to be e'er at ease,
 With too much Quickness ever to be taught,
 With too much Thinking to have common Thought:
 Who purchase Pain with all that Joy can give,
 And die of nothing but a Rage to live.

(ll. 95-100)

Often, as Pope gathers force for a final blow, he pounds out a pattern of similarly constructed lines and then seems to shatter the effect at the end. In the caricature of Flavia, he accepts a point of view, that of Flavia as a wit, and carries it to a ridiculous extreme which forces the reader to recognize the irony.

Following the Flavia portrait are those again, as at the beginning of the poem, of the minor characters, like the description of the lesser chiefs in the Iliad. Each of these women is noted for her ironic constancy: one who laughs at Hell, but finds it "charming" if there is no such place; one who knows her faults and admits them, but is too "honest" to mend; one who is more meek yet more obstinate than an ass; and one whose life "the Church and Scandal share, /For ever in a Passion, or a Pray'r." In each case the constancy is that of contradiction.

But, it seems, there is no contradiction in Cloe's character: she "was form'd without a spot." And Pope's answer is ironic:

Nature in her then err'd not, but forgot. (l. 158)

And Nature forgot, of course, a heart! Her name, therefore, is ironically appropriate--Chloe in pastoral literature was a beloved maiden, and love is the one thing of which Cloe is incapable. Her good breeding keeps her attentive to the decencies, but she has "never, never reach'd one gen'rous Thought."

Virtue she finds too painful an endeavour,
Content to dwell in Decencies for ever.
So very reasonable, so unmov'd,
As never yet to love, or to be lov'd.
She, while her Lover pants upon her breast,
Can mark the figures on an Indian chest;
And when she sees her Friend in deep despair,
Observes how much a Chintz exceeds Mohair.

(ll. 163-170)

She is absorbed with the material things in life--the figures on an Indian chest, the superiority of chintz over mohair--and unconscious of the lover in the throes of passion or the friend in the depths of despair. She is not virtuous, as she is obviously intimate with her lover who "pants on her breast"; she is merely uninterested. She does no harm, slanders no one, and tells no secrets; but she does not care how many of her "Dears" suffer, probably does not even listen to their secrets, and would not know if they were alive or dead unless she had her footman remind her. Her Ruling Passion is her egocentric absorption. Outwardly, she is perfect; inwardly, she is

nothing because she lacks the "creative spontaneity that raises rectitude to virtue."¹⁰ Here again is the contrast between the outward and the inward person essential to Socratic irony.

There is not the same contradiction in the characterization of Atossa. In her, Pope presents a picture of a creature who in the gargantuan violence of her passions, "finds all her life one warfare upon earth," and who "From loveless youth to unrespected age, /No Passion gratify'd except her Rage" (ll. 125-126). He repeatedly stresses this theme with such words as "Fury," "Hate," "Violence," "Revenge," "Hell," "curse," and "death." His diction is harsh and brutal, marked throughout by vigorous, pejorative words--"Knaves," "Fools," "Cheat"--which echo Atossa's vehement and unreasoned judgments:

Shines in exposing Knaves, and painting Fools,
 Yet is, whate'er she hates and ridicules,
 No Thought advances, but her Eddy Brain
 Whisks it about, and down it goes again.
 Full sixty years the World has been her Trade,
 The wisest Fool much Time has ever made.
 From loveless youth to unrespect'd age,
 No Passion gratify'd except her Rage.
 So much the Fury still out-ran the Wit,
 The Pleasure miss'd her, and the Scandal hit.
 Who breaks with her, provokes Revenge from Hell,
 But he's a bolder man who dares be well:
 Her ev'ry turn with Violence pursu'd,
 Nor more a storm her Hate than Gratitude.
 To that each Passion turns, or soon or late;
 Love, if it makes her yield, must make her hate:
 Superiors? death! and Equals? what a curse!
 But an Inferior not dependent? worse.
 Offend her, and she knows not to forgive;
 Oblige her, and she'll hate you while you live.

(ll. 119-138)

It is a small consolation, surely, to be the "wisest Fool much Time has ever made." And the granting of wisdom to the fool becomes less a compliment a few lines later when we find that the fury of Atossa much out-ran the wit. The fury and hate of the woman are so terrible that no man dare be her enemy and yet none dare be her friend. The contradictions of Atossa are mirrored in the imagery and echoed in the language. In the couplet, "No Thought advances, but her Eddy Brain/Whisks it about, and down it goes again," the sudden, changing motion of the lines and the language suggest the wild whirls of her mind; and the words which follow--"out-ran," "hit," "miss'd," and "storm"--are suggestive of the tempest that rages in her brain. Consistent only in her violence, she ends her life in the misery of sterility, both physical and mental. And this is the irony: that so much force and vitality should go to no use. In creating Atossa, Pope has done what T. S. Eliot has accused him of being unable to do: he has created a portrait which, far from being a miniature, is larger and more terrible than life itself. In fact, again, the whole portrait exemplifies the irony of over-damnation.

As usual, though, Pope is doing several things at once. Within the sketch of Atossa is the irony of the paradox of sterility and fertility:

Childless with all her Children, wants an heir. (l. 148)

And a further paradox:

The wisest Fool much Time has ever made. (l. 124)

As well as:

Atossa, curs'd with ev'ry grant'd pray'r. (l. 147)

There is further subtle irony in the lines, "Then the Bust/And Temple rise--then fall again to dust" (ll. 139-140). Atossa, as well as the bust that she has had erected and then ignored, is subject to the exigencies of time, and although she is isolated by her hate from every other reality, there is one she cannot escape--death.

The last individual portrait is that of the Queen. Here, finally, is praise indeed it appears:

One certain Portrait may (I grant) be seen,
Which Heav'n has varnish'd out, and made a Queen:
The same for ever! and describ'd by all
With Truth and Goodness, as with Crown and Ball:
Poets heap Virtues, Painters Gems at will,
And show their zeal, and hide their want of skill.
(ll. 181-186)

But what does Pope really say? The same forever may be good or bad. It has the sound of high praise, and the words which follow all have good connotations--"Truth," "Goodness," and "virtue." But the Queen is described by all "with" truth and goodness, not "as" truth and goodness. Pope heaps virtues "at will" just as painters do gems; but this heaping in each case is done because of the zeal of the artist, not because the virtues or gems are actually present. A later couplet makes it plain that Pope is using the blame-by-praise method of the ironist:

That Robe of Quality so struts and swells,
 None can see what Parts of Nature it conceals.
 (ll. 189-190)

Indeed, "struts" and "swells" are very low words to use in describing royalty. Artists, Pope says, delight in drawing the "Naked," the "parts of Nature" under the robe of quality; and this is precisely what the ironist does--he strips the object of its pretenses.

After the dissection of human depravity in the individual portraits, we have the bleak lines on a "whole Sex of Queens." Once again Pope strikes a pastoral note which contrasts oddly with its theme, the vanity of human wishes:

Pleasures the sex, as children Birds, pursue,
 Still out of reach, yet never out of view.
 (ll. 231-232)

There is a faint breath of underlying melancholy in the pictures of the "Beauties," grown old and friendless, dreading to be alone, still seeking after pleasures, and yet

Sure, if they catch, to spoil the Toy at most,
 To covet flying, and regret when lost.
 (ll. 233-234)

In the fate of these women there is a strange pathos, but pathos is one of the deepest layers in Pope's irony.

The final harsh picture of these "Veterans" of the female sex, with its almost perfect balance, symmetry, and compression, makes an excellent contrast with the portrait of Martha Blount, to whom the epistle is addressed. The irony here is implied by the similar con-

struction. By parodying what he has already said about his inferior characters, Pope makes stronger the praise of his ideal. Compare

To raise the Thought, and touch the Heart be thine!
(l. 250)

against

To Toast our wants and wishes is her way,
(l. 88)

and

Charms by accepting, by submitting sways,
(l. 263)

against

Aw'd without Virtue, without Beauty charm'd.
(l. 46)

He concludes the poem with a final agreeable irony, a gentle mockery of even the ideal in womanhood: like the other, lesser characters, she, too, is a "Contradiction still." Pope is ironically consistent in showing that inconsistency is not confined to the vicious and foolish women. It is also present in the ideal. A less obvious contradiction is to be remarked in her:

She, who ne'er answers till a Husband cools,
Or, if she rules him, never shows she rules;
Charms by accepting, by submitting sways,
Yet has her humour most, when she obeys.
(ll. 261-264)

The only fixed passions, the love of pleasure and of sway, are present even in her. And in his compliment to the lady, after praising her temper, her cheerfulness, her forbearance, her gentleness and obedience, Pope

continues:

Spleen, Vapours, or Smallpox, above them all,
And Mistress of herself, tho' China fall.
(ll. 267-268)

This mention of the serious and the comic in the same breath serves to enhance the irony in Pope. How is one to take such a statement? It is faint praise, surely, that the Lady is not utterly devastated by the fall of a china cup--yet the rest of the compliment is seriously intended. The double meaning here could be, of course, the fall of an empire, which in any case would not be likely to affect the Lady's equilibrium. It is more likely, however, in view of Addison's remark that none of his fair readers were philosophers enough to keep their tempers at the fall of a china cup (The Lover, 18 March 1714), and a similar reference in The Rape of the Lock (ll. 157-160), that the first interpretation is the correct one. Because double meaning is a major device of irony, perhaps both meanings are intended.

Considering what Pope has already had to say in the portraits, there is an overt irony in the term "Heav'n's last best work" applied to women; and there is subtle irony in the phrase also: it is reminiscent of one of the great epics, Paradise Lost, in which Adam speaks in the same way of Eve. Eve may have been Heaven's last best work, but Pope's women have come a long way since the fall.

FOOTNOTES

Chapter III

¹ From Specimens of Table Talk of Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1851), p. 192; quoted here from Boyce, Character Sketches in Pope's Poems, p. 87.

² "Wit and Poetry and Pope," Eighteenth Century English Literature: Essays Presented to George Sherburn (New York, 1959), p. 35.

³ As, for instance, in the "Epilogue to the Satires," II, l. 18, and "The Dunciad," iv, l. 496.

⁴ The Major Satires of Alexander Pope, p. 61.

⁵ From the notes in the Twickenham Edition, III, ii, pp. 30-31.

⁶ In Gay's The Beggar's Opera, for instance, Air VII, Scene VI, "Our Polly is a sad slut."

⁷ Discussed in the Character Sketches, Appendix B, p. 135

⁸ Major Satires, p. 62.

⁹ On the Poetry of Pope, p. 150.

¹⁰ Maynard Mack, "On Reading Pope," College English, VII (1946), p. 273.

CHAPTER IV

THE IRONIES IN THE PORTRAITS:

BAD POETS AND CRITICS

Alarmed by the political corruption and social and moral disintegration of English society, Pope is convinced that it is the responsibility of writers to expose the viciousness and folly which have brought about this deplorable state of affairs. And because he thinks that writers are failing in this duty, he attacks them in the "Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot." That is why this epistle is what Bonamy Dobrée calls it, Pope's most profound moral essay. In all of the epistles under discussion, Pope's interest is largely with moral issues. In the epistles to Cobham and Martha Blount, he is concerned with man's wasted potentialities for good; in the epistles to Bathurst and Burlington, he is attacking man's failure to do some real good with his wealth; but in the "Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot" he is dealing with the failure of men of letters to rise above merely selfish interests--the desire for position and prestige and power--to rise above slander, and envy, and jealousy, and implicitly to rise to virtue and usefulness to the state.

Often, as Maynard Mack remarks, the rhetorically innocent are indignant with the character Pope gives himself in the "Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot."¹ They accuse him of portraying himself not as he really is but as the pleasant, tolerant, virtuous man he would like the world to think him. But they are missing the point. His portrait has the purpose of establishing an authoritative persona: he must make his audience accept him as a good and tolerant man who is challenging the vicious and foolish actions of those who deserve his censure. And through this depiction of his own character, he ridicules and exposes the flatterers and the slanderers, the ungenerous and the vicious. It is the character of Pope that is the centre of the poem; from his position he reaches out to describe the ineffectual poets, the bad critics, the vain patrons, and the jealous men of influence.

The various roles that Pope plays throughout the "Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot" make for irony in several different ways.² In the first role, Pope is the plain, good man, humble and unassuming:

Not Fortune's Worshipper, nor Fashion's Fool,
 Not Lucre's Madman, nor Ambition's Tool,
 Not proud, nor servile, be one Poet's praise
 That, if he pleas'd, he pleas'd by manly ways;
 That Flatt'ry, ev'n to Kings, he held a shame,
 And thought a Lye in Verse or Prose the same:
 That not in Fancy's Maze he wander'd long,
 But stoop'd to Truth, and moraliz'd his song.

(ll. 335-341)

All this seems a straightforward assessment of his own character as he sees it. The ironic implication is, of course, that he has not any of the loathsome characteristics listed, but that others have. The irony is not always so much in what Pope says about others, as in what he implies.

There are several verbal ironies as well: a small one in flattery "ev'n to Kings," as if flattery were less despicable if its object were great. Of course, he implies, it would be more rewarding. And there is a larger irony in "thought a Lye in Verse or Prose the same." If lying is wrong, it is a sober fact, not a matter of opinion, that a lie is wrong regardless of the form it takes. And again as Pope states that he "thought" lying wrong everywhere, he is hinting that others do not. The irony blossoms out fully in the last line of the passage in "stoop'd to Truth." Truth, since pagan times, has been one of the prime virtues, associated with justice. One may aspire to truth, but one does not stoop. Implicit in this is a criticism of a civilization in which the values are so distorted that truth is a poor subject for poetry, and on the perversion of a society in which truth is not the accepted norm.

Pope continues the characterization of himself as tolerant of the malice and slander and viciousness of his enemies, and of the insincerity and hypocrisy and envy of some who purport to be his friends. Here his use of the third person adds impersonality to his

role, lets him stand aside and appear somewhat detached:

That not for Fame, but Virtue's better end,
 He stood the furious Foe, the timid Friend,
 The damning Critic, half-approving Wit.
 The Coxcomb hit, or fearing to be hit;
 Laugh'd at the loss of Friends he never had,
 The dull, the proud, the wicked, and the mad;
 (ll. 342-347)

And the detachment is still there, even when he writes in the first person:

Yet then did Gildon draw his venal quill;
 I wished the man a dinner, and sate still:
 Yet then did Dennis rave in furious fret;
 I never answer'd, I was not in debt:
 If want provok'd, or madness made them print,
 I wag'd no war with Bedlam or the Mint.
 (ll. 151-156)

The unexpected turn in the second line of each couplet sounds quite innocuous, but actually contains cutting irony. In the first couplet, the attention goes back to the word "venal." Gildon is ready to sell his services unscrupulously, and Pope pretends to assume that he must then be starving. Similarly with Dennis, with the added suggestion of petty childishness in "furious fret." And in the last couplet Pope equates madness with need in compelling these men to print poetry, neither likely to be conducive to inspired writing. "Want," of course, is a very ambiguous word with Pope--it can mean "need" here or it can mean "lack." The men may be provoked with Pope for having the talent they lack. The sense of the whole passage is to make his enemies seem mean and little, and to show his superiority over them, not only as a poet but as a man. He is the man of

peace, goaded finally into satire by the actions of fools and knaves.

He is a man, too, who observes the natural pieties, honoring his father and mother, and caring for the latter in her last years:

Me, let the tender Office long engage
To rock the Cradle of reposing Age,
With lenient Arts extend a Mother's breath,
Make Langour smile, and smooth the Bed of Death,
(ll. 408-411)

And he shows obedience to his father while he lived:

I left no Calling for this idle trade,
No Duty broke, no Father dis-obey'd.
(ll. 129-130)

And the "no Father dis-obey'd" is an oblique slap at James Moore Smythe, Arthur's "giddy son," who disappointed his father and neglected his calling to write his poor verses. Each seemingly harmless commendation of Pope's own virtues has in it an implicit reference to some one who lacks that virtue. Pope is not only an obedient son, but also a man of enduring friendships, claiming patronage and encouragement from the great in a more golden age for poetry--from Walsh, Garth, Congreve, Rochester, Sheffield, and St. John. In that age, ability was the essential requisite for patronage; in this, flattery is the necessary degradation.

But Pope, the man of integrity, laughs to scorn the men who come to flatter him. Unlike Bufo who thrives on it, he ridicules the homage paid to him, recognizing the insincerity and self-interest that prompt it:

One dedicates, in high Heroic prose,
 And ridicules beyond a hundred foes;
 One from all Grubstreet will my name defend,
 And, more abusive, calls himself my friend,
 This prints my Letters, that expects a Bribe,
 And others roar aloud, 'Subscribe, subscribe.'
 (ll. 109-114)

They are not only flatterers and poor poets, they are unintentional satirists as well. A dedication written in heroic prose should be a compliment. Pope's answer to his most abject flatterers continues in lines of superb humor:

There are, who to my Person pay their court,
 I cough like Horace, and tho' lean, am short,
 Ammon's great Son one shoulder had too high,
 Such Ovid's nose, and 'Sir! you have an Eye--'
 Go on, obliging Creatures, make me see
 All that disgrac'd my Betters, met in me.
 (ll. 115-120)

Small comfort, surely, to learn that the physical deficiencies of the great are met in his body. He appears though to accept the heroic comparisons and then ironically carries them to a ridiculous conclusion:

Say for my comfort, languishing in bed,
 'Just so immortal Maro held his head:
 And when I die, be sure to let me know
 Great Homer dy'd three thousand years ago.
 (ll. 121-124)

The contrary use of "comfort," the obsequious "Sir," and the use of the word "obliging," hardly applicable to those who draw attention to all the wretchedness of his physical condition, are overtly ironical.

Thus Pope depicts himself as the simple, unassuming man of persistent loyalties, one who loves best the language of the heart. But he gives himself another side, too, that of the ingénu, the person standing in wide-eyed wonder at his own involvement in literary affairs:

Why did I write? what sin to me unknown
Dipt me in Ink, my parents', or my own?
(ll. 125-126)

The irony here is that of the plain, guileless, humble man who pretends not to understand.

As yet a Child, nor yet a Fool to Fame,
I lisp'd in Numbers, for the Numbers came.
(ll. 127-128)

And that he does not mean what he says is apparent to anyone who takes the trouble to look at his poetry. Even his earliest poetry is carefully meditated and scrupulously correct. He continues to deprecate himself:

Friend to my Life (which did not you prolong,
The World had wanted many an idle Song)
(ll. 26-27)

Soft were my Numbers, who could take offence
While pure Description held the place of Sense?
Like gentle Fanny's was my flow'ry Theme,
A painted Mistress, or a purling Stream.
(ll. 147-150)

Yet soft by Nature, more a Dupe than Wit,
Sappho can tell you how this Man was Bit,
 This dreaded Sat'rist Dennis will confess
 Foe to his Pride, but Friend to his Distress:
 So humble, he has knock'd at Tibbald's door,
 Has drunk with Cibber, nay has rym'd for Moor.
 Full ten years slander'd, did he once reply?
 Three thousand Suns went down on Welsted's Lye:
 To please a Mistress, One aspers'd his life;
 He lash'd him not, but let her be his Wife:
 Let Budgel charge low Grubstreet on his quill,
 And write whate'er he pleas'd, except his Will;
 Let the Two Curls of Town and Court, abuse
 His Father, Mother, Body, Soul, and Muse.

(ll. 368-381)

Throughout these passages Pope's irony is that of manner, evident in his self-abnegation, his gravity, and his apparent tolerance. One can easily see that this "song" is not idle, and that Pope is certainly not "more Dupe than Wit." This irony is rather like the Chaucerian variety which insists always that the narrator is a simple, harmless, not-too-bright person, agreeable to everyone. Pope is probably sincere in what he has to say about his early poems, for in later years he scorned his pastorals and "flow'ry" themes. But "gentle Fanny" is again an ironical reference to the effeminate Lord Hervey, and is also reminiscent of Pope's satire on "The Three Gentle Shepherds," written in 1726. That Hervey was anything but gentle, his attacks on Pope attest. There is also a deft little jab at Addison in "A painted Mistress or a purling Stream," and in case we miss it, Pope points out in a footnote that this is a "Verse of Mr. Addison."

Pope is playing two roles in the last passage quoted, not only the ingénu but also the good man tolerant of many wrongs. As he tells how tolerant he has been he makes it very clear that the men he lists have given him much cause for intolerance. There is a good deal of satire in these lines: Budgell had almost certainly forged Tindal's will, excluding the proper heir and obtaining most of the estate himself, but unless one knows this, Budgell's writing a will seems completely harmless. The same is true of Pope's having "rym'd for Moor." Moore Smythe had plagiarized some of Pope's unpublished verses for inclusion in his comedy The Rival Modes, 1727. Pope had then in fact rhymed for Moore, but not willingly. He is justifying himself, but his pretense at disinterested sincerity is ironical. In the self-justification he manages to cast aspersions on the morals of these men--on Windham for immorality, on Welsted for libel, on Moore for theft, and on Budgell for forgery. But this is done so unobtrusively that the whole seems only praise of his own magnanimity.

The third pose of Pope in the epistle is that of the public defender and hero, warding off his attackers and slanderers. He is at pains to point out that his manliness is in moral courage, in contrast to Sporus:

A Knave's a Knave, to me, in ev'ry State,
 Alike my scorn, if he succeed or fail,
Sporus at Court, or Japhet in a Jayl,
 A hireling Scribler, or a hireling Peer,
 Knight of the Post corrupt, or of the Shire,
 If on a Pillory, or near a Throne,
 He gain his Prince's Ear, or lose his own.
 (ll. 361-367)

But one of the beauties of Pope's irony is that he includes himself in the ironic vision. In this way, he makes his irony a criticism of life, not merely a criticism of other people. In giving himself the character of the common-sense, conventional man he acts as a foil to the various Alazons of society; but in making himself a comic substitute for the heroic figure, he gives his own character irony. The epistle begins with a comic picture of the unsuccessful poets' descent on Twickenham to seek favors from Pope. They descend like a swarm of insects, with "fire in each eye, and Papers in each hand." They besiege his fortress and he is the hero withstanding the invasion:

What Walls can guard me, or what Shades can hide?
 They pierce my Thickets, thro' my Grot they glide,
 By land, by water, they renew the charge,
 They stop the Chariot, and they board the Barge.
 No place is sacred, not the Church is free,
 Ev'n Sunday shines no Sabbath-day to me.
 (ll. 7-12)

But the invaders are really not very fearsome, and the fortress is only thickets and a grot, and the little hero is not very heroic. Unable to find a hiding-place, he appeals to his servant:

Shut, shut the door, good John! fatig'd I said,
 Tye up the knocker, say I'm sick, I'm dead.
 (ll. 1-2)

All this is comical exaggeration but it also shows that Pope is not taking himself very seriously as a hero. Even his anguish at his suitors' poor attempts at poetry is mock-anguish:

To laugh, were want of Goodness and of Grace,
 And to be grave, exceeds all Pow'r of Face.
 I sit with sad Civility, I read
 With honest anguish, and an aking head;
 And drop at last, but in unwilling ears,
 This saving counsel, 'Keep your Piece nine years.'
 (ll. 35-40)

Here the play on the words "Piece" and "saving" and the alliteration of adjective and substantive in "sad Civility" add to the general comic effect. "Saving counsel" suggests saving both the piece and the peace for nine years, which, in view of Pope's "honest" anguish and aching head, might be a good idea. But his desperation and martyrdom are also mockery:

A dire Dilemma! either way I'm sped,
 If Foes, they write, if Friends, they read me dead.
 Seiz'd and ty'd down to judge, how wretched I!
 Who can't be silent, and who will not lye.
 (ll. 31-34)

In the last two lines contemporary readers would immediately recall Oldfox gagging and tying the Widow to force her to listen to his verses.³ And the serious and comic meaning of the word "lye" adds to the mockery: Pope will speak out fearlessly and truthfully, and he will refuse to lie still to hear the verses.

From his vantage point of the little hero resisting invasion, Pope attacks those poetasters who come to him seeking favors: there is one whose "modest wishes" are truly anything but modest, since all he asks for is Pope's friendship, a prologue, and ten pounds. The sketch of Pitholeon is an ironic comment on the baseness of those who want a "place." Pope is to excuse libel now on the grounds that "he knew no better." And then, delightfully, comes the threat: if Pope refuses, Pitholeon will return to libel with the help of Curll, a master of the art; or he will "write a Journal, or he'll turn Divine." In the latter two cases he will be enabled to libel or slander from a safe position; and this is an oblique reference to the low ends for which those high offices are used. Next comes the Stranger with the *Virgin Tragedy*, the *Orphan Muse*:

Bless me! a Packet. -- "'Tis a stranger sues,
 "A *Virgin Tragedy*, an *Orphan Muse*."
 If I dislike it, "Furies, death and rage!"
 If I approve, "Commend it to the Stage."
 There (thank my Stars) my whole Commission ends,
 The Play'rs and I are, luckily, no friends.
 Fir'd that the House reject him, "'Sdeath I'll print it
 And shame the Fools--your Int'rest, Sir, with Lintot."
Lintot, dull rogue! will think your price too much.
 "Not Sir, if you revise it, and retouch."

(ll. 55-63)

The obsequious use of "Sir," both in the portrait of Pitholeon and, more pronounced, in that of the Stranger with a packet, is an ironical comment on the servility of these suitors. The Stranger is an even more

despicable character than Pitholeon, asking for Pope's influence with the theatre and with the editor Lintot, and finally his collaboration in dishonesty. Here Pope's giving him a "Virgin" tragedy or an "Orphan" muse, intended by him to stir emotions of tenderness and pity in his public, is a clever touch. Or, on the other hand, the suggestion in these words is that the play is very risqué, and meant to appeal to the rakish element in the audience.

Pope briefly sketches his other suitors:

Is there a Parson, much bemus'd in Beer,
A maudlin Poetess, a ryming Peer,
A Clerk, foredoom'd his Father's soul to cross,
Who pens a Stanza when he should engross?
Is there, who lock'd from Ink and Paper, scrawls
With desp'rate Charcoal round his darken'd walls?

(ll. 15-20)

In this amusing picture of the mad compulsion to write poetry, it is the unexpected word or phrase which makes for irony. One expects a parson to be rapt in religion, not bemused in beer; and "scrawl" and "foredoom'd," as well as the misplaced "desp'rate," modifying "Charcoal" rather than the man writing without ink or paper in the darkened room--all suggest a mindlessness behind the urge to poetry.

This same mindlessness is present in the sketch of Codrus:

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

(ll. 85-88)

The tone is appropriate for a story of heroic endurance, and the words chosen suggest heroic battles on a vast scale--"mighty," "convulsions," "hurl'd," "Pit," and "bursting World." Here Pope achieves irony by applying to the insensitive Codrus the noble lines of Addison's translation of Horace in which the resolved and steady man faces disaster unmoved (Ode III, iii, 7-8). The intrepid hero in this case, however, is facing the ruin of the pit, box, and gallery of the theatre, and the danger is only mocking laughter. The retention of Addison's word "crack," which Pope had already labeled as vulgar in Peri-Bathous, adds to the clash of tone and theme. The classical parody points up the perversion of literary culture of the Dunces, and the portrait as a whole derives its irony from the mock approval of Codrus for what he really is.

Pope attributes the poetic madness to the reappearance of the Dog-star in the sky, but there are those who place the blame on Pope himself, and that for more than just the writing of poetry. He is held responsible for sons' neglect of filial duties and wives' of matrimonial ones, and for the disappointment of fathers, and the cuckolding of husbands:

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.
(ll. 95-100)

Again Pope justifies himself:

Whom have I hurt? has Poet yet, or Peer,
 Lost the arch'd eye-brow, or Parnassian sneer?
 And has not Colly still his Lord, and Whore?
 His Butchers Henley, his Free-Masons Moor?
 Does not one Table Bavius still admit?
 Still to one Bishop Philips seem a Wit?
 (ll. 95-100)

All of this is made into strong argument in Pope's favor by means of the rhetorical question. Here indeed is elusive irony: Pope couches information detrimental to the characters of these persons in casual tones, making it sound insignificant. He uses this apparent vindication of himself as a new weapon with which to strike. Not one of the prerogatives or interests he leaves his victims with is admirable; or if there is danger of its being considered so, he allows them only one-- Bavius is still admitted to one table, Philips has still one admirer. The crowning irony is, of course, in equating the King, Colly's lord, with his whore.

From his central position within the poem, Pope strikes out at bad and vicious critics. The back-stabbing Fop is an example of the latter. The subjective analysis tells us just what kind of courage this man has: he attacks "fal'n Worth," and absent authors, and "Beauty in distress." Professing friendship, he reads a poet with a "Lust to mis-apply, /Make Satire a Lampoon, and Fiction, Lye." Then Pope speaks out vigorously:

A Lash like mine no honest man shall dread,
But all such babling blockheads in his stead.

(ll. ~~159-160~~)
303-304)

If, he says, a sober critic censured his work, he benefited by listening, but the Bentleys and the Theobalds are another matter:

Pains, reading, study, are their just pretence,
And all they want is spirit, taste, and sense.

(ll. 159-160)

Again it is in a word or phrase that Pope introduces irony. His very casual "all they want" sounds as if want of spirit, taste, and sense were not a very serious deficiency, yet what more can they lack as critics? Speaking of their acquiring fame by editing the great masters, Pope's wit is more brutal than usual:

Pretty! in Amber to observe the forms
Of hairs, or straws, or dirt, or grubs, or worms;
The things, we know, are neither rich nor rare,
But wonder how the Devil they got there?

(ll. 169-172)

Here the repetition of "or" and the slowness of the second line draw attention to the words he is using to describe these men, all words that are far from complimentary, as is "thing" in the last couplet. The descent to the slangy tone in the last line is an implied comment on their worth: Pope is fitting his language to his subject. The wit becomes less brutal and more incisive:

Yet ne'r one sprig of Laurel grac'd these ribalds,
From slashing Bentley down to pidling Tibalds.

(ll. 163-164)

In this couplet the epithets are extremely cutting, the word "sprig" suggests the pettiness of these critics, and the rhyme is used to biting advantage. It is bad enough to be called a ribald, but to have one's name rhymed with it!

Finally Pope attacks bad poets. For those who are simply a nuisance, for the unsuccessful, debt-ridden poet who has the happy misfortune of arriving at Twickenham at the right time to share Pope's meal, he uses gentle mockery:

Then from the Mint walks forth the Man of Ryme,
Happy! to catch me, just at Dinner-time.
(ll. 13-14)

And his raillery is similarly gentle for the poet who cannot afford to keep his piece nine years:

Nine years! cries he, who high in Drury-lane
Lull'd by soft Zephyrs thro' the broken Pane,
Rymes e're he wakes, and prints before Term ends,
Oblig'd by hunger and Request of friends.
(ll. 41-44)

The rhyming before he wakes sounds as if this were again a poet driven by compulsive poetic madness, but the end of the line suggests something else--necessity. Implicit here, his need is made explicit in the "oblig'd by hunger" in the following line. The pastoral image in "Lull'd by soft Zephyrs" contrasts oddly with the broken window pane, and "high in Drury-lane." Obviously this poet is living in squalor in a garret in a disreputable part of London. And as Jacob H. Adler points out, the first half line is "broken" by the explosive

"b" and "p" of the last part, and sound and sense inform us that "soft Zephyrs" is ironic.⁴ The last line of the passage adds new irony. Here Pope yokes together two completely different levels of meaning, and "oblig'd by hunger" is slipped in quite unobtrusively, but it is grimly present.

As he moves on to the more vicious poets, Pope's satire becomes more cutting. After remarking that he "gave them but their due," he runs through a catalogue of poets, and does just that:

The Bard whom pilf' red Pastorals renown,
 Who turns a Persian Tale for half a crown,
 Just writes to make his barrenness appear,
 And strains from hard-bound brains eight lines a-year.
 (ll. 179-182)

And he gives him nothing: even his renown has come from pilfering the work of others; and the turning of a Persian tale for half a crown, the prostitute's customary charge, implies the prostitution of ability and literary principle. But he has no ability, apparently, for he has constipation of the brain, and the line strains out to ten monosyllables in sympathy with the efforts of the bard. The word "Bard" is overtly ironical, with all its connotations of great poetical ability.

Next is the poet who steals from others, but has not wit or judgment enough to steal wisely:

He, who still wanting tho' he lives on theft,
 Steals much, spends little, yet has nothing left;
 (ll. 183-184)

Then there follows the poet who writes without meaning, and Pope chooses words and a contorted style that fit the confusion in his subject's mind. Conspicuous are the feminine rhyme words, always weaker than monosyllabic rhyme, and the clumsiness of "blunders round about," and the increase in pauses in the lines:

And he, who now to sense, now nonsense leaning,
Means not, but blunders round about a meaning.
(ll. 185-186)

He is followed by the ranting poet whose poems are not poetry but bad prose instead:

And he, whose Fustian's so sublimely bad,
It is not poetry, but Prose run mad.
(ll. 187-188)

Fustian can be, and often is, poor poetry; but "sublimely" with its connotations of elevated and lofty thought is utterly incongruous applied to "bad."

All these poets are so obviously untalented that he can only advise them to become translators like Tate:

All these, my modest Satire bad translate,
And own'd, that nine such Poets made a Tate.
(ll. 189-190)

And is this a compliment to Tate? Hardly, since Pope has already labeled him as a "cold writer, of no invention," who sometimes translated fairly well when aided by Dryden.⁵ In this last couplet, again, Pope justifies himself, but "modest Satire" is certainly said with tongue in cheek.

Pope as hero holds himself aloof from all the bad poets and critics:

I sought no homage from the Race that write;
 I kept, like Asian Monarchs, from their sight:
 Poems I heeded (now be-rym'd so long)
 No more than Thou, great GEORGE! a Birth-day Song.
 (ll. 219-222)

But even here he cannot keep entirely aloof. It was true that George II scorned letters, and Pope cannot resist a sneering comment on the learning of the King. He continues the characterization of himself as the simple man, plain-living, religious, honest, unconcerned with the pettiness of the world around him:

Above a Patron, tho' I condescend
 Sometimes to call a Minister my Friend;
 I was not born for Courts' or great Affairs,
 I pay my Debts, believe, and say my Pray'rs,
 Can sleep without a Poem in my head,
 Nor know, if Dennis be alive or dead.
 (ll. 265-270)

What Pope is saying is the truth; at the same time, it rather sounds as if he is saying that those born for courts and great affairs do not pay their debts or accept religion. The word "condescend" is at least unexpected in connection with a Cabinet minister, and is in complete disagreement with "great." As usual, "great" is ironic.

Sometimes Pope's mask of aloofness slips, and the disgust he feels with the activities of other poets is mirrored in his language:

I ne'r with Wits or Witlings past my days,
 To spread about the Itch of Verse and Praise;
 Nor like a Puppy daggled thro' the Town,
 To fetch and carry Sing-song up and down;
 Nor at Rehearsals sweat, and mouth'd, and cry'd,
 With Handkerchief and Orange at my side:
 (ll. 233-238)

In this passage the diction and imagery are purposefully ugly: "daggled," and "sweat and mouth'd and cry'd," and the "Itch of Verse and Praise" together suggest filth and sickness and disease, and "Puppy" and "Sing-song" smallness and insignificance. The whole implies the low level to which poets had to sink in order to obtain patronage, and Pope uses low language to denote that level. In an age of patronage that could ignore a Dryden and neglect a Gay, the state of poetry was not an enviable one.

Pope has attacked with less force the slighter characters, the incapable, the foolish, and the vain, saving his heaviest fire for patrons like Bufo who have the power and the wealth to do much good, for court poets like Sporus who have the ability and position, and, above all, for influential men of letters like Addison, who has every quality and advantage--position, prestige, and genius. The portrait of Bufo begins with a kind of parody of the opening of the second book of Paradise Lost in which Satan sits exalted on a throne of royal state. And there is a second reminder of that epic in "puff'd by ev'ry quill," resembling Satan's explosion to full height at the touch of Ithuriel's spear. But Bufo is a petty Satan, as he is merely puffed with pride by dedications from writers' pens. The comparison of Bufo to Apollo is ironic, too, as Apollo was the Greek god of light and prophecy as well as of music and poetry. Bufo is diminished by such comparison to the

great. Here the tone is appropriate for something noble and grand, but the sense of the passage denies the tone, and all we have is a full-blown, puffed up little man fed with soft dedications:

Proud as Apollo on his forked hill,
 Sate full-blown Bufo, puff'd by ev'ry quill;
 Fed with soft Dedication all day long,
Horace and he went hand and hand in song.

(ll. 231-234)

And the epic echoes and nobility of tone coupled with the dingy hero and the ugly images make for irony. Certainly the imagery here suggests bodily grossness, and that could have been one of the layers of Pope's meaning, but the grossness is more aesthetical than physical. Some of the animus is taken over by the servile band of followers who feed Bufo with "soft Dedication all day long," and some by the oblique blow at the whole practice of patronage. Although writers sometimes were ironical in their dedications, they more often sacrificed some degree of self-respect in making the compliments necessary in order to secure patrons. Boyce suggests that "Horace and he went hand and hand in song" is an allusion to Dodington's having been mentioned instead of Maecenas in Welsted's paraphrase of Horace's first Ode, an example of the kind of compliment practised;⁶ and then cites further evidence to prove that the portrait is more likely a combination of Halifax and Dodington. But this is to pin the portrait down too much. The allusion is most probably a multiple one, fitting any number of characters: the practice of extravagant compliment was a wide-

spread one. Ironically Pope takes over the art of these flatterers, and makes it more ridiculous with his adaptation: "hand and hand in song," with all its connotations of happy children playing, is ludicrous applied to the puffed and full-blown Bufo, and one can scarcely imagine the ancient and dignified Horace in this role. Putting the two together adds to the incongruity.

Bufo's library, like Timon's, is not for use, but for show. In adorning it with busts of dead poets and a "true" Pindar (appropriately without a head, since it could not be identified), Pope ridicules the prevailing fashion of exhibiting broken statues of ancient poets, and also makes an oblique comment on the taste that ignored worthy poets of the day, preferring the acknowledged masters:

His Library, (where Busts of Poets dead
 And a true Pindar stood without a head)
 Receiv'd of Wits an undistinguish'd race,
 Who first his Judgment ask'd, and then a Place:
 Much they extolled his Pictures, much his Seat,
 And flatter'd ev'ry day, and some days eat:
 Till grown more frugal in his riper days,
 He pay'd some Bards with Port, and some with Praise,
 To some a dry Rehearsal was assign'd,
 And others (harder still) he pay'd in kind.

(ll. 235-244)

The self-interest of Bufo's visitors is captured neatly in their asking his judgment (presumably on their efforts at writing poetry) and then the favor of a position. Flattery, then, not ability, is the necessary requisite to patronage. But the flattery is evidently not always so well paid by the increasingly "frugal" Bufo, who dispenses food, port,

or praise with a fine discrimination. Sometimes, less helpful, he promotes a "dry Rehearsal" or pays them with his own verses, and the implication is that his poems are poor things, even inferior to a dry rehearsal.

The last four lines of the portrait are a masterpiece in irony:

Dryden alone (what wonder?) came not nigh,
Dryden alone escap'd this judging eye:
 But still the Great have kindness in reserve,
 He help'd to bury whom he help'd to starve.
 (ll. 245-248)

The pathos of Dryden's dying in neglect and want is overshadowed only by the irony of it--in his being given a spectacular funeral by those who would not help him while he lived. But irony is present also in the details: in "judging eye," with its connotations of common sense and the ability to weigh and appraise, and in "Great," which suggests not only greatness in office, but something of nobility of nature. The compression of the last two lines, the dispassionate, matter-of-fact tone, and the surprising turn on the word "help'd," all combine magnificently to provide irony. It is only in the last five words, "whom he help'd to starve," that the real intention of the couplet is realized. Until then it is praising the great Bufo--a fine example of the blame by praise method of the ironist. }

In contrast the portrait of Sporus opens unequivocally on a note of abuse:

Let Sporus tremble--'What? that Thing of silk,
Sporus, that mere white Curd of Ass's milk?
 Satire or Sense alas! can Sporus feel?
 Who breaks a Butterfly upon a Wheel?'
 (ll. 305-308)

But throughout the portrait Pope mingles irony with the abuse, and this adds subtlety to what would otherwise be vituperation. He accomplishes this most brilliantly through the sensuousness of the language and imagery. John Butt has stated that it is a triumph of Pope's virtuosity that he has reserved most of his later sensuousness for his satirical passages, as though he were trying to remove any hint of irritation from his reader's mind, or show with what gracious ideas his own was filled when he wrote these scathing attacks.⁷ But in this portrait the ideas are not gracious, although there is certainly beauty in many of the images and in the quality of the verse. The contradiction of placing the beautiful and desirable constantly against the ugly and sordid subtly emphasizes the discrepancy between the prettiness of Sporus' appearance and the baseness of his character:

Yet let me flap this Bug with gilded wings,
 This painted Child of Dirt that stinks and stings;
 Whose Buzz the Witty and the Fair annoys,
 Yet Wit ne'er tastes, and Beauty ne'er enjoys,
 So well-bred Spaniels civilly delight
 In mumbling of the Game they dare not bite.
 Eternal Smiles his Emptiness betray,
 As shallow streams run dimpling all the way.
 (ll. 309-316)

Here is a continual contrast between attractiveness and unpleasantness in both image and diction. Many of the impressions too, are vivid ones of disgust: Sporus is like the Toad squatting at Eve's ear, "half Froth, half Venom," spitting himself abroad,

In Puns, or Politicks, or Tales, or Lyes,
Or Spite, or Smut, or Rymes, or Blasphemies.
(ll. 321-322)

He is an "Amphibious Thing," a fop, and a flatterer, a "vile Antithesis"--now tripping a lady, now strutting a lord, neither masculine nor feminine. He has a "Cherub's face," but is a "Reptile all the rest." The hard monosyllables, the concentration of sibilants and labials,⁸ the many questions and exclamations, and the jerkiness of the movement, all combine to make this one of the liveliest portraits Pope has created. As Geoffrey Tillotson has remarked, the composite activity deflects from mere offensiveness. In the "baroque zigzag of beauty and nastiness," he says, "the cruelty and indecencies are forgotten."⁹ This subtle irony in placing beauty consistently against the ugly is pointed up finally in the phrase "Beauty that shocks you," accurately summing up our own reaction to the effect. Yet the wealth of detail and the success of the images make us accept Pope's point of view, whether in fact it is valid or not.

In the portrait of Sporus, Pope's method is largely one of attack, and the portrait is a success. But he could not often have

employed this technique or the effect would pall. In the portrait of Addison the irony suggests by reservation. There is no vehemence, no violence. The style is a compliment to the man: Pope does not call him any names, not a reptile or insect, nor a tyrant or fool. No, the language is as polite as Addison's own tone in the Spectator, and the portrait is as mannered and mannerly as the man himself. And this is clever beyond all else in the portrait, that Pope writes with the exquisite precision and delicate control characteristic of Addison, that Pope's tone and manner echo his cool, disengaged urbanity. It is the subtlest of characterizations. The whole is tightly controlled, with a fine concentration of style: there are none of the sweeping sentences and ringing tones of the sketch of the Man of Ross, none of the short, ejaculatory phrases and vulgarisms of Timon's portrait, none of the exclamations and questions that break up the portrait of Atossa. There is instead a splendid use of antithesis, a deliberate calculation and poise:

. . .but were there One whose fires
 True Genius kindles, and fair Fame inspires,
 Blest with each Talent and each Art to please,
 And born to write, converse, and live with ease:
 Shou'd such a man, too fond to rule alone,
 Bear, like the Turk, no brother near the throne,
 View him with scornful, yet with jealous eyes,
 And hate for Arts that caus'd himself to rise;
 Damn with faint praise, assent with civil leer,
 And without sneering, teach the rest to sneer;
 Willing to wound, and yet afraid to strike,
 Just hint a fault, and hesitate dislike;
 Alike reserv'd to blame, or to commend,

A tim'rous foe, and a suspicious friend,
 Dreading ev'n fools, by Flatterers besieg'd,
 And so obliging that he ne'er oblig'd;
 Like Cato, give his little Senate laws,
 And sit attentive to his own applause;
 While Wits and Templers ev'ry sentence raise,
 And wonder with a foolish face of praise.
 Who but must laugh, if such a man there be?
 Who would not weep, if Atticus were he!

(ll. 193-214)

Although the portrait is intended to depict a certain type of influential man to whom personal glory and gratification are more important than the encouragement of good literature, Pope leaves no doubt that the person who inspired the portrait was Addison. The passage which precedes the sketch has just introduced Addison's name; and the fact that it is introduced in such a way as to lead us to expect praise of Addison only adds to the effect of the portrait:

How did they fume, and stamp, and roar, and chafe?
 And swear, not Addison himself was safe.

(ll. 191-192)

A second reference that is certainly to Addison is that of the Turk: in Addison's essay in Spectator 253 he had compared Pope, because of his treatment of other writers in "An Essay on Criticism," to the Eastern King who destroyed his kin to rid himself of possible rivals. Here Pope applies this criticism to Addison himself and stabs him with his own polished dart. A further reference is the allusion to Cato's little Senate, the line taken almost verbatim from Pope's prologue to Addison's play. Here, too, is Pope's calculated little slap at the obsequious Buttonians, Addison's followers, who

scan his every sentence and "wonder with a foolish face of praise." Finally, Atticus, a correspondent of Cicero, was the exemplar of the retired life, an ideal of self-sufficiency and contemplation. The irony is obvious: Addison is the diametric opposite, with his jealous desire for pre-eminence in the literary world, and his need for flattery and adulation.

The entire portrait is presented in a manner polished, urbane, true enough to sting, yet without the manifest exaggeration that would allow his victim to laugh it off. Until the last couplet Pope's tone is detached, the only emotion one of mild wonder, and in this studied absence of emotion lies the irony. The characterization is deliberate and gradual. First are four lines of praise, and such praise! The man described has genius, fame, every pleasing art. He is not merely an accomplished man of letters and society, he is a born gentleman. Then each little meanness is picked out, line by line and half line, as Pope strips his character naked, exposing his deviousness, his pettiness, his jealousy. But there is something else: Pope never tells us that it is Atticus he is describing. The whole is advanced as a supposition: if such a man acted in such a way, this would be our reaction. Pope is hinting faults and hesitating dislike, hitting Addison with his own weapons of offense.

The main principle of Pope's style is balance. His lines are so organized that each clause and each phrase balances another in meaning

or in sound:

Dreading ev'n fools, by Flatterers besieg'd,
And so obliging that he ne'er oblig'd.

He achieves emphasis in a variety of ways. The inversions and the continuous parallel of the lines give formality and an important place to emphatic words:

Shou'd such a man, too fond to rule alone,
Bear, like the Turk, no brother near the throne.

Here the position of "alone" and "throne" gives them a certain emphasis, and the couplet catches all Addison's jealous desire for pre-eminence. Pope achieves emphasis also by the repetition of words or roots--the repetition of "each" in "Blest with each Talent and each Art to please" gives added significance to the abundance of Addison's natural gifts, and prepares the way for the pity of his abuse of them. The recurrence of "sneer" in "And without sneering, teach the rest to sneer" emphasizes Addison's insincerity and deviousness; and the hissing "s" suggests the image of the snake. Alliteration is used also to telling advantage to pick up the verbs in depicting his lack of courage and commitment and, at the same time, his maliciousness:

Willing to wound, and yet afraid to strike,
Just hint a fault, and hesitate dislike.

The many verbals, yoked with damning adjectives, are the weapons with which Pope strikes his hardest blows: "View him with scornful, yet with jealous eyes, /And hate for Arts that caus'd himself to rise,"

and his unwillingness to give other writers their due is phrased with complete economy in "Damn with faint praise, assent with civil leer"; his abuse of critical powers in "Alike reserv'd to blame, or to commend"; and his desire for adulation in "sit attentive to his own applause."

In contrast to Addison, Pope is generous in giving praise where it is due. Admittedly the sense of the praise runs through the criticism that follows and makes it the more damning. And again the praise is put forward as a supposition, not as a fact. Yet through it Pope makes us aware of the potentialities of Addison, of the waste of his excellence in petty jealousies, and of the discrepancy between what he could be and what he is. He makes us feel the clashing emotions in

Who but must laugh, if such a man there be?
Who would not weep, if Atticus were he!

We realize the ridiculousness of the man and feel the pity of it. And that comic painfulness is pure irony.

FOOTNOTES

Chapter IV

¹"The Muse of Satire," Yale Review, XLI (1951), 87.

²Maynard Mack remarks on the roles assumed by Pope, discussing them at more length in "The Muse of Satire," pp. 85-88.

³Wycherley's Plain Dealer, V. 3.

⁴The Reach of Art: A Study in the Prosody of Pope (Gainesville, 1964), p. 91.

⁵Note to line 103, The Dunciad, I, The Twickenham Edition, VI.

⁶The Character Sketches in Pope's Poems, p. 28.

⁷"The Inspiration of Pope's Poetry," Essays in the Eighteenth Century Presented to David Nichol Smith, ed. George Sherburn (Oxford, 1945), p. 72.

⁸Maynard Mack notes these in "Wit and Poetry and Pope," p. 72.

⁹On the Poetry of Pope, p. 156.

CONCLUSION

Pope's epistles contain a good deal of humor and fun, much wit and irony. As Ian Jack remarks, they are full of variety, alternating criticism with satire, panegyric with personal censure, and autobiography with moralizing.¹ Throughout his characterizations Pope has attacked almost every vice of men, and exposed most of their follies. Even when description begins with an individual, it always ends with a type. He is concerned with contemporary life, with what is going on around him day by day, not with something distant and vague, and he is always consciously addressing himself to some one else. His work has at least a moral purpose. As James Sutherland has commented: "The price of order and beauty and dignity is eternal vigilance; and it was one of the most important functions of the eighteenth-century writers to maintain and cherish the standards of polite society, not only in matters of taste and manners, but also in morality and religion."² The satirist is necessarily a judge, and his satire may be by turns angry or bitter or comic, but in order to be great satire it must have at its centre a core of moral idealism.³

Alan Reynolds Thompson has stated that the ironist is likely to be a passive person, not because he is indifferent to the world, but

because he realizes that reform is hopeless and rebellion probably worse ultimately than submission.⁴ From this he reasons that for those who understand the ironist's hidden meaning his view of life is more discouraging than outspoken criticism. Pope's irony is not passive. He tries to make men look at what they might otherwise ignore, but he knows that it is necessary to do more than just tell the facts. He wants to destroy men's pretenses and illusions, to tear off their disguises, and expose the naked truth. There is emotion behind his irony because he does not like things as they are, and he uses his irony to startle his readers into an awareness of how much better the world could be. His irony is not a mood of flat dislike or cynicism. His campaign against dullness, folly, and venality is waged against persons representing those qualities, but not against mankind. In his own words he hopes to heal with morals what he hurts with wit.

There is always a humorous or witty twist even in his most biting attacks. At the same time he is in earnest underneath the sparkling surface. Maynard Mack puts it this way: "Pope is not the poet of complacent rationality or unspiritualized common sense. Sensible he is, but I know no poet more keenly aware than he of the skeleton beneath the skin, and, what is always true with great poets, of the soul beneath the skeleton. It is this awareness that makes gleam on his pages that complex ironic view of the grandeur and

misery of man, the precariousness of his predicament, and the enormous importance, therefore, of preserving and extending the little he has achieved."⁵

Pope's irony is not pessimistic. His method of recommending virtue is to represent opposing vices, but behind his satire lies the vision of the good life--the life of order and intelligence and spirituality. The vicious and foolish characters are exposed, but the vice is always contrasted with a correct scale of values: the admonition to virtue is always present in some form. It is essential to his irony that he show the potentialities for good in man, the image of a life to which men may aspire. The force of all his satire depends on this reference to the ideal other case.

Throughout his epistles Pope has depicted an ideal, sometimes with a gentle touch of irony, sometimes without. Cobham is the ideal patriot, Martha Blount the ideal woman, the Man of Ross the ideal philanthropist, Burlington the ideal man of taste, and Pope himself the ideal man of letters. But the one who is the true ideal, the exemplar of the unworldly man, the happy man content with the quiet life, the complete contradiction to the Addisons, the Timons, and the Whartons, is Pope's father:

Born to no Pride, inheriting no Strife,
 Nor marrying Discord in a Noble Wife,
 Stranger to Civil and Religious Rage,
 The good Man walk'd innoxious thro' his Age.
 No Courts he saw, no Suits would ever try,
 Nor dar'd an Oath, nor hazarded a Lye:
 Un-learn'd, he knew no Schoolman's Art,
 No Language, but the Language of the Heart.
 By Nature honest, by Experience wise,
 Healthy by Temp'rance and by Exercise:
 His Life, tho' long, to sickness past unknown,
 His Death was instant, and without a groan.

("Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot," ll. 392-403)

And the simple dignity of the man is reflected in the lines. In his portrait there is the implicit contrast between the sincerity and innocence of his life and the hypocrisy and corruption of the world around him. But the force of this passage does not lie in its irony, for it contains none. As J. A. K. Thomson has said, where there is feeling, emotion, and no irony, we are shown by a sudden revelation the power and nature of the emotion that lies beneath irony.⁶

And this is the key to the epistles. The irony is good fun, but it is not an end in itself. Its purpose is to expose and tear down that something better may be built. Pope is not a complacent man, because complacency and irony are incompatible. He will appear objective and detached, for that is the pose of the ironist, that is what makes his irony work. But he is actually much involved and deeply concerned. He sees men as they are and as he would wish them to be. And through his irony Pope tries to pierce the strange duality of man, man equipped with reason he too seldom uses and tormented

by passions to which he too often succumbs, man inconsistent,
wonderful, and ridiculous--the glory, jest, and riddle of the world.

FOOTNOTES

Conclusion

¹ Augustan Satire: Intention and Idiom in English Poetry 1660-1750 (Oxford, 1952), p. 109.

² A Preface to Eighteenth Century Poetry (Oxford, 1948), p. 39.

³ Louis I. Bredvold, "The Gloom of the Tory Satirists," p. 11.

⁴ The Dry Mock: A Study of Irony in Drama (Berkeley, 1948), p. 255.

⁵ "On Reading Pope," p. 273.

⁶ Irony: A Historical Introduction, p. 178.

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